

# Local News

Thursday, August 21, 1986

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

## Island enthusiasm contagious

### Park rangers take cue from spirited chief

By Hillary Hauser  
News-Press Staff Writer

"OK, troops, what are the four mammals found on the islands?"

William Ehorn, superintendent of the Channel Islands National Park, stands at the helm of the boat that takes him, two rangers and a scientist to Anacapa and Santa Barbara islands — and he waits for answers.

There are some guesses, some right and some wrong.

"You guys all flunk," Ehorn barks. "You're supposed to know. You work for the National Park Service. I'll tell you — the island fox, field mouse, skunk and bat."

The boat roars on, over the clear blue sea. The quizzing is all in fun, because that's the way Ehorn works.

#### Two main points

"OK, what are the two major plans for the management of the park?" he asks next.

Some more answers dribble in.

"I'll tell you," Ehorn offers. "One — to preserve and protect. Two, to provide for the enjoyment of the people."

"Some birds fly overhead."

"What are all those little birds, Charles?" Ehorn asks.

Charles Drost, a scientist studying the island night lizard on Santa Barbara, San Nicolas and San Clemente islands, looks up spies the birds.

"They're western grebes," Drost says.

Ehorn is satisfied.

#### Like troop leader

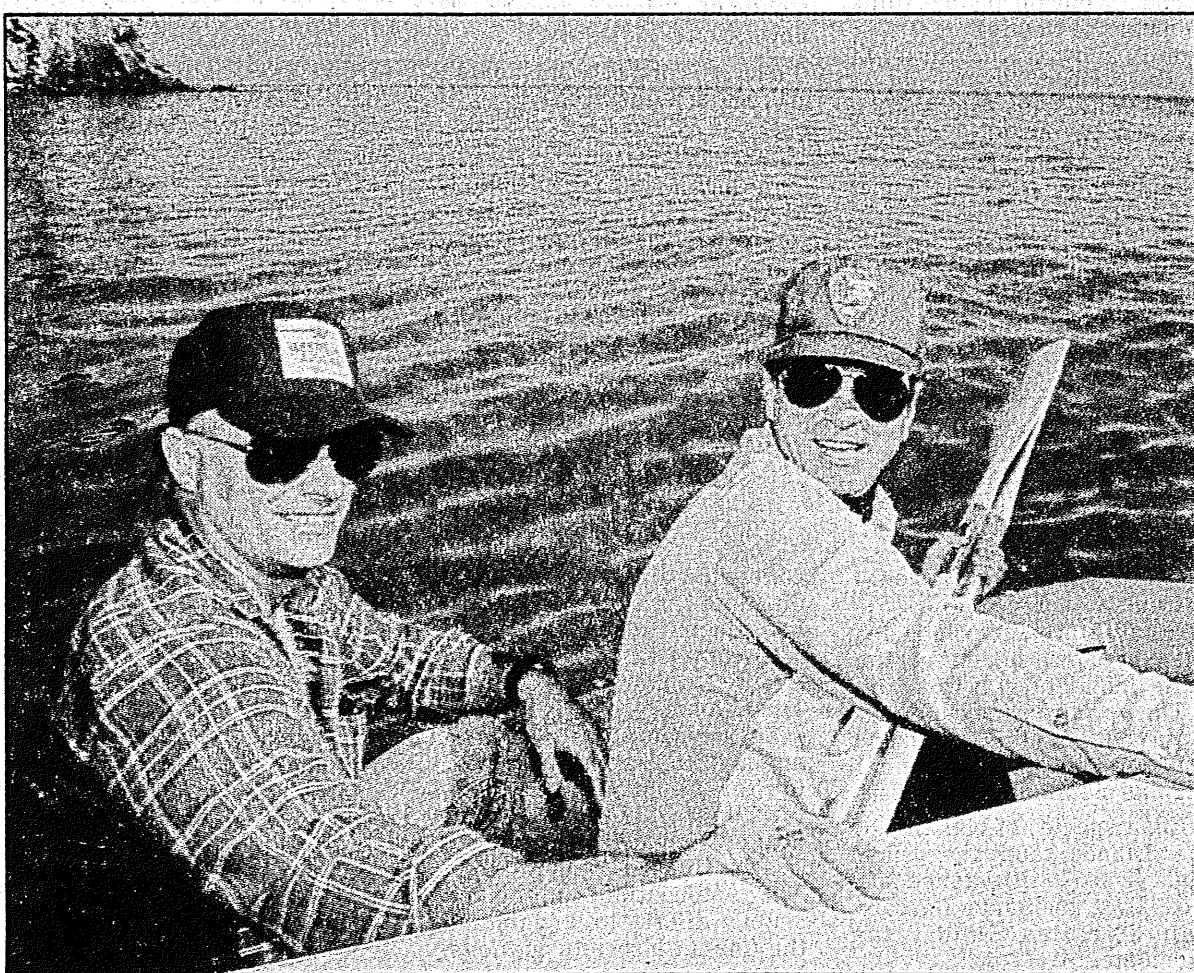
Wearing a Smokey Bear outfit, Ehorn is more like a troop leader to his rangers than a boss, and many of them comment on how much fun it is to work for him.

