

The 1989 Bench Lake Station Year End Report

by: Bob Kenan

miles hiked: 1150

visitor contacts: 1200

1

It was a very productive season for Bench Lake & Simpson Meadow area management. I made contact with a large number of backpackers & stockusers throughout the season. Many illegal fire rings were torn down in the multitude of lake basins above 10,000 ft. within the region. This report is an effort to show what work was accomplished during the season & to help illustrate where on-going work will be needed on a seasonal basis in the future.

The amount of backpacker visitation seemed about the same as last season. There was a noticeable increase in stock trips this season. Last season there was only one stock trip over Taboose Pass. This season there were ten to my knowledge. There is an obvious trend for stockusers to want to get into the more remote areas of the park. Taboose & Sawmill Passes are getting more use. There is an overall trend of increasing stock use in the backcountry by all of the commercial pack stations. Rainbow Pack Station had one of its biggest years.

How well are we managing stock in the park? How well are we managing backpackers in the high elevations? Twenty backpackers are a heck of a lot easier to manage at 10,200 ft. than twenty head of stock. What is the status of our water quality in the high elevation lakes & drainages. May I suggest that it could

be better.

Biodegradable soap is a real problem. Too many park visitors think it is okay to use it directly in the water. Way too much suds is noticeable almost everywhere.

Bear boxes have proven to work well over the last two seasons. A majority of hikers on the main trails are camping from one bear box to the next. What effect will having such concentrated camping have on these areas in the future?

A real close look at the impact created by visitors in the backcountry reveals that we do have problems. Taking a close look at the main problems & potential solutions will help us more effectively manage the park visitor in the future.

### Composite Rehab

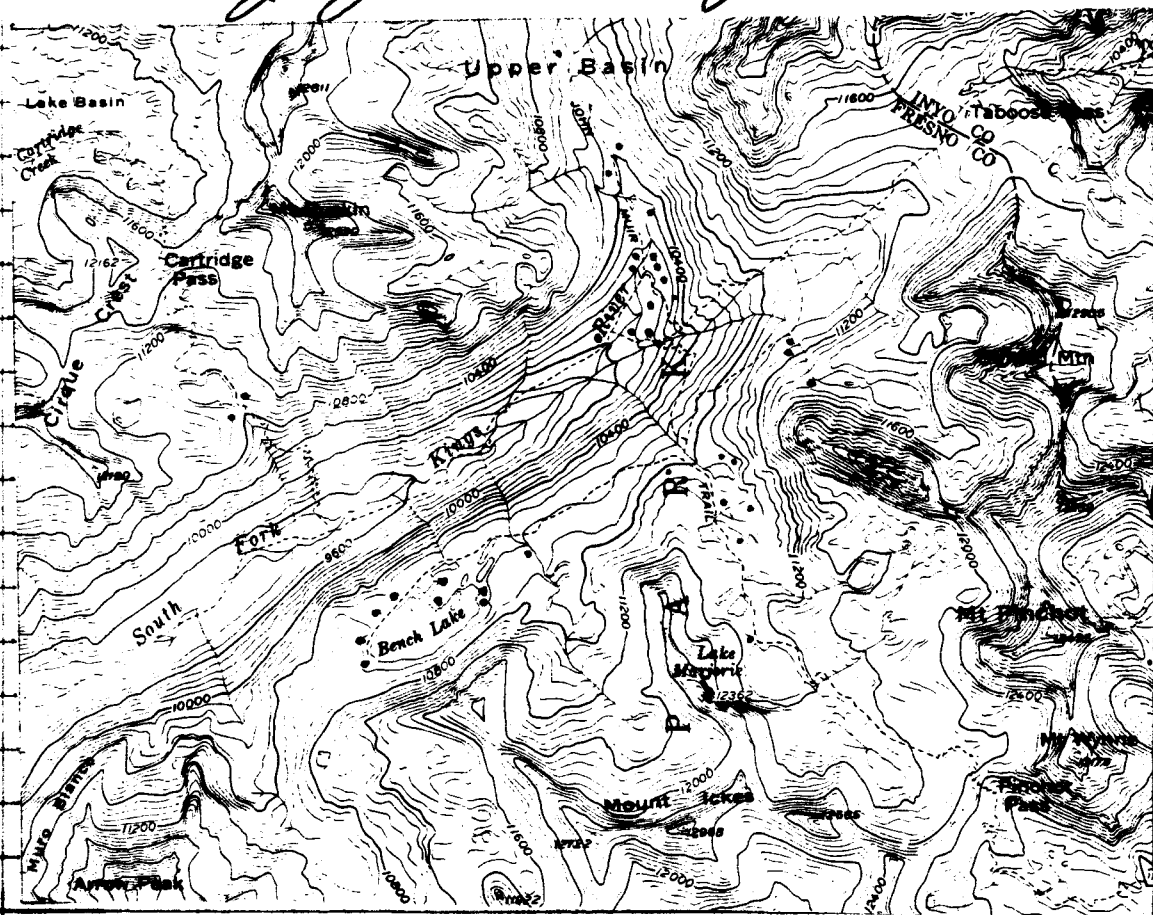
The hypothesis that follows from last season has now proven to be theory.

"On the positive side, park visitors are mostly predictable as to where they will build firepings. On the negative side, after firepings are torn down & the area renaturalized, firepings will be rebuilt again in the same location."

It is also very obvious to me that by tearing down firepings - rolling rocks & slinging dirt - that visitors are made

aware that a ranger is working the area.

The roving ranger has a big job. The objective is to keep firewings from accumulating in the multitude of lake basins from the Sierra Crest to the Le Conte Divide. This requires covering as much territory as possible & "working the basins" on an ongoing basis throughout the season.



