

1984 Charlotte Lake Ranger Station Report

Randy Morgenson, Technician

Charlotte Lake-Kearsarge Basin is a strange place for a backcountry ranger to spend a summer. But for the incredibly beautiful High Sierra, there are elements more closely resembling a front country campground, or a train station.

My approach was to concentrate my efforts & energies on the Charlotte-Kearsarge area. That was perhaps not the best approach, & in another year I might ramble more, trying to give the larger area more uniform coverage. I got to Junction Meadow twice, & East Lake once.

Upper Bubbs Creek was not covered as much as it should have been, judging from the number of illegal fire sites above 10,000 feet, nor was Center Basin. I got through Gardiner Basin on one ill-fated occasion. That is not enough. It is a popular off-the-beaten-path journey. There is a steady trickle of people into Gardiner Basin all summer, from June through September. It would be useful to determine from wilderness permits just what the level of visitation there is.

The elevation campfire closure is so universally ignored throughout the parks, I'm beginning to believe a stronger enforcement posture might be justified. What would happen if the trail rumor were that rangers wrote tickets for illegal fires, no excuses?

I am also prepared to accept metal signs in the Charlotte patrol area. I would plant a sign at the trail junction west of Kearsarge Pass: Fires Not Allowed Above 10,000 feet. (Or, if the sign-maker prefers, No Fires Above...) I would plant a sign at 10,000 feet on the JMT north of Vidette Meadow: No Fires Beyond Here; & also a similar sign at 10,000 feet (at the present drift fence) on the JMT south of Vidette Meadow. I have to accept that signs are preferable to the ugly firesites, if signs help. At any rate, they help eliminate people's excuses. It might also be useful to have a sign at the trail heads (east side too) about this rule.

Dave Brennan wrote in 1983: "Illegal fires at Charlotte are a persistent problem that require constant attention by the rangers." I did not find that the case this year. There probably were only a half dozen fires. I posted a sign on

the trail entrance to the lake, & I was there nearly every night. In fact, there were few problems at all at Charlotte Lake, primarily, I believe, because I was there nearly every night. One small area...

There were skirmishes with bears, people, & the red & blue nylon berries which hang in trees near human camps, during early summer until people got well cable-trained. The cable was used improperly a few times at first, & bears got food. Throughout the summer there were a few people who preferred trees. But by late July the problem was really licked at Charlotte Lake. Bears were not getting food & were not coming around as often. They would still pass through occasionally & sniff tents & packs, but get nothing. They 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. So the cables at Charlotte Lake might be the most spectacular success story in the parks.

These cables have also concentrated camping, which is good because these are the most heavily impacted places, where little harm can be done. There is now very little camping near the inlet

* that corner of the lake, an area which would suffer from very much use. More on bears, cables, & poles elsewhere.

I tried to do trail work this summer, & soon learned that very much of it is probably too time consuming for rangers to become habitually involved. But there is some that I feel good about. Glen Pass, south side, in particular. In late September Dave Wilson from Horse Corral rode over it with 18 stock. His comment, "Trail's sure in good shape." I agreed.

In early summer, snow lies across most of the switches near the top. Hikers cut straight down the hill, dragging an incredible load of rocks & debris into the trail. This being the first year in several that the trail became completely snowfree, seemed a good time to deal with it.

I cleared & widened the tread, with V.I.P. help on a couple of days, & scaled down loose debris perched above the trail. Those switchbacks are now a smooth, easy walk. But next year hikers will be cutting straight down the hill, & there will be a shoveling job after the snowmelt. Perhaps shoveling a path in the snow would be helpful.

I did the same sort of work, though there was less of it, on the trail from Sand Flat to Kearsarge Pass. Following Alden's early season lead, I gave special attention to the last half mile, where the trail is continually filled with rock. Widening seems to help, so people needn't stand up slope.

The other section of trail that needed regular attention was that from Sand Flat to Violette. It too is steep & gets filled with rock. The water bars are all at the wrong angle & silt in with every rain.

We do need trail crews, badly. There is a limit to what can be done by one person with a shovel. And rangers in a place like this are plenty busy without trail work.

