

Roaring River End of Season Report 2001

By Greg Muller

Introduction

This was my first season as the Roaring River backcountry ranger, and I really enjoyed the challenges in learning this new area. I rode into the backcountry on June 27th with Catie Karplus, the Roaring River Ranger of the previous four summers. It was a hot dry dusty trail, and looked more like August than June. Needless to say this set the tone for the season. The meadow use would need to be watched very carefully. Having Catie come in with me was a huge help in setting up the station, especially the water system. Plus being able to talk about the meadows, and areas of concern. My boss John Stobinski was also new to the Roaring River operation, and together we did what we could to figure everything out. My goals were to concentrate my patrols on the four main trails out from the station, up to Colby, Elizabeth, and Avalanche passes, and out to Comache meadow. I also patrolled into some higher elevation Lake Basins, which seemed to be popular off trail routes, Big Brewer, Sphinx, and Big Bird Lakes.

Visitor Use

The park expected a heavy stock use summer, due to the Horse Corral Pack Station getting lots of inquires for trips this summer. Fortunately these large numbers never came to pass. Most stock use seems to head up Cloud canyon. Backpacker magazine also ran an article about Deadman canyon and the different loops you could make in the area involving this canyon. Since I hadn't worked this area before I had nothing really to compare it to, but overall use seem pretty steady. With the Sillman, Elizabeth passes loop being most popular among the backpackers.

Stock Use

Scaffold meadow was the most used area with 285 known stock nights, led by our trail-crew with 144 of them. The Lackey section was only used 15 nights. I was able to persuade the commercial outfitters to avoid using it this area, and they accounted for only 18 stock nights there. Overall there were

only about 150 commercial stock nights all summer. I also only talked with seven private parties, resulting in 282 stock nights. Catie had also been concerned about use at the Grave, and I tried to steer people away from using it. I believe there was only one spot trip in the area, resulting in less than 10 stock nights. Cement Table was the hardest hit area, but the impacts were on the main campsite, with the hitchrail, and not the meadows. The camp there is right next to a drift fence, below camp, and I was able to encourage the users to turn their animals out, on the other side of the fence. Garth Maze the head packer for Horse Corral would also let some of his animals out at the Big Wet Meadow drift fence above the Cement Table area. The camp was used about two weeks straight, and as a result new social trails have formed. The users also didn't rake up, and spread the manure piles outside of camp, so that needs to be addressed. I would highly recommend that, as a project for any interested volunteer stock group next season. Overall the meadows are in good shape. I tried to lead by example, moving my own stock around to graze, I used a total of ten different meadows, and I feel this helped promote good stewardship of the area.

Horse Corral Pack Station

It was a pleasure to work with Charlie Mills, the manager at the pack station, and his head packer Garth Maze. Charlie has gone through a Leave no trace Stock users course, and has shown a real willingness to work with me, on where to camp, and graze his stock. We have discussed the use in Cloud canyon this season, and he has told me, he will only plan trips into Deadman canyon next year, to help give Cloud a rest. Garth is also a master farrier, and we hired him to shoe my horses a couple times. Once it was done at my station, which was a big help, since I didn't have to leave the backcountry.

Trails

The trail-crew was working in my patrol area about eleven weeks this summer, with about five weeks out of Ranger meadow, and another five weeks working out of my station area, on two different hitches. The remaining week they worked up towards Colby pass from their Grand Palace Hotel camp. Zack Merten was the crew leader, and impressed me very much. His crew did excellent work. They filled in some serious ruts in the Ranger meadow area, and put in some new steps there. At the station area, they finished working on the bridge approach, and support, putting in the fourth wall they couldn't get to last year. They also put in a nice causeway,

below the station, and swinging gate drift fence. The area had been real wet, and boggy. There are still some serious ruts in the upper Canyons, and the Avalanche pass area received some erosion problems due to heavy rains in early July. There was also a rockslide affecting six switchbacks just below Colby pass that will need to be addressed next summer. That trail is now not passable for stock.

Incidents

It was a quiet summer as far as emergencies are concerned. There were no searches, or serious medical situations. On July 3, while still at Seville Lake, Zach had to deal with a possible elevation sickness case. An Outward Bound student, was packed out. But there were other issues with that group, and a mutiny was going on at the time. Horse Corral packed them out, and it sounded like the kid was feeling great at their Pack Station that night. I also had an emergency room nurse come by the station on August 23rd, Marcia Male. She had a bum knee, but it was a preexisting condition, and she wanted no help, so we just filled out a run sheet and AMA the incident. Compliance with our park regulations this summer was excellent. Other than a few food storage warnings everyone did a great job.

