

## Rock Creek Station Year End Report, 1987

Miles: 788

Trash: 300 lbs.

Visitors: 913

Fire/site Rehabilitation: 110

### I. Resources

#### • Meadows / Stock Use

This was a very busy season for the Cottonwood Pack Station.

When I arrived on June 25 I was told that the pack station had had stock in the Rock Creek area every day for 20 days already.

Only a few trips were overnight trips, but the stringer meadow had already been grazed. All meadows inventoried showed some signs

of the previous years' use (mainly deep hoof-imprints) but only

the stringer meadow had been grazed. It had signs of mechanical impact (all those listed on the inventory) scattered throughout over 10%

15% of the meadow. By the end of the season this meadow had been heavily used, with much mechanical impact. It is arguable

whether or not it was "overgrazed" - certainly it is not aesthetically appealing, and Cottonwood quit using that camp in mid-August.

The stringer camp received almost continuous use from late June through July.

In August, Nathan's Meadow and the lower crossing meadows began to receive more use, with Nathan's being used almost constantly for

three weeks. It has a mowed appearance as of mid-September. Penned-Up Meadow was used for only about 4 nights that I know of; the lower

meadows (below the crossing) for 7-10 nights. All meadows except Penned-Up have been at least moderately used, with the heaviest

use in Nathan's, the stringer meadows, and Lower Rock Creek Lake meadow.

2 parties used "Meadow #2", unaware that it was closed. Both stopped using it as soon as they were informed of the closure, but that

meadow was grazed a few times. There were signs from early in the season that stock from the stringer meadows above periodically use the closed meadow. The trail crew stock ended up at the Ranger Station Meadow twice, but never stayed long. Upper Rock Creek Lake meadow was used twice.

All meadows were fairly dry (relatively) by July and much drier through the season than in a normal year.

Cottonwood Pack Station did many spot trips, mostly to the Upper lake; all-expense trips (2-4 nights) about every 2 weeks; and some longer trips. (Wright Lakes, Crabtree) They "lost" 2 mules and a horse in early August and never retrieved them. The best guess is that they are somewhere around Guyot Creek.

Rainbow came through once, that I know of; the Londons reportedly came through three times, evidently in violation of their H.S.S.U.A. agreement; and Charlie Morgan camped at Nathan's Meadow for 10 days with 16 head of stock. I contacted 6 other private parties with under 10 head of stock each.

While the heavier use of the meadows this season has rendered many of them less than aesthetically pleasing, there has probably been no lasting impact other than deep hoof imprints in wet places, of which there are many. I think the area was able to tolerate this level of use - though I would prefer that the stringer meadow and Nathan's be less used with better distribution of use to the lower meadow.

### • wildlife

I saw a bighorn sheep ewe just west of the saddle above Soldier Lake on August 17. No others were reported to me. The deer population is thriving with many fawns present this year. Marmots are active but not a problem. Sandpipers and Golden Eagles nest in this drainage. The bears (probably just one, actually) were a problem for a few weeks.

in July, but there was only one incident reported following the installation of the bearboxes. Good move. (Bear boxes are currently located at Upper Rock Crk. Lk., the lower lake, and the lower crossing.)

## II Facilities

### • Trails

The trails in this area are in good shape, in general. The trail crew spent some extra time pulling out rocks between the two lakes - this section is steep, lacks water bars, and will probably continue to deteriorate. In time it will need more work. Areas of concern are:

- Upper Rock Creek crossing - wide, wet. (See photos.) Perhaps some rock-~~is~~-fill work here.

- New Army Pass trail - deep gullies, and a badly eroded section <sup>1/2 mi</sup> above the junction. Trailcrew should spend a few days on this trail doing some rock-and-fill.

- Erosion/exposed roots between Ranger Station and FCT/Rock Creek junction.

- Stock/unmaintained trail through s. end of Penned-Up Meadow - needs to be routed slightly higher, sharp rocks removed, fill brought in to keep trail out of very wet section.

There are many, many "trails" in the D.G. leading to Mt. Langley, and a well-developed trail from Soldier Lake to the saddle above it. (NW of Army Pass.) There was also a fairly well-developed trail from Milestone Creek going over the saddle into the two lakes on the southern tributary of that drainage, with signs of stock use. (There were signs of stock throughout the Milestone Basin.)

All the trail reroutes, erosion control work, and rehabilitation work in this area looks excellent. I photographed the Old Siberian Pass Trail to show the current state of the revegetation effort. The

replanted grass has "taken" well everywhere except the top  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile where the plugs appear to have died.

