



Yosemite Volunteer Trip May 19-25, 2024 Trip Report



OVERVIEW

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) led a volunteer trip to Yosemite National Park May 19 – 25, 2024. The volunteers were treated to unique and interesting experiences this spring which will be detailed in this report. An exciting element of the trip was the return to Yellow Pine Campground. This beautiful and isolated campground is reserved for volunteer organizations to enjoy their time at the park. The Yellow Pine area is secluded and naturally beautiful with a stunning view of Sentinel Falls and easy access to Sentinel Beach. Our catering partner, Willow Creek Catering, participated again this year serving nutritious gourmet meals throughout the week.

A last-minute change in NPS personnel gave the 12 volunteers, including two trip leaders Danielle Simpson and Pam Morgan, the opportunity to meet other NPS rangers and experience vastly different areas of the park reserved for park employees only. The volunteers were thrilled with their frequent '*behind the scenes*' views of areas not open to the general public and experienced the park through the NPS climbing and backcountry rangers. This gave our volunteer group the chance to learn more about the inner workings of the park and the different ways to enjoy Yosemite National Park.

The gorgeous weather for the week complemented the starry nights and a very unusual chance to experience a [moonbow](#). A moonbow, also known as a lunar rainbow, is a rare natural phenomenon that occurs when moonlight is refracted through water droplets in the atmosphere. Moonbows are similar to rainbows, but they are usually fainter and less vibrant because the moon is not as bright as the sun. We'll share some of the stunning pictures in this report from the volunteers who traded sleep for the chance to view the moonbow at Yosemite Falls.

Under the supervision of the NPS climbing ranger Gus Anderson, NPS trail crew leader Brian England, and seasonal assistants Matt and Henry, the volunteer group completed 300 volunteer hours on projects which included:

- Obliteration of climbing approach trails at the base of El Capitan; social trail obliteration, brushing, tree trimming, rock removal and scattering duff
- Trail maintenance at Sentinel climbing approach trail; brushing, tree trimming, root and rock removal, scattering duff; signpost installation, removal of large, downed tree and installation of log steps at steep section of approach trail
- General trail maintenance along west Valley Loop Trail; scaling, tree trimming, brushing, social trail removal and removal of large, downed tree using griphoist
- Mucking at Trails and Corrals Shop; trail maintenance at Bridalveil Falls (behind parking area/bathrooms); scaling, tree trimming, and brushing
- Trash removal throughout worksites

Tools used during work week:

- Shovels (flat and spade), pick mattock, Pulaski tool, McCloud tool, loppers, digging and tamping bars, saws and griphoist.



DAILY RECAPS

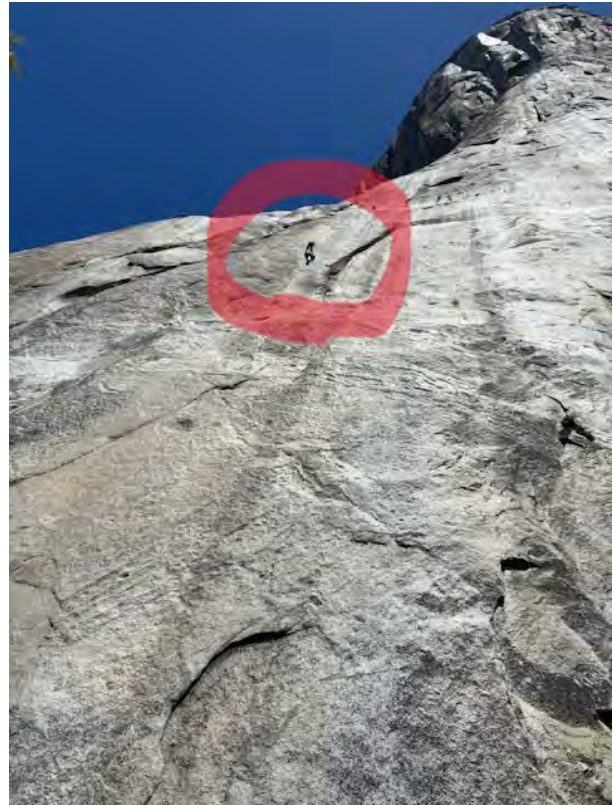
- **Sunday, May 19th**– Danielle arrived on Saturday morning (5/18) to set up camp; Pam arrived Saturday afternoon after flying into SFO – both rented 7-passenger vans for transporting volunteers to and from worksites for the week. The trip leaders set up at Yellow Pine Campground which is right next to the Merced River at sites A and B, allowing plenty of room for the campers to spread out and enjoy the beautiful view of Sentinel Falls. The camp hosts, Andrea and Julie, were welcoming and accommodating, providing unlimited firewood as the trip leaders worked on the final logistical arrangements.
- The initial group meeting took place on Sunday afternoon at the picturesque Yellow Pine Campground and covered:
 - Introductions and expectations
 - Emphasis on priorities for the week; 1) safety, 2) fun, and 3) volunteer 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) and showers
 - Free time available for exploration and sign-out sheets
 - Contact cards distributed and photo release forms for volunteer signature.

