



Mule Pack Section



Spring 2006

Annual Newsletter

MULE PACK

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In This Issue

Our call for additional trip reporters was heeded! Many thanks go to those who took the time to prepare the 2005 trip reports that begin on page 4.

The Forest Service announced their Decision on the new Management Plan. This document identifies their plan for Trail and Commercial Pack Stock Management in the Ansel Adams and John Muir Wildernesses. The plan will be phased in over time with a few portions in effect immediately and other provisions being implemented in 2007. The service day limitations that have been in effect since 2001 will continue for the 2006 season and will be replaced in 2007.

Five trips are planned for 2006. For those who prefer long-weekend trips, Dave Cross and Christine Gutierrez have again planned two trips within Yosemite Park. The first one opens the mule pack season in mid July with a return visit to Tilltil Valley leaving from Hetch Hetchy reservoir. And once again they will close

our season with a Labor Day weekend trip. This year they will start from Tuolumne Meadows with a campsite near the Glen Aulen High Sierra Camp. A dayhike to LeConte and Waterwheel Falls will be a highlight.

The other three trips last a full-week. Sandy Burnside, Sandy Sperling, & George Wysup will lead a trip to Sabrina Lakes basin, a scenic lake-filled area which California Hiking calls "a bejeweled paradise".

Saddlerock Lake will be the destination for a trip led by Yvonne Tsai and Laura Joseph. Numerous lakes, peak bagging, and a hike over Bishop Pass into Dusy basin are major attractions for this trip.

Dan Butler and Laura Joseph will lead a trip to Purple Lake, which has been the site of several MPS trips and was last visited in 2000. The John Muir trail, Virginia Lake, Ram Lakes, and Franklin Lakes provide many day hike possibilities.

Forest Service Management Plan—Inyo and Sierra NF

In December 2005, the Forest Service released the final EIS for the Trail and Commercial Pack Stock Management plans in the Ansel Adams and John Muir Wildernesses. The selected plan will eliminate the Service Day quotas that have been in effect since 2001 and replace them with trip destination quotas in the 2007 season. A trip is defined as a one-way service. Full-service trips will have separate quotas from dunnage-drop and spot trips. Each pack station will have a limit on the number of stock, including day rides, in the wilderness at one time.

The usual MPS trip is classified as a dunnage drop and will count as two trips against the pack station quota. The separate quotas for full service trips will eliminate the issue of competing with the higher-income full-service trips that are sponsored by the pack stations. The full impact of the new rules will be understood only after a period of time as the pack station policies adjust to the rules. It may become more difficult to book trips to the most popular

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2006 Mule Pack Trips

Jul 14-17 Fri-Mon

O: Hike in Hetch Hetchy Backcountry (with a little help from our mules): Hired packers carry our gear while we hike separately with only daypacks, starting from the dam at Hetch Hetchy. Arrive at trailhead campground before 8 PM Thursday to avoid road closure. Fri morning hike 7 mi, 2000' gain to our camp in Tiltill Valley, passing within arm's length of 3 magnificent waterfalls. Layover day options include easy dayhikes around Tiltill meadow or moderate/strenuous hikes along Moraine Ridge to Brannigan Lakes, looking down over the entire "Little Yosemite Valley" amid luscious mid-altitude foliage and brimming Alpine lakes. Mon hike out. Note reservation/cancellation policy on page 3. To reserve send 2 SASEs, SC#, requested info & check for \$220 members/\$225 non-members to reservationist/Ldr: Dave Cross, Co-ldr: Christine Gutierrez

Jul 23-29 Sun-Sat

O/I: Saddlerock Lake, 11120': Have all the advantages of a backpack in the Sierra without the weight on your back! Mules will carry max 50# per person. Sun morning hike from South Lake trailhead near Bishop 4 miles, 1365' gain, to camp at Saddlerock Lake. You'll have five full days to bag peaks, explore, photo, fish, relax, etc. This trip was especially designed for peak baggers. We'll be within dayhike distance of Chocolate Peak, Mt. Agassiz, Mt. Goode & Dusy Basin. At the end of the day enjoy the good company and legendary Mule Pack Happy Hours. Trip limit is 10 people. Note reservation/cancellation policy on page 3. Email or phone for information and reservations to co-leader Laura Joseph. Include recent trekking experience & altitude



