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## Early Career Opportunities for Humboldt Geographers

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# Early Career Opportunities for Humboldt Geographers

Otto Schmitt

Twenty-two miles north of Arcata lies an often overlooked one-square-mile park of lush trees and cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Patrick's Point State Park is on ancestral Yurok land—it is commonly referred to as “Sumêg” by the Yurok people—and is a great place for hiking, tide-pooling, and birdwatching. It is also a great place for early career experiences for Humboldt State geographers.

Geography major Kourtney Boone was hired as a seasonal worker at Patrick's Point, starting her position on March 13, 2020, the day the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a national emergency. From the beginning of her seasonal work, park operations were altered due to state protocols. Kourtney had to adapt to fluid public health and safety measures while continuing to perform her job duties, which included working the kiosk, greeting visitors, and collecting entrance fees. She also assigned campground spots and was the primary contact person when visitors had any issues or questions.

Kourtney was the main closer for the majority of the season. She was in charge of finalizing everything for the day and preparing the park to open the following morning. Her favorite part of the day was after day-use visitors had left, when she would spend the remaining few hours of her shift alone listening to the California State Park radio scanner, finding amusement at what park rangers across the state encountered on a nightly basis.

The highlight of the job, Kourtney said, was interacting with visitors, the number of which many longer tenured co-workers told Kourtney seemingly had increased despite the pandemic. She took special joy interacting with children as they discovered the park's unique ecosystem. Kourtney recalls one such interaction,



*Two Thumbs Up:* Kourtney approves working at Patrick's Point.

when a little girl was playing “stump the ranger” with her and she had to guess what animal the girl had found in the park. “It was a banana slug,” Kourtney said. “It was just so fun to watch her get involved with the park, with nature, and ask me questions. She wanted to be a ranger when she grew up, and so it was really cool to see that appreciation for a natural environment and protecting it in someone so young and impressionable.”

Asked what compelled her to apply for this position, Kourtney replied, “It sounded like something that aligned with my degree because it was based outdoors

and recommended by a recently graduated Geography major, Sam King, who had worked at the park during his senior year at HSU.” Kourtney admitted nervousness when accepting this job, but she was determined, saying, “Let’s do it, let’s try a new challenge.”

In addition to forest hikes and sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean, Patrick’s Point also offers visitors opportunities for whale watching and viewing other sea mammals. The Humboldt coast lies along the migratory path for gray whales as they travel from the cold waters of Alaska to the warm waters of Baja California in the winter, then return to Alaska in the spring. When the whales migrate back to Alaska, visitors might see mother whales with their young calves close to the shoreline, seeking refuge from predators. The cliff at Patrick’s Point, surrounding shallow protected waters, is one of the best whale watching places on the West Coast. The peak time to observe the gray whale migration is September through January and March through June.

In her time working at Patrick’s Point, Kourtney became familiar with all areas of the park and gained proficiency in communicating clearly to visitors and using keywords to help build mental maps. She also learned much about Yurok culture. Within the park lies Sumég Village, featuring examples of traditional family homes, a redwood canoe, and other Yurok landscape elements. Sumég is used by local Yurok tribe members to help educate their youth and sharing their culture with park visitors.

When asked if she had any pointers for students who would may want to work at Patrick’s Point, Kourtney replied, “Absolutely! If you are interested in park work at all, just go for it. Reach out and I would be happy to help people if they have any questions.” There are many opportunities for geographers, foresters, GIS technicians, and people from other related fields to get involved.

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on these positions, visit  
[parks.ca.gov/jobs](https://parks.ca.gov/jobs)*

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*Cassandra: What are some of your memorable moments from your career so far?*

Kieron: We have regional meetings where we all meet and discuss topics, issues, and challenges to find solutions to common issues we face in our cities, and I really enjoy that. I also enjoy that it’s fast paced and that we can see the benefits of our work in real time, whether it’s providing a loan for a new Black-owned bakery or facilitating the first street to be named after an Asian-American in Berkeley (Kala Bagai Way). The work is broad, dynamic, and rewarding.

*Cassandra: How did you get involved with the Black Panther Legacy?*

Kieron: Growing up in the Bay Area, my family held prominent positions in the Black Panther Party. Their dedication to keeping the legacy of the Panthers alive was what drew me to the organization over 15 years ago. I’m also part of the 100 Black Men of the Bay Area that supports economic development in the Black community as well as mentorship for young boys in Oakland. This organization has helped with my professional development, networking and volunteerism in my community.

*Cassandra: I am interviewing you during a pandemic, which has brought difficulties that impact many students, myself included. When you were an undergrad at HSU, what helped you stay motivated?*

Kieron: For me, having a built-in network of the Lumberjack basketball team that supported me was crucial. The support from the coaches, trainers, teammates, fans, media, and faculty was integral part of my success at HSU. While not necessarily a fraternity or a group that’s based on something other than what you’re studying, it has those same characteristics. That was helpful for me, Lumberjack for life.

## **QUESTIONS FOR KIERON?**

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