



Mule Pack Section



Spring 2003

Annual Newsletter

MULE PACK

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In this Issue

The Mule Pack Section has six trips planned for the summer of 2003. Many are long-time favorite locations. Last year's trip to Paradise Valley was so popular that the season starts with a return trip over the July 4th weekend. Later in July, two trips are scheduled including one to Thousand Island Lake, one of the premier spots in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Late July also has a full-week trip to explore the Pine Creek canyon area in the John Muir Wilderness— this one was last visited by the MPS in 1997—long overdue for a repeat.

Mid August features a return trip to the Bishop Pass/Dusy Basin area and a full week to explore the Virginia Canyon area in the northeast corner of Yosemite Park.

The season ends with a Labor Day weekend trip to Cottonwood Lakes. This one sets the high altitude mark with the planned campsite being over 11,000 feet and it is rumored to be our Section Chair's favorite location.

The eight trips in 2002 were all very successful. The leaders on a couple of trips had to contend with complications resulting from the new regulations on the packers, but they overcame the obstacles and the trips proceeded as planned. Reports from four of last year's trips are included in this newsletter. If you are disappointed to find that your trip does not have a write-up, volunteer on your next time out to submit a short trip report.

The Forest Service Management Plan

In last year's newsletter we noted that the new Forest Service Management Plan placed new restrictions on travel in the Ansel Adams, John Muir and Dinkey Lakes Wildernesses. These included reduced trailhead quotas, the imposition of quotas on little-used trails that in the past had none, and restrictions on the building of campfires. For the upcoming 2003 year all trailhead quotas, individual and commercial, are being reduced by another 10% from those used in 2002. Fire restrictions remain the same as last year— no fires above 10,000 ft north of Glacier Divide or above 10,400 ft south of the Divide. As of this writing, the areas where bear cans are mandatory had not been expanded.

We also noted in the 2002 newsletter that several organizations had sued the Forest Service for not conducting an environ-

mental review of the impact of pack stock and, as a result, a court had imposed a limit of 12 people on all trips using the services of a pack station. The court gave the Forest Service through 2005 to complete a cumulative impact study and through 2006 to implement site specific plans.

The packers also had annual "service day" limits placed on them. The original management plan called for a five year phased reduction, but the court ordered an immediate 20% reduction. Unfortunately, 'service days' are defined by the number of participants and not the number of pack stock involved on the trip. As a result it makes it more difficult for the packers to support "dunnage drop" trips because the number of participants is

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2003 Mule Pack Trips

Jul 3-6 Thu-Sun Mule Pack

O: Families: Camp without a Pack in King's Canyon: Hired packers carry gear while we hike separately with only our daypacks or hire a horse to ride into camp. Thursday morning hike 6 mi., 1600' gain to campsite at lower end of Paradise Valley on the S. Fork of the King's River. Fri-Sat hike, photo, fish, enjoy scenery, or relax in camp. Sun hike out. More info from Ldr: ED LULOFS, elulofs@yahoo.com. Note reservation/cancellation policy below. Send requested info & \$120 check to Asst: NORM STABECK



Thousand Island Lake & Mt. Banner

Jul 25-28 Fri-Mon Mule Pack

O/I: Camp without a Pack at 1000 Island Lake: Hired packers carry gear while we hike separately with only our daypacks. Fri hike 11 mi., 2300' gain to campsite at scenic lake below Banner Peak. Sat-Sun hike, photo, fish, enjoy scenery, or relax in camp. Mon hike out. Note reservation/cancellation policy below. Send requested info & \$190 check to Ldr: SCOTT MEEK, Asst: JULIE SMITH-MEEK

Jul 28-Aug 3 Fri-Mon Mule Pack

O: Upper Pine Lake (John Muir Wilderness): Mon morning hike 6 mi, 2900' gain, with just your daypack while hired packers carry your gear (up to 50 lbs) to scenic base camp in Pine Creek Canyon. Five full layover days to hike, explore, photo, fish and enjoy nature at

Pine Lakes, Granite Park, Italy Pass, upper French Canyon, Royce Lakes & others. Sun hike out. Lmt:12. Note reservation/cancellation policy below. Send requested info & \$195 check to Ldr: JOHN KAISER, Co-Ldrs: PAUL CARLTON & SANDY BURNSIDE