- Individual and group conversations around expectations and what volunteers are most looking forward to during the week
- Evening debriefings after dinner around campfire

Trip leaders, Danielle and Pam, making sure the campsite was welcoming upon arrival!



- **Monday, May 20th** – introduction to Gus Anderson and Matt, climbing rangers with NPS
 - **PROJECT** – obliteration of two climbing approach trails at base of El Capitan, assessment of additional approach trails including the Pine Line Ledge
 - Social trail obliteration, brushing, tree trimming, rock removal and scattering duff
 - Climb to Pine Line Ledge with climbing demo by Matt
 - Visited *Ask a Climber* offering opportunity to talk with climbing rangers (Anica and Henry) and view El Capitan climbers through a high-powered telescope
 - Volunteers finished the day with stops at Tunnel View and Bridalveil Falls
 - **Highlights** –1) learning more about the climbing culture at Yosemite, and 2) viewing the climbers on El Capitan





➤ **Tuesday, May 21st**

- **PROJECT** – General trail maintenance at Sentinel climbing approach trail; realign of trail, reroute drainage, closed off drainage ruts, signpost installation, tree removal, and log step installation to improve drainage, access and ease for climbers:

- Maintenance at Sentinel climbing approach trail included brushing, tree trimming, root and rock removal, erosion rehab, tread improvement and construction and trash removal
 - Cleared encroaching berry bushes and removal of several deep stumps at initial trailhead
 - Volunteers introduced to the cross-cut saw that the park uses for large tree cutting (this saw is 100+ years old and meticulously maintained by the park)
 - Signpost installation at cross junction of climber's access trail and Valley Loop trail
 - Removal of a large downed tree using griphoist on a very steep section of trail
 - Tread improvement by installing 4 log steps on steep part of access trail; the volunteers gathered the downed logs from surrounding forest, cut them to specifications and manually installed them
 - Finished the day by walking back to Yellow Pine Campground from worksite
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- **Highlights** – 1) learning about NPS' philosophy towards care and maintenance of tools and resources; the cross cut saw we used is 100+ years old and still an important tool and used by trail crew, 2) learning about [Dolly Chapman](#) and her unique contributions to the park that continues today (she is responsible for sharpening the cross cut saw) and 3) seeing the moonbow pictures from brave volunteers forgoing sleep this evening to capture this phenomenon



