

KERN RANGER STATION YEAR-END REPORT
1985

SUMMARY

I was on duty at the Kern Station from June 26 to Sept. 12. I patrolled 785 miles and contacted 727 visitors (477 backpackers & 250 Stock Users with 541 head of stock). Compared to the 1984 season, visitor use was about the same, although backpacker use was down 18% and stock use increased 16%. All trails were open early in June for foot and stock travel and a consistent trickle of visitors were in and out all season (little heavier use in August) even after Labor Day.

All trails in the area remained in fair shape, but due to lack of trail crew people a few areas now need extra attention. I turned in trail maintenance requests for Coyote trail, Soda Creek and Kern trail near Rattlesnake Creek.

A total of 109 fireings were worked on in the Kern area with concentration in Rattlesnake Canyon. On two special projects with Ranger Sandy Graban and Mountain Mama, Peggy Schleigh, we rehabed Lower and Upper Funston stock camps.

I issued many verbal and written warnings to Stock Users about grazing and camping regs and wrote one citation for Resource Damage - tying stock to trees. I wrote two citations for backpackers with dogs in the backcountry. Two medivacs: one by helicopter for an incompetent backpacker and one by Park stock for a sore foot, and oversaw the care of two sick horses brought in by stock parties.

I made several trips helping Park personnel and researchers here and there and ended the Kern season packing out the Little Five Ranger.

After the fall E.M.T. refresher, I worked the Hockett Plateau from Sept. 23 to Oct. 23 for hunting season. I contacted 25 hunters, 5 backpackers, and 8 Stock Users with 14 head of stock. Ranger Krumland on boundry patrol cited one hunter for a loaded weapon. I worked on 21 fireings including campsite rehab at Blossom Lakes with Ranger Dave Brennan. Just about all the signs on the Hockett are in bad shape.

Weather was warm and dry all summer with rain and snow coming in after Labor Day.

I. MAINTENANCE

A. Trails

I turned in three trail project requests for:

- a) washout 3/4 mile up Coyote Creek trail
- b) 2 bogs on Soda Creek Canyon trail
- c) river bank erosion on Kern trail near Rattlesnake Creek

I cut out several logs from the trail through the summer and left one huge one on the Kern trail north of Rattlesnake that stock can get around.

B. Fences

All the fences were put up and taken down, some repairs made, more needed. The Upper Funston fence (#5) needs some new posts as well as the Lower Funston fence (#2). The gates for the Golden Trout fence and little Ranger pasture needs some work. The trail crew did a great job repairing the large Ranger pasture fence and gate.

C. Station

The new shake roof is holding up fine. I put a new shake roof on the outhouse. The mice and woodrats were not a problem this summer. I rearranged tools in the new tool shed -- also the two carpentry saws sent out last year to be sharpened need to be sent back in! The steps to the front porch are getting a little shaky. Henry Brown brought over a few tuff and volcanic rocks which are presently stored under the front porch. He also donated 3 more 8x11 historical photographs of Lewis Camp to make a total of eight hanging in the station and sent 2 black & whites to be reproduced in Ash Mountain. It would be nice to get those framed under glass.

D. Signs

Lots of signs were put up and some new ones ordered. The wooden Kern Entrance sign got ripped up by a bear and is patched together hanging in the station; the new sign is waiting to be flown in next season as well as a new grazing regs sign to replace the big obsolete one at the River Pature drift gate. The bear cable sign with an arrow was finally put in at Junction Meadow, and immediately the cable and nearby campsites started getting use. The Soda Creek/Sawtooth sign was put in at Lost Canyon but needs a sign to Big Five Lakes added to it. A metal Shotgun Pass sign replaced the wooden stenciled one and the new Franklin Pass sign was put in place. Several signs were ordered but apparently need to be reordered:

← Franklin Pass	Forester Lake	Lewis Camp
Kern River --→	←-- Little Clare	Administrative Pasture
	Soda Creek	

I object to the sign committee's policy of putting only

the next trail junction on a sign instead of routes or main destination points. It's a good way of getting people confused, lost, and turned around. Visitors are using all vintages & types of maps these days and many don't even show certain trail junctions. It's more important to list main destination points and/or major trail junctions on the new signs and leave obscure trail junctions to be either signed at that junction or left to be found by the seasoned traveler who knows where to look for it.

