



120 Village Square #9, Orinda, California 94563
www.conservationvip.org
info@conservationvip.org
Tel: (925) 228-5946
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Volunteer Project Report For September 11-17, 2016 Yosemite National Park Volunteer Trip

Executive Summary

Thirteen volunteers and two volunteer trip leaders contributed 442.5 hours of volunteer labor from September 11 through September 17, 2016, assisting the National Park Service in maintaining approximately 5.9 miles of the Ostrander Lake Trail, beginning at Bridalveil Creek Campground and entering into part of McGurk Meadow.

The National Park Service (NPS) Trail Crew, working under the supervision of Joe Meno, provided guidance and oversight of the trail maintenance. The Ostrander Lake Trail maintenance completed by the NPS Trail Crew and Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP) volunteers was successfully completed. Shown below (in red) is the trail on which ConservationVIP volunteers revitalized paths that hadn't seen maintenance in more than five years. Volunteers and the NPS Trail Crew repaired or built approximately 110 water drainages and pruned hundreds of scrubs and saplings.



Detailed Report:

Day One – September 11, 2016 (Orientation)

Volunteers arrived Sunday, September 11, 2016 in the early afternoon. All volunteers were welcomed by the trip leaders and provided assistance to get their tents set up at Yellow Pine Special Use Site for Volunteer Groups. The volunteers and trip leaders enjoyed the Valley Floor Tour via bus, which provided an introduction to the layout and history of the Park. This is a great way of creating a sense of place and on a personal level the sense of “Awe.” During the tour everyone was excited to see rock climbers scaling the walls of El Capitan. Prior to the tour, an orientation to Conservation Volunteers International Program and the work to be conducted was provided to the volunteers. Dinner and an evening campfire on the first night provided a further opportunity for everyone to get to know each other.



Pointing at rock climbers on El Capitan while on the valley tram tour.

Workday 1 - September 12, 2016

Volunteer project trip leaders Ed Eads and Patrick Murphy (who were assisted by Dale Walker) met with NPS Trail Crew Supervisor Joe Meno and his trail crew the morning of September 12th. The ConservationVIP volunteers ate breakfast with the NPS crew before driving to the Ostrander Lake trailhead to begin trail maintenance.

At the trailhead, a safety briefing was conducted and a shared value of doing the job safely was discussed. Joe, the NPS crew lead, provided a demonstration on building new and repairing existing water drainages for the ConservationVIP volunteers. Joe also provided context on the importance of the water drainages to the conservation and maintenance of the trail. The

ConservationVIP volunteers paired together and set out along the trail. Throughout the day the NPS crew toggled between ConservationVIP groups to aid and assist the volunteers, working side-by-side and ensuring the volunteers were satisfied with the progress. At one point a caravan of stock passed on the trail that the volunteers were working on, much to the delight of everyone. The visitors on horseback thanked the volunteers for maintaining the trails.



One of the daily morning meetings talking about the safety and the upcoming trail work.

Volunteers were encouraged to take frequent breaks, drink and snack frequently, and to work at their own pace. As the day progressed all volunteers were diligent about both the trail work they accomplished and the safety of themselves and those around them. Along with wearing eye protection, gloves and sunscreen, shovels and rakes were carried with caution. The first day of work began at a slow pace to acclimate to the higher elevation and reiterate the importance of safety, water and nourishment on the trail. However, volunteers were upbeat about the trail maintenance being performed throughout the day.

The weather on this day was indicative of the week's weather, with temperatures between 65 - 75 degrees and sunny or partly sunny skies. The trail could be dusty, with dry dirt kicked up from the maintenance being completed. The first day's trail work was informative, tiring and inspiring for the volunteers.

Workday 2 – September 13, 2016

The NPS Trail Crew met with the volunteers and leaders at Yellow Pine campground to enjoy time with volunteers before leaving for the trailhead at 8am. Once at the trailhead the group discussed individual and group safety before equipping with shovels, rakes and loppers provided by the NPS Crew. All volunteers had the necessary tools, safety gear and nourishment for the day of digging water drainages and pruning back overgrowth. Volunteers enjoyed a full day of labor which included both repairing drainages and pruning overgrowth. The NPS Trail Crew verbalized the importance of pruning by explaining that overgrowth on the trail pushes trail hikers and stock off the trail and onto the natural growth that could be conserved just feet off the trail.



Volunteers pruning vegetation to help keep hikers from veering of the trail unnecessarily.



