



Project Report Yosemite National Park Volunteer Trip September 9 - 15, 2018

Executive Summary

Fourteen volunteers including two trip leaders from Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) contributed 448 hours of volunteer labor from September 9 through September 15, 2018 in Yosemite National Park. The volunteers assisted the National Park Service (NPS) in restoring approximately 500 yards of an eroded section of the Happy Isles ADA-accessible trail; preparing a new embankment (~250 yards) for native plantings (hydro seeding) as part of the El Capitan Meadow Restoration Project; re-routing approximately ½ mile of the Tamarack Creek Trail which was undercut and eroded by the creek; and removing crumbling asphalt from a former pack trail between the stables and the Mirror Lake Trails near Tenaya Creek.



The National Park Service Trail Crew (Joe, Nick, Dave, and Steve), working under the supervision of Eamon Schneider, provided guidance and oversight as volunteers worked side by side with them on these trail maintenance projects.

The weather was perfect for the work, with highs in the low 80's, sunny, and a slight breeze. The evenings were clear and comfortable, with the skies festooned with stars (the Milky Way was front and center.) The mornings were cool (50-degrees F) and comfortable.

Detailed Report

Day One – September 9, 2018 (Orientation)

Volunteers arrived Sunday, September 9, 2018. Volunteers were welcomed by the trip leaders, Michael Toth-Purcell and Rebecca Kramer, who assisted with tent set-up at Yellow Pine Special Use Site for Volunteer Groups. Early afternoon on Sunday, after all volunteers had arrived, an orientation to Conservation Volunteers International

Program, the REI partnership, and general details on the work to be conducted was provided by the ConservationVIP® leaders.

Following orientation, the volunteers explored Yosemite Valley to orient themselves. Dinner, prepared by Willow Creek Catering, and an evening campfire on the first night provided further opportunities for everyone to get acquainted with the Park and each other and to ask and answer questions.

Workday 1 - September 10, 2018

Volunteer trip leaders met with NPS Trail Crew Supervisor Eamon Schneider and his trail crew at breakfast to discuss volunteer projects assigned to the volunteers and NPS expectations of the volunteers. After a hot breakfast and packing lunches, water, and supplies, the volunteers were introduced to the NPS Trail Crew and the work plan for the next few days.

After a short drive to the Happy Isles Nature Center, the Trail Crew introduced the volunteers to the tools to be used during that day and general safety rules related to trail work. All necessary tools and safety equipment required to perform the various projects were identified and provided by the NPS Trail Crew. A briefing was conducted, and special note was made of doing the projects safely, enjoyably, and effectively. The volunteers were checked throughout each workday to ensure they had work gloves, took proper breaks, and had adequate water, lunch, and snacks.

Happy Isles offers an accessible nature center and a nature trail, approximately 0.5 mile one-way, with access to the Merced River and two islands formed by the splitting of the Merced River below Vernal Falls. The trail on the last island (across the second footbridge) was heavily eroded by the spring run-off/flooding of the Merced River, exposing the rocks below and isolating the river overlook from the rest of the trail.

Under the oversight of the NPS Trail Crew, ConservationVIP® volunteers learned the basics of trail maintenance and working side-by-side with volunteers. The volunteers learned appropriate work-detail procedures, and guidelines for maintaining the trail tread.



Using wheelbarrows, teams of volunteers moved 8 to 10 tons of specially constructed road-base from a stockpile near the nature center to the work site. Once deposited, volunteers raked the material into place, building up the trail surface 3-inches at a time. Others sprinkled the newly placed road-base with water from the Merced River so that the material could be compacted with a vibratory plate compactor (also wheeled to the

worksite on a large dolly by volunteers). The process was repeated throughout the day (3-inches of elevation at a time) until the stockpile of road-base was depleted. At the end of the day, all but the final 75-feet (closest to the bridge) had been returned to “like-new” condition. The plan was for some or all of the volunteer team to return once the stockpile had been replenished and as other work projects allowed.