He speaks in a usual yell, and his enthusiasm for the islands is contagious.

"I came here from Omaha, Nebraska," Ehorn said. "That was the worst assignment of my career."

And the Channel Islands — where he was assigned in 1974 — may be one of the best.

"This was a totally new experience for me," Ehorn said. "I'd always worked in mountains — skiing, hiking — and then I came here. I was overwhelmed — islands and oceans. The first thing I learned to do was scuba dive.



News-Press photo by STEVE MALONE

William Ehorn, with oars, superintendent of Channel Islands National Park, prepares to

take longtime islands' landowner Pier Gherini Jr. ashore at Santa Cruz Island.

Then I learned the significance of the islands."

#### Began at Lassen

Born and raised in Red Bluff, Ehorn said he first went to work for the National Park Service in Lassen Volcanic National Park in 1958, working as a ranger during the summer.

After pursuing studies in park management at Cal State Sacramento, he took a full-time ranger job in Lassen. In 1967, he was made district ranger of the giant forest at Sequoia Kings Canyon.

His first superintendent job came in 1970, at Cedar Breaks National Monument in Utah, and in 1972, he was made program officer in the Park Service's regional office in Omaha.

In 1974, Ehorn was made superintendent of the Channel Islands National Monument, established in 1938 to include Anacapa and Santa Barbara islands.

#### Knows his turf

Since taking over his post, Ehorn has educated himself about many aspects of the islands — scientific, political and otherwise — and he takes a hands-on approach to his ad-

ministering duties.

His admirers praise his direct, often blustery ways, while his critics (which include many commercial fishermen) say he is turning the islands into another Yellowstone or Yosemite.

But Ehorn is adamant about the Park Service mandate to protect the islands, and says this philosophy takes precedence over public access.

"We have learned from all the mistakes made in Yellowstone and Yosemite," he said. "We didn't have the people and concerns then that we do now. We now have science, we're doing research, and we're careful and thorough."

#### Dudleya plant

He gets excited when he hears about more pelicans being born on west Anacapa and when he hears a scientist has discovered another Dudleya plant on Santa Barbara Island, where rabbits once nibbled them into near extinction.

He has called meetings with scientists, government officials and university researchers when an ecological question arises.

When he learned that a space shuttle will be launched

out of Vandenberg, he called such a meeting to consider the effects of the resultant sonic boom on San Miguel's caliche forest, pinniped and bird populations.

There's not much that slips by Ehorn, and he runs fast to keep up with everything that happens in his 125,000-acre domain. In fact, he begins each morning with a multi-mile jog.

#### Two sons

His wife of four years, Nancy, is assistant superintendent of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, and his two sons by a former marriage are also Park Service employees.

Son Randy, 23, works for Island Packers, the charterboat concession operating out of Ventura, and Billy, 21, is a student at UCSB who will work for the Yellowstone concession in summer.

