

# **MOUNT SHASTA**

## **Climbing Ranger Report 2020**

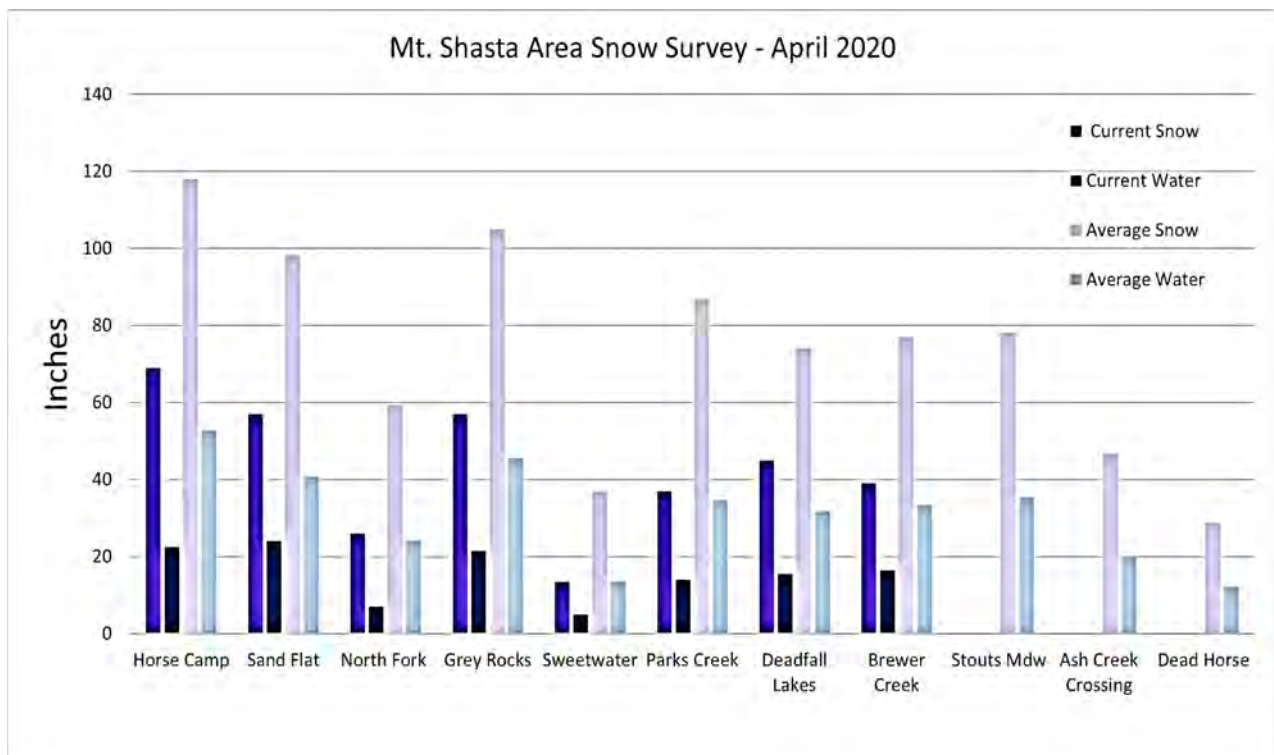


## Season Summary

The year of 2020, where do we even start? The weather over winter 2019/20 left most wishing for more. Precipitation was well below average. This set the mountain up for a sub-par climbing season. Good climbing conditions means snow on the mountain -- pure and simple. The less snow, the more rockfall and the earlier the mountain melts out into a giant, loose pile of rubble.

Snow survey, conducted by USFS personnel, observed the snowpack well below historic average. For the Sacramento/Shasta/Trinity watershed in April, numbers were half of historic values. For the McCloud River watershed, snow depths were only 23% of normal.

A shallow snowpack, especially on Mount Shasta, can mean prime climbing conditions occur earlier in the spring, and last for a short period of time. It is a gradual decrescendo toward increased rockfall, icy snow surfaces and one-step-up, two-steps-back type of climbing in the loose scree/rock. Slip and fall consequences are greatly exacerbated by sliding/tumbling falls on snow that terminates into boulders.



Then came COVID-19. The global pandemic affected people and places like never seen before. Streams of visitors fleeing confined, city life rushed to the mountains. Small, local economies were stressed.

