



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 2007 the NWPS totals 107,436,608 acres. There are currently 702 Wilderness Areas.
- The Forest Service manages 30% of federal lands and 32% of NWPS acreage.

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

Desolation Volunteer Program: Year 4!

Welcome back to the Trailhead! This is the news update devoted to the Desolation Wilderness Volunteer and Education Program, which is entering its 4th season in 2007. Our number of volunteer wilderness rangers continues to increase each year. Currently, 33 people are

contributing time and energy to the program. In fact, the high number of interested people spurred the development of a second program, the Wilderness Monitoring Program for volunteers whose primary interests were resource oriented. What is the purpose of our volun-

teer 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 pro-

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What is Wilderness?

How are wilderness areas different from other wild areas

Wilderness is an area of natural land or water which has been designated by congress to be preserved in a wild and natural condition. A designated wilderness area is different than wild lands. The term "wild lands" usually refers to any undeveloped lands, while a wilderness area has special legal protections. People can visit wilderness but cannot remain there for any extended period of time. Developments such as houses, restaurants and stores as well as mechanical devices such as cars, bikes, chainsaws and powerboats are usually not allowed in the wilderness. Howard Zahniser wrote the first draft of the

Wilderness Act in 1956. The draft was then rewritten 65 times. It was finally signed into law by Lyndon B. Johnson on September 3, 1964 (4 months after Zahniser died). The Wilderness Act was designed to create areas for the "use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment of wilderness". This act states that wilderness is to be "protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which... has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation" and "shall be devoted to the purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific,

educational, conservation, and historic use." When the Wilderness Act was passed in 1964 there were 54 areas (covering 9.1 million acres) in 13 states designated as wilderness. There are now 702 areas, encompassing a total 107,436,608 acres, that are part of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Rand Guthrie

"The wilderness holds answers to questions man has not yet learned to ask."

-Nancy Newball

The Great White Wilderrat



About three years ago, Steve, one of the wilderness rangers, camped in a favorite stealth ranger spot above Maud Lake. The site was just high enough to afford a good overview of the popular Maud campsites, and he'd frequented it all season to keep an eye out for illegal campfires .

On this particular visit, Steve had finished his patrol for the day and settled in to enjoy the cool September evening. He cooked himself some dinner and stretched out to read a book for a while before bed. Finally as last light faded, he hung his food out of reach of bears and marmots, fastened the hip belt of his pack around a small scrub pine, and laid his leather-cased FS radio just outside the door to his tent. In moments he was fast asleep.

As Steve tells the story, he was awakened around midnight by a scuffling outside the tent. Bear tracks had been seen earlier that season lower down on Rockbound trail, and the movement outside had substance and deliberation to it. It could be a cub investigating his backpack or negotiating his bear hang. The sounds were unapologetically determined. Cautiously he unzipped the flap and peered into the moonlit camp.

There, Steve described to the rest of us rangers afterward, stood the largest pure white possum he had ever seen. Except it had a furry, flattened tail, hairless ears and bulging eyes. And there are no possums at 7600 feet.

Naturally we received his story skeptically. Some of the guys insisted that Steve must have been tipping a flask. Except that Steve didn't drink. And he managed to shut us up altogether when he presented the remains of his chewed leather radio case for our inspection. It would not be beyond Steve to concoct an elaborate joke, but his insistence seemed sincere. It

was a bona fide mystery, and it became known to us then as the "Great White Wilderrat".

Time passed, but no other ranger was privileged with a sighting of the Great White Wilderrat. Steve never faltered in his retelling of the tale, and even sent each of us out with coordinates to the stealth campsite to seek it out. But it was not to reappear, and in spite of the chewed radio case, some of us dared to wonder if perhaps this colorful and experienced ranger had gone a wee bit round the bend.

Two years later I accompanied the manager of the forest's White Pine Blister Rust program up along the ridgeline near Rockbound Pass to collect Whitebark Pine cones for her seedbank program. A ancient whitebark pine grandmother with sprawling branches as thick as an elephant's leg had caught my notice on a previous trip. It's canopy spread for perhaps 20 feet in all directions from the trunk, creating living benches and graceful archways to crawl beneath. On a whim, we set up a small tent beneath it and left the rainfly off so we could look up through mosquito netting and the branches at the stars.

We had settled in for the night. Around us hung assorted pieces of our debris from the tree limbs, damp clothing, my shiny sunglasses, some binoculars. Except for the steady wind it was quiet and we fell asleep easily.

