



Trip Report for Volunteer Trip Yosemite National Park May 15-21, 2022



Executive Summary

Trip Leaders: Michael Chambers-Purcell & Danielle Simpson (Assistant)
NPS Leaders: Eamon Schneider & Matthew (Matt) DiNome

Summary

Eight volunteers and two volunteer trip leaders successfully contributed **320 volunteer hours** during four days of work in the beautiful valley of Yosemite National Park ("the Park"). Under direction of National Park Service (NPS) leaders Eamon Schneider and Matthew (Matt) DiNome, the group worked in four primary locations: in the valley **southeast of El Capitan**, along the Valley Loop Trail adjacent to the **Wahhoga Village**, between the old Wawona Road and **base of Bridalveil Falls**, and at the **Happy Isles Fen** restoration area. Across these locations, the group worked to generate new timber rails and posts to be used for rail/fencing replacement throughout the Park, to reroute a section of currently-established trail, to decommission and temporarily "conceal" the currently-established trail, to establish a sizable section of new trail, and to maintain an aging boardwalk. In total, the group created eighty-five 10-foot long split (either halves or quarter) lengths of cedar for making new posts and rails, rerouted (including decommission of old) 900-linear feet of trail, established 1,000 - 1,200-linear feet of new trail, and repaired approximately 250-linear feet of boardwalk.

Daily Routine

The group was camped at Upper Pines campground, sites 96, 97 and 124. Each morning, the group woke to fresh coffee around 6:30am and hot breakfast at 7:00am; the group departed for the worksite at 8:00am. NPS leaders Eamon and Matt met the group at camp each morning and shared the plan for the day – morning briefings touched on worksite, tasks, tools, daily goals and safety. At the worksites, Eamon and Matt also covered safety and use of tools in more depth; basic trail maintenance training and encouragement to try different tools and tasks was provided throughout each workday.

The group traveled via caravan to the worksite each day – each ConservationVIP® trip leader drove a seven-passenger minivan, following NPS leaders to the worksite and following instructions on where to park. Touchpoints inside the minivans were wiped clean with disinfectant wipes at the end of each workday.

ConservationVIP® contracted with Willow Creek Catering to provide hot breakfasts and 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 (per the Park's bear safety rules) were set up adjacent to the campsite, including a handwashing and sanitizing station. Two chefs prepped, cooked, and served a total of 17 meal services (approximately 170 meals) throughout the week.

Sandwich orders were placed with the catering team each evening after dinner, for lunch the following day. After breakfast each morning, individual bagged lunches were provided, with the selected sandwich to go; each person also chose from fresh fruit, nuts, veggies, and other snacks to add to their bag for the day. Lunches were enjoyed together on site each day – either at, or in close proximity, to the day's worksite.

Work was completed around 4:00pm each work day and the group returned to camp. Volunteers enjoyed free time until dinner, while ConservationVIP® trip leaders completed daily briefings together, sanitized the vans, attended to any administrative duties and ensured everything was set for the following day.

With the exception of the group's rest day, dinners were served at 6:30pm. All meals were catered by Willow Creek Catering, who did an exceptional job. All dietary restrictions were adhered to without issue, and the group had plenty to eat. One night the group was even treated to a taste of fresh Trout, caught that same day! Dinners always included a hot protein, vegetable, and starch, along with salad, and dessert.

Tools

Eamon and Matt came prepared with safety gear (eye protection and ear plugs) for the group, along with any/all required tools for the day. Tools were well-maintained and ready for use by the group; there were plenty to go around. Throughout the week, tools included single and double jacks (trail slang for sledgehammer), wedges, rock rakes,

shovels, mcleods, combi tools, rock bars, various hand saws, pole saws, loppers, digging and tamping tools, tarps, log tongs, wheelbarrows, and even a grip hoist.

Detailed Report:

Day One – May 15, 2022 (Orientation)

The caterers arrived to the campsite some time in the late morning/early afternoon and were greeted by the Assistant Trip Leader. Overall camp setup and catering needs were discussed and a prime spot for cooking and meal service was identified; the catering team began setup.



Volunteers arrived in the afternoon and were welcomed by the trip leaders. As they got settled and began setting up camp, each volunteer met with the Assistant Trip Leader to complete the COVID Health Screening.

