

SEQUOIA and KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS

Backcountry Ranger Annual Report Summary Information

1991

STATION: *KERN*

LENGTH of SEASON: *June 14 - SEPT. 14, 1991*

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| 1.  | Total Visitor Contacts:   | <u>781</u>                                     |
|     | Day hikers:   | <u>27</u>                                      |
|     | Backpackers:  | <u>497</u>                                     |
|     | Stock Users:  | <u>213</u>                                     |
|     | Day riders:   | <u>44</u>                                      |
| 2.  | Stock Observed:   | <u>498</u> (including 190 NPS crew stock)      |
| 3.  | Llamas Observed:  | <u>0</u> - strays not counted -                |
| 4.  | Total Miles Covered:  | <u>549</u>                                     |
|     | Hiked:  | <u>282</u>                                     |
|     | Rode:   | <u>267</u>                                     |
| 5.  | Trash Removed (pounds):   | <u>200</u>                                     |
| 6.  | Total # Firerings Worked:   | <u>67</u>                                      |
|     | Rehab/Cleaned:  | <u>50</u>                                      |
|     | Removed:  | <u>17</u>                                      |
| 7.  | Total Campsites Worked:   | <u>65</u>                                      |
|     | Rehabilitated:  | <u>49</u>                                      |
|     | Removed:  | <u>16</u>                                      |
| 8.  | Total Law Enforcement Contacts:   | <u>21</u> (Total incidents 30) (34 violations) |
|     | Citations:  | <u>3</u> (issued at Ash Mtn)                   |
|     | Type Violation:   |  |
|     | (5) GRAZING (2-Closed area; 1-exceed. limit; 2-Opening); (1) PICKET LINE IN MEADOW; (2) TENT IN MEADOW; (1) TOO CLOSE TO WA |  |
|     | (7) FISHING W/O LICENSE; (3) LICENSE NOT IN POSSESSION; (2) NO WILDERNESS PERMIT;   |  |
|     | (1) TWO WILDERNESS PERMITS; (1) WEAPON IN PARK; (3) FOOD LEFT UNATTENDED; (1) DOG;  |  |
|     | (1) TOILET ON SURFACE OF GROUND; (1) STOCK FOULED WATER SOURCE; (1) SOAP IN LAKE;   |  |
|     | (4) FOIL IN FIRE; (1) NAILS IN TREE; (1) UNEXTINGUISHED CAMPFIRE; (1) LITTERING   |  |
|     | (PLUS NUMEROUS CASES OF FOIL IN FIRE, VIOLATOR UNKNOWN)   |  |
|     | Written Warnings:   | <u>4</u>                                       |
|     | Verbal Warnings:  | <u>14</u>                                      |
| 9.  | Emergency Operations:   | <u>4</u>                                       |
|     | Searches:   | <u>1</u>                                       |
|     | Rescues:  | <u>0</u>                                       |
|     | Medivacs:   | <u>3</u>                                       |
| 10. | Special Projects:   |  |
|     | <u>BEAVER SURVEY, FIRE WEATHER,</u>   |  |
|     | <u>MEADOW &amp; SNOW CONDITION SURVEY TO DE-</u>  |  |
|     | <u>TERMINE OPENING DATES, FROG SURVEY,</u>  |  |
|     | <u>WILDLIFE OBSERVATIONS, REVIEW &amp; COMMENT</u>  |  |
|     | <u>ON WILDERNESS MGMT. PLAN AND SUPT'S. COMPEN-</u>   |  |
|     | <u>DIUM, ASSIST TRAIL CREW, ORGANIZE FILES &amp;</u>  |  |
|     | <u>SUPPLIES AT STATION &amp; ELIMINATE SURPLUS, RESTORE SMALL RANGER PASTURE,</u>   |  |
|     | <u>CORRECT NEW TOPO MAPS, ROUND UP STRAY STOCK FOR COTTONWOOD PACK STATION</u>  |  |

KERN - END OF SEASON REPORT - 1990  
Terry Gustafson

PATROLS : During the period from June 27 through September 9, I covered 563 miles: 397 with stock and 166 on foot. I made a deliberate effort to travel less and have more time open to work along the way; with the slow (2 m.p.h.) stock given the Kern Ranger and the limited number of suitable campsites, I did not always succeed.

VISITOR USE : In this fourth drought year, with water levels extremely low, trails dusty, trees dying, and reports of fires burning elsewhere in the Sierra, visitor use in the Kern was down. Of the 617 visitors contacted, 236 (about 38%) were stock users. However about 65 of these contacts with stock users (27% of the total!) occurred only because they had been drawn to the Park by NPS activities: either as guests of the Trail Crew for the Fourth of July celebration at Lewis Camp or as volunteer Back Country Horsemen solicited by us for the work project at Upper Funston Meadow. Without these people, visitor use would have been down substantially.