Volunteers were encouraged to take frequent breaks, drink and snack frequently, and to work at their own pace. Hikers and tourists stopped to ask questions, compliment the volunteers, and express gratitude for their work. A request for feedback from volunteers was made by the Trip Leaders at day’s end. Some general comments were made, volunteers expressed satisfaction with how the day progressed and gratitude for learning more about trail maintenance. They agreed the trip was enjoyable, rewarding, and met or exceeded their expectations.

Workday 2 – September 11, 2018

The NPS Trail Crew joined the volunteers group for breakfast and to discuss the day’s plans. After the briefing and reiteration of all safety guidelines, each volunteer was checked to ensure they had the necessary tools, safety gear, water, and nourishment for the day ahead.



The volunteer team and NPS Trail Crew headed to the El Capitan Meadow, a favorite viewing area for climbers on El Capitan and the (Middle) Cathedral Rock and Spires. The National Park Service had initiated a project to restore the meadow, including adding a perimeter walkway, split rail fencing to direct access to specific locations, and elimination of the various social trails crisscrossing the meadow.

Recently, the Park had deposited (surcharged) a large volume of topsoil, extracted from the Ahwahnee meadow pond project, to build a new contoured slope behind the fence from the walkway to the meadow. Using rakes, McLeods, and shovels, the volunteer team worked with the NPS crew to contour the soil and feather it onto the meadow floor to improve both aesthetics and drainage. After the volunteer team completed the contouring, including tamping the new surfaces for stability, the NPS planned to complete the process by hydro seeding the new embankments with a mix of native grasses and wildflowers.

The volunteers were treated to stunning views, including being able to observe climbers scaling El Capitan, and a host of visitors to the Park.

Workday 3 – September 12, 2018

The NPS Trail Crew joined the volunteers for breakfast to discuss the work to be accomplished that day. The Volunteer team was split into two teams of seven, each with two NPS Trail Crew members. One team returned to the Happy Isles Project while the second traveled outside the valley to the Tamarack Flats Campground and the Tamarack Creek trail. Trip leaders checked that all volunteers had necessary tools, safety gear, water and nourishment for the day.

At the Tamarack Flats project site, the volunteers and NPS Trail Crew moved approximately ½ mile of trail, in two sections, away from the degrading and eroding creek bank to a more stable location. Throughout the day, NPS Trail Crew instructed the ConservationVIP® volunteers on appropriate methods, including where and when to clear the vegetation from the trail corridor (brushing, lopping, and pruning). The volunteers removed several large and small trees, logs, shrubs, and layers of duff and dirt to build and contour the new trail sections. They also pruned and trimmed limbs to improve overall trail accessibility.



At the Happy Isles project site, the volunteers and NPS Trail Crew wheelbarrowed the remaining 4 to 6 tons of road-based to complete the portion of the trail left after the first workday. By the end of the project, the remaining section of the trail had been smoothed and compacted, making the river overlook at the back of the Happy Isles trail accessible to all hikers.

Volunteers were encouraged by Trip Leaders to take frequent breaks, to drink and snack frequently, and to work at their own pace. Temperatures were pleasant and there was abundant sunshine throughout the day. Hikers and tourists continued asking questions and making complimentary remarks to the volunteers about their work.

Workday 4 – September 13, 2018

On the final volunteer work day, the NPS Trail Crew joined the volunteers for breakfast to discuss that day's plan. Volunteers were treated to another beautiful day in Yosemite Valley with mild and comfortable temperatures.

With the team back together, volunteers restored the former bridal/pack trail from the stables to the Mirror Lake bridge along the Tenaya Creek. Years ago, the park had placed asphalt on the trail to reduce the erosion from the large volume of horse and mule traffic. The trail is now mostly used by hikers and no longer has a heavy volume of equine traffic. Sections of asphalt were crumbling in areas and making their way into the Tenaya Creek after flood events. The volunteer team was tasked with removing the asphalt using rock bars, shovels, rakes, and wheelbarrows to a stockpile located next to

the Mirror Lake Bridge. While assessing the work areas, the NPS Trail Crew identified a social trail from the road to the main trail as well as a corresponding wide swath of trail that had resulted. It was decided that half the volunteer team would rotate through working on eliminating the social trail and narrowing the main trail in the area of the intersection. To accomplish this work, the team moved various fallen trees and debris with grip hoists, ropes, rock bars, shovels and rakes.