Upper Basin Area

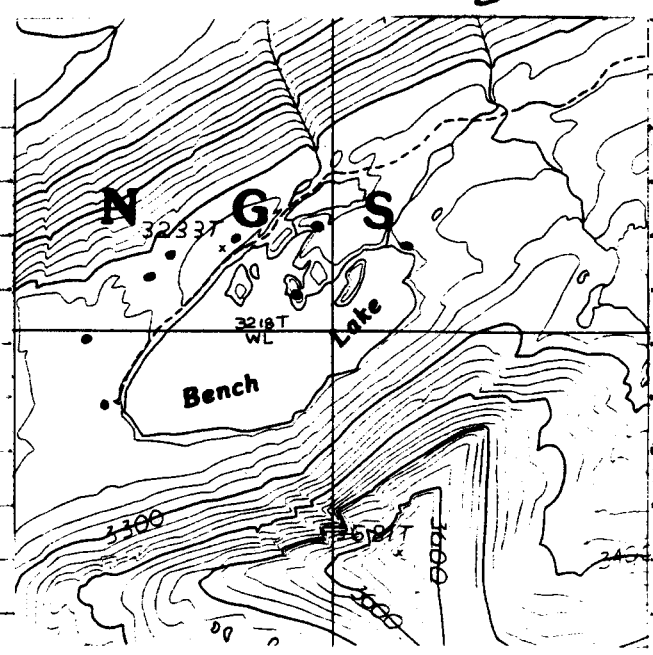
Between Pinchot & Mather Passes, the only area below 10,000 ft. along the Muir Trail is at the lower crossing of the South Fork Kings River.

I allow firerings approx. 1/2 mile north from the 10,000 ft. crossing. The map of the Upper Basin area shows where hikers will rebuild firerings & established campsites.

With all the work done in the area the last few years there is less rebuilding of firerings along the Muir Trail above 10,000 ft. The Muir Trail overall is looking cleaner than it has in years. But hikers are continuing to build firerings at the "off the trail" locations shown.

Bench Lake

Bench Lake is a popular fishing lake & it received a good amount of visitation this season. Firerings had been rebuilt on the eastern side of the lake in the places shown below. At the beginning of the season



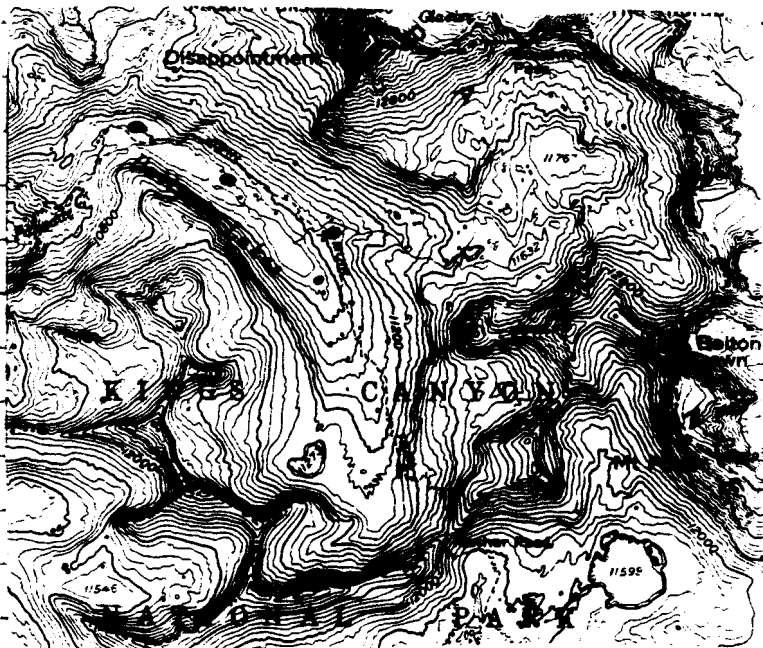
I worked Bench Lake. Then throughout the season firerings were torn down when they were rebuilt.

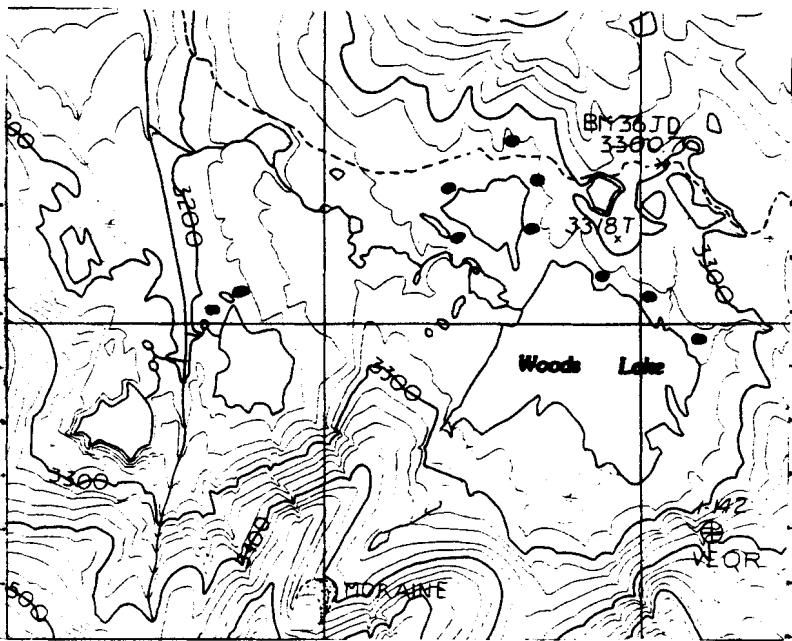
### Striped Lakes

Near the outlet of the lower lake several large firerings & rock walls were torn down last season. I tore down several firerings this season on the outlet creek at approx. 1110 ft.

### Palisades Lakes

Most of the camping here is in the three locations shown. The camping area at the upper lake needs to be patrolled on a regular basis along with the area between both lakes.





