



Yosemite Spring Volunteer Trip May 18-24, 2025 TRIP REPORT

Spring 2025 did not disappoint! Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) led a volunteer trip to Yosemite National Park from May 18-25, 2025. The conditions were perfect with stellar weather, flowing waterfalls and beautiful stary evenings. The eager volunteers arrived on Sunday afternoon in time to set up their tents before the orientation. With all the introductions out of the way, the trip leaders provided a thorough safety overview, details on what a typical workday might look like, and the expectations to stay safe, have fun and complete park projects with the NPS crew. After the initial meeting and delicious dinner, the participants spent time getting to know each other over a blazing campfire. This enjoyable evening routine would be consistent throughout the week with the volunteers coming together to share stories and personal experiences from the day. We'll be detailing the week in this Summary Report and hope it will encourage you to join us on one of our Yosemite adventures!

Our first evening together is always special and offers a chance to finally meet our compadres for the week. It is also an opportunity to meet our fantastic caterers, Dawn and Kearey from Willow Creek Catering. Their attention to detail and willingness to accommodate any dietary concerns is always much appreciated. The delicious, home-cooked meals are always a hit, but the dessert is by far the favorite! Danielle and Pam, trip leaders, were excited to welcome the volunteers and assist with any help setting up their camp for the week. Our Yellow Pine campground is a special treasure hidden away from the crowds and provides flat terrain with a view of the flowing Sentinel Falls and Sentinel Rock in sight of our tents.

Our campground hosts, Andrea and Julie, were there to welcome the volunteers as they prepared to camp for the week. As we found out shortly after arrival, the park bears were especially active during this season, so special care was required and meticulous attention to bear-safety was very important. No matter the age or experience of a hiker, it's always thrilling to anticipate seeing a bear in its natural

habitat. It's also fun to share our own bear stories with our fellow volunteers. The volunteers were lucky this week to get a few bear sightings, as well as seeing a bobcat, rattlesnake, deer and plenty of beautiful birds.

A special thank you is extended to the Yosemite National Park Volunteer Office and Trail Crew for ensuring our week was productive and enjoyable. Eamon Schneider and his team (Tom and Jordan, with contributing Climbing Ranger, Gus) made sure to schedule our team for very interesting projects around different areas of the park. It was a wonderful week filled with hard work, new skills and stunning views! Under the supervision of Eamon, the group of 9 volunteers, including trip leaders Danielle Simpson and Pam Morgan, completed **288 volunteer hours** on the following projects:

- Trail maintenance at base of Lower Yosemite Falls for a well-trafficked climbing access trail; “quarrying” rocks to build steps for ease of access, rerouting a portion of trail, repositioning some fallen timber, and obliterating a few social trails.
- Decommissioning a section of trail at Mariposa Grove; former trail was decompacted and regraded to follow the natural slope then covered with native materials and duff to mimic the nearby forest floor; grip hoist work to reposition larger trees and rocks along a creek bed.
- Trail work along Upper Yosemite Falls trail; hiking to worksite was required which included 1.5 mile hike (1,065 ft gain in elevation) carrying the necessary equipment; work along rock steps to stabilize the large stones using crushed rock to fill in gaps, gathering stones/rocks along the steep downhill slope paying close attention to safety (careful to not roll rocks down hillside potentially endangering climbers and park visitors); stabilizing the inslope with built-up rock walls.
- Work at NPS wood cache site; moving heavy materials using grip hoist, splitting large logs into fence posts using wedge and hammer, producing firewood for future volunteer crews, moving materials and clearing the cache to ensure the area was well organized for the upcoming busy season of park maintenance and conservation.

Tools used during the week:

- Shovels
- Grip hoist
- Short and large rock bars
- McCloud tool
- Pulaski
- Single and double-jack hammers
- Wedge tools (metal and heavy plastic)
- Axes
- Chainsaws (NPS use only)

- **Saturday, May 17th** – Trip Leaders, Danielle and Pam, arrived at Yosemite National Park. Leaders arrive a day early to assess and begin prepping the group campsite, to acclimate to the park, and to finalize any remaining logistical arrangements. Both leaders drove 7-passenger vans for transporting volunteers to and from worksites for the week. The leaders met with campground hosts, Andrea and Julie, who were welcoming and accommodating; they stocked the site with firewood for the week.

