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1997 Bench Lake End of Season Report by Kay Edens

Introduction:

On Tuesday, July 1, 1997, I arrived at the Bench Lake Ranger Station to begin my duties as a backcountry ranger. My supervisor, Cindy Parcell helicoptered in to Bench Station to assist in set up and instruction on duties for the Bench Lake Patrol Area.

This report will focus on the following topics:

- Continued search into the disappearance of Randy Morganson, the 1996 Bench Lake ranger
- Campsites and campfires
- Meadow Management with emphasis on Taboose Meadow
- Law Enforcement
- Medicals
- Ranger Station
- Education
- Conclusion

Search for Randy Morganson:

Last noted radio contact with Randy Morganson was on or near Mather Pass on July 20, 1996. A major search was begun and was downsized by August 3, 1996. On August 11, 1996, I was flown into the Bench Lake Patrol Area to assume Randy's duties and continue the search, but found no trace of Randy.

This year, I have continued the search with detailed observations to boulder fields, chutes, cols, passes, talus fields, cliffs, unammed

lakes valleys, drainages, creeks, and rivers.

Search encompassed the following areas:

Bench Lake and surrounding lakes, Arrow Creek drainage, head waters of the White fork and surrounding lakes, Window lake drainage and ridges, Arrow Lake, Arrow Pass, S.F. of the Kings river, Cartridge Lake and Pass, Petes' Col, Dumbbell Lakes and Pass, Observation Pass, and Amphitheater lake and surrounding lakes, Palisades lakes and surrounding lakes, Palisades Creek, Stripe Lakes, Cardinal Lake, ridges North of Taboose Pass, Lake below Pinchot Pass, Twin lakes and woods lakes.

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I have been unable to find any trace of Randy. For further details of search check daily journal. There are several areas that have not been searched due to time constraints. These areas will receive first priority next year.

Campsites and Campfires:

The majority of the Bench Lake Patrol area is above 10,000 feet and open fires are not permitted. The few sites below 10,000 feet where open fires are allowed are located by the South Fork of the Kings River. Fire rings that had been traditionally ~~been~~ left intact above the 10,000 feet beside the Kings river were dismantled last year. These fire rings were rebuilt once the ranger station had closed for the season. Six fire rings above 10,000 feet by

the Kings river were dismantled at the beginning of this season. and "No fires in this area" signs were posted. New fire rings have not been built since this time.

Restoration signs need to be posted in two closed campsites located close to the S. F. of the Kings river, both showing damage to vegetation and rock scarring. One site is located 25 feet above sign by river crossing, "No fires above 10,000 feet." The other site is located directly across the river from sign.

Established three sided fire pits below 10,000 feet are accessible to hikers and stock users, but because the 10,000 foot mark is located 50 feet below sign at the crossing of the S. F. of the Kings river campers have expressed confusion about where they can have fires.

In these instances campers have been educated about the impact of fires on this delicate eco-system and the importance of using only established sites below 10,000 feet

Illegal fire sites were found at Stripe lakes, Lake Marjorie, Upper Basin, Bench Station and Bench lake. These sites were established after ranger station closed last year.

The Palisades Creek ~~was~~ area work project included restructuring seven large fire pits rings into three sided fire pits.

Encouragingly, at the beginning of the season no new fire rings established since last year at Turn lakes and Lake Basin

Meadow Managements:

The time slotted for the opening of meadows to stock in the Bench Lake area bordered between wet and dry. Passes were inaccessible due to snow until late August, allowing time for meadows to dry.

I routinely monitored the meadows for wetness and vegetation. All meadows in the Bench Lake patrol area with the exception of the S.F. of the Kings river are located above 10,000 feet in a alpine to sub alpine growth. I am concerned that these high areas may be too fragile to handle long term use by stock.

Taboose Meadow remains wet throughout most of the season. There are seven springs on the north east side of the meadow that form two streams which join to form one stream that crosses the meadow then changes direction back across meadow again. Another spring south west of meadow also flows into meadow. From stock and hiker use, damages to this delicate eco-system ranges from rutted trails, secondary trails, trails disappearing, and hoof impact.

The unmaintained trail on the north side of Taboose Meadow is badly rutted with three trails paralleling each other and contains archeological and historical sites, dating back from 2000 years ago to the 1830s. Artifacts found in this area include lithics, spear and arrow heads, trading beads

Soap stone, mortars, and purple and blue bottles.

I purpose that the trail above Taboose Meadow be relocated to the far south side of meadow connecting to the main trail leading toward Bench Lake and down towards the S.F. of the Kings river, and that the unmaintained trail north of Taboose Meadow be closed to protect the Archeological and historical sites. I also purpose rehabilitation of Taboose Meadow, closing meadow to grazing.

