

Campsites / Problem Areas

1989 Kern End of
Season report

per Funston Headcar

Upper Funston is the biggest management headache in the Kern patrol area. You never can go there without expecting (and finding) some new man-made disaster. I am starting to think that Upper Funston may need a different campground concept. Over the last 3 seasons as Kern ranger and on previous years occasionally helping the Kern ranger, I have spent many days in rejuvenating the Funston Camps, and it is the same nonsense over and over and over again: big developments, benches, tables, gigantic pits 50 ft. from river, stock rings around the trees, soil pulverized, horse droppings everywhere, etc.

There are several different approaches we can take. First is pursuit of current policy, but this doesn't seem to be working. We had the low-key/high maintenance tactic - patrolling area, urging people to clean up and use proper stock etiquette, occasional hand-written signs (last one lasted less than 2 weeks), repetitive breaking down of new (usually huge) pits and restoring established ones, repetitive demolition of furniture (especially tables), filling of tree wells with soil, and doing of many such labor-intensive chores. This approach works well at the Hot Springs' camps. The users seem to respect the intent of keeping small campsites, even though this must be one of the most-frequented overnight spots in the Sierra. Clean-up and patrol of the area is never a huge chore, as there is some kind of self-regulation going on, and people are buying into our philosophy.

We could try a higher profile of signs and law enforcement. A bulletin board could be erected with information and all the do's and don't's. Upper Funston could be made

a patrol focus. I think some parties were overstaying the limit this year. Some of these things could be checked more frequently.

Another idea would be to do some major overhauling of the physical campground space at Upper Funston. I have been hearing rumors (from stock-users) that there is to be a big Upper Funston H.S.U.A. project next summer for the Centennial. This could be an occasion to find out what sort of (compromise) campsites could be created that would be respected enough by stock-users that we wouldn't have to do such an outlandish amount of maintenance and rehabilitation there.

There are a number of large logs that define the campsite spaces in Upper Funston. We could do some major removal work, and at least the main camp could then be moved back to 100 feet or more (from River). Perhaps large boulders (or something!) could be planted in the big problem spot (25 ft. from water). Perhaps some obstacles could be placed to keep the people from hitching their critters in the immediate camp area. Hitching posts might alleviate some of the stock problem.

see Furnston Meadows

Lower Furnston Meadow wasn't such a bad deal to maintain this season as was Upper Furnston. It got hit pretty good in June and early July, but use slacked way off in latter July and all of August. The camps weren't being built-up or messed-up nearly as much as last year.

Camp ① is most used and abused, but it is manageable. Finally the people are not rebuilding it on the river's edge. Many trees are hacked - lots of stumps showing. Ground is pulverized. The aesthetics of place could benefit from flushing stumps and picking up some of the mutilated log carcasses strewn about. Many trees near camp look sickly, maybe hazardous. One hitching post rotted and got pulled over. Both could stand to be rebuilt out of Cedar.

Camp ② is also traditional and popular. It's got some definite problems. It's too close to river (35 or 40 ft.). (Try to move it back, but it reappears in present spot.) A large section of camp is situated in the grass, and this gets trampled. And - this is the worst spot on the River for people tying up to trees. The trees are just too inviting at this particular place for some reason.

Camp ③ gets occasional use. I tried to discourage it for while but decided it is actually better-placed than the others, and it probably won't hurt to spread things out a little.



Resources

Drought

Kern River was astonishingly low by August. One could ~~traverse~~ ^{traverse} across in many ^{places} on rocks, without getting wet feet. Many creeks were way down, but the Golden Trout and Coyote Creeks at southern end of the Park did not seem as badly diminished.

The main thing I noticed regarding lack of moisture is dry and barren areas in some of our meadows. Lower Henston has a large dry grass/herb area that tends to get pulverized, and it looks like the barren areas may be enlarging in these dry years. These spots dry early, get eaten first, and we're getting less and less regrowth. This same thing is happening at Lewis Camp, large meadow (around edges in grass growth) and in the upper Rattlesnake short-hair-grass meadows.