Our tradition in clearing trails of downed trees has been to cut the log & roll the piece to one side (on top of whatever might be growing there). Is there a better way to dispose of these cut pieces, a more out-of-sight way, that would not be a hassle to trail crews?

I think we should maintain the prohibition against stock travel around Bullfrog Lake. After 25 years of protection it looks pretty good, but still wears obvious scars. The local packer told me that route was only five minutes faster than the high trail

Stock went around Bullfrog Lake several times this year, + began to make a mess. There is imprinting where they ride on the meadow + around boulders. There are a couple of places where the trail is no longer wide enough for stock so they have started making their own path up the hill + around these places. And the trail is right on the water's edge. With questionable water quality in Kearsarge - Bullfrog Basin I don't think it is in our interests for stock to be urinating + defecating on the edge of Bullfrog Lake. That ain't legal behavior for people, + it ain't legal to tie horses that close.

The trail scars around Bullfrog Lake are still very impressive, probably healed very little. I think it would be nice if our newly learned trail restoration work could be done here, from perhaps a quarter-mile above the lake to the pond below it. (Fill + revegetate.)

Then it would seem we would have 2 choices:
1) Rough-in a foot-path (only) back from the lake + slightly above it, which wouldn't be too difficult but a little rock work would be involved, depending on how smooth a foot path was desired.

2) Try to eliminate that as a through route, in other words, no trail around Bullfrog Lake. Post "keep off" signs on the revegetated trail. Remove "Bullfrog Lake" from the signs at the junctions. And make an immediate phone call to USGS to be sure the new maps (on their way) don't show that trail around the lake.

~~Is~~ Too difficult?

Whatever. My impulse & concern is to see that something is done about those trail scars.

I recommend against reconstructing the trail from Kearsarge Pass junction down to Kearsarge Lakes. This should be maintained primarily for foot travel, & kept unattractive for stock.

An Onion Valley packer told me that people in the Inyo Forest office, Lone Pine, have told Mark Berry they will budget in the future for repairing & upgrading the Shepherd Pass trail. Apparently Mark Berry keeps after them. We need be ever vigilant. Sierra District must not lose track of this. A job for you, Alden. The reasons against it have been set down, & Supt. Evison has recommended against it to Arasin. Sierra District must remain continually aware of the status of this movement, & apprise the Supt. each time it is

necessary to apply pressure. The park should have the only say on this matter, since repairing that trail will provide increased access only to park land, not to any new forest land.

The Charlotte drift fence is in terrible disrepair, not completely effective, & needs to be rebuilt with native materials. Get rid of those ugly orange posts & the awful George Biggs gate. One concern: deer wander around there & pass through the fence regularly. This pulls wires off posts & parts splices. What will the effect be on the deer if a really sturdy, tight fence is built?

Needed for next year to put up this fence: a roll of strong twine &/or a roll of one-strand wire. The fence wires have to be tied to each post.

The East Lake fence is so long, & the wires so tight that it should be put up next year by a crew, as it was this year. It would be nice if that gets into Trails' schedule. For one ranger to try to do it would be unwholesomely frustrating.

It is important for the Cedar Grove trailhead to remain sufficiently staffed for there to be regular patrols to Woods Creek + Bubbs Creek. Paradise Valley obviously needs rangers present regularly. So with Bubbs Creek. Even if I increased my patrols to Junction Meadow + East Lake, I could not get there often enough to adequately deal with the problems in these high use areas. They were saved this year by the people from Cedar Grove who spent time there.

And with the position in Onion Valley. It is possibly more important than a couple of our backcountry positions; possibly even more than the Whitney + South Lake positions. (No?) (A drive-thru situation doesn't allow for the kind of in-depth contact as at Onion Valley.) The real advantage for this area would be with two people at Onion Valley so one could be at Kearsarge (Dorkasaurus) Lakes at least 4 or 5 nights a week, talking bears + looking for illegal fires + other problems. I am convinced this would greatly reduce the problems there, + it would allow the Charlotte ranger to give the greater patrol area better coverage. As it is, there are too many high-problem areas for one person.

I don't see how we could function at all with no one at Onion Valley. Kearsarge would look like the Independence dumps. That position

Woods Creek. (The entire drainages?)

