

Death and Disappearance (or Transfiguration)

Stock animals that made the ultimate one-way trip

1984 Charlotte - Morgenson

[Bears] became occasional visitors only until Rasty Horse died. But even during the time they were daily chewing on Rasty, they weren't getting food from people.

1984 Rae Lakes - Cameron

One further complaint I had this summer with the packers was that they agreed to come up and put lime on the body of a horse that died during an attempted evacuation, and never did. Mark Berry made an agreement with me which he completely failed to keep.

1987 Rock Creek - Lyness

Cottonwood Pack Station did many spot trips, mostly to the upper lake; all-expense trips (2–4 nights) about every 2 weeks; and some longer trips. (Wright Lakes, Crabtree.) They “lost” 2 mules and a horse in early August and never retrieved them. The best guess is that they are somewhere around Guyot Creek.

1990 Tyndall - Atkinson

The forest service's newly rebuilt Shepherd Pass trail held up amazingly well. Despite the heavy stock traffic up and down it all summer long. The upper section did get narrower and narrower due to small rockslides as the season progressed, and one switchback slipped completely away, but the packers always managed to shore things up enough to keep it open. Regardless of its condition, though, this trail remains difficult for both stock and backpackers. The packers never did like it, even early in the season when it was three feet wide. There were numerous wrecks, and one horse, early in the season, fell to its death (it remains there to this day, and still reeks).

1991 Kern - Gustafson

8/20 – 9/6 Cottonwood Pack Station

Caught a stray horse and cared for it and two mules lost about 8/11. One mule, “Sweetheart”, had been turned loose near Junction Meadow tied to another animal. When found by Park visitors she was lying on her side, weak and dehydrated, with her feet tangled in a halter. This large moving stock party had been sent out under the supervision of an inexperienced packer and a ten year old boy, according to Ranger Malengo. I turned the stock over to Cottonwood packer Robert Lombardi on 9/6, about 26 days after they were lost.

1992 Kern -Wood

I took care of 1 sick horse (Mineral King Pack Station) and took it out to Mineral King. And also 1 injured NPS horse. (The never ending Bill story—I hope he made it out ok in the fall with Jim Harvey). Bill stepped on a nail.

9–1 Tried to assist two backpackers who were looking for 2 lost horses. Radioed Sierra District to see if they had been found or reported to F. S. Sierra Dist. also called Golden Trout Pack Station to send 2 horses and 1 mule to pick them up at little kern lake. (These 2 horses were never found to my knowledge)

9–12 to 9–13 I flew into East Lake to bring out 2 private horses which had been lost in the backcountry. I took them out to Cedar Grove and they were put in the care of the Pack station.

1993 Kern - Wood

I found a lost private mule and kept [it] for 2 days until it was taken out by Golden Trout Pack Station.

9–24 Took a report of a lost private mule. Had left the private land. I found the mule the same day and radioed Sierra District to leave a message at Golden Trout Pack Station and the owners home. Brought gear to R.S—Took care of mule until 9–27 when Golden Trout Pack Station led it out.

1995 Hockett - Stowell

First Aid and Penicillin shots for two weeks to an injured trail crew horse, Little Brown, and escort out of the backcountry. First Aid and care for one week to a lame Kern Ranger horse, JR, and escort from Kern R-S, to Quaking Aspen.

Mineral King Pack Station had a mule wreck near the east fork bridge, on the Atwell-Hockett trail in late July. The packer did not report the incident. I later learned from Linda Wallace that it was a serious wreck and three mules died and two of the mules were winched out by the trail crew — the third mule was never located.

1996 Crabtree - Malengo

The trail crew had difficulties this season due to the accident on Mt. Whitney trail, causing the death of two animals. We dynamited the animals which involved the closure of the trail, One week of work was lost here.

1996 Sierra Crest - Purcell

Stock:

Total contacts: 30 horses, 12 llamas at Rae Lakes

29 horses at Bench Lake

Reports received indicated stock use heaviest during August and September.

1 -mule death on North-side Muir Pass

3-horse injuries: LeConte, Bench Lake, Twin Lakes.

1997 Charlotte

A mare and a mule, belonging to Cedar Grove Pack Station, disappeared down Charlotte Creek in early August, and were not seen again. Several searches by myself and packers were conducted in August and again in October. Additionally, a notice was posted at the drift fence gate requesting hikers/climbers to look, listen and smell for any signs of stock, but none were noted.

1997 Kern - Wood

One Near Medivac for a woman who was pushed down and stepped on by a pack mule in the F. S. She wanted to be checked , but refused any further medical assistance. She had stock and said she would ride out if she didn't feel better. I later learned that she received a cracked rib.

