



Sierra
Club

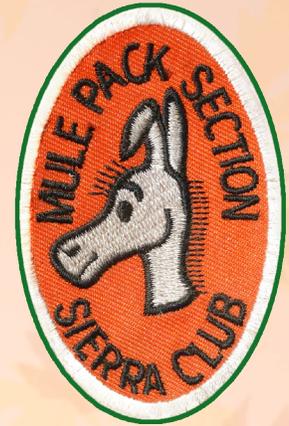
Founded 1892

Angeles Chapter Sierra Club

Mule Pack Section

January 2012 Annual Newsletter

Edited and published by *Bob Hansen*



The MPS Executive Committee voted in 2008 to publish the MPS newsletter only as an online document. The newsletter will include only short trip reports to provide our members and leaders with resource information about the destinations of the mule pack trips. Here are reports from the 2011 trips.

MIGUEL MEADOWS (ORIGINALLY RANCHERIA FALLS)

June 23-26, 2011

Leaders: John Kaiser and Yvonne Tsai



The group at Hetch Hetchy

The planned Rancheria Falls trip became a Miguel Meadows trip. The deep winter snows and a cold, snowy spring were followed by extremely hot weather in June. The resulting huge runoff led to a closure of the Wapama Falls footbridges for safety reasons on the morning of our trip. We diverted by climbing out of the valley before reaching the falls and setting up base camp in a pleasant wooded area adjacent to the Miguel Meadows Ranger Station. There were good camp spots for the eleven members of the trip among the widely-spaced trees as well as a small clearing. Water was available from a small stream or from a pipe behind the unoccupied cabin. Nearby large meadows provide the name of the location, but no water is available

in those meadows. With the closure of the trail to Rancheria Falls, we had a lot of company that arrived on the second and third nights. Gravel Lake is about 0.5 mi from this location but after visiting it on a day hike we decided that it would not be good camp area.

On the two layover days, we enjoyed hikes to Eleanor Lake and to Frog Creek. We left for Eleanor Lake, a very large reservoir, in two hiking groups. The first located a small cove where two members enjoyed a swim on the warm day but the rest of that group preferred relaxing. The second group continued to the end of the trail where a backpack and boat-in campground is located. Both groups found large numbers of swallowtail butterflies clustered along the edge of the lake.

We reached Frog Creek using the Laurel Lake trail. With the abundant runoff, the creek was a torrent that was not safe to cross and no one was tempted to continue to Laurel Lake. The stream bank made an excellent lunch spot where we enjoyed the sounds and sights of the cascading water



Western Azalea

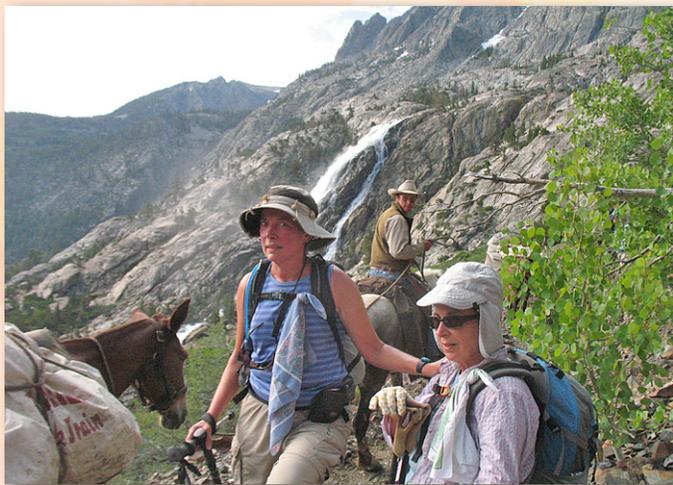
and admired a large number of western azaleas.

The Hetch Hetchy area is noted for its variety of early-season wildflowers and we were not disappointed. Among the many species, we identified two that were new to us: Wild Ginger has an unusual, exotic flower and Meadow Foam covered large areas. The white variation of Venustus Mariposa Lily and Williamson Clarkia were among the showy wildflowers that were encountered.

On the exit hike, after reaching Hetch Hetchy reservoir, several members did the additional out-and-back distance for the great views of Tueeulala Falls and to witness the power of Wapama Falls. The footbridges had been reopened but everyone who was crossing was thoroughly soaked.

