

CRABtree Season END Report  
1992

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Crabtree Ranger

What a summer! My first season (or first time for that matter) in the Sierra Nevada. My season began on June 11 when I hiked over Cottonwood Pass, after coming from the Rockies, I was surprised to find the high Sierr<sup>a</sup> free of snow so early. Only above 13,000 ft. on Mt. Whitney did I encounter significant areas of snow.

The weather this summer was tame by mountain standards. Hurricane activity in June and early July caused some cloudiness and cool temperatures in the high country. I can only recall, however, one real storm with several days of rain and some lightning activity in early August. September and October were abundant with sunshine and warm temperatures.

I patrolled 1,143 miles of trails this summer. Mt. Whitney received the most visitation of the Crabtree patrol area.

Visitation - as I was fuctold the Crabtree area is a busy place. The majority of visitors in the area are Mt. Whitney hikers. The most popular route seems to be a 3 day loop that starts at Cottonwood Pass and exits the Whitney Portal. This is a popular route caused by the restriction to 50 overnight permits per day issued for the east side of Mt. Whitney. The Keamsage Pass to Whitney Portal loop is also a popular route.

The busiest overnight area at Crabtree is Gutter Lake. This is due to the fact that the Mt. Whitney hikers want to camp as close as possible to the mountain. There are upwards of 100 people camped at Gutter Lake during the busiest days of August. I think this area is over used and would like to see the use spread out more in the Crabtree area. Unfortunately I do not see a feasible

way of achieving this. Therefore I recommend that a toilet be built at Visitor Lake to accommodate this over-use.

The area of the ranger station also receives much use. The fact that fires are permitted in this area leads many people to set up camp there. This is not a problem as there is an abundance of firewood to be found in the avalanche chute adjacent to Whitney Creek. The bear-box also brings people to the ranger station area to camp. On busy nights I would instruct people to use the barrels next to the ranger station for food storage because the bear box would fill-up.

The last 3 weeks of August see the most visitation in the Crabtree area. Otherwise there is a steady flow of visitors throughout the summer. Rarely was there a night when there wasn't at least one party camped in the vicinity of the ranger station.

Permits - Most visitors to the Crabtree area hike in from the east side and therefore get their permits at the Forest Service office in Lone Pine. During the course of my visitor contacts I would inquire what information they received when getting their permit. The answers I received were varied. Some people picked up their permit in the night box and therefore received no information. Others would be shown the minimum impact rules and be given a talk by a forest service ranger. I'm sure the Forest Service office in Lone Pine is a very busy place. It would be nice to see a standardized set of rules and regulations that every visitor to Sequoia N.P. has received. Some visitors do not even know that they are in Sequoia National Park! Consistency would insure that people have been informed and make enforcement of Park regulations consistent as well.

A positive note about permits is that those Park visitors who received permits on the west side at the various trail-heads were very well informed. It was obvious that the NPS ranger issuing the permit had made a positive impact on the visitor, kudos off to the trail-head rangers.

Incidents - Yibe Crabtree ranger was involved with 8 medi-macs this summer. 2 were in the Wallace Creek area, 1 at Rock Creek, and 5 at Crabtree. Yibe Longo N.F. helicopter was used on 1 medi-mac because the Park Service helicopter was on another medical at Cedar Grove. 4 of the medi-macs were high altitude conditions. One was a STAT medical where the patient had blood in vomitus and was ataxic. It would be a good learning tool for the rangers if we were informed of what became of the medi-macs we handle and what suggestions the doctors might have on handling of the patients in the field.

Yibe Crabtree ranger was involved with 2 "hasty" searches this summer. On 9/6 a search was carried out from Mt. Whitney to Starvater Pass for 3 individuals who were 3 days overdue. Yibe irresponsible party showed up at Whitney Portal after being overdue for 5 days. On 9/11 a search was carried out from Crabtree ranger station into the Miter Basin looking for an overdue hiker. Yibe hiker showed up in camp after being lost overnight.

A small wildfire was discovered just south of upper Crabtree Meadow on 8/2. It was decided to suppress the fire after reconnaissance by 110 and 960. This decision was based on the fact that the fire was in a high-use area and most likely man caused. 2 fire-fighters were flown in and the small fire was shortly thereafter extinguished.

A Dead-horse was discovered on the PCT just

above lower Crabtree meadow on 8/16. Because of the proximity to the trail it was decided to blow the horse up. Steve Moffit was flown in and soon after his arrival the horse was "naparized".

Law-enforcement - Law-enforcement in the Crabtree area was low-key. One citation was issued for unlawful food storage. One courtesy tag was issued for improper-grazing. The Crabtree rangers spent much time educating the public on the "right-way". Many verbal warnings were given and compliance rates most often achieved. This is evidenced in the fact that there was a bear in the area all summer making the "rounds" and only 2 parties lost food to the bear.

