

10 minutes with...

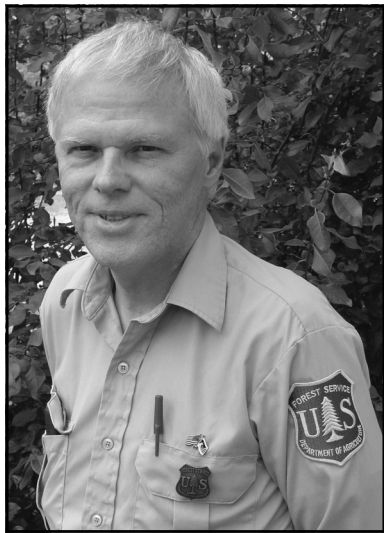
Dennis Strayer

Visitor Center Manager at Illinois Valley Visitor Center

Age: 56
Lived in Illinois Valley: Seven years

How long have you worked at the Illinois Valley Visitor's Center?

I'm going on eight years now. It's a fun job. We had a family in from France and probably close to a dozen families from Israel recently which is pretty unusual.



What question do you hear the most?

Where are the Caves? How do you get there? When people find out it's a three- or four-hour block of time that can be a big decision maker for folks. The interesting thing about the Oregon Caves is it's just about the smallest national monument in the U.S. and it has a very high re-visitation rate.

What are the most asked about places to visit in the valley?

The Oregon Caves is our No. 1 attraction. It's a close second to the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Some of the other attractions they ask about are the wineries, Kerbyville Museum and the old cemeteries for family history and genealogy research.

How did you get your job at the visitor's center?

I've been working for the U.S. Forest Service for a number of years in visitor's services and recreation, and I had a very supportive boss working at Grants Pass for about 10 years. I came out here two times before when previous managers left. I've been real heavily involved with the visitor's services and tourism for my whole career to it seemed like a natural fit. I applied for the job and was selected and I moved out here.

Bigfoot seems to be in the news once in a while. Do you believe Bigfoot exists and resides in the valley?

In 1988, I worked at the Mt. St. Helens Visitor's Center. Supposedly that was the original home of Bigfoot and last year a man had told one of his relatives on his death bed that he was the one in a gorilla suit (in a video of Bigfoot) and his wife videotaped him. It remains to be seen. But I remain skeptical. Seeing is believing.

Ever heard stories of people seeing Bigfoot here?

Not really. One time I was out hiking and answering 'nature's call' when I heard something walking up behind me. Finally, it felt like it was right behind me. I turned around with my flashlight and it was a giant bullfrog. You really get your imagination going when you are out in the dark especially after swapping stories by a campfire.

Do you get many reports of wildlife sightings?

Last year we had a number of sightings of bobcats. The year before we had an issue with a cougar at Cave Creek Campground. We get a lot of bird sightings. We heard a lot about some bald eagles a couple of years ago at Lake Selmac. It's a real active wildlife area and I have some displays at the visitor's center.

What are some of your hobbies?

I do volunteer work at the Kerbyville Museum. I do a lot of nature photography of the landscape and wildflowers. I take groups out to the Babyfoot Lake area. I took pictures in May and have before and after pictures on display. The (Biscuit) fire was just about on the scale of Mt. St. Helens as far as changing the landscape.

Were you heartbroken when you saw Babyfoot Lake damaged by the Biscuit Fire?

The whole place from the trailhead down to the lake is black. It's so dramatically changed. You live in an area for so long and you're used to seeing green and shade you almost take it for granted. It can be pretty emotional. I understand that this is part of the natural process. Some people tend to forget that.

What do you like about living in the valley?

It's a slower pace of life. I grew up in the Portland area and it's definitely not something you find in the bigger cities. People for the most part are very friendly. I think the community spirit is still very strong especially last year with the fire. And we're in a pretty amazing place geologically; almost 200 million years old. If people slow down and go off the roads to the caves or into the wilderness they'll see there is some pretty incredible features here.

If you weren't working at the visitor's center what would you be doing?

I work a lot with the museum and community groups. We're working on a new tourism map for the valley that is nearing completion. I really like the area. If things work out I would like to retire here and live here as long as my health will allow.

What's the farthest away place a person has come from that registered at the center?

Amazingly we had a person from Tahiti. We had teachers from mainland China and a medical student from Russia.

What do you say to new people moving into the valley?