On Friday August 22, 1997 the Rock Creek Pack Station brought in two groups of stock located at Bench Lake Ranger Station and the first lake southwest of Bench Station. A total of 28 stock at an elevation of 10,800 feet and higher. All stock congregated at station first night. The second day 16 stock were taken over Taboose Pass for re-supply while the other 12 head of stock was taken to Bench Lake. Stock removed to Bench Lake returned to ranger station. The third night the 16 head of stock returned to station and the other 12 head of stock joined them.

Damage sustained to lake and meadow was substantial. I first tried to measure damage, but realized damage was too wide spread. Lake in front of station sustained damage full length of west shore and half length of North shore.

Second stock camp above ranger station.

Sustained damage on the Northwest and west lake shore.

Lake shores in these areas are undercut and caved in by weight of stock.

Rangers have stated that the Benchlake Ranger Station and areas above offer poor grazing and realize that this area is fragile. When privileges are taken away from them, a natural reaction is to fight back. I feel a compromise is in order even though the damage that occurred is unrepairable. I propose that the Bench Station and areas above be limited to spot trips or limiting stock groups to 5 or less. Larger stock groups can use the meadows above Benchlake and the South Fork of the Kings river where grazing is best.

I would like to obtain any legal documentation over the lawsuit brought about by the High Sierras Hiker Club over money allotted and lost to maintain Taboose trail in Inyo National Forest, so I may have a better understanding of problems surfacing in this area.

I propose that the Benchlake Station would benefit with a longer season due to an increase in backcountry visitation in late August and early September. Refer to chart on documented visitor contacts.

Law Enforcement Contacts:

In all cases of law enforcement contacts encountered compliance was obtained by offenders.

The most common violation has been hikers without permits. In this situation, my goals are officer safety, to educate the hiker why a permit is necessary, and for them to understand the importance of minimum impact and to send the violator out of the backcountry to obtain a permit. To confirm that the violator has actually left the backcountry, I instruct him to contact dispatch and dispatch contact me.

When checking permits, I've observed on some Forest Service permits stamped below the written regulations "Violators will be cited" Permit holders carrying this type of permit have stated that it differently caught their attention. I suggest this stamp on all permits. This would be valuable for P.C. statements.

Illegal fire rings and trash are two other common violations found in the Bench Lake patrol area. During patrols this season numerous fire rings and trash were found ^{many} which ^{were} reestablished after the closing of Bench Lake Ranger Station last year. I suggest that the Bench Lake Ranger Station season begin earlier and extended ^{later} to prevent this.

Medicals:

All medicals in the Bench Lake patrol area have been minor consisting of mild hypoglycemia, facial trauma, and high altitude sickness.

The mild hypoglycemic patient was caught in a rain storm which delayed his trip by three days leading to a shortage of food. I provided him with extra food and sweets which alleviated the condition.

Two cases of facial trauma were caused by falls while

attempting to make river crossings. One facial trauma patient was sent out of the backcountry to seek medical attention due to continues oozing from abrasion above lip.

The case of high altitude sickness was caused by the patient over exerting from jogging at high elevation and making two rapid ascent on passes above eleven thousand feet. On first contact dry heaves, paleness, and sweating were observed. Considering the activities leading to the patients condition, I decided to observe patient for several hours at which time patient was able to hold fluids, and regained natural skin color. I remained and monitored patient overnight.

Bench Lake Ranger Station:

There are several issues to be addressed regarding the Bench Lake Ranger Station, equipment, radio communications, the new solar system, station, notes, and planned projects.

Equipment needed:

Red R.E.I. 1st aid kit needs to be restocked with benedryl
2-20 gallon tanks and 1-5 gallon tank needs to be filled with propane and returned to station
2 cases of Turbo Tornado cannisters
1 gallon of white gas
2 gallons of enamel gray paint 16165
1 gallon of paint thinner
1 reading lamp w/ extension cord
Red North Face Back Pack (snow leopard) needs repaired
2" medical tape
roll of small garbage bags
30 large garbage bags
14 rolls of toilet paper

2 Boxes of AA

Extra forms: DI 12, (Fire) 343, 344, Workmans
Comp, EMS, Missing person report, large
envelopes, stamps, holy envelopes,
Pictures of military aircraft,

No Mayo, Mustard, SALT, pepper, Laundry soap, Dish Soap, paintlike M
collapsible rake, MOP

Thick Needle - sewing repairs to canvas tent

No Corn Meal, Coffee, (Zmuth sup. Trip, KTR), syrup, lemonade, pasta, soy sauce
No Fabric softener, No Sponge Scrubbers, Burlap Sacks, Mouse traps, No pillows, paper

Items to be checked out for 1998:

Badge

Ammo

Fire Arm

SI key

Fanny pack for firearm

Black pepper spray

radio HT 1000 w/ extendable antenna

3 re-chargable batteries

Battery charger

Camera

Binoculars

Thomas Bag

Thermo rest

QR. Bivy sack

Down Sleeping Bag

Poly sleeping bag

Whisper lite stove

MSR Fuel container / w pump

Day pack

Overnight Backpack

2 water Bottles

2 head lamps

Snow Shovel

Equipment wanted:

Shower - check with Eric Morey
Coleman Table - check with Eric Morey
Metal Shelves
Extra Jell Cell Batter to run computer

Radio Communications:

Radio Communications has moderately improved since last year. It is still difficult to transmit and receive. When in depth conversations of detailed instructions are required, poor communications has lead to misunderstandings. An extendable antenna for the HT 1000 may improve reception. Operating manual for radio is on file at station.

