

We see them in National Parks, and they are an integral part of the area, but there is a cloud of mystery that surrounds them. How did they get there? And what's it like being one?

If you're like most people, you're curious, especially after reading that.

So, what is a National Park Ranger responsible for?, and how did they become one? I have the following interview with Phil Selleck, a retired NPS (National Park System) Ranger, and he might be able to enlighten you as to what a Park Ranger does and what it takes to become one, and learn a little bit about The National Park system itself from someone who has been on the inside of the system and is currently the person who oversees land acquisitions for the NPS.

Phil Selleck has a very distinguished career in the NPS. Phil has worked in several of our nation's National Park's as a ranger, a manager and. he is currently a consultant for land acquisitions for the NPS. Which places land in to trusts for future designation/ and use as National Parks.

TS: A lot of people see Park Rangers, but really don't understand the role of one. What does A Ranger do? It's more than giving presentations and rescuing lost hikers and pets, .Is there a law enforcement aspect to it as well?

PS: Rangers are jack-of-all-trades. There are law enforcement rangers, interpretive rangers and climbing rangers for example. But as a law enforcement ranger I was also an EMT, SCUBS diver, wildland firefighter, structural firefighter and boat operator, all in the same assignment. In some parks, rangers may be more specialized. For example, law enforcement might be the major duty. Generally interpretive rangers can be more specialized, but also have other duties in the smaller parks.

TS: If someone wanted to be a Park Ranger and work for the NPS specifically, what would you recommend they do to prepare themselves to be selected for that line of work, and is it like being police officer, does it take a certain kind of personality to be a successful Park Ranger?

PS A park ranger must be motivated, willing to work at odd times and long days. They also need to be self-motivated and, in some cases, able to work independently and alone.

There are colleges that ha NPS law enforcement training programs, 9 of the last I heard. Taking the course, usually a couple of months long, qualifies you for a seasonal or temporary law enforcement ranger job.

TS: What and where was your first assignment as a Ranger, and did it influence you, or maybe I should ask did it determine how you would define your role in the NPS?

PS: My first assignment was as a temporary law enforcement ranger at Boston National Historical Park. After that assignment, I knew I wanted to continue my career in NPS law enforcement.

TS: I remember visiting you in Badlands National Park, I traveled out there with your father and mom, and my mom. It was a memorable experience in part because the location, but I remember the helicopter ride through the area, and it always made me wonder: Do Park rangers need to have a Pilot's license? And I also look back on it and wonder if your parents influenced your decision to become a ranger in any way, did they?

PS: There are rangers who are pilots, but not too many. They work mainly in Alaska, where airplanes are the main method of getting around.

My dad,, your grandfather (my dad's brother) and other uncles were outdoor-oriented. We spent time in the woods and on the lakes in Michigan growing up. We also lived where is was a short walk to the woods, so I grew up loving the outdoors.

TS: What are some of the best experiences you can share with the readers that you had as a Ranger, what about the the worst? Can you tell us the good the bad and any of the ugly that you encountered?

PS:

I can tell you the worst experiences as a ranger were those involving the death of a visitor. I remember particularly bringing a young man who drowned up off the bottom of the lake, onto the beach, with his family right there.

The best experiences were those when I got out into the Sonoran Desert on patrol, by myself, for most of the day. Or running a 31-foot boat on patrol up the Rio Grande, or riding with another ranger out into the middle of the Everglades, where the only communication with the outside world is a radio,, and it is dead quiet when you stop the boat.

TS: You currently work for the National Park Trust, what is that and how does it influence, or what part does it have within the NPS? How did you become involved with it?

PS We are a nonprofit that helps acquire land for national parks. There are properties in and next to parks that can help protect endangered species, have

archaeological sites, or something else special that makes them valuable to have as part of a national park. I happened to see a job posting for the Trust, and one of my old bosses from the NPS was on the board of trustees, so I had a pretty good idea of the work involved. They liked my NPS background and connections as well

TS: What did you like most and least about your career as a Park Ranger?

PS: I liked the law enforcement work and the opportunity to guide and instruct other rangers. I chaired a committee, beginning in 1996, that designed a training program for all new NPS law enforcement rangers, and was implemented in 2003. I was leader of a special law enforcement team, and we had assignments in a variety of parks for special events. However, we were also activated after 9/11 and spend 7 weeks away from home. And of course seeing all the parks for those special assignment was great. My least favorite times were difficult situations with employees who were not working well with coworkers, or who were not performing their duties acceptably. And there were several instances dealing with employees who had committed crimes.

TS: Is there a website that people can go to discover and learn more about the National Parks and the National Park Trust?

PS: The best website to NPS is [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov). For the National Park Trust, you can go to [www.parktrust.org](http://www.parktrust.org)

TS: If someone asks you to recommend a National Park, is there one or two you would tell them they must see/experience?

PS I would say to think of what interests you, and find a park that fits. There are 423, so it's a good chance you can find one or more that interests you.

TS: How many National Parks are there, and out of curiosity which one is the biggest and the smallest?

PS: New parks are created almost every year. There are 423 at this time. Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Historic Site, 0.02 acres, in Philadelphia, and the largest Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, 13 million acres, Alaska.

TS: And finally, if there is one thing that people should realize about the National Parks, what would you like to tell them? I think a lot of people know about them, but they don't fully understand what their real value is to us as a nation. What value do the National Parks have?

PS: We have inherited "America's best idea," our national parks. They guard, protect, and share millions of acres of irreplaceable landscapes, plants, and animals. They also preserve nationally significant historical and cultural places and tell the stories of people who made great sacrifices for our country.

Parks are our classrooms, playgrounds, and places of escape and peace. They let us experience solitude and quiet, natural sights and sounds undisturbed by civilization, and beauty as simple as skies so dark you can see by starlight. The National Park System is ever-changing. There are new lands, water, plants, and wildlife to protect, and as time passes, new history to commemorate.

And the national parks cannot continue without our support, and without us making sure there is enough funding and enough trained and motivated NPS employees to take care of them.

Thank You Phil for participating in this interview, and I hope it has given some realistic insight into the role of a NPS ranger and maybe influenced some readers to pursue a career as Park Ranger or at the very least to explore the National Parks via the following website or if they are able to, experience the parks in person and learn first-hand from the people that wear the NPS uniform.