

1993 year-END Report
CRABTREE meadows
Rob Pilewski, Ranger

(1)

The summer of 1993 was a relatively quiet one in and around Crabtree Meadow. Visitation was down considerably from last year, the one place where it seemed that visitation was up was Mt. Whitney. The majority of people hiking Mt. Whitney would do so from the east side as a day hike. A forest service survey conducted on a Friday in September showed that 450 people hiked the mountain in one day! I would attribute the low visitation in the backcountry to the heavy snows of last winter. Although there was much more snow than last season, backcountry travel was still possible in the southern Sierra Nevada without much difficulty in early June. The Crabtree area was easily accessible from Hulsehoe Meadow, as well as Whitney Portal as early as June 10. Even Granger Pass at 13,200 ft. was passable without the aid of technical snow travel knowledge.

The many stream crossings on the Kern Plateau did pose a threat to backcountry travellers starting in mid June. Thankfully there were no incidents because of this hazard and the streams began to recede the first week of July.

The heavy moisture content did account for a very buggy summer. The mosquitoes were in full force for most of the summer. I also noticed many more bugs in the area this season and wonder if this is also due to the heavy snows of winter. Many yellow-legged frogs were seen in the Whitney Creek drainage and in and around Crabtree.

reports? It seems that the word of mouth and word of mouth from unreliable sources accounted for the incorrect information that people were receiving.

While at the forest service office I did view the video that is shown to visitors obtaining backcountry permits. I was impressed by the body of information shown in the video. Valuable and accurate information about Sequoia N.P. was given in an appropriate manner. The forest service gets an A+ for making this video in an attempt to better inform backcountry travelers about proper camping techniques and backcountry ethics.

Visitation started picking up in mid July and peaked in the middle of August. Many large groups, mostly boy-scouts, were in the area in August. This kept the rangers busy preaching minimum impact and lining the boy scouts out on service projects.

Once again the most heavily used overnight area at Crabtree was Gutter Lake. Gutter was "tent-city" thru most of August and into September. Many visitors complained about unsanitary conditions and the need for a toilet at Gutter Lake. I agree.

The three and four day trips thru the Sequoia backcountry and out over Mt. Whitney are again the most popular hiking routes. Horseback meadow and over Cottonwood at New Army pass to Mt. Whitney was most popular. From the North Shepherds and Kearsarge Pass also brought visitors

be monitored by the rangers.

Several hasty searches were carried out by the Crabtree rangers with no major incidents. The most exciting occurred on 10/07 when I was involved with an air search on the East side of Whitney for a hiker who had fallen on the mountainous route. Although the hiker made it out under his own power (with a broken arm, broken nose & facial lacerations!?) it was an exciting and worthwhile duty for the Crabtree rangers. It seems that the rangers in the field are not given the opportunity to become involved with the transportation of medicals or of searches in the respective areas. As an EMT I feel that I could have flown with both of my medics this season. As the initial responder wouldn't this insure better patient care?

One citation was written by the Crabtree rangers this season. This for improper food storage. Otherwise law-enforcement contacts were at a minimum. The commercial packer (Cottonwood Pack station) for the area kept the law-enforcement side of ranger work hopping.

Several incidents occurred on Mt. Whitney this summer and were handled by the Inyo National Guard. The most serious occurred on 8/20 and involved a lightning strike of 2 people just below the summit. The 2 were able to make it down to trail camp where one, who had a broken leg, was evacuated by helicopter. The lightning diffusion

Resource Management - The Crabtree rangers apologizes for not being able to officially document the projects that were outlined at the beginning of the season. The fact is that the Crabtree area is usually so full of the 2 legged ritters wearing backpacks that it is difficult to organize consistent research projects. Regarding the 2 projects that resource management were concerned with this year; there were no brown-headed cowbirds sighted on the Kem Plateau by the Crabtree rangers and there were many yellow-legged frogs sighted.

