



Project Report for Volunteer Trip Yosemite National Park August 22 – 28, 2021



Executive Summary

On ConservationVIP's first trip to Yosemite National Park in nearly two years, seven volunteers and two volunteer trip leaders contributed 286 hours of volunteer labor from August 22 through August 28, 2021. The group assisted the National Park Service in realigning 236 feet of trail, obliterating 744 feet of social trails, rebuilding 480 feet of pole fences including installing 31 new fence posts and constructing 120 feet of new trail and a 33-foot drainage structure in the vicinity of Happy Isles. The team also maintained 2,900 feet of the Valley Loop trail near the Yosemite Chapel.

The National Park Service (NPS) Trail Crew, working under the

Leadership of Matt DiNome and of Joe Meno, provided guidance and oversight of the projects. The volunteers installed post and rails near the Happy Isles shuttle stop, collected logs, branches and leaf litter, obliterated large, denuded areas, established clear trails with large rocks and logs, constructed a short length of new connecting trail, and cleared existing trails of debris. They cleared one culvert and built another drainage structure. The volunteers completed all planned work faster than anticipated and were assigned additional projects.

In addition to the quantifiable and statistic driven outcomes for the trip, the volunteers and trip leaders accomplished and experienced difficult-to-measure outcomes that contribute to conserving and sustaining special places. Each volunteer learned trail maintenance skills and the philosophy behind them. As a result, the volunteers will view

trails with a critical eye and will be better able to recognize lands in their own backyards that could use help. Importantly, the volunteers also spent time with and learned about the fine people who work for the National Park Service who are both passionate and dedicated to their work. It is important to recognize that our National Parks are a treasure that require care and protection to ensure they are wild and available for future generations.

Volunteer trips are group trips that occur in a setting where strangers became friends for a week. Many of those bonds will extend beyond this trip. This group bonded quickly and remained so for the duration of the trip. They also collectively showed a desire to experience Yosemite fully and seemed to enjoy the planned activities and their own explorations during their free time. They laughed and expressed concern for each other. They reminded each other to carry tools properly and worked hard as a team on each project.

Detailed Report:

Day One – August 22, 2021 (Orientation)

Sunday morning, the volunteer trip leaders Barbara Kennedy and Richard Grayson met with Matt DiNome from the NPS, to discuss and look over the potential projects for the week ahead.

Volunteers arrived Sunday, August 22, in the early afternoon. All volunteers were welcomed by the trip leaders, underwent a short health screening, and assistance was provided to get their tents set up at the Upper Pines Campground volunteer loop. Once all volunteers arrived, an orientation to Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) and the work to be conducted during the upcoming week was provided to the volunteers. Volunteers were provided the opportunity to ask questions about Yosemite, ConservationVIP® and the work. Volunteers introduced themselves, where they traveled from and why they chose to volunteer in Yosemite. The Volunteers were also oriented to COVID-19 safety protocols to be followed throughout the trip.

By mid-afternoon, the volunteers and trip leaders were becoming well acquainted and started to have a familial sense that would last throughout the week. Dinner on the first night provided a further opportunity for everyone to get to know each other. This group started laughing and never really stopped.

At the end of dinner, the group was introduced to the campground host, Andrea Timpone, who discussed campground guidelines especially related to bears. For the first time in a number of years, there has been a significant increase in human and bear encounters in Yosemite, which may be attributed to the drought and a limited natural food supply, and the influx of first time campers and visitors who may not understand outdoor ethics and behavior. Sadly 6 bears have been euthanized in 2021 as a result of repeated bear/human encounters. The volunteers vowed to take the precautions necessary by proper use of bear boxes and food safety practices.

Workday 1 – August 23, 2021

The ConservationVIP® volunteers enjoyed breakfast while getting acquainted with the NPS trail crew. Before walking to the day's project site at Happy Isles shuttle stop, the NPS team and the trip leaders briefed the volunteers on the projects for the day, as well as safety protocols. The primary project was to reinstall pole fencing around the Happy Isles shuttle stop and restroom, which had been removed to allow for removal of a number of large hazard trees. The second project involved collecting large amounts of leaf litter, branches and bark to truck to the next project about ½ mile away.

The team also discussed safe use of the various tools to be employed, how to work safely near large numbers of park visitors and the need to stay hydrated given the warm weather conditions. At the end of the briefing the team loaded a variety of tools into the support vehicle, then walked to the project site a short distance away.



Part of the team took on the fencing project. The post and rail fence project included clearing debris from the ground, digging new post holes, and cutting and fitting rails to size. After the fence was tamped in and stabilized, leaf litter was returned to give the area an undisturbed appearance, and the roads and walkways were cleared of any leftover debris. At the end of the day the volunteers installed 16 new fence posts and 360 feet of fence.

