

**END OF SEASON REPORT, CHARLOTTE 1992**  
GEORGE DURKEE

"A backcountry ranger is no less responsible in command and in duty in his district than the captain of a ship at sea."

Gordon Wallace  
Kern Subdistrict Ranger, 1946

**STATS:**

Visitor contacts:	1100	
Stock Observed		40
Total Miles:	750	
Law Enforcement Contacts		
Citations		10 (a dubious new record)
(Dog in backcountry--3; Fires--7)		
Warnings		49
(weapons--3 [all peace officers]; camp on vegetation--22; fire--3; soap in water--4; litter--3; food storage--6; too close to stream--8;		
Emergency Operations:		
SAR		2
Medicals		5
Fires (escaped campfires)	4	

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It's like deja vu all over again: Charlotte Lake has got to be the bozo center of the Universe. It's been a number of years since I've been called a "fucking asshole" while writing a ticket; I think this was the first time it's been done by a 15 year old girl. Sigh.

Not too much critter use at Charlotte this season--3 groups. The meadows immediately above the East Vidette drift fence, however, were devastated, probably by overuse by Cedar Grove pack station. Not much else of note. We cut to the chase:

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1) The high number of citations and LE hassles were due to A) the number of beginning/novice hikers the area gets and, most importantly, B) **the failure of the Lone Pine office and USFS trailhead rangers to emphasize NPS regulations.** Both Alden and Gail have talked and trained these folks endlessly. The problem is **they don't seem to care.** If our purpose in supporting their operations is to familiarize Park users with our regulations and reduce impact within Sequoia Kings National Parks, we're wasting our

money with them. Although Forest Service personnel religiously give out the wilderness permit, the permit itself is no longer especially relevant: the drop in the number of backcountry users mean trailhead quotas are only occasionally exceeded.

The primary purpose of the trailhead ranger and office personnel is to emphasize minimum impact regulations both verbally and with written information. It is significant that of the 10 citations I issued this year, only one was to a person who got their permit from the park. In addition, I was at Charlotte in '86 and '87 when Carolyn Lynch was the USFS ranger at Onion Valley. Both years had many fewer enforcement problems **as a direct result of the conscientious efforts of the trailhead person.** Nina, at Road's End makes sure she has all the members of the hiking party present when she verbally goes over the most important regulations. She then hands the leader the permit and literature. This seems to work.

A related problem is that we're giving out too much literature to people We (and the forest service) have a total of only a half dozen regulations that require emphasis, yet with both USFS & NPS literature, people are getting about 10 pages of reading material. The ones who need to read it don't. We need to work with the Forest Service and consolidate this stuff into no more than two pages. The new NPS reg sheet that comes out on the white paper is excellent, that might be all we need (I think the newspaper format might only be useful to large groups--Boy Scouts--by having them promise to go over it the first night out).

We should consider having a say in whoever's hired as trailhead people as well as giving them extra training in NPS regulations as a condition of giving the USFS money for their operations.

2) The small meadows 1/4 mile above the East Vidette drift fence were badly overgrazed by the fall. The grass was cropped down to less than 1/2 inch. I believe this was done mostly by Cedar Grove Pack Station (Onion Valley only had spot trips there, as far as I know). At this camp, stock had been tied less than 50 feet from the creek. In addition there were a number of small downed trees that were sawn up for firewood rounds--rather than just cutting one all the way back, the tops of 5 were used, leaving more stump ends.

I was not there to see or talk to whoever did it. It demonstrates the difficulties involved in enforcing "voluntary" use limits of an area.

3) Both the Mt. Gould and Windy repeaters were not working or worked so poorly as to be unusable for several weeks at a time. Both were reported right away yet nothing was done for 3 weeks. Visitor safety (as well as our own) requires that our office take a more aggressive role in both monitoring, reporting on and following up on radio problems.

A related problem is with our morning checks. Although their primary purpose is to find out where we'll be for the day, I like to think they're also a check to see if we're still breathing. When the Windy repeater was out, Sierra District (according to another ranger) called me every day on that repeater without an answer from me (for 10 days!). They did not attempt to call me on another channel. There apparently was no concern about either the repeater not working or me being in trouble and unable to respond.

4) Take down all "one night limit" signs on the Rae Lakes Loop and remove that regulation from the permit.

(There's a large sign on the Onion Valley trailhead, another at Rae Lakes and, I think, a couple down Bubbs Creek).

5) The stock users have proposed 11,000 ft. as an acceptable compromise to the fire limit in the Kern. This is ridiculous--it is not a matter of some "offer/counter-offer" quibbling but being changed for a reason: protecting the ancient Foxtail forest and the aesthetic damage done by campfires in that area. The pure Foxtail/Whitebark zone begins at 10,600 ft. That's where the upper fire limit in the Kern should be. The Forest Service has banned campfires entirely in the Foxtail zone.

A handful of exceptions can be made for specific traditional stock sites that have sufficient lodgepole present to burn. I've taken pictures at various elevations in the Kern which show the complete absence of down wood at these elevations and will submit them when they're processed.

6) The Charlotte drift fence needs to be completely rebuilt. The fence still uses red snow stakes as fence posts. Rangers have requested these be replaced since at least 1980. Stock are also getting around it quite often and into Charlotte Meadow causing moderate damage to the spahgnam meadow.

7) **BEARS** No major problems this year. I suggest another box at the Center Creek/JMT crossing in lieu of one (already approved but never put in) at Wheelbarrow camp/JMT. The latter would seriously increase use in a fragile (alpine meadow) area. I found that warning people about the Wheelbarrow camp was enough to keep people from using it and kept incidents to almost 0.

Use of boxes by hikers has become good enough that incidents have declined dramatically in the Bubbs watershed. I examined about 50 bear scats and found foil or plastic in only 5. I suggest that rather than spend their time compiling bear incident reports, that the bear techs. do regular transects & collections of bear scats to get a better idea of bear/human food encounters.

Based on my observations I believe we've reached a point where bears are foraging for food in a normal way with backpackers now only an opportunistic part of that foraging rather than a primary target.

Consumeables still at Charlotte (1992):

12 Gal. Blazo

20 (at least) large plastic garbage bags

3 pkg. paper towels

8 rolls toilet paper

6 burlap bags

Plenty of nylon parachute cord

A ton of snow survey food (check with surveyors, but it was overstocked in the fall).

**NEED:**

2 New generators for the Unleaded 3 burner Coleman Stove (requested in '91 and again in early '92)