THE THREAT TO THE NORTH COYOTE CREEK/LAUREL CREEK/SOUTH RATTLESNAKE BENCH "PRISTINE ZONE" : In the 1960's the Park staff identified a half dozen superlative areas in SEKI where the meadows were still untrammelled, the waters ran pure, and hillsides and meadows were not scarred by trails. We called these "Pristine Zones", and a prominent goal of backcountry management was to protect them in their natural state. There were to be no trails or other development in these areas, and no consumptive use by humans. Access would be cross-country and on foot.

At the time of the first controversy over dedicated Wilderness within these Parks, the Director ordered these "Pristine Zones" eliminated from our formal backcountry management presentations, saying he didn't want any category of protection stronger than that afforded by the Wilderness Act. We were still highly cognizant of the value of these least disturbed areas, though, and vowed to continue protecting them informally. The area between the Coyote Pass and Rattlesnake Creek trails, including the Crytes Lake area and the entirety of the Laurel Creek drainage, was one of these "Pristine Zones", which we felt deserved the strongest category of preservation.

Institutional memory is short. Twenty-three years later, I'm dismayed to find this area threatened in three ways:

1. Unrestricted cross-country stock travel. Somehow, in the early 1980's, a statement was inserted into the Park Grazing and Livestock Regulations that the "Entire area (Chagoopa, Funston, Big Arroyo, Rattlesnake, Laurel and Coyote Creeks) open to unrestricted stock use EXCEPT for Big Five and Little Five Lakes area. This statement is the root of the current problems, and I STRONGLY RECOMMEND ELIMINATING IT FROM THE REGULATIONS.

The only other areas in SEKI that are open to unrestricted off-trail stock use are the Kern Canyon below Kern Hot Spring (where one can't get more than a half-mile from the trail without running into the canyon wall), Roaring River, and the South Fork Kaweah/Hockett Plateau area. These three areas were identified by the Park staff as the zones where we would accommodate stock use as much as possible. All three are traditionally popular with private parties and all are at relatively low elevations and thus more resistant to environmental degradation.

We never envisioned that unrestricted off-trail travel would be allowed anywhere in the fragile high country, much less within the "Pristine Zones". I've spoken about this with Charles Morgan, Craig London, and our own Jim Harvey, who has spent nineteen years in the Kern. All are strong supporters of stock use in these Parks, and members of the Back Country Horsemen of California. None had any idea of why the West Kern Plateau should be treated in this anomalous manner, when stock travel in the remainder of the high country in both Parks is restricted to within one-half mile of recognized trails. None had any objection to seeing at least some of the Sierra preserved as much as possible as it was before exploitation by our European culture. Charles Morgan's only concern was that some overzealous Ranger would cite him for pulling off the trail to let another string pass, or to eat lunch, since these situations aren't specifically mentioned in the current regulations.

2. Stock "trail" into Crytes Lake. In the last few years, someone has managed to get stock in to the wonderfully pristine meadow below Crytes Lake, 3.5 miles north of Coyote Creek, and, amazingly, to have this route, which has obviously only been traveled a few times, perhaps once a season at most, added to the Park Trail System! The reason given is "This trail needed to offer more golden trout fishing to stock parties."

Only two or three stock parties camped along the Coyote Creek Trail itself during 1990, all small private parties staying one night enroute to somewhere else. There is no reason in the world why this route, which is difficult to follow on the ground, even with rock "ducks" to mark the way, should be officially acknowledged as a Park Trail, other than that it may be some Park employee's favorite fishing spot. I talked to Jim Harvey about it; he says he's never been there, but that Dan Gardner, packer for the Hockett Trail Crew, has taken his family in. Whatever the history may be, this is not a traditional stock use area, and is within the former "Pristine Zone". PLEASE DELETE IT FROM THE TRAIL SYSTEM.

3. Mineral King Pack Station has apparently been using the beautiful meadow on South Rattlesnake Bench to pasture their stock. A stock "trail" has developed from Rattlesnake Creek to the meadow; it is mud soup in places (see photos) as it follows the small stream draining the meadow up the hillside. I found four

horseshoes and a torn packsaddle strap along this route. There is trampling damage in this formerly unspoiled meadow, streambank vegetation is beginning to be torn off, and there are tracks everywhere in the small woodland meadows in the vicinity. Stock has been ridden as far as the saddle overlooking the untouched Laurel Creek area; luckily for Laurel Creek they have not yet found their way across, but nothing in the current regulations is stopping them.

TRAILS : V.I.P. Betty Jo Black and I measured all the trails in the Kern Patrol Area this summer with an odometer wheel. In addition I measured the trails to Coyote Lakes, and from Coyote Pass to Farewell Gap, both out of the Park, but whose lengths affect mileages shown on our signs.

