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Club

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Angeles Chapter Sierra Club

# Mule Pack Section

January 2015 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 2014 trips.*



## **DESTINATION: BOOTHE LAKE**

**DATES: JULY 22-26, 2014**

Leaders: Fran Penn, Doug Farr and John LaRue  
Participants: Kim Gunderman, Angie Mason, Ghislaine Stuart, Richard and Lorraine Seidmeyer, Clifford Mapes, Patti and Dean Anderson, and Vivian Linderman

Leaving the crowds in the Tuolumne Meadows area of Yosemite National Park was refreshing and a pleasure even with the thought of a 6.7 mile trek and a 1300 foot elevation gain to get to our campsite. The morning air had a chill which soon dissipated after the first mile. We put about 800 feet of elevation behind us in the first two miles of heavily wooded forest after which the trail leveled off through intermittent meadows followed by more elevation gain. About half the distance to the Tuolumne Pass we could hear the Rafferty Creek bubbling down the mountain. As we approached the

midpoint, the forest opened up into a distinct valley with Johnson and Rafferty Peaks visible on our right. Within the final two miles from the Pass we could see Fletcher Peak with patches of snow from the winter storms. If you did not know where you were, you would have thought you were in Switzerland. Boothe Lake sits by itself about 150 yards off of the heavily used Vogelsang trail and is teeming with Eastern Brook Trout. We could see the trout feeding on flies in the early morning and late evening. Boothe would qualify as a five star hotel anywhere in the world. One could spend an hour just gazing at the glistening waves with a backdrop of pine trees on the lake's edge and the high mountains in the distance. A visit to Boothe Lake is not complete without a trek up to Evelyn Lake, which is in an Alpine setting and somewhat desolate. The lake has a reputation for hold-





ing large Rainbow Trout. Additional day trips included Vogelsang, Fletcher and Emeric Lakes.



**DESTINATION: CHARLOTTE CREEK**

**DATES: JULY 27-AUGUST 1, 2014**

Leaders: Sandy Burnside, Laura Joseph  
 Participants: Sam Nelms, David Urciuoli, Joanne Hihn, Dick Hihn, Mary Kay Prentice, Mark Rosen, Paul Rosen, Sherry Owens, Nancy Power, Kathy Duvall, Russ Brown, Sylvia Stevenson, Camille Cusumano

The site along Charlotte Creek is about ¼ mile northwest of the Lake. It is heavily treed, close to the stream and has plenty of room for a common area and tent sites.

We had serious difficulties with the packer. We had reserved 8 mules and requested a 9th but never received a response to the request. Upon arrival at the pack station, we were told there were only 7 mules available. This is the second time this packer has shorted us on the number of mules (the previous occasion was at the



other pack station they own, Pine Creek). We had to sort out items that could wait to be delivered the next day including food, clothing, wine and several pieces of group gear. The next day, the wrangler was able to obtain only one mule and so could not bring everything that had been left. Fortunately, he was able (without, we suspect, authorization from the station owners) to make another trip on the third day and bring the remainder of our things. In addition to all this, the pack station's costs are much higher than what is typical. We recommend that Sequoia Kings Pack Station and Pine Creek Pack Station (both owned by Brian and Dee Berner) not be used by the Angeles Chapter MPS. This means that Honeymoon Lake and Charlotte Creek will not be possible destinations.

Among the hikes that participants did were Bago Peak, Glen and Gardiner Passes, Kearsarge Lake and various



cross country rambles. Hiking was limited by rain every day except the day before we returned to our cars. Participants made wonderful dinners including pasta with meatballs and several sauces, stir fry with veggies and chicken, and salmon with Hollandaise sauce. Appetizers and desserts were delicious and varied. Quesadilla night was rained out for most people but we caught up on leftovers night.

Unfortunately, because of the irresponsibility, unreliability, non-responsiveness and high cost of the Berners' pack stations, this destination will no longer be possible for Angeles Chapter mule pack trips. We can only hope for a change of ownership.



**DESTINATION: JOHNSTON LAKE**

**DATES: JULY 31 TO AUGUST 3, 2014**

Leaders: Dave Cross, Christine Gutierrez



Participants: Ruth Goldstein, Samuel Goldstein, Doug Farr, Maurica Anderson, Carol Tucker, Paula Day, Farkhondeh Afrookhteh, Terry Boehmer, Jean Murray, Marie Lafayette, Lillie Tallman, Karen Belville

Twelve participants joined the two leaders early Thursday morning for an enjoyable 4.5-mile, 1200' gain day hike to our destination near Johnston Lake. The Red's Meadow Station packer was on time, and efficiently packed everything onto 5 mules, helping us stay within the budgeted amount. After a slight detour to take in the morning glory of Rainbow Falls, we arrived at the campsite at about 11:00, and found all of our gear in good order.

