

KERN RANGER STATION - 1991

ANNUAL REPORT

Terry Gustafson



South Rattlesnake Bench

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## PART I: 1991 ACTIVITIES

### EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

- 6/26 - Potential Medevac, upper Rattlesnake Creek.  
A church group leader had sprained his ankle. We discussed having a horse meet him on the other side of Franklin Pass (still closed by snow) and the benefits and cost of a helicopter evacuation. He decided to distribute his load among other members of the group and walk out.
- 7/2 - Medevac, Kern Ranger Station. (see narrative report of 7/2/91)  
Linda Van Tilborg, age 28, was flown out with a partially torn collateral medial cruciate ligament of the left knee.
- 7/22 - Medevac, Kern Hot Spring. (Incident # 100820)  
CHP helicopter evacuated a 23 year old diabetic man who was vomiting blood and had bloody stools. A bear had destroyed his insulin supply.
- 8/4 - Potential medevac, Forester Lake. (Incident #101030)  
Patricia Taniki had pulled an inguinal ligament. Dr. Max Holland contacted me about a stock evacuation he had arranged with the Mineral King Pack Station that didn't materialize. She walked out.
- 8/13 - Potential medevac, Kern Hot Spring.  
Jack Ballance, a 44 year old leader with Boy Scout Troop 120 of Arcadia, complained of a painful achilles tendon. I examined it and we discussed the possibility of a medevac. He decided to proceed to Crabtree R.S. and contact the ranger there if he couldn't continue to Whitney Portal. I notified Ranger Malengo, who was filling in at Crabtree. Mr. Ballance walked out.
- 8/20 - Medevac, Big Kern Lake. (Incident #101403)  
Willis Evans, age 72, was evacuated by USFS helicopter to Bakersfield for treatment of a blocked urethra. I responded and accompanied the patient to Kern Medical Center, since the Forest Service didn't have an EMT on duty.
- 8/23 - 8/25 Larry Stephens Search.  
  
I was assigned to assist Ron Meagher and his dog "Sierra" in searching below the cliffs at the mouth of Rock Creek. The body was found between the two waterfalls late on 8/23. I secured a landing zone near Kern Hot Spring on 8/24 to transfer the body from the sling to the ship, but it wasn't used. Flown back to Kern R. S. on 8/25.

### LAW ENFORCEMENT

- 6/14 - Littering. Little Kern Bridge. Verbal Warning, contacted USFS.  
Hikers reported to me that four young men had been scattering beer cans and other litter near the bridge, in the Sequoia National Forest. I told them to clean up their mess and reported the name and address of the permit holder to the Wilderness Patrol at Trout Meadow.

- 6/17 - Grazing. Rock Creek & Crabtree. Letter. (Incident #100760)  
Bill Gillam and party had grazed these areas before the opening dates. I sent him a letter through Sierra District, with a copy of the Park Grazing Regulations.
- 6/17 - Grazing. Kern Ranger Station. Verbal warning - corrected.  
Jim Harvey turned four head loose in the Small Pasture without my permission. I talked to him about it and we moved the stock.
- 6/22-6/28 Grazing (suspected). Lower Funston Mdw. Not apprehended.  
David House and family arrived at Lower Funston on 6/22 with four head of stock. His permit, issued by the Forest Service, said he would be in the Park through 6/28. When I reminded him on 6/23 of the 48-hour stock limit at both Upper and Lower Funston Mdws. and asked him where he planned to stay for six nights, he was hostile and evasive. I suspect he stayed at Lower Funston. When I returned on 7/2, his father was in camp, having come in with the same stock. His father did leave on time.
- 6/30 - Foil in Fire (2). Kern Hot Spring. Verbal Warnings - corrected.  
Explained the new regulation to two parties who were burning foil.
- 6/30 - Fishing. Kern Hot Spring. Verbal Warning.  
A couple from Florida convinced me they had bought an out-of-State fishing license but had left it in their car.
- 7/1 - Grazing. Kern Ranger Station. Not apprehended.  
Returned from patrol to find fresh stock tracks and cropped grass in the Small Pasture in front of the Station.
- 7/3 - Grazing. Meadow NW of Forester Lake. Verbal Warning.  
Ranger Tom Suk found Mineral King packer Jon Pocock's stock grazing this meadow before it was legally open. He refused to move them down to Cow Camp on 7/5 until Ranger Suk threatened to cite him. I joined Ranger Suk and spoke to Pocock later that day.
- 7/22 - Foil in Fire. Kern Hot Spring. Verbal Warning - corrected.
- 8/5 - Soap in Lake. Forester Lake. Not apprehended.  
After soapsuds appeared in the lake I talked to all the parties camped there. No one admitted to the violation.
- 8/6 - Tent on Grass. Rattlesnake Creek. Verbal warning - corrected.  
A Mineral King spot party had pitched one of their two large tents in a vegetated area. They moved it.
- 8/6 - Foil in Fire. Forester Lake. Verbal Warning - corrected.
- 8/7 - Fishing. Forester Lake. Citation. (Incident #101123)  
A woman who did not have a fishing license was fishing with her husband's gear while he slept.
- 8/8 - Picket Line in Meadow. Lower Funston Meadow. Not apprehended.  
An unidentified party had picketed their stock in the meadow, destroying the grass where each animal was tied.

- 8/10 - Sanitation. Lewis Camp Soda Spring. Not Apprehended.  
Jim Harvey reported horse manure and human urine next to the Soda Spring. I investigated, and talked to a couple at Little Kern Lake who had been in the area. They denied having done it.
- 8/12 - No Wilderness Permit. Lower Funston Mdw. Verbal Warning.  
Owner Dan Shew was absent when this party left Golden Trout Pack Station. Terry Hurst and Mike Palmer each thought the other had picked up a permit. The packer forgot to give them one.
- 8/12 - Fishing. Kern Canyon. Citation. (Incident #101140)  
Glenn T. Kiser, with the Terry Hurst party out of Golden Trout Pack Station, was fishing without a license.
- 8/12 - Fishing. Kern Canyon. Citation. (Incident #101141)  
Stephen Edward Green, with a Shake Camp Pack Station party, was fishing without a license.
- 8/12 - Fishing (2). Kern Canyon. Verbal warnings - corrected.  
No fishing license in possession. Showed them to me in camp.
- 8/13 - Two Wilderness Permits. Kern Hot Spring. (Incident #101143)  
A Boy Scout troop had been deliberately issued two wilderness permits by a Ticketron employee at Lodgepole, each for half the party.
- 8/14 - Food Left Unattended. Kern Canyon. Written Warning.  
Food and used food packets were left scattered on the ground at Scott Graham's camp at the mouth of Rattlesnake Creek. I left a note asking him to correct it and leave the area immaculate or be subject to citation.
- 8/20 - Unextinguished Campfire. Kern Canyon at Whitney Creek.  
When found by Park visitors on 8/23, the fire had burned an area 15-20 feet in diameter. It ultimately consumed 15 acres; 16 firefighters and three helicopters were involved in suppressing it.
- 8/21 - Weapon in Park. Lewis Camp Soda Spring. Verbal Warning.  
A private stock party on their way out of the Park had stopped to wait while I got them a missing person poster to take to Cottonwood Pack Station. On returning I noticed an empty scabbard on one man's saddle. He admitted to having a disassembled rifle in his dunnage. I informed him that it was not legal in the back country of the Park even if disassembled and hidden away.
- 8/22 - Dog in Backcountry (suspected). Kearsarge Pass to Kern R. S.  
Don Kinch and his companion had been ordered out of the Park by Ranger Scattareggia for having a dog. I didn't know this when I made a courtesy phone call for them on 8/22. I suspect they hid the dog before approaching me.
- 8/23 - Food Left Unattended. Kern Hot Spring. Verbal Warning - corrected  
A confused camper, who believed his food only had to be secured at night, had left food packets on the ground in his campsite. Once he understood why his food needed to be secured at all times, he was quite cooperative.