I spent most of my time in the Whitney Creek drainage so this is where I spotted most of the frogs. The seasonal tarn just behind the ranger station is where most tadpoles were sighted. In fact this is the only place I spotted the tadpoles. The frogs themselves were visible in all of the lakes in this basin: Gumbeline, Isnutar and Hitchcock. There were many more tadpoles than adult frogs over-all. Also of note is the fact that all of the above mentioned lakes have fish (goldens) in them while the tarn does not.

Bear activity was low in the immediate Crabtree area. There was one bear who hung around for 4 days in July. In 4 days he (she) managed to cause quite a commotion. The toll was: 2 tents, backpack, and several scared campers who watched this rather large bear lose a wrestling match with the bear-bag below the station. During these 4 days I made sure that everybody stored their food

properly and finally the bear headed off for better pickins. I believe this was the Park Creek area at first and then over the crest to Cottonwood Lakes,

The most surprising bear activity occurred just below Gravelly Pass at 12,000+ ft. and at Lake South America. Both of these areas are well above timberline and people were basically sitting ducks to this rather aggressive bear. I posted bear warnings in the Grindall Creek area and little else was heard about this bear the rest of the season. This does not mean that they did not happen.

The most common wildlife seen in the Crabtree area are the marmots, ground squirrels, deer and bighorns. Golden trout are in abundance in all of the lakes and streams. The state department of Fish and Game (Wildlife!?) did a fish collection for this area for genetic research to be done at U.C. Davis. It will be interesting to see the results.

Projects - When not dealing with visitors the Crabtree ranger had plenty of projects to keep him busy this season. The Whitney toilet was re-constructed with the help of Paris Maloney in mid July. The Whitney honey-bucket had to be flown 2 times this season - a testament to the many hikes on Whitney this summer. Routine maintenance was performed bi-weekly on Whitney. This included: replacing the Whitney registers, staining the floor in the shelter, checking that the lightning diffusion system is still intact, cleaning the shelter and picking up trash. This to go along with the other ranger duties on Whitney.

of taking pictures for tourists, answering questions, identifying peaks and telling people that their excruciating head-ache is due to the difference in barometric pressure between 14,494 ft. and their home at sea level which they left yesterday !?! With the amount of use that Mt. Whitney receives it is amazing there aren't more incidents.

On-going projects in the Crabtree area included a sign-inventory and maintenance of the ranger station and campsites in the area. During the busy times I would spend 2 days a week cleaning up after people. The most tedious task is chng aluminium-foil out of fire-pits and removing the ashes from the same.

Projects in the Gull included meadow-monitoring and a 4 day hunting patrol with 311, the meadow-monitoring kept me running as I did the work in the G. Spindall Creek area as well,

Low-flying aircrafts -

Once again low flying military aircrafts were the number one source of visitor complaints in the Crabtree area. The jets are intrusive to the wilderness of Sequoia National Park, but more importantly are a real safety hazard for people hiking on Mt Whitney. Several visitors reported that they were fearful of their lives because of these jets who frequently "buzz" the summit area less than 100 ft. above the ground. The day is coming when there will be a serious accident, probably on one of the east face climbing routes, caused by the commotion

Recommendations

(1) Build a toilet at Guntar Lake. A vault-type that could be flown out when full seems like the best plan. It would have to be bigger than the Whitney honey bucket to allow for more use and less flights. Dave Kangas & Gaylor of Kern trail crew and myself looked at an area at Guntar Lake that seems like a good place for such a toilet. Building a toilet at Guntar will probably mean much more work for an already very busy Habitat Group.

(2) Make the fire-limit on the Kern Plateau consistent at 10,800 ft. Print the fire regs so they can be understood by all at a quick glance (which is what most visitors give our minimum-impact handouts.) Crabtree Lakes could be an exception to the fire-limit.