The rest of the group began to gather materials to disguise bare ground at our second project. Using rigid and flexible rakes, scoop shovels and wheelbarrows, they gathered

leaf litter, fallen bark and small branches and loaded it into the support vehicle. Over the day, they accumulated and moved 6 pickup truck loads of debris to the site. Once extra material had been removed the volunteers raked a large area where trees had been logged out to look smoother and less disturbed.



The area was busy with lots of visitors heading out for a hike on any number of popular trails that start in the area. Volunteers were questioned about their activity and thanked for their service a number of times.

The weather on this day was indicative of the week's weather, with temperatures reaching between 80 - 90 degrees and sunny skies with the morning starting out cool at around 50 degrees. Throughout the day volunteers were encouraged to take frequent breaks, drink and snack frequently, and to work at their own pace.



**Workday 2 – August 24, 2021**

The NPS Trail Crew met with the volunteers and leaders at Upper Pines Campground to enjoy breakfast and coffee with the volunteers. At 8 AM everyone gathered for a safety briefing and discussion, and to talk about the day's projects. They loaded needed tools into the support vehicles and walked to the project site.

The first task was to finish installing the remainder of the fence. Some of the volunteers began removing logs and debris and digging post holes with post hole diggers and metal bars. By lunchtime this team finished the project-adding 120 feet of new fence, which required installing 15 additional posts.

The second project was to decommission an area of social paths on both sides of the shuttle bus/Happy Isles loop, and to

establish a new trail connecting the paved road to an existing riverside trail. Before repair, in places the area looked more like a sandy beach than a forest floor.

The project began by volunteers breaking up any visible trail edges and returning the slope to a more natural grade, then spreading leaf litter and small debris over the sandy surface, to disguise the previous human traffic. The 6 truckloads from the previous day were quickly depleted over the large area, so volunteers foraged the surrounding vicinity for additional materials. Then larger limbs and branches were scattered randomly over the area. Finally using human power and in some cases a grip-hoist (winch) large logs from the surrounding areas were moved to complete the disguise. The ultimate success was when park visitors stopped wandering through the area to short cut between the river and the road and began to walk by without noticing that there was once a path.

Other team members worked on clearly establishing a defined path to follow, which involved pruning vegetation with loppers, setting large stones along the trail edges, clearing the tread, and building a 33-foot-long drainage structure. About 120 feet of new trail was constructed at this site.



After our project day ended, some volunteers were relaxing in camp when all of a sudden, a commotion of a running bear, humans and explosions broke the silence. One of the bears who had become a problem because of human food interaction, was being tracked and chased by NPS wildlife biologists, who were trying to make her interaction with humans most unpleasant. After they successfully chased her into the forest with fireworks, bean bag rounds and shouting, one of the bear biologists visited with our group and talked about their program to keep bears wild.

Sally Martinez, Yosemite National Park Volunteer Program Coordinator, joined us for dinner Tuesday night. She gave us an overview of the large volunteer program in Yosemite and answered many questions about the Park. Each volunteer received a 2021 Volunteer bandana and patch.

After dinner, the group enjoyed a campfire and shared stories and laughter until it got dark, and the tired volunteers, after a full day of hard work, drifted off to their tents for a good night's sleep.

Workday 3 – August 25, 2021

The NPS Trail Crew mingled with the volunteers and had breakfast before conducting a project and safety briefing, loading up tools, and departing for the worksite at 8:00 AM.

The group started the day by finishing up the previous day's project. We laughed at ourselves and our success, as we walked past the site without noticing it at first. After a few hours, we decommissioned a total of 684 feet of social trail, along with the drainage structure and new trail previously mentioned.



In the afternoon we moved to our third project site across the road from North Pines Campground. Once again, we faced a broad area of denuded sandy soil, and crisscrossed social trails. Our project was to establish a clear trail through the area with large rocks and logs, while obliterating unwanted paths and denuded areas.

While some of the team travelled to nearby areas to collect leaf litter, branches and other debris, a few volunteers began defining a trail by removing rock obstacles and half burying and stabilizing them at the sides of the trail to define the edges. Others spread out in the adjacent forest to harvest leaf litter, downed logs and branches and began disguising exposed areas. This work continued through the end of the day.