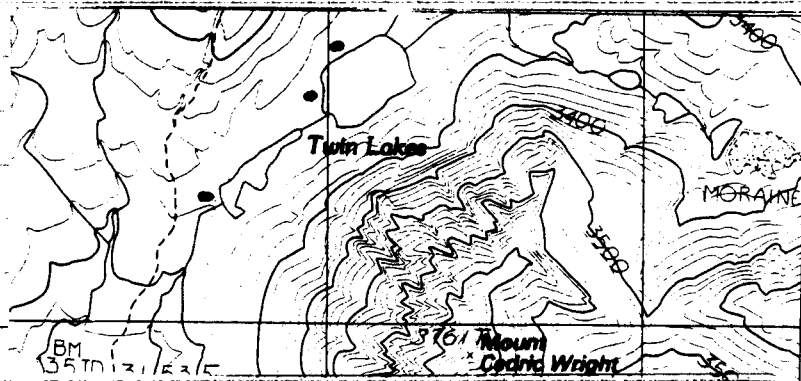
Woods Lake Basin

This area continues to be one of the most abused basins in the region. Firerings were torn down this summer in the places shown. Firerings were rebuilt during the season at the main camps on Woods Lake.

It is important to work this area throughout the season to keep firerings & litter from getting out of control. It is best for the Bench Lake Ranger & the Rae Lakes Ranger to patrol Woods Lake Basin as frequently as possible.

## Twin Lakes

Firewicks were torn down at the upper lake campspots this season. This area is fairly well secluded, so hikers feel they can get away with building a fire here. Also, a real popular spot for camping is at the outlet of the lower lake.



## Basins / Areas worked this season include:

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Twin Lakes       | Blue Canyon Basin |
| Woods Lake       | Lake 10212        |
| Lake Marjorie    | Ruskin Basin      |
| Bench Lake       | Lake Basin        |
| Striped Lakes    | Marion Lake       |
| Pelicanos Lakes  | Amphitheatre Lake |
| Horseshoe Lakes  | Upper Basin       |
| State Lakes      | South Fork Kings  |
| Simpson Meadow   | Gardiner Basin    |
| Window Peak Lake | Woods Creek       |



## Sierra Nat'l Forest

There are an increasing number of park visitors entering via Sierra Nat'l Forest. I contacted two groups last season at Lake 10212 who had entered through the Nat'l Forest. Both of these groups were in the process of building a fire.

They had both obtained their permits from the Donkey Creek Station & they stated that no one had said anything about fire restrictions in Kings Canyon. Upon inspecting their permit, the little blurb on the back was not very clear to me about fire restrictions in the park.

This is a border area far removed from park management influences. With the increasing popularity of the recreational reservoirs, many more visitors will be entering the park from these trailheads & routes in the future.

Stock Use

There was a noticeable increase in stock use this season by commercial pack stations. Rainbow Pack station had one of its biggest years. Rainbow spotted in numbers of groups over Taboose & Sawmill Passes. Dave Dohnel & Bob Tanner were contacted in Upper Basin with large stock trips. Cedar Grove Pack station was contacted on several occasions with groups they had packed into Simpson Meadow. Also, packer Milt Riba, of Clyde Pack station was contacted in Blue Canyon. Milt stated that there were a number of groups that wanted to be packed into Blue.

There is a noticeable trend of stock users wanting to get into the more remote areas of the park. There is also an obvious trend of increasing stock use in the park back-country.

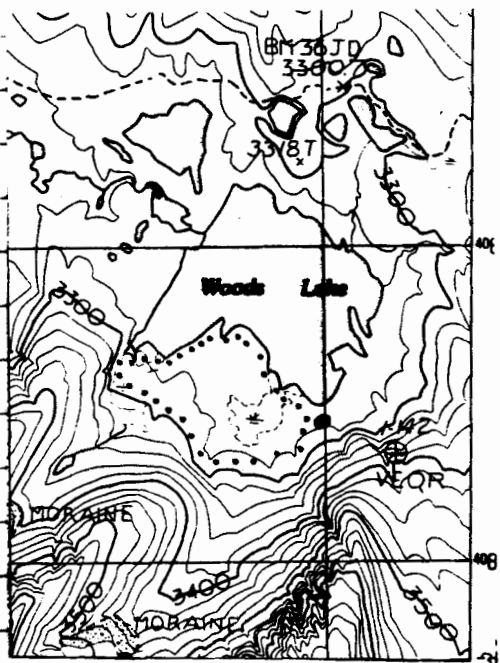
So, how are we doing managing the stock use in the backcountry. May I suggest that we are doing a poor job. How well prepared are we for managing a big increase in stock use in the future. I feel that some definite changes in our stock management need to be made to help prepare us for the future.

I'm taking a close look at the impact by stock in the high elevations we do have a problem. In the fragile lake basins above 10,000 ft., stock grazing can be

very noticeable & damaging.

An example of stock damage was seen this season at Woods Lake. I contacted John Berry of Rainbow Pack station on August 5 at Woods Lake. John was camping at Woods Lake at point C. He had penned his 10 head of stock overnight in the area shown on the south side of the lake. The natural cliff barrier had prevented his stock leaving to the west.

I inspected the area where the stock had been kept overnight. There were deep hog marks in the soft lakeshore grasses. Also, there was manure in the inlet streams to the lake. This is not a rare case, but it is more of a common practice. I have seen over the years stock penned into a number of places in the high elevation basins.



So, how do we deal with this problem? When stock graze in areas below these fragile basins there is much less damage. I can see no where in Kings Canyon back-country where it is appropriate to keep stock overnight above 10,000 ft.

I am in full support of the proposal to restrict grazing to 10,000 ft & below in Kings Canyon. Actually, this restriction would not change current stock use patterns very much, but it would prevent a lot of stock use damage in the future.

