

## **Introduction**

I began my season on June 4, and after two weeks of training I hiked into the backcountry on June 19. I hiked over Granite Pass to Simpson Meadow and then up to LeConte Canyon. It was great to get into the backcountry, as it was my second season to be stationed at LeConte, the first was in 1980. My initial priority after setting up the station was to check out the trail conditions on the area passes for Muir, Bishop and Mather Passes. It was a 70% of normal snow year in the Kings, so there was some snow on the passes. Muir Pass had snow on the south side for about a mile and Mather Pass has about a ½ mile of snow on the north side.

## **LeConte Station**

LeConte Station had been broken into twice since I had last traveled through the area the previous fall. Once in mid Oct. 2001, and one time the first of June, 02. Each time the offender had broken a window to get in and then replaced the wooden shutter after they left. The reason for hikers breaking in was to obtain some food, as no further damage was done to the station. The station was relatively easy to break into, since when the station was closed down in the fall of 2001, the plywood shutters used to seal the windows were inadequate. I requested plexiglass for fixing the two windows and this was flown in on my initial mobilization flight. The plexiglass was easier to work with than glass and an extra piece was left at the station for future repairs. At the end of the season I had new plywood shutters flown in to allow me to safely secure the station windows for the winter. Other repairs on the station this summer included adding metal reinforcement to the storage shed door and adding an additional hasp lock to this door.

**Recommendation:** I have requested metal window shutters and a metal shutter for the door for next season. This would be a major improvement for securing the station in the future. It would make it much easier to close down the station and help to prevent break- ins from happening in the future.

In regards to the stations solar electric system, the panels are tricky to mount on the roof. Last season I hiked up from Bench Lake to do the hook up for Sandy. Also, the system doesn't work very well because of the trees in the area shade the panels. From the first part of September, the batteries started to not recharge and I had to use the propane lantern in the evening. In the beginning of the season it took about a week for the system to fully charge.

**Recommendation:** I am recommending that we move the panels off of the roof for next season. There is an excellent solar spot about 100 ft. from the station to the south. This "ground mounted" system would provide better charging capability, plus it would be much easier to put up and take down each season.

Furthermore, the station aluminum roof is in need of being replaced with a metal roof. The plywood under the aluminum panels is rotting around the perimeter. This is due to there being no flashing "drip edge", which causes the water damage. There are several holes in the aluminum roof on the north side of the station (see photo in back of report). Also, there is evidence of water damage inside the station. The plywood ceiling is warping and this is a result of water damage from water leaking through the roof.

**Recommendation:** The aluminum roof needs to be replaced next season with a metal roof. Refer to the back of report for these specifications.

### **Visitor Contacts**

This season I contacted approximately 1200 park visitors and hiked approx. 900 miles. The busiest time was in August, but there was significant hiking activity when I arrived in June and there were still some hikers coming through the area in Oct. when I left. In referring to my 1980 LeConte end of season report, I reported that the majority of hikers in the area were doing the North Lake to South Lake Loop. This season, I would estimate that ½ of the hikers were doing the John Muir Trail. There has definitely been a significant increase in JMT hikers over this period and primarily within the past five years.

Another noticeable trend was with the North Lake to South Lake hikers. It appeared that about ½ of these hikers were doing Lamark Col. This included groups such as Boy Scout Troups and those hikers that would not be expected to do a cross country type of route. The cross country part of this trip from Darwin Canyon over Lamark Col to the base of the pass of the east side is challenging. It is surprising that more injuries do not occur in this area.

From checking wilderness permits this season, a significant number of hikers entering from the east side through Inyo, did not have the park minimum impact information stapled to their permit. They would have Forest service regulations, but not the parks. As a result park service regulations were being violated. The most common one was camping on the grass. Numerous times this season I gave verbal warnings to hikers for setting their tents up on the grass and for camping too close to rivers and lakes. We need to find a way to get hikers to carry with their permit the park regulations. It's a full size sheet that is sometimes given to hikers from the Bishop permit station. In some cases this summer hikers told me that they had left it in their auto at the trailhead. Also, in talking to Rachel (wilderness #34) she informed me that there was a time during the season that the Bishop Forest Service office had run out of Park Minimum Impact regulations.

**Recommendation:** For those hikers entering the park from Inyo we should have a regulation sheet the same size as the the Forest Service regulation sheet. Also, we need to make sure that the Forest Service staples this sheet to the permit, so hikers are more inclined to keep it with them on their hike.