Several members arrived at the tunnel at the same time as the pack train and, at the request of the packer, acted as guards while the train passed through the tunnel. The packer will not take the mules through the tunnel while hikers are present; future trips should consider having a rear guard to assist the packer in this manner on the entrance hike.

A photo album may be seen [here](#).



Sarah, Lynn and unnamed wrangler heading to Clark Lakes

CLARK LAKES

July 31-August 6, 2011

Leaders: Sandy Burnside and Laura Joseph

The hike in to Clark Lakes begins at Silver Lake (7220'), near June Lake, and goes 6 miles, gaining 3000', across Spooky Meadow, over a 10,000' pass to the campsite at Clark Lakes (9800') in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. The hike in can be difficult for folks who are not strong hikers but, even in this case, a slow pace will get you there.

Our campsite was located at Clark #2 near the trail junction from Gem Lake. The campsite has good water access, a nice level area and several higher areas for campsites a bit farther from the common area. Clark Lakes are not well-known but there were plenty of back packers setting up nearby during our stay.



Deer in the Minarettes

We had eleven people, about half of whom had been on mule packs previously. Two were from the Mammoth Lakes area and one from Berkeley.

Hiking destinations included Island Pass, Weber Lake, Waugh Lake, Thousand Island Lake, Gem Lake, Emerald and Ruby and Garnet Lakes, Carson and San Joaquin Peaks. The High Trail (PCT) from Agnew Meadow is just over Agnew Pass and offers a chance to view beautiful wildflowers. Access to Garnet was hampered by snow and high water levels in the streams. Davis Lake is a nice destination but no one tried it on this trip. The whole group hiked to Carson Peak by three different routes. Some of the group returned later in the week using the best of the three routes. Several of the participants went on from Carson Peak to San Joaquin.

The flowers were gorgeous, including a huge field of pink monkey flowers on a slope near Carson Peak, and spotting a rare flower (Davidson's Fritillary).

Other than Carson, there are no peaks close enough to Clark Lakes for day hikes. This is a location for folks who like lakes as destinations.



Clark Lake

We organized full pot luck dinners each night including the usual quesadilla, salad and leftover nights as well as a pasta night with meatballs (that had been kept fresh in our snow pack “refrigerator”), spring rolls, and a marvelous salmon, mashed potato and dried veggie dinner. We were treated to a trout dinner, each getting our own. They were caught at Clark #1.

The Frontier Pack Station is, without doubt, the most efficient we deal with. Our gear was at the camp site before we arrived and back at the pack station about the same time we returned.



SOLDIER LAKES

Jul 31-Aug 6, 2011

Co-sponsored by Sierra Peaks, WTC

Leaders: Sandy and Peter Lara



We had a strong group of eight for our Soldier Lake (10,400') mule pack trip. Our primary sponsor was the Mule Pack Section, co-sponsored by the Sierra Peaks Section and Wilderness Travel Course. Each section was represented by three or more participants, many of us being members of two or all three of these groups.

Lower Soldier Lake is located southwest of Mt Langley, only about 2 miles northwest of New Army Pass. To get there, we left the Cottonwood Pack Station at Horseshoe Meadow and hiked on good trail in the rain over Cottonwood Pass, joined the PCT for a time, then left on another trail heading north to the lake. It was our good fortune that the heavy rains over several days kept the dust down, cleared the air, and then stopped when we reached our camp. We had no more rain the rest of the week. Rock Creek was running high from the rain and we had to be extra cautious during crossings early in the week. Stats from trailhead to camp: 10.6 mi, 1850' gain.

During the week, we took advantage of our location to bag



several peaks in the area. We climbed Joe Devel (13,327'), Mt Chamberlin (13,169'), Mt Newcomb (13,422'), Mt Pickering (13,474'), Major General (12,400'), and Cirque Peak (12,900'). Everyone climbed something, no one climbed all of the peaks. We also had relaxing hikes to Erin Lake, Sky Blue Lake, and Upper Soldier Lake, the latter two enticing some for a quick swim.