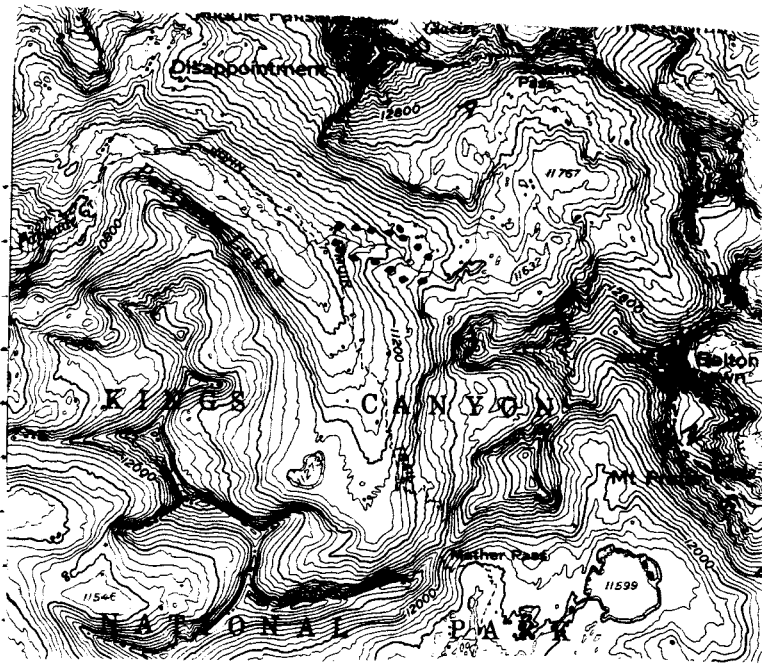
### Stock Use Patterns

This section will take a close look at the feasibility of restricting stock from grazing above 10,000 ft in Kings Canyon backcountry.

Starting in Evolution Valley, currently grazing of pack stock is not allowed in Evolution Basin. Stock trips travelling over Muir Pass must travel from Evolution Valley to LeConte Canyon in a day.

Most stock parties travelling south from LeConte over Mather Pass will do it in a day to the South Fork Kings River at 10,000 ft. To shorten the trip, some stock groups will leave from Deer Meadow to cross Mather Pass.

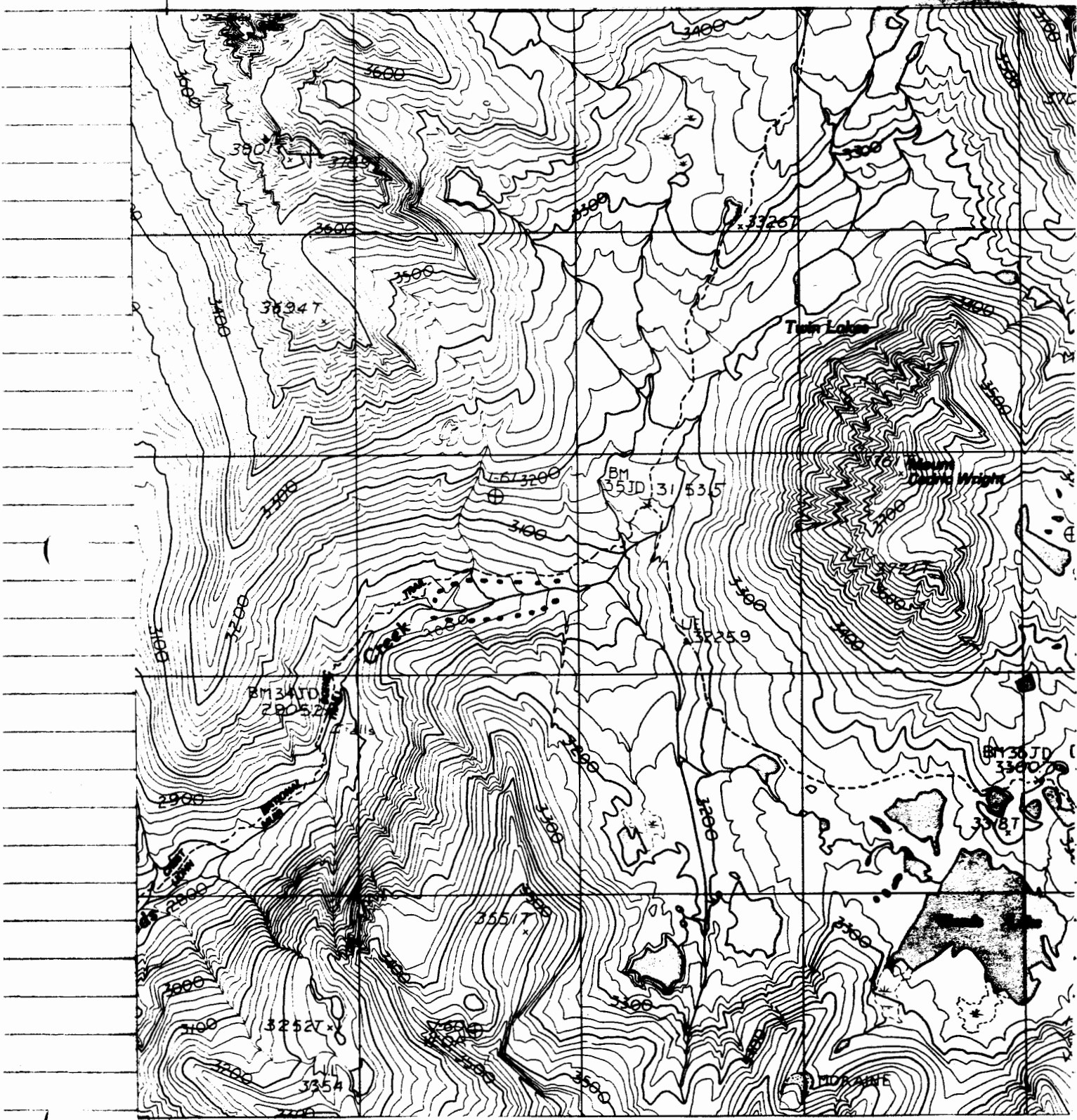
Since Palisades Lakes is not closed to stock, I have seen stock parties camp



