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## **Project Report for September 17-21, 2014** **Yosemite National Park Volunteer Expedition**

### **Executive Summary**

Eighteen volunteers and two trip leaders contributed 440 hours of volunteer labor from September 17 through September 21, assisting the National Park Service in redefining trail boundaries and rehabilitating a large number of social trails near the Happy Isles Trailheads. The volunteers assisted with trail tread clearance and maintenance from Happy Isles to Clark Point on the John Muir Trail. In addition, the volunteers working under the close direction of the NPS Trail Crew assisted in the maintenance of the mule trail that leads from Happy Isles to the John Muir Trail.

The National Park Service (NPS) Trail Crew, working under the supervision of Remo Fickler, provided guidance and oversight of the projects assigned to volunteers. All projects assigned by the National Park Service Trail Crew to Conservation Volunteers International Program Volunteers were successfully completed and the NPS crew noted the high efficiency and careful skill with which the Volunteers conducted their tasks.

### **Introduction**

Project trip leaders Michael Toth-Purcell and Mark Hardgrove (who were assisted by Dale Walker) met with NPS Trail Crew Supervisor Remo Fickler the morning of the volunteers' arrival, September 17th, to discuss the projects assigned to the volunteers and NPS expectations of the volunteers. All necessary tools required to perform the various projects were identified and provided by the NPS Trail Crew.

Volunteers began arriving the afternoon of Wednesday, September 17, 2014. All volunteers were welcomed with an orientation briefing. A safety discussion was conducted, which included a demonstration on the safe use of the tools that were to be used. Volunteers were also briefed on the type of projects they would work on and the location of those projects. The volunteers and trip leaders enjoyed the Valley Floor Tour via open-air tram, which provided an introduction to the layout and history of the Park. Dinner and an evening campfire on Day 1 provided a further opportunity for everyone to get acquainted.

### **Detailed Report**

On the morning of the first work day, September 18, 2014, after arriving and parking at the Trailhead Parking Area near Happy Isles (shuttle stop #15), volunteers were briefed again about the various work sites and the work to be accomplished at each site. All volunteers were checked to ensure that they had work gloves, boots, safety goggles, water, lunch and snacks. The NPS provided hard hats and additional safety gear, which were required to be worn at all times while on the work site.



The volunteers worked on nine trail projects and completed seven. Two of the projects were longer term (1-2 months) where the volunteers advanced the project and the remainder was to be completed by the NPS Trail Crew. The projects could be described in three broader categories: social trail removal, trail tread repairs, and rock work.

Social trails are formed when hikers take a shortcut through a vegetated area. Over time these unintentional trails compact the soil and prevent native vegetation from taking root. The process of rehabilitating the sites is four part: 1) rake back the duff; 2) loosen the soil by shovel and rake; 3) move into place logs and brush to form a barrier to future access; and 4) camouflaging the area with the raked back duff to make the former trail appear as the surrounding area. The group assisted in renovating several persistent social trails.

The volunteers hiked to Clark Point on the John Muir Trail, which offers stunning views of Yosemite Valley and Nevada Falls. This is a heavily used trail that requires regular maintenance work due to its use by both hikers and mules. The backcountry camps and trail crews servicing the Yosemite wilderness rely on mules to shuttle supplies up the John Muir Trail. The volunteers maintained the trail by clearing water bars of debris and removing softball-sized rock that had accumulated on the trail tread. These rocks pose a hazard to both hikers and the mules that use this trail.



The third category was repairing and maintaining the designated mule trail between Happy Isles and the Vernal Falls footbridge. This was a difficult project that involved removing large rock pieces and using sledgehammers to break down larger rocks into smaller pieces that could be used in maintaining the trail. The volunteers also used rock bars to move and reposition large rocks to ensure a safe and stable trail for the mule teams.

Each day the volunteers enjoyed lunch trailside and throughout the day, NPS Trail Crew members instructed the volunteers on safety concerns and appropriate methods for moving large and heavy fallen trees. Volunteers utilized shovels, rakes, rock bars, log tongs, and wheelbarrows to complete the projects. Volunteers were encouraged to take frequent breaks, drink and snack frequently, and to work at their own pace. Hikers and tourists from around the world stopped to ask questions and complement the volunteers for their work who in turn cheerfully greeted and engaged all.





The volunteers also shared dinner with Yosemite's Volunteer Coordinator, Heather Boothe. She shared stories and gluten free cookies with the volunteers. The volunteers and leaders enjoyed Heather's enthusiasm and knowledge of the park. She graciously answered numerous questions.

### **Logistics**

The NPS Trail Crew provided all tools for all work sites. The volunteers hiked to their respective work sites under the supervision of the NPS Trail Crew.

Volunteers and Project Leaders camped at the Volunteer Camp in Yosemite Valley (Yellow Pine). All personnel brought their own camping gear and tents.

The High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew, a non-profit entity that organizes volunteers to help the Forest Service and other land managers maintain trails in the Sierra Nevada, provided all meals in a timely and tasty fashion at all times. Conservation Volunteers International Program contracted with the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew to provide cooked breakfasts and dinners, and to provide food for volunteers to prepare their own lunches to take to the work site. A cook tent and cook truck were set up adjacent to the campsite. Sufficient water and drinks were provided at all times.

## Summary

Tourists both from the United States and abroad made many positive comments of gratitude to the volunteers at their various work sites. All volunteers, who quickly became good friends and shared the common bond of “sustaining some of the world’s greatest landscapes and cultural sites,” made a lasting impact on the Park and positively influenced the NPS Trail Crew. Conservation Volunteers International Program and volunteers give special thanks to the Yosemite National Park Valley Trail Crew under the leadership of Remo Fickler, Yosemite National Park Trails Manager Dave Kari, and Yosemite National Park Volunteer Coordinator Heather Boothe for their commitment to our volunteer projects. Volunteers also thanked the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew for their outstanding assistance with food preparation and service.

Volunteers completed 440 hours of volunteer labor, rehabilitated or beautified approximately 2.5 miles of trails, and enjoyed 220 tasty meals served by High Sierra Trail Crew, and most importantly, made 20 new friends and countless lasting memories!

