

Scientists Share Expertise Through Olympic Seminars

By Jerry Edelbrock

In the autumn of 1984, Olympic NP initiated a program which provided the general public an opportunity to study in-depth the natural resources of the park from the wilderness coast to the lush rain forests and alpine ecosystems. A program of educational field seminars began with the help of resource managers, scientists, and artists who have studied and worked in Olympic NP. These professionals served as instructors for small seminar groups and used the forests and trails of Olympic as a "classroom."

The expertise of the instructors covered a variety of fields including plant ecology, photography, art, mycology, and wildlife biology. Thanks to the willingness of these instructors and the whole-hearted support of Supt. Robert Chandler and Chief Park Naturalist Henry Warren, the field seminar program proved to be tremendously popular and a new extension of Olympic NP as an educational resource.

One of the most successful seminars was the "Natural History of Roosevelt Elk" held in the Hoh River Valley on a colorful September weekend during the elk rutting season. The course was designed to provide a detailed look at the behavior, habits, life cycle, habitat, and general management concerns of the Roosevelt elk through discussion and direct observation in the Hoh River Valley. The team of instructors included Dr. Ed Starkey, research biologist with the NPS stationed at Oregon State University, Dr. Doug Houston, research biologist based at Olympic NP and noted authority on elk throughout North America, and Bruce Moorhead, Olympic NP wildlife biologist.

The seminar provided an opportunity for these scientists to share their knowledge, experience, and field methods with park visitors who had a particular interest in these large animals. Discussions centered around population dynamics, browsing effects on vegetation, nutritional requirements, censusing, the use of biotelemetry, carrying capacity and other related subjects. On day-hikes through the forest and onto river gravel bars, participants discovered the tell-tale sign of elk, and they heard various interpretations of the sign as seen through the eyes of experienced scientists. Later on, class members became familiar with some of the research tools used during extensive field studies. The instructors demonstrated radio transmitter collars, directional antennae, and tranquilizer guns and darts.

Early in the morning, just before dawn, the hardiest members of the class ventured out with their instructors onto the gravel bars of the Hoh River in hopes of observing a bull elk with full antlers and his harem of cows. They were rewarded with just such a sight as well as a sparring match between two young bulls. There was ample material for photography as antlers clashed and gravel sprayed.

The participants in this seminar came from a wide spectrum of professional disciplines. Some were interested in management concerns because of their own professional responsibility for managing small herds of elk. Others were there because they believed a better understanding of these animals would increase their chances of success during the hunting season. Several photographers were in search of new ways to locate, approach and capture wildlife on film.

Still others enrolled in the course just for the experience of spending two days in the field with scientists who have a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Olympic National Park, in conjunction with the non-profit Pacific Northwest National Parks and Forests Association, plans to continue offering field seminars for those individuals who want to explore and understand the resources of the Pacific Northwest. The 1985 program includes 24 seminars scheduled between March and September, and begins with a winter course, "Olympic Weather and Snow," taught by Dr. Ed LaChapelle, professor emeritus at the University of Washington and an expert on glaciers, snow and avalanches. He served as director of the Blue Glacier Project on Mt. Olympus for 20 years. His seminar will include discussion and field work on Hurricane Ridge examining the physical features of snow and ice and the weather patterns that produce them. Participants will be on skis or snowshoes.

Other seminar topics include wilderness photography, birding on the coast and ocean, Ozette archeology, wildflowers, Makah Indian culture, canoeing, backpacking for women, geology, mosses and lichens, rain forest ecology, and mushrooms of Olympic NP.

Several joint programs are offered in conjunction with North Cascades NP Complex (Wilderness Photography at Stehekin by Pat O'Hara), Mt. Rainier NP, (Alpine Ecology by Drs. Ola and John Edwards; Glaciology by Carolyn Driedger), and the Gifford Pinchot National Forest (Life Returns to Mt. St. Helens by Dr. Ernie Karlstrom).

Judging from the tremendously positive response of participants last fall and the large number of enrol-

lees in the 1985 program to date, field seminars appear to be an excellent way for scientist to relate national park research to the general public through an educational and recreational experience.

Further information on the 1985 program is available from the Seminar Coordinator, Olympic National Park, 600 East Park Avenue, Port Angeles, WA 98362-6798, telephone (206) 452-4501 ext. 220; FTS 396-4220.

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Radio telemetry equipment is explained here by Bruce Moorhead Olympic NP Research Biologist, as a member of the class hoists the antenna.



Using the dirt as a blackboard, Doug Houston, PNR Research Biologist, draws a graph of elk carrying capacity for the ecosystem under study. Fellow NPS instructors Ed Starkey (lower right) and Bruce Moorhead (upper left) and students look on.