



The Trailhead



*A United States Forest Service News Update for
The Desolation Wilderness Volunteer Program*

Desolation Facts:

- Total acreage of the wilderness is 63,960.
- 17 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail runs through the Desolation.
- Elevation in Desolation ranges from about 6,500 to 9,983 feet on Pyramid Peak.

National Wilderness Facts:

- California has almost one-fifth of the acreage of the federal National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)
- In 2006 the NWPS totals 106,619,208 acres
- The Forest Service manages 30% of federal lands and 32% of NWPS acreage.

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Desolation Volunteer Program: Year 3!

Welcome back to the Trailhead! This is the news update devoted to the Desolation Wilderness Volunteer and Education Program, which is entering its 3rd season in 2006.

This year we've doubled the number of volunteer

wilderness rangers over last year. Currently, 26 people are contributing time and energy to the program.

What is the purpose of our volunteer program? Generally there are two objectives: Our first is to preserve and protect the

Desolation Wilderness through education and example so that the wilderness will be available for future generations to appreciate and use. Our second objective is to provide the public an opportunity to be involved in management

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Aldo Leopold National Stewardship Award

National Award Highlights Efforts of All Involved in Desolation Management

In recognition of outstanding management efforts on the Desolation Wilderness, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth announced in April that the 2006 Aldo Leopold National Stewardship Award would go to the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and Eldorado National Forest. The award will be celebrated throughout the 2006 season at visitor centers and trailheads.

A diverse set of projects, programs, and priorities involved in caring for the Desolation Wilderness resulted in the award. Jen Ebert, Assistant Resource Officer on Pacific Ranger District is quick to point out that credit for the award should go to a broad collection of people involved in managing Desolation. Ebert notes that this includes the efforts of volunteers, who over the past 3 seasons have

contributed significant time and energy in providing quality wilderness information at both front desk and in the field. The volunteer program has had an emphasis on education and LNT philosophy communicated through such programs as the Wilderness Education Tour, or W.E.T.

In addition, several

restoration projects that have reduced impacts associated with recreation use were also cited as a reason for the award.

Other reasons cited for the award included a strong use management program with permit and quota systems, group size limits and campfire restrictions, all aimed at preserving the wilderness resource and character.



One last taste of winter was in store for volunteers on the year's first training day on Memorial Day weekend. Gwyn Ingram Photo

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.”

Rachel Carson

“I am glad I shall never be young without wild places to be young in. Of what avail are 40 freedoms without a blank spot on the map?”

Aldo Leopold
A Sand County Almanac

Desolation Volunteers: Year 3 (continued from pg. 1)

of their public lands so they can provide a valuable service to their community. Additional goals are to increase the presence of the Forest Service in the wilderness area and to maintain and improve the agency’s service to the public.

Volunteers can be involved in any of the four duties of our program, including serving as wilderness ranger patrols, being a trailhead

naturalist, collecting information related to our monitoring programs, and finally, providing wilderness information at a number of public service sites on both sides of the Desolation.

Founders of the volunteer program, Jennifer Ebert of Eldorado National Forest and Suzy Lancaster of Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, both continue to head up the program from their

respective “sides” of the Desolation. Brent Carpenter has stepped into the position of volunteer coordinator in addition to his wilderness ranger patrol duties in Desolation. David Rolloff is working as the wilderness education coordinator. Both Brent and David are involved in the day to day work of the volunteer program. Read more about the four Forest Service staff members below.

Forest Service Staff – Desolation Wilderness Volunteer Program



Suzy Lancaster. In her 8th season of work in the Desolation Wilderness, Suzy currently serves as the Wilderness and Dispersed Recreation Manager for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. Suzy is a graduate of Humboldt State University with a degree in Natural Resource Interpretation. In 2002 Suzy made a first effort at developing a volunteer program who worked in Desolation with a group of 8 volunteers from the Tahoe area. A year later, Suzy co-founded our current volunteer ranger program with Jen Ebert. Suzy is married and has a 9-month old girl named Madelyn.



Jennifer Ebert. Serving as Assistant Resource Officer and trained as a wildlife biologist, Jen has been on Pacific Ranger District 9 years. She co-founded the volunteer program and has become increasingly involved in resource management within Desolation including numerous restoration and monitoring projects. Jen has also expanded into a broader wilderness management role with educational programs and multiple resource management efforts (e.g. fire use, resource monitoring). Jen has a degree in wildlife management from Humboldt State University. She and her husband Jeff have a daughter, Emily, who is 3 years old.



Brent Carpenter. In his 4th season serving as a wilderness ranger in the Desolation Wilderness, Brent has taken on the role as the volunteer coordinator for the program as part of his job. Brent lives in El Dorado Hills and enjoys getting out on the national forest year-around. He particularly enjoys getting out backcountry skiing in the winter (including volunteering with the El Dorado Nordic Ski Patrol). Brent is married and has 2 children, ages 14 and 12, who also go backpacking with him. Brent enjoys working in a place that he loves and says that one of the best parts of the job is meeting people with a passion for Wilderness.