In anticipation of this and a busy climbing season, the USFS implemented an area closure on Mount Shasta above 10,000 feet in elevation on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. Naturally, social media feedback was both positive and negative. Springtime is the most popular time to climb the mountain and during a typical year will attract up to 7,000 climbers. This creates extreme congestion at trailheads and popular base camps. Climbing is also inherently risky and law enforcement and/or search and rescue operations may be limited during the pandemic. Due to these public health and safety concerns, the forest order prohibiting entry or use of the upper mountain was deemed necessary. The general message was that high-risk activities that increase your chance of injury or distress should be avoided. The closure order worked well and most fell into compliance.

On May 16<sup>th</sup>, the closure was lifted and so were the flood gates. Bunny Flat was right back to usual with vehicles parked hundreds of yards down the road. Crowds like we have never seen before continued all summer long. Mountains of trash and other disrespectful behavior occurred. It was a long, tiresome summer of trying to take care of resources and facilities all the while worrying about not contracting the virus.

Visitor use begins as primarily climbers, skiers and other winter recreation. As summer progresses, campers, hikers, motor tourists and spiritual use dominates. Some climbers, despite warnings, still gave the mountain a go all season long.



If a global pandemic and extreme visitor use wasn't enough, Mother Nature brought on a record-setting year of wildfires. By the end of the year for California alone, 9,639 fires burned 4,397,809 acres, more than 4% of the state's roughly 100 million acres of land, making 2020 the largest wildfire season recorded in California's modern history (Source: Ca Dept of Forestry & Fire Protection). Just south of Mount Shasta, the August Complex fire was described as the first "gigafire" as the fire area burned exceeded 1 million acres. The fire destroyed over 10,000 structures and cost \$2.079 billion in fire suppression costs. The intensity of the fire season has been attributed in part to decades of poor forest management as well as increased warming due to climate change.

Numerous other USFS forest order closures related to fire were implemented. The entire forest/region was closed from September 7<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup>. Following this closure, the Shasta/McCloud Management Unit was under a dispersed camping closure order from September 19<sup>th</sup> to November 15<sup>th</sup>, where no overnight camping was allowed within certain boundaries.



By the end of the season, climbing rangers and recreation techs alike were spent.



## **Mt. Shasta Summit Collections for FY 2020**

### **Fee Tube Collections**

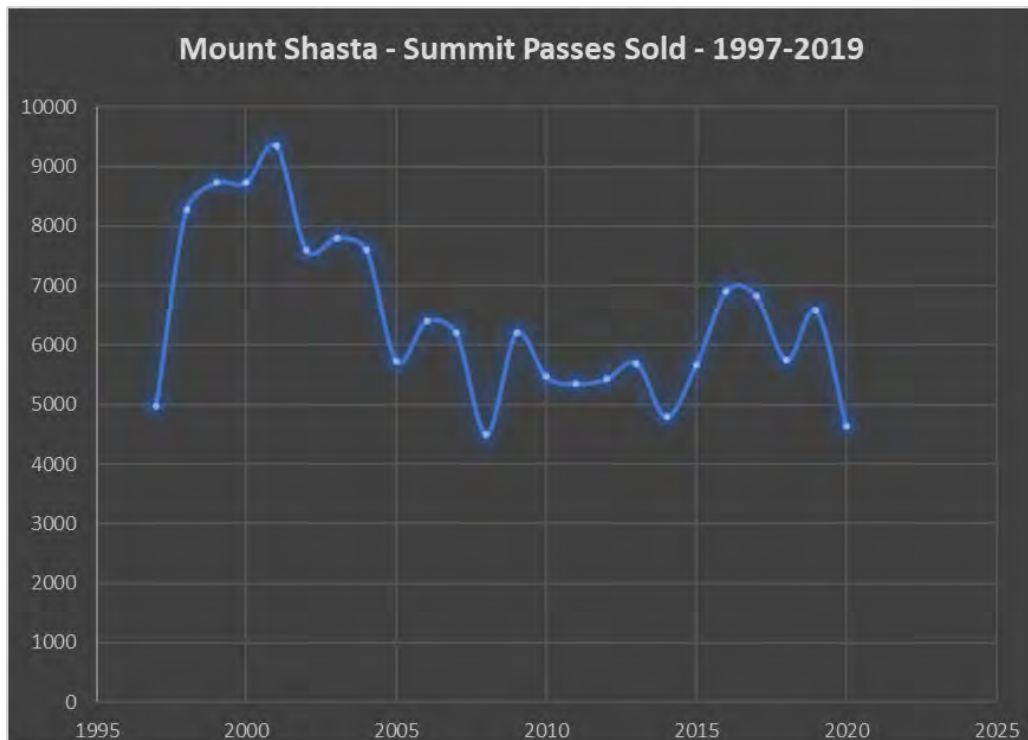
<b>Site</b>	<b>Number of Sales</b>	<b>Total Sales</b>
Brewer Creek	306	7,664.66
Bunny Flat	1,374	34,350.16
Clear Creek	646	16,151.85
Mt. Shasta Office	310	7,751.45
North Gate	138	3,465.85
Old Ski Bowl	25	618.63
Sand Flat	2	55.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,801</b>	<b>\$70,057.60</b>