When he has three days off from his duties, Ehorn goes to an 80-acre forested homestead and cabin west of Red Bluff, which has been in his family since 1913.

"There are two ponds full of trout, apple trees, a lot of deer and bear," Ehorn said. "It's like my own little national park."

## Island provides a 'missing link'

### Mammoth's tusk found by two boys

By Hillary Hauser  
News-Press Staff Writer

In 1984, a 13-year-old Santa Paula boy and his friend were exploring a creekside arroyo on Santa Cruz Island when they found a 20,000-year-old mammoth tusk.

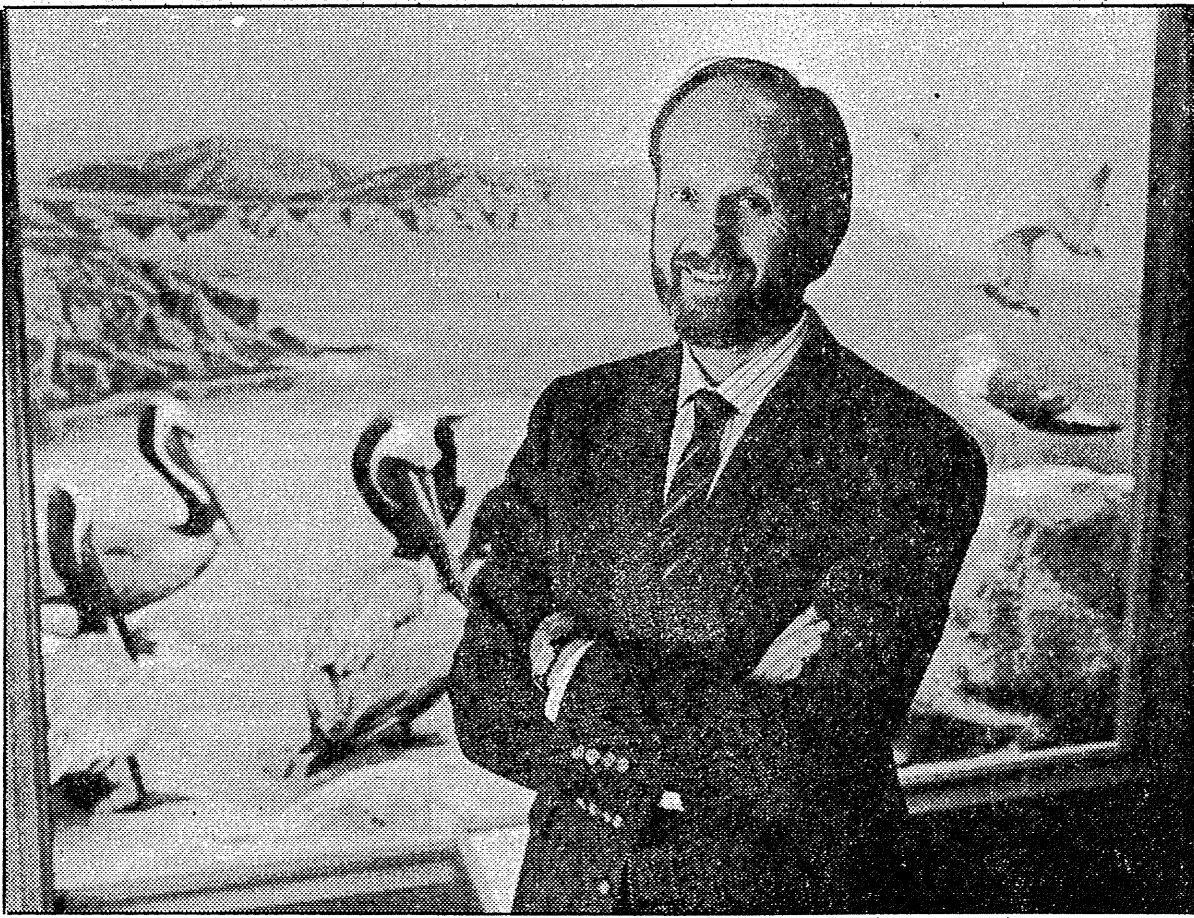
The fossil, the first mammoth tusk ever found on the island, was taken to the Museum of Natural History in Santa Barbara, which determined that the tusk was from a small imperial mammoth, a "missing link" between the imperial and dwarf mammoth.