- 8/24 - Sanitation. Upper Funston Mdw. Not apprehended.  
Someone had defecated on the ground at least twice, next to the main stock camp, and left the used toilet paper nearby. Other pieces of TP were blowing around the area. There is a pit toilet within 200 yards, but it is hard to see.
- 9/2 - Nails in Tree, Lower Funston Meadow. Not apprehended.  
Someone had recently driven horseshoe nails into a tree in the main stock camp northeast of the meadow. I suspect the John Cator party, who vacated this camp on 8/28.
- 9/14 - Multiple Violations. Franklin Lake. Written Warning.  
A couple had pitched their tent in the meadow, eight feet from the stream on the shelf east of Franklin Lake. They had left food packets on the ground, and no Wilderness Permit was in evidence. I left a note at their camp and reported them to Ranger Merrill, who said this couple had come through Mineral King early in the morning before the station was open. The "do-it-yourself" permit box had been empty, so they had missed being briefed on Park regulations, and did not have a permit.

#### VISITOR ASSISTANCE

- 7/2 - Arranged two phone calls for Linda Van Tilborg, who was medevac'd next day.
- 8/4 - (Incident #101030) Helped Dr. Max Holland in finding out why the promised stock evacuation for Patricia Taniki had not taken place.
- 8/4 - (Incident #101041) Recorded a complaint by Charles H. Webb that he and his friend had been dropped off by the Mineral King packer near the top of Franklin Pass instead of upper Rattlesnake Creek.
- 8/5 - Provided tools and nails to Jim Etcheverry, 6413 Gina Ct., Bakersfield, Ca 93308, to reset a horseshoe.
- 8/20 - (Incident 101403) Phoned Golden Trout Pack Station through DISPATCH to inform family members about the Willis Evans medevac.
- 8/22 - Arranged a phone call for Don Kinch to inform his wife of time and place for pick up.

#### ASSISTANCE TO OTHER AGENCIES

- 6/14 - Reported littering violation to Sequoia National Forest.
- 6/15 - Advised USFS Wilderness Patrol Richard Thomas on proper care of stock in the back country.
- 6/15 - 9/13 Maintained Angler Survey Box. Moved it to a better location at Kern R.S. on 7/28. Urged Park visitors to record their fishing experiences. This data is to be passed on to the California Dept. of Fish and Game by the Park Wildlife Biologist.
- 6/29 - Surveyed the trails in lower Big Arroyo to correct errors on the new U.S. Geological Survey topographic map.

- 7/19 - 9/14 - Recorded deer observations for a report to be passed on to California Dept. of Fish and Game by the Park Wildlife Biologist.
- 7/22 - (Incident #100820) Provided run sheet and verbal description of patient's condition to California Highway Patrol paramedic, on turning over the patient to him for evacuation.
- 7/22 - Provided accommodations at Kern R. S. to USFS Wilderness Patrol Richard Thomas, and put up his stock in the Lewis Camp Large Administrative Pasture. (The Forest Service returns this favor, allowing us to graze the Trout Meadow and Tunnel Meadow Administrative Pastures.)
- 8/20 - (Incident #101403) Responded to medical emergency at Big Kern Lake and accompanied patient to Bakersfield at the request of Sequoia National Forest. Provided run sheet and patient info to USFS helicopter pilot and ER nurse at Kern Medical Center.
- 8/30 - Noted erroneous trail location on the new USGS topo map in the vicinity of the High Sierra Bridge in Kern Canyon.
- 9/14 - Noted erroneous trail location on the new USGS topo map in upper Rattlesnake Creek.

#### ASSISTANCE TO CONCESSIONERS, PERMITEES AND NEIGHBORS

("Neighbors" are those who use the Henry Brown property across the river from Kern R.S., on the Inyo National Forest.)

- 6/15 - Golden Trout Pack Station  
Invited packer Hayden Decker to stay at Kern R. S. overnight, and kept his nine head of stock in the Lewis Camp Large Administrative Pasture, due to a mule who balked at crossing the bridge.
- 6/16 - Neighbors  
Helped Veronica Finley look for her lost dog, and Dr. Ben York's lost stock.
- 7/4 - Sierra Wilderness Seminars (Special Use Permittee)  
(Incident #100761) Took a long deposition from Cierra Toombs on the breakup of her group.
- 7/7 - Mineral King Pack Station  
Stopped by the pack station and gave Don Bedell the latest trail and snow conditions.
- 7/15 - 9/13 Neighbors  
Watered Henry Brown's Sequoia seedlings at least once a week. He requested this courtesy through Sierra District, and I was happy to oblige.
- 8/7 - Mineral King Pack Station  
Helped packer Fred Shulz unpack his mules and drop off a party in upper Rattlesnake Creek.
- 8/15 - Balch Park Pack Station  
At owner Tim Shew's request, Jim Harvey and I volunteered to go out via Coyote Pass and take out a large log on the Sequoia National Forest north of Shotgun Creek. This saved him and his party a dangerous detour.

8/20 - 9/6 Cottonwood Pack Station

Caught a stray horse and cared for it and two mules lost about 8/11. One mule, "Sweetheart", had been turned loose near Junction Meadow tied to another animal. When found by Park visitors she was lying on her side, weak and dehydrated, with her feet tangled in a halter. This large moving stock party had been sent out under the supervision of an inexperienced packer and a ten year old boy, according to Ranger Malengo. I turned the stock over to Cottonwood packer Robert Lombardi on 9/6, about 26 days after they were lost.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER PARK FUNCTIONS

Research/Resource Management

- 6/14 - 9/14 138 Wildlife Observations
- 6/15 - 9/13 Angler Survey
- 6/15 - 9/14 Frog Survey
- 6/15 - 9/14 Meadow Observations (reported below)
- 7/15 Comments on draft Wilderness Management Plan; observations on our responsibility as an International Biosphere Preserve to maintain the ecosystem as intact as possible, to minimize consumptive use, and to at least keep off-trail areas free of grazing.
- 7/19 - 9/14 Deer Observations
- 8/28 - 9/2 Beaver Survey, with Wildlife Ranger Alia Selke.
- 9/12 Comments on Superintendent's Compendium
- Pending Review and comments on the Park Forage Area list.
- Pending Comments on revised draft of Wilderness Management Plan.

Historic Structure Restoration

- 6/20 - Sent out surplus roofing felt and shingle oil.
- 7/14 - 7/29 Inventoried stored construction material, took measurements and reported on needed repairs at Kern R.S.
- 8/8 - 8/17 Historic Structure Crew staying at Kern R.S., their 11 head of stock in the Lewis Camp Large Administrative Pasture. They concurred with my recommendation to use eyebolts to secure the present shutters, rather than building elaborate new shutters, as had been planned. They accomplished many needed repairs, and moved the fixed radio antenna to a higher position, improving transmission capability. I'm grateful for their help.
- 9/12 - Recommendations for repairs to Kern R.S. next year.



## Fire Management

6/15 - 9/12 Daily Fire Weather Observations

8/13 - (KNT 0041) Relayed a report by a Park Visitor of a fire in upper Rattlesnake Creek. It turned out to be lightning-caused, but it was located next to a campsite and had been so worked over by Park visitors that the FMO decided to extinguish it. I submitted a narrative report to the FMO.