### Mt. Shasta Summit Pass Sales

Type of Pass	Number of Passes	Total Sales
3 Day Pass	80	2,000.00
3 Day Pass-Senior Discount	1	12.50
3 Day Vendor Sales	1340	30,150.00
Annual Pass	59	1,770.00
Annual Pass Senior Discount	2	30.00
Annual Pass Vendor Sales	350	9,450.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,832</b>	<b>\$43,412.50</b>

### Summary for Mt. Shasta Summit Collections

Source	Number of Sales	Total Collected
Fee Tubes	2,801	\$70,057.60
Pass Sales	1,832	\$43,412.50
<b>Grand Total for FY 2020</b>	<b>4,633</b>	<b>\$113,470.10</b>



## **Search & Rescue**

The US Forest Service Mt. Shasta Climbing Rangers continue to operate and conduct search and rescue activities on the mountain under a current memorandum of understanding with the Siskiyou County Sheriff's department, the lead agency for all search and rescue operations. Mt. Shasta City Fire and CALFIRE will also come to the aid of visitors for lower elevation mishaps and medical aids near trailheads and/or roads.

A typical search or rescue on the mountain begins with a 911 call. Cell service is good in many locations on Mt. Shasta. Dispatch forwards the call through to the on-duty Sheriff's department SAR coordinator. The coordinator, under the MOU, shall notify on duty USFS ranger personnel, and a plan is devised. Helicopters used for rescues on the mountain include California Highway Patrol out of Redding and the National Guard out of Sacramento. The CHP H-14/16 conducts most of the helicopter rescues on the mountain. Two helicopters are stationed in Redding and pilots/crew are on duty and usually able to respond within 30 minutes. Both helicopters have hoist capabilities and a medic on board. Many of the pilots have years of experience flying on the mountain. Rangers and SAR personnel train with both agencies annually. This year, due to COVID, the annual helicopter SAR training was canceled.

This year, the total number of incidents on the mountain were down from the last couple seasons, most likely due to COVID and the associated forest closure and stay at home orders. Summit passes sold average over the past 20 years is 6,467 and in 2020 the Forest Service sold 4,633. For the same time period, search and rescue incident average is 20, with only 12 incidents for the year. Unfortunately, one of those was a fatality on September 26<sup>th</sup> on the north side, Hotlum/Bolam route . A 36-year-old male climber in excellent physical shape with moderate climbing experience slipped and fell while descending the route near 11,500 feet. The snow/glacier conditions at the time were very icy and self-arrest impossible on steep slopes.





Location of ultimate resting place of the climber fall on the north side, Hotlum/Bolam route

We had a couple slips and fall accidents on the West Face also, both within a short period of time in June. Below is a picture of where both climbers fell (red circle) and ended up (X). This steep area near 11,000 feet along the West Face gully route rolls over the edge of a long, lateral moraine. A slip and fall is exacerbated by exposed rocks at the bottom of the slope. Both climbers slid approximately 400 feet on snow into boulders.





The West Face route with a circle depicting where both climbers fell and an 'X' where they came to rest.

Overall, common themes this season for incidents include slips and falls on snow and/or rock on the descent. Additionally, we always get a couple of searches each season for climbers who are unfamiliar with the terrain, separated from their group, do not have navigation tools and get lost in poor weather/limited visibility conditions. One of these incidents, which has happened more than once in the past, occurred when an Avalanche Gulch climber descended the Whitney Glacier while descending across the Summit Plateau. The Whitney glacier in recent years of low precipitation winters is a jumbled mess of rock, ice and crevasses.