Once everyone was settled in, the group convened for an introductory briefing. The trip leaders did introductions, followed by each volunteer. Each individual was asked to share something unique about themselves that not many others would know. The leaders then reviewed the mission and goals of ConservationVIP®, the plan for the week including schedule, safety, meals, and wildlife safety. Leaders indicated that all work would be under the direction of NPS and that we would meet our NPS leaders and learn more about the projects in the following morning. At this time, Emergency/Important Contact Information cards were handed out to each volunteer, and two forms were circulated for completion – the Insurance Information Form and the Permission to Contact/Photo Release form. A third form was introduced, which would remain on a clipboard in the middle of camp for the duration of the trip: the Camp Sign-Out sheet. As a safety measure should anyone go missing for any reason, volunteers (and leaders!) were asked to make use of the Sign-Out sheet any time they were leaving camp.

The use of bear boxes and other bear safety protocols and best practices were covered during this introductory briefing; during the week, volunteers adhered to the bear safety protocols and no encounters occurred.

Two final items were also introduced at the introductory briefing – the “COVID Box”, and the “Info Box”. Each box (reusable Sterlite container) was kept at camp in the common area for use by the group –

- COVID Box: contained extra hand sanitizer, sanitizing hand wipes, sanitizing wipes for the vans, and extra bug spray for communal use. This box was kept in the bear box closest to the main group area for the duration of the trip.

- Info Box: contained a few books about the Park, trail maps, pens, an LED lantern, campsite maps, maps to the showers, and shower passes. This would remain along with the Camp Sign-Out sheet on the picnic table in the main group area.

The meeting ended with a round of general questions and answers; in general, the group seemed already at ease and comfortable with their surroundings; all were excited for the week! Between camp set-up and dinner, volunteers had the opportunity to explore on their own. By dinnertime, everyone was settled in, acquainted, and looking forward to a great week.

This first evening included some excitement when the group got to witness the thundering sound of a tree fall in the forest, not 50 yards from camp! Those who heard the beginning said it sounded like fireworks – cracks and pops, followed by a cascade of large crashes and booms as a large tree fell, taking out two others along the way. The Trip Leader went to investigate as onlookers gathered on the nearby road and peered into the forest in the direction of the sound. The large Pondarosa pine that started the domino had been compromised by fire sometime before, and it took two other equally sized Pondarosa pines with it when it fell. Luckily, no one was in the area when the excitement started.

Workday 1 – May 16, 2022

Worksite: Valley location adjacent to the meadow, just SE of El Capitan
Tools: Single and double jack hammers, rock bars, metal and plastic wedges, scrapers, draw knives, chain saw (use by NPS crew only)
PPE: Eye protection (safety glasses), work gloves, ear plugs
Output: Approx. 85 hand split and stacked rails & posts for fence restoration

Today the group was introduced to NPS crew leaders Eamon and Matt! Eamon and Matt arrived just as the group was finishing up breakfast and preparing their packs for the day; trip leaders were updated briefly on the plan for the week before the group met together for introductions and orientation to the projects and schedule for the day and week. Work would be done in multiple locations throughout the valley over the next four days.

Eamon began by telling the volunteers how excited he was to be working with the group, how much he appreciated those who chose to spend their time as a volunteer in Park, and how valuable their contributions would be. On this day, he also spoke about the significance of the work that would be done that day as part of a new “pilot program”.



Eamon explained the impact of inflation and material shortages in the Park's ability to obtain the lumber that was usually imported to repair wood fencing and rails throughout the park; he also touched on the controversial nature of choosing to import wood from another state, while Yosemite was rich with fallen lumber. The new program was aimed at finding a more resilient and sustainable solution – one in which fallen trees would be repurposed for reuse within the Park. Our group was the first to test the viability of this solution! The group was eager to get to work.



Day 1: Tools & safety briefing at the worksite!

Upon arrival to the worksite, our workday began with distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and an in-depth tutorial and safety briefing for the tools to be used. Matt arranged the tools on the ground and went through each in depth, giving instructions on how to hold and use the tool (correct ways to lift, swing, position hands, etc) and, most importantly, how to work safely. Matt spoke about the potential danger or risk factor of each tool, pausing on each to

allow questions and encouraging interaction from the group; throughout the day, leaders observed the volunteers checking their tools for safety items that were discussed in the morning (loose handles, sharp edges on wedges, etc) – it was great to see! Matt also touched on the importance of awareness and communication – staying aware of who and what was around you, communicating with others, and staying focused on the task. This same topic of the importance of communication was stressed and repeated throughout the day, along with the importance of staying hydrated and pacing oneself; the day's work was physically demanding!

