

(S.D.)-Ranger Mary Laycock Retires After 34 Years At Wind Cave

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Photo: Rangers Mike and Mary Laycock. (NPS photo)

(WIND CAVE NATIONAL PARK, S.D.)-Thirty-four years is a long time to work at one place unless you love your job. For park ranger Mary Laycock, who began working at Wind Cave National Park in May of 1979, it doesn't seem long enough, as this November marks the end of her career, one that has touched thousands of visitors.

"My husband Mike and I were traveling around the country in 1978 visiting national parks when we discovered Wind Cave," said Laycock. "We thought the wildlife viewing opportunities were on par with Yellowstone, but here you also had a marvelous cave to explore."

Laycock began her Wind Cave career as a seasonal interpreter leading cave tours and working at the information desk. She was soon helping train new employees and became a full-time employee in 1994.

"Before joining the National Park Service, I was a teacher for five years in southern Ohio. But it wasn't until I began working with students here that I felt I was able to really help others make strong connections to nature and the park. To be able to experience the 'real thing' makes learning come alive – it's a joy to watch that happen with both children and adults," Laycock said.

During her years at the park, Laycock oversaw the development of an environmental education program that annually hosts around 900 students and parents. In recent years, she developed a program for toddlers and homeschooled children that draws participants from around the Black Hills.

"Mary brought many talents and skills to her job," said park superintendent Vidal Davila. "She served as the park's webmaster, overseeing a website with over 3,000 pages of information. Mary was also the park's exhibit specialist, interpretive trainer for new employees, editor of park publications such as our newspaper, and all around troubleshooter."

A retirement party honoring Laycock's work at Wind Cave National Park will be held at the American Legion in Hot Springs on Friday evening, November 15th. For those wishing to attend, please call the park at 605-745-4600 to make a reservation.

--Wind Cave National Park