8/27 - (KNP 0047) Relayed a report by a Park visitor of a man-caused fire he had encountered in the Kern Canyon south of Whitney Creek on 8/23. He had previously left a note about this fire on the door of Rock Creek R.S. It eventually burned over 15 acres; 16 firefighters and three helicopters were involved in suppressing it. I submitted a narrative report to FMO and later spoke to Subdistrict Ranger Blain about the possibility that a certain Park visitor I had met at Kern R.S. on 8/22 might have caused this conflagration.

8/31 - Posted a warning about the fire on the Hot Spring bulletin board.

## Emergency Services

8/19 - Sent information to EMS Coordinator Tom Tschohl on the EMT course at NAS LeMoore, to distribute to future EMT trainees.

## Kern Trail Crew

They were short-handed this year and I enjoyed helping where I could.

6/15 - 6/21 Shared the Kern R.S. with the two-man crew and their 11 head of stock.

6/17 - Volunteered to put up the two Lower Funston drift fences.

6/19 - Accompanied Tyler Johnson and Jim Harvey on a logging run up the Coyote Pass Trail to Coyote Lakes Junction. Checked the trail condition from there to Coyote Pass.

6/24 - Put up Rattlesnake Creek Drift Fence #1.

6/25 - Put up Rattlesnake Creek Drift Fence #2.

6/24 - 6/30 Checked trail conditions and recorded the size and location of down trees and rocks blocking the Rattlesnake Creek, Soda Creek, Lost Canyon, Big Five Lakes, Little Five Lakes, Big Arroyo and Willow Meadow Cutoff trails, and turned my notes over to the Trail Crew, along with information on other trails provided by Ranger Suk.

6/30 - Relayed to Sierra District Jim Harvey's recommendation that the Lower Rattlesnake Creek Trail be closed to stock travel except for loose herding by experienced packers, pending major repair work. This was accomplished and the trail reopened about 7/8.

7/11 - Put up Rattlesnake Creek Drift Fences #3 and #4.

7/20 - Volunteered as "Bear Guard" in the trail crew camp at Cold Spring so the two-man crew could work trails.

- 7/30 - 8/14 Took care of "Pat" mule, who escaped from the trail crew near Tyndall Creek and made her way down to Lewis Camp.
- 8/10 - 8/14 Shared Kern R.S. with trail crew and stock.
- 8/15 - Helped Jim Harvey trail his 11 head out to Mineral King.

## PART II: OBSERVATIONS, COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### TRAIL MAINTENANCE

#### DRIFT FENCES, GATES AND HITCHRAILS NEEDING REPAIR

The south hitchrail at Lower Funston Meadow needs replanting. Cedar posts would be best.

Posts on the hitchrails in front of Kern R.S. are rotted out at the bottom.

Gate on Rattlesnake Creek Drift Fence #1 needs a new bar.

Gate on Rattlesnake Creek Drift Fence #2 needs a new bar.

Re-tie the cable that holds the High Sierra Gate closed.

The south stock camp at Lower Funston Meadow badly needs a saddle log. We are requiring stock parties to camp in designated sites, and this camp is substandard. A hitchrail would be helpful too.

Rattlesnake Drift Fence #4 (the upper one) needs to be removed or relocated. It crosses a wet stringer meadow which suffers severe trampling damage as stock drifting upstream pile up against the fence and mill around. It is tacked to trees, missing posts, and much of the wire is old, rusty and loop-spliced. It is not built to Park standards. Stock users complain because a huge boulder blocks most of their string from view when they dismount to open the gate on their way upstream.

I recommend that we consider eliminating this fence completely. Both Jim Harvey and I have speculated on where else it might be placed, without coming up with a good answer. The stringer meadow extends for quite a distance up and down the canyon, and any other location would require a much longer fence.

Parts of the long flat meadow (Middle Rattlesnake) between this fence and Drift Fence #3 stay wet throughout the season. In the past it has been heavily used by both commercial and NPS stock. The trail crew no longer use it, staying at Cow Camp, with its abundant forage, instead. Don Bedell, owner of the Mineral King Pack Station, told me he thought the meadow condition was "pitiful" when he saw it a couple of years ago, and said he had told his packers not to use it.

Eliminating this fence would end the convenience of a "fenced pasture" and discourage overuse in the future. A possible disadvantage would be to increase grazing on South Rattlesnake Meadow, where stock can be held easily, and on the meadows west of Forester Lake, which are already heavily impacted.

The East River Pasture Drift Fence, along the Park Boundary across the river from Kern R.S., needs some attention. It is about 700 yards long and mostly in good condition. About seven posts are loose or down, and less than 100 yards of wire needs to be replaced. I vowed to fix it this year, but didn't get to it. This boundary fence keeps stock turned loose at Snake Camp off the Henry Brown property.

#### SOIL AND MOISTURE

The Rattlesnake Creek Trail crosses to the south side of the creek about a half mile east of the present junction with the trail to Forester Lake, then recrosses to the north side right at the junction. I recommend that it be rerouted along the north side of the creek.

The crossing in the meadow at the junction has caused severe erosion, with a small island of meadow now left standing in the middle of the expanded creek. The Forester Lake Trail runs downstream parallel to the creek for about a quarter-mile before swerving uphill to the north, so only about a quarter-mile of new trail would need to be lined out. The canyon floor is fairly flat here, and no new construction would be needed. This relocation would also eliminate the only two stream crossings in Rattlesnake Canyon, which cause difficulty for backpackers early in the season. Leroy Maloy would probably know if there is any reason other than historical accident for having the trail cross the stream twice. The alignment after rerouting would approximate that shown (erroneously) on the new 7-1/2' topo map.

After the trail is relocated, the junction with the Forester Lake Trail will shift about a quarter-mile downstream. The mileages should be rewheeled before any signs are ordered for this junction.

#### TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Except for the washout in the chutes in lower Rattlesnake Creek, which was repaired this summer, Kern area trails came through the winter in good shape. There is a potentially dangerous spot about a hundred yards below the repaired switchback in the chutes, and a couple of "jump-up" steps farther down the switchbacks that could be improved by blasting. As always, there is work pending on the lower part of the switchbacks east of Franklin Pass. A bad mule wreck is bound to happen there sooner or later.

A tree came down lengthwise in the trail between Lower Funston Meadow and Rattlesnake Creek in mid-September. I cleared several down trees after the trail crew left. If it's a heavy winter, I suspect they'll have their hands full just logging, rocking and cleaning drains next summer.

#### CHAINSAW AT KERN R.S.

I wish to thank Tyler Johnson for taking about four hours to look at the old chainsaw at Kern Station, and to teach me about the proper use and maintenance of these tools. He discovered some major problems with it which couldn't be remedied in the field. It is now at Ash Mountain for repair or replacement.

I feel the stock rangers should have a good chainsaw at their station, and should be expected to clear down trees off trails when the trail crew is not available. The Mac-35 at Kern Station in the 1960's was difficult to start, and the current saw has suffered neglect. The chain has been damaged by well-meaning but ignorant people who have tried to sharpen it without a jig. No training on chainsaw safety, use, maintenance and repair has ever been given to backcountry rangers in these Parks, as far as I know. Tyler Johnson says he would be happy to give it, if asked, to the rangers who have chainsaws at their stations.

#### SIGNS NEEDED

Coyote Pass Park Entrance Sign (requested 9/91)

Coyote Lakes Pass Park Entrance Sign (requested 9/91)

(The posts for these signs are stored in the tool shed at Kern R.S.)

Revised enforcement signs for camping restrictions at Upper and Lower Funston Meadows (requested 9/90, 8/91)

One goes on the Lower Funston Drift Fence gate, one on the Laurel Creek Drift Fence gate, one on the Rattlesnake Creek Trail at the foot of the switchbacks in Kern Canyon, and one on the Upper Funston Drift Fence gate.