While Matt gave the safety briefing, Eamon began preparing fallen cedar trees for our work – each tree was cut down to length by chain saw (NPS use only). Two lengths were cut – 6' lengths for splitting into posts, and 10' for rails. Upon completion of the safety briefing, Eamon gave a lesson on how to first strip the bark using scrapers or draw blades, and then how to split the log, using wedges, hammers, and rock bars; he educated the group on the various layers of the log (heart wood and sap wood), and about how various conditions might impact the ability to split the log.

The group was asked to pair off, and each pair got to work. Pairs went from log to log, methodically approaching each one by first assessing the log to look for natural breaks, setting the first wedge to begin the primary split, following that through to complete the split, and then splitting each half into one or two more segments, depending on size. Segments were then carried and stacked before the team moved on to their next log.



Teams of two working together to accomplish the work!



This process repeated until the site was fairly well cleared! Throughout the day, all honing their ability to “read the wood” and more successfully split it into the sizes desired; by the end of the day, each team was working like a well-oiled machine!

Lunch and breaks were taken in the shade at the worksite, surrounded by views of towering peaks to the north and south. To the north, the back side of El Capitan rose; Matt shared with the group about his experiences climbing and upcoming plans!

Work continued after lunch, same as in the morning. The group moved throughout the area, transitioning into a more wooded section of the site in the afternoon, which availed some shade.



...And having fun along the way!



Workday one ended with a dirty, sweaty, happy crew! Together, the group produced approximately 85 posts and rails and the project was deemed a huge success. Eamon reported that NPS Trails Manager Dave Kari drove by the worksite and, upon seeing the large pile of split rails, was extremely satisfied with the work; one volunteer later recounted how cool it was to be able to take a fallen tree and “create something new”. ConservationVIP® agrees! The group swept the site for tools and helped Eamon and Matt pack up the truck. An added bonus from the day was a large haul of firewood for the campsite, a result of unusable left-overs from the project!

This night, the group was served a hearty dinner of Salmon, salad and sides with fresh Key Lime Pie for dessert; clean plates all around!

One final bit of excitement was heard (and felt!) by many of the group that night around 1:00am – another large crack, rumble, and crash! This time, the Trip Leaders concluded was likely a rockfall – potentially something as large as a school bus breaking loose and a tumbling from one of the towering cliffs. Rockfalls are a common occurrence in Yosemite National Park with approximately one every ten days.

Workday 2 – May 17, 2022

Worksite: Wahhoga Valley, just west of Camp 4
Tools: Mcleods, rock rakes, shovels, combi tools, rock bars, hand saws, loppers, digging and tamping tools
PPE: Eye protection (safety glasses), work gloves
Output: Approx. 900-linear feet of trail rerouted

Eamon and Matt met the volunteers for breakfast and gave a briefing on the plan for the day. This day's project would have the group working in the Wahhoga Valley, adjacent to the Wahhoga Village Cultural Site. This site has significant historical importance, with the Village – and ongoing restoration within it – honoring the ancestral lineage of the land (you can learn more about the Wahhoga Village here:



<https://www.southernsierramiwuknation.org/wahhoga>). Eamon shared with the group about the history and cultural significance of the area, and also about the relationship between the Park and the native tribe; as land has been rededicated back to its original stewards, NPS has worked with tribal members to restore the surrounding habitat and reroute trails that passed through the rededicated land. This day's project would be to reroute the heavily-trafficked Valley Loop Trail, providing more space between the trail and the sacred Village.

Upon arrival to the worksite, the group was greeted by an elder of the village, Bill Tucker, along with Archaeologist Erin Gearty; as the group was within a Cultural Site, Erin was there to observe the work and check for historical artifacts. Bill spoke from the heart as he recounted memories of the Village as a child, and of what was then versus



Village Elder Bill Tucker speaks to group

what is now; he shared about plans to reconstruct the Village in the same way it had been built by his ancestors, many generations before. He also shared about the topography and about how the Valley had changed over the years – how the riverbank receded and waterline lowered, and how access to natural resources had declined; he spoke a bit about his ancestors being driven from their land. Bill invited the group into the Village and gave a tour as he continued to share about its history and about the

redevelopment that was underway; as the Village is not open to the public, this was an incredibly special experience! Even Erin reflected that she had never been given a tour in that amount of depth – Bill must have seen something special in our group to be willing to welcome us in!