### **Medivacs**

This season there were two occasions that I requested stock from Rainbow Pack Station to stockevac backpackers. One hiker had mountain sickness and was too weak to hike out. The other hiker had injured his foot. He was somewhat reluctant to ride out, but I encouraged him to, because I was concerned that he might aggravate the injury if he hiked out.

Dusy Basin continues to be a hot spot for medivacs. There were three times during the season that the helicopter flew out injured hikers from this area. On two occasions the USFS frog researchers used their satellite phone to call for help.

Several times this season I contacted hikers that reported mountain sickness type of ailments. On these occasions I checked out their vitals and filled out a run sheet. These

run sheets were kept on file. In these cases, both the patient and myself were in agreement that a medivac was not necessary. I encouraged them to take it easy for a couple of days and not push it so hard.

### **Mt. Winchell Search**

On August 16, I got a call from 111 about a climber that did not return to his camp the previous night after attempting to climb Mt. Winchell. It was one of the frog researchers from Dusy Basin. I was on standby all day waiting for the helicopter to pick me up. It was not until the following day that the ground search actually began and helicopter 552 flew me to Cedar Grove and then up to Dusy Basin to start searching.

The young med student had attempted this technical climb solo and he was attempting to free climb to the summit.(see photo in back of report) After four days of searching he was spotted 200 ft. from the summit on the east side of the mountain where he had fallen to his death. The Park Service and Inyo made a huge effort to locate him in this search. It was a very sad ending to the life of a young climber that made a very big mistake.

### **Visitor Assistance**

I did assist many hikers this summer in many ways from fixing camp stoves, boot repairs to giving out emergency food. My approach with backpackers is not this: Hi, I'm the ranger can I see your wilderness permit, but Hi, I'm the ranger, how can I help you. Once that you have established that you are the ranger there to help in need, you can check there wilderness permit. On five occasions I relayed important messages for hikers through dispatch to make phone calls for them.

### **Palisades Creek Fire**

On August 26, a fire began around Stillwater Meadow in lower Palisades Creek. The trailcrew was there after the fire began and they made an effort to put out this very small fire that was burning around a dead snag. The trail crew continued up canyon to do some work on the Golden Stair Case and later that day the fire started to take off. They made the report to fire management and fire monitors were flown in to manage this as a natural let burn fire. For approximately two weeks fire monitors escorted hikers through the area at 0800 hrs every morning. The rest of the day the area was closed to travel.

The trail crew reported to me that the fire began around a dead snag and not around a camp fire. So as a result, it appears that this was a lightning started fire. The burn overall was a very good one reducing a lot of ground fuels and thinning the forest. As no fire is perfect, there were several stands of trees that were killed. Fire management did a big job escorting backpackers through this area and allowing this stretch of trail to remain open. The majority of the burning occurred during the first two days of the fire, as it flashed up canyon. From that point on it was primarily small spot fires and burning up the sides of the canyon on the north and south side.

### **Park Radio**

There were new repeater towers put in this summer on three repeater sights: Gould, Windy and Evolution. All summer most of the Evolution patrol area was "in the

blind” from the Evolution repeater. Radio transmissions in this area worked fairly well before the new tower was activated. This was reported on numerous occasions this summer and nothing was done to try and fix the problem. We are just flat out lucky that there was not a medical crisis this summer that was complicated by the ranger’s inability to transmit.

In the LeConte patrol area there are numerous places that are out of range of the Windy repeater. One of the most hazardous stretches of trail is “out of range”. That area is from Muir Pass south approx. two miles to Upper LeConte Lakes at 10,400 ft.

### **Stock Use in Little Pete and Big Pete Meadows**

Little Pete Meadow is a relatively small and narrow meadow that is the most popular camping site for backpackers in the area. There are approx. 6 camping sites here with only one site that is big enough to handle a large group. Frequently this summer in August, all of these camp sites would be filled by backpackers. There was a lot of stock use in Little Pete this summer. In most cases this summer stock groups camping here would not have access to the group site, because it was occupied by backpackers. As a result, they would have to use a smaller site and their tents and gear would be spread out all over the meadow grasses. There were a few times this summer that backpackers complained to me about the stock. In an ideal park management scenario, backpacker camping would be separated from stock grazing.

Big Pete Meadow on the contrary has four really good group sites. It is much better suited for stock groups than Little Pete. I met with packer Bobby Tanner this summer as he had a stock group that was coming south from Muir Pass. He ended up camping in Little Pete, because he thought Big Pete was closed to grazing. Bobby told me that he would have preferred to camp in Big Pete over Little Pete. As it turned out, in Little Pete, the group site was occupied so they had to camp at a small camp site. The group’s tents were spread out all over the meadow grasses.