David Rolloff. Having worked previously on the campsite monitoring effort in Desolation, David has expanded his involvement this year on the volunteer program as Wilderness Education Coordinator, and is working on information outreach programs (LNT ranger talks, newsletters, etc). A former wilderness ranger himself, David is a professor of outdoor recreation resource management at Sacramento State in the Recreation & Leisure Studies Dept. One of his proudest accomplishments is having 6 students working as part of the developed recreation staff in the Crystal Basin this year.



Desolation Lake Names: Where did they come from?

By William J. Finch, Wilderness Volunteer Ranger

Before I became a Wilderness Volunteer, I started to research Desolation Wilderness to learn all I could about this marvelous resource. I wanted to be able to field any questions that would come my way from people I would come in contact with on the trail. As I poured through guide books, Forest Service material, and the internet, I was struck by the peculiar looking and sounding names for some of the lakes in the area of the wilderness located roughly south of Lake Aloha.

My research began to yield results as I looked for information on lakes such as *Ropi*, *Jabu*, *Waca*, and others. I learned that in the 1920's a group of men formed what they called the Mount Ralston Fish Planting Club (the MPFPC) for the purpose of stocking the lakes in the Devil's Valley of the newly formed Eldorado National Forest. Later, this area would become the Desolation Valley Primitive Area when given protection status in 1931.

Since most of the lakes the MPFPC stocked were unnamed, they decided to name the ones they were stocking, and after lengthy discussion they

decided the lakes should have Indian sounding names. To accomplish this, they decided to create a lake name by combining the first two letters from the first and last names of the members of the MPFPC. For example, *Ropi* Lake is named after Ross Pierce—RO-PI.

Other lake names have the following origins: *Gefo* Lake – (George Foss), *Frata* Lake – (Frank Talbot), *Jabu* – (Jack Butler), *Toem* Lake – (Tom Emory), *Waca* Lake – (Walter Campbell). Another lake, called *Osma* Lake, is believed to have been named after Oswald Maybeck, although not all sources are certain about this.

Another lake with an Indian sounding name is *Umpa* Lake. However, this lake name is not from the combining of letters but from someone not being

able to pronounce all the letters of the word it should have been named. The lake is named for a Forest Service employee in the late 1920's who had a grandson who wanted to name the lake "Grandpa Lake" but when he tried to pronounce "grandpa," it came out "*umpa*," hence the current name!

More on Desolation place names in the next issue of The Trailhead.

In his second year as a volunteer in Desolation, Bill Finch is a former faculty member in the Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies at Sacramento State. He has been a Navy intelligence officer, an Army Paratrooper, and a Boy Scout leader. Bill has also traveled widely in the California backcountry.

References:

Yesavage, Jerome (1994). *Desolation Wilderness*. Portland, OR: Frank Amato Publications.

<http://home.earthlink.net/~lzmmaps/id8.html>



Tyler Lake Sunset. Photo: Brent Carpenter

Volunteer Profile: Tim Longo

Job opportunity in the Bay Area doesn't keep Tim from getting back to Desolation.

Those of you who have been around the last few seasons may have seen Tim Longo change hats a few times, which is why we thought we'd feature him in this first "Volunteer Profile" column.

Tim has been involved in the volunteer program for three years, and it was during his first year that he became a Leave No Trace Trainer after attending Brent Pettey's course in Stanislaus National Forest. (Brent has coordinated a large volunteer program on the Stanislaus for a number of years).

Tim explains that he has hiked in Desolation most of his life. He was raised in the Coloma and Placerville area and vacationed in Tahoe for many years. Tim recalls, "I had always wanted to get involved with Desolation in a more official capacity but there were

no programs to speak of." He continued, "Though they don't remember, I'm sure I actually hounded the Pacific Ranger District staff a few times about volunteering for them but there was just no way to support my desires at the time." Finally, Tim's interests were satisfied with the creation of the current volunteer and education program.

Volunteering his first year, Tim explains, "I traveled from Sausalito where I lived at the time while working in the video games industry. Though I didn't get to Desolation as much as I wanted to that first year, I did go to the LNT training and the Wilderness Rendezvous as a volunteer." However, he also explained "I was looking for a change from my job at that time and talked to Jen Ebert & Suzy Lancaster about a Forest Service staff position with Wilderness." The



Tim Longo served as volunteer coordinator during the 2005 season in Desolation Wilderness.

departure of the first volunteer coordinator left the position open, and Tim got the job. It was, he recalls, "Probably one of the best summers of my life," explaining further, "I developed the Wilderness Education Tour (or W.E.T.) among a few other programs and helped manage around 15 volunteers."