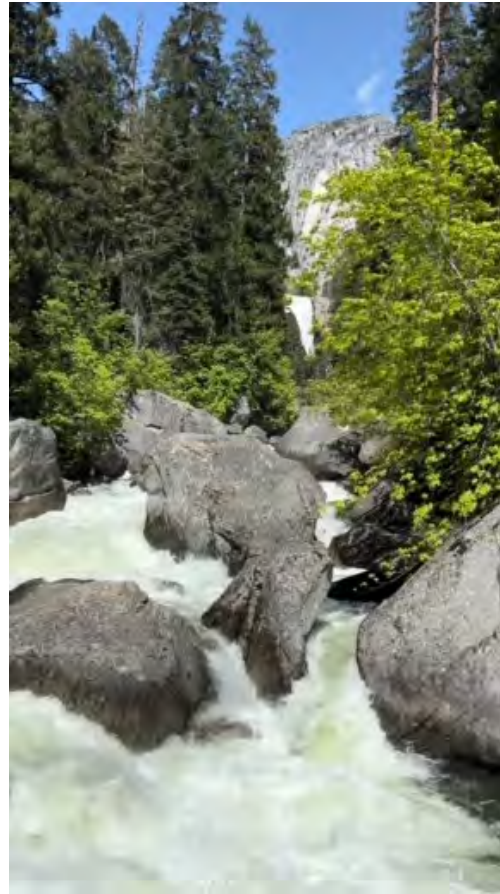




➤ **Wednesday, May 22nd**

- **PROJECT** – our work assignments today were guided by instructions from Brian England, NPS trail crew leader, as we focused our maintenance along the west Valley Loop Trail and Happy Isle trails. Our tasks included scaling, tree trimming, brushing and social trail removal. The volunteers were able to use the griphoist tool and had an impromptu knot tying demonstration (one of our volunteers eagerly participated):
 - Trail scaling, tree trimming, brushing and social trail removal
 - Used griphoist to move a large downed tree blocking the trail
 - Detailed instructions and explanations on using the griphoist tool allowing all volunteers to participate (knot-tying demo, proper vocal instructions and detailed safety instructions)
 - Assessment of Happy Isle trails
 - Finished the day with a group hike to Vernal Falls
 - Enjoyed dinner with the Yellow Pine Campground hosts, Andrea and Julie
- **Highlights** – 1) learning about Wahhoga Village and the park's commitment to preserving original inhabitants heritage, 2) fun time learning about the griphoist tool and watching a volunteer actively share her knot-tying expertise, 3) relaxing lunch beside the Merced River, 3) an exhilarating hike to Vernal Falls to cap off our day, and 4) hosting our campground hosts, Andrea and Julie, for dinner tonight





➤ **Thursday, May 23rd**

- **PROJECT** – additional educational opportunities on other parts of the parks important to keep all systems working smoothly; trail maintenance at the Bridalveil Falls trail (behind the parking area/bathrooms) – the ConservationVIP® volunteers have worked on this trail project in years past; and a visit to the Yosemite Conservation Heritage Center
 - Started the day at Trails and Corrals Shop for a quick tour and behind-the-scenes tour of the livestock, facilities and maintenance area
 - The volunteers met Shane and Liz who provided an overview and history of the park animal and their valuable purpose at the park (packing and backcountry utility, search and rescue services, and law enforcement)
 - We pitched in to muck the areas for the horses and mules
 - Trail maintenance at Bridalveil Falls trail (behind the new parking area/bathrooms); this trail traverses to the Tunnel View parking area
 - Finished the day at Yosemite Conservation Heritage Center for a private tour

- Enjoyed our visit with Daniel Farfan, Park Ranger Field Seasonal, during dinner; Daniel shared his personal experience with the park and statistics about volunteerism (in 2023 park volunteers completed 5,000 work hours)
- **Highlights** – 1) *behind-the-scenes* tour of the Trails and Corrals Shop and learning about park horses and mules, 2) private tour at Yosemite Conservation Heritage Center, 3) hosting Daniel Farfan, Park Ranger, for dinner this evening as he shared interesting tidbits about the park and his personal experience, and 4) celebrating our productive week with camp hosts, Andrea and Julie, as they gifted each volunteer with a teal Yosemite Volunteer bandana and 2024 badge





➤ **Friday, May 24th – Rest day for volunteers!**

- Some of the activities that the volunteers embarked on were hiking the Mist Trail/Glacier Point/4-Mile Loop Trail, biking, lunch at Ahwahnee Hotel, hiking the Yosemite Falls trail, and driving to Glacier Point
- Recap of the week with many insightful comments during our last group debrief:
 - It was wonderful to see parts of the park not available to tourists.
 - Unique opportunities to see cool parts of Yosemite National Park
 - The volunteers bonded over the evening campfires.
 - Everyone was excited about our projects and eager to pitch in
 - 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. Our efforts helped to preserve one of our most precious national parks. Special thanks also to NPS crew leaders Gus Anderson and Brian England, as well as Matt, Henry and Jalen, Also, we're grateful for the coordination from the Yosemite Volunteer Office and an evening visit from Daniel Farfan. The work NPS does 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 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

- ✓ **300** volunteer hours this trip!
- ✓ Day 1 – El Capitan climbing approach trails
 - **500 ft** of social trail obliteration
 - **200 ft** of brushing, trimming trees, removing rocks and scattering duff
 - Revegetation & social trail removal
 - Trash collected
- ✓ Day 2 – Sentinel climbing approach trail
 - **250 ft** of tread improvement and construction
 - **300 ft** of erosion rehab
 - **1** signpost installation at junction of climber's access trail and Valley Loop trail
 - **4** log steps gathered, cut and sized and manually installed on steep part of access trail
 - Trash collected
- ✓ Day 3 – Valley Loop and Happy Isle trails
 - **1.25 miles** of scaling, tree trimming, brushing and social trail removal
 - Trash collected
- ✓ Day 4 – Trails and Corrals Shop and Bridalveil Falls trail
 - Mucked **3 weeks and 40 animals** worth of waste in 90 minutes
 - **.75 mile** trail scaled at Bridalveil Falls (behind parking area/bathrooms)