Tueeulala Falls at Hetch Hetchy

tolerance. Upon acceptance send one SASE, contact info & \$235 check to Co-Ldr Laura Joseph. Co-Ldrs: Yvonne Tsai & Sandy Burnside

Aug 6—12 Sun-Sat

O: Dingleberry Lake: Trailhead is Lake Sabrina (9130'), 17 mi SW of Bishop on paved road. Hike in Sun morning 5 mi, 2000' gain, w/ daypack only to campsite at Dingleberry Lake (10489'). Packer led mules carry your gear (50# / person) to campsite. Enjoy 5 full layover days to hike, fish, photo, swim, and enjoy nature in a basin created from 13000' peaks surrounding many alpine lakes. We are known for our outstanding happy hours. Sat hike out. Trip limit is 10. Note reservation/cancellation policy on page 3. Email for information and reservations to co-Ldr, Sandy Sperling. Include trekking experience and altitude tolerance. On acceptance, send one SASE, contact info and \$250 check. Ldr: Sandy Burnside, Co-Ldrs: Sandy Sperling & George Wysup.

Aug 25 - 31 Fri-Thu

O: Purple Lake (9960': This one is for lake lovers! Friday start from Mammoth Lakes and hike 8 miles, 2300' gain to beautiful, secluded Purple Lake. We'll have five days to hike, fish, photo, relax, and possibly bag some peaks or passes. Evenings feature the Mule Pack Happy Hour—we supply the wine, you bring munchies and we all have a good time. Mules return to pack us out on Thursday. Purple is close to John Muir trail and Duck Lake. Trip limit is 12, so sign up early! Note reservation/cancellation policy on page 3. Email for information and reservations to co-

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On the trail to Purple Lake—View of Duck Lake

2006 Mule Pack Trips, cont.

Ldr: Dan Butler. Include recent trekking experience and altitude tolerance. On acceptance send one SASE, contact info and \$230 check. Co-Ldr: Laura Joseph

Spend the weekend enjoying the beautiful area, including a planned hike to Waterwheel Falls. Great time of the year to visit, the weather is usually rather temperate with fall colors and mosquitoes are long gone. Mon hike out. Note reservation/cancellation policy below. Send email and home address or two SASEs, with requested info & \$175 check to Reservationist/Ass't-Ldr: Dave Cross; Ldr: Christine Gutierrez

Sep 1-4 Fri-Mon

O: Hike in Yosemite National Park to Glen Aulen (with a little help from our Mules): Hired packers carry gear while we hike separately carrying just daypacks from Tuolumne Meadows. Fri morning hike 5.3 mi, 1000' loss to our camp at Glen Aulen.

2006 Trip Contacts:

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Reservation/Cancellation Policy: Send requested 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. Contact addresses are above. Email can be substituted for one or two of the mailings as noted in the trip write-up.

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.



Western Azalea



Coville's Columbine

Check your mailing label:

If the bottom of the address page contains a box stating "It's time to renew" we want to you to do just that. Just send an email, leave a phone message, or drop a note saying "please continue" to the address below.

We're on the Web

For the earliest notice of each summer's trips, check the website, www.angeles.sierraclub.org/mps, in December.

You can also view or download copies of this and previous newsletters in pdf format with pictures in full color.

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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Management Plan, cont.

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spots, but the MPS trips are planned so far in advance that it is unlikely that we would be shut out of these locations. Starting and ending trips on "low-demand" days may become more desirable to the pack station operators to minimize the number of stock in use on a particular day.

The Forest Service notes that the quotas are designed to maintain usage at the levels of the past 3 to 4 years and have been set to accommodate most but not all demand for the packer services. The Rock Creek Pack Station reports that full service trips will be severely restricted. The pack stations may become more dependent on the dunnage-drop and spot trips for support.

The maximum group size will be returned to 15 in the 2007 season. However, 14 site-specific locations will have lower limits, some as low as 6 people. None of the areas typically used by the MPS will be affected by the lower limits. Independent of the FS rules, however, the typical week-long MPS trip will continue to be limited to less than 15 members by packer-imposed limits on weight and bulk.

