



Conservation Volunteers International Program

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A Non-Profit 501c3 Tax Exempt Organization CST 2089890-40

Conservation Volunteers International Program/REI Adventures Yosemite National Park Volunteer Trip September 24 -27, 2012 Project Report

Summary:

Eighteen volunteers and two trip leaders contributed 360 hours of volunteer labor between September 24 and September 27, 2012 assisting the National Park Service to restore a .25 mi. destroyed portion of the Mirror Lake Loop Trail in Yosemite Valley. The one quarter mile section of trail was destroyed in March 2009 by a rock slide that fell from Ahwiyah Point on the north side of Half Dome.

The volunteers and trip leaders assisted the Yosemite NPS Trail Crew move heavy boulders, blast rock, fill in sections with sand and gravel, camouflage side trails, and move fallen trees and logs in order to cut a trail through the granite boulder debris field. The total distance worked was approximately 1 mile.

The task was a significant accomplishment for the Conservation Volunteers International Program -REI Adventures (Conservation VIP/REI) volunteer program in Yosemite National Park. Without a doubt, this was the hardest work the National Park Service has asked our Conservation VIP/REI Adventures project team to perform. Volunteers are to be commended for working in a hot, dry, and dusty work site.

The National Park Service (NPS) Trail Crew, under the supervision of Greg Torres, expressed gratitude for the work that was performed by the Conservation VIP/REI Adventures participants. The NPS Trail Crew had been working on the project site for a period of nearly three months prior to the arrival of the Conservation VIP/REI Adventures participants. The park administration had set a goal to complete the project before October 17th, 2012. With the help of the 18 volunteers and 2 trip leaders, the NPS Trail Crew estimated they would be able to complete the project within the deadline set by the park administration. No volunteers suffered any injuries during the project.

The Ahwiyah Point Rockslide Project:

The NPS estimated that the rockslide which obliterated a quarter mile section of the important Mirror Lake Loop Trail was one of the biggest rockslides in recent history in Yosemite Valley. The NPS website described the event as follows:



Conservation VIP/ REI Adventures Volunteers in Yosemite National Park. Photo by Dan Covey.

On March 28, 2009, a large rockfall occurred from Ahwiyah Point near Half Dome. Rocks fell roughly 1,800 feet, knocking down hundreds of trees and burying hundreds of feet of trail on the southern portion of the Mirror Lake Loop Trail. The impact generated ground shaking equivalent to a magnitude 2.4 earthquake. Numerous smaller rockfalls have occurred from Ahwiyah Point since the initial rockfall on March 28. There were no injuries or structures affected.

The approximate volume of the initial rockfall is 43,000 cubic meters, or 115,000 tons. This is considerably larger than the 1996 Happy Isles rockfall, which was estimated at 30,000 cubic meters in volume. Therefore, this rockfall is the largest one in Yosemite National Park since the 1987 Middle Brother event.

Project Leaders Celia Dunlap and John Hollinrake met with NPS Trail Crew Supervisor Greg Torres the day prior to the arrival of the volunteers to discuss the project work, and NPS expectations of the volunteers. Later that same day, John and Celia hiked to the rockslide project area to assess the worksite first hand so that the volunteers could be briefed as to the specifics of the work environment and work to be performed.

Volunteers and Project Leaders camped during the project at the Volunteer Camp in Yosemite Valley (Yellow Pine Campground). Volunteers and project leaders brought their own camping gear and tents. All meals were provided by the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew, a non-profit that provides meals to wilderness trail crews. Conservation VIP contracted with the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew to provide cooked breakfasts and dinners, and to provide bread, cheese, lunch meats, and condiments 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.

Volunteers began arriving the afternoon and early evening of the day prior to work commencing. All volunteers were welcomed with an orientation briefing prior to the first evening meal. A campfire was conducted during the evening with an opportunity for volunteers to get acquainted.

On the morning of the first work day, the volunteers were briefed again about the project site. A safety discussion was conducted, which included a demonstration on the safe use of the tools that were to be used. All volunteers were checked to ensure that they had leather work gloves, boots, safety goggles, and water. The NPS provided hard hats, which were required to be worn at all times while on the work site.