Trails in the Kern are very dusty this year, but in general are in good condition - much better than when I was last stationed here in 1966. The addition of boardwalks in boggy spots, and rerouting out of meadows has significantly lessened environmental damage. In addition, the Trail Crew has covered over some former rocky spots with sand, and widened them so that they are now a pleasure to ride.

The two prominent exceptions are the "bad spot" beside the cascade in lower Rattlesnake Creek, and the switchbacks above Upper Rattlesnake Creek, leading down from Franklin Pass. One Park visitor, who packed for DeCarteret in the '60's, rolled and lamed a pack horse on the switchbacks. He claims these two stretches of trail are both much worse than they used to be; says he used to lead a string of mules down them without worry, and now is afraid even to walk through and lead them one at a time. Our Park stock seem to negotiate them successfully, if painfully, but they definitely need major work. I RECOMMEND THAT THESE TRAILS BE REPAIRED. This recommendation has been made year after year, and Maintenance is well aware of the problem. I'm sure they are doing their best to get to it, and just hope that their priorities allow it before someone is badly hurt.

There were two small washouts on the Coyote Lakes Trail during a flash flood on July 14. They can be easily remedied, and I've turned in a Rehabilitation Assessment Form asking that this be done. I was glad to be of help by removing eight logs from the Kern Canyon and High Sierra Trails at various times during the summer. They came down after the Trail Crew moved on to other areas.

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation for the spirit of cooperation and mutual help that prevails nowadays between the Maintenance and Ranger Divisions in SEKI. This is quite a change from the '60's, and makes life in the backcountry a lot more pleasant. The Trail Crew is welcome at Kern Station any time; they've done a lot of work to maintain and improve it, and clean it impeccably before they leave.

MEADOWS AND GRAZING : The meadows generally looked good at the end of the season. Opening dates were no problem this year due to the extremely early snowmelt and dry conditions. There are, however, growing bare spots on slightly elevated

areas in the midst of the most nutritious forage in both Upper and Lower Funston Meadows, which may indicate that the plants are losing vigor due to the prolonged drought, and would benefit greatly from a later opening date next year, even if it is a dry year. Mike Neuman broached this idea to me, and I WHOLEHEARTEDLY ENDORSE IT.

The only problems I can identify, other than the degradation of relatively pristine meadows in off-trail areas discussed previously, are the continuing severe overuse of the "Middle Rattlesnake Creek" meadows, between the two upper drift fences, and the deterioration of the two administrative pastures at Lewis Camp.

We have helped lessen the problem in Middle Rattlesnake Creek by curtailing administrative use of the area; the Trail Crew now stays at Cow Camp in Lower Rattlesnake Creek, where there was abundant feed left even at the end of the season. I experimented by leaving my stock in the Cow Camp area three nights, while traveling on foot in Upper Rattlesnake and Laurel Creeks, and found that quite satisfactory, both for the animals and myself. However, as Jim Harvey noted, the Middle Rattlesnake Creek meadows simply "didn't come back" this year, and looked pitiful throughout much of the summer. He says he would have liked to see them closed during August; in retrospect, I would have too. Do we still have the authority and the gumption to do such things? My guess is we have both. I would not want to close this pasture only to transfer the abuse to the meadow on South Rattlesnake Bench or elsewhere. It seems to me we are faced with an overuse problem in Middle/Upper Rattlesnake Creek, and we have three alternatives available:

1. Let it become a "sacrifice zone", and allow the gradual degradation of the area to continue.
2. Require that stock be tied up and fed pellets.
3. Require that much of the use be transferred to the Cow Camp area. This is an hour further from Mineral King, and would cause some inconvenience for Mr. Bedell's packers, but seems the most attractive of the three alternatives.

Another measure that would help, perhaps, is to strongly insist that the number of stock held within the Park by the Mineral King Pack Station be held within legal limits. I understand that they have been exceeding their limits lately, claiming that the excess animals were sick or injured and not available to work.

The two administrative pastures at Lewis Camp are also showing signs of losing vigor, and the dusty areas along the upper edge are much larger than they used to be. They used to be both reserved for the use of the Kern Ranger, or the Subdistrict Ranger, with three head of stock. In recent years the Trail Crew has also shared them during their annual stay at Lewis Camp early in the season. This heavy early season use by eleven head of stock is not ideal, but I see no easy alternative available. I would recommend that the Small Pasture, immediately across from the station, be reserved for the Kern Ranger. With careful irrigation and early season

rest, it would serve as a reserve late in the season when forage is getting scarce elsewhere.

This year Bill Deisman, Recreation Officer for the Tule District of the Sequoia National Forest was given permission by the Superintendent to pasture his three animals at Lewis Camp. He put them in the small pasture. In the future I would like it understood that any guests, and the Trail Crew, are to pasture their stock in the Large Pasture; it is only a five minute walk from the Ranger Station.

