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## Deception Pass State Park - Rosario Beach Naturalist

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# COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



**Internship Title:** Rosario Beach Naturalist

**Student Name:** Ron Isarankura

**Internship Dates:** June 18th - September 6th

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**STUDENT SIGNATURE** Ron Isarankura

**DATE:** 9/12/2022

## **Deception Pass State Park**

Over the summer of 2022, I had the privilege to work with Deception Pass State Park as a beach naturalist at Rosario Beach. Deception Pass is located on two islands in the North Puget Sound region, with Fidalgo Island being to the north and Whidbey Island being to the south. Deception pass is home to one of the most visited state parks in the state of Washington. With areas like Rosario Beach and the great Deception Pass bridge, it is no surprise an area as beautiful as this gets so much traction. In addition, Deception Pass is also an amazing recreational experience. Families can often be seen going for a swim, fishing, kayaking, camping, hiking, and so much more making it very populated during this hot summer. Deception Pass was also celebrating its 100-year anniversary during the internship. The Deception Pass Park Foundation hosted several summer events to keep people entertained for their celebration making the state park more populated than in past years. Overall, Deception Pass is home to many fun activities and gorgeous views making the internship that much more enjoyable.

I originally found this internship by reaching out to an advisor in the College of the Environment at Western Washington University. I was forwarded an email from an Interpretive Naturalist serving at Deception Pass State Park. When reading about the internship I was excited about what the opportunity had to offer. As an intern, I would either be assigned to the tide pools located at Rosario Beach, the education table located just outside of the tide pools when the tide is high, or at the park's intertidal Discovery Center which provided education and exhibits for the visitors. The goal for the interns would be to help guide the visitor experiences through an exploration of what the park has to offer as well as enhance the personal experience they would

have while being at the park. Another goal they set for the interns was learning interpretation. Interpretation is generally helping people who visit the park understand the importance of the life that lives there and helps them gain a better understanding of the world around them. I found this opportunity the most interesting compared to all the other ones I was offered because I would be able to gain experience giving out environmental education while outdoors which sounded like a great way to spend my summer.

My learning objectives for this internship experience were to expand my knowledge of marine topics as well as be able to get hands-on experience in the field. Additionally, I wanted to expand my knowledge of the Rosario tide pool ecosystem as well as learn how it was working in a recreational area at a state park. I wanted to be able to interpret and answer questions regarding the natural marine ecosystem that Rosario Beach had to offer. After completing this internship I believe that each of these objectives was completed.

At the beginning of the internship, my knowledge of the region was very limited. While working at Deception Pass I learned that talking to visitors was a key aspect of learning the area. Whether people were asking questions or giving me information they learned in their life, each day I felt like I learned something new about where I was working. For example, visitors came by each day and talked about the region. I learned much about the history of attractions in local areas like Bowman Bay and Coupeville. From talking to visitors I discovered that Bowman Bay had a family of river otters that tended to swim by and steal fish from the hooks of fishermen around there. I learned that in Coupeville there is the Coupeville Wharf that houses a skeletal gray whale named Rosie, a dall's porpoise named Rudy, and a steller sea lion named Samson. I

found that the residents always had a vast amount of knowledge when it came to the area and it was a joy to get to know the area more each day. I believe learning about the region and the residents played a big role in learning the duties of a park ranger as well as helping me gain experience in a field such as this.

Before heading into the marine ecosystem in the tide pools I ended up researching the creatures you could find in the ecosystem. However, even with that knowledge I still was able to learn something new each time I was out there. One geology teacher that visited told me that the tide pools sat on top of basalt and the geologic fault line ran along the southern ridge. I also learned quite a bit about tides as a whole. I was able to gain an understanding of how tides worked, when high and low tides were, the different intertidal zones, and most importantly how tide pools are created.

