

[From Fall 1997]

Work Camper - A Unique Approach to Retirement

Retired and running out of things to do and places to go? Or simply running low on the wherewithal to reach those objectives?

That was the problem that faced us recently. We had been retired for about four years and, during that time, had made two trips of three months duration each across the United States. We had also spent several months touring the coast of Maine, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Our twenty-six foot travel trailer had also taken us on four annual fishing excursions to Quebec, Canada, where we just camped on the shore of Cabonga Reservoir for three or four weeks of total relaxation.

What else is there to do or see? How can you live the rover's lifestyle for part of the year and still feel as if you're doing something meaningful or making a contribution to society?

An article in one of the travel magazines one day gave us a possible solution to our dilemma. It described how it was possible for individuals to volunteer for work at many of our national or state operated facilities for twenty to thirty hours per week, in exchange for a trailer or RV site with full hookups (electricity, water and sewerage). This meant you could work at something that was both interesting and fulfilling in an area of the country that you wanted to visit, the only restriction being that of time. Generally it is necessary to spend a minimum of one month at a given facility.

Now that you've decided that this is something you might want to do, how do you go about choosing a location at which to do your volunteering? The easiest procedure to follow is to read the advertisements in travel, trailer and RV magazines, or subscribe to *Workamper*, a newsletter that is published about once every other month. It carries ads for both paid positions in private campgrounds and volunteer positions in national parks, state parks and refuges.

As soon as you have made your decision, you should communicate your desire to serve by either a telephone call or a letter (or in some cases by e-mail). A short resume might be useful. But in most cases, the will to serve is the determining factor.

In our case, a phone call to the Eastern Shore of Virginia Wildlife Refuge in early June was returned by Jim Kenyon, the person in charge of volunteers. He replied that we were more than welcome to come in early September and stay until the end of the month. We started looking forward to our new experience.

Actually, there was very little we had to do to prepare for our four-hundred mile trip from northern New Jersey. Never having been to the Eastern Shore before, we did some research on the area - places to see and things to do. When September 5th arrived, we were on our way. As will invariably occur, the morning we were to leave we discovered a pool of oil on

the floor of the garage. It turned out to be a leaking differential oil seal. With the able repair skills of our auto mechanic, we were out by ten in the morning.

After an overnight stay at a state park in upper Maryland, we arrived shortly after noon the next day and were welcomed by the staff.

The anticipation of what the next three weeks will bring is very exciting to us. Working in the beautifully appointed Visitors Center, meeting and conversing with people from all over the country, and trying to answer their questions will be a challenge. Banding and keeping track of birds during the beginning of the annual migration, and simply making ourselves useful around the refuge is something we are looking forward to.

How we make out remains to be seen. Hopefully, we will make a contribution. At least enough to have earned our keep. And, if we're lucky and do well, perhaps we will be asked to report to you in a future issue.

*Al Stoleroff,
ESNWR Volunteer*

Part 2 of this story is in Winter 1997 edition of the Piping Plover