All peaks were climbed via class two routes which sometimes required miles of extra hiking to approach from the direction that allowed for this. The longest day was to Mt Chamberlin, a 20 mile round trip with 5000' of gain. From camp we descended southwest and west along Rock Creek until joining the PCT at a low point of 9600'. The PCT turned north and we followed it to the saddle between Mt Guyot and Mt Chamberlin. We turned northeast and climbed to Mt Chamberlin, then retraced our steps. There was a fire burning in the Golden Trout Wilderness that created a lot of smoke in our area, especially in the afternoons. We elected not to add Mt Guyot to our day partly because the smoke was so thick that the views were extremely hazy. We will return another time as the vistas are reported to be superb.

Soldier Lake is marshy and not a swimming lake, though beautiful, with the Major General looking down from above. Mosquitoes were present but bites were mostly



prevented by covering up. We did not expect the foot traffic that occurred at our camp, mostly from fisher people and backpackers. It was helpful that we usually had someone in camp to talk to folks passing through and to keep an eye on things. We happened to be at a very popular location on the peninsula that points north into the lake. This site accommodated our group of 8 well, but there were other nice sites around the lake, particularly on the east side.

We set up our Happy Hour area with a tarp overhead, four bear boxes (in the shade of the tarp), a 2 ¼ x 4 ft table, two stoves, kitchenware, a lantern, and our chairs. Our dinner meals were planned in advance by Tonyce Bates, who assigned each of us to bring certain items and oversaw meal preparation. Everyone helped in preparation and clean-up. We consumed almost all of the food, but much of the wine was carted back to the trailhead. Unlike many other mule pack trips, with this one we often did not arrive back in camp after the day's adventures until dusk. Our Happy Hours were more condensed, although those taking a short day or rest day could be seen enjoying this time earlier. We enjoyed getting to know each other. Five participants were new to mule packing and all are expected to return on future trips!

Our thanks go to participants Phil and Tonyce Bates, Don Raether, Linda Emerson, Annemarie Mikolaitis, and Tim McCoy. Everyone's personality had a mark on our trip. We had a great time at our final celebration telling our (funny) observations of each other and receiving our Mule Pack patches.



BISHOP & SADDLEROCK LAKES

August 14 - 19, 2011

Leaders: Winnette Butler & Jim S. Fleming

This trip was planned to go to a campsite at Bishop Lake (elevation 11,200'); however, due to the amount of snow the Sierras received this past winter and trail conditions,



Mount Goode



Alpinglew on Agassiz

it was decided that the better choice would be Saddlerock Lake (elevation 11,128'). The packer was Rainbow Pack Outfitters, located a few miles before the trail-head at South Lake. They are behind Parcher's Resort on the South Lake Road. Some in our group stayed there on the evening before our trip; others at the Bishop Creek Lodge farther down the road. We had a pre-trip meeting on Saturday night at the packers facility-they provided a sumptuous feast for our dinner, well appreciated by the group.

Our group of 11 met at the packer's lot on Sunday morning at 7:00. One thing that we did not anticipate was their requirement to have all of our duffel bags be no longer than 36" long-apparently they have new saddlebags with restricted space. However, after shuffling things around, they were able to accommodate us. We consolidated into the fewest number of vehicles and headed up to the trail-head at South Lake, where parking is limited (there are plenty of fisher-persons in the lot).

The hike to our campsite was a very beautiful and fairly easy climb of 1,500 feet in 4-1/2 miles. Our site, suggested by the packer, was on the north end of Saddlerock Lake. It can be reached by a use trail which starts right at the outlet from the lake, ascending over a small rise to open areas and trees at the north end. We all agreed that it was a better location than we would have had at Bishop Lake. We spread out a bit so that we would have sites with trees and one large area for our pot-lucks.

The potluck area was large enough, but the trees were far enough apart that we would have to use long ropes to make a tarp-covered shelter for the tables. Fortunately, the weather was not a problem all week and we didn't need shelter.

On Monday, many of the group decided to do one of the nicer loop hikes in the area: to Chocolate Peak and surrounding lakes. This hike retraces the route back toward South Lake, then climbs the trail to Ruwau Lake. The trail is a bit indistinct in places, but negotiable. The peak offers outstanding views of the area, including the camp area. One

can also hike by the Chocolate Lakes and Bull Lake, then climb back up the trail to return to camp.