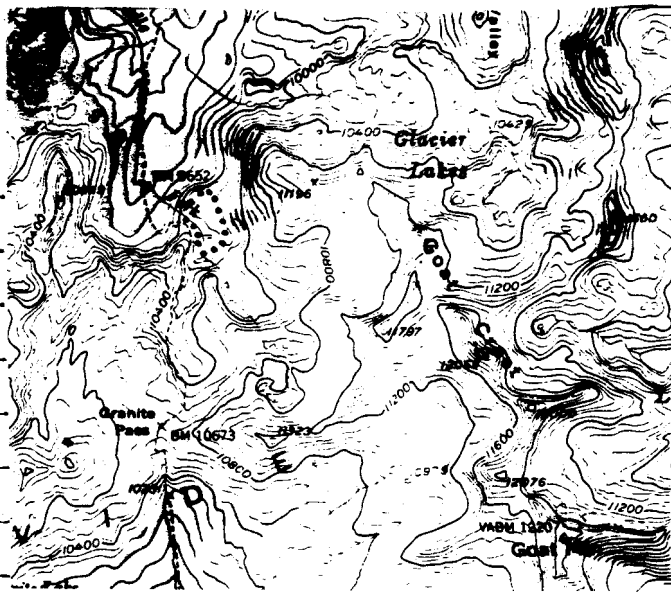
at the Upper Palisades Lake & graze the stock overnight in the area shown. This is not an appropriate place to keep stock overnight. The fragile creek bank is very susceptible to stock damage.

Travelling south over Pinchot Pass, stock parties are either going to exit Sawmill Pass or continue south on the Muir Trail.

This season I contacted Dave Dohnel of mt. Whitney Pack station at the South Fork Kings River. Dave's group of 8 guests & 20 head were travelling south over Pinchot Pass & were going to exit Sawmill Pass. Dave had two layover days planned for Twin Lakes, but he did not want to camp above 10,000 ft. I suggested a camp along the Muir Trail below 10,000 ft. This camp worked well for the group as they were able to day hike into the surrounding basins & build a campfire at night.



Woods Creek Stock Camp Area



Granite Pass is another route used for a lot of stock trips out of Cedar Grove. There are areas below 10,000 ft in Granite Basin for stock parties to camp.

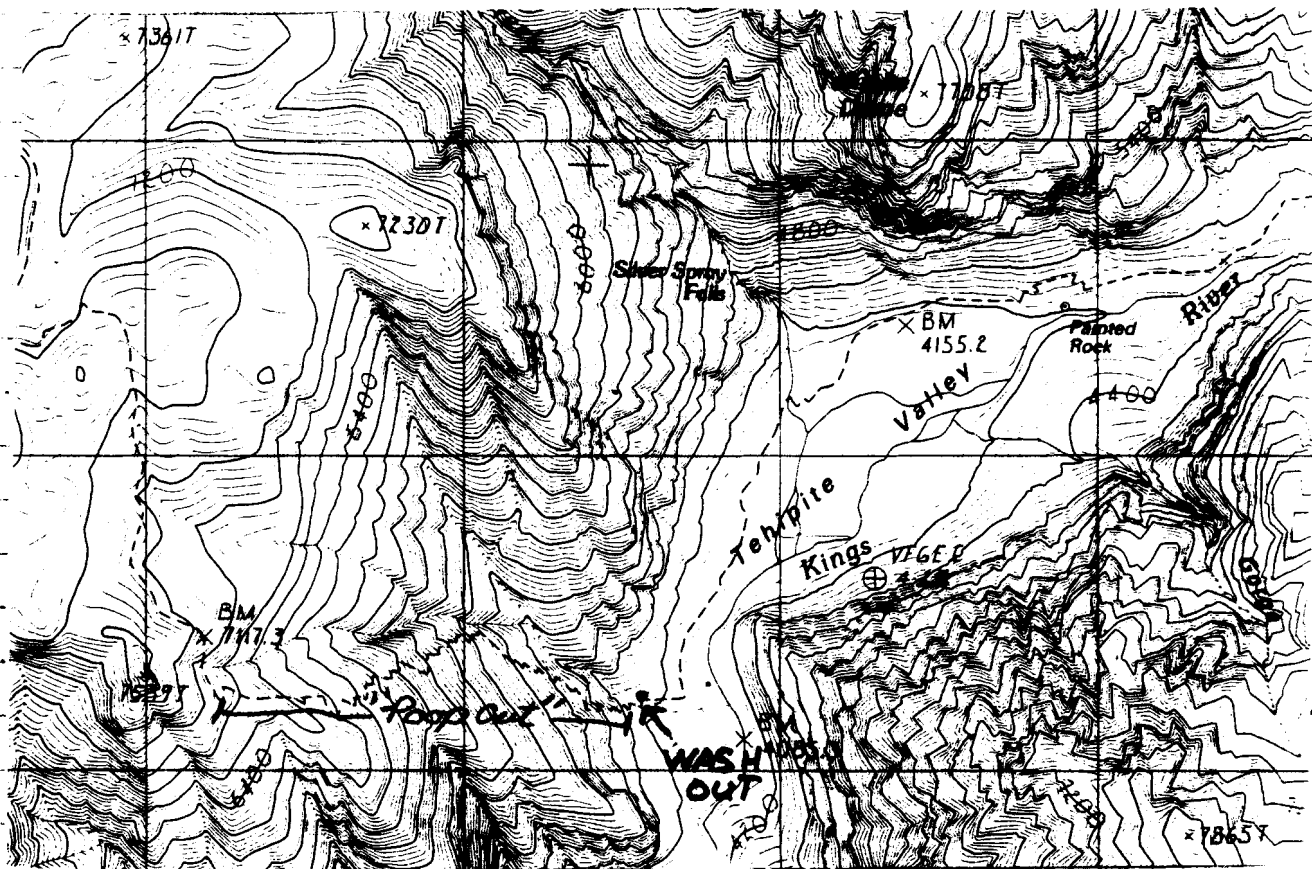
Shortica Meadow is a popular stock camp just north of Granite Pass. This meadow is so close to 10,000 ft. that it could be considered close enough.

On looking at the stock use patterns in this region of Kings Canyon, it is feasible to limit grazing to 10,000 ft. Also, it would not require too many changes from current stock use patterns.

## Trail Conditions

Overall trail conditions in the region are in real good shape. There is a washed out switch-back in the area shown that does present some potential hazard to backpackers. It is approx. 30 ft of trail in a gully that needs to be rebuilt.