Tour completed, it was time to get to work. The workday began with a walk of the trail to be rerouted. Starting at a high point just northeast of the village, Eamon lead the group down the 900-foot length of trail to be rerouted – green flags marking the centerline of the new route. As the group walked, Eamon and Matt gave instruction on width and height (6' for the tread and the length of arm + tool for the canopy) to be cleared, and outlined any specific instructions needed along each section of trail. Along the length of trail, conditions and terrain were varied, allowing plenty of opportunities for volunteers to spread out and try different tools and techniques. Before splitting out to begin work, the group convened at the truck for a safety briefing and instruction on any new tools that had not been used the day before. Reminders were given to stay hydrated and to pace oneself. The group split into two general groups and got to work at the upper and lower limits of the project.



Left: (Before) Upper portion of the new route with Camp 4 at right and Wauhoga Village (not pictured) at left

Below: (After) Upper portion of new route after minor surface clearing and relocation of signpost





Along the length of new trail, activities included: clearing and grubbing, benching, pruning and clearing limbs, one tree removal, relocation of one signpost, and one area where a small section of waterline was to be set down to avoid being disturbed or severed. Matt worked closely with a team on tree removal and overhead clearing, while Eamon worked with a team to reset the waterline and grade/bench the upper portion of new trail; the Assistant Trip Leader worked to relocate

the signpost. As this task involved more significant digging, it also required close observation by archeologist, Erin. Erin inspected the new hole before it was filled, checking for artifacts like obsidian; nothing found.

Throughout the day, volunteers moved from section to section along the length of the trail; by late afternoon the length of new trail was primarily cut and the group got to experience their first user! A woman on horseback came through and enthusiastically agreed to help “break in” the trail! As she progressed from top to bottom of the new section, volunteers were able to confirm clear heights and widths were sufficient, and it also helped to identify areas where grading and transitions needed more work. Refinement was focused in these areas, and the group worked together to finish the remaining sections of new trail.



Midday, lunch was enjoyed across the street from the worksite, at the edge of a beautiful meadow. The group was able to spread out and relax while taking in the incredible views.

The workday ended the same as the day before, with everyone pitching in to collect tools and return them to the truck. Matt and Eamon were pleased with the day's work, and Bill extended his thanks as the group departed; the group thanked him in

return for his willingness to share about the rich history of the Wauhoga Valley. Volunteers reflected that the day's work was very rewarding – not only to be able to see the immediate transformation of creating a trail where there wasn't one before, but also

to know how significant it was in helping to restore the Cultural Site and thereby give back to the Miwuk tribe. Seeing a horseback rider use the newly-created trail was the cherry on top!



Above: the group with Bill Tucker and the son of one of his Tribal Group members; in the middle back, a Volunteer holds the pole saw - helpful for clearing the canopy tall enough for horseback riders!

Upon returning to camp, many volunteers (and trip leader/s!) used free time to get in some hikes! One group enjoyed a trip to Vernal Fall, a roaring waterfall that could be heard from the campsite. Dinner this night was Chicken Marsala with salad and sides, plus a special treat – Caterer Kearey had caught a fresh trout that day and offered a taste to anyone who would like to try! Delicious! To finish out the night, s'mores by the campfire! Another fulfilling day.



Above: a view from the hike to Vernal Fall

Workday 3 – May 18, 2022

Worksite: Bridalveil Fall area, between Bridalveil Fall parking and old Wawona Road
Tools: Mcleods, rock rakes, shovels, combi tools, rock bars, hand saws, pole saws, loppers, grip hoist
PPE: Eye protection (safety glasses), work gloves
Output: Approx. 1000 linear feet of new trail established

Again, Eamon and Matt joined the volunteers for breakfast and Eamon gave a briefing on the day ahead – another new day and another new project! And this would be a big one! Eamon described an area at the west end of the Valley where hikers coming down the old Wawona Road from where Old Inspiration Point ties into the current Wawona Road (CA 41) and are forced to walk along the highway for a quarter-mile stretch until they reach the Bridalveil Fall parking area; the day's project would be to cut new trail to finish the connection. This connection would keep hikers off the highway and would also allow for later revegetation of a cut-through trail that had been created for rock climbing access.