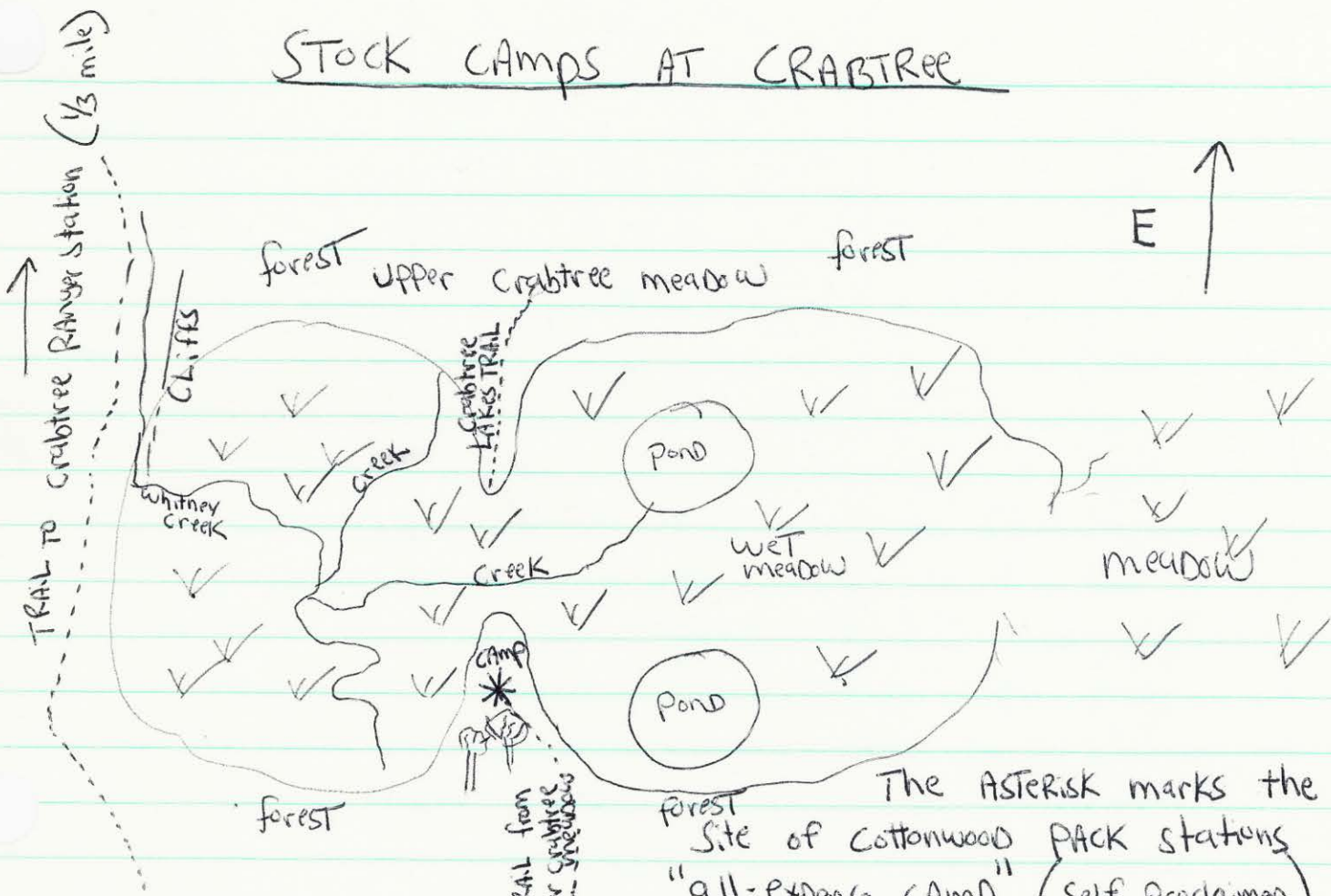
(3) Put a ranger back at the Gurdall station next year. I realize that this year was due to lack of funding. The backcountry of Sequoia, as well as the visitors, will be much better served if there is a ranger at Gurdall.