Approach to Dusy Basin

Aug 15-17 Fri-Sun Mule Pack

O: Camp Without a Pack from South Lake to Dusy Basin: Hired packers carry gear while we hike separately with only our daypacks. Fri morning hike 5 mi., 1900' gain to camp below Bishop Pass. Saturday, hike to Dusy Basin, a beautiful basin of wonderful terrain dotted with lakes. Sunday we hike out. Note reservation/cancellation policy below. Send requested info & \$150 check to Co-Ldr: DAVE CROSS, Co-Ldr: CHRISTINE GUTIERREZ

Aug 17-23 Sun-Sat Mule Pack

O:Mule Pack Trip to Virginia Canyon: We will set up camp in Yosemite backcountry using hired packer to carry 40 to 45 lbs per participant. Walk in from Virginia Lakes trailhead is 5 mi. with 1400' gain and 1800' loss We'll have 5 layover days in this remote area to explore various lakes, meadows, canyons and passes between canyons. Drive up on 16th for early start on 17th. Note reservation/cancellation policy below. Send requested info & \$175 check to Co-Ldr: RON BARBOUR, Ldr: DAN BUTLER

2003 Mule Pack Trips, cont.

Aug 29-Sep 2 Fri-Tue Mule Pack

O: Cottonwood Lakes Mule Pack: Hired packers carry gear of 40 lbs per person while we hike separately with only our daypacks. Fri morning hike 5 mi., 1300' gain to lakeside base camp 11,100' elev, surrounded by gorgeous meadows, streams, and mountains. Sat-Mon hike, photo, fish (catch & release), or relax in camp. Tue hike out. Note reservation/cancellation policy below. Send requested info, especially recent high-altitude conditioning & \$210 check to Ldr: YVONNE TSAI, Co-Ldr: CHRISTINE GUTIERREZ



Virginia Peak and Upper Virginia Canyon

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Reservation/Cancellation Policy: Send two 4" x 9" Self Addressed Stamped Envelopes (SASEs) with recent experience & condition, rideshare info, H&W phones, email, and a check—payable to the Mule Pack Section—for the amount shown to the listed trip contact listed above. Cancellation notices received 45 days or more prior to the trip will result in a full refund. Persons canceling in less than 45 days before the trip will receive a 90% refund only if a suitable replacement is found.

Newsletter Subscription Policy:

The Mule Pack newsletter is published annually and is sent at no charge to all who subscribe. Subscriptions are for four years and can be renewed as often as you wish. Subscriptions & renewals are automatically given to participants on trips. Others should contact the newsletter editor:

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kaiser@pulsco.com

Check your mailing label: If your label contains a box stating "please renew" we want you to do just that. Just send an email, leave a phone message, or drop a

note saying "please continue".

Electronic Copy?

We can email an Adobe Acrobat version of the newsletter to those who would like to try it in that format.

Advantages: The postal sorting machines won't destroy it, and your copy will have the pictures in full color.

Potential Problem: unless you have a broadband connection (cable or DSL), downloading will be very slow as the file size is large—about 700 kB.

To see if it works for you, send an email to the editor and an E-Copy will be returned to you—or you can simply download it from the Angeles Chapter website. If you like it, let us know and we will substitute the electronic copy for the printed version starting with the 2004 newsletter.

Management Plan ...

(Continued from page 1)

high relative to the number of stock animals on such trips; full service trips with fewer people but a larger number of stock animals will take a smaller portion of the packers' annual allotment and generate more income for the packers. Thus it appears that this interim ruling does not address the basic complaint by the litigants and in fact makes it more likely that the trips that do occur will be the ones with a larger number of stock animals that stay with the group over multiple days. This appears to be a classic example of the 'law of unintended consequences'.

The packers have been working to cope and are attempting to accommodate trips of all types, but some are beginning to revise their policies. At least one station has dropped the traditional pricing structure based on the number of pack stock and the number of days of use. Instead the charge is being levied on the number of participants. This resulted in a 50% increase in the price of one of our trips scheduled for this summer.

