



Yosemite Volunteer Trip September 8-14, 2024 Trip Report



OVERVIEW

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) led a volunteer trip to Yosemite National Park September 8 – 14, 2024. The volunteers were treated to unique and interesting experiences this fall which will be detailed in this report. An exciting element of the trip was the use of the Yellow Pine Campground located in Yosemite Valley. 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 as well as the 3,000' Three Brothers granite wall that catches the morning glow as the sun rises each day and has the Merced River running along two sides of the campsite which provides easy access within walking distance to swimming locations including Sentinel Beach. Our catering partner, Willow Creek Catering, participated again this year serving nutritious gourmet meals and exceptional customer service throughout the week. They are a meaningful part of making the week enjoyable and help us promote a "pampered camper" environment to aid not only our enjoyment, but also our recovery from each day's work.

Staying in the volunteer campground and teaming up with the NPS personnel gave the 11 volunteers, including two trip leaders Shelley Sankey and Norman Hageman, the opportunity to experience the park more as a local instead of as a visitor. This gave our volunteer group the chance to learn about the inner workings of the park and the different ways to enjoy Yosemite National Park.

Under the supervision of the NPS Trail Crew Leader, Eamon Schneider, the volunteer group completed 319 volunteer hours on projects which included:

- Cutting back Whitethorn Brush on the South Fork Tuolumne River Trail
- Converting previously fallen cedar trees from the Happy Isles area into cedar post for split rail fences
- General trail maintenance on the Old Inspiration Point Trail (Pohono Trail Extension) focusing on drainage, swells and enhancements to the trail route flow
- Replacing rotted out post with the newly created cedar post at the Lower Yosemite Fall area
- Social trail elimination in the Lower Yosemite Fall area

Tools used during work week:

- Shovels, garden rakes, hand saws, loppers, digging (tamping) bars, fence post diggers, and grip hoist.

DAILY RECAPS

- **Arrivals** – The leaders, Shelley and Norman, arrived on Saturday (9/7) to set up camp; 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 site D (arguably the best camp site in the volunteer camp), allowing plenty of room for the campers to spread out and enjoy the beautiful setting. The camp host, Patty, was welcoming and accommodating throughout the week, providing unlimited firewood and drinking water for our stay.

The volunteers arrived on Sunday (9/8) starting around noon. Upon arrival they selected their specific spot to set up their tent and went about settling in with their tent and camping gear, transferring other belongings from their vehicles into the bear boxes, and introducing themselves to the other team members.

- The initial group meeting took place on Sunday afternoon at the picturesque Yellow Pine Campground and covered many things including:
 - 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



- **Monday, September 9th** – introduction of Eamon Schneider, NPS Trail Crew Leader and first workday
 - **PROJECT** – Cut back the Whitethorn Brush on the South Fork Tuolumne River Trail:
 - Trimmed about a mile of trail for which about half of the mile was being overgrown by Whitethorn Brush.
 - This project was in the high country which had cooler temperatures in the 80's and mostly shaded, versus the valley temperatures in the 90's, and allowed us to work on and enhance a lesser-known trail.

We did not see another hiker the whole day as we worked on the trail.

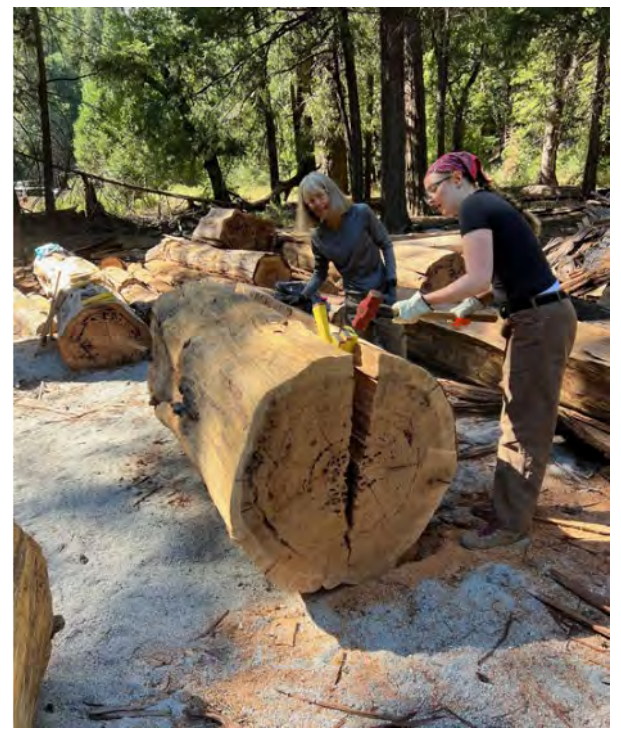
- The day encompassed hiking about 7 miles in association with hiking to the job site with tools, trimming the applicable portion of the trail, and hiking back out.