And then it happened. A scuffling outside the tent. Unapologetically determined movements. Cautiously I unzipped the flap and peered out into the moonlit tree branches. There I saw what appeared to be the largest possum-like creature I had ever seen. Except that it had a furry, flattened tail, hairless ears and bulging eyes. And there are no possums at 9500 feet.

The creature made its way slowly, deliberately along a massive branch, then took my shiny sunglasses in its mouth and continued forward. It was white, or maybe a very light buff color, and had that dozy, uncomprehending expression on its face that night creatures exhibit when illuminated by a flashlight or headlights. I clapped my hands at it as I climbed from the tent, not sure how close I dared to get. It moved sluggishly, but seemed disinclined to release my glasses. Ultimately it dropped them when they hung up on a stob, and I squealed "the great white wilderrat!" as it shuffled off into the rocky darkness.

Buzzing from the experience, we gathered ourselves enough to collect our hanging debris in anticipation of another visit, then settled back in to sleep. Before long the wilderrat had returned. This time it was on the ground in front of the tent and was peeling the hard blue plastic from my aluminum pot tongs. It spotted me, and began to disappear with them, but dropped them at the last minute. We gathered more debris together, eventually hanging a few remaining items from thin high branches above the tent, branches that could not possibly support the creature. Then to sleep....WHUMPH! We were startled awake by the noise and the shaking tent. Looking up through the mosquito netting we were met with the vast soft pink underbelly of the wilderrat, who had chosen to use our tent as a bridge between branches to reach our hanging shiny things. We waited as she explored her possibilities, blissfully unconcerned with us, then finally gave up.

Desolation Lake Names: Where did they come from? Part II

By William J. Finch, Wilderness

The first half of this article appeared in last season's The Trailhead¹ and in that article, I discussed the origin of many lake names, particularly those with Native American sounding names found in the Desolation Valley area of Desolation Wilderness like Ropi and Toem.

In June of this year, I received an email from Wanda Perschnick who is a Forest Service employee working in South Lake Tahoe. She had read the *Trialhead* article and spotted what she new to be an error. With her permission, here is the text of the email:

"Hello Bill, I'm an employee on the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and recently saw your article on lake names in Desolation from last year. I have some information regarding the name of Toem Lake. I have it from near first hand source that it was named after Tom Emeral; not Tom Emory as stated in your article. A few years back I spoke with Bob Emeral, who passed away recently. Bob was in his 90's. He was married to my mother's cousin, Ruth Emeral, who is still living in Sacramento and is in her 80's. Bob was son of Tom Emeral and told me that as a child he accompanied his dad on trips into Desolation with their "fishing club" that stocked the lakes with trout. He told me the story of how several of the lakes were named by combining the first 2 letters of both first and last names of the men. They did this because it sounded like Native American type names. Bob told me that Toem was named after his dad - Tom Emeral. I was pleased to read your article that corroborated Bob's story. Even though it may seem picky, I did want to bring to your

attention the correct name (I believe) of Tom Emeral. Thanks, Wanda Perschnick, Infra Coordinator, Resource Financial Mgmt Specialist, USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Mgmt Unit."

As a follow-up, the information was passed on to the author of the resource which I researched to obtain my information for this article. He expressed appreciation at being able to set the facts straight and promised to make the correction in the next edition of his book. Thank you, Wanda, for coming forward with this information so that the "history" of Desolation Wilderness can properly reflect credit attributed to those who actually participated in it. Desolation wilderness were named by other groups of people. Two such groups called themselves the "Echo Lakes Gang" and "The Wright's Lake Gang." Both groups were comprised, for the most part, by the cabin owners in their respective areas. As you look at your Desolation Wilderness map, you can see the lakes near both Echo and Wright's Lake reflect the names of people, things, geography, and flora.

In other parts of Desolation Wilderness, cattlemen, dairymen, and others had their say in the naming of many of the lakes. I found it interesting to learn why some of west side lakes are numbered lakes, such as Lake No. 9. These lakes were named after cow camps which usually were set up at or near a lake, e.g. Cow Camp Number 9.

I find that my investigation and research of all things related to this marvelous landscape we play in called Desolation Wilderness just serves to make my each and every

experience in the back country all the more personally enjoyable — especially when I can share some of the information with the people I meet along the way.

Primary References:

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

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



About the Author

Bill Finch has been a Wilderness Volunteer since the program began four years ago. He has been an active participant in all parts of the program and has helped the Forest Service improve the program.

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves."

-John Muir

¹ *The Trailhead* 2006 newsletter can be found on the Forest Service website below:
http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado/documents/volunteers/deso/deso_volunteer_news.pdf

Wildlife in Desolation

A partial list...