**Recommendation:** Part of Big Pete is closed to grazing because of the “endangered” plant. As shown from this summer, this creates confusion for the packers thinking that this meadow is closed. This partial closure of Big Pete does not do anything to protect this plant, but it does create confusion for the packers. Big Pete is where we want the stock groups to camp and this partial closure should be cancelled to help prevent this confusion in the future. Also, Catie Karplus and I wandered around the area where this “endangered plant” is located and found that there are trees down all throughout this area that would prevent stock from grazing here. Also, because of the problems created from combining grazing and backpacker camping in Little Pete, it would be appropriate to close Little Pete to grazing. All of Big Pete Meadow should definitely not be closed to grazing to try and protect this “endangered” plant. As seen from this summer this is totally unnecessary. Also, it would create impact in Upper LeConte Canyon. This would make it too far for stock groups to travel in a day, in some cases, from Little Pete Meadow to McClure Meadow. As a result, some stock groups would be forced to camp in Upper LeConte, around the fragile lake areas, because of the long travel distance.

### **Simpson Meadow**

I was in the Simpson Meadow area five times throughout the season. I worked on the station cleaning and organizing and did some roof repairs. At the end of the season I got Tim Loverin, who was doing an end of season trip there, to haul out two gunnysacs of garbage from the station.

At the end of the season, I exited the backcountry by way of Simpson. Simpson Meadow main camp "Cottonwood Camp" was totally hammered from all the stock use from the summer. This was primarily from park service stock that was here on a regular basis resupplying the trail crew in Simpson and Dusy Basin. Fortunately, this meadow at 6,000 ft. is able to recover well over the winter and will look fine by next spring.

### **Trail Crew**

The CCC's were in this area over the summer. They began the summer by working their way north to Granite Basin and then were based in Glacier Valley for about a month working toward State Lakes and "the bitch" trail south of Simpson. They spent about a week in Simpson and then moved north and were located on Dusy Bench for about a month. This was a good crew and they did a lot of fine work in the area. Park Service leader Cameron did an excellent job with this crew and should be commended for the fine leadership that he provides.

Their camp on Dusy Bench is an example of a model camp for CCC crews in the future. It is well hidden and below the lake basin and as a result can sustain the impact of a 20 person camp. Also, it is not an established site that historically was used by backpackers. Resupplies were brought in by stock every two weeks and the helicopter was used for resupplies on occasion. Management should require that every CCC camp in the future meet these criteria. At the end of the season, all of the metal boxes from this camp were flown out. I inspected this camp at the end of the season and found that this area looked really good.

### **Rainbow Pack Station**

Rainbow made numerous trips into the LeConte area this summer. They are a model type of Pack station operation that we want to be working with in the park. Their main packer Charlie was helpful and friendly and always checking with me when he came into the area. He was also willing to graze his animals in Big Pete, even when his group was camping in Little Pete. This was helpful because of the popularity of Little Pete for backpacker camping (refer to section on Little Pete and Big Pete).

On two occasions Rainbow spotted in groups to the area, which means that they dropped off their food and gear and returned to pick them up later. At Ladder camp a group had a ton of food dropped off and they had no way to hang it to keep it from the bear. I requested that they keep someone in their camp at all times to protect the food from the bear.

**Recommendation:** Pack stations should be required to provide food storage for their clients to protect their food from bears. They have the canister capability, but currently they are offering canisters as a rental option for their clients.

### **Cedar Grove Pack Station**

In total contrast to Rainbow Pack Station is Cedar Grove Pack Station. Once again this season the Loverans continue to threaten and try to intimidate Cedar Grove

Rangers. Certainly their reported threats from this summer are nothing new, as it is their standard way of operating since they acquired the pack station 10 + years ago. How can our park continue to allow them to operate this pack station in Cedar Grove. Last season Orland literally threatened my life in front of Roads End Ranger Ryan Christenson. Hopefully, Tim Loveran's threatening remarks made to Ryan this summer will allow us to get ride of them and find a new pack station operator that we can work with in the future.