CAMPsites/FIREPITS : Due to the continuing efforts of past Kern Rangers, and to Rob Hayden, who cleaned all the firepits in the Kern Canyon before my arrival this year, I've had an easy time of it. I only cleaned and rehabilitated 37 firepits; 16 firepits and 15 campsites were destroyed. The area looks much better than it used to, when one would encounter small camps and firepits every few hundred yards along the trails. With decreased use and the availability of bear boxes, campers are concentrating more at certain points. They may be a bit inconvenienced by the lack of firewood nearby, but the elimination of seldom-used intermediate campsites creates a more pleasant and natural atmosphere.

The "Point Camp" north of Lower Funston Meadow suffered greatly early this season, or perhaps last fall. In addition to the extensive development of camp furniture and elaborate firepit, and deep holes around the cottonwoods where stock has been tied repeatedly, someone had constructed a large toilet seat and nailed it between three trees, not bothering to dig a hole.

I doused the pile of excrement and toilet paper with gasoline and burned it, so that it is at least less objectionable. I obliterated the campsite, which was "in the grass" or what was left of the grass, and closer than the required 50 feet from water. I've placed three "Restoration Site" signs in the middle of the three paths leading to the camp from the Kern Canyon Trail, and propose that this site be kept closed for three to five years, to give the vegetation a chance to recover. People will still be welcome to bring their stock up from Lower Funston to graze, but not to camp or to tie to trees. Next year I would like to construct a third campsite at Lower Funston Meadow as an alternative to "Point Camp".

BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF CALIFORNIA WORK PARTY : On July 12 through July 14 six adult volunteers and three boys gathered at Upper Funston Meadow at our invitation to move and rebuild the campsites there, put in hitchrails, and arrange logs and rocks so that people would not be tempted to camp closer than 50 feet from the river. They also helped repair a hitchrail at Lower Funston Meadow. It was a congenial group, with whom I enjoyed working. In retrospect, though, aside from the public relations value, I question how much this project benefitted the Park. Most of the heavy work of rerouting the access trail and bucking up logs was done by the Kern Trail Crew; we got essentially two mornings work out of six volunteers.

Under a Superintendent's Waiver of the 48 hour stock limit, the meadow was subjected to 149 animal-days of use by me, the Trail Crew and friends, and the BCHC volunteers. It also occurs to me that by advertising in their newsletter for

people to volunteer for such projects, the BCHC are promoting use by stock that wouldn't otherwise be taking place, and introducing new people to these areas, whom we can expect back in the future. We are committed to accommodating stock use, but I don't feel it is our role to promote more.

LAW ENFORCEMENT CONTACTS : I issued no citations, since my Law Enforcement Commission has expired, and the situations I came across didn't seem to warrant punishment, but rather called for education. Two people brought dogs to the Kern Ranger Station and were dispatched to the nearby Park boundary. Two stock parties received a written, and later a verbal warning for leaving food unprotected in camp at Lower Funston Meadow, and four groups, including one Mineral King packer, were chastised for putting their tent or bedroll in meadow vegetation.

In the worst violation, three men from Riverside, in southern California, had camped and built a fire in a streamside meadow just north of Lower Funston. They had received their permit from the Forest Service, without an NPS Minimum Impact sheet or the Grazing and Livestock Regulations. They had entered from Golden Trout Creek and missed the Kern Ranger Station. It soon became clear that they were contrite, but had been genuinely ignorant of the results of their action. I asked them to clean up the site as best they could before leaving. They did.

The failure of USFS personnel to give necessary information to stock users planning to enter the Park was consistent until mid-summer, when John Kraushaar talked to the Sequoia National Forest people about it. The performance of the Inyo National Forest remained the same. This is a problem which, of course, will need to be addressed again next year.

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS : I was alerted for one search, and spent two hours preparing to go, before the subject was found. The only medevac from my Patrol Area was the rescue of the two hikers from a ledge near Rock Creek Falls, which was reported by Em Scattaregia, the Rock Creek Ranger, who happened by the Hot Spring at just the right time. I had three Visitor Assistance incidents: shoeing a mare, helping to reshoe a person, and arranging a phone call for an overdue hiker. A very quiet summer.

SPECIAL PROJECTS : In addition to wheeling the trails, I measured and inspected the drift fences and pasture fences in the Kern Patrol Area, helped Dianne Ewell and Paul Atkinson, Tyndall Ranger, with the task of checking and adjusting the Ozone Monitor east of Junction Meadow, and matched several 1979 photos of the old trail in Upper Rattlesnake Creek. I continued the vegetation mapping and frog study, begun by Sandy last year; found three frog sites: two in a remote area above Laurel Creek, the third a small pond in the meadow below Crytes Lake. I took daily weather readings, and recorded fuel moisture when at the Kern Ranger Station.