The day's worksite was farther west than the group had been before, allowing for new vistas on the drive to the worksite. As the Bridalveil Fall area was currently under construction (new accessible trail and boardwalk to the base of the falls), our group was able to share the empty parking lot behind the construction barrier, right at the base of our worksite.



NPS leader Eamon walks the group along the new route, pointing out the red flags and describing the work at each section of trail

As with the previous days, the workday began with a safety briefing and discussion of any new tools to be used – the most significant of which for this day was a grip hoist which could be used to move large obstructions from the trail. Before unloading tools or beginning work, Eamon led the group in walking the route of the new trail; same as the day prior, green flags

identified the planned centerline. Different from the day prior, this trail was meant to be “primitive” – only 2’ in width as opposed to 6’. Some of the trail required limited work (foot traffic would do the bulk of the breaking in), while other sections required significant grading/bench work, tree/limb removal, brush clearing, rock removal, or removal of other major obstructions (such as fallen trees) from the path. This would be the group's biggest project yet.

Before beginning work, the group was reminded to take breaks and drink plenty of water (the day was heating up!); reminders were also given by the trip leaders throughout the day.



Volunteer Nikee trimming branches from a tree to allow for safe use of the grip hoist!

Together, the group cut about 1000 linear feet of new trail through varied terrain and vegetation, allowing the group to spread out and try their hands at many different activities - grading/bench work, grubbing, pruning & cut-back, moving felled trees, moving rocks with rock bars, etc. Volunteers learned to use a variety of tools and the transformation of the area was seen & felt by all. While Eamon took a group up the trail with the grip hoist, Matt educated others at the base on the proper technique of “benching” (cutting into the hillside in order to grade a walking surface) – volunteers were instructed to cut in no more than 18” and shown how to establish a hinge and gentle cross-slope, finishing the hinge with a 45 degree cut back into the hillside. Matt described the reason behind each instruction, all helping to manage runoff and create a long-lasting, resilient trail.

Further up the trail, Eamon gave instructions on how to set up and operate a grip hoist, along with a reminder on proper techniques of brush clearing; once Matt finished instructing the group at the base, he moved up to do the same. Working with loppers and various hand saws, volunteers at the top worked under Matt and Eamon’s direction to cut the new trail; where needed due to obstructions or to increase long term sustainability of the trail, adjustments to the route were made. Volunteers recounted how incredible it was to see the trail come to life as, slowly but surely, they blazed a path which unveiled the base of the trail our new section would be connecting to!



*Left: (Before) A log obstructs the path of the new trail (look for the red flag marking the centerline!)
Right: (During) Two Volunteers and NPS leader Eamon take turns using the grip hoist to move the log off the trail.*



Lunch was taken midway up the trail in a patch of shade. The group discussed progress of the work and tasks yet to be completed; in general, there was already a great sense of accomplishment across the group – volunteers appreciating the instant gratification of seeing a trail begin to take shape! Refueled and rejuvenated, the group was back at work, completing the new section of trail.

As was now the custom, the workday ended with all hands on deck to return the tools to the truck; tools in hand, the group walked single file down the newly-created trail, observing the work accomplished in the day. As a special treat, the group was given the okay to take a walk through the adjacent construction area (work had stopped for the day) up to the base of Bridalveil falls. It was a short walk and availed an opportunity to learn about construction of the decomposed granite walkways throughout the park; the group enjoyed this small field trip together.



The group at the base of Bridalveil Fall

Dinner this night was BBQ Tri Tip, and the group had special guests! Camp host Dean Benedix joined the volunteers for dinner, along with daughter Alicia and dog Jesse. Dean discussed the plans for re-opening Yellow Pine (volunteer camping) which was closed due to the amount of ash and burnt trees still within its boundary. He was hopeful that some of the sites would be open in the next week or so.

Workday 4 – May 19, 2022

Worksite: Happy Isles Fen Restoration Area + Same Sites as Workdays 2 & 3
Tools: Single jack hammers, Mcleods, rock rakes, shovels, rock bars, hand saws, loppers, grip hoist
PPE: Eye protection (safety glasses), work gloves
Output: Approx. 250 linear feet of boardwalk mended;
Approx. 600-linear feet of trail decommissioned & concealed;
Finishing touches and major obstruction clearing at trail from Workday 3

The last day of trail work! Eamon and Matt joined the group at breakfast and again presented the plan for the day. This day would have the group working at three different sites - one quick task at the nearby Happy Isles Fen Restoration Area, then back to the worksites from the previous two days to complete some finishing touches.