Mammals

- Pine marten
 - Weasel
 - Badger
 - Coyote
 - Bobcat
- White-tailed jack rabbit
 - Snowshoe hare
 - Black bear
 - Mule deer
 - Black-tailed deer
 - Wolverine
 - Pacific fisher
 - Mountain Lion

Rodents

- Yellow-bellied marmot
- Belding ground squirrel
- Golden-manteled ground squirrel
- Yello pine chipmunk
 - Lodgepole pine chipmunk
- Douglas squirrel
 - Pika
 - Porcupine
- Busy-tailed woodrat
- White-footed mouse

Birds

- Horned grebe
- Cooper's hawk
- Red-tailed hawk
- Northern Goshawk
 - Bald eagle
- Great horned owl
 - Great gray owl
- Common nighthawk
 - Stellar's jay
- Clark's nutcracker
 - Blue grouse
 - Mountain quail
 - Peregrine falcon
- White-breasted nuthatch
- Red-breasted nuthatch
 - Oregon junco

Voices for Preservation

The Roots of Wilderness

Our own Desolation Wilderness alone receives over 100,000 visitors each year, while nationally, an estimated 12-million people visit a designated Wilderness. Its hard to believe, but there was once a time when wilderness had to be scarce before it was valued. When the original European settlers arrived they found a 1.9 billion-acre wilderness. But at first wilderness was only seen as an obstacle. So it was that at first, pristine forests were cut down, rangelands plowed and rivers dammed as the mantra of Manifest Destiny was being embraced by a young nation that saw the Great Plains, the Sierra and the frontier wild lands as something to beat back and subdue. Over time, growing populations, expanding civilization and widespread urban development would consume vast regions of the nation including some of this country's most scenic and pristine lands. After 300-years, 98% of this nation's wilderness was gone.

But softly at first, and soon growing louder arose the voices of concern from 19th century writers and philosophers. Henry David Thoreau believed that not only did nature bring out the best in people, but that a natural world provided inspiration and beauty and in an 1851 speech he was to proclaim that "in wildness is the preservation of the world." John Muir, who founded the Sierra Club in 1892 would add his passions and his eloquence to argue for the preservation of wilderness for its own right. That wilderness was a necessity in a world that was "over-civilized." Over the years others joined in to promote an awareness of the value of preserving wilderness in a nation where

undeveloped wild lands were quickly disappearing. In 1935, Robert Marshall along with Aldo Leopold helped found the Wilderness Society, dedicating their lives to championing the importance of wilderness for both people and for nature. They emphasized the connection between mankind and the environment, and the need for wilderness preserves, arguing that



Jack's Peak Photo: Brent Carpenter

the American culture and our unique pioneer spirit were shaped by the very presence of wilderness.

Slowly, attitudes and perspectives began to change. The idea of protecting the remaining wilderness areas in the nation began to take root. The debate was often heated, and there were endless disagreements, but the time had finally come to try to protect what wilderness was left, while there was still time left...while there was still some wilderness left. The Wilderness Act was to undergo 65 revisions, generated by countless hours of arguments and 6,000

Protection

pages of testimony before it was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on September 3, 1964. The Wilderness Act was controversial and it was bold, and it was to mark the beginning of a new era of preservation for our nation's natural heritage for present and future generations.

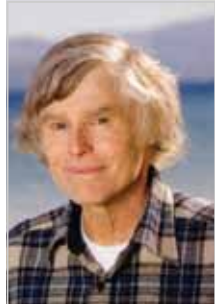
The Wilderness Act ensured that suitable wild land or scenic public lands would not be developed and would remain natural for future use and enjoyment as "wilderness." A place where nature and nature's forces dominate the landscape; a place that people can visit and enjoy as long as the wilderness character is preserved. The new law established a national wilderness preservation system that initially identified 54 areas covering 9.1 million acres. Included were pristine Sierra lakes, mountain meadows, old growth forests and raging wild rivers. Over the past 43-years, other natural areas have been

added to the national system, and today there are 702 designated wilderness areas totaling over 107 million-acres. The Wilderness Act was a monumental first step towards preserving this nation's natural heritage, but there are still challenges ahead. Only one thing is certain, that is as our population increases and civilization demands and consumes more land for homes, highways and industry, the importance and the need for preserving wilderness will only grow.

