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## **Project Report for May 14-18, 2014**

### **Yosemite National Park Volunteer Expedition**

#### **Executive Summary**

Twenty two volunteers and two trip leaders contributed 471 hours of volunteer labor from May 14 through May 18, assisting the National Park Service in redefining trail boundaries and rehabilitating a large number of social trails near the Happy Isles Trailhead Parking Area and in the area west of Camp 4. Social trails are formed when hikers take a shortcut through a vegetated area. Over time these unintentional trails compact the soil and prevent native vegetation from taking root. The process of rehabilitating the sites is four part: 1) rake back the duff; 2) loosen the soil by shovel and rake; 3) move into place logs and brush to form a barrier to future access; and 4) camouflaging the area with the raked back duff to make the former trail appear as the surrounding area. The volunteers also assisted with drainage repair along roughly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of the Valley Loop Trail between Camp 4 and Yosemite Falls, removing a portion of old, no-longer used, paved path west of Camp 4, and the beautification of  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of the Valley Loop Trail behind the Chapel. The beautification involved cleaning up the leftover remnants of deadfall trees within 10-15 feet of the trail on both sides.

The National Park Service (NPS) Trail Crew, working under the supervision of Greg Torres, provided guidance and oversight of the projects assigned to volunteers. All projects assigned by the National Park Service Trail Crew to Conservation Volunteers International Program Volunteers were successfully completed and the NPS crew noted the high efficiency and careful skill with which the Volunteers conducted their tasks.

#### **Introduction**

Project trip leaders Ed Eads and Michael Toth-Purcell (who were assisted by Dale Walker and Peter Murphy) met with NPS Trail Crew Supervisor Greg Torres the morning of the volunteers' arrival, May 14th, to discuss the projects assigned to the volunteers and NPS expectations of the volunteers. All necessary tools required to perform the various projects were identified and provided by the NPS Trail Crew.

Volunteers began arriving the afternoon of Wednesday, May 14, 2014. All volunteers were welcomed with an orientation briefing. A safety discussion was conducted, which included a demonstration on the safe use of the tools that were to be used. Volunteers were also briefed on the type of projects they would work on and the location of those projects. The volunteers and trip leaders enjoyed the Valley Floor Tour via open-air tram, which provided an introduction to the layout and history of the Park. During the tour the volunteers were able to see the spectacle of Bridalveil Falls shifting through a rainbow of colors as the sun shifted overhead and the light refracted perfectly. Dinner and an evening campfire on Day 1 provided a further opportunity for everyone to get acquainted.

#### **Detailed Report**

##### *Day 1*

On the morning of the first work day, May 15, 2014, after arriving and parking at the Trailhead Parking Area near Happy Isles (shuttle stop #15), volunteers were briefed again about the various work sites and

the work to be accomplished at each site. All volunteers were checked to ensure that they had work gloves, boots, safety goggles, water, lunch and snacks. The NPS provided hard hats and additional safety gear, which were required to be worn at all times while on the work site.



The volunteers began by redefining trail boundaries and rehabilitating social trails near the Happy Isles Trailhead Parking Area. The group split into two teams: one that began eliminating/rehabilitating social trails and a second that gathered brush from around Yosemite Valley with NPS Crew Members to camouflage the former social trails. Trip leaders were in constant contact via handheld radio and text messaging.

The volunteers rehabilitated 5 social trail sections totaling approximately 900 lineal trail feet over an area of 17,250 square feet. Volunteers brought in heavy debris (branches, fallen tree trunks, pine needles, etc.) to create visual and physical barriers of trail openings along unpaved hiking path and paved road. Heavy logs were placed in shallow dugout trenches to help ensure they would remain in place along the trail boundaries. This popular trailhead had been heavily crisscrossed by social trails; many of which were eliminated.

After enjoying lunch trailside, the volunteers relocated to the Camp 4 area and split into two groups. One group focused on drainage repair alongside a reconstructed section of the Valley Loop Trail between Camp 4 and Yosemite Falls. The volunteers removed ridges on both sides of the trail to improve drainage and trail aesthetics. The group repaired a 300-foot long section of the trail.

The second group rehabilitated a large social trail to the west of Camp 4. The volunteers used shovels to turn the heavily compacted soil in an area approximately 15 feet wide and 400 feet long. Several of the volunteers gathered brush from elsewhere in the Valley with NPS Crew Members to camouflage the area. The volunteers then used this brush along with pine needles and other duff to disguise the former social trail. The volunteers also carried into place several large – 12-18” diameter logs to provide visual and physical barriers.

Throughout the day, NPS Trail Crew members instructed the volunteers on safety concerns and appropriate methods for moving large and heavy fallen trees. Volunteers utilized shovels, rakes, rock bars, log tongs, and wheelbarrows to complete the day’s projects. Pleasant morning temperatures gave way to hot, dry conditions in the afternoon. Volunteers were encouraged to take frequent breaks, drink and snack frequently, and to work at their own pace.

Throughout the day, hikers and tourists from around the world stopped to ask questions and complement the volunteers for their work who in turn cheerfully greeted and engaged all.

After the first day’s work, the volunteers shared dinner with Yosemite’s Volunteer Coordinator, Heather Boothe. She shared stories and gluten free cookies with the volunteers. The volunteers and leaders enjoyed Heather’s enthusiasm and knowledge of the park. She graciously answered numerous questions.



### Day 2

Meeting the NPS Trail Crew at Camp 4, volunteers were briefed again about the various work sites and the work to be accomplished at each site. All volunteers were checked to ensure that they had the necessary safety gear and nourishment.

