

Charlotte Lake Ranger
1997 End-Season Report

Miles Hiked - 625
Visitor Contacts - 1696
Stock Observed - 162

Citations - 1
Verbal Warnings - 23
300# trash
67 fire pits removed
63 pits cleaned & removed

VISITOR USE

With the relative light snowpack and late staffing of the backcountry rangers, visitor use was fairly busy from the onset (arrived Charlotte Lake - 6/28). The "one night camping limit" was enforced at Charlotte Lake this year (included in 1986 B/C Management Plan, but not enforced prior) and helped keep peak visitation of lake to under 30 people per night, as opposed to the 50-100 reported in previous summers. The various permit issuing agencies were made aware of this restriction early in the season, and notices were posted on bear boxes and map-signs at Kearsarge Lakes as well as Charlotte Lake. "Backcountry Basics" should also indicate the one night limit for next year's printing.

Previous Charlotte Lake rangers had warned me about boyscout troops camping at the lake, and sure enough I contacted over a dozen groups (usually between 10-15 per group) throughout the summer. From past experience, I've learned that the best method to avoid problems with boyscouts is to try to talk to the whole group (especially the adults) about minimum impact camping, and to give them

a sense that their noise level can often be offensive to other visitors. With proper education, perhaps rangers can turn around their bad reputation in the Parks. On the other end of the spectrum of wilderness ethics are the Outward Bound groups, several of which I encountered near the Kings-Kern Divide, usually crossing Harrison, Lucy's Foot or Milly's Foot passes.

Compliance with regulations was fairly good. One citation was issued for not having a permit for overnight travel. About two dozen verbal warnings were given: 13 for improper/inadequate food storage (often someone walking away from a backpack); 4 for tents on vegetation; 2 for illegal fires with extenuating circumstances (good excuses); 2 for camping too close to a stream or a trail. The citation and warnings were well received, always done in conjunction with an education talk to explain the reason for the regulations.

EMS/SAR

Three medivacs were required in my patrol area this season. The first occurred my first day of patrol, when I encountered a stock group about a mile above the Sphinx Creek crossing on the Bubb's Creek Trail. An eighty-two year old female had just fallen off of her horse,

and sustained a broken rib and multiple contusions/lacerations. With assistance she was able to walk to a LZ for helicopter evacuation — 4-1-2 responded. Two other medivacs were handled without my involvement: one at Gardiner Basin (an ALOC with 4-1-3 responding), and a bear mauling at Vidette Meadow with 5-1-1 responding (see "Bear Incidents").

A search was started in August for an overdue hiker, last seen north of Harrison Pass. I was asked to hike to this area from Gardiner Basin, but about half-way there the search was "cleared" due to the discovery of a note posted at the Roaring River Ranger Station by the overdue visitor stating he was on route, but two days late in his itinerary.

Another search was conducted for Randy Morganson in September. Rick Sanger and myself were flown to Dumbbell Lakes and searched over Observation Pass and down the drainage to the west to the Middle Fork of the Kings River, then to Simpson Meadow. Boulder caves, pools and logjams were investigated along the search route, but no significant evidence that could be connected to Randy was found.

I also participated in a technical rescue of a 6' 9", 250 pound man who had sustained a broken and/or dislocated upper right leg at the 14,000 foot level of Mt. Tyndall. Seven of us belayed him down a tricky cliff section of the "Northwest Ridge" before we were eventually joined by about twenty others to "caterpillar" the litter down the steep, boulder-filled route. At about the 13,000 ft level, a U.S. Army Blackhawk helicopter was able to fly in and hoist the patient on board, taking him to UMC.

VIP NAVE

Steve Nave, a dentist from Carlsbad, worked in my patrol area twice this summer. He and his wife, Carole, came in for two weeks in August and cleaned campsites and assisted visitors along Bobb's Creek between Center Basin and Junction Meadow. They located and removed a can dump in Center Basin, cleaned and destroyed dozens of firepits, and were instrumental in arranging the medivac of an injured visitor at Lower Vidette Meadow. He and Carole assisted me in firepit eliminations at Lake Reflection and the cleaning of the East Creek drainage.

In September, Steve Nave returned and assisted in taking down drift fences, RB monitoring and

campsite cleaning along Bubb's Creek and East Creek once again.

He and his wife's professional, courteous visitor encounters, and hard, thorough custodial work were a valuable asset to my area and to the Park Service in general.

STOCK USE / GRAZING

Stock use was moderate this season with 168 stock observed (including two llamas). About 90% of the stock were from commercial pack stations, with the remainder split between administrative and private parties. Charlotte Creek (below the drift fence) had less than ten nights used for grazing with a total of about 60 stock-nights. Most stock seen at Charlotte Lake were spot trips or food cache drops from Onion Valley Pack Station, returning the same day.

All grazable meadows were opened at the dates set for a "Normal" year. The three meadows that were monitored for residual biomass (East Vidette, Junction and East Lake) showed signs of average use with RB results similar to those of 1996.

A mare and a mule, belonging to Cedar Grove Pack Station, disappeared down Charlotte Creek

in early August, and were not seen again. Several searches by myself and packers were conducted in August and again in October. Additionally, a notice was posted at the drift fence gate requesting hikers/climbers to look, listen and smell for any signs of the stock, but none were noted.

