



## Yosemite Volunteer Trip May 14 – 20, 2023 Trip Report



### OVERVIEW

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) led a volunteer trip to Yosemite National Park May 14 – 20, 2023. Though ConservationVIP® has organized volunteer trips to support Yosemite for more than a dozen years, the May 2023 Yosemite Volunteer Trip presented a unique challenge because the winter of 2022-2023 had the largest ever recorded snow fall for Yosemite, with over 240% of the average snowpack. In the weeks leading up to the trip, water levels on the Merced River began to rise due to snowmelt and concerns rose about the potential for flooding in Yosemite Valley. After coordinating closely with National Park Service (NPS) representatives to assess the conditions and reviewing evacuation protocols should the water reach flood stages during the trip, ConservationVIP® decided to proceed with the trip, with the understanding that the trip might have to end early if the river reached flood stage. The volunteers agreed to this arrangement, as did Willow Creek Catering, which provided meals for the group.

NPS and trip leaders monitored the conditions throughout the week and the trip participants generously and graciously maintained good spirits as they volunteered in the uncertain circumstances. The 13 volunteers, including two trip leaders Danielle Simpson and Pam Morgan, were rewarded with incredible waterfall views and a relatively quiet park for the entire planned volunteer trip. The weather for the week was beautiful, with sunny and warm days, cool nights, no rain.

Under the supervision of the NPS Trail Crew leader Eamon Schneider and his assistant Johnny Ray, the volunteer group completed 364 volunteer hours on projects which included:

- Fence repair, removal and realignment at Happy Isles, Swinging Bridge parking area, Southside Drive between Swinging Bridge and Yosemite Chapel (including up to the footbridge across the Merced), and at Yosemite Valley Visitor Center
- Bridalveil Falls trail opening (removing barriers to allow for visitor access to new ADA platforms and bottom of waterfall)
- Edge work/regaining along roadways at Happy Isles and multi-use path between Swinging Bridge and Yosemite Chapel
- Resource (rails, posts and other lumber) cache organization for materials repurpose/reuse.
- Trash removal throughout worksites
- Revegetation and social trail closure at Happy Isles

#### Tools used during work week:

- Shovels (flat and spade), post-hole digger, digging and tamping bars, brooms and Griphoist.

## DAILY RECAPS

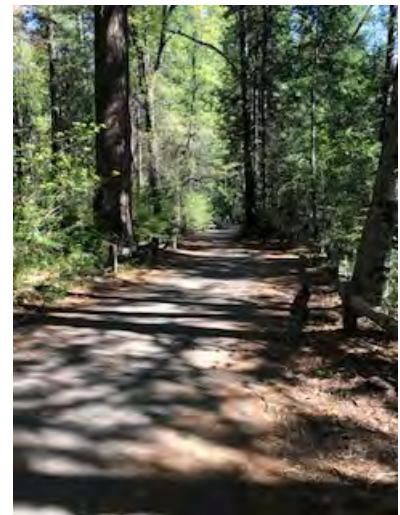
- **Sunday, May 14<sup>th</sup>**– Danielle arrived on Saturday morning (5/13) to set up camp; Pam arrived Saturday evening after flying into SFO – both rented 7-passenger vans for transporting volunteers to and from worksites for the week. Because of the flooding risk, the Yellow Pine Volunteer campground which is closer to the Merced River was not feasible, so the trip leaders set up sites 95, 96 and 124 in Upper Pines campground to accommodate the group, met with the camp host and worked on final logistical arrangements.
- The initial group meeting took place Sunday afternoon and covered:
  - Introductions and expectations
  - Emphasis on priorities for the week; 1) safety, 2) fun, and 3) work projects
  - National Park Service leadership
  - Camp rules / food storage / quiet times
  - Mealtimes, snacks and hygiene
  - Volunteer project hours, basic duties, travel, lunch prep, morning routine and travel to worksite(s)
  - Evacuation updates

- Time available for exploration
- Contact card distributed and photo release form for volunteer signature.
- Private conversations with each volunteer for COVID self-assessment and any identified allergies or medical conditions listed on initial paperwork.