Stock-use - Stock use in the Crabtree area commenced on the first week of July and, due to the beautiful weather in September, ran into the middle of September. Use was at acceptable levels and no aesthetic impacts could be seen until September when 3 consecutive Buck Creek parties grazed the upper meadow. This had the upper meadow looking like a lawn-mower had run-over it, but was late enough in the season. Both lower and upper Crabtree meadows will be in fine-shape come next Spring.

The majority of stock-use in the Crabtree area comes from Cottonwood Pack station. The packers are typically young, but I found that I was able to work with them a & gain compliance. Buck Creek pack station out of Bishop does a fine job and practices minimum impact better than most backpackers. The group out of Red's meadow did a fair job with the 25 head that they brought into the lower meadow for 2 nights.

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In summary there were no problems with stock use in the Crabtree area.

Resources - The big animal sighting for the summer came on Sept. 27 when I saw a Mountain lion chasing a deer in the meadow above the Buck Creek station. Otherwise, nothing out of the ordinary in the Crabtree area. The most bear activity seemed to be in Widette Meadow. I took several reports from people who described a rather aggressive bear in this area. There was a bear making his presence felt most every night in the Crabtree area. Besides the 2 parties who lost food to the bear no real problems caused to the bear by our human intrusion.

Besides Sinitas Lake, all camping areas are in good shape with acceptable levels of impact.

The Crabtree Lakes area is the only real area that will change around Crabtree if the fire limit is lowered to 10,000 ft. I suspect that the fishermen who frequent the area will be quite upset by such a change. I do not see a real shortage of downed wood in this area, although most wood is from Gristle snags. This area could possibly be an exception if the fire limit is lowered in the Kem. I assisted Dan Demersal in a resources management project at lower Crabtree Lake. The goal is to see the wood production of a given stand of Gristle Pine. It will be interesting to see the results of the study.

The fire regulations do need to be printed in a more understandable fashion. There is much ambiguity in how they are currently printed on the various park hand-outs.

aircraft over Park - approximately 10 low flying military aircraft were reported by the Crabtree rangers. The area above the Sierra Crest, Mt. Whitney area seems to get the most traffic. The aircraft are intrusive even at 3,000 ft. ATL and are the number 1 source of visitor complaints in the Crabtree area.

Trails - Trails in the Crabtree area are in good shape. One small section of trail above Sutter Lake needs to be re-routed to take it out of a wet meadow and a messy situation. The Mt. Whitney trail could use some work as well. Particularly the last 3/4 mile section to the summit. This is not a 2 man job, however, so not much can be done by the current Kem trail crew.

Kats off to Joe & Eric of the Kem trail crew for doing as fine a job as can be expected by a 2 man crew.

Maintenance - The Crabtree rangers spend at least one full day a week performing maintenance duties at the campsites in the area. Most of this time is spent picking aluminum foil out of fire pits and maintaining fire pits at an aesthetically acceptable level. Many sacks of garbage were flown out from Crabtree from these "clean-up" days. The obliteration and rehabilitation of illegal fire-sites is also an important maintenance detail.

The big maintenance project in the area was performed by Jack Vance and the "History-buys". The crew deserves much credit for enduring adverse conditions while installing the lightning protection system on the Whitney shelter. Not only did they put the protection system in, they did some fine work restoring the shelter to a more appealing condition. Kats off to

Jack Vance and the "History-buys".

Danger Station and facilities - The Crabtree station is in good repair. A steel-door and more secure door-frame would make the cabin more secure. The privy is in good shape and will not need moved for at least another year. Some serious back-haul would help to rid the station of much "junk" that has accumulated over the years.

### Recommendations -

1.) Lower the fire-limit on the Kern Plateau to 10,800 ft. There could be some exceptions (Crabtree Lake), but print the regulations so they can be understood by all.

2.) Build a toilet at Guntar Lake. The area is already aesthetically impacted by the dozens of tents that can be seen there every night. Restricting (regulating) over-night use there is an even better idea but I see no feasible way of doing so. I'm afraid that a "Whitney-type" toilet that can be slung out when full is the only way to go.

3.) More consistency in permit-writing for Sequoia N.P. on the east side Guest Service offices.

4.) Make correction on the maps that erroneously show the small pond above Guntar Lake closed to camping and Guntar Lake open.



Station Needs -

- steel door and more secure door frame,
- window for back room (was broken in the past and never replaced).

Artist List -

- set of coffee mugs
- 1 cast-iron skillet
- 1 set of glasses (drinking)
- 1 coffee pot

Mike Whitney told "honey-bucket" will need to be loaned out first thing next season.

8- BATTERIES used by Crabtree Ranger 6/11 - 10-15