



Ranger History

In November of 1968, for the first time in the 40 year history of PARD, a Park Ranger was added to the staff. This ranger was hired to promote the enjoyment of all city parks and facilities, to offer park visitors a sense of security and tranquility, and to enforce all policies, rules, and regulations pertaining to the City-owned land and facilities under PARD jurisdiction. The Park Ranger position was created to administer better control over protective measures related to the parks and recreation areas. There was also a need for foot patrolman in areas inaccessible to a patrol car. The Park Ranger was trained to use preventative measures to prevent law infractions and to ensure proper use of park structures and facilities.

In February of 1969 a second Park Ranger was added to the force. By May of 1970 the Park Rangers had 10 total full time rangers. The 10 rangers were on call 24 hours a day and patrolled Lake Austin Park, Town Lake, Decker Lake, Zilker Park, and all other PARD neighborhood parks, playgrounds, recreation centers, and golf courses. In these patrol areas the Park Rangers had the same authority as the Austin Police Department. These 10 Rangers were commissioned peace officers, and as a result the Park Rangers were renamed Park Police in 1985. The same year a new interpretative Park Ranger Program was initiated, separate from the Park Police. This new Urban Park Ranger program was to provide safety, interpretation, and other related services to the growing trail system in the City. Unfortunately this program was eliminated in an economic downturn in 1986, but the Park Police remained.

By 1991 eight new Park Police officers had been hired to create the Hike and Bike Patrol, and to provide foot and bicycle patrol on the trails. In 1993 the Park Police officers completed 80 hours of basic Ranger instruction. This effort was designed to help the officers better serve the public, narrow the communication gap between park patrons and park police, broaden interpretative work, and help with public relations. On February 8, 1993 each officer became certified as a Federal Park Ranger. They were able to enhance their interpretive skills and answer questions about the parks on the trail.

Throughout the years the Park Police has been assigned many tasks. When increased criminal activity was observed at Austin Recreational Centers, the Park Police stationed themselves at each location for safety. Their presence was associated with a decrease in drug use, gang activities, burglaries and weapon possession. In addition to increasing facility safety, the Park Police presence at the recreation centers also provided positive role models for Austin youth.

In 2008 the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Management was annexed to the Austin Police Department, and as a result so were the Park Police. To supplement the Park Units, Austin City Council created the Austin Park Rangers to serve as a roving interpretive force that would also enforce park safety. The new Park Rangers would be the eyes and ears of the Austin Parks and Recreation

Department. On December 18, 2008 the Austin City Council passed Ordinance 20081218-047, and the Park Ranger Program as we know it today was officially created.

Today the Park Rangers main area of patrol is the Lady Bird Lake Hike and Bike trail. Rangers are all CPR/First Aid certified, and are always available to help and answer your questions. The Park Rangers also offer a variety of educational programs. If you would like the Park Rangers to come and speak at your school, camp, or educational facility [e-mail us!](#)



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