➤ **Tuesday, September 10th**

- **PROJECT** – Convert previously fallen cedar trees into cedar post for split rail fence:

- Drove to the Valet Fencing Cache near the Wilderness Lot in the Yosemite Valley and received training and guidance from Eamon
- Created 59 cedar post from the sectioned trees which was a record production amount for a given day by a volunteer group using only wedges and sledgehammers
- This was a great sustainability project as the cedar trees were from the nearby Happy Isles section of the park
- Fire scars on the trees were believed to be over 100 years old



➤ **Wednesday, September 11th**

- **PROJECT** – Perform trail maintenance on the old Inspiration Point Trail (Pohono Trail Extension) which has the trailhead located at the Tunnel View overlook:

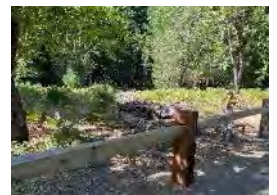
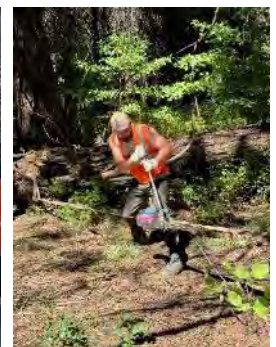
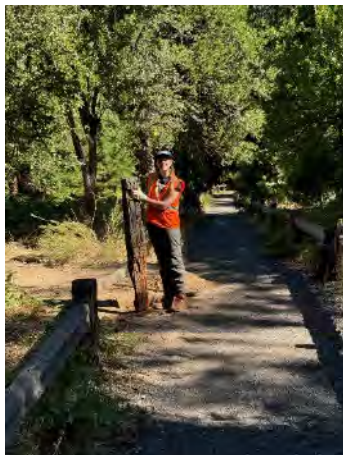
- Trail work focused on drainage, swells and enhancing trail route flow
- This is the same 1-mile section of the trail we worked on a couple of years ago and it was gratifying to see that the trail improvements had stood the test of time
- Drainage improvements focused on removing sediment out of water run out areas
- Swells were added to worn-down trail areas to guide water in conjunction with enhancing the flow of the trail path itself eliminating shortcuts and defining the correct path in areas of the trail that had been widened by hikers
- We finished the day by hiking down the old Wawona Road Trail so that we could hike the trail extension that the May group helped create earlier this year that leads to the Bridalveil Falls area



➤ **Thursday, September 12th**

- **PROJECT** – Install replacement cedar post and eliminate social trail in Lower Yosemite Fall area:

- Replaced 15 rotted out cedar post with some of Tuesday's newly created cedar post as well as repaired/replaced split rail as needed
- Eliminated 100 yards of social trail in the Lower Yosemite Fall area
- Utilized grip hoist (wire rope hoist) to move tree at entrance to social trail



- **Other activities during the week as well as rest day on Friday, September 13th**
 - Some of the activities that the volunteers embarked on were swimming, star gazing, campfire conversations, smores, souvenir shopping, viewing climbers, hiking, exploring the Ahwahnee Hotel and Ansel Adams Gallery, etc.
 - Jackie Garcia, Park Ranger Volunteer Coordinator and Edith, VIP Intern joined us for dinner on Tuesday and thanked us for volunteering as well as the cherished relationship with ConservationVIP®. Jackie also gave a presentation on the geological formation of Yosemite.



- Recap of the week with many insightful comments during our last group debrief:
 - Awesome, awesome week... became family... outdoors was my church
 - This week was just what I needed... I came to give to nature, but nature gave back to me... is it possible to make future trips longer
 - This is my favorite vacation ever... too many favorite things to list
 - Fabulous group... enjoyed the multigenerational nature of our team
 - A very rich experience that felt like a privilege... leaders attuned to needs
 - Fantastic week... great birthday present and experience
 - Leadership is really good... good educational, meaningful and diverse work
 - Dawn and Kearey (caterers) really were family and added to the experience
 - Unique opportunities to see different parts of Yosemite National Park
 - We all kind of inspired or pushed each other in the best of ways
 - ConservationVIP®, and this trip, was a whole tier level better than the other two service organizations I have done conservation trips with in the past
 - Loved getting to learn new knowledge about park work... and diverse food
 - Achievement of all goals - safely had an amazing week while performing meaningful work!

We thank the volunteers who dedicated their time to work on volunteer projects in Yosemite in September. More importantly, we thank them for opening their hearts and giving freely to make a difference not only in the park, but to each other as we became a closely knit team in the process. Our efforts helped to preserve one of our most precious national parks while creating memories that will last a lifetime. Special thanks also to NPS Trail Crew Leader, Eamon Schneider. Also, we're grateful for the coordination from the Yosemite Volunteer Office and an evening visit from Jackie Garcia and Edith. 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 as the needs are real and never ending. THANK YOU!

SUMMARY OF PROJECT STATS

- ✓ **319** volunteer hours (11 volunteers worked 29 hours) this trip!
- ✓ Day 1 – Cut back the Whitethorn Brush on the South Fork Tuolumne River Trail
 - **1 mile** of trail worked with about half needing Whitethorn Brush cut back
 - Hiked 7 miles getting to the work section and returning afterwards
- ✓ Day 2 – Convert previously fallen cedar trees into cedar post for split rail fence
 - **59 cedar post** created from sectioned cedar trees
 - New record for number of posts created by volunteer team in one day
- ✓ Day 3 – Trail improvements on old Inspiration Point Trail (Pohono Trail Extension)
 - **1 mile** of trail improvements focused on drainage and eliminating shortcuts
- ✓ Day 4 – Install replacement cedar post and eliminate social trail
 - **15 cedar post replaced**, also repaired or replaced split rails as needed
 - **100 yards** of social trail eliminated in the Lower Yosemite Fall area