During dinner, volunteers were joined by Ranger Chris Raines, who spoke about flora and fauna at Yosemite National Park for 50 minutes, followed by answering questions. Volunteers were appreciative to hear about her knowledge of the park and its animal inhabitants. Ranger Chris brought hides, pelts and antlers of fauna that had passed naturally as part of the demonstration.

Workday 3 – September 14, 2016

The NPS Trail Crew met with the volunteers and leaders at Yellow Pine campground to discuss the various work sites and the work to be accomplished at each site. Again, the NPS Trail Crew mingled with the volunteers and had breakfast before departing for the trail at approximately 8:20am. To reach the trail that needed to be maintained, volunteers and the NPS Trail Crew hiked approximately 1.5 miles from the trail head. There were fewer drainages on this section of the trail that needed maintenance and more overgrowth that needed to be trimmed back from the trail. The few drainages that needed maintenance were on a particularly routed section of the trail and required additional attention. Volunteers split into groups of three to work on the drainages and split into groups of two for the pruning work.



Before, the trail was covered by a downed tree that make the trail difficult to navigate.

The volunteers came across hikers during the day that were grateful for the volunteers' time and effort provided on the trail. The day finished with the volunteers hiking approximately 3 miles back to the trailhead from the points where trail work was completed.

Volunteers were joined by Ranger Heather Boothe, who sat with the volunteers throughout dinner and the subsequent campfire. Volunteers asked Ranger Heather questions about Yosemite National Park, the National Park Service and volunteering. Ranger Heather answered volunteers' questions thoroughly, and added an extra special flourish on those questions about the history of Yosemite National Park. Heather presented the volunteers with patches and bandanas to commemorate their service. Volunteers were grateful to have Ranger Heather share her vast knowledge about the park.

Workday 4 – September 15, 2016

The NPS Trail Crew met with the volunteers and leaders at Yellow Pine campground to discuss the work site and the work to be accomplished. The volunteers set off for the McGurk Meadow trail at 8am after a nourishing breakfast. Volunteers hiked approximately 0.9 miles to begin maintenance on the trail, which included building approximately 35 drainages and pruning hundreds of shrubs and saplings throughout the day. By this point in the week, volunteers felt comfortable with the trail maintenance work and were able to contribute more effectively and efficiently. There was a strong sense of camaraderie on the trail between the volunteers and the NPS Trail Crew. The volunteers continued to have a focus on group safety, with frequent water and snack breaks and safety with tools.



A before and after on one of the many drainages repaired by volunteers.

At the end of the workday, the volunteers, driven by the trip leaders, went to Glacier Point. Volunteers enjoyed sweeping views of the valley and took photos before going back to the campsite.

Rest Day – September 16, 2016

Friday, the last full day of the trip was set aside as a rest day. The volunteers were asked to keep the leaders informed of their intentions and trip(s) planned for the day. Each volunteer chose their activities and places to visit to round out their experience at Yosemite. Many of the volunteers made plans with other volunteers as friendships continued and the recognition of traveling/hiking with a partner(s) being important.

It was very enjoyable to hear at the end of the day all of the experiences and places visited to add to the volunteers' memories of Yosemite. That evening after a delicious dinner, the enthusiasm and kindness shared amongst the volunteers was wonderful and there was a sincere and warm feeling of accomplishment and togetherness.

Travel Day – September 17, 2016

Volunteers started the morning breaking down their camp, enjoying breakfasts, loading their gear into their vehicles and saying goodbye to new friends. By late morning Yellow Pine Campground was empty and all volunteers had left.

Logistics

The NPS Trail Crew provided all tools for all work sites. The trip leaders drove the volunteers to the trailheads where work was completed. The volunteers hiked and worked under the supervision of the NPS Trail Crew.

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

The High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew, a non-profit entity that provides meals to wilderness trail crews, provided all meals in a timely and tasty fashion. 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. One cook prepped, cooked and served a total of 255 meals for the volunteers throughout the week.

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 Joe Meno and Yosemite National Park Volunteer Coordinator Heather Boothe for their commitment to the Park and our volunteer projects. Volunteers thank Ranger Chris Raines for her commitment to educating visitors and for her presentation and kindness to our group. Volunteers also thank the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew Cook for his outstanding assistance with food preparation and service.

Volunteers completed 442.5 hours of volunteer labor, maintained approximately 5.9 miles of trails, repaired or built approximately 110 water drainages and enjoyed tasty meals served by High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew, and most importantly, made many new friends and countless lasting memories!