The elevation limits on campfires will have minor adjustments to the previous rules. These adjustments are expected to be implemented by FS Orders by June 2006. In

specific locations where an abundant supply of downed wood has been identified, the boundaries for prohibited fires have been modified. Purple Lake and Lake Genevieve are two such locations where campfires will now be allowed. All visitors will be permitted to have charcoal fires at locations where wood fires are prohibited, provided that a fire pan is used and all ash is packed out.

The complete Final EIS documents can be examined or downloaded from the Forest Service website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo>.

In a related action, the FS is now conducting an analysis of the special-use applications of all pack stations. The Draft EIS expected to be issued in February 2006. This analysis will determine whether (and under what conditions) to issue long-term operating permits to the twelve pack stations and two outfitter/guide operations. This study includes the Golden Trout & South Sierra Wildernesses, non-wilderness areas of the national forest, as well as the Ansel Adams and John Muir Wildernesses. Public input will be requested and the final decision will be issued by December 2006.

Documents related to this study can also be accessed at the website of the Inyo Forest.

2005 Trip Reports

Hetch Hetchy High Country

June 17-20, 2005

Leaders: Dave Cross, Carol Fallon & John Kaiser

Submitted by John Kaiser

Water, water everywhere! A rain storm that started the night before the trip, the runoff from a heavy snow pack, and the blowing mist from powerful Wapama Falls created wet conditions on the first morning of this trip. After meeting the packer in a steady drizzle, we started the hike by crossing O'Shaughnessy Dam. The rain became intermittent during the morning, allowing us to remove some rain gear. But the gear went back on as we approached the blowing spray at the footbridges across the base of Wapama falls. Earlier, some of us replaced hiking boots with waders to navigate the trail where runoff from Tueulala Falls was boot high in the trail. At our lunch spot overlooking the lowest cascade of Rancheria Falls, a lull in the rain allowed us to fully enjoy the view of the cascade and gave promise of better weather on the way.

After lunch, we climbed over the pass to Tiltill Valley through low hanging clouds that kept visibility down to a hundred yards. But on the descent from the pass, the rain stopped, the first breaks in the clouds appeared, and the remaining days of the trip had excellent weather.

The campsite was located at a bend in Tiltill Creek, which provided Jim with an ideal fishing spot. He caught several large trout in the



Teresa, Anjna, Sandy, Jim, John C, Terry, Dave and Peggy get a wet start at O'Shaughnessy Dam.

Tueulala Falls and lower Wapama Falls peek through the clouds

creek only yards from the tents and the fish

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2005 Trip Reports, cont.

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made an excellent addition to the happy hour feast. From stream to dining table in minutes! Nothing could be finer. Terry provided outstanding fare for the happy hours and Dave's wine selections were several notches higher than usual for a mulepack. At one happy hour gathering, a colorful Western Tanager perched overhead to our enjoyment.

On the second day, most trip members hiked the trail toward Lake Vernon while some elected to relax at the meadow adjacent to the campsite. Along the trail, strange noises had us guessing as to the source until John C identified them as the strumming of grouse. Jim, Peggy, Carol, John C and I were content to reach the high point of the trail where we relaxed and enjoyed the view while Sandy and Anjna went farther along the trail until snow fields made the going difficult. Carol and I were the last to reach the overlook, having spent considerable time photographing an especially fine snow plant.

On the third day smaller groups explored the area to the south of camp or worked their way around the meadow to the west. Jim, Peggy, and I successfully found a route

to the crest of a ridge and hiked along the ridge to gain a view of Hetch Hetchy and Kolana Rock. Carol & John C took a different path to a duck pond and an overlook of Tiltill Valley. Dave, Terry, and Teresa found the walk around the lower meadow more challenging than expected since the heavy snow melt had left the meadow under considerable water in some locations.



Anjna, Jim, Carol, John C, Teresa, Terry, John K, Sandy, and Dave in good spirits at Happy Hour.

The weather for the hike out was warm and sunny and the route was lined with wildflowers. My personal favorites were the shooting stars that covered the valley floor, the harlequin lupine all along the trail, and the Western Azalea next to the trail above Tiltill Valley. For lunch, a location adjacent to another section of the Rancheria Falls was selected. At Wapama Falls there was no need for rain gear as the blowing mist had lessened and provided just the right amount of air conditioning for the warm day.