Also, due to the '88 fire along the infamous "Popout" trail, this stretch will present increasing maintenance problems in the future. Burned trees will be falling across the trail & erosion will be a problem.



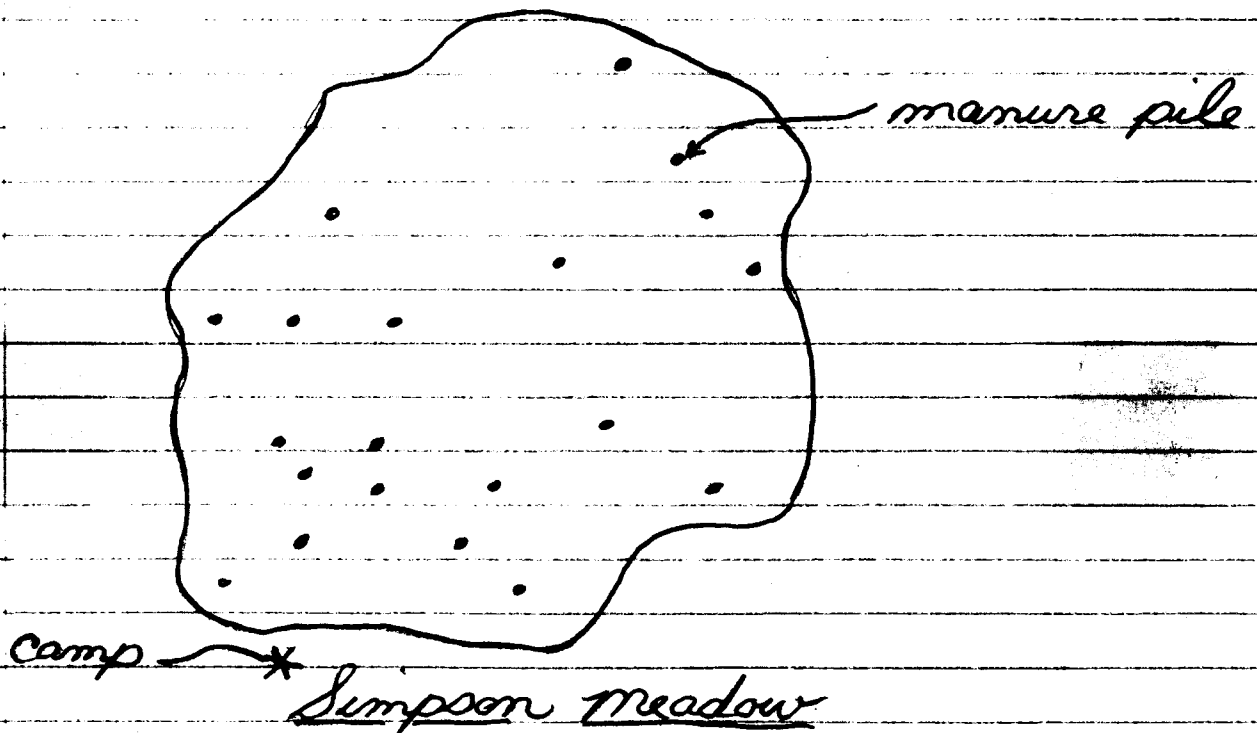


## Meadow Monitoring

Simpson Meadow was grazed quite a lot this season. Cedar Grove Pack Station had several trips here. Kings Canyon trail crew grazed their stock here a few days during the summer.

The manure piles around the camp got way out of control. I spoke with Tim Loren at the end of the summer & requested that he start raking the manure away from the camp. This should be done as standard practice at the end of each trip to prevent the accumulation.

How much manure in a meadow is too much? In the early fall Simpson Meadow looked about like the picture below.



## Blue Canyon Meadow

This is a wet meadow. I inspected the meadow twice this season and found the moisture to be approximately as follows:

July 28

- 60% damp
- 30% wet
- 10% dry

Sept. 8

- 50% damp
- 25% wet
- 25% dry

The illustration on the next page shows why this is such a wet meadow. Cliffs are to the east & west with Blue Canyon Creek flowing from the north. Even though it was a dry year, this meadow remained wet.

