

1996

Season End Report

A General

As usual at Crabtree Meadows many backpackers are met both passing through (mostly camping higher up toward Guitar Lk.) and many camping overnight in the Crabtree Meadow area (Lower, Upper and Ranger Station meadows). The area has many good camp locations. Fires being allowed, most camps have a low-profile firepit (3-5 rocks). A good variety of such camps exist in the area. Most campers are able to locate these camps, which are spread out in a radius from the bear box.

Almost all are backpacker in the Crabtree area. The distance from the trailhead makes it too far for day hikers to make it here. The only exceptions are lost hikers coming down from Mt. Whitney (which unbelievably happened four times this season). Of course Mt. Whitney gets as many as 150 day hikers per day but those are all returning to the Whitney Portals to complete their long day hike.

Stock users came often, mostly in the form of commercial outfitters. Cottonwood Pack station had about ten such trips to Crabtree this summer, and Rock Creek Pack Station had about four trips that camped over in the area. No private users this season and the N.P.S. had a trail crew at Sandy Meadows and the maintenance staff trip

2

at Lower Crabtree Meadow. Two burro groups also came through the area.

Law Enforcement situations did not arise in this area except for a citation given to a pack group on the Crabtree Lks. trail by Rob (3-1-5) for leaving a trashy camp. The only other violations were minor things that with compliance amounted to verbal warnings. Backpackers are for the most part a very agreeable group and are almost always willing to comply with park regulations.

There were four medivacs in the Crabtree area, 3 initiated by myself and 1 by 3-1-6

1, HAPE from lower meadow in which I administered O_2 through the night

2, A knee problem flown from Sandy Meadow

3, Moderate Altitude Sickness flown out by 3-1-6 from station

4, A fractured nose and open fracture on a 71 yr. old man coming down from Mt Whitney - flown from Crabtree

The Morganson SAR involved me for about two weeks in Kings. - NO Clues??

The snow conditions were minimal this season almost all passes were open early. Of course Trail Crest required caution from late June and early July snowpecks.

B USE patterns

Hiker use patterns were about the same as previous years except that a slight increase seems to be the trend these past few years. Typically the Cottonwood Pass to Whitney Portals is the most popular route. Onion Valley to the Portals has increased in popularity and so have the number of JMT hikers. Increases in numbers is also due to Mt. Whitney hikers not being able to get a permit for the Whitney trail, taking an alternate route: Cottonwood, Army and Shepards Pass to the Portals, thus increasing the numbers coming thru Crabtree Mdw. and Guitar Lake. I won't say that this is a significant increase because this ~~has~~ been a popular route for the last twenty five years.

Spreading visitors use out by posting a sign listing other camp areas along the trail between Crabtree and Guitar Lake and above has lessened the impact at Guitar Lake by about half.

Lower meadow Ranger Station meadow and above going towards Guitar Lk. gets a lot of use. The rangers need to remind groups to 1, bury human waste well away from trail, camp and water and 2, to not build rock walls for wind protection (this year the # of rock walls definitely increased) I broke

down several of these in the higher elevations (Guitar Lk. and above).

The stock use patterns haven't changed much as indicated in part A.

The Jet Overflights in this area need to be more seriously addressed. The below 3000' AGL flyers are not the only problem. A bigger problem is the constant noise from training maneuvers in this area by the military. Any training elevation is a big disturbance to the peace and quiet of the wilderness! This is not a wilderness as long as we allow this. Meeting with military and WPS officials this summer was not very encouraging. I disagree with those that think that below 3000' AGL is the only problem. The problem is that Jet noise ruins a wilderness experience at any elevation.

The numbers of people that the noise from one jet disturbs is really high. One jet disturbs everyone in the whole upper Kern Basin. Perhaps 200-400 people have their wilderness experience drowned out by just one jet considering that there are several flying almost all summer long makes this disturbance way out of line with what a wilderness park is all about.

Wes Henry of the W.P.S. proposed a off limit zone for the busy summer months. This seems to be a very practical solution to the problem and should be pursued.

as I write the jets are screeching across the sky in ~~one~~ of our most heavily visited backcountry areas. Today on Mt Whitney a military jet flew 200' directly overhead, almost every time I go to Mt. Whitney this is the case. I don't believe anyone that tells me the military is trying to resolve this problem. For the last 25 years my experience here shows me that the N.P.S. has done nothing about this. The N.P.S. "dropped the ball" when Congress required a study to report the jet problem and absolutely nothing was even reported, in fact it was reported that SEKI did not have a significant problem. This was the study required by Congress in '86.

The bottom line is that this disturbance should not be tolerated. We need not feel sorry for the military. They can practice where they do not disturb people on their wilderness vacation.

No commercial use activities were noticed in this area other than commercial packing.

No hunting was observed or reported. This area is generally too far from the road, fortunately.

C. Natural Resources

- No bear incidences occurred in the area from Forrester's Pass to Army Pass. Bear signs were observed but no incidences involving people.

Hopefully Kings Cyn. takes care their bear problems before it spreads to this area.

They need to add 1 Box in Upper Bubbs Ck. - Make sure people know where the Bear boxes are in Kearsarge basin (hikers generally only find one box and the other two are not being used to capacity) and get the Forest Service to add boxes east of Kearsarge pass. Until this is done they will continue to have a bear problem.

