



Project Report for Volunteer Trip Yosemite National Park September 11 – 17, 2022

Executive Summary



Five volunteers and two volunteer trip leaders contributed 208 hours of volunteer labor from September 11 through September 17, 2022. The group assisted the National Park Service in realigning 190 feet of trail, obliterating 800 feet of social trails, rebuilding 365 feet of split rail fences including installing 31 new fence posts and constructing 7 fish ladder log steps in three different locations and created or cleared 13 runoff drainage structures. The team also maintained 210 feet of the Camp 4 trail near the Wahhoga Village which included rock removal and tread buildup.

The National Park Service (NPS) Trail Crew, working under the Leadership of Eamon Schneider and Matt DiNome, provided guidance and oversight of the projects. The volunteers installed post and rails near the Lower Yosemite Falls trail head and viewing area, performed trail maintenance on the Tunnel View trail and Camp 4 trail, collected logs, branches and leaf litter after de-compacting trail surfaces associated with obliterating large social trails at the Lower Yosemite Falls trail head and viewing area, the Tunnel View trail area, and the Happy Isles Loop trail area. 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 – September 11, 2022 (Orientation)

Volunteers arrived Sunday, September 11, in the early afternoon. All volunteers were welcomed by the trip leaders Shelley Sankey and Norman Hageman, underwent a short health screening, and assistance was provided to get their tents set up at the Yellow Pine Volunteer Campground. 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. Also discussed were the campground guidelines including issues associated with bear safety and the necessary use of bear boxes and food safety practices.

By mid-afternoon, the volunteers and trip leaders were becoming well acquainted and started to have a familial sense that would last 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.

Workday 1 – September 12, 2022

The ConservationVIP® volunteers enjoyed breakfast and coffee together, anticipating the day's work. At 8 AM the group met the NPS Trail Crew and gathered for stretching, a safety briefing and discussion on the projects for the day. The volunteers were given the opportunity to walk the 1.7 miles to the work site or to ride in the van. The primary project was to reinstall pole fencing around the Lower Yosemite Falls viewing area and trail head, which had been damaged by snow removal equipment as well as park visitors.

At the job site, 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.



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 27 new fence posts and 350 feet of fence.



The area was busy with lots of visitors heading to the Lower Yosemite Falls viewing area or the trail head. Volunteers were questioned about their activity and thanked for their service numerous times which was richly rewarding.

At the end of the day, volunteers were given the opportunity to walk back to camp or ride back to camp. After a quick snack at camp, most loaded up in the van to go take a shower at Curry Village. Then the team enjoyed a lovely meal followed by conversation around a campfire.



Workday 2 – September 13, 2022

The volunteers enjoyed breakfast and coffee together at Yellow Pine Volunteer Campground, anticipating the day's work and the opportunity to complete the previous day's project. At 8 AM the group gathered with the NPS Trail Crew for stretching, a safety briefing and discussion, and to talk about the work plans for the day. Then the volunteers were given the opportunity to walk or ride to the project site.



Social trail before repair



Closed social trail

The first task was to finish installing the remainder of the fence. Finishing touches were completed on the previous day's fencing as well as installing 4 more post and 15 feet of additional fence repairs. Then the team turned their attention to decommissioning 200

feet of social trail. By lunchtime, this team finished these projects. Lunch was enjoyed in the shade while taking in the views of Lower Yosemite Falls as well as the work completed at this site which resulted in a feeling of pride and contentment.

After lunch, the team relocated to the Tunnel View trail. The views from our worksite were once again amazing. After taking time to enjoy the views, we hiked to the work site taking our time to ensure the safety of all on this very steep trail. Upon arrival at the work site, we received guidance on the project at hand and the proper tool safety for the new type of trail work. Our work for the afternoon was in close proximity and included:

1. rerouting a portion of the trail at a switchback area,
2. adding a log reinforced step and creating a significant drain runoff area, and
3. filling in a deeply eroded section of trail by creating a log reinforced fish ladder type step sequence.

