

THE 1998 BENCH STATION END OF SEASON REPORT
BY KAY EDENS

The season started late due to heavy snowfalls this winter. On July 7, 1998 hiking from the Taboose Trail Head, I was able to get my first impressions. Taboose Pass at 11,500 feet had 95% snow coverage. Snow would be the primary factor in the kind of work I would be doing at the beginning of the season, such as shoveling out the ranger station, shoveling the storage boxes, rebuilding the station floor (which collapsed due the weight of the snow) and assessing passes, trails and river crossings. As the summer progressed, I worked on my usual duties. This report will focus on the following topics

- Meadow Management
- Campsites and Campfires
- Law Enforcement and Medicals
- Ranger Station
- Statistics
- Notes and planned projects
- Conclusion

Management Management:

Due to large amounts of snowfall, meadows opened late this year. South of Pinchot Pass opened August 1, Bench station area opened August 30 and Taboose Meadow opened September 15. The first stock to cross over Mather Pass was Sunday, September 6. With difficulty, stock was able to get into the Bench area.

I would like to reintroduce two proposals from last year:

I propose that the trail above Taboose Meadow be relocated to the far south side of the meadow where it would connect to the main trail that leads to Bench Lake and north of the John Muir Trail. The unmaintained stock trail that leads out of Taboose Meadow to the South Fork of the Kings River should be closed to protect archaeological and historical sites. I have had five incidents this year where individual groups, thinking they were either hiking to Pinchot Pass or hiking to Bench Lake, have been lost on this trail. One trail is all that is needed. I propose that Taboose Meadow must be rehabilitated and closed to grazing. Refer to the 1997 E.O.S. report for more details.

The damage caused by last years stock group that camped in the Bench station area is still highly visible. Grazing is poor in the Bench Station area and the lakes above the station have a delicate eco-system. I propose that the Bench Station area and the lakes above it be limited to spot trips, or stock groups less than five with a one night limit. Large stock groups can use meadows down in the South Fork of the Kings River and the meadow above Bench Lake. These areas have good grazing and can sustain stock use. Refer 1997 E.O.S report for more information.

Campsites and Campfires:

I carried out last year's proposals closing two campsites near the South Fork of the Kings River. Restoration signs are placed at these sites, and since then these sites have not been impacted by campers and have not had any recurring illegal fire rings.

Campfires are illegal above 10,000 feet and education has proven successful in decreasing illegal fires in the Bench patrol area with few exceptions. Problematic areas for reoccurring illegal fire rings are in the South Fork of the Kings River, Stripe Lakes and Taboose Meadow.

Areas where fire rings have been removed:

South Fork of the Kings River	7
Cardinal Lake	2
Arrow Peak Drainage	2
Taboose Meadow	5
Bench Lake	6
Palisade Lakes	1
Amphitheater Lake	0
Dumbbell Lakes	0
Lake Basin	0
Lake above station and station	0
Stripe Lakes	2

Most areas where fire rings occur are built when the station is closed. I predict an even more significant reduction in illegal fire rings since the station stayed open later this season.

In 1997, I removed 43 illegal fire rings; to this year I have removed only 25. Reduction is due to ranger presence and education. Not only does this reflect in the number of fire rings it also reflects in every other aspects of resource management in the area.

Rock walls, fire rings and trash constantly reappear in the Stripe Lakes area. V.I. P. Klum worked two days at Stripe Lakes removing fire rings and providing site restoration, I returned in ten days later and destroyed two fire rings and three rock walls. Stripe Lakes is easily accessible from Taboose Pass and is a popular fishing area.

I propose that all fires be placed under a 9000-foot limitation. This restriction would be uniform with the Sequoia National Park regulations. There will be less confusion among hikers as to where they can and cannot build fires. Areas between 9000 feet and 10,000 feet have limited vegetation and damage is more significant and immediate.