The trails seemed to be heavily affected by the constant stock travel this year. It looked like 2"-5" of tread were lost in many places over the summer, with many roots exposed in September where they weren't in June. Perhaps the winter makes amends??

• Cabin

I sent out literally boxloads of food and junk stored at the cabin and did a complete inventory of remaining supplies. In general, the cabin is well-stocked and in good shape. Both trailcrew & snow-survey people commented on the need to oil the cabin next season if possible, using a penetrating oil rather than keroil.

The trailcrew replaced the rotting & dangerous log crossing behind the cabin and helped with bucking up dead, small lodgepoles east of the cabin. This wood, which I split, will be part of the winter supply. Selective thinning of small trees should continue. There is also a large supply of split wood 100 yds. downstream from the privy at Sorensen's old camp, which should be hauled over to the cabin. (Much is too big for stove use, however.)

The DWR people replaced the un-bunked bed with two plywood boxes w/ hinged lids + locks for food & sleeping bag storage, so the entire cabinet will be available for storing ranger supplies. The plan is to get rid of the bed - we need to follow up on this, so it doesn't just sit outside rot. (There are now 2 beds outside.) Herman was in favor of my suggestion that the last surveyors inventory remaining food, separating/storing non-perishables for use the next season and thereby reducing the amount needed to restock the cabins. If this happens it

will be a minor NPS victory.

### • Campsites

I did firepit & site rehab work throughout the drainage, concentration on Lower Rock Creek Lake & the Upper Lake where old pits remain and new ones proliferate. I removed many old pits & naturalized sites all along the creek, removing nails from trees and so forth. I closed the site just below snow-survey meadow as it is right next to the creek & continued to get use even after all my rehab. efforts. Upper Rock Creek Lake - especially the "peninsula" - is extremely heavily impacted & used, with trash & firerings appearing to be spontaneously-generated.

I also worked some in the Upper Kern, destroying several small, used-once things and wind screens. My observation of this area is that while the major work/maintenance along main travel corridors has been attended to, there is lots to be done by way of naturalizing cross-country, less travelled areas throughout the ~~area~~ Upper Kern. (I realize that Davis may get to these places during the next month.)

If there are ever willing bodies in this area, there are lots of old sites at Lower Rock Creek Lake that would benefit from rehab work - hauling away black soil, etc.

Miter Basin looks good, with a minimum of maintenance needed. A few firepits popped up at Sky Blue; otherwise it's remarkably clean & pristine. Soldier Lake has suffered from fires. At exactly 11,200', fires should not be allowed here.

### III. Visitor Contact & Use

#### • Law Enforcement

I gave verbal warnings for: picking flowers; trash in firepit; building new firerings; camping on vegetation (lots!); grazing in closed meadow; camping too close to water; improper food hanging

There were no major incidents. Most problems are with site selection & trash in pits, bear boxes, and just around the sites. Everyone I checked had a permit. There is a problem with people leaving food in bear boxes... when (if) new stencils are made they should read: "share with others/ keep box closed/ store only food/ leave no food or trash".

Use: Use here is moderate. Lots of groups in August, heading to Whitney. I've seen a proliferation of Outward Bound-type groups in the backcountry ~~area~~, some of which come through certain areas several times a season. Though we can regulate Outward Bound because they are commercial, we seem to have no way of reaching these other groups unless we bump into them. They are usually large, and use cross-country routes. If there were any way to monitor these groups more closely through the permit system, I think it would be useful. (One such group is from Rancho San Antonio Bojo Town; they used this area & Crabtree 3 ~~th~~ times this summer, contacting only the USFS because of their entry through the Golden Trout Wilderness)

Use concentrated this summer at the Upper Lake, with up to 6 or 7 parties camped there on busy nights. The impact shows.

Medicals: Not much happening. One person flown out of Hites Basin for hernia - the incident was reported & dealt with while I was gone. I reported an injured hiker at the Hot Springs when I contacted a party at Wallace Creek, she was flown out with a severely lacerated ~~arm~~, and a stock party reported a person with HAPE at Crabtree, which I reported and he was also flown out. It seems valuable to have a ranger <sup>always in the area in August</sup> either at Rock Creek or Crabtree since messages do find their way to the next ranger station if the nearest one is vacant

#### IV. Jets

The roar of military jets is abominable - almost a constant presence during weekdays. There were several jets flying between 1000'-3000' AGL near the crest, and a handful under 1000'. This continues to be a real problem in this area. Many hikers comment on the noise. The silhouettes & pictures have really helped in identification.

