

BEARPAW END OF SEASON REPORT 1999

The 1999 season at Bearpaw went by very quickly and was quite busy. There were five medicals, one serious. Many visitors came through and requested information or just wanted to talk to the ranger. Weather was mostly very good and the backcountry was very accessible. Although a dry year, the flowers were still extraordinary and the Bearpaw water system had plenty of water all season. The Ranger Station was staffed from June 22 through September 29. The High Sierra Camp was open from June 18 through September 18.

Incidents

There was a major trauma medical on July 25 to rescue John Sturdevant, Kaweah Trail Crew leader after he took a 200 foot tumbling fall down steep slickrock above the trail crew camp on Lone Pine Creek. John was first discovered injured by a group of Outward Bound students who heard him yelling as they hiked across the canyon. Two of them went to his aid as the others immediately notified their leaders who all happened to be nearby. Two raced to notify me as the other 5 leaders went to help. By the time I arrived on scene after being helicoptered in from Bearpaw, the Outward Bound leaders had examined John, anchored him with a chest harness, carefully lowered him to a safer location, dressed his wounds, and put him in shock position. All people on scene were at least EMT's and some had IV training and work ambulances in the off season. Parkmedic Eric Gabriel arrived on scene and with everyone's assistance there were 9 medically trained people working on John. Luckily Lemoore's helicopter rescue team was able to extricate John by winch before dark as we would not have been able to carry him to our helicopter that evening. The assistance provided by the Outward Bound people was crucial to evacuating John safely and quickly.

There were four other medicals, all non-stat, from the Bearpaw area that were evacuated by helicopter or stock.

There was one mule incident where a packer from the Cottonwood Pack Station lost one of his mules over the side of the High Sierra Trail just east of Bearpaw. He didn't plan on reporting it but some visitors notified us and the incident was investigated.

There was one citation issued for a dog in the backcountry at the Pinto Lake camping area.

PATROL AREAS

Bearpaw

The Bearpaw area had many visitors stopping by to ask questions, give us information, or just to chat. There were visitors from both the High Sierra Camp and the campground. The whole area wintered well and there were no new problems with any of the facilities. There was one log in the trail in the campground and an Outward Bound service project took care of that. The pit toilets are still intact and have at least a partial season of growing room, although the doors could use some hinge and latch work.

Hamilton Lake

This area again received extremely heavy use and often there were many more people than available campsites. The overflow camping area below the lake worked well this year with large groups and when the lake was really busy. At least weekly patrols helped keep the area clean and contacting campers headed into the area helped also. The areas that have been roped off to speed revegetation are looking better with many plants moving in. The pit toilet was damaged again at the beginning of the season, probably by a bear, but was completely rebuilt and moved at the end of the season by the Kaweah trail crew and looks great.

Tamarack Lake

This beautiful lake gets limited use because of its location at the end of a trail although it is on the way to many cross-country destinations. The campsites stayed quite clean all summer with illegal fire rings only present at the beginning. There were no bear incidents there and no stock use reported.

High Sierra Trail West

This seemed to be a normal year of use at the three major camping areas along the trail. Mehrten Creek again got the most use because of its location midway to Bearpaw and the presence of a food storage locker. The heavy use of this area necessitated the combined efforts of the trailhead staff and the Bearpaw ranger. Between all of us it stayed relatively clean all summer. A couple of times after a large scout troop or two it was really dirty but in these instances prompt cleanup took care of the problem. The Nine Mile Creek camping area gets quite a bit of use but its concentrated at one or two of the more obvious campsites. The bears tend to frequent this area but I received no reports of incidents this year. This camping area doesn't seem to get as dirty as Mehrten so is easier to maintain in a clean state. The Buck Creek camping area is very small and gets little use although the placement this year of a sign pointing to the food storage locker is likely to increase use because previously many people hiked by without noticing the camping area.

Redwood Meadow

This is the first year in the last four years that this meadow has seen any grazing use because of a two year closure followed by an extremely wet season. The Hockett trail crew spent considerable time and effort fixing drift fences and setting up water for the stock. They also spent time working on the cabin, tack room and surrounding trails. Their stock used the upper section of the meadow which looked very lightly used at the end of the season. The lower section of the meadow was set up for private use and got at least one group this season. There were many deep footprints from the use down there and some use trails but otherwise the vegetation was dense. The cabin is in good shape and is well tended by the trail crew. There continue to be additional scratches on the exterior by bears but there is no structural damage and a coat of paint would camouflage much of these. Quite a few visitors stop here while doing a loop out of Mineral King or Crescent Mdw. but the area does not look heavily used. While there this summer with Bob Meadows, we found many Native American granite bowl sites on the far side of the meadow from the cabins.

