

McClure Meadow Ranger  
(Dave Gordon)  
1999 End-Season Report

VISITOR CONTACTS AND BACKCOUNTRY PATROLS

	<u>Visitor Contacts</u>	<u>Miles Patrolled</u>
June (10 days) -	122	49
July -	304	211
August -	831	172
September -	151	156
October (7 days) -	34	41
Totals	1442	629

There were a record number of PCTers, traveling the JMT from south to north this year (estimates ranged from 200-300 starting at the Mexican border), in part due to last summer's heavy snow pack which made travel through the Sierra difficult in June, July and early August (1998). Consequently, I encountered mostly PCTers (10-15 per day - about 90% of contacts) the first 10 days of the season. Afterwards, there were a large number of hikers (about 50%) doing the JMT (mostly north to south, ending at Mt Whitney), about 30% hiking North Lake to South Lake (or vice versa), about 15% coming in from Florence Lake, and about 5% hiking over Lamarck Col. Organized groups consisted of eleven Boy Scout troops, three Outward Bound (all in upper Goddard Canyon), two church groups, one Sierra Club outing, and a "3 Corner Round" trip.

## STOCK USE / GRAZING

169 stock were seen in the backcountry with 83 stock users. Stock consisted of 124 horses/mules, 30 llamas, and 15 burros. Of the 24 groups contacted, 5 were administrative, 7 were private, and 12 were commercial operators ( Bishop Pack Station, High Sierra Pack Station, Rock Creek Pack Station, Muir Trail Ranch, Rainbow Pack Station, and Trailhead and Co. Llama Treks).

Most grazing occurred at Evolution Meadow (moderately grazed) which opened per "normal year" schedule on July 1<sup>st</sup>. McClure, Colby and Darwin Meadows' grazing openings were delayed two weeks from July 15<sup>th</sup> to August 1<sup>st</sup> and experienced relatively light grazing. Only one party (horse and mule) was seen up Goddard Canyon — day ride to Martha Lake, with overnight grazing at Hell-for-Sure Junction. (see "Recommendations" 1→4)

## LAW ENFORCEMENT INCIDENTS

Two citations were issued for dogs in the Park backcountry. Fifteen verbal/written warnings were given as follows: (6) tents on grass; (3) camps too close to water; (1) camp too close to trail; (1) dog on JMT (followed packer from Muir Trail Ranch); (2) one night grazing limit; (1) building an extraneous firepit (near existing ones); and one for small pieces of trash in camp.

In addition, numerous parties were told to hang their food higher off the ground (10' min) or to hang food further away from the tree trunk (8' min.). The citations and verbal warnings were all well received, and always done in conjunction with education (the reason for the regulation).

### MEDICAL INCIDENTS

Miraculously, there were no searches or medivacs in this patrol area this summer, and only a few minor medical incidents consisting of the following:

7/16: cleaned and dressed blisters at Ranger Station

8/5: examined sore knee at Sapphire Lake

8/28: examined sore ankle at McClure Meadow

(both of the above joint patients were advised to use cold therapy, rest and elevate the leg for a day, and to report to me if the pain persisted, which did not occur — neither joint had swelling, discoloration or grating upon flexure/rotation)

A couple of other visitors had symptoms of mild altitude sickness and/or dehydration and improved with copious drinking and rest.

### SERVICE INCIDENTS

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, I met with trail crew (5-5-9 and 5-5-18) at the Cony Meadow drift fence to rebuild the gate.

We cut, stripped, notched and erected three new gate posts with four cross-members (pole supports), and made two new sliding gate poles. The two paired posts were wired and spiked together.

On August 26<sup>th</sup>, I met with Charlie Hellen and Tim Feely of Sierra National Forest at McClure Meadow Ranger Station. We discussed grazing regulations and drift fences in the Park, and their effectiveness in moderating stock impact on the meadows. We also talked about bear incidents and various food storage techniques for packers (they were using metal, bear-proof panniers).

