

ROCK CREEK YEAR END REPORT 1986

by: Bob Kenan

Season Report- Rock Creek 1986

Bob Kenan

Statistics

- .hikers contacted- 1200
- .miles hiked- 900
- .garbage removed- 400 pounds
 - .includes: 5 steel grates
 - much foil and plastic from firerings
 - 3 old can dumps
- .verbal warnings- 5
 - .1 stock party illegal picketing on soft vegetated soil and near standing water
 - .Cottonwood Pack Station cutting trail
 - .others were camping violations
- .not apprehended
 - .was reported from a reliable informant that a hiker had shot a bear near lower Rock Creek Lake-- no evidence found
 - .dog tracks were seen on the areas trails on several occasions this seasons
- .medivacs- 0
- .fire rings removed- 95

Area Management

This season there was a new approach to the Rock Creek area management. Instead of spending all my time patrolling the Rock Creek drainage, about half of each week was spent as a roving patrol with Tyndall Creek Station used as a base station. This provided an effective means of contacting backpackers on the trail and enabled me to do needed cleanup work in some of the more remote basins in the area.

The backcountry season began on June 27, when I was flown into Rock Creek from Ash Mountain. Helicopter 5-2 landed at Rock Creek twice on that day to deliver my 600 pounds of supplies. Also, on that day Dario was brought into Crabtree and supplies for both of us were delivered to the Tyndall Creek Station.

Upon arriving at the Rock Creek Station, there was garbage all around the station. The bear had gotten into the outside garbage cans that were full of garbage from the winter surveys. The first few days of the season were spent around the station organizing my gear and cleaning up. On July 1, I dropped down to the Kern Hot Spring via the route just south of Rock Creek. Had dinner with the Kern Trail Crew and the next day ventured up the Kern to assess the stream crossing and down tree situation. As expected, Whitney and Wallace Creeks were quite hazardous and Tyndall Creek was impassable. The other primary hazardous stream crossing in the immediate area was Wright Creek at Wallace Creek on the High Sierra Trail. Information was given to the trail crew of what they had to expect in working their way up canyon. Also, trail conditions reports were called into Dispatch primarily stressing the hazardous stream crossings in the area. In the early season, there were patches of snow in the higher regions of the area. New Army, Trail Crest, Shephard and Forester Passes were the main passes in the area that had considerable amount of snow on their north and east facing slopes.

Teamwork

There was a refreshing teamwork approach to the area management this season. Dario and myself would coordinate our patrols in such a way as to cover each others area when one of us were out on patrol. For example, when I'd go north to the Upper Kern, Dario would loop through the Rock Creek area. Also, if he were out on patrol away from Crabtree, I'd make a point to cover the area for him. With this approach, there was never more than a day or two that there was not a ranger in the Rock Creek and Crabtree areas. This technique worked so well that the word from groups that were spotted in by Cottonwood Pack Station was that they were told by Dennis Winchester that they "would" see the ranger while in the Rock Creek area.

Early in the season I made a request to Cathy Winchester to stop cutting the trail near Siberian Outpost. They had been using this shortcut for a number of years since it saved them about five minutes each way. It presented a problem to hikers because some of them would miss the trail junction and get lost as a result of thinking that the shortcut was the real trail. I explained the situation to Cathy and apparently they stopped using the shortcut. There should be a close watch of this in future years to make sure that they don't begin to use the shortcut again. An effort was made to obliterate the shortcut section of trail that they were using.

Cottonwood Pack Station (cont.)

I contacted Cottonwood Pack Station on a number of occasions throughout the season. For all their "all expense" trips they use the same camp near Lower Rock Creek Lake. The meadow that is adjacent to the camp has become a trampling ground. There are far too many stock nights allowed for this camp and meadow area. Cathy has even agreed that the camp is overused, so it's time for us to take the initiative and locate an alternative camp for them. The problem is that the alternative camps are all downstream from the lake. And of course, the best view is at the lake. Dario and I have discussed this and it seems that the best option may be to allow them to camp there at the lake, but enforce a limit to the number of stock nights allowed in that meadow. This would require that one of their packers bring the animals down to the lower meadow areas once the grazing limit has been reached. The meadow about a mile below the lake at the trail crossing of Rock Creek could easily handle their stock for a number of stock nights. It would also be convenient enough for the packer to shuttle the animals down there.