TOILET sign, with an arrow pointing left, for Upper Funston Meadow

(see "CAPMPSITE PROBLEMS", below)

Stock Limit enforcement sign to for Junction Mdw. (Kern)

(see "INDIVIDUAL MEADOWS", below)

Sign to protect Kern Hot Spring Mdw. from human trampling

(see "INDIVIDUAL MEADOWS", below)

The following trail signs have erroneous mileages and need to be replaced. (I've only corrected the bad mileages here. Consult the Park Sign Inventory, or better yet, let the Kern Ranger look at the signs next summer, to get the complete texts, arrow directions and positions of bolt holes):

Sign on Coyote Pass (should read "Coyote Lakes 4.1 " and "Mineral King 16.6")

Sign at Coyote Lakes Jct. (should read "Coyote Lakes 3.0")

Sign at Shotgun Pass Jct. (should read "Shotgun Pass 2.9)

The old grey trail signs with red letters at the junctions of the Kern Canyon trail with the Coyote Creek and the Golden Trout Creek trails need to be replaced as soon as we get accurate mileages from Sequoia and Inyo National Forests. (see my earlier memo on this)

If the trail in upper Rattlesnake Creek is rerouted (see "SOIL AND MOISTURE", above) we will need a new sign at the Soda Creek Jct.

#### VISITOR USE LEVELS

I encountered 781 people this year (plus another 71 outside the Park). The 26% increase over last year is due to several large stock parties in the Kern Canyon and to my spending more time in upper Rattlesnake Creek, which gets a lot of traffic from Mineral King. Overall use seems about the same as last year, despite the late start caused by snow on the passes. The first two weeks of August were the most popular. Now that children are returning to school earlier, the last week of August is very slow, and on Labor Day Weekend the Kern was almost deserted.

I believe that private stock use continues in a slow downward trend. Gordon Wallace, in his 1946 report, mentions meeting over a hundred stock parties on a July day in and around Lower Funston Meadow. Today there are only two stock camps there, and these were empty this year at least half the time. When I was stationed in the Kern in the 1960's, many people remembered staying at Lewis Camp when it was a going concern, and still camped there out of habit and tradition. Now they are gone; the fishing is not as good as it used to be, and the Golden Trout Wilderness to the south has become more popular with private stock users, who tend to take shorter trips nowadays.

Commercial stock use in the Kern was up this year, with large moving parties from Mineral King, Cottonwood, Golden Trout and Shake Camp Pack Stations enjoying the area. Now that Mt. Whitney (Rock Creek) Pack Station has unlimited access via the improved trail over Shepherd Pass, we can expect continued use by them in the Upper Kern.

About two-thirds of the people I contacted this year were backpackers. Early in the season, long trips in the Golden Trout Wilderness are popular, and many of these extend into the Park. Backpackers predominate in upper Rattlesnake Creek and on the High Sierra Trail.

I recommend that a fourth category: "Dayriders", be added to our visitor use analysis, as I have done on the Summary Sheet this year. Quite a few people ride into the Park for a day's fishing, or merely cut through on their way to Golden Trout Creek, and have no significant impact on the Park.

#### PERMITS

Only two parties I contacted this summer didn't have a Wilderness Permit: a commercial stock party who failed to get one due to a mixup at the pack station, and a couple who hiked in from Mineral King in mid-September, after the "write your own" policy was in effect, and had come through the ranger station early in the morning before it opened, on a day when the permit box was empty. On the other hand, I met a Boy Scout troop who had been issued two permits, each for half the group, by a Ticketron employee at Lodgepole.

Nearly all visitors to the lower Kern Canyon enter through the Golden Trout Wilderness; it is rare to see an NPS Wilderness Permit there. We need to continue striving for better coordination with the National Forests, so that people coming into the Park will be better informed about our policies and regulations. It would be especially useful if the Forest Service Wilderness Permit issuers would give private stock parties a copy of the Park Grazing Regulations, Opening Dates and a Stock Use Reporting Card.

Fishing License compliance is much less, probably because they are seldom asked for in the backcountry. Of the thirty or so people whom I checked, nearly a fourth didn't have one on their person, and one out of ten hadn't bothered to buy one. Those people who did have a license were usually delighted to be asked to show it; many commented that it was the first time they had ever been checked in the backcountry.

#### AIRCRAFT VIOLATIONS

A bad summer, and the military is generally unresponsive. I called in ten incidents in one day (July 25). I feel we should call them in on weekends as well, just for the record. On August 25 I spoke with Captain Paul J. Valovich, Commanding Officer, NAS Point Mugu, CA 93042-5000 Phone (805) 989-7903, as he backpacked through Lewis Camp. He says he will not tolerate his pilots flying lower than the legal limit.

## CAMPSITE PROBLEMS

### FIREPLACES

People are surprised when I tell them that burning foil in their campfire is now prohibited. I hope the new regulation works, because nothing else has. Every fireplace cleaned produces a little pile of foil scraps. I cleaned and simplified fifty this summer and demolished another 17. Stock parties, who bring shovels, sometimes pile sand and dirt over their dead fire, which later has to be excavated by the ranger.

Lots of people won't believe our little three-sided "Soiree Pits" are safe. They immediately build a fourth side and begin piling rocks above ground level all the way around. I simplified three firepits at Kern Hot Spring one day, and returned the following evening to find that all three had been altered in this way.

I recommend that we mention in training the need to hide ashes well away from campsites, and to minimize the number of ash heaps by finding where the last ranger dumped them.

### DEVELOPMENTS

Stock parties love to use materials gathered around camp, and sometimes wire and nails they have brought in, to build ever more elaborate tables, chairs and shelves, which they leave behind for the ranger to tear down. Stock people, as they tell me so often, are not backpackers, and appreciate these amenities in camp. Their most common complaint is that we have ruined the camps by dismantling them. In the 1960's we allowed a simple table in traditional stock camps in the Kern, Hockett and Roaring River areas. The private stock parties who frequent them would be grateful if we still did.

### BEARBOXES

The backcountry food storage boxes have concentrated camping, for better or worse, in the campsites where they are available. They are 100% effective if they are sufficient for the number of people using the site, and have not been stuffed with non-food items. I strongly support placing boxes in all places along major trails experiencing bear problems, such as Wheelbarrow Camp, and putting an additional box at sites that need one, such as Hamilton Lakes. If bears ever again become a problem in the Kern Canyon, I'd recommend that a box be placed at the mouth of Rattlesnake Creek.

The 55-gallon drums we have put out in some areas for public use, to store food caches and as overflow bear boxes are a poor substitute for well-designed food storage boxes. The snap ring that holds the lid on lacks a lever and is tricky to manipulate. I dinged my finger on the one at Kern Station (now flown out). Ranger Suk told me he leaves a work glove and screwdriver on top of the one at Little Five Lakes, hoping people will protect themselves from injury. I suggest we either get lever-operated snap rings (with a carabiner or other locking device to keep the bears from pulling the lever) or a different type of container.

## LOWER FUNSTON MEADOW

In 1990 I tore down the old "Point Camp" north of Lower Funston Meadow and signed it as a restoration site. It was the most abused campsite in the Kern Canyon, year after year. Too close to the water, in what had once been a meadow, it was repeatedly built up with elaborate camp furniture. Nearby trees were endangered by deep holes where campers tied their stock. Last year I burned a 1-1/2 foot high pile of human feces and rotted toilet paper and destroyed a toilet seat which had been nailed to trees. (See my 1990 Photo Report on this.)