I recommend that new people get involved in the community. There is a lot of needs for volunteers whether at the museum or at the schools or just helping out with the recent crime wave. That way they could also make new friends. We have a lot of people that have professional backgrounds in a lot of areas and people can benefit from their expertise.

What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?

Vanilla. That way you can put anything on it.

— Interview by Steve Fairchild

Proper clothing might keep your child safe

Oregon transportation safety officials are asking parents to keep their children's safety in mind as they purchase clothing and other items for the coming school year.

If riding a bike, skateboard, scooter or roller blades, make sure children start the new school year with a properly fitting helmet. Other important safety gear includes elbow and knee pads.

When buying a new bike, be sure to get one that fits the child properly, not one to grow into. An oversized bike is dangerous because a child can have difficulty controlling it and stopping. And high center or top tube bars are a well-known source of painful injury.

Consider a bike-mounted bag or basket for children who bicycle. Heavy backpacks can make kids top heavy, leading to crashes. Brakes are an important aspect of bike safety. Be sure a child can quickly and effortlessly use the brakes.

Backpacks and bags with reflectors often cost a little more but make a big difference in visibility on overcast fall days or consider attaching reflector

key tags and other accessories.

Look for and request outerwear with reflectors. A small child in a dark coat or jacket can be invisible to drivers in bad weather.

Brightly colored coats, umbrellas, rain hats, backpacks and other items are more visible to drivers.

Avoid excessively baggy clothing that could trip the child. Baggy clothes and loose strings can easily catch in bicycle chains, wheels and controls.

Shoes with reflectors show up better in low-light conditions, increasing safety. Consider wet and slippery weather traction when choosing shoes, to prevent falls.

Parents who drive their kids to school must have the proper safety seats, booster seats and/or safety belts. Oregon law requires specific types of restraint systems depending on the child's size and age. For more information on child passenger safety, visit www.actsoregon.org.

For more information, visit the ODOT Transportation Safety Division at www.odot.state.or.us/transafety/.

House bills crack down on driving while drunk

The house of Representatives passed a package of bills to help curb the incidence of intoxicated driving.

HB2900 and HB2901 were requested by Bruce and Anne Pratt and Janet Lovelace in an attempt to increase accountability from Oregonians who drive while impaired by intoxicants.

Both bills were sponsored by Rep. Randy Miller (R-West Linn) and co-sponsored by a number of Reps. And Sens. From both parties, including Rep. Gordon Anderson (R-Grants Pass) who carried HB 2901 on the House floor.

"Most of the legislation we deal with in the House concerns what seems like faceless numbers," Anderson said. "The bills we passed today have life and death consequences, and victims with names and stories. I'm glad we could do what we can to discourage this dangerous behavior."

House Bill 2900 will create the crime of refusing to take a breath test, punishing offenders with a fine of \$500 to \$1,000.

HB 2901 adds a statement to the state driver's license application that applicants would be required to state: "I acknowledge that driving under the influence of intoxicants can result in serious injury or death. I agree not to drive under the influence of intoxicants." The signed form would be kept on file by Driver and Motor Vehicle Services (DMV), and could potentially aid in prosecutions for driving under the influence of intoxicants, as it would prove that the defendant knew that his or her behavior could cause injury or death.

"I have heartfelt hope that today we will be one step closer to making our roadways safe from intoxicated drivers. It is my wish

Nothing is better than boating on a beautiful day. Don't let alcohol spoil the picture. In Oregon, nearly half of boating accidents involve alcohol. Fortunately, we're working hard to keep drinking boaters off the water, making it safer for everyone. So leave the alcohol at home, but bring your sunscreen and come on out. It's better than ever out here.

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****August & September Events: 7-10 p.m.****
***Thursday, Aug. 28
Fund-raiser for I.V. Football Program
Open mic' with Jake Thompson
Fund-raiser Dinner Specials -
Hot Dog - \$4, Hamburger - \$6 or New York Steak - \$8
Dinner includes French fries & salad
*Friday, Aug. 29
Sequoia - Bluegrass
*Friday, Sept. 5 - IMBAS - Celtic Rock
Come-one, Come-all Scrabble games
DINNERS SERVED
Thursday, Friday & Saturday - Starting at 5 p.m.**

SERVING BEER AND WINE ESPRESSO Open for breakfast 6 a.m.

Did you find it?

The 'Did you find it' is a hold over from last week since nobody found the flower. This week the first person to bring in the hidden scorpion to the 'I.V. News' will receive one free potted shrub (a \$5 value) from Dillion's Nursery & Garden Center