

STEWARDSHIP

Community Service and Camaraderie by Thomas Zentmyer

All I really needed were a few community service hours for school next year, which I just happened to put off until the last minute. However, like any fifteen-year-old nowadays, I despise heavy labor. Signing up for five days of backcountry trail stewardship in the Ansel Adams Wilderness would not have been my first choice, and I called myself crazy when I did so. Yet this week with Friends of the Inyo, the Inyo National Forest, and funding from the National Forest Foundation turned out to be one of the greatest experiences I've ever had.

Every job we did was different in its own way. The fallen logs we tackled with a crosscut saw could range from barren sticks taking no more than ten minutes to saw through to dead behemoths surrounded by a thick net of sticks and branches. Campsite rehab entailed disguising a campsite that was too close to water and turning it into one of the most uncomfortable places on earth. Campfire ring destruction gave you an opportunity to chuck rocks into the river (an activity anybody can enjoy), and cleaning water bars meant digging funnels so that any water would flow harmlessly off to the side instead of eroding the trail.

My fellow workers were an outstanding and encouraging group of six volunteers and two Friends of the Inyo staff. These people showed me what true mountain folk are like, whether they are geologists, nurses, journalists, or firefighters in the frontcountry. From them I got great stories, new friends, and even some writing tips. No matter how demanding the work, this

talented crew would keep me going until the workday was done.

I'm a frequent visitor to the backcountry, but this trip had scenery like I had never seen before. I would come back from a hard day of work and settle down for dinner, surrounded by the sound of gushing water, golden light from the setting sun, the gentle whisper of the trees, and the impressive mountains of the Ritter Range above Shadow Creek. Even in the midst of arduous labor, the place felt beautifully alive, with the soft swaying of the ferns, the occasional animal or birdsong, or the sunlight sifting through the trees and casting itself on the dust stirred up by our boots. The place had this immense power to drag me out of what I was doing and cause me to stare around in wonder.

More people my age, and more people in general, need to work together to help keep the Sierra as natural as possible, while also keeping it accessible for future generations. Our trails need care and love, and federal agencies aren't the only ones responsible. The Ansel Adams Wilderness Project offered me a wonderful opportunity to give back to the backcountry. I will use that opportunity again in the future, whether I need community service hours or not.

Thomas Zentmyer is a sophomore at Bishop High School and earned his community service hours in wild fashion with Friends of the Inyo on the Ansel Adams Wilderness Project in August of 2017. This article originally appeared in the Inyo Register.

Friends of the Inyo appreciates the partners and supporters that helped make our stewardship projects happen this summer:

- Alabama Hills Stewardship Group
- Amargosa Conservancy
- Bishop Paiute Tribe
- Bodie Hills Conservation Partnership
- Bodie State Historic Park
- Bureau of Land Management
- California Department of Fish & Wildlife
- Eastern Sierra 4WD Club
- Eastern Sierra Land Trust
- Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
- Inyo National Forest
- June Lake Trails Committee
- Mono County
- Mono Lake Committee
- National Forest Foundation
- Sierra Club
- Sierra Eastside Mountain Bike Association
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



Good times while giving back in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Photo: Ken Miller



Volunteers grooving away on the cross-cut saw in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Photo: Ken Miller