

## Charlotte Year End Report--1999

George Durkee

*“Power and riches appear then to be, what they are, enormous and operose machines contrived to produce a few trifling conveniencies to the body, consisting of springs the most nice and delicate, which must be kept in order with the most anxious attention, and which, in spite of our care, are ready every moment to burst into pieces, and to crush in their ruins their unfortunate possessor.”*

Adam Smith *Moral Sentiments*

*“How wondrous this! How mysterious! I carry wood, I draw water.”*

Li Po

### Stats:

Visitors Contacted	1300
Miles Hiked	680
Citations	3 (2 Improper Food Storage; 1 Fire)
Warnings	30 (camping on veg.; food storage; close to water, etc..)
Medivacs	0 (!!)
Searches	0

### Summary

A low snow year--70% of normal, so trails, passes & river crossings were easily passable by mid-June this year. It was also an incredibly quiet season: no medivacs (which I don't think has ever happened before), no searches and very few law enforcement incidents (I went over to provide backup for Rick on a possible gun possession incident, but it turned out to be a small cross-bow with a pistol grip handle...). Both Cedar Grove and the east side permit issuers did an excellent job of telling hikers about Park regulations and especially food storage regulations. All permits I checked, including the USFS permits, had the Park regulations attached. Ralph Moore gets an 'attaboy' for the latter.

The radio system was messed up for yet another year. The Gould repeater didn't work perhaps 1/3 of the time. I could usually transmit on Palmer, until that also started to fail. One night, while out at midnight investigating an illegal campfire in Kearsarge Basin and after asking dispatch for 10 minute status checks, both repeaters failed and I had no way of telling dispatch I was OK (or calling for help if things went badly...). A week later, and the day after a radio tech was up on Gould and "fixed" the repeater, it failed again while Rick & I were investigating some hikers who reportedly had a gun. We were unable to talk to dispatch for status checks or wants & warrants. The radio shop did not get around to even *attempting* to fix the repeaters until late August--more than two months into our season. Needless to say this is unacceptable. Someone's got to convince the radio shop to schedule sufficient time in the spring to make sure the repeaters work AND to do it while we're in the backcountry to confirm they work. For the last few years their method has been to work on a repeater, then fly out when they believe it to be OK, without asking us for a radio check. What works right next to the repeater doesn't always work from locations farther away. On the bright side, the last fix of Gould (9/25) may have worked--at least it worked until I left 10/7.

### Bears

As a result of the mild winter and early spring, bears had natural foods readily available and weren't as aggressive as reported last year (a 120% snow year with 3 injuries due to bears). There were few incidents of aggressive behavior (false charges, following hikers etc.). The incidents we did have seemed within the normal range of bears getting hikers' food. Almost all were a result of improper food storage: from forgetting to take candy bars out of a pack to blatantly ignoring food storage warnings. In 3 incidents, though, a bear got into 2 food storage lockers (the double door ones) at Kearsarge Lakes and Charlotte Lake. These were both retrofitted with new latching mechanisms by late September and there were no more problems.

Because the permit stations were doing such a good job this year, every person who had a permit had sufficient bear warnings and information. About 70% of all hikers were carrying storage canisters (by a survey I did of 50 parties). We now have to figure out how to convince the recalcitrant hikers (the ones who have been hiking since the Pleistocene and can't be told how to do anything...) that they must comply with food storage requirements.

Also significant: less than 5% of the bear scat I examined this year had evidence of backpacker's food in it (foil & plastic). This compares to probably 30% in 1985 (before boxes and canisters) and 10% in 1992. Our efforts at education, then, are increasingly successful. It's also worth noting that scats examined from about mid-August on were composed entirely of what looked like pine nuts--probably Whitebark, though possibly Foxtail. I don't know how they're getting the cones. Possibly climbing the trees and getting them, but perhaps (and more likely) eating the cones cut down by Douglas Squirrels. It's even possible bears are tearing them directly out of the squirrel's caches (*Ursus alpinum*??)