(4) allow the rangers in the field to become more involved with transportation of medicals and searches in our area.

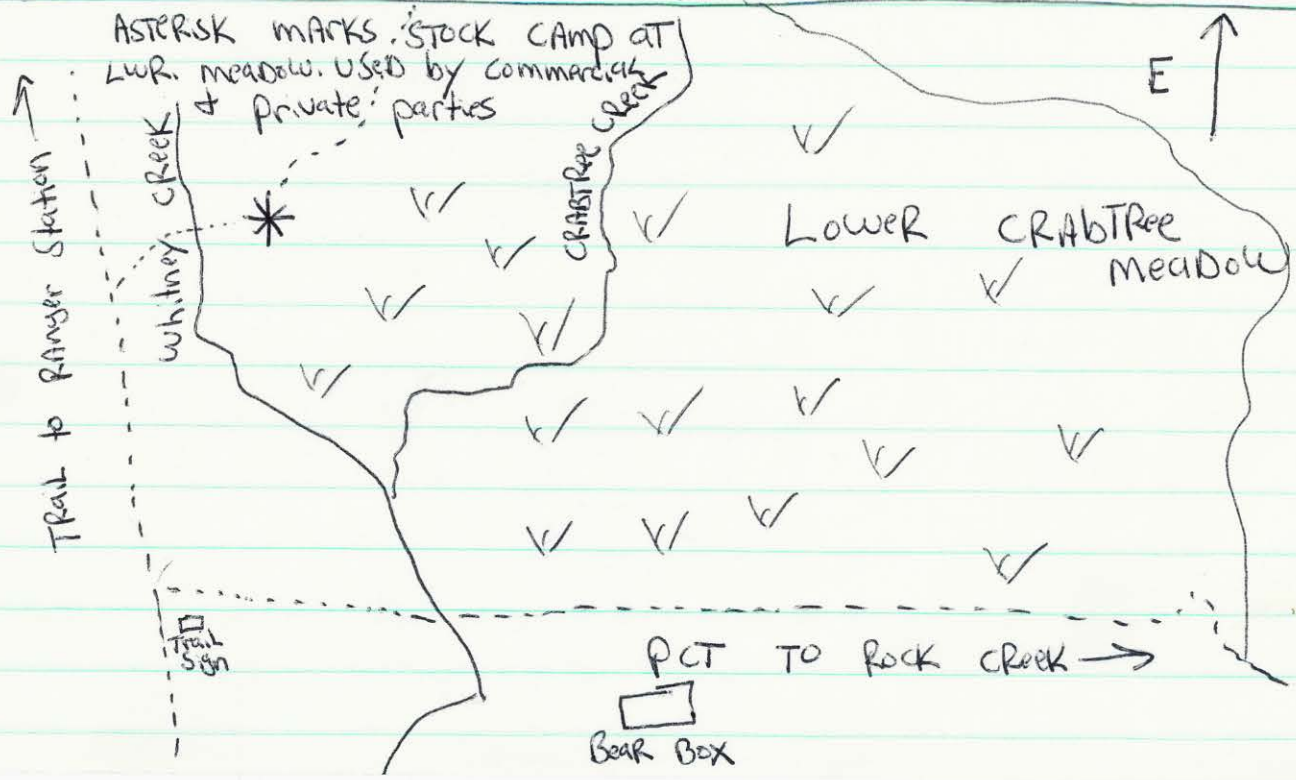
(5) Require all commercial packers and their employees to have some sort of certification to insure proper backcountry knowledge. Most areas require a guides license to practice commercially. Craig Louden teaches a class for backcountry

stock users that all of the people at Tottenham
Park station could benefit from. More importantly
the natural resources of our Parks could benefit
from this. This would also insure some degree of
quality control

