

LECONTE CANYON RANGER REPORT 1988

1) Grazing in LeConte Canyon. With stock users it is simply a cultural habit to graze stock in definite meadows (often wet). While the good campsites are often located at meadow edges it is often the case that there is ample woodland forage in dry valley bottoms between meadows. The best example might be LeConte Canyon.

It is my opinion that Little Pete and Big Pete Meadows needn't be grazed at all. Dry-site woodland forage in the canyon, from a couple of miles above Big Pete Meadow to Deer Meadow, is abundant. Some stock turned out in the canyon hardly graze the meadows at all, when not turned directly into them.

With the right drift fences (and grazing regs) Little Pete and Big Pete wouldn't be grazed and the stock users wouldn't be pinched by it. And I think closing these meadows would enhance our protection efforts. Little Pete is the most popular stopping place in the area, and by mid-summer of every year it looks like a pasture. This year there were about 300 stock-use nights in the meadow. Hikers complain. Most of Big Pete Meadow is wet all year, even in dry years. Part of it is on the Superintendent's List of Seventeen (LOS) permanently closed meadows, but without any protection. From my log: "8/11/88: Sierra Club (Schober's) stock is in Big Pete Mdw., in the wet and permanently closed sphagnum area, acting like they prefer it there." And Big Pete is a meadow of lush, diverse species, including sundews, alpine gentians, Deschampsia, sphagnum... I believe that the entire meadow should be placed in the Superintendent's LOS.

A new fence was built this summer below Big Pete. (It still needs another strand of wire; a roll needs to be sent to LeConte in spring 1989.) This will keep stock from wandering up into Big Pete. If another fence were built just above Big Pete, stock users could camp there and put their animals up canyon. The meadow would have full protection without restricting stock user's use of the mountains.

And if a fence were built below Little Pete, stock user's camped at Little Pete could put their stock below the meadow, ^{be} contained by that fence and the one at Ladder Creek. If this were done, the fence below Big Pete could be removed with the stipulation that stock could not graze between the upper Big Pete and lower Little Pete fences.

2.

Again, the point is, without pinching the stock users in their choice of campsites we could give full protection to both these meadows. And we may not have to worry about opening dates because the drier woodland forage sites probably dry out before stock can get over the passes.

This would be a shift from monitoring grazing as we do now, to actually managing it, and may work in other drainages as well as in LeConte. Along with this we could work with stock users to change their habit of turning stock directly into the lushest, prettiest meadows in the mountains, at least where woodland forage is available.

I recommend Sierra District try this for these two meadows. If it works we could expand. We could fence Grouse Meadow without inconveniencing stock users, though it would be harder to locate short fence sites.

With so many fences in the canyon, we should attach a small sign to each gate explaining that these are for meadow closure to protect the meadows. Hikers don't know what these fences are for and stock users will think they are to keep the stock in the meadows, as in pastures.

2) Our grazing regulations for Evolution Lake need to state that all of Evolution Basin (Lake - Muir Pass) is closed to overnight stock grazing. In July, Galen Rowell's stock party wanted to stay overnight and graze at Sapphire Lake. Misunderstandings and hard feelings were generated when The Green and The Gray intervened.

3) I, and all hikers, think there should be studies on what stock leave in the water, water quality being the concern it is. And there should be guidelines, either in the Superintendent's Compendium (list?) or in minimum impact guidelines, about stock users trying to keep stock away from water as much as practical and possible and trying to keep them from urinating in streams at crossings. Just an occasional effort would be a nice gesture.

3.

4) On the subject of minimum impact guidelines, our handout could include an instruction that since the mountains are littered with firesites one should never build a new one (unless emergency). Proliferating firesites is one of our problems.

The other problems with firesites are that people like them huge, they are not good at discerning inappropriate locations, they don't clean their foil out, and they put rocks and dirt on top of the fire to extinguish it.

No more than half a dozen rocks are ever needed, they need to be located away from water and growing plants and large boulders, aluminum foil doesn't completely burn, and dirt and rocks fill the sites so the next user builds it up higher. These are our educational challenges. Perhaps we need a new minimum impact folder to go with wilderness permits.