The volunteers generally divided into three work groups, one for each project. Volunteers were then free to rotate from one project to another. The work was demanding, yet very rewarding. The volunteers enjoyed learning from the NPS Crew Leaders and set about their work with great focus and enthusiasm. It was observed that most volunteers stayed with their original project because they developed a great sense of ownership and wanted to see the work through to completion. Volunteers were reminded periodically to drink water, take breaks as needed, ask questions as appropriate, and to make time to take in the views.



After our project day ended, we returned to the volunteer camp enjoying the view on the way and sharing stories. After having some snacks, most volunteers chose to go to Curry Village for a shower. Some volunteers remained in camp to relax or take the short walk to the Merced River to refresh themselves.

Dinner was then enjoyed as a team. Comments were consistent all week about how amazing the food was and how Dawn and Kearey were so attentive to all the details. The team had settled into its routine, a very good routine. There was such contentment to simply sit around the fire after dinner sharing stories about the day and about life. The whole team was always there, and it was clear that everybody not only felt included, but truly was included. Admittedly, the nights tended to end early, but tonight we chose to seize the opportunity to walk to the Swinging Bridge for star gazing since the skies were clear. We were treated to spectacular star gazing. The team alternated from awe inspired silence to pointing out something of significance. Shelley had her constellation app on her

phone, so we were able to identify as many of the constellations in the sky as our hearts desired.

Workday 3 – September 14, 2022

The volunteers had breakfast and coffee together, anticipating another rewarding day of working on the trail. At 8 AM the group gathered with the NPS Trail Crew for stretching, a safety briefing, and work discussion before departing for the worksite.



The group started the day by returning to the previous day's worksite. The team divided up again. Some finishing the previous day's projects, others moving on to additional projects further up the trail. The team really enjoyed the opportunity to receive one-on-one training regarding the trail work being completed. Another major benefit was that if you wanted to hone in your skills on a particular type of work (i.e., clearing or creating drainage runoff areas), after completing one project you could move up the trail to the next site where that type of work was needed and challenge yourself to further develop or master your new skillset. Conversely, if volunteers observed others doing different type of work that was interesting to them, they could move on to that type of project and still receive one on one instruction in the process. Truly, I don't think there has ever been a better environment for learning about trail maintenance than what we experienced. After enjoying lunch as a team in the shade while taking in an amazing view of the Yosemite Valley, we returned to completing more projects.



As one project was completed, the volunteers simply leap frogged up the trail to the next opportunity of interest. When the workday came to an end, it was immensely rewarding

on the hike out to see just how many projects had been completed and how we had performed maintenance on a significant amount of trail that badly needed the repairs. It also was deeply moving to each volunteer to realize how they had basically left their signature via trail improvements on the trail that would remain for years to come. Almost without exception, every volunteer mentioned that they will never be able to look at a trail the same again. In the future, they will be so much more conscious of proper hiking etiquette to maximize trail quality as well as what type of repairs are needed on the trails they are hiking.

The fresh air and hard work for the day seem to gladly funnel all volunteers into the same routine upon return to camp. Grab a quick snack, hit the showers, have some scrumptious dinner, enjoy a conversation around a fire and drift off to your tent for a good night's rest once the eyes got heavy.

Workday 4 – September 15, 2022

Once again, the volunteers enjoyed a hearty breakfast, coffee and camaraderie, before gathering with the NPS Trail Crew at 8 AM for stretching, a briefing about our plans for the workday and to address any safety concerns. Today our work would be back in the valley, so volunteers were given the opportunity to walk or ride to the worksite. Our first project was located on the Camp 4 trail along Wahhoga Village. The Wahhoga Village is a cultural site that is being built by Yosemite Indians to honor the tradition and culture that managed a sustainable landscape for thousands of years. Thus, it was special to contribute towards the cause by improving the trail that parallels its border. The team went about improving the trail tread by removing protruding rocks, building up the tread by carrying bucket after bucket of sandy soil or using a wheelbarrow to haul the soil where possible. A drain runoff was added to eliminate future erosion and trail edging was improved. In all, 210 feet of trail was improved.