E. Toilets

Some repairs were made on the Hot Springs and Upper Funston toilets. There is a spare toilet sans lid located at the Hot Spring trail crew cache. I tacked up handwritten signs in each location requesting people not to dump garbage down them. They both have several more years use on them.

F. Garbage

Several hundred pounds of trash were taken out throughout the season by helicopter, park and commercial stock. Quaking Aspen and Mineral King packers were both obliging when asked to pack out garbage and old fence posts and clean up trash dumps.

As always, the majority of trash picked up is from firepits -- that stuff doesn't burn because temperatures do not get high enough in campfires. People can't pick it out or rarely try and they're littering by leaving it behind. So why allow or encourage people to burn trash in the first place?

II. Campsites/Fires

The main emphasis in firering obliteration was in Rattlesnake Canyon where I removed excess firerings and put in at least three new 3 rock firepits. The campsites at Forester Lake are holding up but due to infrequent patrol need some special attention next year. The two stock camp firepits on the east side of the lake need to be rebuilt and continued verbal encouragement to Don Bedel's packers to keep them small and cleaned out.

Little Claire lake was totally neglected this year due to infrequent patrol, but not a total loss if taken care of next season. Forester Lake needs to be patrolled at least 2x month if not more and Little Clare once a month.

Once the bear cable sign was put in a Junction Meadow and people could find the second cable, camping impact in the area was more evenly distributed. Hot Springs campsites are holding up well and only one or two extra firerings were discovered so the six small sites seem to accommodate the heavy use. It would be a good project someday to line those six firepits with 3 rocks to keep them from getting bigger each time they're cleaned out. But, they're still easy maintenance as is. More and more larger groups seem to be

heeding the suggested rule of camping away from the immediate Hot Spring area. The laminated handwritten xeroxed signs for the bulletin board held up fine all season without replacing any so it won't be necessary to cover it with the plexiglass sitting in the station. Extra bulletin board signs are in the cabin.

There is still a problem with stock parties going down into the meadow to tie up while using the tub. I tried blocking the little trails with more rocks which seemed to help some and warning every party headed in that direction to tie up by the bulletin board. It would be helpful to install a hitching rail by the bulletin board.

The two large rehab projects were at the stock camps. Peggy Schleigh, Mountain Mama, and I obliterated the old Lower Funston stock camp on the east side of the meadow and moved it 100 feet from water. We leveled the old four foot high stove of wood and rock that was 6' from the river, the huge firepit 2' from the river, the shower setup on the riverbank, and removed a mule load of grates, wires, horseshoes and nails stuck in trees, logs, and everywhere. We hauled in three huge flat rocks and built a ground level firepit and arranged a few tables and benches sans nails and wire around it. We raked the area over filling in many ringed tyrees. The overall effect is a naturalized low-profile convenient yet easy to maintain camp. Stock parties using the new camp have been pleased. However the whole surrounding area is trashed-out sacrificed grounds. Every tree is ringed and so many dead. I'm reluctant to put in hitching racks because people are just starting to get used to the idea that they're required to use a rope between two trees -- we're making progress there. It still may be worth while to put a small bulletin board in each camp explaining stock camping regs and ethics.

A similiar job was done at Upper Funston stock camp with Ranger Graban, except that we only had room to move the camp 25' from the river. We leveled the Oliphant stove 6' from the river and two firerings and countless numbers of nails and wire. We built a 3 rock firepit and arranged the table and benches nearby again sans wire and nails. Both areas could always use more work, but it will now be easier to enforce basic camping regs with these stock parties.