We reached the trailhead just as the packer arrived and gear was collected. Most of us gratefully accepted Peggy's offer of her sister's house in Groveland for a night's rest before the long drive home on the following morning.

Garnet Lake

July 31- Aug 6, 2005

Leaders: Sandy Burnside & Sandy Sperling

Submitted by Patty House with input from Sandy Sperling, Laura Joseph, & Rich Rowland

A dozen adventurous souls set out on a mule trip to enjoy the stunning beauty of the Minarets and camp at Garnet Lake. Most were seasoned mule packers, but there were three who, even though experienced in backpacking, had never had the pleasure of having mules pack most of the gear and food. The email talk the week before leaving was full of questions from the new guys and thoughtful and helpful answers and suggestions from the experts. The main concern of the newcomers was what to bring for food because all the experts kept talking about **happy hour, happy hour, happy hour!** Well, all the things they said were true. Everyday was a new adventure in hiking. Happy hour was a chance to share each other's day, relax and enjoy the sunset, and an opportunity to plan the next day's treks, fishing, and yes, **happy hour.** Happy, happy. The wine and gourmet food sure beats backpacking without mules.



Happy Hour with a View
 Standing: Sandy S, Rich, Anne, Bill, Sandy B, Keith, & Scott
 Seated: Erica, Winnette, & Patty

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2005 Trip Reports, cont.

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The Fishy Story

Sandy: I hadn't gone fishing since I was a kid. I pulled out my trusty pole and reel (which had a dynalabel on it that said SANDY so my brother wouldn't use it), put on new line, bought hooks, sinkers, floats, bait, a "super duper" lure, and a fishing license, (total cost about \$60) and headed out. Keith was there to watch me tangle my line...multiple times...and help me get ready to cast again. The fish, if they were there, didn't know what salmon eggs or powerbait were. Or they pretended not to notice.

One morning, though, I decided to row a blow-up boat out to one of the islands in Garnet Lake. I somehow landed and got out without falling in, and decided to try my "super duper" lure. I had heard about these when I was young, but never caught anything with one so I thought the name rather misrepresented the item. But Scott and Keith seemed to be catching fish with lures so this was my only hope as it was my only lure.

I cast into the deep waters to the east of the island. Suddenly, there was tugging on my line! My pole was bent. I began to reel the fish in. This must be something big! I was exhilarated and was wondering if my new line was going to hold. I thought of the "The Old Man and the Sea" classic and wondered if I would be able to bring him in and haul him back to camp. I did pull him in: a 9-inch brook trout! Not exactly like The Old Man, but quite significant to me. And much easier to "haul" back to camp. I didn't catch any more. There were too many other wonderful things to do in the great outdoors...with a SUPER DUPER group!

The Lake Baggers

Laura: Sandy Burnside and I had several cross-country adventures. Since the snow and ice elevations were too low to allow peak bagging without ice ax and crampons, lake-bagging became the activity of the week.

On the first full day in camp, we set out to visit Lake Laura--for the obvious reason, plus Sandy remembered it from a previous visit. Heading cross-country up to the pass south of Garnet Lake, we did locate Altha Lake, which is near L. Laura, but were stymied by precipitous drops that stood between us and our objective. We enjoyed Altha Lake and the hike back to Garnet, which featured a fun clamber up a rocky chute with snow patches.

On a subsequent day, we set out again in pursuit of the allusive Lake Laura, this time with Sandy Sperling joining the fun. Taking a more conventional route, we went over the pass and down to the south where we

picked up a faint use trail to Lake Clarice. Who were all these women who had lakes named after them? This would be an interesting research project. We reached Clarice with no difficulty and, from there, crossed over and down to Laura. The route included a challenging cliff descent. Near the Lake, we stopped to enjoy a spectacular flower show - always a magnet for Sandy B. Laura Lake proved to be worth the journey. Leaving the lake, we found a trail, which is almost impossible to see from the JMT from which it originates. Upon reaching the JMT, ducks were placed to make it visible to other hikers.



Bob roughs it at Garnet Lake

The Rain Catcher

On our last day, Rich expressed a determination to visit Lake Ediza and Laura and Sandy B agreed to accompany him.