WILDLIFE : The bear boxes are working well. Aside from the Trail Crew getting hit at Upper Funston on July 14, there were no incidents that I'm aware of in the Kern Canyon (except Junction Meadow), or elsewhere in my Patrol Area. I saw three "wild" bears during the summer, including an

extraordinarily large, fat, healthy brown bear south of Rattlesnake Creek in the Kern Canyon. Others reporting him agree that he's the biggest they've ever seen.

Other observations of special interest were a Northern Harrier, skimming the marsh below Lower Rock Creek Lake on July 24, a coyote, ignoring us and waiting patiently by a rodent hole in a sand flat near Big Whitney Meadow on July 25, a doe with a collar (blue with two orange squares on each side) at Lower Funston Meadow on July 29, a Steller's Jay out of it's usual habitat, in a Lodgepole forest in upper Rattlesnake Creek at 9800' on July 31, another in a similar place on the Chagoopa Plateau on August 8, a mink on the bank of Golden Trout Creek at the Kern on August 31, and a congregation of Clark's Nutcrackers - at least 50 birds - in a quarter-mile area in the canyon below Crytes Lake on September 6.

## KERN CANYON DRIFT FENCES AND INFORMAL STOCK BARRIERS

Compiled by Terry Gustafson (Kern Ranger) 1990

TYNDALL CREEK (Kern): Little more than a pole gate, it forms an effective barrier on the north bank of the Tyndall Creek ford, to prevent stock in the Cold Springs area and the Upper Kern from escaping downstream toward Junction Meadow.

HIGH SIERRA TRAIL BRIDGE (informal): The Trail Crew and others who camp on the west side of the Kern, across from the Hot Spring, often put up "bars" or string a rope across the west of this bridge to keep their stock from crossing the river. The stock will usually be found the next morning among the abundant forage north of the High Sierra Gate.

NOTE: All drift fences from this point downstream are on the west side of the Kern River, with the exception of the River Pasture (East) fence. The former fences on the east side are no longer maintained, and the wire had been removed.

HIGH SIERRA GATE: A swinging gate, 44 yards north of the High Sierra Trail Junction at the foot of Chagoopa switch-backs. Keeps stock released downstream from escaping to the Chagoopa Plateau.

UPPER FUNSTON: A 300 yard fence with a pole gate, 0.2 miles south of the High Sierra Trail Junction. Holds stock within the 2.4 mile long Upper Funston grazing area. There are two places near Upper Funston Meadow where informal barriers may be put up to hold stock. With the barrier just south of the meadow in place, it becomes (for most stock) a fenced pasture, a few areas in extent.

Worried stock users camped at Upper Funston Meadow also commonly bar the north end of the Big Arroyo Bridge, one mile downstream. There is good forage just north of the bridge; a campsite might be developed there to take pressure off of Upper Funston Meadow.

RATTLESNAKE CREEK (KERN): This 90-yard fence, with a pole gate, 0.3 miles north of the Rattlesnake Creek Trail Junction, defines the south end of the Upper Funston grazing area, which has 48-hour stock limit.

LAUREL CREEK: A 68-yard fence with a swinging gate, which defines the upper end of the 1.3-mile long Lower Funston grazing area, which has a 48-hour stock limit.

LOWER FUNSTON: This 203-yard fence, with a pole gate, divides the Lower Funston grazing area from the "River Pasture" to the south. It is 0.6 miles south of Lower Funston Meadow.

KERN PASTURE (WEST): A 240-yard "wing fence" extending from the northwest side of the Large Ranger Pasture at Lewis Camp keeps stock out of the Kern Ranger Station/Soda Spring area, and prevents them from escaping downriver out of the Park.

RIVER PASTURE (EAST): A 600-yard well-built fence just north of the Park boundary on the east side of the river, to keep stock in the Snake Camp area from trespassing on the Henry Brown property in the Inyo National Forest, and vice-versa. It is essentially sound (in 1990), with only eight loose or rotten posts out of a total of 90, but needs some work.

#### **FENCED ADMINISTRATIVE PASTURES AT LEWIS CAMP**

LEWIS CAMP LARGE RANGER PASTURE: A ten-acre completely fenced irrigated pasture opposite the old Conterno Store site. Formerly used exclusively by the Kern Ranger, it is now also grazed by the Trail Crew Stock when they are in the area. The fence is about 1000 yards long and needs some work. The Trail Crew plans on improving it in 1991.

KERN RANGER STATION SMALL PASTURE: About one and one-half acres of irrigated pasture directly opposite the Kern Ranger Station. Used by the Kern Ranger occasionally to hold stock overnight after a late arrival or preceding an early departure. The 370-yard fenced and pole gate are in good condition, following repairs by the Trail Crew in 1989.

#### **RATTLESNAKE CREEK CANYON DRIFT FENCES**

All four fences are on the north side of the creek.

RATTLESNAKE CREEK #1 (Lower Cow Camp): A 356-yard fence at the lower end of a rocky "dike" slope. 3.0 miles upstream, from the Kern, at the lower end of the 1.5-mile long Cow Camp grazing area.

