

Zueckert

KERN RANGER STATION
END OF THE SEASON REPORT
1983

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SUMMARY:

I was on duty at the Kern Station from June 24 until Sept. 30. Due to heavy snowpack and wet meadows, I could not bring my stock in until August 5 through Quaking Aspen. For the first half of the season I was on foot. 421 miles were patrolled on foot, 329 miles on stock, and 649+ visitor contacts were made with 148 of those being Stock Users with 222 head of stock. 105 firerings and campsites were either removed or rehabilitated. Two Courtesy tags were issued (one for a messy campsite with litter and unsecured food, the other for failure to possess a wilderness permit). One search was successfully conducted and no medivacs.

About half of my nights were spent at the ranger station, the other half in the field. I had one bear incident report occurring at Lower Funston Stock camp. Opening dates for meadow grazing ranged from August 1 to September 1. Most trails in the Kern area were accessible to backpackers by mid-July. Visitation was down 30% from last year. Majority of visitor use occurred between August 1st and Labor Day weekend.

Major emphasis was campsite rehabilitation from Hot Springs to Junction Meadow and garbage removal. Special project was the placement of new Hot Springs signs and bulletin board and establishing a management policy there.

I. Maintenance
 A. Trails

Due to heavy runoff this last spring, there were hazzardous stream crossings on all trails to the Kern in the beginning of the season except Quaking Aspen to Coyote Creek. By mid-July, the Kern trail was accessable on foot up to Whitney Creek. By the end of July, all stream crossings were fordable although hazzardous warnings were continued through early August.

The Kern trail between Lewis Camp and the Hot Springs was especially wet and boggy until the beginning of August. Below Chaggo-pa Falls for 1/4 mile, the river broke the bank and inundated the area with water. As quickly as weather and stream conditions allowed, the Kern Trail Crew tackled area by area opening and repairing trails. By the second week in August, all trails in the Kern area were clear and in good condition.

The trail registers at Lewis Camp and Coyote Pass are in fine shape. The register at the Soda Creek trail junction was destroyed by snow and removed.

B. Signs

I removed the two "Junction Meadow - Closed to Grazing" signs in the upper Kern. That leaves one at Lewis Camp and one at the Wallace Creek/PCT trail junction. The one at Lewis Camp has pertinent grazing information but should be replaced with a smaller sign:

" Grazing restrictions subject to change depending on meadow conditions.
 Upper and Lower Funston Meadows - 48hr. limit per party.

At the Hot Springs, I removed the "No stock behind fence" sign and put in new "Fragile Meadow" and "No Soap" signs as well as a bulletin board. There are two spare "Fragile Meadow" signs stored at the Hot Springs Trail Crew cache. The "No Soap" sign is grammatically incorrect and should be replaced with a new sign stored in the Kern Ranger Station.

The bulletin board provides camping and bear cable information. I tried to locate it strategically with regard to visibility, aesthetics and a problem camping area. I tried to keep the wording on the signs short and simple. Since August, when I installed the signs, I

questioned every visitor in the area what their impressions were of a bulletin board in the middle of the backcountry, and I got nothing but positive feedback. In fact, many requested I be more explicit with the information on the signs concerning camping and fires. Next season, when the signs are redone, they should include reasons and objectives to the rules in smaller print. One large sheet of plexiglass is needed to cover the bulletin board and protect the signs; (laminating paper does not last very long),

The Shotgun Pass trail needs a new sign:

Shotgun Pass 1 3/4 miles →

C. Camping

Main emphasis of campsite rehabilitation was in the Hot Springs and Junction Meadow areas. On the Hot Springs bulletin board is a map of campsites and bear cables at both Hot Springs and Junction Meadow. The established campsites at each location are designated by a small reusable low-maintenance firepit. I encourage visitors verbally and through the bulletin board to camp in established campsites and no new firepits in these particular areas. Also, I request they clean out their ashes before they leave and do not use rocks.

I made six campsites at the Hot Springs and three at Junction Meadow. These areas are now low maintenance and require patrol through at least once every two weeks during peak season (less often at Junction Meadow) to pick up trash and clean firepits that campers may have neglected. Without the large rock firerings, the campsites look cleaner and more inconspicuous.