Law Enforcement and Medicals:

Food storage is a problem within the Bench patrol area. Hikers feel immune to bears getting into their food. I find these violators have been in violation of improper food storage more than once. I emphasize education, but I feel that I am not getting through to these people. I have put much thought into how to teach these violators about the seriousness of food storage and believe I must go one step further to get compliance. For now on, I will not only educate, but also issue warning notices. I will explain to the violator that this will be stored on dispatch's NPS computer system and can be checked by any law enforcement officer. If a law enforcement officer finds the person in violation a second time, a citation may be issued.

issue citations

On two occasions I contacted hikers in the backcountry that had no permit. A Cedar Grove Ranger had already contacted the first hikers and the ranger told them that they could continue hiking without a permit until their next food re-supply at Yosemite. Since this arrangement was made, I made one request of them that they notify my supervisor when they obtained their permit. The hikers never contacted my supervisor, so it is likely they never obtained one. In my second contact with hikers without a permit, I told them to leave the park and that when they acquired a permit they could return.

On two occasions, I contacted hikers who had obtained permits by mail. Hikers stated that they never read the terms of the permit after receiving them. I believe this to happen frequently.

I propose that all permits be hand issued. One on one education provides a greater understanding of minimum impact and it allows the park visitor to ask questions, find out about trail conditions, bear incidents, where food storage boxes are located, and to discuss alternative routes and weather.

I propose a stamp on all backcountry permits stating "violators will be cited" It is a good reminder to hikers to follow park regulations and it will provide back up for probable cause statements when citations are issued.

On Saturday, August 1, 1998, I received a report of an injured hiker with a sprained ankle. The hiker was located on the south facing side of Pinchot Pass. I packed medical equipment and an overnight backpack and hiked to the injured person's campsite. I assessed the injury and splinted the foot. I arranged for stock to pick up the injured person. Several days later, I received a report that the injured person had had a fracture fibula.

On Sunday, August 2, 1998, I assisted an injured hiker with multiple abrasion and lacerations to the legs. The injured hiker also had bad blisters on her feet. The hiker had fallen while attempting a river crossing.

Ranger Station:

I shoveled snow from the station floor and around the storage boxes. The station floor had collapsed. The support beams had split in half, and the plywood was significantly warped.

1. I pulled the plywood from the beams.
2. I measured the 2x4s, sawed them and then placed them parallel to the support beams that were broken.
3. For extra reinforcement, I placed rocks every 12 inches under the beams.
4. I dried out the plywood and then nailed it back to the beams.

Because of the work involved, I was not able to set up the station for several days. I set up the tool shed in a clearing and used this as a shelter until I finished repairing the ranger station.

Radio communication has improved since last year. In 1996, transmitting out from the Bench Station was almost impossible. This year I have been able to transmit out with no relays from rangers. There have been few problems with receiving.

Written instructions on setting up the tent are on file at the ranger station in the 1995 E.O.S. report.

Instructions for storing the solar batteries are on file at the ranger station in the 1997 E.O.S. report

A diagram to set up the solar system is on file at ranger station.

The instruction manual for the HT 1000 is on file at the ranger station.

Statistics:

Verbal Warnings	1 tent too close to water 4 no permits in the backcountry 12 improper food storage
Low Flying Aircraft	6 military aircraft 2 civilian aircraft
Rain, Hail and Snow	27 days rain and hail or snow
Visitor Contacts	412
Stock Observations	3
Miles Hiked	473 miles
Illegal Fire Rings	25 removed

Notes:

1. Items listed below needed photographing for clear presentation. I was unable to photograph due to not to having a camera issued.

- a. Stock causing erosion and law enforcement issues.

- b. Historical and prehistorical sites with the exception of a few pictures taken with my personal camera. See photos and UTM coordinates.

It is important to have a camera at the station for documentation. If a camera cannot be provided, a simple disposable camera will do.

2. I observed six large Yellow Legged Frogs in tarn next to Stripe Lakes. I saw hundreds of large tadpoles in tarn. I notified Vance Vredenburg who is doing frog research in the park.

3. I worked on the Clayton Search. The search encompassed hiking in the Sixty Lake Basin areas. VIP Klum assisted me on search team 5. After five days, father hiked out Gardner Creek and son was left at camp. Rangers were contacted on father and son locations. The father had miss read his maps and had become confused. The father and son had no significant injuries. A major problem was fatigue.