The allowable camp sites were in a narrow band of sloping ground, allowing for minimally adequate distances from the creek on one side and the trail on the other side; almost everyone ended up sleeping on a slope. Although Johnston Lake was more of a swamp than a lake, we had ready access to water from the stream feeding it. Happy Hour wine, cheese, and snacks were enjoyed by all the first and second nights, with plenty to share.

The section of the San Joaquin River just above our camp bubbled with cascades, pools and unnamed falls



for a few miles, providing enjoyable hiking, views and swimming opportunities. Friday and Saturday, most participants enjoyed approximately 10 mile, 2000' gain day hikes to various named and unnamed waterfalls and summit vistas in the surrounding area.

Sunday morning, the packer arrived on time, and we hiked out the way we came in, making a slight detour to Devils' Post Pile National Monument, and allowing for an enjoyable lunch at Red's Meadow Resort while waiting for our gear. Everything arrived in due time and in good order, and just as we were leaving we encountered light rain for the first part of the drive home.



**DESTINATION: FOURTH RECESS LAKE**

**DATES: AUGUST 3 - 8, 2014**



Leaders: Winnette Butler and Jim Fleming

Participants: Crystal Davis, Terri Going, Sharon Hechler, Edith Liu, Beth Mika, Roseanne Greenfield, Greg Marlowe, Debbie Nakamoto, Martin Parsons, John Rawlings, Sara Rawlings, Rey Reed, Carol Scurllock,

Driving south on 395 to Tom's Place August 2, the prospect of 6 days in the Pioneer Basin region didn't appear promising. Dense smoke blowing from west side wildfires obscured views and filled the air with throat-irritating particulate matter. In the evening, however, Wheeler Ridge came into view and in the early morning hours of Aug 3, monsoon conditions brought a slow-moving thunderstorm that still rumbled when we rendezvoused at Rock Creek Pack Station. As we hiked up to 12,000' Mono Pass, cloudy skies threatened rain but were clear of smoke—expansive views abounded. We would have no smoke the rest of the trip.

Camp was between 3rd and 4th Recess at about 9,700', about 10 miles from the trailhead, on the south bank of Mono Creek below the large talus field tumbling off of Mono Rock in a large meadow in the lodgepole forest. The final few hours of the day were particularly tough on our leaders, Winnette and Jim, who set up the commissary and prepared dinner in a downpour that had begun in the afternoon and would continue through the night.

We enjoyed a hearty dinner and took advantage of a largely dry but overcast second day to dry out camp; everything and everyone was pretty much soaked the previous day. A few folks nosed out a path east to Fourth Recess Lake, others explored alternative Mono Creek crossings, and most moved jackets and soggy clothing, sleeping bags, and tents from one large granite rock to another.

On the third day, Mt Hopkins was the goal and Jim led



at the base of the Half-Moon Pass ski route used for the Sierra Crest ski tour. This picturesque alpine lake is set in a basin below Mt Starr and Mono Mesa. Most returned via the same trail while a few group members followed the scenic use-trail to the north side of Mono Pass before closing the loop following the Mono Pass Trail back to camp.

On the sixth day, we returned via the Mono Pass trail. Some unusual plants were seen in the Mono Pass vicinity including the high elevation, crevice dwelling composite Pierson's tonestus and the striking, fragrant Cliffbush, a relative of Carpentaria and Mock Orange. In spite of the weather, it was a pleasure to spend the holiday among mountain lovers who accepted a bit of adversity with good cheer.



### **DESTINATION: BALDWIN CREEK**

**DATES: AUGUST 10-15**

Leaders: John Kaiser, Yvonne Tsai

Participants: Mauriça Anderson, Bonnie Blanton, Alan Coles, Doug Farr, Ruth Goldstein, Bob Hansen, Helen Maurer, Karl Rubin, Lorraine Seidmeyer, Richard



the climbing party to its summit via sandy slopes and summit boulders. Though breezy once we attained the summit ridge, the buildup didn't produce rain or lightning. On the return, some participants dallied to enjoy the lake basin below the peak but most headed for camp and happy hour.

Day four rain still threatened and the largest part of the groups headed for Fourth Recess Lake while others set out to find the Third Recess trail and Third Recess Lake. Lunching at Fourth Recess Lake, some members contemplated following paths to the waterfall higher in the cirque while others scoped out Mono Rock. Threatening skies triumphed in the end and we ambled back to camp passing some interesting bogs and a number of large bolete mushrooms.