Four Medical assists to private stock: One with a cut leg from falling down in the rocks along the trail, One with a severe rope burn, One with a wire cut on leg and the disposal of one mule that died from strangulation on the private land.

1998 Bearpaw - Weisman

At the end of the summer, concession packer Jerry Page had a wreck with his mule string at the Alta Bluffs and the two first mules fell forty feet down the cliff into a slot. Jerry had to kill the

mule that landed under the other one and we rescued the live one the next day. It took two z-rigs with two teams to haul her out of there. The trail crew, rangers, Bearpaw employees, and concession packers worked excellently together to pull it off and it was one of the most amazing extractions I've seen. The rescued mule is recovering nicely. Since the mule accident, as many as five bears have been seen feeding on the remains of the dead mule.

1998 Bench - Edens

A horse died of colic approximately 300 yards from the station. The trail crew cut up the horse and buried it on the ridge.

1998 Kern - Wood

Lost Mules: A private stock user lost all four of his stock. They were all mules. They left Lower Funston Meadow and got through 2 fences and crossed the Kern River to leave the Park. They got through 3 fences on Inyo National Forest to return to the Horseshoe Meadow Trailhead. He hiked 22 miles to retrieve his lost animals. I checked the NPS fences, none were down, there were a few loose wires that I repaired. The mules must have jumped over.

Lost Stock: Several times this season, "lost" or roaming stock was found near the Kern Station. The stock belonged to Golden Trout Pack Station. The stock was either caught up and held for the packers or returned to the camp or pushed back down canyon. In most cases the stock was trying to continue up the Kern Canyon.

First Aid for Stock: Care and Penicillin for a mule recovering from a near drowning in a high creek crossing, he was swept down the creek. General care for minor cuts and scrapes.

Stock Concern: Possible contagious illness; A Mule strand of Herpes which can paralyze the back end of the animal and lead to the death of the animal. Mules were thought to carry it, but horses generally died from it. Golden Trout Pack Station was under a voluntary quarantine during late Sept. and Oct. Two animals were put down at the pack station and I know of one horse that was put down after a long trip through the backcountry. (From Lewis Camp trail head to Kern Station, Crabtree, Tyndall, Kern Canyon and back out to Lewis Camp trail head.) It has similar symptoms. This animal belonged to a private stock user named Steve Durn, he sent a blood sample to Davis. This probably contributed to the lower fall stock use. It was thought that the virus might be transmitted from the grass to different animals for approximately three days. I don't know if any of this was confirmed, I heard blood samples from at least 2 animals were sent to Davis. A Forest Service horse also died in the pasture at Trout Meadow, the cause was unknown to the people I talked to at GTPS.

1999 Bearpaw - Weisman

There was one mule incident where a packer from the Cottonwood Pack Station lost one of his mules over the side of the High Sierra Trail just east of Bearpaw. He didn't plan on reporting it but some visitors notified us and the incident was investigated.

1999 Crabtree - Jostad

Two mules and two horses were lost from Upper Crabtree Meadow in early July, never to be seen again. Extensive searching took place on foot, horseback and by airplane. There potentially have been 400+ stock use nights in the Crabtree area this year which are unaccounted for.

1999 Kern - Wood

Stock First Aid included: basic cuts and scrapes, special trimming and care for lame NPS mule — Downer and penicillin for hurt trail crew horse.

Lost Stock: Due to low water, stock was able to cross the Kern river in many places by mid-July. Stock that was east of the Kern Ranger Station crossed the river 1/2 mile south of the station. Heading south, the 12 head were “slowed down” by the first fence and stopped at the second drift fence.

Other stock was lost when someone left the gate open on the Kern Suspension bridge.

Lost Stock: In late July, 2 horses and 1 mule were “lost” from the private land and they headed south. Unfortunately the Sequoia National Forest work crews had left all of the drift gates open. The stock went 10 miles before stopping at the Trout Guard Station fence. This stock got confused with the “Famous” missing stock from Cottonwood Pack Station since 1 horse was also a Palomino it took many radio calls, phone calls and pager messages to get it all straightened out!

Other stock from Golden Trout Pack Station were “lost” from Upper Funston Meadow. The stock went out on the “Islands” and crossed to the east side for 3 days.

1999 McClure - Gordon

On August 11th, two hikers assisted me in dragging a dead llama 300 feet from its make-shift burial site next to the Goddard Canyon trail, a short ways up from the bridge/junction (not a pleasant task).