STOCK CAMPS AT CRABTREE



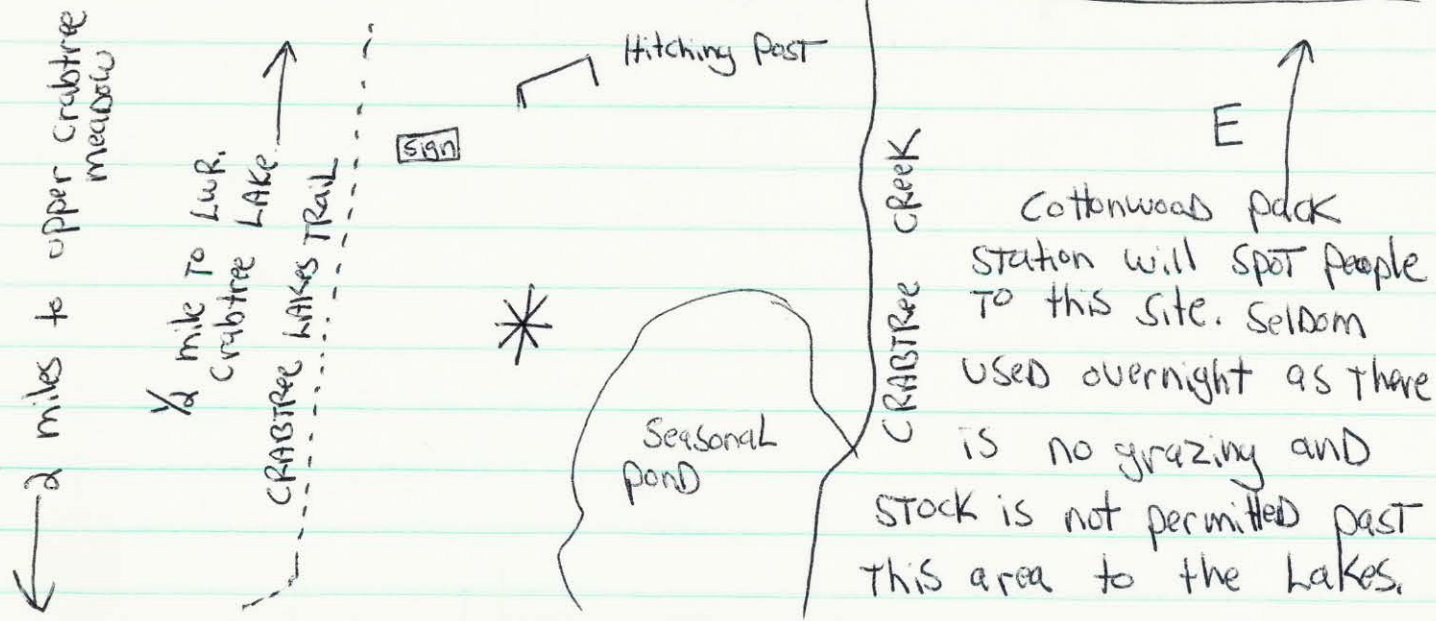
The ASTERISK marks the site of Cottonwood pack stations "all-expense CAMP" (Self Proclaimed) at Crabtree. Site is seldom used by other Stock Parties. Fire-ring is only development at site.



Stock Camps at Crabtree (cont.)



This is the site of the Trail crew camp at "Harvey's meadow". IT is approximately 1 mile west of Lower Crabtree meadow on ^{north side of} Whitney Creek. IT is a developed site with Bear-Box, Table + Shower. The Trail crew are the only people I know of to use this site.



CRABTREE Station Needs for 1994

Toilet Paper

10 Burlap sacks

5 Small Trash bags

5 Large trash bags

1 Case of propane

1 Set stainless steel pots & pans to replace
Aluminum ones

- A propane set-up w/ large tank &
stove ???

The station will need a new paint job soon,
If not in 1994 than definitely the following
year

The privy may need to be moved in 1994