This year, the grasses are lush in the nearby meadow, even though grazing is still allowed. Small pioneer plants and weeds are taking over the old campsite, which will revert to meadow in a few years. Unless we can find a good campsite nearby farther away from the water and out of the meadow, I recommend leaving this area indefinitely as a "restoration site".

To replace it, we need a third stock camp at Lower Funston Meadow. We have signed both Upper and Lower Funston Meadows as "designated campsites only" for stock parties. It's very probable that three stock parties will show up at once at Lower Funston, and the third will have no legal place to camp. I recommend that the Kern Ranger construct a fireplace somewhere between the two existing camps next summer.

Early on, the ranger needs to take a pair of fence pliers to Lower Funston Meadow and pull the nails out of a tree in the main camp.

We need to put up campsite symbols at each designated campsite here.

## UPPER FUNSTON MEADOW

The north bear box has been repaired and repainted, and the two main stock camps are in good shape. During the Back Country Horsemen volunteer session in 1990 we put in an overflow camp in the forest north of the meadow. It's not a good stock camp, but I suggest we sign it, so a third stock party arriving late in the day will at least have a legal place to camp.

When we rerouted the informal trail to the camping area, the pit toilet was left virtually out of sight of the new path. I talked to a couple of parties at Upper Funston this year who were unaware of its existence. I suggest we put up a "TOILET" sign with an arrow pointing to it at a strategic location.

We need to put up campsite symbols at each designated campsite here.

## FORESTER LAKE

The two giant fireplaces on the north shore were demolished this summer. I suggest that the ranger put in "Soiree Pits" or simple rock rings to replace them. A pit toilet is scheduled to be installed next summer and should go on the north shore; Mineral King Pack Station drops off lots of inexperienced campers here, and there is an ongoing sanitation problem. There are still some excess seldom-used campsites in the area that need to be obliterated.

## KERN HOT SPRING

Considering the heavy use it gets, this has not been a problem area. People seem to respect it and keep it clean. Perhaps the bulletin board helps. I installed two new plugs in the bathtub this year, turned out by Park Maintenance. Two extras are stored at Kern R.S.

## JUNCTION MEADOW

There is one campsite northeast of the meadow in the open Jeffrey Pine forest that doesn't look well-situated. I obliterated it in 1990, only to find this year that people retreat there to get away from the mosquitoes. It has been rebuilt and I suggest we leave it.

## UPPER RATTLESNAKE CREEK

I took out a dozen of the most egregious camps near the trail this summer, but a lot of fireplace cleaning and simplification remains to be done, especially along the creek where it is out of sight of the trail.

## LOWER RATTLESNAKE CREEK

The fireplace in the camp just downstream from the Willow Meadow Cutoff junction is a bit closer than 50 feet from the river. However, since it is the only good campsite in the vicinity, I recommend that we keep it.

## KERN CANYON AT RATTLESNAKE CREEK

There are four campsites here, north of the creek and west of the Kern River. They need to be monitored.

## SELDOM USED CAMPSITES

I took out the remaining ones in view of the trail between Kern Hot Spring and Junction Meadow this year, leaving only "Fern Camp", on a beautiful little ledge above the river in a White Fir grove. A campsite south of the Lower Funston Drift Fence was only used once this summer; it should be removed. Upper Rattlesnake Creek and Forester Lake still have some poorly situated excess camps.

## GRAZING

### GENERAL

Grazing by pack and saddle stock is by far the most ecologically damaging practice currently allowed in these Parks. Since we are committed to maintaining this form of recreational use (which I enjoy myself!) as a traditional way of accessing the back country, I propose that we do it in the least damaging way. That means requiring stock users to carry feed and tie up, as is done virtually everywhere in the National Park System where overnight stock use is allowed, with the exception of the Sierra Nevada parks.



This won't be welcomed by stock users, but is the only way I can see to reconcile stock use with our mandate to maintain this wonderful fragment of our original Earth in a condition in which most of the species of plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrate life which live here can survive, as this "island" of natural country becomes increasingly isolated by development and consumptive land use elsewhere.

Even the National Forest Wilderness surrounding these Parks is grazed heavily, not only by recreational livestock, but also by cattle. There needs to be someplace in the Sierra where stock users, like other visitors, practice true MINIMUM IMPACT, "take only photos, leave only footprints", and not seven-inch deep footprints in meadows that many native species depend on for their livelihood.

We need to evaluate our own practices in this respect. It is less expensive to send our Park stock to the backcountry to eat "government grass" (which is really the wildlife's grass), than to feed hay in the front country when they're not needed. Thus, we had eleven head of stock supporting a Kern Trail Crew of two or three men all summer, who were being resupplied weekly by helicopter, a resupply which was intended, when it began in the early 1970's, to cut down on administrative stock use in the back country.

Another problem is that the Park Corrals operation is funded entirely by "rent", so much per month per animal, paid by the other Park Divisions, such as Rangers, Trails, and the Historic Structures Crew. Fewer animals mean less funding for the Corrals, already hard pressed to buy new equipment and maintain a quality operation. Roy Lee Davis is doing a good job under the conditions he has to face, but isn't there a way to fund an ecologically conscientious stock operation in these Parks that doesn't reward unnecessary stock use and punish thoughtful restraint? A good question for the Superintendent!

#### OPENING DATES

To keep the opening dates controversy in perspective: we aren't asking the pack stations not to use any areas, just to carry feed and tie up if they stay overnight before the legal opening dates. That's inconvenient and costs a little more, but it hardly threatens their livelihood. Pack stations in some Rocky Mountain Parks are required to carry feed all the time, and are still making a profit. The pack station owners don't complain when they are shut out of certain areas by late-melting snow; they accept it and adjust their schedules accordingly.

I've just looked at the revised Draft Wilderness Management Plan and am pleased to see we're going to be looking at conditions year by year and refining our opening dates standards through experience.

To "simplify" opening date regulations by setting the same opening date for an entire drainage ignores the reality that, nearly always, the meadows in lower elevations will sprout sooner and dry out sooner than those higher up. So if we are going to simplify the regulations let's do it by elevation.

In Big Arroyo for instance, which was set to open July 10, I found that the lower end, below 8,600', was ready by July 1. Above that line, as I recall, the opening was delayed until July 20. The four-mile stretch below the Patrol Cabin should, in my judgement, be closed to all stock travel at least until August. It is one of the few places left in these Parks where the trail hasn't been rerouted out of the meadows. It goes through one wet meadow after another, completely disappearing in some. It is seldom used by stock, but just one big early party, churning through these meadows in knee-deep mud, could cause irreparable damage. And - it would not be fun! The people we might dissuade from subjecting the meadows, their stock, and themselves to such an experience would be receiving a favor from us.

#### RATTLESNAKE CREEK NOMENCLATURE

To avoid confusion I suggest that the old names be used for forage areas in Rattlesnake Creek, rather than those initiated after the helicopter reconnaissance in July. They are much easier to remember and already in print in forage area descriptions by meadow researchers.

Moving upstream from the Kern, they are:

Lower Rattlesnake: Below the lower drift fence (#1). Seldom used, but a moderate amount of good forage is available.