Numerous visitor assistance throughout the summer consisted of cross-country route advice; camping locations; good fishing spots; trail conditions; weather forecasts; repairing water pumps (twice); repairing a stove; supplying food (four times); supplying insect repellent or sunblock; repairing a pack belt strap; and making five llama "boots" out of screen, burlap and packing tape. Also, two hikers with only day gear arrived at the Ranger Station at dusk after losing their llama group (with their food and sleeping gear). They were fed dinner, breakfast and supplied with sleeping gear for the night (good thing I happened to be there, as it got down to 26°F that night).

On August 11<sup>th</sup>, two hikers assisted me in dragging a dead llama 300 feet from its make-shift burial site next to the Goddard Canyon trail, a short ways up from the bridge/junction (not a pleasant task).

RANGER STATION

Several repairs/improvements were made to the ranger station early in the season: the door was removed and one inch was cut off of the bottom such that it would open and close without scraping the floor; boards were cut and nailed to the sill plate (door frame) and the door bottom to make a rodent-proof seal; a removable table to accommodate three people was constructed; numerous gaps in the logs were chinked with wood strips/plugs to keep rodents out; the two (poor) wood ladders were dismantled and combined to make one good one; an external antenna was mounted on the roof apex (unfortunately the reception/transmission does not improve with its use).

The condition of the ranger station is fair and does not require the proposed dismantling/renovation imminently, in my opinion. The roof is in good shape (no leaks), and no rodents were able to get into the main, lower living area. Between fifty and seventy mice were trapped in the attic, but were not

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bothersome as long as mousetraps were routinely set.

### WILDLIFE OBSERVATIONS

The only rare/unusual animals that I observed were a long-tailed weasel near the ranger station in early season, and a pine martin in the same location in late season. Only one bear was seen early season in lower Goddard Canyon.

### TRASH REMOVAL

Approximately 200 pounds of trash was collected in the backcountry, hiked to the ranger station or the Goddard Junction bridge, and packed out by Park or commercial packers. Trash consisted of cans, bottles, old fence wire, an aluminum chair and lots of campfire foil.

### FIRERINGS

157 firerings were cleaned and/or reduced.

71 firerings were eliminated that were either illegal or extraneous (unnecessary).

### MEADOW MONITORING

Two meadows were monitored for residual biomass: Colby and Evolution Meadows. Colby Meadow had only a "reference plot", as there was evidence of very light grazing and it was uniform throughout the

entire meadow — the same plot as previous years was used. Evolution Meadow was monitored using a moderately grazed "core plot" and a lightly grazed "reference plot", again with the same sites as previously done. Although Evolution Meadow was the most heavily grazed meadow in this patrol area, it has a high grazing capacity and experienced much less grazing damage than other meadows that I have previously monitored (i.e. Scaffold Meadow, Junction Meadow, Upper Vidette Meadow, East Lake Meadow). Darwin Meadow had only three or four stock groups spend the night (30-40 stock nights), but shows signs of heavy impact damage due to its boggy nature. As this meadow is well away from the trail and has a stock camp (with hitchrail) not used by hikers, I consider it a "sacrifice meadow", and would not want to reduce its use only to have more impact on Colby or McClure Meadows.

Also, four 7½ min. "Meadow" Quad maps were reviewed and corrected for meadow and regulation accuracy ("Meadow Vegetation of SEKI, and Regulations Pertaining to Selected Meadows" for new GIS layer).

TRAILS

Trailcrew cleared fourteen trees crossing the JMT in early July. I cleared several small trees crossing the Goddard Canyon Trail with a handsaw.

A second trailcrew reconstructed a rock, creek crossing below Wanda Lake, and cleared water bar drainages in late season. The JMT from Muir Pass to Piute Creek is in relatively good shape and no significant work is needed.

Throughout the summer on routine patrols, trails were cleared of small rocks (stumblers) and horse/mule manure eliciting many favorable comments from hikers.