Rich: Towards noon it started to rain and my hiking partners decided to turn back. I decided to forge ahead on the shortcut between Garnet Lake and Ediza. Many backpackers were heading out as I hurried to the Lake and took a few snapshots. I thought how scenic it was even in the poor weather, particularly up canyon towards the base of the

Minarets. I turned back towards a copse of fir/hemlock I had passed below the lake, and managed to stay dry there as I had lunch. Shortly after I finished lunch, the rain stopped. I was glad I had made it up to Ediza Lake.

And About The First-Timers . . .

They watched and listened as two fantastic evening meals were served. When it was obvious it was their turn to cook, Bob, Patty, and Erica banded together and served the hungry group. It was easy, now, for they had learned the secret of mule packing: One can bring ALMOST ANYTHING to eat as long as they do not exceed the weight limit.

What did the three think about the rest of the trip? Pure Pleasure! There were cloudless, starry nights, crystal-clear named and un-named lakes, treks through shoulder-high wildflowers, throwing snowballs from a glacier to green meadows below, taking a catnap with their feet dangling in a gurgling brook, overcoming the daily attack by native mosquitoes, outwitting the hungry bear who was determined to haul off their huge metal bear-proof box of food, long and short hikes to scout and enjoy the Minaret's secrets, sitting atop a boulder patio every morning with warm coffee and a fantastic view of the mountains, lake and sunrise.

2005 Trip Reports, cont.

Charlotte Creek July 31– Aug 6, 2005

Leaders: Yvonne Tsai, Sandy Burnside & John Kaiser

Submitted by Dora Henning with input from Yvonne Tsai

The group for this camping and hiking adventure met at the Onion Valley campground on Saturday, where we spent the night. Early on Sunday our bags went to the pack station for transport to our destination on Charlotte Creek while we started on our hike. The cloudy and cool weather was great for hiking over Kearsarge pass on this first day, making the many switchbacks to the top seem easy. The view from the top of the pass is beautiful; one sees three small lakes at the bottom of the pass and in the far distance Bullfrog Lake. We arrived at camp in late afternoon and after an early "Happy Hour" and dinner retired to our tents and hoped for a good nights sleep. Soon we were greeted by a light show in the sky, first without thunder, but later in the night an hours-long thunderstorm with terrific lightening and rain entertained us.

Early Monday morning we were raised from slumber by loud cries of Bear! Bear! from Sandy. The bear was pushing over the food pannier in the unrewarded hope that the lid had not been latched. With the appearance of several campers, but no food, the bear retreated and went in search of easier meals. Later, another large, scruffy-looking bear appeared. This one also retreated when we took notice, but returned several more times over two days.

The rain continued during the morning and Yvonne and John rigged a large plastic shelter between the trees, which was to serve as the unofficial happy hour and dining place for the duration of our stay. The rain stopped in the afternoon and the group decided on a short hike around Charlotte Lake, located a short distance up canyon from our campsite. A limit of two days camping adjacent to the lake was the reason we camped further down on Charlotte Creek.

Tuesday the group was joined by Ron Zappen, a hiking friend of Sandy and Winnette, who had backpacked over Kearsarge on Monday. Yvonne, Sandy, & Winnette joined Ron to bag Mt Bago while the others hiked to Glen Pass.

From Yvonne: The approach to Bago is from the south side of the outlet of Charlotte Lake, heading southeast up the slope to gain the ridge adjacent and below the bowl of

Mt. Bago. Ron found a nice route for us as we traversed over the low ridge. Then the hard work of contouring the bowl and heading northwest toward the summit ensued. I became impatient and headed straight up to the saddle and then maneuvered to the red-colored east summit of Mt. Bago, thinking this is it. When the wind blew in the right direction, I could hear Sandy's voice, and sometimes Ron's voice. Yet, they were nowhere to be seen. I finished taking pictures and studying my topo maps, lingering a good hour on the east summit. As I began to head down to the saddle to the west of my summit, I noticed three hikers descending across from me. Ah, I thought, don't tell me, I got a false summit! Indeed that was so. Sandy was most gracious and let me run up to the real summit to sign the register before the group descended to camp.

The Glen Pass group started up through a use trail that the Charlotte Lake Ranger had described to John. This trail cut two miles of the distance to the pass and joined the John Muir trail directly above Charlotte Lake. John, Bill and Liz climbed the trail like the seasoned hikers they are, while Dora as usual brought up the tail end huffing up the steep incline.

