



Project Report for Volunteer Trip Yosemite National Park September 12-18, 2021

Executive Summary



Lower Yosemite Falls Trailhead Split Rail Fence Repair – day one

Nine volunteers and two volunteer trip leaders successfully contributed 345 volunteer hours during the four days of work in the beautiful valley of Yosemite National Park. Under the direction of the National Park Service (NPS) leaders Matt DiNome and Joe Meno, the group worked in three locations: **Lower Yosemite Falls, Mirror Lake, and Happy Isles**. They transformed and improved heavily traveled areas by reducing tread width, reshaping, decompaction and outsloping of tread, fixing broken and missing fence rails and posts, stabilizing posts, clearing and improving drains, and revegetation of large open spaces and slopes.

The **Mirror Lake trail project** reduced tread width by 4' along a 600' trail by reshaping and outsloping 200' of tread, decompaction, passive revegetation and covering 2400 sq ft with large debris. The **Lower Yosemite Falls and Mirror Lake split rail fence project** included 380' fence replacement and repairs, 25 new posts and post stabilization. Along the **Happy Isles Road**, 7500 sq ft of sandy and bare slope was covered with mulch and large debris, and at the **Lower Yosemite Falls trailhead**, another 600 sq ft of social trail was removed and 125' of drains were cleared and improved. Near **Upper and Lower Pines campgrounds**, a new pedestrian sign was put in, while rocks were moved to minimize the use of social trails.

Matt DiNome and Joe Meno met the group at camp each morning and discussed safety and daily work goals. They also provided basic trail maintenance training and encouraged volunteers to try different tools, move around the work site changing projects as they wished. There were plenty and a great variety of well-maintained tools for everyone. This included a pruning saw for corridor improvement at Mirror Lake; grubbing tools such as the mcleod, combi tools and rakes; digging and tamping tools such as round point shovels and bars; and lifting and carrying tools such as wheelbarrows, timber carriers, buckets, and tarps. The group was also introduced to the grip hoist tool to help move large tree trunks or stumps. The information around safety, work protocols, approach and terminology were very informative and helped the volunteers understand why things are done a certain way so results last.



Detailed Report:

Day One –September 12, 2021 (Orientation)

In the morning, the trip leaders met with Matt DiNome of NPS, to review the project plan. Matt had a thoughtful approach and flow which worked out well during the week.

Volunteers arrived in the afternoon and were welcomed by the trip leaders. Before setting up their tents, they met with a trip leader to complete the COVID Health Screening and the Permission to Contact forms.

Once everyone was settled in, the trip leaders did introductions followed by the volunteers including name, where they were from, their expectations and concerns. The common theme was safety, to see something of the park, weather and having fun. The leaders then reviewed the mission and goals of ConservationVIP®, the plan for the week including the work, safety, meals, and wildlife safety. Several volunteers asked questions about bears which were addressed by the leaders and volunteers with prior bear experience. It also was helpful to have a real example during this conversation: a “local” juvenile bear walked peacefully on the road passing our camp, putting the volunteers somewhat at ease. During the week, volunteers adhered to the bear safety protocols and no encounters happened during the week.

*Juvenile Bear*

The meeting ended with a review of COVID protocols and safety standards. Camp host, Patti, joined the group and she provided the good news that shower passes were available and that cars were allowed to stay at camp. Additionally, whatever else the volunteers needed or had forgotten, Patti said she would have it. Between camp set-up and dinner, volunteers had the opportunity to do exploration on their own. By dinner time everyone was settled in, acquainted, and looking forward to a great week.

Workday 1 – September 13, 2021

NPS crew leaders, Matt and Joe, joined the volunteers for breakfast followed by group introductions and orientation to the projects and schedule for the day and week. Work would be done in the valley with a heavy focus on fence repair and addressing social trails. They talked about the purpose, mechanics, and importance of social trail decommissioning and how natural revitalization can occur when done right. Additional topics included safe use of tools and the importance of communication between volunteers, leaders and the NPS crew. Trip leaders emphasized the importance of staying hydrated and pacing themselves especially on day one.

Prior to arriving at the work site, volunteers went to the NPS maintenance yard and loaded cedar wood to replace rails and posts. At the Lower Yosemite Falls site, a group picture was taken and the NPS leaders provided a walking review of the work site identifying examples of sections of fencing rails and posts that needed to be repaired or replaced. Volunteers quickly broke into work groups eager to work. Matt and Joe of NPS used a chain saw to

*NPS Maintenance Yard wood transport*

cut rails, posts, and post holes upon request. Additionally, the group obstructed 600 sq ft social trail by moving large and small debris and cleared and improved 125' of drain and runoff.



Lower Yosemite Trailhead Fence Repair - day one



The entire project was completed in the morning. A total of 200' fence was repaired, and 15 new posts installed.

A well-deserved lunch was taken in the meadow facing El Capitan, one of the most iconic rock formations in the world. Stories were shared about climbing this 3000-foot vertical formation, the ultimate challenge for climbers.