Cow Camp: Between Drift Fences #1 and #2. A traditional grazing area with abundant feed. (called "Cow Camp II" after the helicopter flight)

Unnamed area between Drift Fences #2 and #3: not a forage area, as it lacks feed. The one party that tried turning loose here this summer recovered their stock next day in Middle Rattlesnake. (called "Cow Camp I" after the helicopter flight)

Middle Rattlesnake: Between Drift Fences #3 and #4. A long flat meadow, kept closed this year through July 30. (called "Rattlesnake II" after the helicopter flight)

Upper Rattlesnake: Above the upper drift fence (#4). (called "Rattlesnake I" after the helicopter flight)

#### 1991 MEADOW CONDITIONS

##### MONTANE MEADOWS

Meadows in the Kern Canyon held up well under grazing this year. Summer rainfall was less than normal, but well-spaced. June and early July were cool; after that it was hotter than usual, and virtually frost-free through mid-September. Combined with more snowfall last winter, this produced ideal conditions for vigorous growth. Usually the grass begins to yellow by mid-August, but it was still green when I left, as were the ferns on the forest floor. I didn't see any signs of autumn until I reached Cow Camp, at 8,600', where about a third of the willows had turned.

## SUBALPINE MEADOWS

Above 10,000' elevation, snowdrifts lingered on into July. Growth started late and meadows stayed wet well into August. The "normal snowfall year" opening dates for grazing turned out to be too early, especially in the Little Five Lakes area, which apparently received more snow during the winter than Rattlesnake Creek. Nearly all of the grazed subalpine meadows in the Kern Patrol Area suffered trampling damage from too-early use.

## INDIVIDUAL MEADOWS

### KERN RANGER STATION SMALL ADMINISTRATIVE PASTURE

This pasture, in front of the station, is reserved for use by the Kern Ranger the night before long patrols or late in the season when feed in the Large Pasture gets thin. Several times, I've returned from patrol to find that someone has grazed it in my absence. To prevent this, I recommend that a chain, such as those used to secure a bicycle, be sent into Kern Station, so the ranger can drill a hole in the top bar of the gate, and padlock it shut when not in use.

The upper part of the pasture gets hit heavy and early. The grass is stunted and has disappeared entirely along the fence opposite the cabin. This year, even though it had already been grazed by trail crew stock early in the season, I decided to give it a rest and keep my stock off, to see if I could bring it back.

By August, the grass in the lower part was over a foot high and headed out. Sal Nattoli, of the Historic Structures Crew, who has packed in the Park for a long time, said it was the first time he'd ever seen that. The grass along the upper end was so devoid of vigor through years of overuse that it didn't grow at all until mid-August. Then it took off and by September 13 was about six inches high, though it never did head out. By August, a tinge of green was showing in the bare dusty ground along the upper fence as tiny pioneer plants appeared. Deer moved into the meadow; birds were abundant in the nearby willows. It was a great pleasure for me to live next to a recovering meadow instead of a dusty overused pasture.

It will be up to the ranger as to how he or she wants to treat this pasture. Different rangers will have different ideas. I do recommend irrigating it most of the summer, with occasional breaks to dry out. I found the drinking water in the cabin was more palatable if I strung a hose over to the irrigation ditch and let the water run constantly. This provided some water to the pasture even when I wasn't drawing water into the ditch from Coyote Creek.

### LEWIS CAMP LARGE ADMINISTRATIVE PASTURE

This six-acre pasture about 300 yards north of Kern Station accommodates the ranger's stock and any other NPS stock staying over at Lewis Camp. The trail crew usually bases here for a couple of weeks early in the season, and this year the Historic Structures Crew used it. I kept the stray animals belonging to Cottonwood Pack Station here in August, and

let a packer from Golden Trout Pack Station use it overnight, due to a balky mule. Forest Service personnel also use it once or twice a season, a favor they repay by letting us use their administrative pastures at Trout Meadow and Tunnel Meadow.

The ranger needs to be careful not to irrigate it too much, since much of the pasture is already boggy. The palatable grasses around the edge are consumed early in the season. From then on, the stock hangs out among the sedges, doing the best it can. My animals are always happy to leave. Areas on the upper end that supported grass in the 1960's are now barren ground. What this pasture DOESN'T need is to be opened up to public use, as some have suggested. I do believe the ranger should be allowed to let visitors use it occasionally, at his discretion and with good reason.

#### LOWER FUNSTON MEADOW

Lighter use than usual use this year. Though it looked like there was a lot of feed left at the end of the season, most of this was unpalatable coarse sedge. The dry areas in the meadow that went bare last year after four years of drought have not recovered, since they are the first to be hit by stock in the spring. We may be losing these portions of the meadow permanently.

An upstream logjam has diverted the Kern River into the meadow at high water. It was under water or boggy through most of June, and unsuitable for grazing. Upper Funston, by contrast, was dry and ready. I informed Sierra District of this, and posted a notice on the Kern Station bulletin board. Unfortunately, some stock parties arrive late in the day and can't make it beyond Lower Funston in the dark. If early season flooding persists, we will need to change the opening date.

#### UPPER FUNSTON MEADOW

Didn't get its usual "mowed down" look until late August, and then only in patches. As a "pasture" it can probably sustain its current level of use indefinitely.

#### EAST SIDE OF THE KERN

There are two traditional stock camps, "Snake Camp" and "21 Inch Camp" on the east side of the Kern, accessible by fording the river. They were both used this summer by large stock parties who enjoy the privacy and the absence of grazing limits. The forage areas adjacent to these camps need to be looked at by the Park Meadow Researcher to estimate sustainable use.

#### KERN HOT SPRING MEADOW

Until 1976, this small meadow surrounding the Hot Spring was protected from stock grazing and human trampling by a primitive split-rail fence. A visitor told me that in 1980 it was badly beaten down and overrun by people. He said it looks much better now. Grazing is still prohibited, but there is no way now to keep stock out.

This year people trampled a shortcut trail through the tall grass directly uphill from the Hot Spring. I blocked it with branches and put out a small hand-lettered sign, asking them to please use the trail from the north end of the meadow to access the Hot Spring. I talked to District Ranger Coffman about placing a small permanent sign there, and still feel it is needed, unless the split-rail fence is rebuilt.

#### JUNCTION, MEADOW (KERN)

There is a limit of twelve head, one night per party, which I believe was overstayed by at least one large party this year. We need an enforcement sign stating the limit, to be placed adjacent to the meadow on the east side.

#### LOWER RATTLESNAKE CREEK

The forage below the lower drift fence seldom gets grazed. The Kern Trail Crew stayed there this year and hit it pretty hard. I agree with Jim Harvey that this was a good idea, as long as it doesn't become a yearly practice.

#### COW CAMP

The profusion of healthy tall grass here withstood use well throughout the season. We recommended to Mineral King Pack Station that they pasture their stock here whenever practical, instead of upper Rattlesnake Creek. They did, at least once, under pressure from Ranger Suk, before upper Rattlesnake Creek was open. I left my stock here and backpacked upstream to avoid pressure on the higher meadows and assure my stock good feed.

#### MIDDLE RATTLESNAKE CREEK (Rattlesnake II)

As I mentioned above, in discussing the upper drift fence, this meadow stays wet in many places throughout the season. Although abused in the past, with the cooperation of Don Bedell we kept it closed this year until the end of July. It is on the way to recovery. It would be a mistake for the Park trail crew to begin using it again. A late opening date is definitely indicated; Mr. Bedell concurs in this.

#### UPPER RATTLESNAKE CREEK

This area gets concentrated use by Mineral King Pack Station. There is no way the current use level can be sustained without gradual deterioration of some of the meadows. Shifting grazing from one meadow to another within this zone only moves the problem around.

The two small meadows along the creek seem safe from overuse since stock won't stay there.

South Rattlesnake Meadow, which is about 80% wet sedge, is the most beautiful meadow in the Kern Patrol Area. Until the 1980's it escaped damage, but in recent years the Mineral King packers have beaten out a "trail" up the outlet creek (see my 1990 Photo Report) and it is now one of their favorite grazing sites, since stock are easy to hold there. The streambanks are beginning to break down from trampling; one can see here the beginning stages of deterioration of a healthy wild meadow.