The route to the pass is rewarding, passing ponds and lakes along the way, with many flower gardens among the rocks. At the pass the view of lakes and high mountains, some still with snowfields, rewarded us. Large groups of hikers continued over the pass into Rae Lakes Basin. Our return trip followed the longer route along the John Muir trail and at Charlotte Lake we were recruited by a crew who was making a new film for the Kings Canyon Visitors Center.

The four of us were filmed in a discussion with Ranger George, and later Liz and Bill were

filmed with one of the pretend campers who star in the film. A future visit to Kings Canyon will be needed to see if any of the footage survived the cutting process. The group made it into camp just as another thunderclap announced an evening thunderstorm with heavy rain.

That evening when Ron joined us at Happy Hour the persistent bear went in his tent in search of food. The bear was chased away and this time did not return, having found nothing more than a sock that had been used to wipe up a little food. A bent tent pole was the extent of the damage.

On Wednesday, Liz and Dora decided to relax, taking

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Liz, Dora, Winnette, Yvonne, Bill, Sandy, & John (kneeling) at Kearsarge Pass

2005 Trip Reports, cont.



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camp chairs, books, and lunch to Charlotte Lake, where they spent the day to the amazement of through hikers, who thought we had fallen out of the sky so far from civilization, looking like a pair of backyard lounging people. The others headed down canyon toward Charlotte Dome, a climbing destination for many serious climbers, and a hike up to Gardiner Pass. The route to Charlotte Dome was un-maintained and had a section with a thick manzanita growth that was especially difficult going. The trail beyond that was little used and often disappeared, but the destination was obvious. Yvonne and John, having started earlier, made it to the pass for views into Gardiner Basin. Sandy, Winnette and Bill decided to head back to camp following lunch in a meadow below the pass.

Thursday featured a hike to Bullfrog Lake which proved to be one of the highlights of the trip. Lush vegetation and Pine trees surround it; the views from the Lake are outstanding. We traveled around the Lake and met two creeks flowing into and out of the lake. The first crossing was not a problem, but alas the next one turned into a challenge. No fallen tree or bunches of rocks to traverse the creek could be found. While John and Bill photographed an interesting tree and rock formation, Dora decided to wade the stream, taking off boots and socks. The water was surprisingly mild and Liz was encouraged to follow. Winnette had waterproof boots and came across without problems. John's and Bill's photography session led them to another crossing lower down.

Happy hour that evening was special because Yvonne,

Two Views from Bullfrog Lake

with the help of Sandy, Winnette and

John, made quesadillas for the whole

group for dinner. This was terrific food, spiced with guacamole and all the fixings. Great thanks to our leaders.

On Friday, Yvonne, Winnette and Sandy headed up to Glen Pass while the others relaxed and investigated beautiful spots close to camp.

We met some interesting groups among the many hikers. Yvonne reported on a survey team that had camped in the backcountry for weeks looking for artifacts left by indigenous people who lived and hunted in the area many years ago. Earlier in the week we encountered two backpackers who were employed for the summer cataloging the population of Mountain Yellow-Legged Frogs. Two climbers passed through our campsite late one afternoon and paused to chat following their successful ascent of the face of Charlotte Dome.

Saturday, for the nine-mile trek back to civilization, John, Liz and Dora took the direct route. Others wanted a last lakeside view from Bullfrog Lake, adding a little to their mileage. We rejoined at Kearsarge Pass for lunch and a final view of the sweeping vistas before descending to the Onion Valley trailhead. We arrived mid-afternoon but had to wait until 6:30 before retrieving our gear from the Mule Pack station. This made for swift goodbyes with hopes of meeting again next year for another backcountry camping experience.

Big Pine Lakes and Palisade Glacier

Aug 26– Sep 1, 2005

Leaders: Dan Butler & Laura Joseph

Submitted by Susanne Blessington

Have you ever felt you landed in paradise? You have to hike about 6 miles with 3100' gain to get there. "There" is a major rock ledge overlooking Fourth Lake of the Big Pine Lakes with the Palisade Glacier as your picture window in the distance. Only it is real! Add to that the most glorious sunshine, blue sky and warm air and your world has been transformed. There are few places as stunning as this spot in the High Sierras to set up your tent, about 15 miles from Big Pine.

