

RICK SMITH

Richard B. “Rick” Smith of Tucson, Ariz., died July 16, 2025, after a long illness. Rick was born in Ionia, Mich., on March 8, 1938. He is survived by his wife of 45 years, Kathy Smith; his brother Bill Smith (Kim) of Coldwater MI; nephew Eric Smith (Sandy) of Louisville, CO; niece Julie Walker (Ben) and grandnieces Emma and Ellen of Muscle Shoals, AL. He was predeceased by his parents, Mary and William Smith, brother Phil Smith and sister-in-law Kitty Smith.

Rick obtained a bachelor’s degree from Albion College and a master’s degree from Michigan State University. He taught middle school for six years and worked as a seasonal park ranger in Yellowstone National Park during the summer months. Rick joined the Peace Corps in 1968 and became an Instructor at the University of Ascension in Paraguay. Upon returning to the United States, Rick decided he enjoyed his job as a National Park Service (NPS) ranger better than teaching and followed his passion, making it a career from which he retired after 30 years.

Rick’s NPS tenure was as legendary as it was long. He was a ranger in Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks; instructor at the Albright Ranger Training Center in Grand Canyon National Park; Legislative Affairs Specialist in the Washington, D.C., coordinating national park legislation with Congress; Superintendent of Fredericksburg Battlefield; Manager of a Special Task Force in Alaska to protect newly created National Monuments; Assistant Superintendent of Everglades National Park; Associate Regional Director of Park Operations for the Mid-Atlantic Region; Superintendent of Carlsbad Caverns and Guadalupe National Parks; Associate Regional Director of Park Operations and Cultural Resources for the Southwest Region; and finally, his last assignment was in 1994 as Acting Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park.

Upon retirement, Rick’s rich experience and proficiency in Spanish led him to become a much sought-after consultant in Latin American countries on national park management, natural resources protection and ranger training. He consulted in every Latin American country except Venezuela through such organizations as Aid for International Development, World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organization and more.

Throughout his career and afterward, Rick remained dedicated to the protection of the National Park System and the development of park rangers. He was a leader and an inspiration to all. In 1977, he and several other National Park Rangers founded the Association of National Park Rangers (ANPR) and became its second President. They created this organization to encourage and increase communication and share expertise among fellow National Park Rangers. Upon the formation of the International Ranger Federation (IRF), Rick immediately joined and later became President. With his many contacts in Latin America, Rick worked with the Latin Rangers to create organizations and join the IRF. He then found funding for some to attend the World Ranger Congresses. When National Parklands were threatened by Federal Administration decisions in 2003, Rick and two other influential Park Rangers formed the Coalition of Retired National Park Rangers (now Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks). This organization provides a powerful voice for those who care deeply about the well-being and future of the National Park System. Rick, again, became their second President.

In 2005, Rick became one of the founding board members of Paso Pacifico, whose mission was to restore and protect the endangered dry tropical forest and coastal ecosystems of Mesoamerica's Pacific Slope. He started a Turtle Ranger Program in Nicaragua by providing some innovative ways to protect turtles and their eggs. He trained new rangers to prepare them for the task. Rick proposed a Junior Ranger Program and arranged airplane flights for the rangers to view their resources.

Rick was admired and appreciated by all who worked with and for him. Throughout his career, the organizations he served presented him with numerous awards. Before retiring from the National Park Service, Rick earned the "Meritorious Service Award" from the U.S. Department of the Interior for his outstanding contributions in park management. Rick was given the Association of National Park Rangers (ANPR) "President's Award" in 2003, recognizing his dedication and outstanding contributions to ANPR. He was given "The 1872 Award" from the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks in 2020 for his continued work for the Coalition and dedication to protecting the national parks and public lands through his administration of the Park Lands Watch site. And in 2024, the International Ranger Federation presented Rick with the Gordon Miller Lifetime Achievement Award for his tireless dedication, outstanding contributions, and inspirational and lasting impact on the park ranger profession. From his alma mater, Albion College, Rick received the "Distinguished Alumni Award" in 2006 for his excellence in career achievements, contributions to community and humanity, and service to the college.

In addition to a lifetime of service protecting America's and the world's public lands, Rick enjoyed everything those lands had to offer. He loved to ski, scuba dive, raft rivers, and play golf. Rick with Kathy traveled across the US, Canada and Mexico in their camper and chartered sailboats from ports worldwide, with Rick as captain.

Known for his generous spirit, commitment to national parks and the NPS, thirst for adventure and love for family and friends, Rick was one of a kind and will be missed by all.

There will be a Celebration of Life for Rick in Grand Canyon National Park in the fall. More details to follow soon.

To make a donation in Rick's memory these organizations and funds were very close to Rick's heart:

Paso Pacifico: <https://secure.qgiv.com/for/ricksmith/>

Rick Smith International Fund: <https://www.anpr.org/donate>

Condolences may be sent to Kathy Smith at kathysmith0918@icloud.com ***or***
5264 N. Fort Yuma Trail, Tucson, AZ. 85750.

