



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Death Valley National Park

CA Highway 190
PO Box 579
Death Valley, CA92328

phone 760.786.3200
fax 760.786.3246

Death Valley National Park News Release

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Contact: Abby Wines, 760-786-3221, abby_wines@nps.gov

Court Appearance by ‘High On Life’ for Park Violations

DEATH VALLEY, CA – Five defendants from the Canadian group High On Life appeared in the Yellowstone Justice Center on November 1 for multiple violation notices from National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management public lands. Two defendants pleaded guilty to violations in Yellowstone and Death Valley National Park. The other three defendants pleaded not guilty and will be appointed court attorneys.

The group, consisting of Charles Ryker Gamble, Alexey Andriyovych Lyakh, Justis Cooper Price Brown, Parker Heuser, and Hamish McNab Campbell Cross, were the subject of multiple investigations by the NPS and the BLM:

- Zion National Park
- Death Valley National Park
- Yellowstone National Park
- Mesa Verde National Park
- BLM Corona Arch
- BLM Bonneville Salt Flats

“I am deeply offended by the serial nature of these violations,” said Death Valley National Park Superintendent Mike Reynolds. “This is a pattern of behavior that shows no respect for environmental protection or the experiences of other park visitors.”

On March 11, 2016, a park ranger contacted three people from High On Life at Badwater in Death Valley National Park. They were cited for using a bicycle off the roadway, possessing a bicycle in a wilderness area, operating a drone, and commercial photography without a permit.

P. Heuser pleaded guilty to two violations in Death Valley National Park that included riding a bike in wilderness and commercial photographs without a permit. He will also pay for collateral fines that stemmed from violations at the Bonneville Salt Flats (BLM). He agreed to pay more than \$1,000.00 in fines and fees. P. Heuser was not charged any violations in Yellowstone National Park.

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“Over 91% of Death Valley National Park is designated wilderness. By law, wilderness areas are supposed to be free of mechanized equipment and commercial activities. These violations occurred at Badwater, which is the most-visited area in the Death Valley National Park Wilderness. Using a bicycle off road can also leave tracks that can be a visible impact to park visitors for a long time,” Reynolds said.

On May 16, 2016, a concerned citizen contacted park rangers in Yellowstone National Park, after seeing four individuals walking on Grand Prismatic Spring. During the course of the investigation, park rangers identified the four individuals involved in the violations in Yellowstone National Park and arrest warrants were subsequently issued. Through the use of social media and tips from the public, additional investigations were conducted about the group’s activities on other federal lands.

H. Cross pleaded guilty to charges in Yellowstone National Park that included disorderly conduct by creating a hazardous condition and foot travel in a thermal area. He agreed to pay over \$8,000.00 in fines, restitution, community service payments paid to Yellowstone Forever, and fees. Both individuals will be on probation for five years which includes being banned from public lands managed by the U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

“The judge’s decision today sends a very clear message about thermal feature protection and safety,” said Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Dan Wenk. “Hamish Cross’s egregious actions damaged a world-class hot spring and risked his own life coupled with the lives of responding rangers. We look forward to the outcome of the case regarding the three remaining defendants.”

Harm can be done by walking on bacterial mats that surround thermal features like Grand Prismatic Spring. The colorful mats contain communities of thermophiles, or heat-loving organisms. Walking on the mats damages the microscopic communities and the footprints left behind impact the visual landscape people expect in Yellowstone.

Scalding water also underlies much of the thin, breakable crust around hot springs like Grand Prismatic Spring. Many hot springs are near or above the boiling point and can cause severe or fatal burns. More people have been injured or killed in hot springs than any other natural feature in Yellowstone. For example, a fatality occurred in June 2016, at the Norris Geyser Basin when a man walked off the designated boardwalk, slipped, and fell into a hot spring.

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