



Friends Patrol Forest Trails

by Georgia Munsell

If you enjoy hiking and meeting people, probably one of the easiest and most enjoyable volunteering activities you can do for Friends of the Forest is Trail Patrol. Instead of wearing a badge and packing a pistol, you wear a cap which identifies you as a Friends of the Forest, Forest Service Volunteer and you carry a map to assist other hikers, and a litter bag to pick up trash.

While on trail patrol, a major part of the work is making contact with visitors and attempting to answer questions relating to the trail, the flora and fauna, availability of water, special features of the area and safety precautions. Many visitors do not carry a map or if they do, it's not very good. So being able to help them with trail directions or show them a detailed map is very important. However, once you identify yourself as a volunteer with Friends of the Forest, most people are eager to find out about other hikes you would recommend.

Sometimes our work turns serious as was the case for five- year trail patrol veteran, Kevin Harding, who had an experience of virtually saving someone's life. As Kevin explains, "I was hiking out of Boynton Canyon at the end of a cold day in December and it was getting dark when I came across an elderly woman heading deeper into the canyon with no warm clothes and no water. She asked me how much further it was to the parking lot. I was really happy to have come across her when I did, so I could give her a warm jacket, turn her around and lead her back to her car."

Other times Trail Patrol leads to unusual activities. For example, one time while hiking Bandit Trail near the trail head off Shelby Drive, a volunteer on Trail Patrol saw a great deal of litter just off the trail. The litter turned out to be the remains of numerous homeless camps. For two half- days, eight volunteers filled two Forest Service pick-up trucks full of debris, including old mattresses, furniture, food containers and old clothes.

Volunteering for Trail Patrol can easily work into anyone's schedule because you pick any trail you wish to hike in the Red Rock Ranger District of Coconino National Forest, any day and any time. Of course, with over a hundred trails to choose from finding a suitable trail is never a problem.

After your hike, you are asked to complete a survey for the Forest Service to help them determine usage and maintenance issues. You report such items as the number of hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders. Additionally, the Forest Service wants to know the number of cars parked at the trail head, what new signage or trail maintenance work might be needed, general conditions of the trail and the amount of litter packed out.

Referring to the trail reports, Connie Birkland, the Red Rock Ranger District Public Affairs Specialist, comments, "With hundreds of miles of trails and few Forest Service employees, we are very appreciative and reliant on our 'Friends' in the forest who provide daily assistance patrolling, observing resource conditions and talking to the public. Their information assists our managers in prioritizing field work to be accomplished."

With so many trails to patrol, Friends of the Forest is always looking for more volunteers. If you are interested in making a difference, consider joining Friends of the Forest. For more information, visit www.friendsoftheforestsedona.org or contact the Red Rock Ranger Station at 203-2900.

Georgia Munsell is an active member of the Friends of the Forest Trail Patrol Committee, averaging over 20 hikes a month, and she is the recipient of the 2009 Trail Patrol Committee Award. A Friends of the Forest member writes the first Serving Sedona column each month.

Statistics from July 2008 - June 2009 Trail Patrol Reports

81 volunteers participated

4200 hours and 5400 miles patrolled

8 top hikers patrolled more than 200 hours each

12,350 hikers counted

8,265 hikers contacted

225 pounds of trash collected

Trails most frequently patrolled - Bear Mountain, Big Park, Brin's Mesa, Soldier's Pass, Vultee Arch, Cathedral and Wilson Mountain