Concerning fires in general, I still suggest my last year's proposal of lowering the fire elevation in Sequoia east of the Divide.

III. Visitors and Resources

A. Stock Users

Here was a definite (if only slight) increase in stock use with a constant flow of visitors throughout the season. Most of the use was in Lower and Upper Funston as usual with day trips to Hot Springs. Coyote seems to be a pass thru

area to Coyote Lakes. Rattlesnake gets most of its use from the Mineral King Pack Station. On the Kern, 21" Camp by Rattlesnake was used 2 times by Mineral King packers and Snake Camp was used only a couple of times. Parties rarely seem to use Junction Meadow anymore and if they do, they camp south a-ways. Most parties travel directly from Upper Funston to Wallace Creek/JMT or the Upper Kern.

A large number of parties did the big loop up the Kern, around Wallace Creek or Tyndall Creek, thru Crabtree, Rock Creek and Golden Trout. But even more amazing was the number of parties headed for Milestone Canyon. That place got thrashed and trashed this year. A resupply party left a large box of food, stove, and gas in there which I packed out. Fragile areas were trampled to dust and campsites enlarged. Groups I spoke to stayed anywhere from 1-3 nights in that canyon. I encouraged many to camp at Cold Springs (near Tyndall Creek on Kern R.) and day ride into Milestone and discouraged some parties due to the rough trail. One party killed a horse climbing the trail up the rock wall to the Upper Kern, and my stock slipped and fell there too. The amount of stock use Milestone got in the years past seemed acceptable, but if use continues like this season, I would recommend Milestone be designated day use only. It's only a two hour ride from excellent camping and grazing areas on the Kern by Tyndall Creek.

After five seasons of dillegently warning Stock Users about not tying to trees and other stock regs and posting regs at Lewis Camp, I find no problem with coming down hard now on stock parties breaking rules. The one citation I issued this season for tying to trees had a positive effect - word spread like wildfire and I had more cooperation and support from other packers. Mineral King and Quaking Aspen Packers are very cooperative but you have to keep after them and remind them you're watching.

I've had problems this year with people going over the 20 head stock limit, picketing in meadows, and overstaying the 48 hour limit in Upper and Lower Funston. Charlie Morgan suggested the number of days determined by stock nights (i.e. Upper Funston - 12 head/2nights so a party with 6 head can stay 4 nights or 3 head canstay 8 nights). However despite arguments and pleas from stock parties any size, I think the 48-hour limit is easier to enforce and keeps the parties moving sothere is less impact on the camps and available to more people.

As with all the Park regs, the Forest Service is neglecting to inform visitors of Park regs and problems arise from the differences in USFS and NPS stock regs like the number of head allowed. Several times this season I've had run-ins with stock parties due to misinformation from USFS.

B. Backpackers

Very little confrontation and animosity between Stock Users and backpackers. There are too many large backpacking

groups coming in. How can we endorse minimum impact camping ethics and still let large groups come in? Group size should be limited to 15 people although smaller would be better. Everybody cringes when they see a large party moving down the trail or into an already impacted area.

C. Bears

There were definitely some beg bears lurking around the canyon especially at Lewis Camp and Hot Springs. I have three sightings of bears in Rattlesnake Canyon but no problems as yet and bear signs in Coyote Canyon but no campers there. All of the bear incidents around the Hot Springs were from people not hanging their food or using the bears cables but tying off to trees. Didn't see any parasites this year using bear canisters.

D. Researchers

Mitch McClaren spent five days looking at meadows in the Kern area where I packed him from Upper Rattlesnake to Upper Funston to Lewis Camp and back to Rattlesnake. A researcher from U. of Minn. did a lichen collection in the Kern and I packed her as far north as Junction Meadow and back to Lewis Camp. We flew out about 63 pounds of tree and rock lichen samples. There were two V.I.P. bear people running around supposedly warning people about bears and advising on storage techniques. Couldn't there have been better use of their time spent at trailheads contacting more people or in problem areas rather than flashing thru an area once. Perhaps they could have spent time cleaning the ropes off the bear cables and out of trees. At least they brought in my mail.