### **Bench Lake Station**

Bench Lake Station has become a vital backcountry station that should be manned every year. While being stationed there last season, I noticed an obvious increase in visitation here over the past five years. This is due primarily to the increase in Muir Trail Hikers. I estimated last season that 75% of the hikers I contacted were doing the full Muir Trail. In the past, this station has been an "on again off again" manned station depending on if funding were available. Again this season, with all of the hiker activity in this area, it proved that the trend of high visitation in this area will continue into the future. We no longer have the luxury to not fund Bench Lake every season.

Last season I moved the station and built a new floor frame. I was unable to totally finish the floor due to lack of funding. The floor needs to have 1" X 10" pine boarding installed on top of the plywood. If this is not done next season we are in jeopardy of losing this floor due to deterioration.

### **Dusy Basin Research Crew**

The past two seasons there has been a Forest Service Research Crew camped in Dusy Basin. (refer to photo in back of report) This crew sometimes consists of as many as six people. They got permission to do research here from the park and were allowed to select their own campsite. The lake where they set up their camp was picked by them due to its convenience and accessibility. Unfortunately, since it is right below Bishop Pass, it is one of the most popular camping spots of any lake in Kings Canyon backcountry.

Problems created by this large established camp include the following:

- \*There are only a few good camping sites around this lake and backpackers create additional impact at this fragile lake by having to select a less appropriate site.
- \*A big part of what we provide for park visitors is the "feeling" of true wilderness. When there is an established site like this with the metal box, all the tents, lawn chairs, etc, it no longer feels like true wilderness (see appendix I).
- \*As a result of all of these researchers living here, trails have begun to be established around the lakeshore through the fragile lakeshore grasses. These trails will take many years to renaturalize.

**Recommendation:** I am definitely recommending that this camp be removed next season, so we can begin to restore this area. In the future, as managers of this backcountry, we need to be the ones that select the camping areas for research crews in order to avoid problems like this in the future. Also, should we be allowing researchers other than our own park service crews to be setting up studies in our backcountry at all?

## Conclusion

It has been my good fortune to have been working with this National Park for the past 28 seasons. It was a busy but also very awesome season in the backcountry. I was in for almost four months and I hiked out of the backcountry for only one night during the season. The next day I was very ready to hike back in again with a belly full of Sizzler steak and shrimp.

One of the biggest challenges that we face in the future in managing this magnificent wilderness is to protect the water quality. It continues to get worse every year due to the stock and human waste contaminating the water sources. The most fragile areas are the high elevation lake basins. It is time that we take a close look at stock use in Sequoia and Kings Canyon backcountry. Currently, along the Muir Trail, some of the lake basins are closed to grazing. This was done for the obvious that the impact got so heavy and devastating that the closure was made. What is the cause of the incredible amount of algae slime that is growing in Rae Lakes. These lakes are literally infested with an algae growing in the lakes. It is not an algae that is growing on the rocks on the bottom of the lakes, but a unique form of slimy algae that grows thick like “algae clouds” in the water. Has the cause of this ever been studied by the park? No other high country lake that I’ve ever seen has an algae slim like Rae Lakes. Certainly, a common sense observation would be that it is a result of fecal bacteria contaminating the water source- human and stock. Unfortunately, the closure of Rae Lakes to stock grazing was made too late. The algae slime in this lake is irreversible and may continue to get worse.

We have a situation in Kings Canyon that many lakes are unprotected and subject to a similar type of irreversible impact as Rae Lakes. What lakes in Kings Canyon are susceptible to this type of impact. Along the Muir Trail, in order to simplify this analysis, there are four main areas; Upper LeConte Canyon lakes, Palisades Lakes, Twin Lakes and Bench Lake .On the Monarch Divide; Horseshoe Lakes, State Lakes and Volcanic Lakes are unprotected. An immediate priority should be given to closing **all lakes** to grazing in Kings Canyon backcountry. Hopefully, in working as a team with the backcountry rangers, district and subdistrict rangers, resource management and the superintendent, we can face up to these current problems and make the needed changes to protect this most sacred environment.

### **LeConte Station Needs for 2003 Season**

\*for the station water filter: one of the ceramic filters has broken and needs to be replaced  
note: there are three vertical filters.(this sytem is totally unusable unless we get a new filter

\*10 large gunnysacs

\*10 rolls tp

\*30 small plastic bags

\*for the new solar unit mounting system

\*200 ft of the heavy wire used in these systems

\*100 ft of ½ pvc piping to put this wire several inches underground  
(8 or 10 ft lengths would work with connectors and some glue)

\*one gallon of brown exterior latex paint

\*metal shutters for the windows and for the front door

\*111 has these measurements

\*new metal roof – (see specifications included)