On the first day, volunteers were asked by the NPS Trail Crew to bring the tools required for the work up the trail to the work site. Wheelbarrows, shovels, and rakes were hand carried approximately one and a half miles from the Mirror Lake Road intersection with the Valley Perimeter Trail to Mirror Lake, and then on up the Mirror Lake Loop trail to the work site.

During the morning hours, volunteers worked primarily hauling sand and gravel from an adjacent meadow, and from the rock slide debris, and filling in a section of trail that had already been roughly prepared by the NPS trail Crew, and was ready for a sand and gravel “tread”. Some volunteers were asked if they wanted to work with the trail crew which was engaged in moving heavy boulders using mechanical “come-along” boxes. Some volunteers asked to crush rock with hammers to level the trail tread that was to be filled in with



sand and gravel. The entire tread area that had been prepared was fully graveled by the end of the work day. A section of trail which was approximately 100 yds. from the rockslide was re-routed by the volunteers to eliminate a bend in the trail, and re-route the trail through an area that had been made impassible by a fallen tree. Volunteers moved the entire fallen tree as it was sawed into sections by the NPS sawyer. The new section was raked, and rocks and stone removed.

Due to the heat of the afternoon, additional water was required at the work site. Water was hiked in after lunch by volunteer Dale Walker, who was participating in his second Conservation VIP/REI Adventures Yosemite trip.

The second day of work involved continuing the work of moving sand and gravel into the newly prepared trail tread. The NPS Trail Crew brought in additional Igloo water containers with ice water. This provided sufficient water for everyone to remain well hydrated. Again, those volunteers interested in moving rocks with the “come-a-longs” were encouraged to do so. This activity was done under the direct supervision of the NPS Trail Crew members. In the afternoon, due to the heat that was fatiguing to some of the volunteers, several teams were assigned the task of camouflaging side trails between Mirror Lake and the work site. This work was able to be performed in the shade, providing some relief to those not used to the bright sun. The side trails were completely camouflaged and closed off, with no trace of trail visible.

On the third day, sand and gravel work had been completed, and volunteers were shifted to several tasks. A number of volunteers chose to work with the NPS trail crew moving rocks with the “come-alongs.” Other volunteers worked with the NPS sawyer, who was moving fallen trees and logs off of the trail in the forest area east of the rockslide. Volunteers had an opportunity to use “come-alongs” and block and tackle to move the heaviest of the trees and logs.

For those volunteers interested in a unique opportunity, the NPS trail crew permitted volunteers to set blasting charges into boulders to be blown up within the path of the trail, and to pull the trigger on the blasting pins from a safe distance of 300 ft. All of this activity was conducted under their direct supervision of the NPS trail Crew. The blasting was accomplished with gunpowder shotgun shells placed into tubes drilled into the boulders. No dynamite is used in this procedure.

After hour activities:

Volunteers were provided an evening “behind the scenes tour” of the National Park Service administrative center, the Pioneer Cemetery, the Ahwahnee Hotel, and the Indian Village after dinner on the second evening. On the third evening, the volunteers were given the opportunity to go star gazing from the footbridge crossing the Merced River near the camp.

Conclusion:

The Ahwiyah Point Rockslide Project was a challenging work assignment for the Conservation VIP/REI Adventures volunteers. However, despite the heat and dust, the volunteers performed far and above the call of duty. The NPS Trail Crew expressed its sincere thanks for the hard work that the



Pulling down logs with block and tackle.
Photo by Jenn Beard

volunteers performed. This project demonstrated that the Conservation VIP/REI Adventures program in Yosemite National Park can accomplish the hardest of tasks that the National Park Service can ask volunteers to perform, and that the Conservation VIP/REI Adventures program met and exceeded NPS expectations without any injuries. The members of this particular team of volunteers can proudly return some day to Yosemite, and with a great sense of accomplishment, point to this very difficult section of trail, and say “I helped build that.”

Trip Leaders: Celia Dunlap, Director, Conservation VIP
John Hollinrake, Director, Conservation VIP