

It's hard not to be inspired'



Former International Ranger Federation President Deanne Adams: An interview with Brenna Lissoway

Deanne Adams enjoyed a 37-year career with the National Park Service. Starting in her home state of Alaska, she held multiple assignments there and in the Lower 48, eventually retiring as the chief of interpretation and education for the Pacific West Region.

The International Ranger Federation (IRF) captured Deanne Adams's heart nearly two decades ago. In 1994 she was serving on the executive board of the Association of National Park Rangers (ANPR) when a representative of the IRF requested financial support for the first World Ranger Congress. Adams recalls that ANPR leaders hesitated before committing some of their slim budget, although ANPR was among the three founding members of IRF.

After Adams and her husband Tony Sisto, also an NPS veteran, attended the second World Ranger Congress in 1997, she began a long period of service with IRF. Adams represented North America on the IRF executive board, became vice president, and then served as president from 2009-2012. At the 2016 Congress, Adams and Sisto led the drafting of the Estes Park Declarations, a set of principles and goals that echo what Adams had discovered long ago: Rangers the world over share common bonds as they safeguard the planet's fragile resources.

Brenna Lissoway's Oral History Project interview with Adams at the 2014 Ranger Rendezvous follows.

LISSOWAY: I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about how you became involved in the International Ranger Federation. What was it about the international aspect that attracted you? Why did you want to help that organization?

ADAMS: This week [at the 2014

Rendezvous] we're talking about how ANPR is going to host the 2016 Congress. A lot of people have been reflecting on what a Congress does to them, and what they are saying is what I say, too. That is, we grumble in our parks about the resources we don't have, and we do need more. This is a rich country and we should invest more in our parks.

But when you go to a World Ranger Congress and you meet people who are ... I get emotional here, sorry. I mean, some of those people literally put their lives on the line. The people, they're just incredible people. We have incredible people in this country and a group of rangers who do wonderful things throughout the service, for people and for the planet.

Can I make it through this [emotionally]?

We don't think of that so much in this country. I mean, we've had rangers murdered in this country. But in other countries, it's incredible what they go through. Because they believe that the health of



◀ Tony Sisto and Deanne Adams with the plane for their honeymoon trip after getting married in Denali National Park in 1980.

▶ The IRF booth at the 2003 World Parks Congress in South Africa. Deanne Adams with rangers Alejandro Caparros, Argentina, and Elaine Thomas, Australia. Photos courtesy of Deanne Adams



their country, the health of the world, is so dependent on what they do in their jobs. And that they'll go back every day and do it again. Their families lose them. The Congo's a big example. But it's, to a lesser extent, so many other countries.

So you come to this Congress and you learn about those kinds of people. It's hard not to be inspired. But you also see this huge bond that we have. When I went to Costa Rica, my first Congress, I don't speak Spanish. There's a guy there from Colombia, not a young ranger, probably my age at that point, and he starts talking to me in Spanish.

I didn't know what he was saying. So I grabbed Yvette Ruan [retired from the NPS]; she translated. What he was saying was, "I had no idea there were other rangers in other countries. I had no idea that there were people doing this work that I'm doing, and that they understand what I'm dealing with. They understand the challenges that I have." It was just a revelation. And that happens at every Congress.

We have new rangers coming, and it is so strengthening for them, to know that they're not alone. One ranger, Juan Carlos Gambarotta, got real active with IRF. He was the only ranger in Uruguay when he first learned about IRF. And they've got more rangers there now.

So there's that very basic thing, really, the family, that we share the same values across languages, across these immensely different cultures. But we're all bonded by this basic knowledge that our earth is limited, and — [choking up] it's hard to talk about this all of a sudden — just how

important our work is for our planet. And for the future of our kids, our grandkids.

That's why I'm so in love with the IRF.

LISSOWAY: Can I ask, what do you see is the major contribution that the United States National Park Service can give other countries?

ADAMS: That's a great question, because you know, the U.S. is perceived so poorly a lot of places — you know, as a bully — and we've got all the resources and we can do

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whatever we want in the world. But when it comes to parks, we used to be a real leader internationally.

When a bunch of us from IRF went to the World Parks Conference in Durban in 2003, people would come up to us that represented the U.S. Park Service and say, “Where have you guys been? We miss you. You are our leaders. You have the first national park in the world. You have these great systems. You have all these great examples for us of how things can be done if you have the resources. And you're not here.”

And it's politics, over time, that we stopped going. With Jon Jarvis now we're getting re-engaged internationally to the extent that we can. And of course resources is always a part of that.

I feel like there's a lot we can learn from other countries. We talked about the involvement with communities, and man, oh, man, can we learn from other countries about that. They'd teach us tons. The other thing we can learn is just being resourceful. So many of those countries that don't have very many resources are very creative in how they still protect their parks, so we can get a lot of good ideas from them.

But what they get from us is some real specific support. Sister parks are a great example. Rocky Mountain has a fantastic sister park arrangement with Poland and Slovakia. Rocky Mountain got a bequest, and they're using that money so rangers from there come over here and rangers from here go over there. That's all kinds of rangers; resource management's really involved with it. Those rangers over there really appreciate what Rocky Mountain is being able to share with them and show them, from technologies to techniques. But it's the same for us, that what they brought over here, Rocky Mountain has used.

So the World Ranger Congresses are terrific sharing grounds for that.

Brenna Lissoway is an archivist at Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico.

Lu Ann Jones, a staff historian with the Park History Program in Washington, D.C., and Lissoway edited this interview excerpt.