1999 Ranger Lake - Kenan

There was an abandoned injured horse this season that was left by a stock group near the park entrance. Jeff rode in and helped the horse to get out to the pack station. They nursed the horse for a few days, but he later died. This was a big effort on Jeff's part to try and help this injured animal, as this really was not his responsibility.

2000 Kern - Wood

NPS Horse Fatality, Rambo - #22, the Kern Ranger riding and pack horse since 1994, fell to his death off the lower switchbacks of the “Chute” in the Kern Kaweah. I was packing him and using him to “tow” the new horse Nelson, who had been stopping and pulling back. Nelson stalled out on a corner jump and Rambo was trying to tow him. Nelson threw himself back repeatedly and the cotton lead rope must have been cut when hitting a sharp rock. It broke and sent Rambo off balance and he was thrown off of the trail. He crashed and hit about 20 times before coming to rest about 200 feet below the trail in a boulder field. He was already dead when I arrived at the scene.

NPS Horse Rescue, Nelson, the new Kern Ranger pack horse was “stuck” at the base of the “Chute” after Rambo fell and died. He seemed to be in shock and would not be led up the trail. He repeatedly refused to go up the switchbacks and would jerk back and spin around on the very narrow trail and almost fell off. I tied him up for the night and I radioed out to Dispatch to contact Jim Harvey, 752, for suggestions or help of some sort. Without help, I felt that Nelson would probably go off the trail also and die. The next morning, Steve Moffitt, 751, and Jim Harvey arranged for three people and gear to fly in for the rescue. Eric Davenport, Tyler Johnson and Greg Feltis flew in and gave medication to Nelson, then Eric ran and led while we chased

and yelled the secret “monkey noises”. (A trail crew tradition) They helped me pack up Nelson and they flew out the gear I had retrieved from Rambo and sent me on my way. Thanks guys.

Lost Stock: Although the Kern River was very low all year, there was only one report of a lost mule crossing the Kern River ... and it left the private land to sneak into the Lewis Camp Large Pasture!

A saddled horse, with no rider, came running to the Kern Ranger station dragging its reins through Coyote Creek. I rode it back down the trail and found the Roberts group having a small mule wreck near the by pass trail. I assisted with holding stock, reloading the mule and returned the escaped lead horse.

2009 Rock Creek

A combination of six horses and mules died in the backcountry of Sequoia/Kings Canyon this year. In the Tyndall area, while on a commercial trip, a horse and a mule fell off a thirty foot bluff in the Upper Kern/Milestone Creek vicinity after making a wrong turn on a switchback. They died upon impact. Due to the terrain and distance from the trail and water, they were left as is.

2012 Roaring River Wood

Thanks to Carey at the Heliport and Greg for sending bandages and medicine to the Switchback SAR. Thanks to Kings Packer for flying over and helping with the evacuation of 14 head of stock, many injured, and leading the way over Bishop Pass and holding up his string while I had to get off and cut a lash rope,....then again to get a lead rope from between an unknown mules leg...is this the one that kicks?.....and a third that I don't remember, but I remember the drop off! I think that's when I lost my brass name tag. Thanks to Trail Crew Tim who helped from the ground in many ways and then hiked out ahead in the dark to get us help from Rainbow Pack Station and helpers to unload stock and later to unsaddle and check injured stock etc. Thanks to Cody for keeping the wreck to a minimum and getting animals separated and later holding stock for us at the trail head and pack station and the rainbow packers. Glad it all worked out.

2015 LeConte Paolilli

Resource Impacts

Mule incident

Rainbow Pack Station had Pete, a previous employee of Rainbow, assist with their operation for a month. When Pete was out on a commercial trip resupplying JMT hikers, he got into a wreck and a mule died along the Dusy switchbacks just above LeConte canyon. When this occurred I was out of the backcountry and Edlyn's crew was in the process of evacuating due to the poor smoke conditions. There was some confusion as to what should be, or what was going to be, done with the dead mule. Initially, the trail crew thought they could come back in to blow it up.

By the time I arrived back at LeConte and was able to contact David Karplus to find out if the trail crew would be coming back in, at least one bear had already started eating the carcass. Due to the location of the mule, there wasn't a good place to realistically move it to away from water or away from the trail. Therefore, it was decided to let bears eat it. I regularly went up to check on the progress of the bears and the state of the animal and put notes in the trail advising hikers to cut the switchback to avoid encountering the bear that took residence. However, this led to another pack trip encountering the bear on trail (discussed below in the Commercial Users section).

Due to the reroute, there is trail damage between the 13th and 14th switchback up from the ranger

station. A path cutting the switchback was created through the manzanita to keep visitors away from the bear that was eating the dead mule that will need to be rehabbed.