The Natural History Museum, located near the Mission and sporting an enormous blue whale skeleton outside its front door, has long been the repository for important archaeological and biological finds in the Channel Islands.

It has also amassed a collection of island research.

Reflecting on the National Park Service's new role as scientific steward of the islands, Dennis Power, director of the museum, said he is pleased with how the Park Service is handling the job.

"We worked a lot on San Miguel before and after the National Park Service became involved," Power said. "It's more tight now than it was then. We wanted San Miguel to remain



News-Press photo by LEN WOOD

Dennis Power, director of the Museum of Natural History, stands in front of the

display on the Channel Islands greeting visitors at the museum.

pristine. The Park Service made it so pristine that we have to follow their orders now."

He also said the federal agency has removed some pressure from the museum, since Park Service scientists are now working on the islands, some of them full time.

Museum scientists contributing significantly to the body of knowledge about the islands include Erich Hochberg, an invertebrate biologist, and Ralph Philbrick, a botanist.

Also, Charles Woodhouse has documented the marine mammals of the area, and Paul Collins, associate curator of

vertebrate biology at the museum, has extensively studied the birds of Santa Cruz.

The plant and animal biology of the islands is like nowhere else on earth, because the separation of the islands from the mainland has encouraged the evolution of

See Page C-2, Col. 3

# Museum houses history of islands

Continued from Page C-1  
distinct life forms.

Notable are the island fox, thought to be a smaller version of the mainland gray fox.

The spotted skunk of Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz has a broader face and shorter tail than its mainland counterpart.

Eight species of bats live on the islands, and the island night lizard, a threatened species, lives on Santa Barbara, San Nicolas and San Clemente.

Other species unique to the islands include the deer mouse, which occurs on all eight islands, and the Santa Cruz Island scrub jay.

The islands have been important archaeological storehouses, too.

Phil Orr, a full-time researcher with the museum before his retirement in 1969,

conducted archaeological digs on Santa Rosa and published a book on his findings.

Human bones discovered on Santa Rosa were dated at 11,000 years.

The museum has also been an important research center for the Chumash Indian culture. John Johnson, a scholar of the Chumash, has replaced Travis Hudson, who died in 1985, and continues in the museum's efforts to understand the Chumash society on the islands.

Two replicas of a "tomol," or Chumash canoe, are at the museum today. Peter Howorth, a local island and marine mammal expert, built a canoe that was transferred from the county Courthouse to the museum in 1986. The other replica was built in 1915 by Fernando Librado, a local Chumash Indian.

In the year the National Park Service took the reigns of the Channel Islands, museum scientists prepared a biological survey of the islands for the federal agency.

That study was a complete overview of island conditions and was essentially an environmental impact statement, Power said.

Much of the information turned over to the federal agency was also the outgrowth of a symposium focusing on scientific research on the California islands, which was hosted by the museum in 1978. The results of this meeting were published in a book, "The California Islands," in 1980.

The museum will hold similar symposium in 1987, Power said.

"This is how we can contribute to fostering research on the islands," Power said.

Power said he is pleased with how the Park Service is handling scientific matters on the island. The eradication of burros from San Miguel was an "important step," and ridding Santa Barbara Island of rabbits was a good step, too, he added.

"It should have been done earlier," Power said. "Because of the rabbits, we lost the song sparrow and house finch from Santa Barbara Island."

The museum will maintain its involvement with the Channel Islands, Power said.

"They are like a shining star because the area is so interesting, so unique, worldwide," he said. "You can talk about the country, the coastal shelf, but when you talk about the Channel Islands, everyone brightens up. They are special — there is nothing like them."