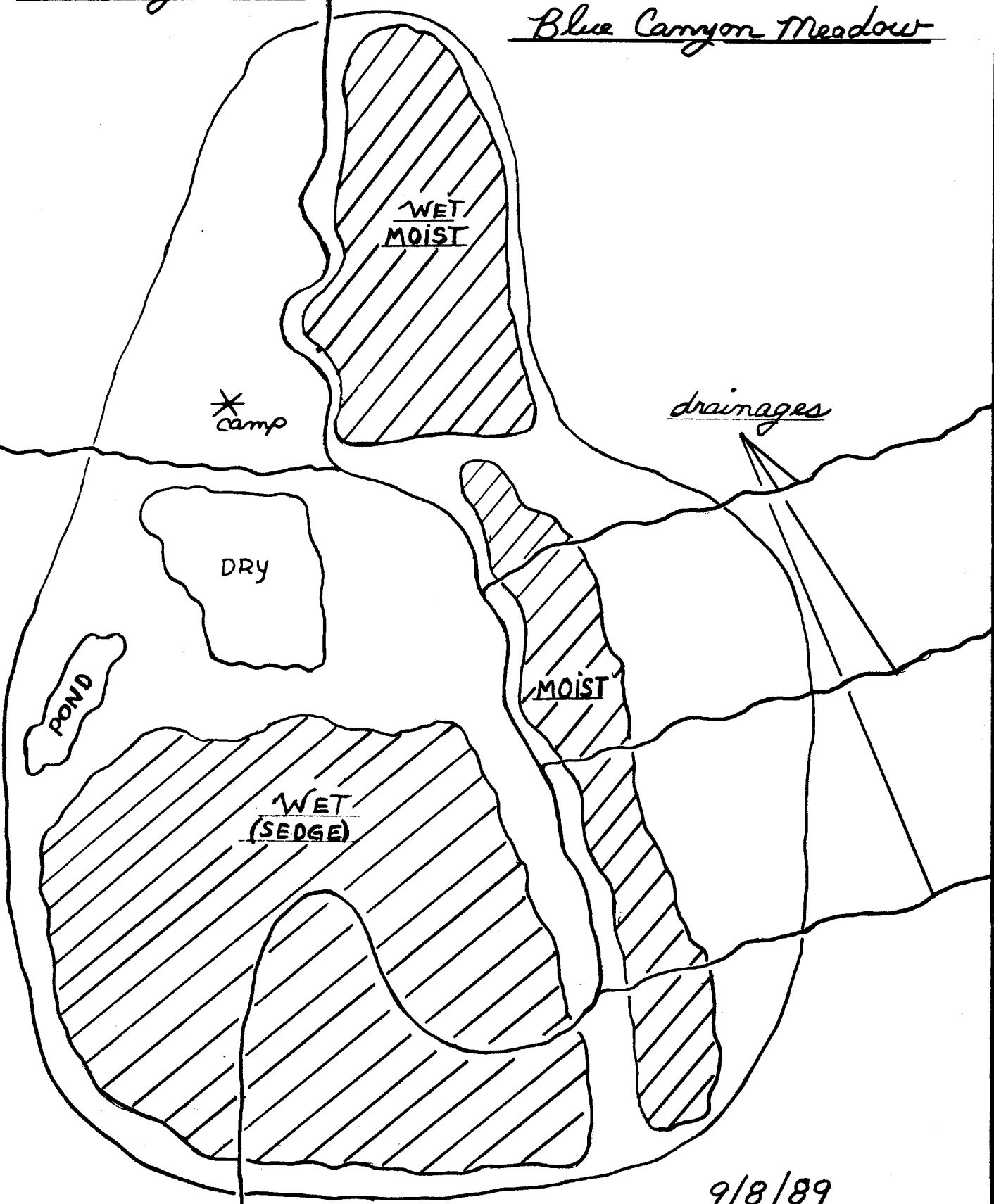
Thought should be given to delaying the opening date of this meadow on a dry year. Blue Canyon is seeing an increase in visitation over the last few years. I contacted a packer from Clyde Pack station here this summer. He stated that he had a number of groups that wanted to be packed into Blue.

A couple stock trips early in the season could do considerable amount of damage to the meadow.

Blue Canyon Creek →



Blue Canyon Meadow



cabin  


- 9/8/89
- 25% WET
  - 50% MOIST
  - 25% DRY

## Stock Management

There is a significant increase in stock use in the park. Private & commercial use is increasing while administrative use is remaining about the same. What degree of impact to the backcountry would a large increase in stock use bring.

How can we continue to let pack stations write their own permits? In order for backcountry rangers to "work with" stock parties to make sure that they are abiding by the regulations, we need to know when & where they are going to be.

Commercial Pack stations need to be required to contact either Sierra Crest or Sierra District operations prior to bringing a trip into the park. That way I could be notified by radio as to the stock parties itinerary. This would allow me to be able to check up on the group. If these groups aren't "checked up" on, then they are much more inclined to not worry about abiding by the regs. We need for them to be concerned that at any given moment a ranger could be walking into camp.

## Conclusion

After 15 seasons with the park, I'm starting to get familiar with the territory along with visitor related problems in the backcountry.

It does seem that some of the needed management changes are obvious, but I do understand that policy changes are not necessarily easy to make. I'm taking a close look at some of the problems & potential solutions, we can more effectively manage the park visitor in the future.

# ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

# JUNE 1989

SUN.	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SAT.
NOTES:		MAY 1989 SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT	JULY 1989 SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT	1	2	3
		1 2 3 4 5 6	1			
		7 8 9 10 11 12 13	2 3 4 5 6 7 8			
		14 15 16 17 18 19 20	9 10 11 12 13 14 15			
		21 22 23 24 25 26 27	16 17 18 19 20 21 22			
		28 29 30 31	23/30 24/31 25 26 27 28 29	152	153	154
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
155	156	157	158	159	160	161
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	ASH Mountain					
	• TRAINING					
162	163	164	165	166	167	168
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
INTO	• BENCH LAKE	• BENCH	• PALISADES Cr.	• SIMPSON	• SIMPSON	• STATE
BENCH		• MATHER Pass	• Middle Fork	• MIDW.	• Horseshoe Lk.	• LAKES
LAKE		• PALISADES LKS.	• SIMPSON			• STATE
-VIA						PK. COL
552						• BENCH
169	170	171	*Contact 113 172	173	174	*Contact 213
25	26	27	28	29	30	NOTES:
• BENCH	• BENCH LK.	• WOODS LK.	• BENCH LAKE	• BENCH LK.	LAKE BASIN	
LAKE	• WOODS LK.	BASIN		• Cartridge Pass	• Cartridge Cr.	
	BASIN	• PINHOT PASS		• LAKE Basin	• SIMPSON MDW.	
	• VIA Pinhot	• BENCH LK.				
176	177	178	179	180	181	