On another day, some in the group hiked up the trail over Bishop Pass and continuing down the south side into fantastic Dusy Basin, with its many meadows and small lakes. Views from this area include Sierra peaks--the northern Palisades group, Isosceles Peak, Columbine Peak, and the area above Kings Canyon gorge. Three of the group did a scramble and climb of Mt. Agassiz--definitely a tough climb, not recommended for anyone not an able climber or familiar with cross-country navigation.

On Thursday, several in the group did a climb to just below the summit of Mt. Goode. It was a great climb; however, there was a bit too much snow to allow us to go to the top safely. Perhaps on another trip! This area is one of the nicest in the Sierras, and will be visited again!

The group was convivial, the happy hours and pot-lucks well done.



EVELYN LAKE

Dates: August 18-23, 2011

Leaders: Yvonne Tsai and John Kaiser

Evelyn Lake is set in a large, almost treeless, basin at 10,334' about 1.5 miles east of Vogelsang High Sierra Camp (VHSC). This location was selected when wilder-



Evelyn Group

ness permits could not be obtained for the Rafferty Creek trail. To reach Evelyn, the ten members first hiked 5.5 miles from Tuolumne Meadows (8700') along the gently-rising Lyell Canyon trail and enjoyed the beauty of the Lyell fork of the Tuolumne River meandering through green meadows and cascading over granite. After reaching the Ireland Creek trail junction, we started a steep climb, cresting at 10,480' where we had great views to the south of Amelia Earhart and Parsons peaks before continuing to our desti-



On Vogelsang

nation. The total distance to Evelyn Lake via this route is 10.6 miles. Several participants commented that the views in Lyell Canyon and along the Ireland Creek trail made the distance worthwhile.

Evelyn Lake is very large and scenic, and this year was yielding large rainbow trout – up to 17” pulled in by one of our members between breakfast and the start of a day-hike. A nice beach at the east end provides easy access for anyone wanting to swim or wade. The extremely late snow melt -- VHSC opened only one week before our trip -- meant that mosquitoes were abundant but that was probably an anomaly for late August. We were fortunate that it did not rain because rigging a rain tarp was not possible due to a shortage of trees; future trips should bring a couple of tarp poles to supplement the sparse white bark pines.

On the four layover days, we enjoyed two leisurely hikes and two that were more strenuous. Several people did an easy loop hike from camp to pretty Townsley Lake and Fletcher Lake, combining on- and off-trail hiking. From Fletcher, a short walk brought us to VHSC where they serve lemonade every afternoon. The area to the north of Evelyn provided another relaxed hike along the outlet



Townsley Lake

stream, through meadows, along grassy benches, and over low ridges where we enjoyed the views and the early wildflowers.

The high point of the week for many was a climb of Vogelsang Peak (11,493'), made a little more difficult than normal by the snow that remained in the gully of the East Face route. Our pathfinder navigated around most of the snowfields and all who made the trek to the peak will not forget the 360 degree views. The longest day hike was to Ireland Lake, located between Amelia Earhart and Parsons Peaks. The trail climbs through many attractive meadows before arriving at the large lake. We sought shelter from a cold morning wind among the pines at the west end of the lake for lunch. Later the winds died and we enjoyed a

leisurely walk to the eastern end of the lake and down the outlet drainage until progress was blocked by snow. A nice collection of wildflowers, a marmot, and a large buck were seen before we started back to camp.

We made the exit hike along the shorter (8.5 miles) Rafferty Creek trail, but most of us thought that the Lyell-Ireland route was more attractive. Evelyn Lake is a worthy alternative when permits for the direct Rafferty trail to the Vogel-sang area are not available, provided the group is prepared for the open expanse of the location.

A trip with more layover days could add hikes to Emeric Lake and/or Bernice Lake.

To see a photo album of the trip click [here](#).



The Cottonwood Group

COTTONWOOD LAKES

August 21-27, 2011

Leaders: Laura Joseph, Cathie Miller

The hike in to Cottonwood Lakes was easy with just over five miles and a thousand feet of gain to the lakes at 11,100'. We camped on the slight ridge east of Cottonwood Lake #3 and west of the unnamed body of water that is incorrectly labeled #3 on the USGS map. This is just past the abandoned ranger hut. The lakes are labeled correctly on the Tom Harrison map. We recommend this site which has a number of options for tent sites and a large flat open area for the group common area set up.