Additionally, each day I was able to learn something new about the species while giving that knowledge out to visitors who were seeking answers. The Rosario tide pools house a multitude of creatures. Visitors tended to be interested in the tide pool sculpin, purple shore crabs, and aggregating anemone since they can always be seen in the marine ecosystem of the tide pools. On days with lower tides, different species like sea stars, nudibranchs, anemones, sea cucumbers, and gumboot chitons are exposed to the surface and garner a lot of attention. However, throughout the summer, we had other rare interesting organisms pop their heads out around the tide pools. Each creature has a story behind them and made the tide pool ecosystem and Rosario Beach much more lively.



*Images of a pacific blood star, six-ray star, red sea cucumbers, and a gumboot chiton were taken from the Rosario Beach tide pools. Credit: Deception Pass State Park Beach Naturalists*

One key animal that everyone adored was a great blue heron that came by every day. The heron was old due to loss of color in its feathers and came by each day to feed on gunnel it could find in the tide pools. It was most visitors' favorite because it was very comfortable around humans and sometimes even walked with people in the tide pools. The creature became so well known that the locals ended up naming it Glenn.



*Image of Glenn at the Rosario tide pools. Credit: Deception Pass State Park Beach Naturalists*

Another creature I had the pleasure of seeing in person was the famous Northern elephant seal named Elsie Mae. Elsie Mae is a bit of a historical figure around Deception Pass State Park. Elsie is quite comfortable around humans and has known to like human interaction going as far as even crashing two weddings. She was born in Bowman Bay around 2018 and has even given birth to a pup named Emerson who is just as comfortable around humans as she is. For example, I was told of a story where Emerson was once found sleeping next to a tire of an RV. The residents have been able to watch Elsie and her pup grow over the years and the two have made for some amazing tales over the years.



*Image of Elsie Mae at Bowman Bay. Credit: Deception Pass State Park Beach Naturalists*

Lastly, I was able to see a live Great Pacific Octopus out in the tide pools. This was a very exciting experience for me because I have never seen a live octopus outside an aquarium. In the morning, my coworker and I were standing in front of the tide pools talking when a man came up to us asking what type of octopus was in the tide pools. We were shocked because we haven't had an octopus show up in the tide pools for around a year. When he went to show us we found the GPO (Great Pacific Octopus) my coworker later named Ruby. We were able to deduce

that it was a GPO due to the lumps on its eye and the fact that Puget Sound is home to many other GPOs. The visitor traffic became very large this day due to word getting around of the octopus. Due to this the octopus camouflaged itself and hid in a crevice, but its tentacle still stuck out so visitors were still able to see a glimpse of it.



*Image of Ruby, the Great Pacific Octopus at the Rosario Beach tide pools. Credit: Deception Pass State Park Beach Naturalists*

At the end of my internship, I believe I was able to expand my knowledge about the organisms that live in the tide pool ecosystem as well as learn the history of the area around it. By the end, I was able to easily answer questions regarding any of the organisms in the tide pools as well as interpret information for visitors to make it easier for them to understand.

I believe that this internship experience is great for anyone looking into being a park ranger or learning about interpretation. You can put your knowledge of marine biology and science you learn in class to use in a public setting. They give you so many interesting materials

to work with to help expand your knowledge as well as others. This internship also offers other services such as the education table and Discovery Center. In both, you are given materials such as whale bones, otter pelts, and various shells. When learning about each material to be able to interpret for the visitors you end up learning a large amount about the organisms and how they fit into the ecosystem around Rosario Beach. This internship helped me be more confident in talking about environmental topics as well as marine species that reside in Puget Sound. Some courses that I believe were the most valuable during this internship were my oceanography course along with my course on the biology of fishes.

My recommendation for other students that are thinking of doing this internship is to do your research and have fun with it! Be passionate about what you are talking about and most people will have fun and remember that experience. For example, one of my coworkers always loved to talk about the brutality of sea stars and how they rip open oysters and put their stomach inside them and release digestive acids to eat them. Visitors found that fun and took that knowledge back with them. Also, the Deception Pass State Park staff and volunteers are all very kind-hearted people who are passionate about what they talk about so you can always count on them to raise your spirits. And most importantly, you can spend your summer outside talking about something you enjoy.