DRIFT FENCES

As previously mentioned, the Cony Meadow drift fence gate was completely rebuilt with the assistance of trail crew. Additionally, the other two drift fence gates (below Evolution and McClure Meadows) each had two new gatepoles made, and five connecting logs (pole supports) on the McClure fence gate were replaced. All three fences are in good shape, and do not require more than routine maintenance in the immediate future.

BRIDGES

A log rail and support post on the Goddard Junction bridge were broken by a mule in late August. The logs were replaced by trail crew in early September. All three bridges are now in good shape.



## RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

The first eighteen days of the season, I was not able to communicate with anyone in the Park due to a problem in the repeater chain ("Evolution" → "White Bark" → "Park Ridge"). Fortunately, I was able to contact Sierra National Forest Dispatch on their "Givens", and they did an excellent job of relaying messages. Also, this is the second consecutive year that I was issued an HT-1000 that would not "hit" the primary repeater (no trailing tone on transmission). A King radio replacement arrived on June 26<sup>th</sup>, but had only two disposable batteries and a clamshell battery case for "AA"s — the radio would not transmit with even new "AA"s. On July 14<sup>th</sup>, both the HT-1000 and the King were replaced with fully functional HT-1000 and MT-1000 (better transmission) radios. Throughout the summer, there has been an intermittent transmission problem in one of the repeaters such that every few seconds a word drops out — radio shop personnel have been working on it.

## BEAR INCIDENTS

Only three bear incident reports were taken this summer, all on August 20<sup>th</sup>, and all for the same large, adult black bear. He/she had obtained food (inadequately hung) at McClure, tried to get hung food at Colby (chewed branch), and tried to get into a food canister at Darwin Meadow. These incidents came two days after having reported to Craig Cavanna "... there are no bear problems in Evolution Valley." No other incidents were reported.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Adjust opening dates for McClure, Colby and Darwin Meadows to 8/1 for a "normal" year, 8/15 for a "wet" year, and 7/15 for a "dry" year (this summer was the dry end of a "normal" year and these meadows were way too wet for the scheduled 7/15 opening)\*
- 2) Allow multiple (2-3) nights grazing in pocket meadows between Colby and Darwin Meadows for walking parties with burros or llamas\*
- 3) Close Martha Lake to all stock travel — the route goes through a boggy meadow about 1/2 mile below the lake that does not dry out enough to prevent severe impact damage from any stock travel\*
- 4) As many former McClure Meadow Rangers have suggested, if McClure Meadow were closed to grazing, visitors would be able to enjoy a totally natural stock-free, grazing-free, manure-free sub-alpine meadow in the Park (I feel that Big Wet Meadow in the Roaring River patrol area should also be closed to grazing for the same reason.) The closure of McClure Meadow to grazing would not unduly inconvenience stock users, nor overburden other Evolution Valley meadows. It would require an additional drift fence above the meadow.

\* these recommendations were submitted to Silvia Hultain via Bob Meadows on 8

5) Construct a bridge across Evolution Creek at the JMT crossing below Evolution Meadow - this would allow the closing and rehabilitation of the alternate, high water route that goes through Evolution Meadow, as well as making the crossing safe.

6) (Again) limit cross-country groups to 6-8 in number (as Yosemite) - Davis Lake, Martha Lake, Darwin Bench, and the Ionian Basin all have limited camping sites, such that large groups cause excessive impact damage (from multiple tents).

7) Obtain a Motorola MT-1000 radio with a telescopic antenna and an adequate supply of disposable batteries (12-16) for the McClure Meadow Ranger. Several comparison tests made with Craig Cavanna proved that the transmission quality was noticeably better than the HT-1000. The radio shop has stated that there are not enough MT-1000s in the Park\*, but VIPs and trail crew are routinely issued them - I feel that a Backcountry Ranger should have a priority for one if other radios (HT-1000 or King) are inferior in the corresponding patrol area. (Please program with both Sierra & Inyo National Forest Dispatches.)