Day 5 dawned with weather much as it had been and the entire group walked uphill to Gold Lake, which lies



Seidmeyer, Sharon Wright

The 6 mile entrance hike starts on the popular and scenic McGee Pass trail and crosses McGee Creek twice. The second crossing has two small logs, one partially cracked, high above the creek: some walked across, some crawled across, and a couple of participants chose to wade the creek at a point where the water was only knee deep. Portions of the McGee trail coincide with a jeep road that was constructed in the 1940s to reach the Scheelore tungsten mine at the upper end of Baldwin Canyon. After the second creek crossing, the Baldwin route splits from the McGee Pass trail at an unsigned junction. A mile farther along, the group again took an unsigned fork in the trail for the final climb to base camp.

Our camp was located at 9800' adjacent to Baldwin Creek under mature lodgepole pines. The area is one of the few in the eastern Sierra where campfires are still allowed. There was an abundance of downed wood



and ample photographs. Continuing up the canyon to the mine location -- actually two sites about 1/2 mile apart -- the hike paralleled a white granite ridge. The exploration of these two locations was cut short by the arrival of rain and hail. Two participants returned later in the week and reported that the lower site contained a large number of artifacts.

The weather on day two was threatening, but the rain held off during a hike to Grass and Steelhead Lakes. The route descends to McGee Creek, crosses, and then climbs steeply to the lakes. Large fish were seen in the lakes, prompting a return visit later in the week by one fisherman. A use trail to Golden Lake splits from the official trail above Grass Lake -- directions from the packer about this use trail provided sufficient information for one visit to Golden Lake at the end of the week.

On day three, the rains of the preceding weeks yielded to clear skies and beautiful weather. Most of the group hiked to Big McGee Lake where they enjoyed a leisurely lunch. Two members started early, hiked to McGee Pass and returned to join us while we were relaxing at lakeside. Several others who started later hiked up the rocky and colorful canyon to a point just below



although the group chose to have a campfire only one night. There is ample room to spread out under the trees with most people setting up at the western end of camp where they had a view through the trees of one of the colorful peaks of Baldwin bowl. Three found nice camp sites on the more open hillside between the trail and the happy hour area where they had views of a nearby cliff. There is also a large area on the north side of the trail where one person chose to camp -- this location provides early morning sun for those who rate that feature highly. As an aside, this latter area was the location of the bunkhouse for the mine workers. On the first day, most participants hiked up Baldwin Canyon to the Scheelore mine. After making some necessary corridor improvements through willows a short distance from camp, the group reached the gorgeous Baldwin bowl & meadow and paused for admiration



the pass before turning around.

On the last layover day, many returned to Baldwin Bowl to leisurely explore the meadow and enjoy the colorful scenery while others went to Round Lake or Golden Lake. A catch-and-release fisherman returned to Grass and Steelhead and reported excellent results at Steelhead. Earlier in the week, another fisherman tried Baldwin and McGee creeks: he reported that there were no fish in Baldwin Creek and McGee Creek has fish but is difficult to fish due to obstacles.

The Baldwin area is rarely visited but is worthwhile. Early season would likely have mosquito problems in the main camp due to the tree cover and its proximity to nearby wet meadows.



filters, and tarps set up.

There were no bears in the area, nor any signs of recent presence. One marmot was spotted near the site. Dingleberry Lake and the Sabrina Basin are the most beautiful locations in the Eastern Sierra. Numerous gorgeous lakes are located among rocky, heavily treed craggy ridges. Our campsite at the south end of the lake afforded an ample communal area and multiple choices for tent sites.

On our first layover day, five of us went to beautiful Midnight Lake and several tried to locate Pee Wee Lake on the return hike. We found that the trail was almost invisible and led to a puddle below a beautiful waterfall—Pee Wee Lake was not visible. We subsequently discovered that one can get to Pee Wee by climbing up the right side of the waterfall or from the Hungry Packer Lake trail. That lake was the destination for three hikers while two went on from there to Echo Lake and from there to Midnight.

On the second day, seven of us had a cross country adventure around Emerald Lakes and over a gnarly ridge to the spectacular Blue Lake. The two heartiest of our hikers went to Baboon Lake while three climbed up to Pee Wee. In the afternoon, a build-up of thunder-



## **DESTINATION: SABRINA BASIN, DINGLEBERRY LAKE**

**DATES: AUGUST 17-22**

Leaders: Laura Joseph, Les Wilson

Participants: Dan Butler, Carole Scurlock, David Wales, Richard Potratz, Bob and Lori Graf, Sam Rametta, Kathleen Gustafson, Mark and Paul Rosen

There was no rain!

The terrific group included 9 people who have been on trips led by Les and Laura previously and three newcomers—only one of whom had never been on a mule pack trip.

Bishop Pack Outfitters are among the most competent and pleasant to work with—the only downside is that they provide barrels rather than boxes for food protection. The packer delivered our stuff shortly after noon when we had just finished lunch. The gear was claimed, tents pitched, and everyone helped to get the common area, latrine and shower tents, gravity water



storm clouds caused concern but the storm blew past us. The last day, five went to beautiful Hungry Packer Lake and discovered that, to get to the prettiest spot for lunch, one should stay on the west side of the outlet rather than crossing the stream and follow a use trail on a ridge to the lake. Other folks visited Hell Divers and Blue Lake.

