

# Olympic's Coastal Preservation: A Dream Comes True

By Hank Warren

This is a success story involving many characters, but in which the interpreters played a key role in bringing about the protection of a prime national resource: the intertidal zone along some 57 miles of coastline adjacent to Olympic National Park.

The coastal strip of Olympic NP was established as a wild, unspoiled shoreline much as it was hundreds of years before the arrival of European man . . . a place for solitude, discovery and nature's fury. Above all, the coast is a living museum showing the diversity of life at the edge of two great realms: land and sea.

When the coastal strip was added to Olympic NP in 1953 and when it was expanded in 1976 the boundaries stopped at mean high water, which meant that the intertidal zone remained in state ownership. Under the State of Washington four agencies with different missions, Natural Resources, Parks, Game, and Fisheries had jurisdiction over components of the coastal resources. Trying to coordinate the policies of any four powerful semi independent entities, no matter how well meaning, is a gigantic task and the protection of tidepool life along the coast was getting lost in the shuffle. The biggest threats were from fishermen collecting bait, visitors collecting specimens, and the possibility that foreign enterprises would begin collecting food on a commercial scale.

From the beginning, the Naturalist Division of Olympic NP has interpreted tidepool life as if it was an inherent park value, even though the tidepools lay outside the park. However no NPS research funds were earmarked for the study of tidepool life because we did not own the resource and we had to be careful not to alienate the State agencies whose cooperation we needed.

In 1979 when I transferred into the park as Chief Naturalist, I found the park was blessed with a superior staff of researchers. I am a firm believer that naturalists need to be knowledgeable about park resources and preferably expert or near expert in some aspect of park resources. So I took up scuba diving and began to study the intertidal zone intensively. Emphasis was placed upon intertidal studies during seasonal training.

In 1980, under then Supt. Roger Contor, Professor Robert Paine, one of the Pacific Coast's leading authorities on intertidal ecology, presented a seminar to a cadre of the park's staff. As a result of this seminar, Dr. Paine suggested a low key scheme that could be carried out informally by park naturalists to monitor the "health" of the intertidal zone.

At this stage any suggestion that the intertidal zone be added to the park was regarded as impossible and even resisted by some members of the park staff on the grounds that there would be too much political opposition and that the park would inherit a complicated law enforcement situation.

In 1984 a new West District Naturalist, Doug Wilson, was hired with the mandate from the Chief Naturalist that he was to become "expert" on intertidal life. Then in February 1985 Doug and Park Supt. Bob Chandler attended an interregional workshop on coastal resources management and interpretation, which was the brainchild of Western Region's Chief of Interpretation, Dick Cunningham. The workshop inspired both men.

During the early summer of 1985, because feed-

back from the diving community had aroused increasing concern about impacts on coast, I determined to raise this issue again. But first I wanted to be sure that "our own skirts were clean" and I audited coastal interpretive activities to be certain they were carried out in a manner that minimized impacts on the resource. Doug and the coastal seasonal staff, using a simple baseline sightings notebook developed as a method to record any sightings of Dr. Paine's indicator species, had already started to monitor the intertidal areas.

Exploring the tidepools and being present on a daily basis, the coastal interpreters realized that impacts and abuses were taking place in the tidepools. For example, some fishermen were decimating the garnet colored tubeworm clusters, also known as feather duster worms. Removed with knife or shovel, the worms were carted off in five gallon buckets to be used as bait for summer surf fishing. Many people collected far more than they could use on a single visit and froze the rest for future trips. Mussel beds were scraped clean with shovel or machete, not to harvest mussels which were out of season, but to make it easier to collect the ribbon worms that live between the mussels. It became evident that an increasing number of people were relying upon the tidepools for subsistence. When one such individual was questioned about the intertidal creatures he had collected, his response was, "It's cheaper than the supermarket."

I presented these preliminary findings to Superintendent Chandler and it was decided that more detailed documentation was needed. Doug and the coastal naturalists began describing the condition of intertidal areas in field notes, maps, inventories and photographs.

The park was fortunate in that the husband of the seasonal interpretive supervisor at one of our coastal areas was a competent seashore algae researcher. He was not an American citizen, so could not be hired by the park. However the park used \$2,000 in natural history association funds to provide an embarrassingly small stipend for him.

Meantime, events had been moving on other fronts. The park and the neighboring national forest had mutually agreed that it would be best to seek legislation modifying their joint boundaries to hydrographic divides. As a part of the legislative briefing package, the Superintendent and our lands officer decided to include a document describing the threats to the coast. Olympic Park Associates, an environmental watch dog group, also was briefed. Everybody felt that the likelihood of legislative action affecting the coast was a long shot, but miracles happen. Olympic NP is fortunate in that Sen. Dan Evans holds a deep appreciation for the park and the entire Washington State Congressional delegation is very supportive. As a result the boundaries of the park have been modified in a number of ways advantageous to the park, including the addition of the intertidal zone adjacent to the park.

This episode demonstrates that the interpretive division is functioning as an integral part of the park's management team and that individuals can make a difference. Without the collective effort described here, the park addition would have remained just a dream.

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