E. Medivacs and Searches and Band-aids and Moleskin

I had two medivacs. The first was a backpacker out of food, wet gear, chaffed legs, blistered feet, blown-out boots, and out of shape who panicked, broke into the station, helped himself to my food and bedding, practiced unsanitary sanitation practices out my back door and wanted to be rescued. We flew him out.

The second began as a search for two lost hikers who came down the cliffs of Volcanic falls, Golden Trout, alive and ended up packing one of them with a pain in his foot up to Tunnel Air Strip where he flew out to Lone Pine. It took a day and a half but less time than waiting around for a commercial packer and less expensive than a helicopter.

There were numerous cases in need of band-aids, moleskin, new boots, and directions, and several cases of stock parties with animals scraped up that I attended to with Betadine and ointments. One stock party came thru or barely made it with two young horses on their last legs. I put them up in the ranger pasture, called for advice, and after several days got them out alive. I suspected negligence and cruelty to

animals but where and when do we intervene?

F. Jets and Wildlife

I continued reporting low flying Jets. On Aug.5,6,7, I spotted Jets for Randy Morgenson in the Upper Kern to photograph but only one flew by. No unusual wildlife sightings, however Jim Griffith of Visalia caught a 30 & 1/2 inch, 7 pound German Brown trout near Lewis Camp in late June.

G. Misc.

I wrote one case incident report on a party reporting evidence showing their food was ripped off from bear cables by a person not a bear. No investigation, but gave them food to hike out.

1986 projects

- 1) Concentrate fire/campsite rehab:
Upper Kern
Lower Big Arroyo
- 2) Coat of paint on shower house/ tack shed
- 3) New gates: Little Pasture & Golden Trout fence
- 4) Put in Kern entrance and grazing regs signs
- 5) Rock line Hot Springs firepits
- 6) Hitching rack at Hot Springs
- 7) Stock Camp bulletin board

MEADOWS

Concerning the opening dates for various meadows in the Kern area and considering 1985 a "normal" year: first of all I would consider this a ~~dry~~ year, if so dates as such are fine but if you insist this is a normal year then:

- 86-1 KERN BRIDGE CAMP: no dates listed, but lots of grazing potential in heavy vegetation and grazing should be allowed as soon as trail and dry forest area are open.
- 86-2 UPPER FUNSTON MEADOW: Fine. This year, medium average amount of use, some areas get grazed more heavily than others. End-of-season meadows looked grazed, but fine.
- 86-3 LOWER FUNSTON MEADOW: Fine. Very heavy use this year. End-of-season, some areas looked like a golf course, but not grazed to bare ground. Trail troughs through meadow due to heavy camping use.
- 86-4 KERN STATION (BIG PASTURE): a lot more use than other years, some areas heavily grazed to bare ground, but good recovery.
- 86-5 KERN STATION (SMALL PASTURE): pasture only for emergency overnight visitor use or occasional administrative use and with heavy irrigation, meadows remained in good shape.
- 89-4 UPPER RATTLESNAKE: I was in Upper Rattlesnake July 2 and meadows were in excellent shape for grazing, definitely dry enough. Change normal year to July 1 and dry year to June 21(?) / wet year to August 1. Boggy areas of meadow will be boggy wet or dry year.
- 89-5 FORESTER LAKE: July 1; July 15; August 1. Can only guess. By the end of 1985 season in September, meadow looked no different than early in season in July.
- 89-7 LOWER RATTLESNAKE/COW CAMP: low amount of use, areas boggy wet or dry year. Dates-Fine.
- 89-8 CRYTES CREEK: didn't check.
- 89-9 MIRROR CAMP: handy meadow, little use. July 1; July 7; July 21.
- 89-10 UPPER COYOTE CREEK: NOT USED----didn't check.