



Golden Gate National Recreation Area News Release

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Presidio to Yosemite Trip Honors Buffalo Soldiers' Legacy

San Francisco, CA (June 3, 2014) On Saturday, June 7th, in honor of the 2nd annual African American National Parks weekend, a number of Bay-Area residents will pay homage to the famed Buffalo Soldiers by retracing their historic journey from the Presidio of San Francisco to Yosemite National Park.

The event is a joint effort led by Outdoor Afro and the National Park Service (Golden Gate National Recreation Area) with support from the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, chapters of the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club, the city of Los Banos, the Presidio Trust, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) and the Yosemite Conservancy. The group will honor the legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers who served our country nationally and internationally. In particular, the 24th Infantry and the 9th Cavalry protected both Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks in 1899, 1903 and 1904.

“It’s amazing how little of this history is known,” says Teresa Baker, Outdoor Afro trip leader and co-organizer of the event. “I think it is important for us to recognize the role that our forbearers played in protecting some of our country’s most iconic national parks.”

Baker’s innate love for nature and the outdoors spurred her to create the first African American National Parks Weekend last year. Using social media, she encouraged people across the country to visit a national park one specific weekend. Thousands – including many first-time visitors - responded to the call and sent in photos of their groups in national parks. Outdoor Afro, a social networking community focused on reconnecting African Americans with the outdoors, celebrated with a Buffalo Soldier interpretive walk hosted by the National Park Service in the Presidio. During the aftermath of that highly successful event, the idea of actually retracing the trail of the Buffalo Soldiers was conceived.

“I can’t think of a better way to start celebrating the upcoming Centennial of the National Park Service than by honoring the Buffalo Soldiers,” says Kelli English, Supervisory Park Ranger with the National Park Service and co-organizer of the event. “They set a high bar in protecting

and caring for our National Parks, which ultimately resulted in the creation of a separate government agency to carry on that legacy.”

At 8:30 a.m. Saturday morning, a sendoff ceremony will be held at the Presidio Main Post flagpole area, near the Officers Club at 46 Moraga Avenue. Activities include a flag-raising ceremony and brief remarks by National Park Service managers and other special guests. At 9:00 am, participants will board motor coaches provided by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy and depart through the historic Lombard Street gate at Lyon Street, escorted by a detachment of riders from the Buffalo Soldiers Motorcycle Club.

Although no spaces remain for additional passengers on the trip, interested people are encouraged to attend the sendoff ceremony. Following the departure of the group, there will be a ranger-led Buffalo Soldier history walk and an open house at the historic cavalry stables on McDowell Avenue from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Visitors may also visit the National Cemetery where more than 450 Buffalo Soldiers, including a Medal of Honor recipient, are interred.

In 1903, units of the 9th United States Cavalry made the 280-mile trek from the Presidio to Yosemite over a period of 13 days. Leaving the Presidio post in the spring and returning in the fall, the troopers spent the summer in the park protecting it against poaching and grazing and blazing trails still used today. Along the route, the troopers camped near race tracks, at roadhouses and along rivers.

The Outdoor Afro group will follow the historical route as much as possible, passing through San Jose, Gilroy, Los Banos, Madera and Oakhurst before entering Yosemite through the southern Wawona gate. Along the way, the pilgrimage will stop at the City of Los Banos in the San Joaquin Valley, where the Buffalo Soldiers rested and refitted nearly one hundred years ago. The group will enjoy the hospitality of the city and eat lunch at the fairgrounds before resuming the trip to Yosemite, where they will camp overnight. The highlight of Sunday’s activities will be a presentation of park ranger Shelton Johnson’s award-winning living history program at the Pioneer Cemetery at noon. After the program concludes, the group will mount up for the bus trip back to the Presidio of San Francisco.

A similar event retracing the Buffalo Soldier trail from the Presidio to Sequoia National Park is being discussed for next year, as well as a large celebration in honor of the National Park Service’s Centennial in 2016.

To learn more about the Buffalo Soldier history in your national parks, please visit <http://go.nps.gov/buffalosoldiers>.

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