Volunteers Thom & Nikee pounding in screws!

We started our day with a quick project at the Happy Isles Fen Restoration area, resetting screws in the boardwalk that had become a hazard for hikers, runners and cyclists. Our group made quick work of the project - many hands make for efficient work!

Next, we returned to Wahhoga Valley. The rest of the morning was spent on finish work for the trail established on workday 2 to provide a bit more separation between the heavily-trafficked Valley Loop Trail, and Wahhoga Village Cultural Site. Along with the finish work, the group worked to temporarily decommission and conceal the original trail. Eventually, NPS crews will come with heavy machinery to remove sections of pavement and will then revegetate the area of the original trail, but as an immediate solution to encourage hikers, cyclists, horseback rider and others to begin immediate use of the new route, our group was tasked with concealing the old trail with logs, rocks and “duff” (leaves, pine needles, and other soft cover) scavenged from nearby parts of the forest. Volunteers used rakes, tarps and wheelbarrows to move materials from heavily covered areas of the forest floor, onto the barren section of well-worn trail. To assist with outlining the new trail

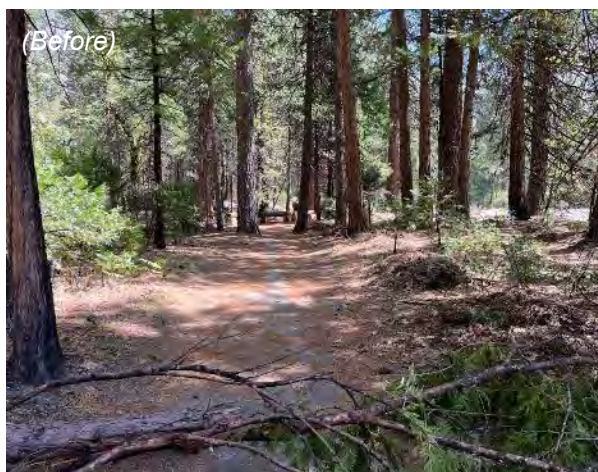




and forcing closures at the transition points, rock bars and log tongs were used to strategically place boulders and logs.

Left: Strategic placement of boulders (see previous page for image of rock bars in action!) create an attractive edge along the Valley Loop Trail; our rerouted trail & signpost can be seen in image right!

Success! As the group was completing the work of concealing the original trail, multiple groups of hikers and cyclists came through and began using the new trail. NPS will return at a later date to complete the full decommissioning and revegetation, and to add trail signs at the newly-created junctions.



Above Left: Obstructions are placed at the beginning of the old trail to deter use, but the trail can still be seen. Above Right: Placement of duff conceals the old trail, making it less inviting; NPS will ultimately return to remove the underlying asphalt and revegetate the area.



Right: Before & after of a new section of trail.

As a treat to cap off the work week, the group was able to enjoy lunch at an incredible river-side spot on the way to our final worksite for the day. The group reclined against river rocks and took in a picture-perfect view of the Merced River and Bridalveil Fall. The group then returned to the Bridalveil Fall parking area to complete the afternoon's work.



Above: Our lunchtime view looking over the Merced to Bridalveil Fall

The final project for the day was finish work on the new section of trail the group had established the day before and – most critically – to remove a 500+ year old fallen tree from the top section of the trail. Removing this massive obstruction was the final step in allowing for final tie-in of the trail, which will ultimately provide hikers a safe connection between the old Wawona Road and the base of Bridalveil Falls, keeping them off the shoulder of the highway. Attempting first with a grip hoist (see images, next page), volunteers put into action what they had learned the day before – anchoring the hoist to a living tree, using chain to secure it around the fallen tree, and then taking turns to operate the hoist. After very slow progress, Matt and Eamon determined that the hoist should be de-tensioned, and that manually severing the old tree would be the best next step. Matt gave instructions





Above: NPS leader Eamon oversees operation of the grip hoist in an attempt to break and move the fallen tree.