We had fourteen people on the trip, including eight first-timers. Everyone had a great time.

Most days, we split into two to four smaller groups for hikes. Favorites were the trail to South Fork Lakes and Cirque Lake—a beautiful route featuring an incredible view of a lush green meadow—and Muir Lake, but folks did more ambitious hikes as well. Among the best were the

cross country route to Lake #6, from which one can continue cross-country to Muir and Hidden Lakes if time permits. The hike is 4.2-miles (with 800' of elevation gain/loss) along the Old Army Pass Trail past Cottonwood Lakes #3, #4, and #5, then continuing cross-country to Cottonwood Lake #6 (11,613') and from there hiking cross-country eastward to Muir Lake (11,140'). Hidden Lake (10,876') is additional cross-country from Muir or cross-country from the main trail. The route provides lots of boulder-hopping as well as picturesque views of lakes, streams, mountains, and forest.

The more hearty hikers took Old Army Pass to New Army Pass to Cirque Peak, a relatively easy hike if one is not intimidated by the steep switchbacks up to Old Army. Inexperienced hikers should not attempt the Pass. Another day, our four strongest hikers went up New Army, over to Langley, and down Old Army. Using New Army to get to Langley adds a fair amount of time to the hike.

The “moderate” group enjoyed a hike to New Army Pass, an 8-mile hike with about 1,500' of elevation gain/loss.



A beautiful meadow near South Fork Lake

Shorter hikes only went as far as Long Lake and High Lake.

The weather was “partly cloudy” all week with no precipitation so we were not alarmed when our last full day dawned with an overcast sky. About mid-day, when everyone was away from camp, it began to hail accompanied by thunder and lightening. Everyone got back to camp as quickly as possible, set up our extra-large tarp (which works better than two small tarps), and huddled under its protection for several hours until the heavy rain stopped. Fortunately, a breezy evening did a good job of drying off our tents before we packed up the next day.

As usual, the Cottonwood Pack Station’s service was satisfactory. They got our gear to the campsite about a half hour after we arrived and back to the pack station about an hour after we arrived.

The excellent pot luck dinners we enjoyed included the salad-based dinner, a sausage and bean stew (vegetarian and meat options), a Middle Eastern-themed meal, a pasta meal, quesadilla night and the leftovers feast. Appetizers and desserts provided by participants not responsible for main meals were plentiful and delicious.



Glen Aulin group at the trailhead

GLEN AULIN

August 25 -28, 2011

Leaders: Francine Oschin and Dave Cross

Our group consisted of twelve hikers. We began the easy journey to Glen Aulin at the High Sierra back packers’ camp. With water in Yosemite National Park at near record levels, the hike from Tuolumne Meadows and our camp site were especially lovely.

Despite the poor fishing, the hikes to nearby lakes were terrific. The group hike led by Dave Cross to Water Wheel Falls was impressive due to the abundant water flow. Although the trail marker for Water Wheel shows it at three and one half miles from the Glen Aulin camp, after four and one half miles of hiking, Dave’s CGPS indicated that we still had not come to the falls. Nevertheless, we did



White Cascade on the Tuolmne River

enjoy both California and Le Conte Falls and are unsure of why we never reached Water Wheel (there is speculation that we actually did get to Water Wheel Falls and didn’t recognize it as none of the water falls have markers).

As this is a backpackers’ camp site, there were many other folks who gathered around the campfire each night. On our “sharing night” we read poems and told stories and were joined by others who added to the fun. We collected these “new friends” and walked to the bridge over the river, turned off our flashlights and lay face up to view the stars against the pitch black night sky. Brilliant!



VIRGINIA CANYON

Aug. 28-Sept. 3, 2011

Leaders: Dan Butler, Mary Patterson, Peter Ireland, Beth Mica



The group at Burro pass.

The final MPS outing of the year included 13 participants who explored Virginia Canyon in the seldom visited north eastern section of Yosemite National Park. Trumbull Lake Campground and Virginia Lakes Resort (cabins and restaurant at 9,500') provided early bird arrivals accommodations for acclimatizing, fishing and day hiking. Nearby Virginia Lakes Pack Outfit made our Sunday morning gear drop-off easy and convenient.