Perhaps couple these bins + polite recommendations, directed toward hiker's personal interests, with closures in certain areas. Close Paradise Valley + see where bears + people go. On Bubbs Creek, I think the whole thing would have to be closed for bears to vacate. It might be interesting to do that closure for a year or two + see where bears go. There would be a public outcry.

When Carolyn steered people away from Kearsarge Lakes she wasn't making a major disruption in anyone's plans, just a minor diversion. But the fact is, people went elsewhere + so did the bears, + the problems at Kearsarge were a fraction of their former extent. We don't know what the end result of this would have been, for in early August food storage poles were installed at five locations at Kearsarge Lakes.

I would like to see someone in this park write an official letter to the forest service thanking them for the job done by Carolyn this past summer. (Is it possible to give her an award, since we paid her salary?) She was more effective at solving problems at Kearsarge than I was. Aside from bear information, she continually told hikers headed for the park about our regulations + minimum impact standards. She made a

special effort to contact hikers at the conclusion of their trips, & passed on the information learned to those setting out. She cared about the job she was doing, & how people treated the backcountry. Our management objectives, & the park visitors, benefited greatly by her presence in Onion Valley.

Other bear facts:

A cable has been placed at ~~the~~ Junction Meadow at the junction of Bubbs Creek trail & East Lake trail. This creates a new camping area & the meadow there is already being summited with camping & fire sites. That cable should be removed this fall so there will be no camping there on the new grass next spring.

There are cables up & down Bubbs Creek & bears get food every night. A few people don't use the cables at all. Someone forgets a lunch or a few candy bars. Some don't camp near the cables so put their food in trees, & loose it. In the Vilette & Upper Bubbs Country bears have learned to climb out on limbs as far as they can, then chew off the branches. People cower in their tents while all this is going on. Even when the food comes down (bear still in tree) they won't go get it, afraid the bear will pounce out of the tree on them. When you are dealing with a bear like that, how are

you going to put your food in a tree & expect to have it in the morning if you won't defend it?; or rescue it?

People are scared to death of bears, & every bear I saw this summer ran from me when I approached for a closer look. I spent a great deal of conversational energy trying to teach people they needn't be afraid, & that the critters can actually be chased out of one's camp. That defending one's food is part of the necessary technique of preserving it from being eaten by bears. Some basically timid people did that this summer, unwittingly & successfully.

Our Law requires food be counterbalanced 12 feet up & 10 feet out. Legal proper food storage. I don't think it says how far down from the branch & I don't think it says how thick the branch must be. Bears hereabouts have broken branches at the trunk up to about 5" thick. At any rate, they just crawl out on thicker branches & chew through them where they are about 2" - 3" thick.

Among other bears, there was in this area a sow with 3 cubs, & in the Junction Meadow - Charlotte Creek (at Bubbs Creek) area a sow with 2 cubs. Those cubs learned that their food hangs in pine trees in the form of brightly colored nylon berries. Next year will be the year of the yearling, & promises to

be very interesting. The sow + 3 cubs periodically ventured east of Kearsarge Pass, wreaking havoc. Will 3 yearlings do likewise next year?

And there were reliable reports of bears in Sixty Lakes Basin in late summer. A sow w/2 cubs. I don't think bears had previously been in the Rae Lakes area. Does this mean cables + poles there nest? And Glen Pass the only safe spot on the Rae Lakes Loop?

The solution to all this is simple: Make it illegal for people to bring food into the backcountry.

Cable + poles aren't helping bears revert to their natural ways. And meanwhile they are wandering further afield: above treeline toward Forester Pass, above Golden Bear Lake in Center Basin, near Gardiner Pass (south side) + possibly over Gardiner Pass to South Fork Gardiner Creek.

These experiences aren't bad for backcountry hikers (part of the wilds). Are they bad for backcountry bears? If not, maybe we should not worry so much. Bear behavior is changing, but is that bad for them? Are they psychologically or physiologically suffering? Bears are a good wild experience. Our everyday lives are probably too tame. (On a freeway? In a city where Man is its own predator?). Heresy, eh?