BEAR INCIDENTS

Unfortunately there were two visitors injured by bears this summer. In July, a bear tore into a tent at Big Pothole Lake where a man had been sleeping next to his food. The man awoke and surprised the bear and was consequently bitten and clawed, inflicting moderate injuries. The California Department of Fish and Game came in the next evening and set up a tent with food in it in the same location, then shot and killed a bear that responded — hopefully, the same bear.

In August, a Sierra Club leader had fallen asleep next to boxes of food at Lower Vidette Meadow, after fending off several bears all evening. A bear grabbed a box of food and woke the man, who startled the bear which swiped the man's face causing deep lacerations. A bear tech was sent in the next day to try to identify the bear, but about a half dozen bears were seen that night at the victim's camp. (According to the Park Compendium

a "large group" with too much food to fit in a food storage box, can guard the food with 24-hour "human presence". ↪

VIP Nave placed notices regarding the bear hazard at three sign boards along trails entering Vidette Meadows and at the four food storage boxes in the area.

According to Jason Barbeau, the USFS Ranger at Onion Valley, there has been a significant decrease in food obtained by bears on both sides of Kearsarge Pass this summer. He attributes this decline to visitor education efforts by both USFS and NPS personnel, notices we have placed in problem areas, and an increased use of portable bear-proof canisters. These canisters are more readily available to purchase or rent at Eastern Sierra stores, USFS visitor centers, and at the Onion Valley campground. Having extra (this summer) food storage boxes at Charlotte Lake and Kearsarge Lakes has also helped, allowing enough storage capacity to accommodate the busiest days.

Bubb's Creek had the most problems with bears getting food, especially at the Center Basin/JMT junction camp, where there are often too many visitors using the food storage box (a larger box,

or an additional box is recommended).

Virtually all visitor contacts included stating proper food storage/protection techniques and inquiring as to any bear sightings or incidents. Most reports of bear incidents were second hand information, one party reporting of another's food being taken.

WILDERNESS PERMIT SYSTEM

There were a few problems with permits issued by the Wilderness Reservation Service early in the season (mainly multiple night camping at Charlotte Lake or Kearsarge Lakes). These were quickly rectified by phone calls by Cindy Purcell to their office in Big Pine. Most visitors are favorable to the reservation/permit system, commenting that the permit process is more convenient than when the USFS handled it exclusively.

Improvements for this summer included being able to make reservations six months prior to the starting date of the trip, instead of the the previous April 1st start. Also, approximately 20% of the quotas are allotted for walk-ups to account for no-shows (allotted amount varies according to historical no-show rates for each trailhead).

Although volunteers sometimes monitor permits at trailheads, there is nothing else done to determine what percentage of permits issued are actually used. Are backpackers "overbooking" trips and group sizes to secure contingency trips?

WORK COMPLETED

- 1) replaced approximately 20 shingles on ranger station roof
- 2) replaced 1/2 mile of wire and several fence posts at the Charlotte Lake drift fence with trail crew
- 3) cut and removed six fallen trees across various trails
- 4) removed rocks and manure routinely from trails
- 5) assisted Vance Vredenburg, frog researcher at Sixty Lakes Basin, in "tagging" frogs
- 6) did rehab on both ends of "short-cut" trail between Charlotte Lake and Glen Pass to minimize use (excess erosion)
- 7) completed RB monitoring of three meadows
- 8) took photographs of two Shorty's cabins
- 9) did rehab (eliminated) about 1/2 dozen camp spots along the northwest shore of Charlotte Lake
- 10) 67 firepits were eliminated (illegal or unnecessary)
- 11) 63 firepits were cleaned and/or reduced
- 12) about 300 pounds of trash was removed from food storage boxes, campsites and near trails
- 13) 3 maps and 9 notices were made, laminated and placed around Kearsarge Lakes and Charlotte Lake
- 14) chopped and stored about 600 pounds of firewood

FUTURE PROJECTS

- 1) place 5 new milage/direction signs at various trail junctions
- 2) place "one night limit" signs at Kearsarge Lakes and Charlotte Lake
- 3) place hooded, wooden map/notice signs at Kearsarge Lakes (2), Charlotte Lake (1), and Bubb's Creek (3)
- 4) ^{Beckerman?} rebuilt East Lake drift fence with trail crew or Cedar Grove P.S.'s assistance
- 5) rebuild window frame on southeast window of Ranger Station
- 6) B.S. Troops to move signs around.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) place additional or larger food storage box at Center Basin/JMT junction camp
- 2) restore earlier season start date for backcountry rangers to cover the high visitor usage in late June
- 3) continue to keep backcountry rangers commissioned authority to issue citations is a deterrent to violation
- 4) change Compendium to require the use of food storage boxes or bear-proof canisters along the Rae Lakes loop, Charlotte Lake, Kearsarge Lakes, and Bubb's Creek (illegal to hang food)
- 5) change Charlotte Lake ranger's lieu day — Saturday and Sunday are the busiest days of week
- 6) Wheelbarrow camp bear box issue → Lgr. box @ JMT/Ctr Basin junction + change reep - notice on BB that this is last later.

Lalbert
Diana Petricola
re: Jason

- 6) continue to fund the two Park Service positions at the USFS visitor center in Lone Pine — the quality of the information given to visitors entering the east side of the Park is greatly enhanced by their work there