The popular Virginia Lakes Resort area was soon left behind as we began the 7 mi. hike towards our Virginia Canyon campsite along Return Creek. Passing picturesque Big and Little Virginia Lakes, Red Lake, Blue Lake, Cooney



Alpine Lily

Lake, and Frog Lakes we stopped to rest at the old miners' cabin at Cooney Lake before continuing the climb up and up to what is locally known as Burro Pass at 11,150'. From this vantage point, the majesty of Hoover Wilderness abounds in all directions and no, it wasn't named after the notorious J. Edgar as one participant asked.

Having completed our 1650' of gain we now began our 1720' descent toward Summit Lake with Hoover Lakes in sight to the north. Arriving at Return Creek we found our packers had placed our gear at an easy to find campsite with

excellent trail access.

Virginia Canyon is a glacially carved northeast southwest trending canyon with the trail running along the bottom and adjacent to Return Creek. Scenic alpine lakes dot the higher elevations and are accessible with basic cross-country travel up from and returning down to the main canyon trail.

On the layover days our two fisherpeople had a delightful time in and around Return Creek while our day hikers had



Peter, Beth and Bob at Sheppard Lake

ample opportunities to traverse the canyon trail as far south as its junction with the PCT and to visit the area's remote alpine lakes. Back in camp the traditional MPS Happy Hour yielded delightful surprises every night with a variety of spontaneous gourmet offerings.

We had the canyon to ourselves the entire time, seeing only the backcountry ranger and one PCT hiker. On Saturday's hike out, falling on Labor Day weekend, we started seeing other human beings on trail as we reluctantly acclimated back to the real world from a delightful wilderness experience. Our participants came from all parts of California and all walks of life to share in a memorable High Sierra adventure that the Angeles Chapter's Mule Pack Section



Sunset on Sheppard Crest

has become famous for providing. Our thanks to leaders Dan Butler and Mary Patterson for doing such an outstanding job putting this trip together and to Peter Ireland and Beth Mica for filling in when Dan and Mary had to leave the trip early.



MULE PACKING: HOW TO GAIN WEIGHT AND ENJOY IT

By Lynn Lively

As an old backpacker (both in experience and age), I pride myself on being Tough. I sleep on the ground, wear the same filthy clothes for a week, eat jerky and string cheese meal after meal, and have survived for seven days with just the thirty-five pounds on my back.

BUT, last year in the Sierra my travels took me by a campsite where the people were sitting (be still my heart) on chairs! They had a lantern for light and (heavy) cans of food were lying around on a table. The lovely ruby color of cheap wine sparkled in plastic cups. The tents were big. Clothes were hanging on a line. How did all this gear get to camp? "Mules", they told me. "Mules are the secret".

Fast forward to my friend, Sarah Korda, telling me about a Sierra Club trip sponsored by the Mule Pack Section to Clark Lakes in late July, 2011. We paid our \$330.00 each and we were in.

What fun to prepare for the trip. Instead of thirty-five pounds, our limit was fifty-five pounds of personal gear. And even that was increased when the time got close. And that weight didn't include the group dinners, group toilet, stoves, etc. Packing was a joy. Big tent? Take it! Second set of nylon pants? Make it three! Camp shoes? But of course.

The trip was wonderful. Leaders Laura Joseph and Sandy Burnside did an excellent job of managing the camp and us. The hikers were compatible and a good time was had by all. Do I recommend mule packing? Absolutely!

Here are a couple of tips from my first-timer's perspective.

1. Rent a second bear canister from the Forest Service for \$7.00 per week. That way you have plenty of room for toiletries and crunchy goodies. What do you care? It only weighs two pounds!! Throw it in.
2. Consider signing up with a buddy if at all possible. On our trip, the days were not organized. Most of our group wanted to scramble and do cross-country work that didn't particularly appeal to me as a retired climber. But luckily I had my compatible buddy, Sarah, along. We had a blast exploring the trails and our deepened friendship is one of my fondest memories of the trip.
3. Be aware that your seven day trip may require eight days of your time. It is usually possible to drive home dead-tired the day you hike out, but an early morning hiking start may require traveling to your meeting point the day before. It did for us.