Our next worksite was along the Happy Isles Loop Road adjacent to the Merced River. After being briefed on the project, we took our lunch break on the shore of the Merced sitting among the massive boulders and enjoying the sounds of the river. We also took time to review the work performed by our team the previous year to eliminate a very large social trail area. It was important to the volunteers to see how their efforts this year will allow the land to re-wilderness itself where social trails are eliminated.



Then it was back to work, but we started with the excitement of a new tool – the grip hoist. The grip hoist is used to move trees or limbs that are much too large to move by hand

without tools. Moving large trees into areas that have been used as social trails is very important. The benefit is twofold. First, it creates a notable obstruction that will hopefully keep hikers from thinking to use the area as a short cut to their desired location. Second, it provides a notable amount of compost for the soil in the years ahead which will provide needed nutrients to the soil that was recently de-compacted as part of the attempt to return the social trail area to its natural state. Each volunteer was given the opportunity to operate the griphoist. All the volunteers seemed shocked that they were able to move such a large object themselves with the use of the griphoist. It left the volunteers knowing how powerful their efforts truly can be in making a meaningful difference.

Upon completing this project, we moved a short distance down the road to eliminate three more social trails. A fourth trail was improved, and the width of this social trail was reduced to minimize the impact. In essence, the plan was to leave one social trail open as it is clear park visitors want to walk from the road to the river frequently, so we funneled them into the one trail with natural debris and eliminated the three on the outer perimeter of the remaining trail.

Our work for the day was completed with a fun project that entailed knocking down cairns that had been built in the middle of the Merced River by park visitors. Although this practice seems harmless enough, it quickly becomes an eye sore when numerous other visitors add cairns of their own. Before you know it, the pristine river looks very odd with hundreds of cairns peppering the landscape.



At the workday's end, we returned to our campsite and met one last time with Eamon and Matt. 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 – September 16, 2022

Friday, the last full day of the trip, was set aside as a rest day. We would normally take the rest day in the middle of the week, but the NPS trail crews work Monday through Thursday, thus we choose to take Friday as our rest day so that we can align with the NPS personnel. 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). Those who wanted to hike did so in the Happy Isles area with some hiking up to the Vernal and Nevada Falls areas while others took the lower loop. Others stayed in camp relaxing with a good book or did some shopping and sightseeing in the village area purchasing souvenirs or other items of interest.

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. The closing meeting was conducted to receive feedback regarding the trip and to look for ways to improve the experience for future volunteers. It was very encouraging to hear just how meaningful the experience had been to all the volunteers. It was clear that each one of them truly loved Yosemite as well as their opportunity to give back in hopes that the generations to come will have the same ability to enjoy this true treasure. We wrapped up the evening by making s'mores and laughing around a crackling campfire. Dawn and Kearey were presented a thank you card, and they joined us around the campfire to share stories and celebrate a great week and new friendships.

Travel Day – September 17, 2022

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 Yellow Pine Volunteer Campground was empty and the volunteers had left, with many vowing to return to Yosemite or to other adventures hosted by ConservationVIP.

Logistics

The volunteers worked under the supervision of the NPS Trail Crew. The NPS Trail Crew provided all tools for all work projects. Some volunteers enjoyed walking to the work sites when possible and trip leaders drove the other volunteers to the work site as desired. The van was always available for transportation and was used by all for work locations that were further away.

Volunteers and Volunteer Project Leaders camped at Yellow Pine Campground which is a campground in Yosemite Valley which is reserved for volunteers. 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 119 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 – Eamon Schneider and Matt DiNome, 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 thanked Patty, the Yellow Pine Volunteer Campground host for her gracious help, information, and assistance throughout the week.

Volunteers completed 208 hours of volunteer labor, built 365 feet of pole fence, installed 31 new fence posts, decommissioned 800 feet of social trails, realigned 190 feet of trail, built 7 fish ladder log steps in three different locations, maintained 210 feet of the Camp 4 trail adjacent to Wauhoga Village, built or cleared 13 runoff drainage structures, 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!