Don Lane

Spotlight Forest Service Staff

Autobiography of Don Lane



Don Lane has spent over 35-years with the US Forest Service at Lake Tahoe. For many of those years as the Supervisory Recreation Forester, he has been responsible for the management of all of the National Forest campgrounds, beaches, picnic areas, trails, and backcountry in the Tahoe Basin. In addition, he has been both a Desolation Wilderness Ranger as well as the Wilderness Manager for most of those years. With degrees in liberal arts, forest management, and land use planning, Lane has taught a

number of courses at the Lake Tahoe Community College on Tahoe natural history, forestry and recreation land use. He has authored a score of magazine and newspaper articles on Tahoe history, and frequently gives lectures on Tahoe's history to organizations around the Basin. For the last 12-years as a public service, Lane hosts a daily radio feature on Tahoe radio station KOWL AM-1490. Called "Don Lane's Tales of Tahoe," the popular program focuses on Tahoe's colorful history. To date, he has broadcast over 3000 feature programs. In addition to his radio program and lectures, Lane has authored a book "Tahoe Tales of Bygone Days and Memorable Pioneers."

The Great White Wilderrat

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As the wilderrat shuffled off towards her boulder home, we pulled our sleeping bags from the tent and moved out from under the shelter of the tree and up into the open granite to sleep beneath the stars. On my return, I called Steve immediately. Finally vindicated, he chastised me gently for ever having doubted him.

None of the biologists I spoke to had a ready identification for the great white wilderrat, and listened to my tale, I suspect, with a healthy dose of skepticism themselves. But I finally found the answer on the internet. The Great White Wilderrat is, in fact, *Neotoma cinerea*, or bushy-tailed woodrat. Legendary as the original pack rat in western lore, the creatures have an insatiable preference for shiny objects, and are known to have dropped whatever sensible thing they might be carrying

to pick up a coin, a spoon or other essentially useless baubles. At lower elevations woodrats build tent-like homes out of sticks and decorate them with their shiny treasures; pop can lids, bits of glass, shiny plastics. The high elevation woodrat makes its home in rock outcrops or rockslides, lining the interior with sticks and accenting it with whatever shiny trinkets they can gather. They are documented to elevations of about 11,000 feet, and in one instance in the Inyo National Forest's White Mountains even to 14,000 feet.

The animals are predominantly nocturnal and live on pine needles, twigs, fruits and seeds. Most accounts give an overall length of about 18 inches nose to tail. I beg to differ.

Gwyn Ingram

Spotlight Volunteers

Autobiography of Zeb Drivdahl

Born and raised in Olympia, WA. Attended college at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA where I got a degree in Computer Science with an additional major in Business Administration. Moved to Sacramento in 2001 when my wife got in to UC Davis Law School. Since then have worked full time from home as a software developer for a company in Washington, DC. In addition to volunteer work with Desolation wilderness, I also volunteer as a member of the Placer County Search and Rescue Ground Unit. I became a volunteer almost by accident. I wasn't even aware of the program until I met one of the recreation rangers, Melanie Hornsby, at an EMT recertification class. I've always been interested in doing work as a ranger so during one of the class breaks I cornered Melanie and she was kind enough to give me information regarding the program.

For me, the best part of being a volunteer is knowing that I'm doing something to take care of a place that I love. Ever since moving to California I've loved the Sierra Nevada and being a ranger allows me to do my part to preserve a small, very special corner of them. The range and diversity of the work involved in being a volunteer ranger is also a big draw. On one Saturday in June, I had to use my computer skills to help work the permit desk in the morning, then head out on a hike in the afternoon where I assisted a hiker suffering from altitude sickness, stopped some teenagers from vandalizing a few trees, answered numerous visitor questions about the area, and got an amazing view from the top of horsetail falls. There aren't many jobs, volunteer or otherwise, that can give you that kind of range in an 8 hour period.

Biography of Mary and Gary Martin

Mary and Gary share a common interest in nature as well as caring for our world. Gary received a degree in wildlife biology from Chabot and UC Berkeley, and Mary received a degree in special education. Gary originally was from Santa Barbara, CA, and came to work for Park Police and County Sheriff departments for a combined 34 years in the Bay area. Mary worked as a program director at the Crystal Springs Rehabilitation Center in San Mateo. Both Mary and Gary have devoted countless hours to Boy and Girl Scouts of America and teaching young to young-at-heart students. Gary teaches at the college level while Mary teaches science classes for elementary and home school. Although retired, Mary and Gary continue to give back to their community by volunteering with the

Desolation Wilderness Volunteer Program. Gary and Mary brought their interpretive skills to Wrights Lake this summer, creating a "Unnatural Trail" hike from the Chappell Bridge. Kids filed along the trail and counted the number of things they saw that were unnatural; a rubber animal, a cigarette butt, a plastic leaf. Beyond the unnatural trail, kids studied sounds, sitting quietly just to listen and identifying the sounds they heard. They listened as a ranger read clues to identify animals of the forest, and looked closely at an array of wildflowers in full bloom.