We can only hope that the final management plan does not continue to penalize trips that minimize the use of stock animals.

2002 Trip Reports

Lillian Lakes Mule Pack, July 19-22, 2002

Submitted by John Kaiser

A month before this trip started the packer announced that he would not issue all the necessary wilderness permits. With great perseverance, many phone calls, and a lot of discussion with the Forest Rangers, Bob Hiestand worked out the problems, and the trip went off as scheduled. It was especially disappointing that Bob had to cancel from the trip at the last moment due to illness.

The somewhat reduced group started their hike up the Fernandez trail through a forested area. At one bend in the trail we surprised a covey of quail, and the hen ran up the trail ahead of us, crossing and recrossing, to divert our attention while the chicks scurried for cover in the brush. About two miles into the hike, we emerged onto a ridge where we left the

Fernandez trail to take a higher and rockier route past several lakes. It was along this ridge route that we encountered our first panoramic view to the east across the San Joaquin drainage. This view became very familiar over the next three days as we attempted to identify the many peaks along the eastern divide of the Sierras. Mt. Ritter was easy to identify and defined the northern end of our view. Directly to the east and some 20 miles away, Red Slate Mt. stood out with its distinctive snow chutes. Further to the south, numerous high peaks provided a wonderful view that our geographic ignorance could not diminish.

After we set up camp at Lillian Lake and gathered wood for the evening fire, the fishermen, John A, Bill, Zack, & Josh headed for the lake. Much later, while the rest of us enjoyed the evening campfire, they returned triumphant, and cooked a late trout dinner over the open fire. Fishing was so good that John took advantage of the full moon one evening to fish



Early Riser Special
Lillian Lake at Sunrise

2002 Trip Reports

until 10 pm.

On day two, Sophie and Sally explored along the Walton and Rutherford trails, while Josh, Laura, Bill, Marilyn, Michelle, John A and John K left on a meandering loop hike to Shirley Lake and beyond. First stop was atop the granite ridge overlooking Lillian Lake opposite the campsite. From there we continued to peak 9826 before descending to Shirley Lake where we relaxed

and enjoyed lunch. After lunch we set out for Gale Lakes (ponds actually) and were very pleased when we unexpectedly found a waterfall dropping over a ledge from Gale Lakes to a small tranquil meadow. After indulging ourselves with a thorough round of pictures, we continued on to the original destination, which turned out to be anti-climatic after the waterfall. From there we descended down a series of granite ledges, gradually working back to camp.

On our last layover day, two groups set out separately for Rainbow Lakes. The trail route to Rainbow is quite long but the large granite outcropping to the



Bill, Josh, & John A
Overlooking Lillian Lake

north of the campsite provided a highway that cut miles from the hike. John K and Sally set out first and were followed by Bill, Marilyn, John A and Zack a little later using a slightly different route. The two groups rejoined at Rainbow for lunch before returning together to camp. At the campfire, Sophie reported that the lake provided a very refreshing swim.

For a change of scenery on our return hike, we used the Walton Trail. At our lunch break we noted that the east-

ern vista was now obscured with haze and by the end of lunch we recognized that the haze was smoke moving northward. This was the advance signs from the McNally fire that started a day earlier far to the south — the smoke from that fire would blanket the Owens Valley and Sierras for most of the summer.

After retrieving our gear at the pack station, the group drove to Oakhurst for a final meal together before departing with memories of Sierra lakes and peaks, stimulating campfire discussions, and an unexpected happy hour visit by two deer and one very persistent chipmunk.

Fourth Recess Lake

August 5-11, 2002

Submitted by Dora Henning

The letter from our leader informed us that the trip would start early — 7am at the Pack station. The 10,250' trailhead was approximately 17 miles west of Tom's Place off of highway 395. Most of the group decided to spend one or two nights at the East Fork campground to acclimate for the first day's hike to our destination at Fourth Recess Lake.

Monday morning dawned early for us campers; it was easy to get up, because the night had been cold with several people reporting frost on their tents. After depositing our gear at the Pack station, we started the hike over Mono Pass. Mono Pass is at 12,080 feet altitude, and some of the group walked more slowly than the rest. However everybody made it in good time to our camp, where we found our gear deposited by the packer. The campsite was on a wooded knoll above Fourth Recess Lake. The location saved us from mosquitoes and protected us from the frost that was on the meadow each morning but turned the trip to get water into an exercise workout.