#### V. Management suggestions and miscellaneous gratuitous thoughts:

As I break up firepit after firepit and collect bag after bag of trash, and see people camping again and again in inappropriate or illegal spots, it occurs to me that nothing has really changed in the last 10 years, and it's time for a new education push. I did random checks to see if people read their rule sheets: NOT ONE PERSON had even LOOKED at the sheet attached to their permit. The pack station doesn't even bother to give them out. ~~And~~ And, despite the \$19,000 Sequoia gives to East side permit issuers, those folks give NO information (verbal) about Park rules or good backcountry practices. Furthermore, the packers receive no guidance from Winchester and <sup>see</sup> ~~rec~~ didn't even know which meadows were closed. SO: herewith, Lo's Plan For Backcountry Education:

- 1) Alden or The Rock Creek/Crabtree/Charlotte/Le Conte ranger(s) should have a 1 day (or even 2 hour!) training session/meeting with East side permit issuers to discuss the problems we encounter here, and ways they could help. They should <sup>(The USFS employees)</sup> briefly review the regs. w/ each person. (A good idea: in Tuolumne there's a big poster on the wall directly across from the hiker with the main regs in very large letters: "Camp 100 feet from water established firerings" etc. The hiker can't miss seeing the signs.)
- 2) This is kind of "out there", but how about a humorous, catchy 7-10 minute video of backcountry do's & don't's? It could cover campsite selection, food-hanging & dealing w/ bears, fires - all that good stuff. It

\* Talked w/ Julian, who worked Cottonwood Lakes this summer, who says the permit issuers did a really good job, and did give good verbal info to hikers. So perhaps people just don't listen. Which is why a real catchy video would be a good thing.



should be generic enough to be used nationally, with room for a <sup>short</sup> trailer (SP?) with specific information for each use-area. The hiker would be required to see this short presentation before receiving his/her permit. There are small relatively inexpensive TV-like monitors that could be placed where permits are issued, I believe. (Maybe in the next administration there will be more funds???) (Maybe in my next lifetime??)

3) A meeting should be set up next season between ALL Cottonwood Pack Station employees and either Alden or a local ranger to review backcountry practices. These folks sometimes have enormous fires, set up on vegetation, leave stuff in firepits, etc. At least if we know they've gotten the scoop from the horse's mouth, as it were, we can really crack down back here.

Upper Rock Creek Lake

- 1) I recommend closing this lake to fires because:
  - 1) There is so much black soil & ash in the sites that the area looks like the site of a nuclear test;
  - 2) There is absolutely NO organic matter on the ground, and wood is scarce;
  - 3) A fire prohibition would spread use to the New Army Pass jet. & the lower lake which are more heavily timbered;
  - 4) There are 3 sites where people insist on building fires <sup>against</sup> ~~next to~~ large rocks, despite all my efforts.
  - 5) This area is at least as heavily abused as Timberline or Pear Lake, both of which are closed for the reasons listed above.

It appears that the 11,200' <sup>fire</sup> limit is just too high for many places in the Kern drainage. 10,800' would be more appropriate.

Lyndall Creek - It would work, I think, to keep this station unmanned, but have Kern rangers co-ordinate maintenance efforts such that all areas are covered during the season. A log could be maintained at the station,

as well as a day-pack, sleeping bag, cookset, pocket tent, etc., so a ranger could come spend a week, do some serious work spending a few nights in the less-accessible areas, <sup>and</sup> record what was done & where. With a little co-ordination, the area could get a good 6 weeks-worth of work with no additional \$\$ needed for a ranger. We all go there, anyway, but I never really knew what work needed to be done.

- Sensitive Plants: these are located in areas that get very little use. I haven't observed any threats to the populations.

- Backcountry Training

- 1) Field trip to Edwards would be great
- 2) Condense everything so there's less goof-around time
- 3) Medical sessions have all been good
- 4) How about 1-2 hours on long-range backcountry management goals? (and where we fit in)
- 5) Ever tried a 1-2 hr. discussion among all b.c. rangers to just voice concerns & share ideas?
- 6) Field session on meadow monitoring

- Equipment: my pack (#20) should probably be retired - at least needs another waist band (very worn)

- Drift Fences: Next year the Stock Users Assoc. is to put in drift fences. One would go in just east of the Mdw. #2 on the rock ridge. \*I recommend starting with just this one in 1988. If it is felt that another is needed, perhaps in 1989. Any fence below the PCT junction will be obtrusive and have to span a wide area - I'd rather not see a fence down there if it can be avoided.