RATTLESNAKE CREEK #2 (Upper Cow Camp): A 235-yard fence in an open, gently sloping sand flat, mostly used by NPS stock. Need to promote use of this area by ourselves and others (especially the Mineral King Pack Station) as an alternative to the severely overused Middle Rattlesnake area between the two upper fences.

RATTLESNAKE CREEK #3: This 56-yard fence at the top of a major glacial stairstep was constructed in the early 1970's at the urging of Mineral King Pack Station owner Bill DeCarteret, to define the lower end of a 1.3-mile long grazing area in Middle Rattlesnake Creek.

Note: In the past, we have casually referred to this area between the two upper fences as "Upper Rattlesnake Creek". Mike Neuman asks that from now we call it "Middle Rattlesnake Creek" to differentiate it from the area above the top drift fence, which is truly "Upper Rattlesnake Creek".

RATTLESNAKE CREEK #4 (Upper Rattlesnake Drift Fence): This 250-yard fence bisects a wet meadow and extends up a steep hillside. It fulfills the Mineral King Pack Station's desire to have a secure place to hold stock, and is being overused, year after year. The Park is at least now minimizing administrative use in Middle Rattlesnake Creek.

## PATROL GUIDE - KERN RANGER

RATE OF TRAVEL: With the slow (2 m.p.h.) stock used by the Kern Ranger and the limited number of suitable camping places, I've often, in the late afternoon, found it necessary to rush past campsites that need attention in order to make it into camp before dark. The ideal would be to schedule enough time to be able to deal with any problem as soon as it is discovered. This may mean, in some cases staying two nights at a campsite and making day trips, on foot or with stock, to work in nearby areas, before moving on. It is especially valuable to spend at least one day working in Rattlesnake Creek enroute to or from Mineral King.

HEAVY USE AREAS: In the Kern Canyon these are, for both stock parties and backpackers, primarily the "bear box" areas: Lower and Upper Funston Meadows, Kern Hot Springs, and Junction Meadow. Several stock parties each year stay at two established camps on the east side of the river: Snake Camp, one mile north of Kern Ranger Station, and 21" Camp, southeast of the Rattlesnake Creek Trail Junction. In the 1990 season these were old experienced campers who caused no problems.

In Rattlesnake Creek, the primary problem area for stock use is the area between the two upper drift fences, known as "Middle" Rattlesnake Creek. This had been overused in the past by both NPS and commercial (Mineral King) stock. In 1990 the Trail Crew stayed at Cow Camp instead; the forage there was still abundant even at the end of the season.

Large concentrations of backpackers can often be found camping in far upper Rattlesnake Creek, just below the Franklin Pass switchbacks. They also tend to congregate near the Soda Creek and Shotgun Pass Trail Junctions.

Forester Lake, on the very edge of the Kern Patrol Area, is a special problem. It gets heavy use by both stock and backpackers, but is difficult to schedule time for, as there is usually enough to keep one busy in Rattlesnake Creek. Fortunately, as is the case with the Tyndall Creek Ranger at Junction Meadow, the Little Five Lakes Ranger is able to patrol to Forester Lake occasionally. Any patrols by Mineral King Trailhead Rangers are also welcome and warranted.

The entire length of the Kern Canyon from Lewis Camp to Junction Meadow rates as a heavy use area, as well as Rattlesnake Creek. Since the tasks to be accomplished and prior commitments tend to define the patrol schedule, it would be unrealistic to set a fixed number of days as a minimum time between patrols. I would suggest getting as far up-canyon as the Hot Springs as often as possible, and spending as much time in Rattlesnake Creek that is feasible, with an effort to visit Junction Meadow and Forester Lake at least once a month.

REMOTE AREAS: Problems can occur anywhere; therefore it's important to periodically patrol areas where we don't expect them, just to find out what might be happening there. As an example, in 1990 a hike onto the South Rattlesnake Bench to disassemble an old aerial snow marker revealed that a muddy stock trail had been pushed up a stream channel onto the bench, and a beautiful meadow was getting heavy stock use by the Mineral King Pack Station, whose animals had been as far as the saddle overlooking Laurel Creek. Had I stayed in the heavily used area along the trails, we would have no knowledge of this.

Other lightly used areas to be visited periodically are upper Coyote Creek and Crytes Lake, and Laurel Creek. These are the most pristine areas within the Kern Ranger's zone of responsibility, and one insensitive visitor could cause significant and lasting damage. I hope that the provision of unlimited cross country stock travel in this region can be deleted from the regulations. If it is, it will be necessary to keep an eye out for stock tracks going into these places.