Cliff Creek

This camping area at the Timber Gap trail junction gets heavy use but is frequently visited by both Mineral King trailhead rangers and the Bearpaw ranger. It can accumulate quite a bit of trash but was not too bad this summer. The campsites and food storage locker are in good shape and the trail was moved out of the camping area and wet spot to a much better location a few yards away. The trail crew also blasted a few rocks out of the water crossing to make it easier.

Pinto Lake

This area continued to be closed to fires and I didn't discover any new fire rings this season. The two-door food storage locker handle was fixed early in the season and functioned properly the rest of the season. The meadow did not look as if it had been used heavily this season and I only received reports of use a couple of times by the Mineral King Pack Station. The fire closure seems to be helping the issue of denuded biomass but there still is very little downed wood on the ground. I recommend continuing the closure until this situation is remedied.

Spring Lake

This lake's location at the far end of my patrol area makes it unfeasible to patrol as often as I would like but the Mineral King trailhead rangers go through there at least weekly and take very good care of the area. This season there were no major issues here.

Middle Fork Trail

This trail gets most of its use during the spring and fall as it is extremely hot in the summer. It received very little use this year but was quite passable.

Other Areas

The Elizabeth Pass trail didn't suffer any major damage this season but is still difficult to follow at times. The Kaweah crew worked on the lower section and it was much improved. Lonely Lake area got very little use except for Outward Bound groups but little evidence of their impact can be found. The HST from Hamilton Lake to Kaweah Gap was fine for hikers but impassable to stock due to some large boulders until later in the season. The drier conditions made it possible for a longer camping season at Precipice Lake but other than spaghetti thrown in the outlet, there were minimal signs of use. The Over-The-Hill trail was in good shape and the 27 switchback trail across the canyon was much improved by a huge reroute and brushing job done by the Kaweah Crew.

High Sierra Camp

This year the management of the camp was taken over by Delaware North Parks Services, the new concessionaire for Sequoia NP. They spent considerable time and money refurbishing the camp by painting, rebuilding sagging structures and just spiffing up the place. It looks great. The employees had all worked out there some time in the past and were happy to be back. They were manager Carolyn Pistilli, Joni Badley, Major Bryant, and Bryan Czibesz. Their experience, enthusiasm, cooking expertise, and wilderness knowledge made this transition season go by effortlessly and the guests all seemed extremely happy with their time at Bearpaw. It was a joy working with all of them and they were of invaluable help all season long. It was, as usual, great having them as neighbors.

Wolverton Pack Station

This was Jerry Page's third season at Wolverton. This year he had more stock and was able to resupply the camp more effectively and was able to evacuate minor injuries when needed. His mules are mostly quite small, so at times, the weight of the patient is definitely an issue. The first part of the season he went through many packers but midway he hired Doug who used to work in Cedar Grove and he did an excellent job this year.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Bears

There were a few third hand reports of bears getting food in the patrol area but I didn't get any solid facts. The packers reported a bear that was very hard to chase away and at the camp there were many sightings. One of these was also hard to chase but none of these bears caused any problems and didn't return after being chased a few times.

Other Wildlife

Mountain lions were seen a few times in the patrol area along with many tracks and scat. There were many Golden Eagle sightings, Red Tailed Hawks, Cooper and Sharp Shinned Hawks and a few Goshawks. Two birders came through doing sampling and gave me a list of birds netted at Lone Pine Mdw. There was a pair of Great Blue Herons that seemed to be spending the summer at the lower Hamilton Lake. The local Bearpaw marmot population looked to be the normal size but looked like they had mange again this year. This was the first year I saw a scorpion in the Sierra and it was on the front porch of the ranger station. I was also lucky enough to see a sharp-shinned hawk with a robin in its talons on the Kern-Kaweah.

Meadows

Pinto Lake Mdw. and Lone Pine Mdw. both received very little use this year. The opening date for Lone Pine was extended again this year and has been every year and I feel that it is such a wet meadow that it needs to be on the late opening date list. I believe that Pinto Lake Mdw. received low use because of the fire restriction but it is possible that there just weren't that many trips planned there anyway. Redwood Meadow got used by both the park stock during trail crew's stay there and by private stock users. The amount of use was low enough that little grazing effect can be seen other than some deep hoofprints in the lower wet section of the meadow.