- **Sunday, May 18th**—The trip leaders began the day by preparing for the group at Yellow Pine Campground. This site is near the Merced River and allowed plenty of room for the volunteers to spread out and enjoy the beautiful view of Sentinel Falls. The caterers, Willow Creek Catering, arrived around noon, followed by the volunteers, around 14:00. Danielle and Pam assisted all with selection of spot for each tent, and with any set-up needs.
- 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) completing 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) and showers
 - Rest time available for exploration and sign-out sheets
 - Contact cards distributed and photo release forms for volunteer signatures
 - Individual and group conversations around expectations and what volunteers are most looking forward to during the week
 - Evening debriefings after dinner around the campfire
- **Day 1 | Monday, May 19th** – introduced the group to Eamon Schneider, Trail Supervisor, and his team (Tom and Jordan) along with climbing ranger, Gus
 - **PROJECT** – maintenance and stabilization of a popular climbing access trail at the base of Lower Yosemite Falls Trail
 - Steep climb along medium rocks, loose dirt and slick boulders before staging for trail work (carried tools to work site)
 - Social trail obliteration, brushing, tree trimming, rock removal and scattering duff
 - Reposition large, downed trees to recondition trail
 - Reroute section of trail to provide more sustainable grade and prevent future erosion
 - Harvested large rocks to create safe and secure steps for climbers using access trail
 - 150 feet of trail rebuild
 - 75 feet of social trail obliteration
 - **Highlights** –1) learning about and becoming proficient with grip hoist and rock bar tools, and 2) meeting and engaging rock climbers while working



➤ **Day 2 | Tuesday, May 20st**

- **PROJECT** – trail work at Mariposa Grove included creating pinch points (chicanes) on new trail alignments, decommissioning old trail routes, trail recovery and rehab work
 - Identified two sections of the Mariposa Grove trail for work; Eamon sharing that the park's philosophy to not simply abandon old trails – they rehabilitate the land back to its natural state
 - Decomacted and regraded to establish the natural slope along former trail; moved large, downed logs and covered with sticks, pine needles and duff for natural reforestation
 - Volunteers used the grip hoist tool easily with minimal instruction or supervision for moving large stones and downed trees
 - Removal and repositioning of large boulders using grip hoist along a section of trail; large boulders were positioned for ease on another future project
 - Volunteers learned about the phrase 'keeping your dime' which meant to keep 10ft between each other when using the tools
 - 400 ft of trail reconditioning and regrading
 - 150 ft of trail repositioning large logs and boulders
- **Highlights** – 1) enjoying the beautiful Mariposa Grove area of the park, 2) stopping at Wawona for a quick visit to the quaint historic townsite, 3) taking advantage of the proximity and seeing the Giant Sequoias, 4) stopping at Tunnel View on drive back to camp for a stupendous view of the park, and 3) hosting and visiting with Lydia James, Park Ranger Volunteer Coordinator during dinner



Before



After



➤ **Wednesday, May 21st**

- **PROJECT** – Trail restoration along stone steps leading to the ‘Oh My Gosh’ point on the Upper Yosemite Falls trail
 - Volunteers hiked 1.5 mile (1,065 ft elevation gain) on steep ascent along Upper Yosemite Falls trail to worksite; included carrying our tools (some tools stashed in strategic, hidden places close to worksite)
 - Our hike included visiting Columbia Point; a beautiful valley viewing area about 1 mile up the trail
 - Detailed instructions and explanations on the style and process of rock work which has changed over the years; formerly smaller more narrow steps were created, but now the standard is 12” runs on pad to accommodate the whole foot to land on pad, most important on popular trails
 - Volunteers were instructed to fill gaps around large pad stones with smaller rocks and pebbles (crushing rocks onsite) before using sticks and larger stones to fill in the gaps
 - We were instructed to be careful not to pound or force the stones into the crevices so as not to compromise the integrity of the contact within the space
 - Volunteers worked in teams; some gathering rocks/stones from downhill steep side of trail, others crushing rock and filling gaps, and a team gathering duff (leaves, sticks, etc.) to additionally fill the spaces
 - We learned the phrase ‘*Keep Your Nickel*’ which meant to keep 5 ft of space when using the tools on the trail
 - Safety gear or PPE (“personal protective equipment”) included ear plugs – rock crushing can be loud!
 - 40 ft of rock work completed, and 20 ft of secure trail sidewalls created

- **Highlights** – 1) Learning new skills and seeing how our efforts were useful for this very popular trail, 2) exhilarating hike to the work site with stupendous views during our workday, and 3) interface with many grateful hikers as they passed 4) visiting with Brian Shoor, Yosemite storyteller, during dinner