Right: Volunteer Emilia was a champ on the grip hoist! Volunteer Connor (and the rest of the group, not pictured!) cheering her on!



on the proper use of an axe, and on the more efficient way to cut into the tree – wide angled cuts that allow the center wedge to easily break free. Volunteers took turn learning to swing the axe. In the end, it was expert Matt who did the most damage – making quick, efficient work of the cut. With a cut nearly all the way through, the hoist was again engaged, this time succeeding to break the felled tree! All cheered and moved quickly to finish the work to be done – while some volunteers worked to bench the upper part of the trail, others repositioned the grip hoist to move a large boulder and to relocate the now split log into just the right spot – the trail was now open!



Left: Volunteers take turns trying their hand at the axe.



Right: Success! Having successfully severed the massive obstruction, the group assesses repositioning of the newly cut log to allow room for the trail.

With countless opportunities to continue refinement and finishing touches on the new trail, it was hard to pull the group away! Somewhat reluctantly, our enthusiastic and eager group (now energized after such a large victory with the massive tree!) once again collected tools and headed back to the truck. After packing up, it was time to say our goodbyes to Eamon and Matt; all expressed gratitude for their exceptional leadership and they, for the incredible volunteers and work accomplished!

Before returning to camp, the group decided to make a pitstop at Tunnel View lookout; it was a gorgeous, bluebird afternoon- perfect for a view and some photos! Additionally, the large three-dimensional bronze relief map offered a great spot for hike planning for the following day!



A section of the newly cut trail and example of bench work done by the group



Right: More of the morning's work to conceal the old trail where old & new routes converge, near Wahhoga Village



(New)

Thai food for dinner and, once again, clean plates all around! After dinner, the group convened around the campfire for a time of reflection and discussion together. Trip leaders led the group in recounting the week's activities, asking the group to share takeaways from each day, of the projects, and of the overall experience. Feedback included:

- Shared feelings that the work/projects were very fulfilling; the group enjoyed seeing “new made from old”, and found fulfillment in the creation of new trails
- The group enjoyed working in multiple places in the Valley; all felt like they were able to see and experience many parts other Park
- The group loved our NPS partners; they felt Eamon as Matt were exceptional – knowledgeable, personable, patient, and excellent teachers
- Workday one was the best day for teamwork – all really enjoyed working in pairs; each pair worked well together and found the time to be meaningful
- Workdays one and three were the most physically demanding! (But no one was upset about that! Ha!)
- All felt the group dynamics were great and many expressed gratitude for friendships that had been established
- All felt that they learned a tremendous amount about trail maintenance, conservation, and restoration; many expressed excitement about being able to take what they had learned and apply it back home
- Many expressed interest in volunteering again and, specifically, in participating in other trips through ConservationVIP®!



Rest Day – May 20, 2022

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; some chose to explore together, while others enjoyed a day of solitude and introspection.

At the end of the day, everyone returned for a delicious burger dinner and shared about their adventures.

Travel Day – May 21, 2022

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. For some of the volunteers, their trip home could only be described as epic: travel by car, by bus, by train, by car (again), by plane, and finally by car ride home! By late morning the Upper Pines Campground sites for the volunteers were empty and all volunteers had left.



Stunning views from Tunnel View at the end of Workday 4

Summary

The May 2022 trip was successfully completed. Volunteers were dedicated and worked hard to complete the work that NPS leaders had planned for the week. All projects were completed to NPS satisfaction, without any reportable injuries or incidences. Overall, the group of volunteers, trip leaders and NPS crew members worked

seamlessly together – positive group dynamics and camaraderie were observed. Together, May's group of volunteers demonstrated what it means to be **"ordinary people performing extraordinary work"**. The extraordinary work of this group has helped to establish a new sustainable procedure for the Park, to protect and restore one of the Park's valuable Cultural Sites, has created new sections of trail that will enable countless visitors to enjoy the Park in safe and sustainable ways, and has helped to create a safer experience for all who enjoy the Fen Restoration Area, as sensitive vegetation in that vital section of the Park continues to heal and restore itself. The projects completed by volunteers in this week have helped to preserve one of our Nation's most valued parks, and to conserve precious natural resources and a Cultural Heritage Site. The work completed will outlast our days and serve many to come.

Special thanks also to Eamon Schneider and Matt DiNome, NPS crew leaders extraordinaire, 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, attention to detail, and gracious service.