Rich, Sam & others
Above Ruby Lake in route to Mono Pass

2002 Trip Reports

Tuesday, on the first day, about half of the group decided to investigate the surroundings around the lake. Fourth Recess Lake is at the lower end of the canyon in a beautiful setting: steep mountains on both sides of the Recess with the eastern wall rising more than 2000 ft above the lake. At the south end of the lake, a small waterfall drops some 800 ft from the upper portion of the canyon. A boulder field reaches to the edge of the water, creating a challenge for the group who hiked around the lake. Others hiked to the headwaters of Mono Creek at Golden Lake where one tried fishing without much success. That evening was the first of the traditional Happy Hour feasts. This year the food and drink lived up to expectations and led to a much reduced need to cook dinner. During happy hour, tales of the day's adventures and sometimes mishaps are exchanged, like when one member fell into the creek.

Wednesday morning had an early wake up call. It sounded like a stampede of horses with bells and loud cries from a cowboy. Nothing quite that exciting, but it was a mule that had escaped and was galloping among the tents, a furious cowboy in pursuit, offering some choice words to his wayward charge. After breakfast, everyone set out for Pioneer Basin, a high altitude valley 11,000 feet plus with many beautiful lakes, all unnamed. Keith, Sandy B & Sandy S upheld their Hundred Peaks tradition by climbing Mt Hopkins near the entrance to the Basin. Yvonne, Carol, & Rich, joined by backpacker Bob, headed for the northern end of the basin where they climbed the ridge overlooking McGee Creek canyon, and worked their way up the ridge to a point just below the summit of Mt Crocker. In smaller groups, Susanne, Lowell, Dora, Sam, Paul & John explored the numerous lakes in the basin.

Thursday dawned with smoke invading the canyon from forest fires south of us. Some people in the group hiked up to Third Recess Lake. This lake is reached by hiking through a meadow which seems to go on for miles with terrific views of the surrounding mountains. The photographers in the group had a great time taking pictures of the wild flowers still blooming in abundance. Another group went to try

fishing one more time with a little more success this time. Others decided to stay in camp, rest, and attend to housekeeping. Speaking of housekeeping, we were warned that bears in the area had become somewhat of a presence, however none visited our camp during the week we spent there.



Fourth Recess Lake

On Friday, two groups set out separately for Snow Lakes at the upper end of Fourth Recess. The route to the upper canyon was not marked, and one group placed many ducks along the way to mark the trail. In the lakes and ponds of the upper canyon they found many Yellow Legged frogs and three to four inch long pollywogs; these waters had not been stocked with the fish that threaten the frogs throughout the Sierras. Other hikers made their first visit to Third Recess Lake or made a return visit to Pioneer Basin.

Saturday, the last day in camp, arrived much too soon. Some went hiking, using the newly laid ducks to find their way to the upper canyon, while others spent the day fishing or resting in camp. Paul had an experience that shows what can happen when a group does not have proper planning. While fishing along Mono Creek, he heard loud cries for help in the woods. When he went to investigate, he found a young backpacker without a map of the area and without water, very confused and lost. He had become separated from his companions and had wandered in circles for about three hours. Paul gave him water, some food, a map, and escorted him to the trail which would take him to his destination.

Sunday morning saw us up early to break camp and hike back to civilization with the usual regret. Mono Pass was climbed again, with the Hundred Peaks trio making a side trip up Mt. Starr (12,835'). We arrived at the trailhead and the Pack station in early afternoon but had a lengthy wait for our gear. This allowed for showers and some food at the Rock Creek Lake Resort. So ended a great trip with thanks to our group leaders, John Kaiser and Yvonne Tsai, whose great patience and good planning and leadership had much to do with this great experience.

2002 Trip Reports

Sabrina Basin

Aug. 18 - 24, 2002

Submitted by Ron Barbour

This trip required turning in our gear to the packer at North Lake at 7:00 am on Sunday morning. So it was at that early hour that we first met our fellow participants with whom we would spend the week.