CHAGOOPA PLATEAU: Oddly enough, the Chagoopa switchbacks and the High Sierra Trail as far as the Moraine Lake Junction are in the Kern Rangers Patrol Area. Thus we share responsibility for that zone with the Little Five Lakes Ranger. It's a pleasant dayride, even with slow stock, from Upper Funston Meadow to Moraine Lake and back, with barely enough time to clean some camps at the lake. Or it can be patrolled enroute to or from an extraterritorial visit with the Little Five Lakes Ranger a couple of times a summer should be sufficient; this is usually a problem area.

FAMILIARIZATION PATROLS: The Kern Ranger needs to become familiar with all of the major trails in the Kern Basin within the Park, and also to be at least minimally conversant with the geography of the Golden Trout Wilderness to the south, since that's where most of the use of the Lower Kern originates. The Sequoia National Forest is unable to hire people for their backcountry stations, as is the Inyo. Often this summer I've been piled with questions about trails to the south I haven't been over for 24 years.

I'd suggest entering in the spring from Lewis Camp Trailhead (as snow conditions on the passes out of Mineral King sometimes mandate anyway) and later, if there is reason to go out to Mineral King, varying the route between Coyote/Farewell Gap and Franklin Passes. One familiarization trip over Blackrock Pass is a good idea, and even an eventual trip out to Hockett might prove valuable.

I'd suggest during the first year, for someone who isn't already familiar with the territory, a large loop up the Kern to Milestone Basin, then back via Tyndall Creek, Crabtree and Rock Creek, thence on to Tunnel Meadow (where we are welcome to use the Administrative Pasture) and back to Lewis Camp. Every year, he or she should ride up to Tunnel Meadow and back, at least, just to keep in touch.

Kern Lakes are only couple of miles downstream. They are a fine birding area, and it behooves the Kern Ranger to be familiar with the immediate neighborhood. An early morning or late afternoon stroll down there within a couple of weeks after arriving at Kern Ranger Station is indicated.

My own extraterritorial project for my second year in the Kern will be to get familiar with the Lost Canyon/ Soda Creek/ Big Arroyo/ Willow Creek Cutoff/ Sawtooth Pass/ and Glacier Pass areas. (Where the hell is Glacier Pass?)

TIME AT THE STATION: This can be very social, with the Fourth of July celebrations and good neighbors across the river. There is value in that, and it's necessary to go through the literature available at the station and do those necessary things that can't easily be done on the trail.

For visitor contact, though, it's poorly situated. a lot of traffic comes over the suspension bridge from the Golden Trout Creek, and either cuts through about 30 yards of Park land before heading south, or procedds up the trail to the Lewis Camp Junction. In either case, it misses the station. Partially at Charlie Morgan's urging, I spent a week at the station in early August. I averaged about two people a day actually entering the Park for overnight use.

Every seacon is different, and you'll mostly have to play it by ear. Good luck to you! May your summer days be cool and breezy, and may you appear in the right place at the right time.

Terry Gustafson  
September, 1990

TRAIL MILEAGES - KERN CANYON PATROL AREA

Measured 1990 by Terry Gustafson (Kern Ranger)  
and Betty Jo Black (V.I.P.)

Lower Kern Canyon Trail (Coyote Creek to High Sierra Trail)

	distance between pts.	running total	reverse total
Park Boundary	(0.1)	(0.1)	
Coyote Creek/Kern Ranger Station	0.0	0.0	8.5
Golden Trout Creek Trail Junction	0.1	0.1	8.4
River Pasture Drift Fence	0.3	0.4	8.1
Snake Camp Ford	0.6	1.0	7.5
Lower Funston Drift Fence	1.4	2.4	6.1
Lower Funston Meadow	0.6	3.0	5.5
Laurel Creek Crossing	0.3	3.3	5.2
Laurel Creek Drift Fence	0.4	3.7	4.8
21" Camp Ford	1.9	5.6	2.9
Rattlesnake Creek Trail Junction	0.3	5.9	2.6
Rattlesnake Creek (Kern) Drift Fence	0.3	6.2	2.3
Big Arroyo Bridge	0.8	7.4	2.1
Upper Funston Meadow (no access here)	0.6	8.0	0.5
Path to Upper Funston Meadow campsites	0.3	8.3	0.2
Upper Funston Drift Fence (90 yards north of this path)			
Funston Creek Crossing	0.1	8.4	0.1
High Sierra Trail Junction	0.1	8.5	0.0

High Sierra Trail (in the Kern Canyon)

	distance between pts.	running total	reverse total
Upper Funston Meadow Campsites	(0.3)	(0.3)	10.8
(Lower) Kern Canyon Trail Junction	0.0	0.0	10.5
High Sierra Stock Gate (44 yards north of Junction)			
Chagoopa Creek Crossing	1.0	1.0	9.5
Kern River Bridge	0.3	1.3	9.2
Kern Hot Springs (bulletin board)	0.5	1.8	8.7
Rock Creek Crossing	0.1	1.9	8.6
Stream draining Guyot Flat	2.4	4.3	6.2
Whitney Creek Crossing	2.8	7.1	3.4
Small meadow by river - stock camp	1.2	8.3	2.2
Wallace Creek Crossing	0.7	9.0	1.5
Junction Meadow	0.2	9.2	1.3
Colby Pass Trail Junction	0.1	9.3	1.2
(Upper) Kern Canyon Trail Junction	1.2	10.5	0.0