The creative life called Tim back this past winter when a good friend convinced him to return to the video game industry in the Bay Area. "My family and I now live on the coast in Half Moon Bay" Tim reports, "And I'm back to *volunteer status* and loving it." Responding to changing hats from volunteer to Forest Service staff member and back to volunteer, he observes, "There is something you get from being a volunteer that you will never get as an employee of the Forest Service." Tim also reports that Leave No Trace has become "a bit of an obsession" so he'll continue being involved in the stewardship of his home wilderness for a long time to come.



Students from Sacramento State measuring barren core size as part of the campsite monitoring effort at Maud Lake in Desolation. Photo: David Rolloff

Desolation...an extraordinary wilderness By Don Lane

Acre for acre, the Desolation Wilderness is one of the most heavily used wilderness areas in the nation. Receiving over 120,000 visitors a year, the Desolation has become a portal for those intrepid or simply curious spirits that seek to journey over the granite trails into the Sierra Nevada, to seek out its wild heart, or perhaps just to enjoy a short hike to explore a near-by lake or waterfall.

Easy accessibility and location near major urban areas have contributed to the allure of Desolation that is only expected to grow as populations increase over the next decades. But it hasn't always been that way for Desolation or for other wilderness areas, as wild places were once avoided. They were seen as being both desolate and foreboding: a place where the Devil lived. In fact the great Aloha Lakes basin was once known as the "Devil's Basin." The glacially scoured region contained lakes that until the dawn of the 20th Century, were called "Devils Lake," and "Pit Lake." By the 1890's, the same land area was also christened as the "Desolation Valley," reflecting the prevailing

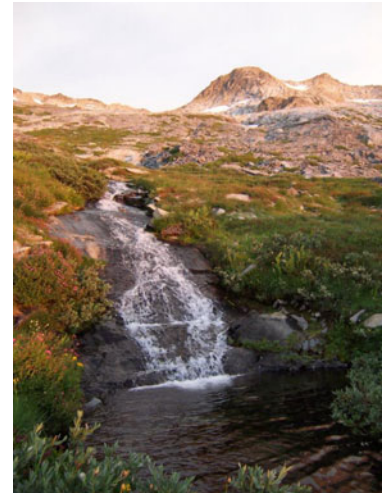
religious themes that anything "wild" or "barren" was also a place where nature could be intimidating or even threatening....a desolate place.

In America's earliest days, most other wilderness and park areas also were viewed with the same caution: wild areas that should be conquered or valued for their resources and not for their wondrous scenery. Even in places like Yosemite, park rangers resorted to tossing live chickens over Glacier Point just to attract and entertain summer visitors. But over time, it too was to be recognized as a scenic treasure.

Desolation, although it became a designated primitive area in 1931, at first only received a reported 35 visitors a week. During the war years of the 1940's because of tire and gas rationing, only a dozen people a week were observed entering the Desolation. Rangers during these years may well have been tempted to find a few live chickens and toss them over the top of Mt. Tallac to try to stir up some interest and some visitors for the backcountry, but to their

credit, they simply waited until victory was declared and the hikers returned to the mountains. Slowly at first they came. There were 3,600 people a season in the early 1960's, and within a decade there were approaching a thousand people a day during peak summer months! In recent years, Emerald Bay Trailhead alone has been used by over 36,000 people.

The Desolation today is a wilderness trying to stay wild, a place where nature dominates and not mankind. Thanks to the dedication of the wilderness volunteers and the rangers, it is not a barren or lifeless place that will ever be known again as the "Devil's Basin" but instead will serve as a refuge from civilization as envisioned by those impassioned dreamers, Thoreau, Muir, Marshall and Leopold.



Early summer evening in the Desolation. Photo: Brent Carpenter

We simply need wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.

Wallace Stegner,
Wilderness Letter 1961

Don Lane has been working in or with Desolation Wilderness since 1974. He has been a Wilderness Ranger, Wilderness Manager and is now the Supervisory Recreation Forester in Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit for the USFS. Don is also a published Lake Tahoe historian.



Another day at "the office." Wilderness rangers enjoy a sunny early season day in Desolation. Photo: Brent Carpenter

Desolation Wilderness

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Volunteers by the Numbers: Some figures from last year

How busy were the volunteers in 2005? Here are some numbers from last year's volunteer effort:

❑ Volunteers: 13

❑ Hours: 1,011

❑ Record for trash carried out at once: 90 lbs.

❑ Monitoring trips: *countless*

❑ Visitor contacts: *countless*

❑ Volunteer at a major incident: 1

❑ Dogs rescued: 1

❑ Number of volunteers who have come back in 2006: 9



Volunteer Francisco Diaz of Sacramento contacting wilderness visitors near Horsetail Falls on his first day in the field. Photo: David Rolloff

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