Another needed educational effort is teaching people how to dispose of their scat. One measure of how far we have come must be that so many don't know what to do with their own body wastes when faced with the absence of a flush toilet. The amount of human feces seen is on the increase, and an amazing amount of it is in wet places or near water. Some separate attention to this in our permit literature might be good.

5) Apparently the Superintendent's efforts with the Muir Hut worked somewhat. In early October the Hut was still clean and only a little of the wood had been burned, though trash was burned with it, leaving the inevitable residue. The roof still leaks.

6) The 18 ft. antenna at the new trailside snow pillow site in Dusy Basin is not collapsible. Herm Raimundo told me they don't have such an antenna, it would take a new design if they were going to take it down for the summer, and if the present one were taken down their electronics man would have to come in and reprogram the instruments in the spring. I understand the Superintendent was told this snow pillow would have an antenna that could be lowered for the summer.

4.

7) Again this summer fires down canyon smoked out the LeConte area for long periods, generating public inquiry. Fire Management didn't call to offer information. It would have been appreciated.

Air quality in California is chronically poor so it is a major disappointment when smoke floods the high mountains in fall, normally the only time with crystalline mountain air (other than winter). If that becomes an annual event we will have sacrificed a valued resource.

8) There were apparently some real frustrations with the helicopter operation this past summer for everyone, least of all a backcountry ranger. However, it can disrupt my attempts to maintain a work schedule when a helicopter is sent my way (on routine business) with no more than half a day's notice. It would be helpful if we had a system of contacting backcountry rangers to approve planned flights, when practical. This would avoid cancelling a several day patrol to go back home for tomorrow morning's helicopter. Nor is it often that flights for backcountry rangers are so important they can't be cancelled for a week or so when there are helicopter problems, rather than putting the flight and ranger on day-to-day standby. Better to let the ranger go about his business and reschedule after the problem is solved.

9) Training recommendation: Everything we need to hear (from everyone, including Chief and Superintendent) can be written and gathered in a folder. We can read it in the backcountry; don't even need to discuss it at a training session. This would also include everything we are to do. If previous year's projects are to be done again, write it, with changes or same instructions. If there are new projects, write them with instructions. This little folder (not to duplicate what's in station manuals) could include everything we normally hear at training.

We also need training for litter rigging for lowering and for helo hoist, including securing patient in the litter, setting anchors, and carabiner brake system. This should be more than just a demonstration. We need small group training and individual practice. I won't learn that stuff by watching someone do it once. What would be good for me would be a small set up I could practice on in the backcountry to keep current.

5.

10) Make the State of California Snow Surveys reset the poles for the Dusy snow course, getting rid of the piles of rocks and clumps of concrete which look real poor. Also make them remove one sign at east end where there are two; preferably remove the sign which is nailed to a tree.

11) For the 1989 LeConte Ranger:
Ancient, ancestral, Anasazi-style firesites were removed at Grouse Meadow, Stillwater Meadow, Deer Meadow, Big Pete, and upper LeConte; in some cases replaced with small sites.

There are three firesites on the Dusy Branch trail which remain to be reduced to ground level, and 2 or 3 remain at Deer Meadow.

There is a little meadowy spot about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile above Big Pete, between the trail and the creek, where periodically fires are built; it requires vigilance so the spot isn't used regularly.

Other attention/work:

Periodically scour Dusy for firesites; the most heavily used place is the first trailside lake below Bishop Pass (above treeline).

Periodic firesite attention at Palisade Lakes.

Vigilance above 10,000 ft. in LeConte Canyon.

Finish new outhouse hole (about three feet deeper and wider, relatively easy digging) and put its dirt in the ranger station trail.

New cabin shutters were left for after new siding, for a custom fit. There's a two-piece new door shutter also. The door jamb needs repair when cabin siding and roof are done.

Bring a roll of fence wire in the spring and finish Big Pete fence. It needs a strand of wire on the long side. staples are in place.

Badger Sierra District re new fences to manage grazing in LeConte as discussed in this report.

20 gal. blazo arrived at LeConte on Oct. 11.
5 gal. was already there. None needed for 1989.

Finally, safety. I participated in two rescues in steep gulleys with loose rock, without a climbing helmet, no passenger helmet in helicopter, and no Nomex clothes for helo ride. In future I should get Nomex from FMO. Can we be issued climbing helmets for these situations?

-Randy Morgenson.