There was not a real good test of the Kearsarge bear poles (for poling bears?) this year since the food lifting poles broke almost right away. Once people learned there were food storage poles at Kearsarge they began camping there in increasing numbers. But since the system wasn't working, bears started getting food.

Public opinion seems to favor any food storage device we erect. And I think eventually these poles will be easier to use than cables, & will not be festooned with tangled ropes. They will be harder to remove than cables. And it will be very interesting to see how long it takes bears to learn to manipulate them somehow so they get food from them. I can't wait.

The propane system for Charlotte hasn't worked well. The tank is inside next to the stove, which is unsafe & probably illegal. I probably won't abide this again. On cold mornings there are wild & scary surges of propane (flame) before the system warms up & settles down. I can't control the size of the flame as well as with blazo; slow cooking is a problem. And replacing blazo in my Coleman stove with propane in my Coleman stove has not addressed the Supt's concern. When I need heat in the cabin I have

to burn wood. In order to bake, I have to burn wood.

The dispatchers are to be complimented for the job they did this summer. I had a few occasions to use them in odd circumstances, & they were entirely helpful, pleasant, & efficient. They just helped me do my job, & on a couple of occasions I couldn't have done it without them. I especially liked the warm personal touches, like, "Sweet dreams." And whoever helped me kill Rasty made that day possible, all by herself.

I used the "First Need" sump type water filter for Charlotte's water which I drank without heating, & it seemed satisfactory. I would use it again. If I get giardiasis, you'll hear.

I think there should be a tradition of keeping these reports in station manuals. Mine is quite different from 1983's, & my successor might find both useful.

Late September, snow surveys built auto snow sensor at R.S. Thirteen flights to get everything in, 4 flights to get everything out. And they argue about flying rangers.

September 11, aircraft listening day. Cloudy all day. 1055 hrs, unseen jet flying south, high. 1400 hrs, unseen jet flying north, high. 1430 hrs, jet flying west, very high. 1720 hrs, unseen jet flying south, high. It would seem that for useful information, this should be done several times in a summer.

I replanted, & in some cases moved, nearly every sign in the area. At least they stand up straight now. In some cases, relocation made their meanings a little clearer.

Metal signs requested for 1985:

- 1) Fires Not Allowed Above 10,000 Feet. (Or, No Fires Above ...) For trail junction west of Kearsarge Pass.
- 2) Two signs: No Fires Beyond Here. For 10,000 feet on JMT, north & south of Vickette.

There are parts for one bear pole hidden in 2 places at Kearsarge Lakes: The top section, with a coupling, is up slope to the west of the connection between lakes 2 & 3, & behind some trees. There are 6 pole sections up slope southwest of the pole at lake 2, behind a tree & rocks.

On the next revision of the rulesheet to go with wilderness permits, put the elevation fire closure on the front & in big, bold print, so it can't be ignored. Many people just don't see it as it is now.

Trees to be cut at Charlotte: one just east of R.S. alongside trail should be cut into rounds for next year's wood. There is one on the trail west of the R.S. toward the outlet, & one on the trail below the lake after the trail crosses the creek.

Needs:

Six-8 thin boards about 12" square (or so) for cardboard signs.

One large saucepan, about 3 quart.

A dozen bolt/nut sets as sample enclosed, to attach food lifting poles to bear pole chains (can be shorter than sample); with hex heads, not slotted heads: everyone has a screwdriver on his knife.

A new captain's chair (director's). The new one sent in last year was broken at the factory.

Addenda:

This position could go another week to advantage if the weather stays reasonable. People are still around, & with long cold nights there are more illegal fires. Oct. 13th, 13 people in the Bullfrog-Charlotte area; a party of 2 trying to camp at Bullfrog Lake.

There almost needs to be a daily ranger up Bubbs Creek, judging by the campsite abuse. It will certainly need more evening watching next year than I gave it this. I sincerely urge some assistance for Kearsarge.

The Plan says signs won't be placed to I.O. passes. Then, should we remove the aluminium sign from Forester Pass?

→ And, I am requesting another sign reading No Fires Above 10,000 Feet, for the last trees north of Forester Pass. Illegal fires in this patrol area were a humongous problem this year. I sincerely believe we should try metal signs.