Maintenance

I maintained, and cleaned over 30 fire-rings on a regular basis. I also spent at least two weeks working on putting up, and repairing the 13 area drift fences, and two pasture fences. I also maintained the fence around the Ranger Station. I am a bit confused on why we have so many drift fences. I was always under the impression that drift fences were for protecting the resource. The only two fences that seem to be doing that are the ones below the station towards Sugarloaf, which is to keep the stock out of very wet area. Otherwise the fences just seem to be for convenience. The only one that didn't need repairs, was the one at Big Wet Meadow, but that one is in a thick aspen grove, which I can't see stock fighting through. So placement of fences was somewhat confusing. The only one that really uses the landscape around it, was the gate at the Grave. I spoke to Eric Morey about this convenience matter, and he said that historically, stock would run down the canyons and end up in Scaffold if we didn't have the fences.

Seville / Ranger Lakes

The Ranger Lakes Ranger Station wasn't manned this summer, but was patrolled by the front country rangers out of Grant Grove. I made one patrol into the area for an orientation, and to check on the ranger cache. I found the cache in good shape, but was disappointed on what I found at Seville Lake, the area has been overused, and heavily impacted. The fire-rings were all oversized, and in need of being reduced, and emptied, most were overflowing with ash. I rehabilitated the stock site, which had just had a party stay there that let their animals graze along the shore; the area is closed to grazing. There was also evidence of tying to trees for long periods of time, with some trees right on the waters edge. I also found lots of garbage in all the camps, and about 20 pounds of trash, and discarded food in the bear box. Turns out it was left by the same Outward Bound group, that Zach had the medical with. Later in the summer I mentioned to one of their instructors, Drew, that I thought this would be a great location for there project work, and he seem to agree, saying they use that area a lot.

Wildlife / Bears

I saw my first Bobcat this summer, just about a half mile up from the Ranger Station towards Deadman canyon. There were very few bear sighting, until the last week of the season. Then they started to move around, I even took a report of one at 12,000 feet, going over Colby pass. There was only one bear incident, and that occurred at my station. I had a large bear chew on the corner of the cabin, bedroom area. I chased it off, and never saw it again. I patched the damage with a piece of sheet metal.

General Comments / Suggestions

I think we need to have metal signs for all our meadow areas that have stock night, and head limits. The Lackey pasture has a two night, three head limit, and is part of the Scaffold two night, 15 head limit. Somehow we need to state that on a sign, and have posted right on the gate at Lackey. We also need two signs for Cement table, 15 stock, 3 night limit, and posted at each drift fence entering this meadow area. The Grave is also a 15 head, 3 night limit, and should be posted at both drift fences entering that area. This would help eliminate the confusion stock users sometimes have, about our grazing rules.

Over grazing at Scaffold meadow is still a major concern. The core area is Blue grass and the stock head straight there. The area is about 20 yards by 20 yards, and I think it could use a rest, so the seed can really take hold again. We could put up a smooth wire fence using tee posts to prevent stock from entering this area, and see what happens. I was also wondering if trail-crew could get resupplied a little less often, say three times a month, instead of every week. Since their stock are in there the most, this could also help on less impacts. Their packer Rex McCall did a good job of trying to stay only one night when he could, to help keep the pressure off.

Overall it was a good summer, and I was grateful for the opportunity to work this beautiful area. I think John Stobinski, and I did a pretty good job of keeping each other posted on concerns, and developments, and I appreciated his efforts to support my needs, and me. A few things fell through the cracks but that's to be expected, with both of us being new to this operation, and its needs. As for the future, I would be more than happy to return sometime, and work this patrol area again.

Statistics

Visitor Contacts	910
Nights in Backcountry	84
At station	61
Camping out	23
Miles Patrolled	713
By Horseback	359
By Foot	354
Know Stock Nights	901
Private	282
NPS Trail-crew	237
NPS Ranger	167
Commercial	147
NPS Squad trip	68

Where I grazed my stock:

JR Pasture	33
Scaffold	28
Westside Roaring River	22
Grasshopper Camp	22
Austin	22
Lackey	12
Grand Palace Hotel	10
Grasshopper Meadow	8
Upper Ranger	6
Lower Ranger	4

Needs for 2002

Catie had requested a couple new beds for the cabin, in her report last year, but they were never ordered. I recommend we get one bed, 54 inches wide, made out of dense foam. I have one for my truck, and it's the best bed I've ever slept on, and best of all, it cost less than \$50. I also suggest we have a carpenter in the park build a frame for it, that can be broken down, and packed in, then put back together. Catie had also requested new screens for the windows, which never came about. The sizes are four at 30" wide by 48-1/2" high. Two at 30" wide by 42-5/8" tall. Currently there are about 20 gallons of propane at the station, two 7-1/2 gallon tanks, belonging to Jerry Torres, and one 5-gallon tank. That's about how much I used this summer. Catie used about 30 gallons last summer.

Other needs:

Wooden Matches	2-boxes
Duct tape	1-roll
Non rechargeable radio batteries	2
Epi pin	1
Compass	1
JR Secore's book, about high routes	1
Therm-a-rest	1
Propane tanks	2-seven and half-gallon size

Toilet Paper
Coleman fuel

4-rolls
1-gallon