The times that I did contact Cottonwood this season, I would ask them when their next trips into the area would be. On a couple of occasions this helped me to plan my patrols to make sure that I would be in that area when they were coming in. Also, once this season I requested Sierra District to try to

find out for me when Cottonwood Pack Station had trips planned to come into the Rock Creek area. I had no success in attaining this information. Also, there were a couple of occasions this season when our administration allowed Cottonwood to stay three nights at the Lower Rock Creek camp.

Backpacker Impact

From the middle of July there began to be a good many hikers enjoying the splendid scenery of the Rock Creek drainage. Many of them were passing through to go climb the "big" mountain, while others were content to explore the Miter Basin. The most noticeable impact from hikers were the campsites of Lower Rock Creek Lake and Soldier Lake. On a regular basis it was necessary to make garbage runs to cleanup these areas. The peninsula camping area at Soldier Lake is a real popular camping area. Fire rings have been limited to one in that area, but it is necessary to tear down additional firerings there throughout the season that hikers build. The rehabilitation site on the west side of that lake is a good idea as that spot is recovering nicely. At the Lower Rock Creek Lake campsites are well dispersed around this lake/meadow area. This is the most highly used location for camping in the Rock Creek area. All the campsites are well away from water and the meadow. Also, regular camping takes place at the sites below the station and down to the lower Rock Creek crossing. At all of these locations a regular cleaning up around the sites is necessary.

Backpacker Impact (cont.)

In taking a look at the Miter Basin area, firering work was done at the site below the Sky Blue Lake waterfall. The basin itself is in good shape, but only by working the area on a regular basis throughout the season can it be kept this way.

Moving to the Upper Kern, there was alot of firering removal done this season in some of the remote basins of that area. There were a number of firerings torn down at the series of three lakes next to the trail that are just above 11,200 ft. and next to the cross on the Whitney quad. There was also an old can dump of approx. twenty pounds that was removed from the shore of the lower lake in that series. These lakes are above 11200 ft. and no fires should be allowed here. A no fires sign was placed this season below these lakes on the trail at 11200 ft. Other firering removal was done in the basins along the Great Western Divide which included the following areas: Kern-Kaweah River, Milestone Basin, Table Mountain Basin, Genevra Basin and Lake South America. Firering removal was also done this season from the headwaters of the Kern River down to the Hot Springs. By utilizing the route south of Rock Creek, in four hours the exciting trip from the Rock Creek Station to the Kern Hot Springs could be made. The roving patrol provided the opportunity to do needed cleanup work in some of these more remote areas, along with making contact with hikers on the long strethces of trails.

Area Maintenance

The focus of attention at Rock Creek Station was in cleaning and ~~organizing~~ the station. Also, began to thin a few of the dead snags in the side yard by the station to help to clear out that area. More of this work will be needed next season and the trees will have to be bucked up. The problem with this area is there are too many lodgepoles with many dead ones approx. three to four inches in diameter. Overall, the Rock Creek Station is in real nice condition with the new roof.

As for the Tyndall Station, a new roof is needed by next season. Some of the shingles are starting to fall off around the edges. Dario and I both worked on digging a new outhouse hole there throughout the season. At the end of the season the outhouse was moved into place. The old fire ring in front of the station was destroyed, renaturalized and a new one was built in a different location. The new one is in a better location and looks alot neater.

And then there was the honey bucket job on Whitney. Certainly this was a thorn in the side to all that were involved. But finally on the third attempt, with the help of the 500D and Frank, the overloaded bucket was removed. Dario and I spent the rest of that day working on Whitney summit doing the following maintenance: build and stain wind screen on the new outhouse, dismantle the rest of the old outhouse, and collect litter on the summit. Dario did a real nice job in building a new door for the shelter.

Comment

The stock use in the Rock Creek drainage brings alot of impact to the meadows of the area. I feel that commercial pack stations should be required to attain wilderness permits just as any other visitor is required. I realize that implementing that regulation would not be easy, otherwise it would already have been done.

Requiring permits would provide the backcountry ranger with several advantages for managing stock parties. The ranger could be informed over the radio as to when the stock party would be coming into his/her area. This would provide the opportunity for the ranger to contact every stock group that comes into their area. Also, with this official record (the permit), the stock group would be more inclined to be on their best behavior. Cottonwood Pack Station did appear to be on their best behavior this summer, but I am convinced that this was because they knew the odds were that they would be contacted by the ranger while in the area.

Rock Creek Station Needs

- .2 coffee cups (ceramic)
- .2 gallons chainsaw fuel
- .5 gallons white gas
- .30 small plastic bags
- .1 captains chair
- .snow seal (large)
- .medical thermometer (with temp. scale down below 98°)
- .4 boxes kitchen matches