- **Monday, May 15<sup>th</sup>** – first full volunteer project day; introduction to Eamon and John with NPS
  - **PROJECT** – fence removal throughout the Happy Isles area. This removal marked successful restoration efforts within the park – a ConservationVIP® group had installed the same fences a few years ago to protect areas of revegetation, and this group had the honor of removing them after successful rehabilitation of the area! Other work included:
    - Regaining the edge, revegetation work, and trash removal
    - NPS introduced volunteers to the ‘GRIPHOIST’ used to move very large objects. Volunteers used the griphoist to reposition large, downed trees to narrow the wider trailheads for perimeter protection and to close off social trails; NPS allowed each volunteer to take their turn at using the griphoist to move tree trunks.
    - Volunteers finished the day by filling in the post holes and adding duff and leaves to the disturbed area and sweeping and tidying the asphalt main trail.
    - **Highlights** –1) introduction to [Steve Griswold](#), author and trail consultant leading a large Yosemite project along the Half Dome corridor, and 2) we saw up close a [pileated woodpecker](#).









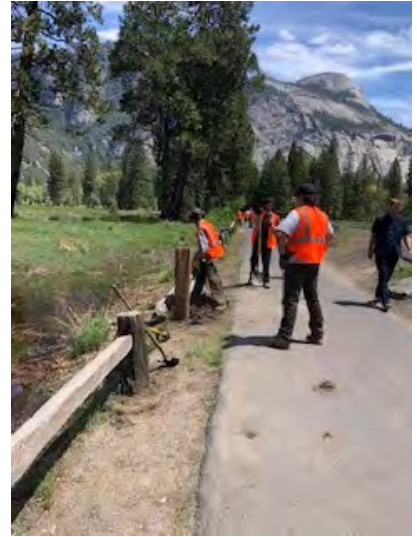
➤ **Tuesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>**

- **PROJECT** – fence repair at Swinging Bridge and Southside Drive (damaged and rotting posts and rails). Grand view of Yosemite Falls during our workday. Repaired posts, rails and realigned posts as needed. Work included using shovels and digging bar as leverage to loosen post and remove or repair. Along Southside Drive/Chapel Road, minor flooding meant some of the posts were submerged and we were digging in mud and water at some of the post locations. Intense work in the full sun and ended the day before completing this project.

- Regaining the edge and trash removal
- **Highlights** – 1) posts used for this repair project were logs split by ConservationVIP® volunteers last spring, 2) many opportunities to interact with park visitors along this popular trail – some comments included ‘*thank you for making the path more accessible*’ and many questions about our organization which we were happy to answer, 3) magnificent view of Yosemite Falls, and 4) dinner with Jackie Garcia, Park Ranger Volunteer Program Coordinator, who shared her knowledge on the early inhabitants of the park.







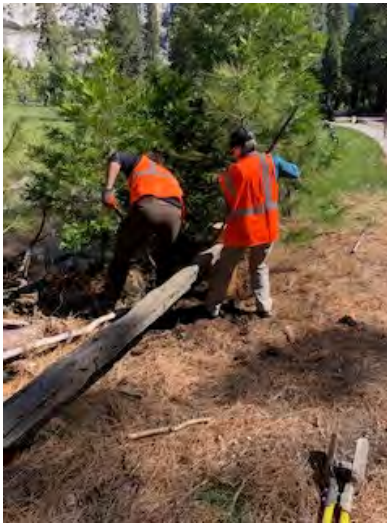


➤ **Wednesday, May 17<sup>th</sup>**

- **PROJECT** – returned to Southside Drive to finish rail/post replacement, repair and realignment and open new Bridalveil Falls trail and lower viewing area for public access (this trail has been closed to the public for about 3 years). The site is getting new flush bathrooms, viewing areas and trails.

Volunteers relocated temporary fencing to open the falls area close to the overlook. The main entrance is still under construction but now visitors can access the falls safely, for viewing.

- **Highlights** – 1) lunch at Bridalveil Falls, 2) satisfaction of seeing park visitors waiting for us to move fencing so they could immediately access the falls overlook, and 3) at end of workday, drove to Tunnel View for photo ops.