Sigh ...
Sayonara.

Charlotte Patrol Av 1984

Work, Maintenance-Type

Randy Morgenson, shovel technician

- 6.23: Charlotte L.: Assisted w/ bear cable installation.
- 6.24: Charlotte L.: Assisted w/ bear cable installation.
- 6.25: Rae Ls.: Assisted w/ tent station set-up.
- 6.28: Kearsarge: Dug new outhouse hole. Removed one sign + replanted another.
- 6.29: Trail work from Charlotte to Bullfrog Jctn (rocks + branches).
Replanted a sign at Vidette Mdw.
Charlotte L.: Removed 2 signs.
- 6.30: Trail work on High Trail to Kearsarge Pass: shoveled rocks + debris, filled holes, cleaned water bars, replanted a sign.
- 7.2: Charlotte Crk: Removed a sign.
- 7.4: Glen Pass Trail: Shoveled from Sand Flat to highest lake, where snow patches start. Removed a sign.
- 7.5: Upper Bubbs Creek: Carried an abandoned camp back to Charlotte, backpack full + stuff tied on outside.
- 7.11: Charlotte Lk: sacked trash, made a sign, planted 3 signs, public outhouse maintenance
- 7.17: Charlotte Lk: cut a tree from trail, cut old register post, made + installed a sign.
- 7.18: Trail work from Charlotte - Bullfrog Jctn: rocks, + dug water bars.
- 7.19: Kearsarge: Removed one sign; moved + replanted another.
- 7.23: Charlotte R.S.: 2 burlap sacks trash out w/ Onion V. packer.
- 7.25: Kearsarge: Started clearing trail of rocks from Kearsarge Pass jctn to Kearsarge Ls. Located 5 food-pole sites at Kearsarge Ls for installation crew. Shoveled dirt on man-caused fire at base of Whitebarks. Onion V. packer took 1 1/2 burlap sacks trash.

Charlotte

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- 7.26: Sealed seams on NPS tent
- 7.27: Nailed 2 signs on post at Vilette; carried trash toward R.S.
- 7.28: Filled large hole where food cache had been buried: Bullfrog Jctn
- 8.6: Krsge: 3 holes for bear poles dug & base pole set in concrete
- 8.7: Krsge: 2 pole holes dug; all day waiting for cement
- 8.8: Krsge: Base poles set w/concrete in last 2 holes.
- 8.6: Chrlt: 1 sack trash out w/552 helo.
- 8.10: Glen Pass trail So. side: shoveled rocks & gravel on switches;
clearing, widening, repairing.
- 8.11: Krsge Ps. Jctn: moved & re-planted a trail sign.
- 8.12: Krsge Ls.: erected one bear pole
- 8.13: Krsge Ls.: assembled & erected three bear poles
- 8.20: Glen Pass trail So. side: clearing & widening.
- 8.21: Glen Pass trail So. side: clearing & widening.
- 8.22: Charlotte drift fence
- 8.23: Krsge Ls.: erected last bear pole
- 8.24: Cleaned trail Sand Flat - Bullfrog Jctn.
- 8.23: Charlotte: packer took 1/2 sack trash.
- 8.26: Gardner Pass trail: removed dex.
- 8.27: Krsge Ps. tr.: shoveled rocks & gravel from pass-jctn.
- 8.30: JMT to Vilette: shoveled rocks
- 9.2: Sand Flat - base Krsge Ps: shoveled rocks off trail
- 9.21: East Lk & Jctn MdW: took down drift fences
- 9.26: Charlotte: took down drift fence
- 9.25: Charlotte: 4 bags trash out by helo.
- 9.27: JMT jctns: replanted 3 signs.

Charlotte
Maint. work 1984

- 10.4: Kearsarge: carried 4, 10 feet long food-lifting poles to bear poles; returned w/5 old ones.
- 10.5: Bullfrog-Vidette jctn: transplanted 2 signs
- 10.6: Krsq: carried last food-lifting pole to bear pole + carried back old one
- 10.10: Blfig: carried 2 signs back to Chlt to go out + be put on 1 post.
- 10.12: Bubbs Cr.: took down upr. Vdt fence again.