Though time conspired to limit the number of times we could offer the hike, Gary and Mary moved forward with a host of ideas for next year's interpretive program. We look forward to working with them in future.



Early summer meadow in Desolation.

Photo: Rand Guthrie

“The pathless world of wild nature is a surpassing school.”

- Gary Snyder

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin”

-J.R.R. Tolkien

“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children”

- Unknown, Haida Indian saying



Lake Doris. Photo: Jessica Ilse.

Forest Service Staff



Allen Siegel retired from AT&T after 25 years in 2003. Allen has been a volunteer with the US Forest Service for over 16 years. He has worked at the Carson Pass Visitor Center for over 13 years. He has also been a Board Member of the El Dorado Forest Interpretive Association. Allen joined the Pacific Ranger Station staff in 2006 as a seasonal worker. He spends the winter months in Arizona and Mexico.



Jennifer Ebert served 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 became increasingly involved in resource management within Desolation including numerous restoration and monitoring projects, and fire use. This summer Jenn moved to the Inyo NF as a vegetation management planner. Jen has a degree in wildlife management from Humboldt State University. She and her husband Jeff have a daughter, Emily, who is 4 years old.



Gwyn Ingram is the lead wilderness ranger for Desolation on the Eldorado National Forest. She started her career with the Forest Service as a volunteer Nordic ski and snowmobile patroller on the Sierra National Forest in 1991. Volunteering led her to a position as a wilderness ranger first in the Kaiser and Dinkey Lakes wildernesses on the Sierra, and later as wilderness manager in the John Muir and a portion of the Ansel Adams wildernesses. She became a permanent Forest Service employee on the Eldorado in 2002, and is particularly interested in the field of wilderness education.



Jessica Ilse is currently the wildlife biologist on the Pacific Ranger District. She began her service 6 years ago while finishing her ecology degree from UC Santa Cruz. Jessica now is involved in resource management on the Pacific District, including in Desolation. As a wildlife biologist she is responsible for documenting the effects of ground-disturbing projects upon wildlife and creating projects that improve habitat for wildlife. In addition to her wildlife biologist duties, she manages campsite condition and group encounter monitoring, as well as watershed restoration projects and fire use in the wilderness since Jenn's departure.

Quick Facts

- **Pre 1800's** Area visited for thousands of years by local native groups. Winters were too cold for permanent year round living
- **Mid 1800's** First people of European descent arrive in area
- **1899** Tahoe Forest Reserve established, which included the land which is now Desolation Wilderness
- **1910** Eldorado National Forest established
- **1931** Establishment of the Desolation Valley Primitive Area
- **1969** Congress designated the Desolation Wilderness as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System
- **1971** The Forest Service begins a permit system
- **1978** The Forest Service begins a quota system to reduce the impact from large numbers of campers concentrating at various places in the wilderness
- **1990** Campfires prohibited in Desolation Wilderness
- **1997** Forest Service begins to charge a minimal fee for overnight wilderness permits in Desolation Wilderness
- **2006** Desolation Wilderness awarded Aldo Leopold Stewardship Award for national excellence

Many more Forest Service staff are involved in managing Desolation Wilderness in addition to those highlighted above.

Desolation Wilderness

U.S. Forest Service

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"The earth laughs in flowers."

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Pacific Ranger District Desolation Wilderness Volunteer Program

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Desolation Wilderness Program: Year 4

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vide the public an opportunity to be involved in management 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, have both moved on to other places. Allen Siegel has stepped into the position of volunteer coordinator in addition to his wilderness information desk duties at the Pacific Ranger Station. Gwyn Ingram is working as the wilderness education coordinator. Both Allen and Gwyn are involved in the day to day work of the volunteer program.



Unmapped Tarn. Photo: Brent Carpenter

How busy were the volunteers in 2007?

- Volunteers: 30
- Hours by Sept. 9th: 1,700
- Volunteers who have come back in 2007: 14
- Monitoring trips: *countless*
- Visitor contacts: *countless*
- Number of rare yellow-legged-frogs and tadpoles found: 30+

Did you know?

- Two lakes in Desolation have dams associated with Hydroelectric power production. These were installed before the area became wilderness - *Rubicon and Rockbound Lakes*.
- One lake in Desolation has a dam for Eldorado County drinking water - *Aloha Lake*.
- In 2006 there were 12,634 overnight and 16,586 day visitors who received a permit.