Participants prepared delicious dinners: Moroccan stew with couscous, veggies and beef; spaghetti and meatballs; salmon with lemon and capers over rice and, of course, quesadilla and leftovers nights.

This was a really great trip. We recommend the location highly.



**DESTINATION: BERNICE LAKE, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK**

**DATES: AUGUST 26-31, 2014**



Leaders: Sandy and Peter Lara

Participants: Lori and Steve Delaney, Sharon Kirk, Tim McCoy, Wanda Naylor, Melissa Swan, Tatiana Vinogradova

We had to get the permit months in advance for our trip to Bernice Lake, but it was well worth the effort to go to such a beautiful place. We left our gear at the Tuolumne Meadows Stables and drove to the Rafferty Creek Trailhead. After storing our aromatic items in bear boxes, we were off on our 11 mile, 2600' gain hike to our home for the week, Bernice Lake, at 10,200'. A good lunch spot was on Tuolumne Pass at 9,992' that is just north of Vogelsang Camp, one of the five high sierra camps, where we also replenished our water and used composting toilets. After lunch the trail took us down to Vogelsang Lake where we had an



excellent view of Vogelsang Peak which we planned to climb later in the week. We then hiked back up to Vogelsang Pass at 10,670' and down to the drainage that is the output of Bernice Lake. The last 1/2 mile to camp ascends 400'. Some participants were tuckered out by this time. Our camp was on the north side of the lake, just east of where the trail hits the lake.

This is one of the most remote locations that packers will go to as a single day trip. It is off the main trail and does not have through hikers, keeping it relatively private and pristine. It is a nice swimming lake, if only for a few seconds because it is cold. The water is clear and has trout which Steve caught for a few extra appetizers.

This is the first trip where we provided all the dinner food, with everyone helping to prepare and clean up. We have a menu that we have tweaked over the course of a few trips. It worked well and we had few leftovers. Participants brought their own breakfast, lunch, and snacks.

Hikes were taken to Parsons Peak, Florence Lake, and an unnamed peak near Mt Lyell, as well as general wanderings around Bernice Lake and to nearby lakes and drainages. Due to the strenuous demands of the



climb, only the leaders and a visiting participant from a previous mule pack climbed Mt Florence (12,561') as it was 12 miles and 4,700' of gain. We left at 6:00 AM and returned 12 hours later after a full day of climbing. We picked the route from the south side of Florence Lake which required climbing hundreds of feet of large talus. Always ready to make a loop hike, we returned cross country on the north side of Florence Lake. The views and exhilaration were worth it.

For Vogelsang Peak (11,516'), we dropped 400' to the bottom of the Bernice Lake drainage, then climbed the trail to Vogelsang Pass where we left the trail and made our way up to the obvious notch. Starting about 30 feet beyond the top of the saddle is a use trail that weaves through the brush to the summit block. Vogelsang Peak also afforded excellent views, including Half Dome, Bernice Lake, and Mt Florence. The



round trip from camp was 5.6 miles with 2100' total gain. We had perfect weather, no mosquitoes, and no evidence of bears.



**DESTINATION: SADDLEROCK LAKE**

**DATES: SEPTEMBER 1-6, 2014**

Leaders: Fran Penn and Doug Farr

Participants: Maurica Anderson, Paula Day, Cathie and Gerry Miller, Lillian Tallman, Bruce and Mary Lou Langedyke, Ruth Goldstein, Janet Steinberg and Brian Fitzmaurice

The drive from Bishop up to the Rainbow Outfitters Pack Station featured miles of Quaking Aspen changing into their bright amber fall colors.

As we departed from the pack station and started our climb to Saddlerock Lake, we saw the huge bath-



tub ring of the drought stricken South Lake which was down at least eighty feet. As we ascended up to Bishop Pass the succeeding lakes appeared to be more filled with water compared to prior years.

Our campsite on the north end of Saddlerock Lake had a minimum amount of shade but an unobstructed view of the area. When we raised our tarp we had an adequate amount of cover. Dinners were a festive event with a different soup each night prepared by the leaders.

Day hikes included Bishop Pass, Chocolate Peak via a cross country route past Timberline Lakes and Ruwau Lake, the Ruwau Lake loop trail and an off trail route to Margaret Lake.

The big surprise to some of the participants was the fishing. Saddlerock Lake held respectable 12-13 inch Eastern Brook Trout along with a few Rainbow Trout. The fish in Timberline Lake just below us held more numerous trout but they were on average 2/3 the size of Saddlerock Lake. Long Lake was a disappointment for fishing but provided beautiful scenery.