The twelve eager adventurers had met the night before

for dinner at the Glacier Group campground. Besides getting to know each other and acclimating for the next day's hike, we also had the task of sorting out our very important food for the week into the available bear boxes provided by the packer. That way we were ready to leave early next morning. There was Dan Butler leading the majority of people, while Laura Joseph, the assistant leader, along with Carol Shawver and John McCarthy, both lovers of the outdoors and with much experience backpacking, were scouting ahead to help secure our site and let us know where we would camp. Our first stop was at the most amazing stone and wood cabin owned at one point by Lon Chaney. We feasted our eyes at the lush green grass and the creek with its own sand beach. Tranquility at it's finest. And, of course, we reminisced about all the wonderful movies in which Lon

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2005 Trip Reports, cont.

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Chaney had starred.

Continuing up the mountain, although strenuous at times, we were rewarded with the jewels of First, Second and Third Lakes, with their most bluest of blue water. Tom and Doreen Swan who had spent many years in Hawaii couldn't resist the lure of these lakes and came back for a dip later. Not surprisingly there was a slight difference in the temperature of the water! Along the way some of the group rallied around Dan who needed a little extra rest and food. Thirty days on the East Coast for a reunion prior to the trip does not compare to hiking the Sierras and made itself known to him. What was gratifying to see was that in true fashion to the Sierra Club teachings, people of the group looked after him. We make sure everyone is okay.

Camp set-up was organized by Laura with the most able help from Don Siminsky who single handedly dug out a very important spot - our latrine. Far enough away from camp and marked by "ducks". A plastic bag served as the signal that the coast was clear (or not). Susanne Blessington went looking for the perfect spot for our sun shower and found just the right cluster of trees to provide a little bit of privacy for that refreshing encounter with warm water. Appreciated by all, I am sure.

Hiking from "paradise" provided many opportunities and for all abilities. Laura, Don and Tom, our resident land surveyor and photographer, would go to the most distant places, mostly off trail. And if there was a pass to climb that was even better! Another group including Dan, Susanne, Linda Renkus, Jennifer Gurung, John and Carole decided to check out Sixth and Seventh Lakes. A great hike with varied terrain, from big boulders to flower filled, lush meadows.

Another popular spot was nearby Fifth lake. Virginia and Phillip Sadler spent a lovely afternoon overlooking the lake from one of its rock outcroppings.

Of course the highlight of this trip was the hike to the Palisade Glacier. But before you get to the glacier you have to hike through Sam Mack meadow. It was almost a

toss up as to who thought Sam Mack meadow was the most beautiful place and who voted for the glacier. However, getting to the glacier certainly has its unforgettable moments. Ably led by Tom and Virginia over great big boulders and sandy trails, the group of 7 made its way to the top: Laura, Don, Dan, Linda and Jennifer. Jennifer at times had her doubts as to whether she would make it to the top. But she did great and is now proud to have this under her belt, or rather hiking shoes.



John, Carole, Virginia, Phillip, Linda, Don, Jennifer, Dan, Laura, Susanne, Doreen & Tom at Big Pine Lakes

Our "campfires" in spirit brought everyone together. Or was it the wine and food? Each evening we would ask John, our very own meteorologist, what the weather would be like. John had the difficult job of forecasting the most beautiful weather, every day. He never missed once. Doreen on the other hand had a way with food. She managed to come up with new items each evening for all to enjoy.

Another highlight of the trip was a "Women only" hike. We invited the men to meet us going the opposite direction but somehow that fizzled out. I wonder why? Laura had this idea to take us to Black Lake over Summit Lake. One of the problems was that part of the way to Black Lake the trail is barely visible. One could end up doing some major boulder hopping if one didn't know where to find the trail. No problem for Laura who seems to be able to handle ANY terrain. But for us lesser inclined, Susanne, having been there before, took us in the right direction and with everyone's help we eventually made our way over to Black



Seventh Lake

Lake.

What a wonderful and invigorating trip for both body and soul. Our thanks to all the leaders and people who make it possible to experience such natural beauty and congenial companionship. And let's not forget those hardy mules and their faithful packer. They made life so much easier delivering all those goodies to make a bountiful "Happy Hour".



View near Bullfrog Lake



View along Fifth Lake Creek



Banner Peak



Charlotte Dome

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