According to Bob Meadows, the Ash Mt. warehouse has an abundance of MT-1000 disposable batteries.

(\* Cindy Purcell, Rob Hayden and myself attempted to obtain a MT-1000 for McClure from the Radio Shop in June.)

DATE	WHERE OBSERVED	Camp/ Trail	DESTINATION (Area to be grazed)	# of Stock	# of People	(P) /A	Kevin (**See Below**) Dierkes
7/26/99	Evolution Mdw	E Mdw	Evolution Mdw	6 <del>burros</del>	12	P	Mark Dupont (3 Corner Ranch) P.O. Box 347, Orleans, CA 95556
7/27/99	Goddard Canyon Inct	E Mdw	Evolution Mdw	6	1	C	Zack Hannah Bishop Pack Outfitters
7/28/99	McClure Mdw RS	Piute Creek	Piute Creek (no grazing)	3 <del>llamas</del>	4	P	Agustin Capuchino 31760 Elliot North Fork, CA
8/5/99	Muir Pass	E Mdw	Big Pete Mdw	12 <del>llamas</del>	3	C	Trailhead & Co. Llamas Treks Julian Arellano; Warner Springs, CA
8/5/99	between Darwin & Colby	Same	between Darwin & Colby	3 <del>llamas</del>	3	P	Melanie Gerside Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546
8/5/99	McClure Mdw	Darwin	Darwin Mdw	6	3	C	Lena Cunningham Pack Outfitters
8/7/99	McClure Mdw	Same	McClure Mdw	7	2	C	Mike & Bo Cunningham Pack Outfitters
8/7/99	Cony Mdw	Cony	Evolution Mdw	3 <del>llamas</del>	2	P	Marion Davidson 9494 Manzanita; Apple Valley
8/10/99	Cony Mdw	Cony	Hutchinson Mdw	8	3	C	Roger Rainbow Pack Station
8/12/99	Hell-for-Sure Inct	Same	Hell-for-Sure Inct	2	1	C	Don Mac Cunningham Pack Outfitters
8/14/99	McClure Mdw	Same	McClure Mdw	9 <del>llamas</del>	8	C	Julian Arellano Trailhead & Co.; Warner Springs, CA
8/18/99	McClure Mdw	E Mdw	Evolution Mdw	12	2	C	Ed & Wyatt Bishop Pack Outfitters
8/19/99	McClure Mdw	Same	McClure Mdw	2 <del>burros</del>	2	P	Steve Steward (Ross Rentals) 9430 Twin Lake Ave, Oranburg, CA
8/25/99	Colby Mdw	Same	between Colby & Darwin Mdw	7 <del>burros</del>	8	P	Bill Wyman Thatcher School - Ojai, CA
8/26/99	Darwin Mdw	Same	Darwin Mdw	13	7	C	Jason & Terry Rock Creek Pack Station
8/26/99	McClure RS	Same	McClure Mdw	5	2	A	Charlie Hollar & Tim Feely USFS - Sierra NF
8/30/99	McClure RS	(lower end) Same	McClure Mdw	2 <del>llamas</del>	1	P	John Harbinson 4813 Grumman Av, Ridgecrest, CA
9/2/99	Evolution Mdw	Colby Mdw	Florence Lake	10	2	A	Clint 5-5-8 NPS Packer
9/13/99	Darwin Mdw	Darwin	Mdw between Colby & Darwin	10	1	A	Clint NPS Packer
9/13/99	Colby Mdw	Same	Same	3	1	C	Ken Cunningham Pack Outfitters
9/13/99	Colby Mdw	Same	Same	4	1	C	Vince Slony Muir Trail Ranch
9/15/99	Evolution Mdw	Same	Same	14	4	C	Mike Morgan Bishop Pack Station
9/15/99	Evolution Mdw	Darwin	Mdw between Colby & Darwin	10	2	A	Clint & Ned NPS
10/5/99	McClure RS	Darwin	Darwin	12	2	A	Clint NPS