Wildlife

It seems the "Bear Boxes" are working. We had no bear problems in the lower Kern this season that I know of. Still, I believe there are plenty of bears around. In late June and early July I saw bear tracks almost daily and the same was true the end of August through September. I saw four bears on the trail in September. I saw plenty of bear scat off-trail - especially in obscure places like hidden creeks of Coyote drainage and northeast of Golden Trout Creek. Also, lower Rattlesnake (below 8000' or 8500') had plenty of bear sign. I haven't seen or heard any evidence of bear killings in the Kern this year. I heard one possible gun-shot in early September, but on investigation could find

no one in the area, so had to assume it was something else. I think we would find some signs of it if people were shooting bears.

Mountain Lion sightings and track sightings certainly are on the upswing. I saw tracks once (Chagopa Falls in September); Trail Crew saw tracks and a recent kill; local packer had lion cross trail in front of him; two different Resource Management parties (Webner and Ewell) saw tracks in the lower Kern.

Fishermen keep complaining of the lower Kern being badly "fished out." Really good anglers, however, seem to have no real trouble catching limits of the big juicy ones. Just before I left in the fall, I ran into the men fishing the big pools who were catching literally dozens of beautiful very large rainbows and German Browns. (They were releasing most of these.) The Kern was so low by that time that these big guys were all bunched up in the pools and easily captured. It seems like a danger-time. Hopefully not too many fishermen will be out there this fall, and may the waters rise drastically by next year.

Meadow Impact - Monitoring

The meadows of the lower Kern seem to be doing well - despite the drought. Upper Funston got major visitor use this year. The only extra stress signs I noticed were possible enlarging of scuffed areas in some of the higher, dryer grass parts. I would say the same to be true for the Lower Funston, except Lower did not get so extreme much use this year. Possibly the wet sedge areas of these meadows got a slightly higher percentage of use this time because of the dryer conditions.

The Lewis Camp large pasture had it's up's and down's this season. It does seem like a concern that the tall grass peripheries always get eaten down and pulverized immediately every year. Peripheries were especially pulverized this year because of drought. From mid-season onward, however, stock was concentrating their munching in the major wide-sedge areas, and this may have some positive effects in balancing out the rigor of regrowth. I heard occasional disturbing gossip of some kind of stock-user campaign to open up the Lewis Camp pasture to visitor use as a tourist pasture. I think the meadow would suffer badly from a big increase in use.

Upper Rattlesnake area got trounced, chewed-up, pulverized. The drought is hurting it (little regrowth). Concentrated stock-use is hurting it (much offit administrative). I think June 15 is too early for these drought years (for opening date). I think NPS users should not use it so hard. The place looks like a putting green.

Maintenance

Trails appear to be suffering from the drought, as well as the plants and creatures. A bunch of early-season stock-use plus extremely dry conditions left the Canyon trails dustier, deeper, wider and a lot nastier to walk in than in recent previous years. Parallel trails abounded this year. I guess the solution will be: fill in some of the double tracks and hope for better years.

Trail Crew did, as usual, an outstanding job in bringing the trail system in the Kern to tip-top shape. The Rattlesnake lower chute ("bad spot") and the rocky climb east of Franklin Pass are the only areas that always need some more work because of gravity, hard use, tough terrain.

Drift fences are for the most part in real good shape. Not have been worked on or replaced in last couple of years. The River Pasture drift fence needs to be overhauled - many rotting posts. The Lewis Camp (large pasture) fence is in need of attention, and I believe the Trail Crew is planning on doing that project next year. (They worked on the small pasture fence this season, so it's now in excellent condition.)

Hitching posts had a bad season. The one at Hot Springs (Trail Crew Camp) got yanked out of the ground twice (both times by Honey the horse) and needs replacing. One (of two) at Lower Junston is busted (needs to be rebuilt out of cedar - lodgepole rots too fast). The one by gate of Lewis Camp (large pasture) rotted out and got pulled out. There are also some rotten ones in front yard of Ranger station.

One of the wooden causeways through boggy meadow terrain in lower Rattlesnake rotted and got busted through.

Ranger Station is in pretty good condition. The cistern got pumped and cleaned out this fall. We got a propane stove and propane lights installed. Trail Crew built a lovely new flagpole. A new outhouse definitely has to be dug next season (early). The flooring in Ranger station needs to be rebuilt - at least part of it. Last year a hole was created by lightning strike (in the kitchen floor). Since then those weaknesses and stresses have given cause for new cracks to get started, and the whole kitchen/dining area is becoming involved.