

Crabtree Year End Report, 1990

George Durkee

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The Falcon cannot see the falconer,
Things fall apart, the center cannot hold.

W.B. Yeats

Another quiet year at Fort Crabtree. Nothing changed since last year. In fact, nothing changed since '77. As such, my recommendations remain essentially the same as last year: lower the fire limit, and close Crabtree Lakes and the Whitney trail to stock use. See my reports for '88 & '89 (or for that matter '77) for details. While I acknowledge--and can sympathize with--the political realities which make adoption of new policies or procedures difficult for either Sierra District or Staff, it is difficult to continue, year after year, to put the time and effort into reports and documentation that, for whatever reasons, are never acted on. Either Charlie Morgan runs the Park or we do.

- 1) On the bright side, I liked the comments we got on our year end reports from last year. From our perspective (i.e. backcountry rangers), we submit our reports at the end of a season and that's the last we hear of them. The frustration level was getting pretty high. We usually had no knowledge of whatever level of wrangling went into each recommendation during the winter. As such, we often assumed our reports were ignored. So, no matter what disposition a recommendation may have, written comment to each of us on our reports is extremely valuable. I hope that can be continued.
- 2) Next: the new plan to include other District's stations in the Sierra District rotations is fraught with problems & has a number of us mighty nervous. Sierra District is not made up (if I may modestly say this) of your average NPS seasonals. Our average age is around 40 and length of service is about 15 years. **No other District in the entire Park Service** has such a consistent rate of people coming back. YOU ARE MESSING AROUND WITH ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL OPERATIONS IN THE PARK SERVICE AND YOU OUGHT TO BE DARN CAREFUL HOW YOU GO ABOUT IT. One of the reasons for this success is that you folks have always, within reason, tried to accommodate our station preferences. I cannot overemphasize how much this "human element" has played in maintaining stability in our District because, in spite of our hammering away about salaries & etc, we are, in fact, partially compensated in sunsets. When you start fooling around with where those sunsets are (e.g. a less desireable or even unacceptable station) you are affecting the very reason we keep coming back. I don't think this is understood outside of Sierra District (and perhaps only dimly understood even there). I don't think any of us are here because we are excited about being "rangers" and therefore would be happy no matter where we are a ranger.

A case in point is Atkinson, who simply said he wasn't interested in working at Bearpaw. Considering the amount of time (about 5 years) he's worked over in that area, that's not an unreasonable attitude. So, maybe we are being whining crybabies, but always before there's been the attempt to come up with some sort of workable solution to make everybody happy.

That didn't happen here. An alternative wasn't even offered or discussed in Paul's case. What happened? How could you, essentially, discard the hardest working most conscientious employee you've got (though, admittedly, a bit high strung, but that seems a small price for the amount of work you were getting...). It is my personal and humble opinion that someone ought to approach Paul Atkinson on bended knee and ask what could induce him to come back. A few discussions I've had with him since make me think that if he were offered something other than Bearpaw, he'd come back.

I realize that seasonals having a say in policy is not SOP in the Park Service. However, given our experience, level of training and knowledge of the backcountry, I suggest it would be wise to formally include input from backcountry rangers in this new plan. For instance, maybe in early Fall a couple of us could get together, talk informally with everyone else, and work up a list of station assignments. This could then be submitted to Sierra District and thence to the various other district & sub-district rangers for final decisions and changes. I think it would make a big difference to all of us to know that we've got some influence in this whole process. That way, even if someone ends up at an "undesirable" station, the knowledge that at least we had some say in the process might ease any resentment.

Finally, I'm not convinced of the logic in this entire scheme. Do we randomly move other rangers around to different districts to bring 'more experience' to those districts?!? Are any of these district folks who came up with the plan willing to be transferred to, say, entrance station supervisor because their skills would improve operations? The analogy is the same with us. All of us have paid our dues elsewhere--in most cases for a substantial period of time. To transfer us to an undesirable station (Pear Lake, Ranger Lake, and, for many, Bearpaw & Roaring River) is essentially seen as a demotion (in the tenuous hierarchy among b/c types) and insulting.

4) After mulling it over during the summer, I'd rather not close specific sites to fires, at least in the Crabtree area. The only practical plan is to make a fire limit at, say, 10,800'. There are enough signs and enough confusion on fires as it is without creating a patchwork of illogical rules for fires. Except maybe in Wallace Creek, there are no areas where I'd want to trade a site closure for signs and confusion.

5) Jim Harvey and I talked over possible stock use regulations for the upper Kern. We agreed that Wright Basin, east of the JMT could be closed off to stock on the condition that Sandy Meadow, and lower Wright Creek be kept open to stock use and that the trail up Wallace Creek as far as the waterfall camp be worked on a little by the trail crew. We also agreed that Miter Basin be completely closed to all stock use. Jim also thought there was no problem with a fire limit of 10,800' with exceptions made for specific camps (e.g. the waterfall camp on Wallace. I agree). I think it would be useful for a couple of us from Sierra District, the Chief Ranger and Jim to sit down with a map of the Park and go over, basin by basin, stock regulations and the establishment of hiker only camps. This might go a long way to pre-empt any objections Charlie Morgan might have to any new regs.

Also, Jim gives a backcountry stock use course for the Stock Assoc., it might not be a bad idea to have him put it on for the packers on the East side next spring--I think this would be more effective than just John & Mike going over there.

6) The pay issues we discussed last winter and spring are not going to go away. If no action is taken this winter, and especially if administrative energy is put into finding more money for the new station assignment scheme, I and at least a few others will likely be forced to file a grievance for past unpaid overtime to get some action on this issue. I have attached a list of times I worked outside of my normal shift this season. A number of visitor contacts involved warning hikers not to be on Whitney or high passes during lightning threats or activity. Of necessity, these warnings had to be given during off duty hours. This was done before the injuries on Whitney as well as during lightning storms after. It's worth noting that no one climbing Whitney from the West slope was injured in that accident. I believe this had a lot to do with the warnings M., Paul and I were giving to all hikers during that period.

It's also worth noting that Yosemite backcountry rangers were asked to keep track of their times this year to possibly justify Administratively Uncontrollable Overtime. This was done with the knowledge of their personnel office and organized by the local Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police. Discussions between Yosemite's Administrative Officer, Chief Ranger and involved supervisors have already taken place. I have attached a draft copy of an upcoming article from the FOP newsletter on their attempts to gain AUO.

Hunting Patrol Once again, I patrolled the Siberian area during hunting season. I contacted only 4 hunters at Rocky Basin Lakes. The weather probably kept most folks out, also I don't think the boundary area gets a lot of hunting use. I posted "Park Boundary" signs at a couple of low points that get occasional traffic into the Park.

Also, snow storms towards late September and early October made Forester, Shepard and Whitney unsafe for travel--2 to 3 ft. of snow on these passes made it almost impossible for hikers to follow the trail as well as exposing them to the potential for serious falls.