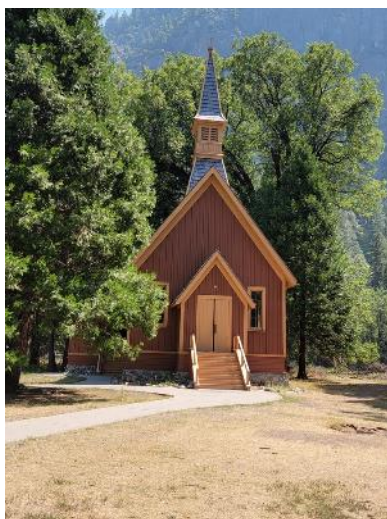
Workday 4 – August 26, 2021

Once again, the volunteers enjoyed breakfast, coffee and comradery with our new trail crew friends, before gathering together for a briefing about our last workday's project and to address any safety concerns. We loaded needed tools in the truck and headed off on foot to finish our project across from North Pines Campground. The project was completed by noon and included realigning two trails: 130 feet and 56 feet respectively,

decommissioning 60 feet of trail as well as disguising a broad area of denuded soil to discourage foot traffic.

At lunchtime, we returned to Upper Pines Campground and loaded into our vans for the first time. We enjoyed our sack lunch at the little Yosemite Chapel. Joe Meno took us to see a sequoia that had been planted nearby.

After lunch, part of the volunteer group remained near the chapel and cleared debris from the Valley Loop Trail and the trail that crossed through the meadow where the original Yosemite Village once stood. They completed maintenance of 2,900 feet of trail.



A second group drove back to a short stretch of trail near Upper Pines Campground and Curry Village. This group realigned 50 feet of trail by moving and stabilizing large rocks to define the edges of the trail and removing woody debris from the trail surface.

At the workday's end, we returned to our campsite and met one last time with Matt and Joe. They summarized our accomplishments, noting that we accomplished more work than they anticipated, and they thanked us for our hard and accident-free work. With some sadness, we said goodbye to our new NPS friends.

The week of trail work was informative, tiring, and inspiring for the volunteers. The tremendous spirit and cohesiveness of this group led to their completing more work than expected.

Rest Day – August 27, 2021

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 any 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 in recognition of the importance of traveling/hiking with a partner(s). Sites visited included Tuolumne Meadows and the high country, Glacier Point, Mariposa Grove, and Wawona.

At the end of the day, it was wonderful to hear the experiences that provided rest and added to the volunteers' memories of Yosemite. That evening after a delicious dinner, the enthusiasm and kindness shared among the volunteers was wonderful and there was a sincere and warm feeling of accomplishment and togetherness. We wrapped up the evening by making s'mores and laughing around a crackling campfire.

Travel Day – August 28, 2021

Volunteers started the morning breaking down their camp, enjoying breakfast, loading their gear into their vehicles, and saying goodbye to new friends. By late morning our site at Upper Pines Campground was empty and the volunteers had left, with many vowing to return to Yosemite or to other adventures hosted by ConservationVIP.

Logistics

The NPS Trail Crew provided all tools for all work projects. The group enjoyed walking to the work sites in Happy Isles and trip leaders drove the volunteers to the work site near the chapel. The volunteers worked under the supervision of the NPS Trail Crew.

Volunteers and Volunteer Project Leaders camped at Upper Pines Campground in Yosemite Valley. All volunteers brought their own camping gear, tents, and protective wear.

Willow Creek Catering provided all meals, and they were outstanding. Conservation Volunteers International Program contracted with Willow Creek Catering to provide cooked breakfasts and dinners, and sack lunches to take to the work site. A cook tent and secure trailer were set up adjacent to the campsite. Two chefs prepped, cooked, and served a total of 163 meals for the volunteers and guests throughout the week.

Summary

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. All NPS Trail Crew that worked with the volunteers were inspired by the commitment from each individual and the organization. Conservation Volunteers International Program and volunteers give special thanks to the leadership of Yosemite National Park Trail Crew – Matt DiNome and Joe Meno, Yosemite National Park Trails Manager Dave Kari, and Yosemite National Park Volunteer Coordinator Sally Martinez, for their commitment to the Park and our volunteer projects. Volunteers also thank the Willow Creek Catering company for their outstanding assistance with food preparation, delivery, and gracious service. The Volunteers also thank Andrea Timpone, Upper Pines Volunteer Campground host for her gracious help, information, and assistance throughout the week.

Volunteers completed 286 hours of volunteer labor, built 480 feet of pole fence, installed 31 new fence posts, decommissioned 744 feet of social trails, realigned 236 feet of trail, built 120 feet of new trail, maintained 2,900 feet of the Valley Loop trail, built one 33-foot drainage structure, and most importantly, made many new friends and countless lasting memories!

The wonderful spirit of this group made this trip special and contributed to the enjoyment and safety of every person involved with the trip. Thanks again, it was wonderful to travel with you!