The six sites at the Hot Springs are small, fairly close together and can accommodate up to six, no more than nine, campers comfortably per site. During peak season, usually the area is packed, with large groups of 10 to 25 taking over several sites, overflowing onto the trail, and crowding out smaller parties. I have posted a sign and request trailheads to inform visitors that groups of 10 or more camp 1/4 mile south of the Hot Springs by the Kern Bridge. The area there is open, flat, and more accommodating for large groups with less impact on the area and other visitors. One large Sierra Club group

of 16 I talked to were quite pleased with the arrangement. Large groups usually have too much food to hang, so being far from the bear cables is no problem.

All the bear cables have been used and have successfully deterred bears from backpackers' food. However, there is a problem with rope getting tangled on the cable and abandoned. It increases the potential for the next visitor's rope to get tangled up in it. All five bear cables have rope hanging from it. I need something like a knife on the end of a collapsible stick to cut tangled rope ^{from} the cables and tree branches.

Two areas of concern over campsite rehab and firerings are Forester Lake/Little Claire Lakes and Big Arroyo. Next season, a joint effort between the Little Five and Kern Rangers to work on those areas would prove most effective.

D. Fences

The fences and gates are all in pretty good shape. The Fence Removal Crew did a good job in removing the old fences on the east side of the Kern. All the wire and metal fence posts were flown out. The fence that runs the boundary line north of Golden Trout Creek on the east side of the Kern was repaired and sections rebuilt; this season and now is in excellent condition.

E. Meadows/Grazing

I completed Debeneditti's Meadow Monitoring form for the season. The Kern area was not open to stock until August 1 due to wet meadows and trail conditions. Upper Funston was the first meadow open to stock with Upper Rattlesnake and Junction Meadow too wet until late August. Lower Funston was under water most of the season. Although I posted Lower Funston closed for grazing until September 1 with alternative grazing and camping 1/4 mile north at "Point Camp," I had problems with stock groups trampling through the wet meadow to get to the stock camp on the far side. Stock groups do not seem to bother stopping at the station to read the grazing regulations, and the USFS is not providing adequate or correct information. One solution would be a small temporary sign on a grape stick planted at each

problem meadow closed for grazing.

Tying to trees is still a habit of many stock users. The idea of putting in hitching rails in certain key areas is good except many stock users have more stock than can be tied to one hitching rail. Ideally, they should learn to tie to a rope between two trees. I would like to first try Mike Williams' (Rowell) idea of posting a small bulletin board (2'x2') in Lower and Upper Funston Stock Camps with stock specific information.

F. Toilets

The trail crew dug new holes and relocated the Upper Funston and Hot Springs toilets. The Upper Funston toilet has a nice view of the meadow, and the Hot Springs toilet has a nice direct view of one of the campsites 50 yds. away. Next season, the trail crew plans to either add another side to the toilet fence or move the fence to obscure the view.

G. Garbage

I collected and packed about 650 pounds of garbage collected from two old garbage pits located at Rattlesnake Creek on the Kern and behind the Kern Station. I packed all the garbage, fence posts, and assorted misc. items down to the station to be flown out. Everything (about 845 lbs.) was flown out in September.

H. Station

Bob Haile checked out the condition of the cabin and said it was in pretty good shape. The chinking needs replacing and the fireplace chimney has a few holes. He had me dig dirt away from the foundation on the west side of the cabin. The trail crew touched up the cabin and railings with redwood stain. I painted the inside of the outhouse. The plywood was flown in for the tool shed door; so, next season, the doors need to be painted and hung.

II. VISITOR CONTACT

A. Visitor Use

Visitor use seemed low compared to past years. My number of visitor contacts this season was about 73% of last year. The ratio of stock users to backpackers this year equaled last year. Due to heavy snow condition and hazzardous water, there was a significant drop in visitor use. I saw an average of 0-3 people a day through July, most people entering Golden Trout trailheads. By the beginning of August, backpackers started coming over Franklin Pass and Farewell Gap. Labor Day weekend had typical heavy use. On the first day of hunting season, I contacted two hunters on the boundry.