The Whitney Glacier

## **The Rangers**

It was another season for rangers Nick Meyers (19<sup>th</sup>), Forrest Coots (14<sup>th</sup>), Paul Moore (4<sup>th</sup>) and Ryan Sorenson (2<sup>nd</sup>). We were fortunate to also have intern ranger Nathan Delmar for several months of the season.

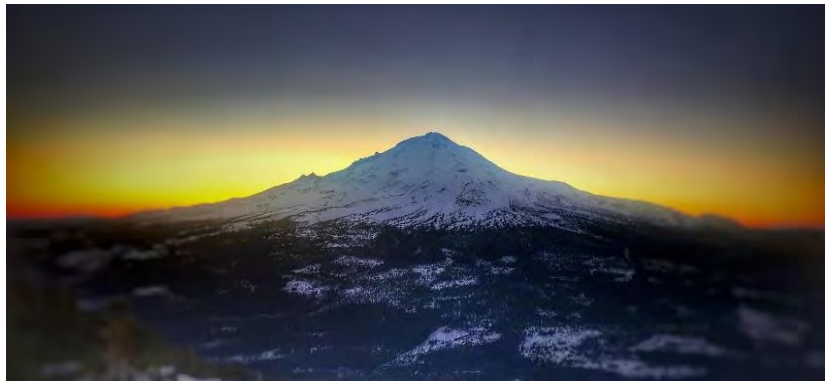
Despite COVID, the entire Shasta/McCloud Management Unit was inundated with visitors of all sorts. Rangers spent ample time on the mountain patrolling, participating in search and rescues, maintaining trailhead facilities and making hundreds of visitor contacts.

Safety and proper sanitation remain top priorities. Weekends were the busiest for climbers and campers, but mid-week crowds increased this

season, too. Rangers work under the umbrella of the larger recreation department and also function as trail crew, sign technicians and sanitation specialists. There are not enough fingers and toes to count the number of pickup truck and stake side loads of dispersed camping trash and abandoned camps hauled to the dump. Trash of all kind left behind in all places was common this season. The Everitt Memorial Highway corridor and the South Fork Road are popular dispersed camping areas. It was quite evident that people living in populated areas were flocking to the mountains to escape cabin fever effects of the pandemic. It was unfortunate to see the disrespectful display of untidiness. Nonetheless, a lot of job satisfaction is gained through helping manage, protect and clean up such an amazing place as Mount Shasta.

Rangers are also proud of another season with zero on the job injuries. The job is widely variable and has many moments of high-risk activity. It is a testament to each ranger's ability to safely manage themselves and others in dangerous environments.

The Mt Shasta Climbing Rangers are a small team on a big mountain. It's critical that we work together, trust each other and communicate clearly and often. Everyone brings something different to the table. It's these common traits that keep us safe and happy in the job.





## Nick Meyers



Mr. Meyers continues as the crusty old lead climbing ranger for the mountain, creeping up on 20 years in the making. His entire FS career has been on Mt. Shasta. Yes, his knees are tired, but he loves every bit of his job, the crew he works with and the place he lives. Being a Cancerian on the astrological calendar and a bit moody sometimes, Nick does not let it get in the way of professional leadership, striving to keep kindness and respect toward others at the forefront. Nick is always honing some sort of skill, seeking adventurous adventures or maybe just tinkering at home.



## Forrest Coots



Forrest is a long-time ranger and solid leader of the crew. He knows the ropes of the program better than most. His technical ability skiing and climbing are top notch. He is strong as hell and has the tenacity of a rumor. He might come across a little gruff on those days worn thin, but deep down his heart is gold. He cares about the mountain, the people who come to visit and most importantly, he cares about his crew of other rangers. A tried and true, trusted partner. Forrest is our chief Instagram and internet big wave surfer, sleuthing out those illegal outfitter guides, local gossip and keeping the crew posted on all things Mt. Shasta kooky.

## Paul Moore



Paul nearly swallowed his tooth as it popped out while gnawing down on a chicken wing. True story. It took a while to get into the dentist, so he scared visitors off with this look. Paul is one of the friendliest rangers on the mountain. He is always willing to contact visitors of all sort and find a common thread. This helps when asking for actions related to compliance of wilderness and forest rules. Paul also continues to hone his public speaking skills and is well versed in providing some of our educational outreach presentations.