Splitting into two teams, one team continued the previous afternoon's drainage repair project on the Valley Loop Trail and the other rehabilitated several additional social trails and removed a section of old paved pathway to the west of Camp 4. The drainage repair team again used shovels, rakes, brooms and wheelbarrows to remove ridges on both sides of the trail that would prevent proper drainage. By day's end, they had completed drainage repair and beautification along approximately 2/3 mile of trail. The team enjoyed views of Yosemite Falls and witnessed up-close rock climbing instruction along a very popular rock face adjacent to the trail. The drainage repair team also had the pleasure of seeing a black bear as they returned from the workday.



The social trail team rehabilitated the terminus end of the social trail completed the prior day where it crossed North Side Drive and continued rehabilitating social trails to the south of North Side Drive. In this area, the volunteers rehabilitated one trail approximately 3 feet wide by 100 feet long and a second trail approximately 3 feet long and 400 feet long. The volunteers again turned the soil with shovels and camouflaged the former trails using brush and duff. The group also used Grip Box winches to pull three large fallen trees into the former path to act as large visual and physical barriers. The social trail team worked next to beautiful meadow and in areas with surrounding views of the Valley cliffs.

In addition, this team also removed a 10 feet wide by 150 feet long section of old, no longer used black top trail. Removing the trail was hard and dirty work that the volunteers dug into and commented on the importance of removing the former trail.

Throughout the day, NPS Trail Crew members instructed the volunteers on safety concerns and appropriate methods for moving large and heavy fallen trees. Volunteers utilized shovels, rakes, rock bars, log tongs, and wheelbarrows to complete the day's projects. Pleasant morning temperatures once again quickly gave way to hot, dry conditions in the afternoon. Volunteers were encouraged to take frequent breaks, drink and snack frequently, and to work at their own pace.

Throughout the day, hikers and tourists from around the world stopped to ask questions and complement the volunteers for their work who in turn cheerfully greeted and engaged all.

Upon returning to the volunteer campsite after the day's work, several volunteers had another chance to see a black bear as one walked past the volunteer campsite through the surrounding forest.

### Day 3

Volunteers met the NPS Trail Crew at the Chapel, where they were briefed again about the various work sites and the work to be accomplished at each site. All volunteers were checked to ensure that they had all safety gear and nourishment. The



volunteers then participated in a safety briefing by NPS Crew Leader Greg Torres on the safe usage of Grip Box winches and relating to moving large logs.

The volunteers spread out along the Valley Floor Loop Trail behind the Chapel and spent the full day rehabilitating and beautifying a roughly ¾ mile long section of the Valley Floor Loop Trail. The area had been burned during a fire roughly 10 years prior and after a large windstorm many trees had fallen in this area. The volunteers were tasked with clearing the remnants of the fallen trees and other debris within approximately 10-15 feet of the trail.



The volunteers moved six trees 24 inches in diameter, dug out and moved two root balls approximately 10 feet in diameter, began digging out an additional two root balls approximately 10 feet in diameter, and carried 40-60 12-18 inch diameter trees from the trail corridor. The volunteers also cleaned out three water bars and swept the trail clear of debris along the ¾ mile section of trail.

Throughout the day, NPS Trail Crew members instructed the volunteers on safety concerns and appropriate methods for moving large and heavy fallen trees. Volunteers utilized shovels, rakes, rock bars, log tongs, winches, and wheelbarrows

to complete the day's projects. They were encouraged to take frequent breaks, drink and snack frequently, and to work at their own pace. The volunteers were greeted with pleasant temperatures, abundant sunshine and worked in a comfortably shaded area throughout the day. At various times, the incomparable Yosemite Falls was visible directly across the Valley.

Throughout the day, hikers, tourists, and horseback riders stopped to ask questions and complement the volunteers for their work who in turn cheerfully greeted and engaged all.

### **Logistics**

The NPS Trail Crew provided all tools for all work sites. The volunteers hiked to their respective work sites under the supervision of the NPS Trail Crew.

Volunteers and Project Leaders camped at the Volunteer Camp in Yosemite Valley (Yellow Pine). All personnel brought their own camping gear and tents.

The High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew, a non-profit entity that organizes volunteers to help the Forest Service and other land managers maintain trails in the Sierra Nevada, provided all meals in a timely and tasty fashion at all times. Conservation Volunteers International Program contracted with the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew to provide cooked breakfasts and dinners, and to provide food for volunteers to prepare their own lunches to take to the work site. A cook tent and cook truck were set up adjacent to the campsite. Sufficient water and drinks were provided at all times.

## Summary

Tourists both from the United States and abroad made many positive comments of gratitude to the volunteers at their various work sites. All volunteers, who quickly became good friends and shared the common bond of “sustaining some of the world’s greatest landscapes and cultural sites,” made a lasting impact on the Park and positively influenced the NPS Trail Crew. Conservation Volunteers International Program and volunteers give special thanks to the Yosemite National Park Valley Trail Crew under the leadership of Greg Torres, Yosemite National Park Trails Manager Dave Kari, and Yosemite National Park Volunteer Coordinator Heather Boothe for their commitment to our volunteer projects. Volunteers also thanked the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew for their outstanding assistance with food preparation and service.

Volunteers completed 471 hours of volunteer labor, rehabilitated or beautified approximately 1.75 miles of trails, saw two black bears, watched Bridalveil Falls turn into a rainbow, and enjoyed 280 tasty meals served by High Sierra Trail Crew, and most importantly, made 23 new friends and countless lasting memories!