WATER SYSTEM

The water system provided plenty of water this year although the winter was relatively dry. Due to the more stringent regulations set by the state of California, the turbidity levels of the daily water samples often were not low enough although all water samples were clean of bacteria when tested. There is also discussion about turning over all or part of the monitoring responsibilities to the concessionaire. Meetings are in progress to work out details of possible solutions to the recurring problem of high turbidities and to finalize the division of duties between the park and concession.

TRAILS

Most trails in the area fared quite well this past winter and the Kaweah and Hockett crews again did a fantastic job of clearing and maintaining the trails in the Bearpaw patrol area. As previously noted, the Hockett crew did a lot of work in the Redwood Meadow area. The Kaweah crew was stationed close to Bearpaw and was extremely helpful anytime assistance was needed for any project. Josh and Tony helped with an Outward Bound service project in the campground, the whole crew helped anytime I asked and I was able to assist them with their blasting a few times. After Jaybo (John) was injured, I spent more time checking in with the rest of the crew and hiking past the worksite to see how morale was. I was highly impressed with how hard they all worked to finish their projects and how dedicated they all are. They did an excellent job this summer.

CABIN MAINTENANCE

The ranger station is still deteriorating. This year one of the park volunteers offered to help paint the front but we were unable to get the paint in time for him to be able to do it. The shutters are still large, eroding pieces of plywood that are railed into the hole-riddled trim around the windows. The doorknob was finally replaced this season and is working properly. The solar electrical system works great and the refrigerator, water heater, and stove continue to operate well. The station was left extremely clean with all cabinet surfaces scrubbed, all plumbing fixtures cleaned, all bedding and other materials bagged and sealed, and the floors swept and double mopped. The solar panels are in the bathroom and most other items are elevated for the winter. I hope the mice and any other visitors don't do too much damage this year.

TRAILHEAD

This season we were lucky to have two new trailhead rangers who performed their jobs like they had been at it for a few seasons already. Tracy Sokol and Shawn Murphy both did excellent jobs writing the permits, giving accurate and entertaining minimum impact talks to the public, providing good trail information, and performing useful and effective trail patrols. The Lodgepole trailhead operation writes many permits and I again want to emphasize how much difference a third trailhead ranger could have on the efficacy of the system and the service of the visitor. With a third person, the rangers would be able to do more trail patrols, thus learning the area more quickly and getting updated information, they would be able to contact more people in the field where it is most effective, more of the frontcountry trails could be covered (currently they get very little attention), and more projects could be undertaken. It would be a needed help to the surrounding wilderness area and to the visitor to have a sufficiently staffed trailhead operation in Lodgepole.

SUMMARY

It has been a busy and highly enjoyable season at Bearpaw. I was able to cover over 500 miles of hiking and investigated a few off trail areas I had not yet seen. The patrol area is highly varied, full of wildlife, and has an amazing diversity of wildflowers. I would be very happy to return to this station.

COMPLETED PROJECTS

- Coordinated and supervised three service projects with Outward Bound.
- Revised and updated EMS pack and supplies at station.
- Fixed seat at Hamilton pit toilet before it was rebuilt.
- Installed sign at Buck Creek camping area.
- Assisted trail crew with blasting and other projects.
- Inspected and cleaned equipment at station.
- Routine cleaning of all firerings, campsites, and pit toilets in patrol area.

Routine maintenance of water system.

NEEDS FOR NEXT SEASON

Min/max thermometer
Packer scale
Safe(for weapon)
Paint and painting supplies
Canvas for director's chairs
Floor wax for linoleum
More p-cord
Long matches
A full size pack w/good suspension for EMS kit(snow leopard from cache?)
A waterproof tarp with grommet holes
Steel wool
Twist ties
Cup hooks
Holey envelopes
9 propane tanks for season
Insect guide
Set of OP & NP airways
Sufficient climbing gear to access a patient initially
1 gal. Simple green

List of Bearpaw Rangers

1963	Jolyon (J.P.) Van Ettinger
1964	Robert Simpson
1965	Pat Coplin
1966-7	John Kline
1968	Garriett (Art) Janssen
1969	Madison (Skip) Hinchman
1970-1	Roger Barclay
1972-8	Dana Abell
1979-84	Peter Pellegrin
1985-6	Lo Lyness
1987-90	Richard Perrelli
1991-3	Bob Meadows
1994	Jane Weisenberger
1995	Catie Stephenson
1996-9	Nina Weisman