



VAGABUS VOLUNTEERS LEND A HAND AT MENDOCINO COAST BOTANICAL GARDENS

By: Molly Rosenthal—Volunteer Coordinator, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

FORT BRAGG, CA—June 9, 2016—On a warm sunny morning in Fort Bragg, a colorful school bus pulls into the parking lot of the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. Out pours a group of six vibrant young people sporting colorful pants, beanies and smiles. After a quick coffee and pastry detour, they head out to the coastal headlands to meet Staff Gardener and Naturalist, Mario Abreu. The group was set to tackle the bi-annual removal of invasive *Lampranthus spectabilis* ‘Ice Plant’ from the native grasslands on the coastal bluffs. Perched high above the crashing waves—with tools and buckets in hand—the group crouches along the cliff and gets to work.

They call themselves The Vagabus Project, a traveling clan of adventurous folk, hitch hikers and self-proclaimed hippies that volunteer their time for a good cause in each the community they visit. The project was started last fall by Steven Boutwell, also known by his road name “Huck,” and has since garnered members from all over the world. Their past projects range from feeding the homeless, assisting at animal sanctuaries, gardening and trash cleanup. The Vagabus convoy has grown from four people and one bus in February to now eleven people, two buses, an RV, a motorcycle and five dogs.

Boutwell connected with the Gardens at a time when the organization is in great need of volunteers as summer is peak season for tourism. Currently, the non-profit has over 200 volunteers on its roster, with nearly 50 wonderful and dedicated people showing up on a monthly or weekly basis. The need for reliable, hands-on hard work is ongoing. Volunteers are a precious resource helping to maintain and improve this regional treasure. “We have a truly remarkable cadre of volunteers who help us on a regular basis, but we are always in need of more help,” said Gardens’ Board Vice President, Ben Nicholson. “We try to make the volunteer experience a fun and interesting learning opportunity. We invite all who are willing to share their talents to contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Molly Rosenthal.”

Vagabus Project Coordinator Boutwell, exclaimed volunteering at the Gardens was “by far one of the best gigs we’ve ever, ever had, hands down.”

He elaborated that most of the time when they volunteer for garden work or environmental restoration, people usually just hand them some gloves, leave them with a bucket, and that’s about it.

“Working with Mario [Abreu] was the equivalent of working with a PhD Botanist; very educational, very informative, and extremely great at coordinating the group on exactly what work was needed, and why such work was important for the local ecosystem,” said Boutwell.

In the near future The Vagabus Project has their sights set on South and Central America, volunteering for non-profits and eco-projects along the way. First, the group plans to head north to Garberville to volunteer at the 40th Annual Summer Arts and Music Festival. The end goal is Argentina—the southern-most point of the Western Hemisphere that they can reach by bus.

For more information about volunteering at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, please call 707-964-4352 ext. 10