### **Meadows & Stock Use**

Stock use was about average this year though, as always, localized concentration of that use caused serious damage at two meadows: East Lake and Upper Vidette. Vidette was probably pushed over it's carrying capacity during a 2 week period when about 40 to 60 head used it for 2 to 3 nights. When Bob Meadows and I went there to do the Biomass transect, we found it in unacceptable condition and requested it be closed to stock use for the remainder of the season, which was done. I have never seen a meadow in worse shape. The problem is that the packers who used it did nothing prohibited by regulations. I failed to keep a close enough eye on it because I thought the two large stock groups were camping elsewhere.

As noted below, we need a quick way to evaluate meadows and quantify trends as the season progresses, which would include an agreed upon set of criteria for closure. I also need to keep a closer eye on it and be informed of stock groups going into those areas. The latter can be coordinated with Cedar Grove permit station for Loverin and direct contact with Rock Creek and North Lake pack stations for the east side (requesting that they call us when they've got trips coming into the area).

### **Recommendations for 2000**

1) We need a quick sampling method to determine whether a meadow needs to be temporarily or permanently closed for the season. I believe most of us (backcountry rangers) have an intuitive grasp of when a meadow is being grazed beyond its capacity, but we also need to start experimenting with a more quantitative and consistent approach that can be done in an hour or so. For meadows at risk, we need to figure out a carrying capacity for each and some way of regulating and enforcing it with the pack stations involved.

For the area between the upper and lower Vidette fences, we need to look at how to distribute stock use

more evenly. It appears as if 90% of the grazing took place at the first meadow (which we had to close by September, though it probably should have been by mid-August). Both a monitoring method for the ranger and perhaps an assigned number of available grazing nights for that meadow ought to be used.

We should also consider packers shortening or eliminating grazing times by supplementing with cubes at the overused meadows. The choice might be theirs: supplement feed to reduce grazing pressure or not be allowed to use the meadows at all. This should all be coordinated with Sylvia Haultain who should determine carrying capacity, and the ranger division to decide how to regulate and enforce the use patterns.

2) As was recommended last year, prohibit hanging of food in the watershed south of Pinchot Pass and north of Forester Pass and down to Cedar Grove (Bubbs & Woods Creeks and tributaries). All hikers and stock users must use either canisters or boxes. As part of this regulation, I would also recommend that, between the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of July to the end of August, groups of 3 or more people be required to have at least one canister to relieve pressure on the boxes (this requirement would only be necessary except during heavy use periods).

Tim Loverin also suggested he be allowed to put in Knack boxes (the same type the trail crew use) at several camps he uses on a regular basis. Specifically: East Lake, Junction Meadow, Charlotte drift fence, the first Upper Vidette camp. He also said he'd be willing to share these with other pack outfits. I would tend to support this because it would relieve pressure on the East Lake and Junction boxes and provide storage at the Charlotte stock camp, which currently has nothing but is not used at all by hikers. As a trial, I suggest we allow him to place one each at Junction (?), East Lake and Charlotte drift fence. I'd hold off on the Upper Vidette site because that meadow got trashed this year by overgrazing and severe hoof and rolling impacts and had to be closed. A box there would only exacerbate this problem by encouraging stock use at that site when it ought to be spread around between the two Vidette fences.

4) Eliminate once and for all the previous request for a food storage locker at Wheelbarrow Camp (the last trees at about 11,200 ft. on the Forester trail). This site is much too fragile to withstand the increased use that would inevitably follow a box there. The Center Basin/JMT box (the last one on the approach to Forester) is severely impacted and the vegetation deteriorating badly since I was last here in '92 (photos to be supplied). Much of this use would move up to the even more fragile alpine meadow at Wheelbarrow if we provide a box there.

An alternative is to put an additional one at the Center Basin/JMT trail junction on the north side of the Center trail. This is a wooded site on d/g and could withstand additional use. *However, I would not do anything until we see if a requirement for canisters in this drainage eliminates the problem anyway.* ("If nothing is done, nothing need be done." Lao Tzu). Next year, we should just put a sign at Center saying it's the last box and that canisters only are required beyond that point. Overall, I believe the Bubbs and Woods Creek drainages have enough boxes and that policy now ought to be directed towards individual responsibility for people who want to camp away from the boxes (by using canisters). This will also disperse use at camps.