High Sierra Trail (Lower Kern Canyon Trail Junction to Moraine Lake Trail Junction)

	distance between pts.	running total	reverse total
Upper Funston Meadow Campsites	(0.3)	(0.3)	
(Lower) Kern Canyon Trail Junction	0.0	0.0	3.8
Top of switchbacks	1.7	1.7	2.1
Top of steep manzanita slope	1.1	2.8	1.0
Moraine Lake Trail Junction	1.0	3.8	0.0

Franklin Pass Trail (Kern River Trail Junction to Franklin Pass)

	distance between pts.	running total	reverse total
Kern River Trail Junction	0.0	0.0	10.6
Willow Meadow Cutoff Trail Junction	2.0	2.0	8.6
Rattlesnake Creek Drift Fence #1	1.0	3.0	7.6
Old "Cow Camp"	0.6	3.6	7.0
New "Cow Camp"	0.4	4.0	6.6
Rattlesnake Creek Drift Fence #2	0.5	4.5	6.1
Rattlesnake Creek Drift Fence #3	1.2	5.7	4.9
Turnoff to old Trail Crew camp	0.6	6.3	4.3
Campsite at head of meadow	0.2	6.5	4.1
Rattlesnake Creek Drift Fence #4	0.5	7.0	3.6
Soda Creek Trail Junction	1.4	8.4	2.2
Shotgun Pass Trail Junction	0.1	8.5	2.1
Bottom of switchbacks to Franklin Pass	0.5	9.0	1.6
Franklin Pass	1.6	10.6	0.0

Golden Trout Creek Trail (Lewis Camp Junction to Kern Suspension Bridge)

	distance between pts.	running total	reverse total
Kern Ranger Station	(0.1)	(0.1)	
Lewis Camp Trail Junction	0.0	0.0	0.3
Soda Spring Access Trail (about 50 yards east of the Junction)			
Kern River Suspension Bridge	0.3	0.3	0.0

Coyote Pass Trail (Kern Ranger Station to Coyote Pass)

	distance between pts.	running total	reverse total
Park Boundary	(0.1)	(0.1)	(5.8)
Kern Canyon Trail Junction	0.0	0.0	5.7
(Kern Ranger Station is across Coyote Creek from this Junction)			
First Coyote Creek Crossing	1.6	1.6	4.1
Stream from Crytes Lake	0.6	2.2	3.5
"Error Camp" Meadow	1.6	3.8	1.9
Coyote Lakes Trail Junction	0.8	4.6	1.1
Coyote Pass (Park Boundary)	1.1	5.7	0.0

Coyote Pass to Mineral King

(USFS Trail between Coyote Pass and Farewell Gap)

	distance between pts.	running total	reverse total
Kern Ranger Station	(5.7)	(5.7)	(22.3)*
Coyote Pass (Park Boundary)	0.0	0.0	16.6*
Stream Crossing	0.1	0.1	16.5*
10,400'Ridge (top of switchbacks)	0.5	0.6	16.0*
Rifle Creek	2.3	2.9	13.7*
Camelback (saddle)	0.5	3.4	13.2*
Pistol Creek	0.7	4.1	12.5*
Rifle Creek Campground Trail Junction	0.6	4.7	11.9*
Shotgun Creek/Pass Trail Junction	0.6	5.3	11.3*
Top of ridge, view of Farewell Gap	0.7	6.0	10.6*
Wet Meadows Trail Junction	0.5*	6.5*	10.1*
Broder Cabin access trail	0.4*	6.9*	9.7*
"Windy Point" campsite	1.5*	8.4*	8.2
Farewell Gap (Park Boundary)	2.0	10.4*	6.2
Franklin Pass Trail Junction	2.7	13.1*	3.5
Mineral King	3.5	16.6	0.0

\* Estimates: I took the old "high trail" (not recommended for stock, due to two dangerous washouts) and missed the Wet Meadows and Broder Cabin Junctions.

Coyote Lakes Trail (Coyote Pass Trail to Coyote Lakes)

	distance between pts.	running total	reverse total
Coyote Pass Trail Junction	0.0	0.0	3.0
Coyote Meadows Campsite	0.6	0.6	2.4
Park Boundary (drainage divide)	1.8	2.4	0.6
Lion Meadow Trail Junction, Deep Creek Trail Junction, and Saddle overlooking Coyote Lakes	0.2	2.6	0.4
Upper Coyote Lake campsite	0.4	3.0	0.0