➤ **Thursday, May 18<sup>th</sup>**

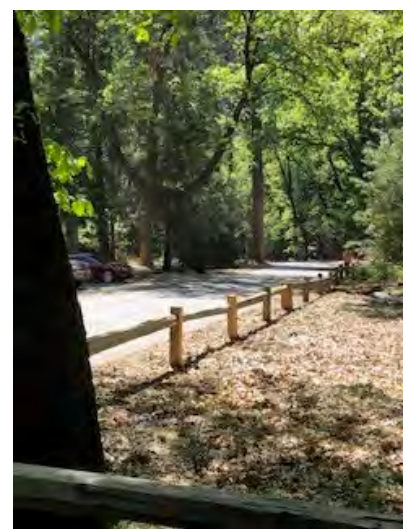
- **PROJECT** – Happy Isles continuation of Monday project / Yosemite Valley Visitor Center fence repair. The first half of the day, we split up the group – one team at Happy Isles area to load wood into NPS truck and the second team at wood cache (near Curry Village) to unload and stack remnants for later repurpose/reuse within the park. A little bit of competition arose with assembly lines formed for efficiency and speed. All volunteers assisted in reloading the NPS truck to take the needed cedar posts, rails and tools to visitor center area for work. The fence fixes at Yosemite Valley Visitor Center included post replacement and realignment; the work was more challenging due to harder soil (versus the softer marsh-type conditions on Monday). Slower going but satisfying work!
- **Highlights** – 1) more synergy at this point with fence repair – the volunteer team worked together efficiently and quickly even though work was harder, 2) in close proximity with park visitors, so many



opportunities to talk with park visitors and our worksite was close to shops, museum, art gallery, etc. to visit during breaks, and 3) At the beginning of our morning, Eamon gave each volunteer an NPS badge with small 2023 date badge to celebrate their contribution to the park – Andrea, camp host, also gave each volunteer a purple Yosemite bandana.











➤ **Friday, May 19<sup>th</sup> – Rest day for volunteers!**

- Some of the activities that the volunteers embarked on were hiking the Mist Trail, Vernal and Nevada Falls Loop, biking, lunch at Ahwahnee Hotel
- Recap of the week with many insightful comments during our last group debrief:
  - Our fencing projects seemed representative of our organization – ConservationVIP’s purpose of restoring and maintaining historical habitats and national parks – by reusing, restoration, and repurposing material sourced from the park, we made the necessary fixes to fencing and reused material around Bridalveil Falls.
  - The volunteers bonded over the challenging work projects.
  - Everyone was excited about our projects and eager to pitch in.
  - Many commented on the skills acquired from fence repair.
  - Great attitudes
  - Pride in ‘giving back’ so others can enjoy the beauty of the park.
  - Achievement of all goals: safety (no recordables!), fun, and completed work!

We thank the volunteers who dedicated their time to work on volunteer projects in Yosemite in May. The projects completed helped to preserve one of our most precious national parks.

We also extend special thanks to NPS crew leaders Eamon Schneider and Johnny Ray, as well as Dave Kari, Trails Manager for Yosemite National Park, Sally Martinez, Yosemite Volunteer Program Manager, and Jackie Garcia, Yosemite National Park Ranger Volunteer Coordinator. The work they did to coordinate and supervise our volunteer projects in the park is much appreciated. A big thanks to the Willow Creek Catering company for their outstanding meal preparations and gracious service. While we always appreciate our trip leaders, volunteers and the others who support our volunteer trips, we offer special thanks to all for supporting the Park this year when the challenges were higher than usual. THANK YOU!

## SUMMARY OF PROJECT STATS

- ✓ **364** volunteer hours
- ✓ Day 1 – Happy Isles
  - Posts removed – **157**
  - Rails removed – **150**
  - Linear feet of fence removal – **1900'**
  - Linear feet of regained edge along paths and roadways: **approx. 1500'**
  - Revegetation & social trail removal
  - Trash collected.
- ✓ Day 2 and 3 – Swinging Bridge and Chapel Road
  - Posts removed/replaced – **44**
  - Rails removed/replaced – **41**
  - Posts stabilized – **37**
  - Linear feet of regained edge along path: **approx. 6000'**
  - Trash collected.
- ✓ Day 3 – Bridalveil Falls
  - **350'** of temporary fencing removed
  - Repositioned temporary barriers by repurposing orange plastic fencing
  - Removal of left over construction materials and debris
- ✓ Day 4 – Happy Isles and Yosemite Valley Visitor Center
  - Approximately **300 pieces of wood loaded**, unloaded and sorted at cache area for future reuse.
  - Visitors Center:
    - Posts removed/replaced – **21**
    - Rails removed/replaced – **15**
    - Posts stabilized – **8**