We got on the trail shortly after 8:00. By 10:00 we had logged three miles and were at Blue Lake, one of the jewels of the High Sierra. After a major rest stop, with snacks, photos, sunning and relaxing, we pushed on. In another two miles we were at Dingleberry Lake, where we found our gear, left by the packer as promised.

Dingleberry had been chosen over the other lakes in the area because of mosquitoes not being a problem. It was also a great spot from the standpoint of shade, spots for tents, running water, and proximity to other, more remote, Sabrina Basin destinations.

With five layover days, Monday through Friday, there were ample opportunities for day hikes and, indeed, that was the most popular activity for most of the participants. The Sabrina Basin is studded with beautiful lakes. Lakes up the canyon from Dingleberry included Hunger Packer, Midnight, Topsy Turvy, and Sailor (formerly Drunken Sailor). Most of our group visited these four lakes on one day or another. We had expeditions on two different days to Bottleneck Lake, which required going over a high ridge into drainage west of Dingleberry. All who went to Bottleneck agreed that it was one of the most pristine lakes in the area.

On Wednesday, seven of us went to Blue Heaven lake at 11,821 feet. That trip required going over a 12,000 ft hump. On another day some of us attempted to go to Mt. Wallace at 13,377 ft. We reached the Sierra Crest northwest of the peak (about 13,000') but were turned back by high winds and steeper than expected rocks. Oh well, we did bag two more big lakes on the

way, Moonlight and Echo. During the latter part of the week we had two hikes to a drainage east of Dingleberry that included Donkey and Baboon Lakes.

One unusual feature of our camp was that the sun went behind the adjacent mountain at 5:00. It got pretty cool shortly thereafter, so 5 pm was established as our dinner hour. We had, in effect, a potluck dinner every evening and that was one of the high points of each day. Karyn Maag-Wiegand dazzled the group with quesadillas, couscous, soup, vegetable stew, etc. Ron Sanchez caught trout, which he shared.

It didn't get dark at Dingleberry until 8 pm or so. Even though we couldn't have wood fires, we had a camp fire of a sort. We had a store-bought ornamental torch at first and, after it burned out, a candle.

When Saturday the 24th rolled around, many of us were reluctant to leave our idyllic spot. On the hike back to civilization we stopped at Blue Lake and lingered for awhile. Some even went swimming there – pretty cold. Back on the pavement, we headed for the little café at the Lake Sabrina boat dock and, after that, back to North Lake to retrieve our gear from the packer.



Sabrina Basin Mulepackers

Seated: Dan Butler, Karen Maag-Wiegand, Ken Norris, Hank Warzybok, Ron Sanchez, and Newton Malony; Standing: Richard Summers, Dane Hill and Ron Barbour. Not shown: Beth Summers and Mark Rosenthal

2002 Trip Reports

Big McGee Lake, August 30-September 3, 2002

Submitted by John Kaiser

The group that assembled at the McGee Creek trail-head included eight members who were on their first Mule Pack, but all were experienced hikers, back-packers, or trekkers. The trail to Big McGee starts in a broad canyon of sage brush and aspen. Two early stream crossings presented a slight challenge: at the first, the group split into those who took the direct wading route and those who worked upstream to find the promised log bridge. One set of wet boots resulted from a misstep. At the second crossing, walking-the-log was quickly handled by the 'high-wire' artists, but others chose a safer 'sit-down and slide' approach; this time all made it without testing the water temperature.

After the second crossing, we passed into a wooded area which soon gave way to rocky switchbacks on a climb to Round Lake where we stopped for lunch. As we prepared to resume our hike, the pack train arrived and the lead packer, Dan Ferris, stopped to chat. He then entertained us by reciting two of his poems about the life of the packer and the beauty of the Sierras, a most unexpected and pleasant surprise.

We then continued climbing through a series of now-dry meadows in upper McGee Canyon to our base camp at 10,600', located in a rocky, shallow basin a couple hundred feet above Big McGee Lake and almost at the foot of Red and White Mountain. Although we did not have a direct view of Big McGee, we had a running stream, a view of a waterfall, a shallow pond that a pair of American Dippers visited

each morning—to Yvonne's great pleasure — and were surrounded by the colorful mountains of upper McGee Canyon. A short stroll to a nearby ridge provided a cliff's edge view of Big McGee Lake, a vantage point from which John, coffee cup in hand, greeted the sun each morning.

