

Season End Report, Rock CK, 1993

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U.S.N.P.S. 9/22/93

This report will be in sections, each section with title and content.

Training:

Ranger training for the backcountry rangers this season offered a welcome deviation from the sitting and listening sessions of the past. It offered us a chance to get involved with real issues, events and situations encountered in the backcountry. Another aspect was that we had a good exchange between co-workers and users in the different sessions.

The Atwell Mill session for mountain medicine was excellent. The logistics of moving class was not as difficult as expected by some and the outdoors surroundings and refreshing atmosphere a welcome change. The presentation by the staff was brief and well presented, offering a refresher of real situations.

The picnic was fantastic and

Socializing in the outdoors most welcome by all.

The mountain rescue and mountaineering sessions were excellent and should be repeated in the future. It was refreshing to see the district and sub-district rangers so enthused about what they were doing.

The only drawback to the full week is that all of us have a lot of preparing to do to get ready for moving into the mountains, and our minds are occupied with a lot of things. So keeping the administrative talk to a minimum would be better. The late Friday talk was a little too much, besides most of what was said had already been said on the first day. I don't believe any of us were listening that afternoon.

In summary: Administrative talk made shorter -

Mountain Medicine and Mountaineering Rescue kept as it is. Having a Dr. from the Valley interested in this field would be a added benefit.

At least a day or two kept open for issuing equipment and getting personal supplies in order

This was still the best training session in my 16 years with Sierra District.

Summer 93, overview

The flying in of myself and supplies went well. Chuck the pilot would have preferred the Horseshoe Meadow spot, but by doing it from my home on Granite View eliminated the need for an extra person on the ground. To fly from Granite View to Rock Ck is a little farther than from Horseshoe but to fly to Crabtree is probably a little shorter from Granite View.

The snow was gone from the south facing slopes on June 16, the north slopes held on for awhile longer. Creek crossings were all a little tricky for the first two weeks but fordable with caution by detouring.

Once again Rob Piluski at Crabtree was a good neighbor and co-worker. Him and I shared several patrols, projects and social sessions. He is excellent with the public and a very competent and professional ranger.

The Rock Ck. patrol has 3 main areas of visitor use: Mitre Basin and Sky Blue Lake - A lot of people go into this area because of its easy accessibility, connection to Crabtree pass and Mt. Whitney and its beauty. Basically the area is cross-country

travel but because of Cottonwood Peck Stations repeated trips here a badly eroded trail now exist into the Mitre Basin. I have received many complaints about this, and will discuss this under stock use.

Soldier Lake and Rock Ck. Lake

Both offer Bear Boxes and great camping. Most people that enter Rock Creek from Army or Cottonwood Pass camp here.

Lower Rock Ck. Crossing A lot of hikers camp here before heading for Coyot Pass and Crabtree. The camps at the crossing get a lot of use but it still remains a nice place to camp. Excellent camping exist downstream from here for both backpackers and stock users.

The ranger station is accessible by a $\frac{1}{4}$ mile walk up Rock Ck. from the main trail. Visitation at the ranger station is light but anyone in need easily finds it.

Bears

The bear situation was not much of a problem this year. In mid-July a large bear came through and got very little food. Twice it got food at upper Rock Ck. and twice it knocked over my garbage cans at the station, and the only damage was to my new solar shower hanging from a nail.

The Bear who came through Rock Ck was probably the same bear that came through Crabtree. After it left Rock Ck, I believe it headed for Horseshoe Meadows and remained there.

A Bear was on the move in the Upper Kern, at Lake South America, Foresters Pass and Wright lakes area. I believe this bear came over from Babbs Ck. I took 3 reports when it got unsuspecting campers food. I believe this bear returned to Babbs Ck. A box or a burrow at Wheelbarrow camp would help this situation.

Medivacs and Incidences

This was a quiet summer but there was one life threatening Medivac. The incident happened when I left Rock Ck, overnight to tend to Julie and my home in Lone Pine. While Julie was here alone the boy scouts reported a woman with serious altitude problems at Sky Blue Lake.

Julie's excellent knowledge of Mtn sickness told her that this was life threatening and she did all the right things in this difficult situation and saved this woman's life. She dispatched 2 scouts to Crabtree to report it to Rob to call in, and two to Lone Pine (because the repeater was not working), and with

Brother Miles and the oldest scout carried O_2 to the patient at Sky Blue Lake. Arriving at Midnight and gave O_2 to the patient until S-2 arrived about 0900 hrs. with 1-1-0.

A hectic night for all involved but with a good outcome. All involved in the rescue should receive the highest praise.

The other Medical was a 32 year old female that was flown out for the same problem but not as advanced a case.

H/APE is quite common in these mountains and we need to continue discussing it in training.

Stock use

The biggest stock users in this area is Cottonwood pack outfit.

The biggest area of use are the stringer meadows behind Rock Ck Lake. This area has been a problem for a decade now. Cottonwood refers to it as "our all expense camp" and that about says it.

The problems with this camp are several:

- ① Too many years of trampling and manure (4" deep over big area) in the tie up area

- ② Camp is too close to water
- ③ Meadows are too fragile and wet and easily imprinted
- ④ Repeated use with no break all summer and no creativity on the packers part about camp selection. Camp is overused.
- ⑤ Winchester's give a damn attitude about the park (which he openly expressed at our beginning of the season meeting)

After rechecking the camp and cleaning up there yesterday I decided that it cannot take any more abuse. Meadow adjacent to camp is heavily imprinted (see photos), and water is only 50 feet from where there kitchen is, with all its soaps, chlorine, etc. Also I discovered many unburied feces within 50 feet of water.

My solution or recommendation will be to close this camp for the future and tell Winchester that he will have to use his alternate camp, only about 200 feet away or go to another area. Enough is enough!

Winchester has been encouraged to go elsewhere and use the lower meadows but refuses. We have heard his reasons... The park should establish a lower stock limit for this Upper Rock Ck. area (12 Head would be a start) and that would make him go lower down.

but moving his camp next season is a must.

The other thing that would help is when we have our beginning of the season meeting with him is to include all of his staff so we can go over the regulation sheet with them all, instead of doing it in the field after they have already done things.

I think basically the park needs to require some sort of a standard with all packers as to skills required and what is expected of them. If they do not know or meet our standards they should not be packing into the park.

Projects

After much deliberation I have decided that the Bear Box on the peninsula at Soldier Lake needs to be moved. Because:

- ① Too hard for people to find.
- ② Peninsula is only 150' across, so wherever people go to the toilet it is too close
- ③ In the 7 years there, the small area is too impacted
- ④ Several good camps exist along the back trail into Soldier lake and Box should be located in this area visible from sign intersection with

a Bear Box → sign located at intersection of side trail and main trail.

Other projects may exist but my philosophy is to only do what is absolutely necessary and let nature dictate to us what needs to be done.

Again, this was another beautiful experience for me at Rock CK. this summer and I hope to return next summer somewhere in SEKI backcountry.

One other project completed this summer was the waterproofing of the Rock CK Cabin. It could use another coat in a season or two. Also the front porch needs to be stripped and sanded, and probably the best coating would be some Watco oil, with a medium dark pigment to it. Otherwise the cabin is in great shape.

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