

END OF SEASON REPORT, ROCK CREEK 1998

DARIO MALENGO-6/15/98-9/30

As usual alot of visitors were contacted but fewer than usual(1140 V. C.). Most contacts ~~were~~ backpackers that ~~were~~ going into upper Rock Creek and into the Mitre Basin and backpackers going on through from Upper Rock Creek to Mt. Whitney and the portals.

Of course many stock groups came through but not as many as in past seasons. Early on all groups packe~~d~~ feed ; there was no grazing until 8/17. Most of cottonwoods trips were spot trips into Upper Rock Creek and a couple to Crab-tree Meadows. Cottonwood did not graze Rock Creek at all in 1998.

Rock Creek Pack Station grazed Nathan's Meadow twice for a total of 36 stock nights. Glacier Pack Station grazed for a total of 28 stock nights. Private groups grazed for a total of apx. 25 stock nights. National Park Service grazed the most for a total of 72 stock nights.

Law enforcement activity amounted to about four verbal warnings. The most serious was telling a man with a dog to turn back before entering the park , and <sup>telling</sup> a man about to strike ~~ke~~ a match <sup>to stop</sup> to an illegal fire ~~in~~ in my 21 seasons of being a National Park ranger I have never met a visitor who has not complied to the rules when told politely and with authority.

Medical activity amounted to having a woman with a bad knee packed out by Billy from Cottonwood.

There were no SAR's this season in the Rock Creek area.

The heavy snowpack was late in melting and creeks were not safe to cross until after 7/20. Before that time hikers needed to cross in the mornings or find a suitable log.

The large cornice on New Army Pass kept hikers from coming in that way until after the first week of August and Old Army Pass until after the third week of August. Otherwise the large snowpack from the winter of 98' was melted off below 11,000 feet by the first week of July.

The military aircraft activity was alot less this season and I only called in two low fliers. Perhaps they are aware that public pressure from our National Parks does amount to something and that what happened in Italy could happen on Mt. Whitney. However the loud sound from military jets was still far too common in the upper Kern and the NPS should try harder to keep all military jet activity out of these parks.

Besides pack trips the only other commercial use in this area was the A-16 backpacking trip in late August and Carol Latimer's womens group.

No hunting was observed in this area. There was a report of a gunshot at Soldier Lake but it was second or third hand and not substantiated.

The most interesting wildlife sightings were the Bald Eagle at Funston Lake observed by myself and others and the two Ewes spotted on the southeast side of Mt. Langley.

Bear signs were observed in the Rock Creek area in late July and around September 10'th a large bear tried to get food at Lower Rock Creek and at Rock Creek Lake. A week later there were no more signs of that bear. It could have been the bear that got food at the trail crew camp at Sandy Meadow or the bear that has been causing problems at Cottonwood Lakes and at the trailhead or one up from the Kern or down from Bubbs Creek? This year's activity has been the first in over ten years in the Rock Creek area.

All Rock Creek meadows were very wet throughout the season. The sensitive plant populations in this area seem about the same. At the stock tie up area at the Rock Creek stringer meadows Sylvia (9-2-28) discovered an exotic from the Valley

'led cheeseweed' (locally called Steve's Cheeseweed).

No change was observed in any of the archeological sites. A projectile point found in 1997 on Army Creek disappeared from its location, probably due to erosion and runoff.

The Rock Creek cabin, built in 1948, is now 50 years old and qualifies as a historic structure. It is in fine condition.

The drift fence below Rock Creek meadow #2 is in need of repair or should be removed. In 1998 this fence served no purpose because no stock roamed up as high as the fence.

All signs were inventoried for the GIS sign inventory. All signs are in good condition and properly located.

All trails in the Rock Creek area are safe and stock passable. The chute going down to Rock Creek Lake and the trail between Nathan's Meadow and Rock Creek Mdw. #2 should be the next areas to be worked by the trail crew.

This year the trail crew and I worked the PCT just inside the park boundary. We improved it greatly but it could still use a couple more days work. Also the area about one and a quarter miles below Army Pass could use some erosion control and a few repairs to existing structures.

All camp areas in the Rock Creek area are in fine shape. Most people camp at one of the three Bear Box locations. The boxes and the camps associated with them are working out fine for the visitors and the area. I moved the Box on the peninsula at Soldier Lake to 400<sup>yd.</sup> south on the backside trail. This new location opens up more camping possibilities and takes the heavy impact off the overused peninsula.

firewood availability has not been a problem for those wishing fires.

minimum impact sheet needs to be corrected to read "fires are allowed one quarter mile below the intersection of the Army Pass trail and Soldier Crk."

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Permit issuing in the Lone Pine office is ineffective as far as getting good information to the visitors, which is one of the main reasons for permits. Being the National Park Service helps to fund this we should encourage the Forest Service to move permit issuing back to the trailhead. Between Cottonwood, Whitney Portals and Onion Valley five people could rotate between these stations to give permits and have trail time. A big problem with the Lone Pine Office is wrong information. This has been the case since I began working on the eastside in 1980.

A recommendation concerning meadows and grazing would be to include the small meadow adjacent to the ranger station sign within the closure of the ranger station meadow. The problem however is that livestock doesn't recognize these closures (contrary to what L. Stowell says about NPS stock knowing how to read). An example was with the trail crew stock which grazed the Lower Meadow and in the middle of the night moved up to the closed Ranger Station Meadow. Their livestock heavily impacted the R.S. sign meadow and then moved to the closed R.S. Meadow to feed, and one of their animals got totally bogged down to its belly (that blows the notion that stock doesn't go into wet areas). There is no way to enforce these specific closures. The only way to protect these meadows is to close them to all grazing and requiring stock parties to pack feed. We make such a big deal about backpackers adhering to Minimum Impact but condone stock impacts **100** times greater than any of those made by backpackers.

NEEDS: # 4 Ceramic soup bowls

ON HAND: Good cooking utensils, cast iron, pressure cooker (stainless)

Tools: Shovels (3), Rake (1), double bit axe, maul