Ranger Suk found Mineral King Pack Station stock grazing illegally in the small round meadow between Forester Lake and Little Claire Lake on July 3rd, as soon as Franklin Pass was shoveled out.

The brunt of the use in upper Rattlesnake Creek is in the long meadow on the shelf between Forester Lake and the foot of Franklin Pass. Much of the ground there is trampled and compacted. As at Siberian Outpost, the fringes have died back from the surrounding tree line, probably in the time of sheep grazing, leaving a broad zone of barren gravel which is unlikely to be revegetated even if grazing were to be removed. As at Siberian outpost, careful digging in this barren zone by a trained observer would probably turn up fragments of defunct meadow plants.

This year, for the first time, Park visitors reported to me that the subalpine meadow on the old Shotgun Pass trail was being grazed heavily. This meadow was cited recently as an example of an ungrazed meadow which could be studied to determine the amount of degradation suffered by the meadows west of Forester Lake.

Mineral King packers also use three small meadows high on the north canyon wall about a mile and a half east of Forester Lake. To my regret, I have not yet visited these.

#### COYOTE CREEK

In the 1890's this was one of the main trails connecting the San Joaquin Valley with the Owens Valley. Hundreds of people would be camped there at times, and the grass was mowed down like a lawn. At these times, with nothing else left to eat, horses would consume Larkspur or other toxic plants, sicken and die. A fellow who used to pack for DeCarteret out of Mineral King, whose father had packed there for Ray Buckman, told me that this is how the persistent rumors of "poison feed" in Coyote Creek originated. Stockmen are still wary of camping there; the meadows are hardly touched.

There is a beautiful nearly pristine meadow stringer south of Crytes Lake (Lake 10,850 on the 15' Quad) in the north part of the Coyote Creek drainage. The California Department of Fish and Game came here several times in recent years to get purebred Little Kern Golden Trout, an endangered species, to restock that drainage. A very few stock users have been in here. I was saddened to hear that a person I ran into earlier in the summer, who has few scruples about destroying nature, had ridden in over Labor Day weekend. As I pleaded last year, please consider the Crytes Lake drainage "off-trail, and close it to stock travel.

#### LAUREL CREEK

This entire drainage is without trails or developments of any kind, and has not been grazed in recent decades. Along with the part of the Coyote Creek drainage north of the trail, including the Crytes Lake area, and the part of the Rattlesnake Creek drainage south of the trail, including South Rattlesnake Meadow, Laurel Creek was protected in the Park Master Plan as a "Pristine Zone" until 1966, when Director Hartzog ordered that classification dropped because he "didn't want any protection stronger than that mandated by the Wilderness Act" of 1964. (I was on the Park Master Planning Team at the time.) I regret that in the 1980's the area was opened to unlimited off-trail stock use. Even though no one has brought in stock so far, there is nothing to stop them.

Laurel Creek needs to be treasured by us as a "pristine zone", and consumptive use by livestock kept out.

## WILDLIFE

### THE NEED TO DISCERN POPULATION TRENDS

In the period 1964-66, when I was stationed in the Kern as a permanent ranger, there were no California (Beechey) Ground Squirrels within the Park in the Kern Canyon. Now they are common as far upstream as Big Arroyo. Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels, on the other hand, have all but disappeared; I didn't see one in the lower Kern Canyon all summer. Since the lowland California Ground Squirrel thrives in disturbed areas, this shift in animal populations may have something to say to us about man-caused changes in the Sierra during the last century, and about continuing human impact within the Park.

Last year I saw no Blue Grouse in the Kern Canyon; this year they were common. Last year there were few Oregon Juncoes; this year they were abundant until sometime in early August, when they disappeared. I've noted Gray Squirrels as far upcanyon as Lower Funston Meadow, A Chickaree, which is not "supposed" to overlap in range with the Gray Squirrel, happily chatters among the pines, firs and Incense Cedars along Coyote Creek next to Kern Station.

We were given a handout in training last June asking us not to record any observations of common birds, but only of species that are rare in these Parks. Luckily I lost the handout, and recorded most of my observations, though not of juncoes, so I missed the date of their disappearance from the lower Kern Canyon, and realized they were gone only in retrospect.

I believe that carefully documented wildlife observations of common species are important, in that changes in the pattern of their occurrence can warn us of subtle changes in the ecosystem we might otherwise be unaware of until it's too late. Even the Spotted Owl and many of the large raptors at the top of the food chain were missing from the list of birds we were to record.

The handout we were given in June originated in Sierra District, as a result of Subdistrict Ranger Kraushaar's belief that backcountry rangers were taking too much time on wildlife observations. I submit that in the long run, our wildlife observations may be one of our most important contributions to the survival of fairly complete natural communities within these Parks.

Please rescind the instructions to ignore all except rare birds in recording our observations.

I found the new SNHA Bird List to be useful, and suggest that one be sent to each backcountry station.

### QUAIL

I've only seen one covey of Mountain Quail in two years, and wonder if they are decreasing. A review of past sighting records might reveal a trend.

### BEARS

There were no bear problems that I know of anywhere in the Kern Patrol Area this summer. Rattlesnake Creek shows no evidence of bears, and the very few wild bears seen in Coyote Creek and the Kern Canyon didn't bother anyone, except for a young bear who entered the Park briefly from Little Kern Lake and rolled over a grain barrel at Kern R.S.

Several Park visitors and employees commented this summer about the increasing scarcity of bears in the Kern Canyon. They were abundant and pestiferous in the 1960's; now they are seldom seen. I saw no bears and only one track there all summer. The rumor persists that someone is killing them. I find that shocking but not unthinkable, given some people's attitudes.

#### FISHING

R.J. Owen, one of our neighbors across the river, claims the fishing this year is the worst he's ever seen. On the day he spoke to me near Lower Funston Meadow, he had two fish to show for his efforts; his four companions came up with nothing. R.J. recalls that in 1934, when the daily limit was 25, he had no trouble catching fifty large Rainbows in a few hours. He says people out of work during the Depression could survive on the fish they caught. As with ducks, he has watched populations and limits decline, decade by decade, and sees no end to the trend.

On June 20, Craig Ashman, very excited, told me he had hooked a nine-inch Rainbow upstream from Lower Funston Meadow. As he pulled it in, a 30-inch German Brown suddenly grabbed it and wouldn't let go. He said he almost landed them both, but in the end the Brownie got the Rainbow and he was left with nothing but a good fish story. I suspect predation by German Browns might be a factor in the decline of the Rainbow fishery in the Kern.

People tell me Suckers are becoming more common in the Kern River, all the way up to Junction Meadow.

On July 22, I asked a fisherman to let me know how the fishing was in the steep gorge upstream from Junction Meadow. He reported to Ranger Lyness at Tyndall Creek that "You get one on every cast. There's billions of them, but they're all about six or seven inches long. Mostly Rainbows."

#### BEAVER

On the biennial Kern Canyon Beaver Survey this year Wildlife Ranger Selke and I found four zones inhabited by beavers:

1. A small colony east of the river, northeast of Lower Funston Mdw.
2. A large colony, which we named "Beaver Megalotropolis", on the west side north of Laurel Creek.
3. A small colony on the west side south of Upper Funston Meadow.
4. A small colony between the mouth of Funston Creek and the north end of Upper Funston Meadow.

#### RATTLESNAKES

This was the "snakiest" year in memory in the Kern Canyon. I saw four myself, and on July 1 received reports of ten snake sightings within the last 24 hours. I saw one at Cow Camp, at 8,600' in Rattlesnake Creek. Trail Crew Foreman Tyler Johnson tells me he's seen them as high as the top of the glacial staircase upstream from Cow Camp, at 9,200'.