After lunch, the group went to the maintenance yard to offload the old rails and posts and then went to the project site at the Mirror Lake Trail. It was estimated that they would be working here for the next 2 to 3 days. The group hiked with the tools to the



Mirror Lake Trail Repair Instructions - day one

end point of the project where Matt provided an overview. The group then walked the 600' to the starting point with Matt pointing out where the trail corridor would be, what part should be covered. This included soil decompaction, removing overhanging branches, protruding rocks and roots, covering with mulch, small and large debris, and trail tread and slope improvement of the remaining trail. Matt was thorough in his explanations, helping the group understand what, why and how. With the time left, the group started staging mulch and debris for the next day. Tools were cached for the next day's use and then the group returned to the trailhead and camp where some went for showers and others to their favorite swimming hole.

Workday 2 – September 14, 2012

Matt and Joe met the volunteers for breakfast. The group repeated some of the introductions in a fun way and discussed the work for the day. This time, the volunteers walked a little over a mile to the work site which they found enjoyable and continued to do so the next few days. Upon arrival at the Mirror Lake Trail, additional tools for digging and transporting were unloaded and carried to the project site. Matt and Joe reviewed the “three step process” of reducing the width of the trail by 4’ including decompaction, placement of organic matter to facilitate seed growth and then placement of large pieces of debris including downed trees and limbs to deter people from walking in these areas.



Tread repair instruction by Matt/NPS

They continued to stress the importance of using patience and persistence resulting in long lasting effects. They also encouraged the volunteers to



Decompaction of 4' wide trail - day two

step back and look at the progress and results of the treading and coverage and adjust as needed. All efforts were labor intensive, from decompaction of soil, improving tread and slope to hauling small and large debris out of the forest without visible impact to hikers.



Carrying large tarps of mulch and debris – over and over again!

Like the day before, volunteers selected their project and worked individually, together, switched around and, as a result, very quickly, the 600' trail started transforming from 8' to a 4' wide, natural corridor in the wilderness. This easy rated trail is well-traveled and often the volunteers received a thank you for the work in progress as well as inquiries about ConservationVIP®. As the sections were completed, it was easy to see how the



Using the grip hoist to move large dead trees – fun!

decommissioning of trail would help preserve the forest and wilderness and provide hikers with peace and solitude. Prior to ending the workday, a group meeting was held to solicit feedback. Everyone was content and enthusiastic about the amount of work accomplished and it was estimated that the work would be completed the next morning and ahead of schedule. The volunteers walked back to camp and relaxed in swimming holes and showers satisfied about the meaningful work project they were part of.



Timber Carrier instruction by Matt and Joe/NPS

*Before - Mirror Lake Trail**After - Mirror Lake Trail*

Workday 3 – September 15, 2021

Again, Matt and Joe joined the volunteers for breakfast and after the standard group meeting and fitness exercises, the volunteers walked the one mile to the trailhead. One trip leader took the car to transport some volunteers to the maintenance yard to help load cedar fencing for the afternoon project.

Arriving back at the Mirror Lake Trail, the volunteers appreciated the fruits of their labor from the day before and the impact they had on narrowing the trail. Matt, Joe, and the volunteers walked along the trail to identify what needed to be refined as well

as the continuation of the work to level out the trail in some areas and to continue the decommissioning of the trail. A group of volunteers proceeded with rakes, tarps and buckets and started covering the uphill side which now seemed a bit bare. The rest of the group focused on completing the remaining section. Towards the end of the morning, Joe and a few volunteers took the truck to the NPS maintenance yard to load fence rails which would be used for the afternoon project at Mirror Lake. The group that completed the trail decommissioning, carried all tools to the bridge and loaded them in the truck and walked the half mile to the other side of Mirror Lake where they had lunch

*More Debris*

with a great view towards the face of Half Dome. Mirror Lake is the only place where one can get close to the base of Half Dome. In the spring, Half Dome is often reflected in the water of the lake.

The afternoon was spent replacing old or missing posts and rails. This included removing the old post and rails, digging out the post hole to remove the remainder of the rotten post, replacing the post and then either reattaching the rails or replacing the rails with new ones. A total of 180' of fence and 9 posts were replaced. It was quite hot after lunch and the group worked in an exposed area, but everyone joined in groups, and worked as a team and completed the work cheerful and satisfied. Some volunteers hiked the Mirror Lake Trail while others walked back to camp to rest and relax.

Workday 4 – September 16, 2012

The last day of trail work! Matt and Joe joined the group at breakfast and reviewed the goals for the day which included projects along the Happy Isles Road, primarily to decommission social trails and returning bare slopes to a more natural condition for aesthetics and to prevent soil erosion. Volunteers walked to the worksite and upon arrival, Matt reviewed three large areas along the road as well as plateau areas where social trails were created. Volunteers formed groups to gather and move materials and other volunteers disbursed, raked, and hauled large debris.