Before



After

At the end of the day, the social trail had been eliminated, the main trail narrowed and defined, and a very large volume (see picture on page 7) of crumbled asphalt had been stockpiled near the bridge. The NPS crew planned to remove the asphalt with a front-end loader and dump truck the following week.

Encouragement continued from hikers and tourists who thanked the volunteers for their service.

The evening meal was made special because we celebrated one volunteer's birthday. All the volunteers signed a card, one made a birthday crown, and we enjoyed brownies with ice cream as we sang a slightly off-key but enthusiastic round of "Happy Birthday!"

Around the evening campfire, the Trip Leaders requested that volunteers begin thinking about feedback, comments, suggestions, for our last evening during our roundup at camp fire after dinner on the next day.

Rest Day – September 14, 2018

The last full day of the trip was set aside as a day of rest and enjoying the Park. Volunteers kept the leaders informed as to their intentions and planned activities for the

day. Many of the volunteers made plans with other volunteers for hikes, enjoying Park amenities and sights, as friendships emerged from the week and the value of traveling and hiking with a partner(s) was evident.

Some volunteers hiked one of the several trails (Yosemite Falls, 4-Mile, Snowmass Creek) that leave the valley floor for the rim some 3,000 plus feet above to experience the vistas. Others hiked areas around Hetch Hetchy, Glacier Point, Tuolumne Meadows, and the John Muir Trail.

Sandy Hernandez from the Yosemite National Park Volunteer Office joined the ConservationVIP® volunteers for dinner and shared appreciation for our work and gave a talk on the value volunteers bring to the Park each year. The volunteers were enthusiastic and asked many questions. Sandy gave the volunteers Park patches and bandanas to commemorate their service.

NPS Trail Crew member Nick, his wife, and their 1-year old daughter Genesis, also joined the volunteers for dinner. His wife brought a delicious, homemade apple cake.

During campfire roundup, ConservationVIP® volunteers asked a series of questions and were given significant time to provide feedback on the value, variety, activity, and overall enjoyment of the trip. Several keen comments were made with valuable suggestions. The volunteers conveyed high satisfaction with how the week progressed, the communication of details each day, and gratitude for the new friendships made.



Special recognition for the Willow Creek Catering providers was expressed by all volunteers and their appreciation was shown for the food variety, meal preparations, quality, and presentation. Volunteers agreed that the trip was highly enjoyable, rewarding, and met or exceeded expectations.

Travel Day – September 15, 2017

The ConservationVIP® volunteers started the morning with breakfast, then broke down their camp, loaded their gear into their vehicles and said goodbye to their new friends. By late morning Yellow Pine Campground was empty and ready for the next volunteers to arrive.

Logistics

The NPS Trail Crew provided all tools for all work sites. Trip Leaders drove the volunteers to the different project sites. The ConservationVIP® volunteers hiked to their respective work sites under the supervision of the NPS Trail Crew. All volunteers brought their own camping gear and tents and camped at Yellow Pine Campground for the duration of the trip. Willow Creek Catering provided all meals and snacks and the ConservationVIP® volunteers were especially appreciative of the variety and quality of the selections.

Summary

The volunteers worked extremely well together and enjoyed the work, the Park, the food, and the setting. The common bond of “sustaining some of the world’s greatest landscapes and cultural sites,” made a lasting impact on each ConservationVIP® volunteer and significantly enhanced the park’s trails for all to enjoy safely.

The NPS Trail Crew expressed their satisfaction and appreciation for all the work done and noted that every project they intended to complete was completed successfully. ConservationVIP® and volunteers give special thanks to the Yosemite National Park Trail Crew under the leadership of Eamon Schneider, Yosemite National Park Trails Manager Dave Kari, and Acting Yosemite National Park Volunteer Coordinators Sally Kintner and Sandy Hernandez for their commitment to the Park and our volunteer projects. Volunteers also thanked the Willow Creek Catering company for their outstanding assistance with food preparation, delivery, and timely service.

In four workdays ConservationVIP® volunteers completed 448 hours of labor at three project locations, enjoyed tasty meals, spectacular scenery and, most importantly, made new friends and countless lasting memories!