➤ Thursday, May 22nd

- **PROJECT** – Work and maintenance at NPS wood cache site near Curry Village
 - Moving large logs into an organized position using grip hoist
 - Removing bark from large logs to prepare for splitting
 - Splitting large logs into post-sized fencing material using wedge and jack hammer
 - Repositioning smaller materials into separate piles
 - Splitting logs into firewood sized pieces for future volunteers' campsites

- Organizing cache and 'clean up' to prepare the trail team for the upcoming seasonal projects
 - Recovering rail materials that were buried during winter debris flow
 - Results – 32 post-sized fencing material, 150 pieces of firewood split for volunteer camps; complete cache organization and materials prep
-
- **Highlights** – 1) Lots of manual hammering, moving and splitting large logs, 2) final organized wood cache was gratifying after the intense work, and 3) recapping our work week with a final debriefing over the campfire





➤ **Friday, May 23rd – Rest day for volunteers!**

- Our volunteers took advantage of their rest day in different ways with some hiking the 4-Mile Trail, walking the Valley Floor Trail and lunching at Ahwahnee Hotel, driving to viewpoint at Glacier Point, or hiking the Ostrander Lake Trail
- We celebrated our productive work week this evening with our camp hosts, Andrea and Julie, as they gifted each volunteer with a teal Yosemite Volunteer bandana and Volunteer patch; NPS provided a Yosemite Trails Volunteer sticker prior in the week
- Wonderful feedback from our volunteer team included:
 - The trip exceeded expectations
 - The work was fruitful, and we could see our contributions
 - Enjoyed visiting with the park visitors
 - Wonderful to see different parts of the park (and not staying in one section of the park for all work)
 - Very much enjoyed Brian Shoor and his stories
 - Impressed by the uniqueness of Yosemite and experiencing the importance of volunteer efforts to park preservation
 - Eager to participate in other ConservationVIP® trips
 - Expressed that the trip was an *'unbelievable experience'*
 - Enjoyed the camaraderie with like-minded people
 - The group was small enough for us to 'click'
 - Very much enjoyed the work and seeing the results of our labors
 - Loved being part of the park's volunteer support
 - Learned we can do hard things
 - Really was impressed with coming full circle with projects from 4 years ago



Our volunteer projects rely on the time, talents and efforts of our wonderful volunteers. Thank you for joining us this year in Yosemite! Your efforts and hard work will be evident for many years to come, and we hope you'll join us again for a future Yosemite National Park trip or at another ConservationVIP® destination.

A special thank you to Sally Martinez and Lydia James in the Yosemite Volunteer Office for working with us each year to organize and coordinate such a wonderful adventure. Huge appreciation to Eamon Schneider and his dedicated team of trail experts for your guidance, fun

projects and patience with our volunteers each year. We've enjoyed our relationship and hope to continue to work with the Trail Crew for many years to come.

To our partners at Willow Creek Catering, we thank you for dishing up the most delicious meals which is such a treat during our camping experience. The hot, gourmet meals are always a hit and a wonderful way to begin and end our days.

We'd like to thank Ed Eads, ConservationVIP® COO and Yosemite Program Manager, for the '*behind the scenes*' administrative work and annual tasks to make sure our trips are scheduled promptly and ready for promotion each year. Your leadership and guidance are invaluable to the on-the-ground trip leaders.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT STATS

- ✓ **288** volunteer hours this trip!
- ✓ Day 1 – Lower Yosemite Falls Climbing Approach Trail
 - **150 ft** Trail reroute
 - **75 ft** of social trail obliteration
 - **225 ft** of brushing, trimming trees, removing rocks and scattering duff
 - Reposition fallen timber
 - Revegetation & social trail removal
- ✓ Day 2 – Mariposa Grove Trail
 - **400 ft** of trail regarding and decompaction
 - **150 ft** of repositioning fallen trees and large boulders
- ✓ Day 3 – Lower Yosemite Falls Trail
 - **1.5-mile** hike carrying tools (1,065 ft gain of elevation) to worksite
 - **40 ft** rock step repair and establishment
 - **20 ft** of secure trail sidewalls created
- ✓ Day 4 – NPS Wood Cache Area
 - **32** fence posts split from large logs
 - **150** pieces of firewood chopped for volunteer groups
 - Scrap material (tree bark, mulch and small pieces of wood) collected and moved to dedicated piles
 - General clean up and organization of the small private NPS area