Before - Happy Isles



After - Happy Isles

The work was done by lunch and the group found a peaceful and shady spot along the creek to eat and nap on another beautiful but hot day. After lunch, three volunteers joined Matt at an intersection near the Upper and Lower Pines campgrounds to install a new pedestrian sign. They also moved boulders to help better define a walkway for pedestrian use. Upon completion, they joined the rest of the group to complete two additional sites. The last site was a major social trail and required a large obstruction and it took 6 volunteers with timber carriers to move a dead tree while others collected many tarps of leaves and needles. The projects were completed efficiently and effectively, resulting, again, in quality work ahead of schedule. The group then walked back to camp and assisted the NPS leaders with unloading and storing of the tools in the NPS trailer which is permanently located at the Upper Pines Volunteer camp. Matt and Joe thanked the group for their hard work, accomplishing much more than expected and in a quality manner. They much enjoyed the camaraderie, positive attitudes, and conversations with their new friends.



A well-deserved lunch and rest



Before - Happy Isles



After - Happy Isles

Rest Day – September 17, 2021

"Today is your Day, the Mountains are Waiting, so get on your Way!" Dr. Seuss

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 for the day. Volunteers chose activities and places to visit to round out their experiences in beautiful Yosemite.

At the end of the day, everyone returned for a delicious burger dinner and shared about their adventures. Feedback about 10 categories was solicited and documented ending with a suggestion to do a reunion trip for September 2022! The evening was completed with sitting around a campfire with smores and Dawn and Kearey, our caterers. And, of course, the final games of Codenames had to be played once more. The enthusiasm



and kindness shared among the volunteers was wonderful and there was a sincere and warm feeling of accomplishment and togetherness. In addition to the fence post “badge” received earlier in the week, our talented volunteer, Tony, provided the volunteers with a Forget-Me-Not badge. The caterers received a card and donation in appreciation for their efforts. Under the trees and stars and by the light of lanterns and fire, there was a very special feeling of togetherness and family.

Travel Day – September 18, 2021

Volunteers started the morning breaking down their camp, enjoying breakfasts and coffee, loading their gear into vehicles, and saying goodbye to new friends and a beautiful place. By late morning the Upper Pines Campground sites for the volunteers were empty and all volunteers had left.

Logistics

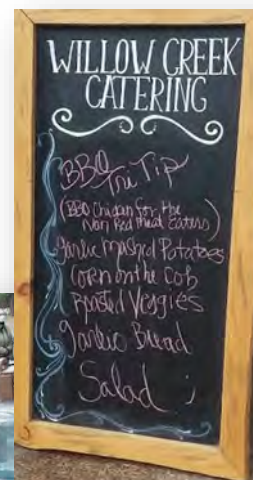
The NPS Trail Crew provided all tools for the projects. Most of the tools were stored in the NPS trailer at the campsite, making it easy to select what was needed and to replenish. The tools were in good working order minimizing the risk of injury. On day one, the trip leaders transported the volunteers to the work site at the Lower Yosemite Falls trailhead and on the remaining three days, the volunteers preferred to walk the approximate one mile to the work sites and back. The volunteers worked under the supervision of the NPS Trail Crew.



Volunteers and Volunteer Project Leaders camped at Upper Pines Campground sites 193, 195 and 197 and the caterers used site 191. Volunteers brought their own camping gear, tents, and protective wear. The camp host, Patti, was terrific. She also shared that the goal is that volunteers will be back at Yellow Pine in future years which is a more secluded site near a running river specifically for volunteers.



ConservationVIP® contracted with Willow Creek Catering to provide cooked breakfasts, dinners, and sacked lunches to take to the worksite. The meals were prepared in a timely and tasty fashion. A cook tent and secure trailer were set up adjacent to the campsite



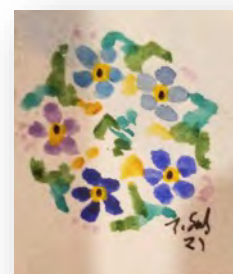
including a washing and sanitizing station. Two chefs prepped, cooked, and served a total of 195 meals throughout the week.

The volunteers continuously complimented the team on the meals (and coffee serving time of 6 a.m.!). Volunteers were comfortable with the implemented protocols in line with COVID regulations.

Summary

The September 2021 trip was successfully completed. The volunteers were dedicated and worked very hard to complete the work that the NPS leaders had planned for the week, and more. They worked in the shade and the hot sun and never complained. Magic happens when like-minded individuals, with a love for nature and wilderness and the interest in doing something that matters, come together ...

“ordinary people performing extra-ordinary work.” Our volunteers are always special and, on this trip, we were blessed with a wonderful group that has made a lasting impact on the park, its leadership and each other. They kept themselves and each other safe, worked very hard, shared personal stories, jokes and banter around camp, on the trail and when playing their new, favorite game by the lantern light. A new family of friends in a beautiful place; a place and time that will not be forgotten.



Forget Me Not by TS

Special thanks also to Matt DiNome and Joe Meno, our NPS crew leaders as well as their leadership, Dave Kari, Trails Manager for Yosemite National Park. Also, to Sally Martinez, Yosemite National Park Volunteer Coordinator. The work they do to

coordinate our volunteer projects in the park is much appreciated. A big thanks to the Willow Creek Catering company for their outstanding meal preparations, delivery, and gracious service. And to Patti, Upper Pines Volunteer Campground host and friend, for her "can-do" attitude, and gracious help.

"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."

John Muir