Solar System:

The solar system has been economical and environmental benefit by using re-chargable batteries there by saving cost and preventing toxic ~~waste~~ disposal of conventional batteries. Recharged radio batteries allow for monitoring and one battery can last up to three days. Other benefits of the solar system are lighting and running other appliances that would otherwise use conventional batteries.

Need percision screw driver 2.4mm or smaller for adjusting controller

Attention: flat wire is negative and stripe wire is positive.

Induct
↑
space
↑
spark wire

To store Jell Cell battery, ^bBattery should be charged to 14.5. Battery needs to be placed on wood or card board. Terminals need to be covered.

^{space} Diagram to set up solar system is on file at station.

^{space} Need universal AC adapter and Triple accessory outlet

Ranger Station:

Measurements for foam pads is 27" x 76.5"

Portions of ply wood and beams appear to be rotted underneath. This may need to be replaced in a couple of seasons.

^{space} Written instructions setting up tent, 1995 E.O. S. report

^{space} Station inventory, 1996 E.O.S report

^{space} Need sharp shovel to dig new pit toilet next season

Floor was painted this season, it could use another coat.

Notes:

Hasty search occurred on Saturday August 23, 1997 for missing person Anthony Nowak. Nowak showed up at station same day.

Archaeological group did studies at station and surrounding areas. Station is located on major site theorized to have been a major trade area. Obsidian in this area came from the fish spring quarry in Lone Pine. I helped group with radio message maps, and known sites.

Fish studies of lake front of station is over populated by male fish.

Planned Projects:

Removal of new fire rings in historical stock camps above 10,000 feet by the S.F. of the Kings river

Restoration signs placed in closed campsites by the S.F. of the Kings river.

Removal of new fire rings that may surface in Upper Basin, Stripe lakes, Bench Lake ranger station, and Lake Margorie.

Continued Search for Randy Morganson

Paint floor

Dig new toilet

Evaluate Meadows before opening dates.

Education:

As emphasized in last years report education is the key to stock users and backpackers developing minimum impact skills. The park provides a variety of ways for park visitors to get the message. This starts at the park entrance when the fee collector passes out the brochures. The park visitor can visit the visitor center and buy literature or listen to free lectures. Backcountry permits contain minimum impact sheets. Park visitors can also use bulletin boards, law enforcement rangers and campground rangers. The information is there for the visitor, but the visitor needs incentives to be educated. I suggest creative incentives like:

Provide badges to boyscott and girlscotts groups that practice minimum impact. The backcountry ranger would evaluate the groups.

Have a contest among stock concessions. The concession that best practices minimum impact wins a trophy. Concessions would be judge by letters by customers.

Provide minimum impact crossword puzzles in Backcountry Basics.

Kings Canyon may be behind the times. Other parks have given up minimum impact for "Leave no Trace", for further information write:

Roger Semler

Glacier N.P.

N.P.S. (Leave no Trace)

National Coordinator.

Permits by fax and reservations take away education.

End of Season Statistics:

Visitor Contacts

Fire pits removal

Miles hiked

Stock observed

Citations

Military Aircraft

Rain Days

Conclusions:

Search for Randy Morgan:

Extensive searching turned up no signs of

Randy Morganson. The search will continue next year in areas not covered this season.

Meadow Management:

Meadows at Bench Station and surrounding areas sustained heavy damage from stock over-use. Careful observations (see documentation in meadow management) of the area suggest stock groups of more than 5 pack animals would be best located at the meadows above Bench Lake or the S.F. of the Kings river where sufficient grazing is available and the eco-system is more able to sustain stock use.

Campsites and Campfires:

Extensive campfires above 10,000 occurred intermittently during the season and more when no ranger presence was in the area. Much of ranger duties involve fire pit dispersal, trash removal, and site rehabilitation. A key element to in park eco-system preservation is visitor education through personal contact with a ranger. This one on one education about fires, trash, bears, food storage, stock use, meadow management, minimum impact, environmental and backcountry ethics and natural history has a deep, lasting personal impact on visitors in the park.

Law Enforcement and Medicals:

Rangers present in the backcountry Bench Lake Patrol area provides hands on medical attention for a high number

of minor medicals during peak season and law enforcement presence should a serious situation occur. Many visitors have expressed their thanks and feelings of security that a ranger was on hand for emergencies.

Ranger Station:

The station provides visitors with routes and weather information, emergency food supplies, and medicals, and helps maintain and preserve this precious natural resource for future generations.