Bear boxes work and I don't buy the Forest Services excuss that people always leave trash. That's why we have rangers and mostly the same ^{people} are visiting both areas. Once boxes eliminate the problem they can be removed.

D. Vegetation

The meadows closed this year due to overgrazing in the past are in good shape for the first time in many years.

The Waterfall meadow closure has worked out good because large groups are not concentrating there but are using meadows below, above and also Sandy Meadow. This meadow should remain closed as should "Harvey Meadow" or Lower Whitney Ck., and Sandy Meadow should be used whenever possible. The meadows are being better protected by these closures and they should continue to be closed.

The sensitive plant *Arabis pymaea*

7,
and Eriogonum Polypodium are abundant in all areas. I was not able to locate Hackelia Sharsmithii either due to it being too late in the season when I looked or I didn't look long enough. This was due to the fact that the area is hazardous due to frequent rockfall off the north side of Mt. Chamberlin which hindered my search. Searching at the other location near Siberian Pass would be a better area to search.

D. Cultural Resources

Of the two sites listed in this area I was not able to find any evidence of the archaeological sites. I found no obsidian chips or arrowheads. The sites are both used as campsites and have been for a long time. Archaeological evidence has been disturbed along time ago.

The only historical structure the Mt Whitney hut is doing fine. All fixtures are intact.

E. Backcountry Facilities

The Crabtree ranger station is in good repair, 3-1-5 and myself painted the inside this season.

It is necessary to put a new roof on Crabtree station next year. The present one is wearing thin and has a couple of leaks.

The only drift fence is the one at Lower Whitney CK and if this

meadow remains closed to grazing the trail crew should remove it.

All signs are in good shape and in the proper locations

This season I removed the damaged sign at Timberline Lk. and replaced it by the good one east of the lake. Thus eliminated one sign.

F. Trails

The trail crew had difficulties this season due to the accident on the Mt. Whitney trail, caused ^{ing} the death of two animals. We dynamited the animals which involved the closure of the trail. One week of work was lost here.

The crew did manage to get in a week of work on the upper part near trail crest.

Next year it will be necessary to work the two mile stretch between trail-crest and the Summit. This should be a priority due to the many dangers presented to so many hikers. All other areas are of a lesser priority.

G. Camp Areas

All camp areas are in good shape.

Constant work throughout the season is required to keep litter picked up and firepits maintained.

Guitar Lake requires special attention due to the larger number of people

Camping here. Encouraging people to use other areas has helped, and weekly patrols for litter and toilet paper are necessary or things will 'pile up', so to speak. Constant observation and work are necessary here.

The firerings located at Lower meadow, ranger station meadow, Crabtree Lks and Wallace CK. require maintenance every 1-3 weeks. Time required is not that much if regular maintenance is kept up. Actual time digging in the 'pits' only amounted to about 20 hrs. all season, a small percentage of time. I remember not long ago when firepits required about half of my time. Things are better now -

Wood is always scarce when people camp repeatedly at the same place, like Crabtree meadows. Two hundred ~~years~~ ^{yards} away from these areas there is still a lot of downed wood.

Probably a more consistent elevation for fires should be adopted. I recommend a 10,800' regulation for the Upper Kern and Crabtree area.

Food storage has been covered ^{under} in bear activity.

The Bear Box at Crabtree meadows needs to be moved, apx. 150' East, before fallen log on trail to ranger station. Need to let the old spot heal and try a new one.

Concerning impacts, Guitar LK has the most in this area.

Heavy stock damage~~d~~ occurred in Upper Crabtree meadow due to the large number of late groups coming through. Rock Ck. Pack St. had several Cottonwood a few and the NPS. added to this from use incurred by the maintenance staff trip, 19 Head X 2 nights.

H. Permit System.

There were no serious complaints about the permit issuance this season. Compliance was 100% here at Crabtree. People either had an advanced permit by reservation from the Big Pine issuing office or got their permit from Lone Pine or had a permit from a west side station.

Only five groups did not have a Whitney Zone sticker. I was able to accommodate these groups with stickers.

One complaint (a minor one) was from a woman who paid for Reservations for 7 and only 3 were able to go, she was out \$16.

Another person got wrong information because she was told by someone on the phone that she could go to Crabtree but not exit Mt. Whitney. I believe she got wrong information from some unknowing person.

All others were 100% happy with the system.

We should be issuing permits or at least

11,
giving them out at trailheads and not in town.
For minimum impact and trail-safety we should
have someone at the trail heads 'checking the
visitors out'.

On the Mt. Whitney trail Diana W. and
Dimitria would check permits 3 mi. up the
trail. Here they turned back many that
didn't have permits. I heard that Diana turned
back 30 in one day and Dimitria 15.
That makes for a lot of unhappy campers.
Better to check them out at the trail-head
and turn back people there.

K. Inventory - one nearly full propane tank, should
last to late next season.

L. Needs for next year:

- 1, new roof for station
- 2, new indoor outdoor carpet $6\frac{1}{2}' \times 10'$

M. Recommendations

- 1, Move bear box 150' East on trail
towards ranger station. Place in front of
fallen log on trail to ranger station.
- 2, Be sure to inform campers in the
area of Guitar Lk. and above to not
build rock walls and use good sanitary
habits.