# Ryan Sorenson



Ryan is like that favorite piece of gear you have that just won't stop, won't fail, keeps on going without a hitch or peep. He is in the best aerobic shape of all the rangers. At one point, Ryan had the climbing speed record on the mountain, sub 2 hours from Horse Camp to the summit. Wow. He holds back though, because he is kind and polite, so that the rest of us can keep a little pride. Ryan has solid computing skills and helps maintain our popular website, [www.shastaavalanche.org](http://www.shastaavalanche.org), submitting countless climbing condition observations and climbing advisory summaries. You'll NEVER hear Ryan complain of cold, tire, hungry. He does what is needed, end of story. Ryan also works as an avalanche forecaster in the winter with the Mt. Shasta Avalanche Center.



## Nathan Delmar



Our fresh intern for the summer from the East Coast, Nathan was a complete asset to the program. His youthful and adventurous spirit, hard work ethic and hundreds of random facts he would share with us was a joy to be around. Nathan took to the job very easily, not only technically speaking but with soft skills too like communicating with the myriad of personalities we encounter around the mountain.



## **Outreach & Public Education**

A long history has been established within the US Forest Service ranger program to foster local partnerships within the community. We continue this today through a variety of local and broader outreach efforts. Many forms of free education and awareness are provided, locally and out of the area, children to adults. This year, all in person events were cancelled due to COVID-19.

## **Volunteers**

The rangers employ a select few volunteers each season to help with a myriad of duties. The visitor information trailer is a great example of government/local partnerships and volunteers giving back to the community. The visitor information trailer locations include Bunny Flat, Panther Meadows and the Old Ski Bowl. Volunteers help share information with visitors about all things Mount Shasta and the area. Volunteers also help with Bunny Flat facility cleaning and maintenance and Panther Meadows campground host duties. Our volunteers are a solid set of people with high integrity and we appreciate their willingness to help us on the mountain. Mount Shasta is a world class destination for many forms of use and recreation. It takes a village of dedicated, passionate and caring folks to protect and share all it has to offer.



Bruce, a longtime volunteer and member of Siskiyou County Search & Rescue, staffs the visitor information trailer.



A couple classic volunteers from left to right: Nearly Normal Bob and Steve on the Mountain

## **Common Warnings and Incident Reports issued by Rangers:**

- Motorized use in Mount Shasta Wilderness: This involves either over snow vehicles (snowmobile/snow cat) and/or ATV use

Dogs in Wilderness: Dogs are not allowed inside the Mount Shasta Wilderness or on Sierra Club land.

- Illegal Camping: These incidents are typically limited to people camping too close to springs/creeks inside the Mount Shasta Wilderness, specifically in the Clear Creek spring area just above tree line. Other illegal camping incidents involve camping in day use areas, or inside the Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) area of Panther Meadows. The only camping allowed in the TCP is in the designated sites of Panther Meadows campground.
- Sanitation/Litter: Rangers frequently find either climber camps or most often, transient camps outside of the Mount Shasta Wilderness in the Sand Flat/Bunny Flat/Panther Meadows area that are unsanitary with abandoned property and trash. Climber camps found are usually from improperly securing equipment/trash upon leaving for a summit attempt. Animals and wind will spread climber tents and gear far and wide. Rangers also find a lot of “micro-trash” at major base camps on Mount Shasta. Tear offs of wrappers, match sticks, tea bags, tent stakes, food scraps, etc. account for much of the trash hauled off the mountain.
- Abandoned camp: Abandoned camps are ongoing and most often found in the dispersed camping areas along the Everitt Memorial Highway, Sand Flat, Bunny Flat and Upper Ski Bowl. The South Fork Flats, Twin Arrows, and Bear Springs areas also host abandoned camp issues.
- SMMU District Trash: During slower times, rangers will patrol other areas around the SMMU district aside from the Everitt Memorial corridor and Mount Shasta Wilderness. Trash, waste dumps, shooting ranges, abandoned camps are found every year.
- Parking: On occasion we get vehicles parking and obstructing the Everitt Memorial Highway at or near Bunny Flat. It's not uncommon to

observe 150+ cars at the Bunny Flat Trailhead on a busy weekend. Our road counter on the Everitt Memorial Highway counted 131,088 cars for the 2017 year with an average of 2.2 people per car. This is a dead end road that terminates in the Old Ski Bowl.