Day two found ten members heading for McGee Pass (11,950'), while Fred K elected to try the fishing at Big McGee, and Denise decided to relax and enjoy the scenery at camp and along lakeside. The trail to McGee Pass quickly climbed above the tree line, and the group worked up a rocky trail between colorful mountains. From a distance, the fallen rocks of red and white blend to give the area a unique pastel appearance. From the pass, Yvonne, Sandy B, Margie, Bob H, Bob M, Fred S, Art, and Laura pressed on to climb Red Slate Mt (13,163') and were rewarded with the wonderful 360 degree views of the surrounding valleys and peaks. John and Sandy D took a somewhat less strenuous route to the flank of Red Slate for the rewarding views into the Dorothy/Genevieve Lake Basin and an up-close view of the top of one of the 40 degree snow couloirs that distinguish Red Slate Mt. On returning to camp, we received a further treat when Fred produced his day's catch for our enjoyment at happy hour.

The following day, we split into smaller groups, with two groups independently searching for rocky routes to Crocker Lake, while a third leisurely worked its way down one of the two streams leaving Big McGee. They soon reached the base of a scenic waterfall at the point where the two outlet streams rejoin. After lunch, they hiked across McGee canyon to find an overlook into Baldwin Bowl. Both parties heading for Crocker Lake were successful, and one of the two



Laura & Yvonne



Crossing McGee Creek

Bob H, Denise & Sandy D

2002 Trip Reports

pressed on to Golden Lake, returning just in time for Happy Hour.

For two days we had looked up at the spot that the topo map labeled as Hopkins Pass and wondered how there could be a route up an extremely steep wall. After a visit late in the afternoon by two backpackers from the Angeles Chapter who had descended from the pass, it was decided to make that our last day's destination. The trail to Hopkins Pass rises steeply above McGee Lake climbing 900 ft in 3/4 of a mile. Although it was constructed by the Conservation Corp many years ago and has had little maintenance since, it was easily followed. Soil slippage on a short section near the pass made footing a little tricky, but all reached the crest without a problem.

From the pass we looked down Hopkins Canyon to the Mono Creek drainage, with views of Third and Fourth Recesses. Those who had attended the Fourth Recess trip several weeks earlier could recognize the glacier above Snow Lakes, one of the day hike destinations on that trip.

Sandy B, Yvonne, and Laura continued down canyon



Fred S — at Baldwin Bowl overlook

to Upper Hopkins Lake, while Bob M and Fred S hiked from the pass to the top of a nearby peak at 12,000'. The shape of McGee Canyon focused their calls from the peak so that they were clearly heard

back at camp by those who were returning from the pass to spend a relaxing afternoon at McGee Lake.

On our final day, as we hiked out, we wondered why we had not met the packer on his way to the gear. The question was answered when we met him, on foot, leading his horse and the mule train. His horse had started limping and rather than risk injury, the packer was hiking. This led to considerable

speculation as to the lateness of the hour when our gear would arrive back at the pack station, with estimates as late as 7 pm.

At the trailhead, many members left to search for the nearest showers, later joining those who went straight to the deck at Tom's Place for a full meal. As the first meals were arriving at the tables, the call came from the pack station: the gear had arrived and it was only 4:30. Our thanks went out to a very dedicated wrangler who had hiked most of the round trip of 15 miles and did so in impressive time.



The Rocky Road to McGee Pass



Fred K at Hopkins Pass—Big McGee Lake in the background

We are on the Web

If you want the earliest possible announcement of the Mule Pack trips for 2004, check the Angeles Chapter website in late November 2003 — <http://angeles.sierraclub.org/mps>



Lowell, Susanne, Rich, Sam, Dora, Paul, Carol & Yvonne
At Mono Pass



Returning from Dusy Basin



Mule Pack hikers at Long Lake

ANGELES CHAPTER, SIERRA CLUB



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