Few stock parties traveled farther north into the park than Lewis Camp. Upper Funston had light use. A few parties ventured up the Kern and around the Sierra Crest. Several parties traveled through the park to get to Coyote Lakes. Vistors reported heavy stock use (up to 80 stock users seen on one trail on one day) in the Golden Trout Wilderness.

B. Information and Philosophy

Again, as in the past, I stressed minimum impact camping emphasizing fires, ashes, and garbage. My philosophy on those issues is basically do not use rocks, do not burn garbage, and get rid of ashes. I believe in dispersing camping by encouraging visitors to breakup all campsites except the designated ones at the Hot Springs and Junction Meadow. As far as I'm concerned, people can camp anywhere they like as long as they do not cause resource damage and they leave no trace of where they have been.

People have to learn to clean up after themselves. If we encourage them to use established sites, then we encourage them to be lazy, unaware, heavy impact campers. Our job should not be to clean up the same sites week after week that encourage this kind of use; instead, we should be educating people to be responsible and clean up the few scattered sites where people "tried" (at least) to leave no trace of their campsite. They may do a lousy job, but they are trying and learning, and our work and efforts are not wasted.

Granted, there are a few areas that call for established sites like the Hot Springs, High Sierra Trail west of Kaweah Gap, Forester

Lake because of no alternatives. Yet, in the rest of the backcountry, dispersal of visitors will have less impact; and we should not have to run after every camper to clean up behind them.

In the Kern, most campsites left by visitors may be used only 2 or 3 times a season by other parties. They grow to be numerous and unsightly, as well as encourage resource damage. An established fire-ring or a stack of firewood will entice a camper to have a fire even though that person could care less whether he had a fire or not. It was convenient. If there were ashes when he arrived, you can bet he will leave his ashes too. I tell people to use small firepits, get rid of their ashes, cover over the firepit, and scatter their firewood.-- don't make it easy for the next person. Let them work for their own wilderness experience. Make people responsible for their actions.

Visitors are getting too much conflicting information of backcountry use and camping. We all have different philosophies, but we (trailheads, interpreters, B.C. rangers, USFS) need to coordinate our efforts to inform visitors and be consistent.

C. Bear Incidents

Due to low visitor use and bear cables located in the problem areas, there were very few bear problems in my area. I took only one bear incident report, though I patrolled the Hot Springs area more frequently than years past. The incident occurred at Lower Funston to a stock party. There was also a small young bear prowling around Lewis Camp most of the summer.

I met several parties using the bear canisters. Most people had negative comments concerning the inadequate yet bulky size and extra weight. Also, several visitors mentioned that the canister needs a way in which a person can secure the canister to a tree or rock so a bear cannot roll it away or into a river.

D. Warnings and Medivacs

I issued no citations and two Courtesy Tags. One tag was to leave absentee campers a note about a messy campsite, the other was for a stock user who had a gun, no permit and was pestering people to give him food. I warned him verbally and issued the tag as a

formality warning that next he will receive a citation. He then left the park.

No medivacs. I had one search assisted by Sandy Grabin (8-1-5) for an "abandoned" camper suffering from high altitude sickness. We found him in good condition and reunited him with his party.

III. Odd Incidents

At the Bearpaw Ranger Station, while attempting to light the propane water heater, gas ignited in an explosion and I received second degree burns on my face from the flashback. I filled out a 343 form on the incident and an accident report. It was due to human error on my part but I feel it could happen to anyone because of the dangers of human error inherent in propane equipment with so many different people using it.

This ranger is not in favor of replacing wood stoves with propane stoves and water heaters in the backcountry stations.

IV. Wildlife and Wild Jets

I turned in a bird observation list for the season. No unusual sightings.

I reported at least 43 low flying jets with as many as 10 in one day. Of course, I was not in the Kern Canyon itself everyday to see them and often did not bother reporting the ones above tree top level. I spent 3-4 days coordinating with the Tyndall Ranger to photograph them; but, during that whole time, only one flew by.

V. 1984 Projects

- 1) Stock camp bulletin boards
- 2) Redo Hot Springs bulletin board signs
- 3) Make temporary "No Grazing" signs
- 4) Repair tool shed doors
- 5) New boundary signs south of Coyote Creek and north of Golden Trout
- 6) Big Arroyo and Forester Lake campsite rehab