- Fire/Campfire in Wilderness: Small campfire rings are found each year and are dismantled. Campfires are not allowed inside the Mount Shasta Wilderness. Fire rings are naturalized and ashes packed out.
- Oversize Group: Group size is limited to 10 inside the Mount Shasta Wilderness, as well as in Panther Meadows. This also includes groups of over 75 people outside Wilderness boundaries.
- Illegal Commercial Guiding: Commercial guiding on Mount Shasta without a permit is an ongoing occurrence, but one we are gaining ground on. Almost all suspected illegal commercial use lies within the spiritual/new age realm and outside of wilderness boundary, although we have had a few climbing groups suspected of illegal guiding.
- Exceeding 30 Day Stay limit: We often run into folks in Mount Shasta who want to spend the summer “living” in the Mount Shasta/McCloud district. Rangers must do their best to keep track of folks and their stay limit on the forest.



## 2020 Photos

A handful of photos from the season in no particular order... Enjoy!



Naturally, intern Nathan Delmar gets the dirty work, with the supervision and help from senior rangers of course. On “down” days off the mountain proper, rangers clean up the National Forest. Cleaning up abandoned camps and dispersed camping trash along the South Fork road and Everitt Memorial Highways could be a full time job. Tax payers monies hard at work here keep the local backyard clean. Rangers took over a hundred brimming truck loads of trash to the local landfill.





Ranger danger. Paul and Forrest at Bunny Flat, our home away from home. We spend a god awful amount of time here cleaning and maintaining trailhead facilities, managing the dispersed camp below the parking lot, talking with climbers and visitors and addressing parking issues. Bunny Flat is the gateway to the south side of the mountain and 15 minutes off the I-5 interstate. Needless to say, this place gets *crowded*. We joke that we need a full time Bunny Flat ranger. It's darn close to true.





Nick and Paul out on the Cabin Creek trail near the town of McCloud. With a one man trail crew this season, rangers assisted in many miles of local trail maintenance. This trail along with the PCT and many trails on the mountain were cleared of trees, signs replaced, water bars repaired and trail tread restored. It's a nice break to get away from the intense sun and environmental conditions of the big mountain for lower elevation duties like this. Except for the poison oak.