## A THREATENED PLANT SPECIES?

On June 15, riding into Kern R.S. from Lewis Camp Trailhead above Quaking Aspen, I noticed a patch of small plants with showy pink trumpet-flowers in the sand beside the trail on the north bank of Grasshopper Creek. Perhaps they were penstemmons, but of a kind I'm not familiar with. If the ranger comes in that way next spring, it might be worthwhile to collect a specimen, even though it's outside the Park.

## LEWIS CAMP AREA

### CABIN AND FACILITIES

Since this may be my last summer in the Kern, I made a special effort to leave the place in tip-top shape. The cabin is the cleanest I've ever seen it. A lot of surplus equipment, supplies and old files were flown out or thrown out; what's left is organized and accessible.

I turned in a long list of repairs to be done by the Historic Structures Crew if they return next year. I'd like to mention again the need to at least try to mouseproof the place. Mice shared the cabin with me all summer, and a woodrat showed up just before I left. There is a large live trap stored at the station, but it's not easily tripped by woodrats. It would be good to get a smaller one.

The four beds have cotton-batting mattresses. One is good; one is mouse-eaten on one side, and the two innerspring mattresses are in need of replacement. I sent the measurements in on my Station Needs list. If anyone reading this knows of some mattresses lying around the Park that are no longer being used, please contact Eric Morey in Sierra District. Last fall a Forest Service Fire Crew stayed in the cabin, and this summer two NPS crews joined me there at times. These beds will be used, if they have good mattresses.

### IRRIGATION DITCHES

Not far from the River Pasture Drift Fence, the irrigation ditch leading to the Large Pasture tends to overflow and flood the trail. At a point where it is constricted between two tree trunks, it needs to be rerouted a couple of feet to the east.

I recommend that the Large Pasture be irrigated only intermittently, and that the ditch that flows back toward Coyote Creek just above the Soda Spring be kept dry. There has been some dilution to the fizzyness of the Soda Spring water, which I attribute to uderground seepage from this ditch, whose sole purpose was to provide water for campsites, when the commercial Lewis Camp operation was in full swing and up to fifty parties a night would be camped here. Nowdays no one camps in the area except occasional backpackers, who prefer the two camps by the river, near the suspension bridge.

### CAMPSITES

Two of the traditional Lewis Camp sites remain: Irene's Camp (Rock Camp) and Ditch Camp. Both are too close to the ditches that bring them water to be acceptable nowdays. They are "historic" in a sense, but hardly used during the past couple of years. I've sent three solo backpackers up to Ditch Camp. Irene's camp has not been used at all, as far as I know. They should probably both come out, despite my sentimental misgivings, since I remember when they were in lively use every summer.

## PATROLS

Between June 14 and September 14 I traveled 549 miles, half with stock and half on foot. Until July 5, the only part of my patrol area open to overnight stock travel was the Kern Canyon, so I wound up backpacking for a week to check on trail, meadow and snow conditions. Franklin Pass was shoveled open for stock travel on July 3 this year; on July 7 it took me three hours to get balky "Mitch" mule across the snowfield on top. Later in the season I left my stock at Cow Camp and backpacked for a few days, so they could enjoy good feed and wouldn't impact the meadows in upper Rattlesnakwe Creek.

Please send a copy of Gordon Wallace's 1946 report to the Kern Station, to be included in the Historical File there. It's an interesting vignette of the Kern as it was then, and still has some valid points to make, such as the need for healthy, fast stock for the ranger. 28-year old mules, washed out from trail crew strings, may be gentle, but aren't very practical if they slow the ranger down so much that a 10-year old girl (as I found out last year) can outhike them. Stock users have faulted former Kern Rangers for not using their stock more, but when it becomes easier and faster to walk, due to the slow pace of the stock available, it makes no sense to ride. Honey, Beth and Mitch are reliable, but average just over two m.p.h., which means, for example, an eleven hour ride from Kern R.S. to Mineral King, instead of the eight hours needed by Jim Harvey's stock.

## ADMINISTRATIVELY UNCONTROLLABLE OVERTIME

I wish to express my appreciation to former District Ranger Paul Fodor and former Subdistrict Ranger John Kraushaar for their efforts, over many years, to secure adequate compensation for the backcountry rangers in these Parks, and to Gail Bennett and the present Sierra District staff for their time and energy in dealing with this unwieldy system this summer. For all its faults, it does reflect more accurately the long hours put in at unpredictable times in the backcountry.

Especially with slow stock, after spending two hours wrangling and packing, it's inefficient not to put in at least eight hours of productive work or travel. Some patrols demand more, since good stock camps, with feed, where the animals will "hold", are not to be found everywhere. So a ten or twelve hour day is often the only reasonable choice. I put in for AUO a few times this summer on days like that, but because it doesn't fit the strict definition of "unexpected events" outside the ranger's control, that we were told would justify AUO, I was always hesitant to do so.

On days when an unexpected event or the necessity of wrangling early caused me to begin work before my scheduled hours, I would try to quit early enough not to go into overtime, and was usually successful in doing this. I hope some kind of "Gentlemen's (and women's) Agreement" can be reached with the backcountry rangers in the future that will provide this extra compensation without busting the District budget.

## PAPERWORK

As I sit here in mid-December, finally having gained access to a word processor, typing out this report, it occurs to me again that we have too much paperwork. Yet when I mentally review the reports required of us I have a hard time zeroing in on specific ways they could be cut back without losing information I assume is helpful in managing the Park.

How to streamline paperwork is something only the permanent staff can judge, since you are the ones who will be receiving and using it. Maybe a request for ideas from the backcountry rangers would produce a few useable ideas. I'll offer a few here, very tentatively.

Please ask yourself, before assigning paperwork: Will it be used? I'm delighted to hear that the Superintendent reads all the Annual Reports, such as this, from the backcountry rangers. If you've gotten this far, Tom, thanks a lot! Some things, such as station needs lists for next year, are obviously needed. I'm sure our wildlife observations will become valuable records, as will our station logs. Beyond these, there must be some things we could cut out.

One would be not to tabulate on paper all our low-flying aircraft observations, since these are recorded by KMC735 FOX at the time we call them in. Another would be to limit use of the time-consuming Case Incident Reports to Law Enforcement situations where a legal record is required. The Concessioner Observation form is a quick and easy way to report observations, positive or negative, involving concessioners. In most other cases, a short narrative report might be adequate.

It seems to me that if we are going to manage grazing "scientifically" we backcountry rangers need to record, night by night, to the best of our ability, who has grazed what meadow with how many head of stock, and to give a "Stock Use Reporting Card" to every private stock party. Yet these weren't even mentioned in training this year.

Meanwhile, we spend time jotting down and tabulating the number of stock seen each day, without indicating whether they are administrative, commercial or private, or where they have grazed or plan to graze. The only use I can see for this statistic is that it can give a vague idea of trends in total stock use from year to year. Let's drop it, since if we are diligent in gathering the more detailed data, we can judge those trends more accurately. If we need to summarize at the end of the season, I'd rather see the total number of known grazing-nights in a patrol area than the number of stock the ranger happened to encounter each day.

In the first part of this report, I've extracted different categories of activities from my station log and pocket notebooks, and set them down with more detail than in the past. Maybe most of these activities were already sufficiently documented by being written up in the station log. Guidance on that would be appreciated.

One of my colleagues has jokingly accused me of being "paper oriented", and I can't deny it. I don't mind putting in a few days of my own time on the annual report if something I say strikes a responsive chord and produces results. May it be so!