JUNE 1989

7540-01-142-8843  
For 1990 Order 7540-01-232-8515

OPTIONAL FORM 67  
FORM 67 (REV. 7-80) 5007-110

# ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

# JULY 1989

SUN.	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SAT.
NOTES:				JUNE 1989 SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT		AUGUST 1989 SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT
				1 2 3	1 2 3 4 5	1 Simpson
				4 5 6 7 8 9 10	6 7 8 9 10 11 12	
				11 12 13 14 15 16 17	13 14 15 16 17 18 19	
				18 19 20 21 22 23 24	20 21 22 23 24 25 26	
				25 26 27 28 29 30	27 28 29 30 31	182
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Simpson UP GOD- DARD CR.	• LAKE IOZIL • IONIAN BASIN • Solomon • Muir Pass • LeConte	LE CONTE to Mather Pass INDEPENDENCE DAY HOLIDAY BENCH LK.	• BENCH	• BENCH	• LAKE MARJORIE	• South FORK KINGS RIVER
183	184	185	186	187	188	189
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
-BENCH -ARROW PASS CREEK -CEDAR GRAB	OUT	- PARADISE Valley	• PARADISE • CASTLE Domes • PINCHOT PASS • BENCH LAKE	• BENCH	• BENCH	• BENCH • UPPER BASIN
190	191	192	*contact III 193	194	195	196
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
UPPER BASIN • AMP. LK. • Dumbell • MARION LK.	• MARION LK. • MARION Peak Col • BENCH LK.	• BENCH LK. • PINCHOT • RAE LAKES	• RAE Lakes • CHARLOTTE	• CHARLOTTE	• CHARLOTTE • Gardiner Pass BASIN • King Col • WOODS CR.	UP Drain- see Bm 913 North • Arrow Basin • Arrow Pass • BENCH LK.
197	198	199	200	*T-STORM 201	202	
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
BENCH	• BENCH	• BENCH • Cross Cirque Crest SE Cartridge Pass • Marion LK. • Cartridge Cr. • SIMPSON	• SIMPSON rdw.	Simpson • Tunemah • Upper Alpine CR. • BLUE CANYON BASIN	• BLUE Canyon • Kettle Ridge • GNAT rdw. • Tehipite Valley	• Tehip. • SIMPSON
204	205	206	207	208	209	210
30	31					
• SIMPSON	SIMPSON STATE LAKES					
211	212	206	207	208	209	210

JULY 1989

7540-01-142-9843  
For 1980 Order 7540-01-232-8515

OPTIONAL FORM 67  
FORMERLY AD-500 0957-110

# ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

# AUGUST 1989

SUN.	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SAT.
NOTES:	JULY 1989	1	2	3	4	5
	SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT					
	1	• STATE PK. COL	• BENCH L.K. LAKE	• BENCH L.K. STRIPPED LAKES	• BENCH L.K. PINEHAT	• BENCH L.K. LAKE
	2 3 ④ 5 6 7 8	• UPPER MURDO BLANCO	MARJORIE		• TWILIGHT LKS	• BENCH
	9 10 11 12 13 14 15	• BENCH L.K.				
	16 17 18 19 20 21 22					
	23 24 25 26 27 28 29	213	214	215	216	217
6	7. BENCH	8. BENCH	9. BENCH	10	11	12
UPPER BASIN		• South Fork Kings River	LAKE	• BENCH • WINDOW COL • WINDOW PK LAKE	• WINDOW PK LAKE • PINEHAT • BENCH	• BENCH
				* RESERVE * Big Fish		
218	- T-STORM	219	- WAIT FOR RESERVE 220	- WAIT FOR RESERVE 221	* Big Fish	222
13	14	15	16	17. Simpson	18. Red Pine	19
• BENCH • MARJORIE • LeConte	• LeConte • Upper LeConte	• LeConte • SIMPSON	• SIMPSON AREA	• Horseshoe Creek & LAKE • WINDOW RIDGE • South Fork BASIN	• MARION PK COL • South Fork Kings • BENCH	• BENCH LAKE AREA LAKE MARJORIE
225	226	227	228	229	x Contact 216	230
20	21	22. BENCH	23. White Fork	24	25. BENCH	26. North
• BENCH	• BENCH L.K. • BENCH LAKE POINT	• White Fork	• White Fork	• BENCH	• MARION PK BASIN • STATE PK BASIN • N. Fork Kid C. BASIN	• North Fork Kid CR. BASIN • GLACIER LAKE • STATE LK COL • BE 238 NCH
232	233	234	235	236	237	238
27	28	29	30	31. CEDAR	SEPTEMBER 1989	
• BENCH	• BENCH • ALLOW PASS • PARADISE V. • CEDAR GROVE	• out	• out	• CEDAR GROVE • PARADISE VALLEY • CEDAR BLANCO	SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT	NOTES:
239	240	241	242	243	1 2	
					3 ④ 5 6 7 8 9	
					10 11 12 13 14 15 16	
					17 18 19 20 21 22 23	
					24 25 26 27 28 29 30	

AUGUST 1989

7540-01-14 8843  
For 1980 Order 7540-01-238-8515

OPTIONAL FORM 67  
FORMERLY AD-509 8067-110



# ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

# SEPTEMBER 1989

SUN.	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY							THURSDAY							FRIDAY	SAT.
			AUGUST 1989							OCTOBER 1989								
			SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT		
NOTES:															1. MURDO BLANCO	2		
															. BENCH LK.	. BENCH		
																. TABOGE		
																PASS		
															244	245		
<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> - Mather Pass - PALISADES LAKES <b>LABOR DAY</b> <b>HOLIDAY</b> - High Route to Dusz - LeConte	<b>5</b> - LeConte	<b>6</b> - LeConte - Black Giant COL - TONIAN - LK. 10212	<b>7</b> - LAKE 10212 - Finger Peak COL - Blue Canyon	<b>8</b> - Blue Canyon - Burnt Men. - Tunemah - Simpson	<b>9</b> - Simpson												
. Bench . Upper Basin																		
246	247	*STATION repair 248	249	250	251	252												
<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> - Bench	<b>12</b> - BENCH - PINCHOT PASS - TWIN LAKES	<b>13</b> - WOODS LK. BASIN - PINCHOT - BENCH	<b>14</b> - BENCH - South Fork Kings	<b>15</b> - BENCH LK. - UPPER MURRO BLANCO	<b>16</b> - STATE PEAK COL - STATE LKS - SIMPSON												
. Simpson . Cartridge Cr. - BENCH																		
253	*PACK UP 254	*gear out 255	256	*213 arrived late 257	258	259												
<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> - SIMPSON	<b>19</b> - SIMPSON mdw. - THE BITCH - Monarch STATION	<b>20</b> - Monarch STATION - Granite Pass - Cedar Grove	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>												
. Simp- SON																		
260	261	262	263	264	265	266												
<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>												
267	268	269	270	271	272	273												

SEPTEMBER 1989

7540-01-142-9843  
For 1990 Order 7540-01-232-8515

OPTIONAL FORM 87  
FORMERLY AD-500 (8/78) 118