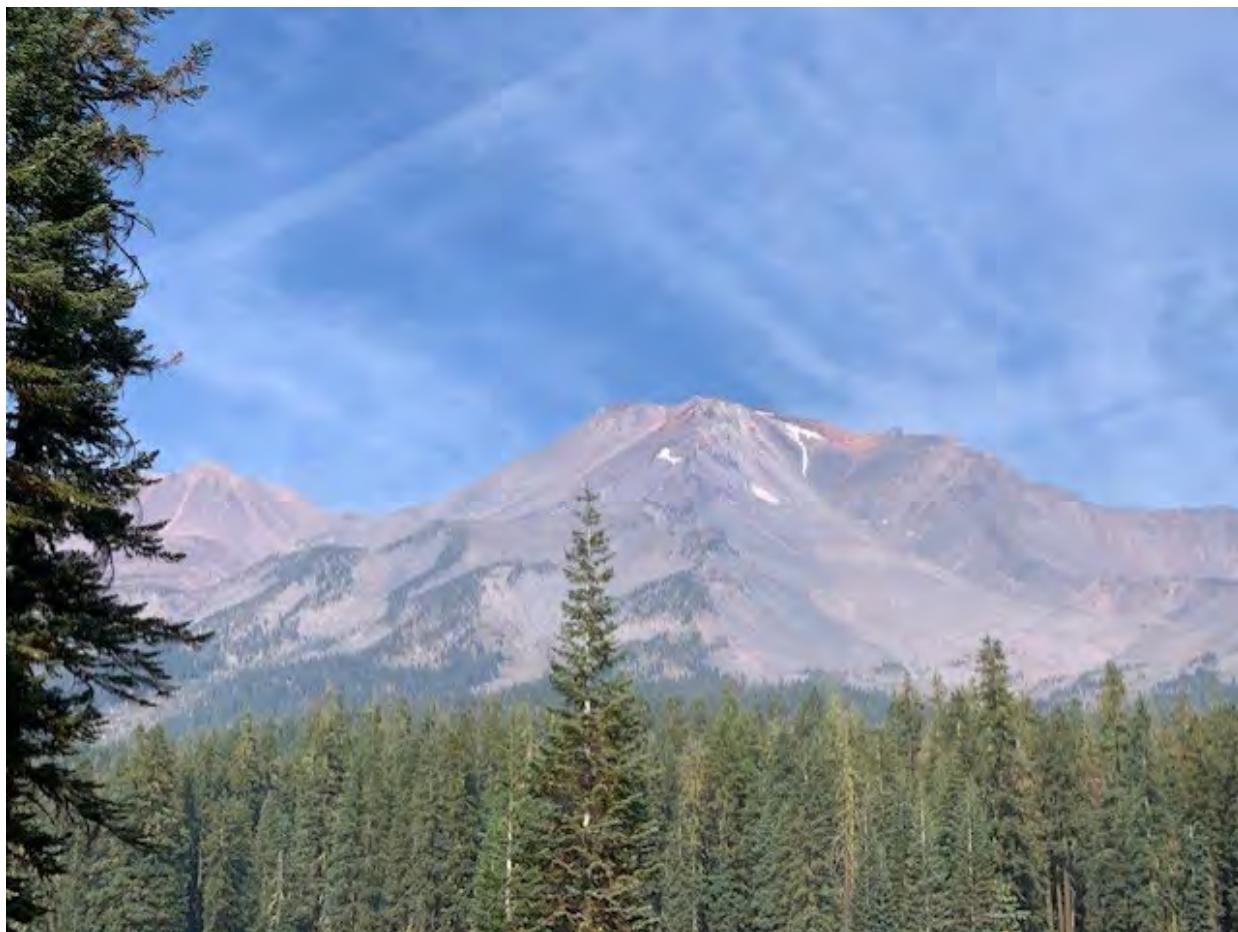


The 'loved to death' Panther Meadows. Rangers and volunteers try hard to keep visitors on trails and out of the meadow. This is an example of one of the many colorful and often cantankerous characters that we contact. Responses are across the board. In this particular case, the gentleman would not step out of the meadow.





California Highway Patrol helicopter departs the Old Ski bowl landing zone for a rescue on Green Butte. A hiker slipped and fell, injuring his ankle. The CHP helicopters (H-14/16) are stationed in Redding, Ca and are able to respond on most incidents within 30 minutes.



Mount Shasta late in the season with only a couple strips and specks of snow left. This made for poor climbing conditions and plenty of rockfall.

Rangers avoid steeper slopes and climbing via these routes during conditions like this.





A

summer/fall project for rangers included removing equipment from the Old Ski Bowl radio bunker and bringing power direct to our weather station telemetry. This was no easy task. Rock bars, a jack-hammer, shovels and a lot of blood and sweat were involved with this project. Many thanks to local USFS Fire crews for the help. The project was successful and completed just before the snow began to fly!



This was the site of an unpleasant, cold and dangerous open bivy at 12,500 feet in Avalanche Gulch/Trinity Chutes that Ranger Meyers and Coots spent with an injured climber late in the season. For the full story, read the October 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> incident narrative. Rockfall was audible all night long as rangers and the patient covered behind the only cover in the area, these small boulders pictured here.





Longtime rangers Coots (pictured) and Meyers make their morning decent from the overnight rescue in the Trinity Chutes. CHP helicopter was able to successfully hoist the patient early in the morning.





Helen Lake, 10,400 feet, is a common base camp for climbers and also a good landing zone for helicopter rescue.



Rangers and private climbers aid in the rescue of a West Face climber. There were two West Face rescues this season, both in late June. (See incident narratives 6/21 and 6/28 for full story)



Large, loose-wet avalanches are possible on Mt. Shasta and roller balls like this whopper a good indicators that larger avalanches are possible on those warm days.





Bunny Flat, 6,950, the rangers home away from home. A lot of time is spent here talking with visitors, cleaning facilities, etc. This trailhead is a major hub for recreation on the south side of the mountain. Closure signs pictured here were in place for COVID-19 precautions, early in the climbing season.





COVID-19 PPE



Ranges typically host an annual search and rescue helicopter training, however due to COVID-19, it was cancelled. Rangers still took the opportunity to travel to Redding CHP helibase and spend a day reviewing helicopter equipment, procedure, and protocol. Safety of rescuers in a high-risk environment is a top priority.



Bunny Flat, busy as ever on a weekend. It is not uncommon to find the entire lot stuffed with vehicles of all type and extending down the highway for  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile.





Rangers patrol not only on the mountain, but along the entire Everitt Memorial Highway Corridor. Needless to say, we meet, greet and speak to a myriad of colorful characters, including these two fellas' here.



# ***THANK YOU!***



All information, reports and statistics compiled by the USFS Mt. Shasta Climbing Rangers.

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