4. I worked with VIP Klum removing five fire rings in the Taboose Meadow area and two fire rings in the South Fork of the Kings River. We did campsites restoration and picked up trash.

5. I worked on the infrastructure project, providing written details on signs, measurements, historical sites, structures, and stock camps. I marked errors on maps and showed where campsites were left out. The infrastructure maps have numerous mistakes, and I recommend that backcountry rangers check all revised work again.

6. I propose that if I am told to drive an employee's personal vehicle while on duty that I am provided with:

1. Enough money to drive the vehicle to the designated location.
2. Enough gas in the tank to drive the vehicle out of the park or in the park.
3. A signed release of liability.

7. The trail crew did an excellent job working in the Bench Patrol area. I was going to recommend a certain portion of the trail be worked on next year. Trail crew repaired those portions of the trail this year.

8. A horse died of colic approximately 300 yards from the station. The trail crew cut up the horse and buried it on the ridge.

9. Visitor contacts after September 15 did not decline as expected. Hikers are still coming into the Bench patrol area.

10. Money appears to be a major issue in keeping the Bench Ranger Station open. I would like it to be noted that I have taken special care in trying to keep weight and equipment down for helicopter cost. In 1996, (for demobilization) I flew my gear in one flight. During 1997 I was able to have stock pack out trash saving space and weight. During 1998 flights in, I had less than 1000 lbs., where other stations had up to 12000 to 14000 lbs. (unsubstantiated statement - cf)

11. Various food caches have accumulated at the Bench Ranger Station over the years. The food caches take up storage space, which is limited. I flew these caches out.

Planned Projects:

1. Attend the S217 class. *****
2. Attend interpretation training at the beginning of the season.
3. Rehab and remove fire rings in the Bench Patrol Area.
4. Take measurements of station floor.
5. Build new pit toilet.
6. Continue the search for missing ranger Randy Morganson.

Conclusion:

Meadow Management: Meadows in the Bench Patrol area received little impact due to passes opening late in the season. Taboose Meadow should be closed to stock with the trail moved out of the meadow. Bench station and the lakes above the station have a delicate eco-system and should be restricted to spot trips or restricted to five stocks with a one-night limit. The meadow above Bench Lake and the South Fork of the Kings River can sustain large stock groups.

Campsites and Campfires: Through ranger presence and education, there is a remarkable decrease in illegal fires, with the exception of a few areas. A continued ranger presence is vital to the area to continue educating the public and to manage the resources in the Bench Patrol area.

Law Enforcement and Medicals: Next year I plan to write warning notices to violators for improper food storage. I will continue to send non-permit holders out of the backcountry. Permits provide the hikers with pertinent information about minimum impact regulations and restrict the flow of people in an area, minimizing impact. Medicals: Medicals were minor. Hikers were thankful to have a ranger in the area to facilitate their needs.

Ranger Station: Due to heavy snowfalls, the ranger station floor caved in. I was able to reconstruct the floor with materials at the station. Radio communications have improved. The Palmer repeater can be hit in Upper Basin, Cardinal Lake and Taboose Meadow. The solar system has been a great asset by providing stationary lighting, saving on Turbo Tornado Canisters, and throw away batteries, and its been great for running other various equipment.

Statistics: Statistics show an increase in low flying military aircraft and a reduction in illegal fires.

Notes: Notes show various work projects accomplished such as Clayton SAR, work projects with VIP Klum, and Infrastructure. Observations are also noted in this area on, frog research, archaeological research, and visitor contacts.

I did not elaborate in my report about Randy Morganson, I still continued searching for him by hiking in areas I have not been before and by taking different routes in areas that I have been in before. Having a ranger in the Bench Patrol area is vital to hikers to provide education, first aid, and law enforcement measures, and information on trails conditions and routes.

Ceremonial Fire Ring (Pinchot 7.5 4084.6 N 367.4 E) Stove (100feet below fire ring)

