Lassen Park Foundation’s

Volcano Adventure Camp
Lassen Volcanic National Park

2019 Report
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Jennifer Finnegan
The Volcano Adventure Camp (VAC) is Lassen Volcanic National Park’s first and only Youth Campground. Lassen Park Foundation raised over $450,000 and, through a partnership with Lassen Volcanic National Park, built the first phase of the VAC facility: opening it to youth groups in the summer of 2017.

The VAC is located just 4.4 miles east from the Manzanita Lake Entrance Station on Highway 89, in the group campground formerly known as Crags Campground. This campground has been the site of numerous camping adventures by children participating in Lassen Park Foundation’s Youth Camping Program.

The VAC accommodates youth groups (ranging from 15 – 80 people) and helps create strong connections between a younger generation and the park through outdoor immersion.

It features ten (10) tent cabins each with eight bunk cots, four tent pads (for traditional tent camping), two screened picnic shelters & BBQs, two camp fire amphitheaters, and a shower facility. With each cabin sleeping 8 campers, the facility can accommodate up to 80 people at a time.

The camp is split into two halves, each half including five tent cabins and a picnic pavilion. One half of the camp can be reserved for a youth group with 15 - 40 people at any given time. Groups with 41 - 80 people are typically designated the use of the entire facility during their stay.

In addition to the cabins, there are four tent-pad camp sites for groups wishing to “rough it” in a traditional tent camping setting. Smaller groups too small to utilize half the facility (6-14 people) often stay in these camp sites.

Before the VAC, all youth groups were required to bring their own camping gear including tents, sleeping bags, and cooking equipment. Now this expanded facility has improved accessibility for first-time campers by reducing the amount of equipment required, and enabled larger groups and a greater number of them.

In addition to camping facilities at the VAC, the Foundation and Lassen Volcanic National Park provide 1-2 dedicated youth camping ranger(s)and a wide variety of environmental learning activities including guided hikes, ranger talks, and in-camp educational programs each summer.

Youth Camping at the park has always been a priority for Lassen Park Foundation. The partnership between the Lassen Park Foundation and Lassen Volcanic National Park has been introducing youth (ages 6 to 18 years) to the joys of camping in a national park since 1996.

Over the years this Youth Camping Program has supported youth groups that serve at-risk or underserved children by awarding scholarships to offset their camping costs. Many of these young campers have never camped or visited a national park before participating in the Youth Camping Program.

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2019 Youth Camping Grant Survey Results

Group leaders play a significant role in the Youth Camping Program at Lassen Volcanic National Park. We rely on them for feedback regarding the available programming, management of the groups during their stay at the facility, and suggestions for improving the grant process. In 2019 we paid close attention to the group leaders’ feedback and created an online survey to better understand how effective the grant process was. Of the 48 grant recipients, 60% of them responded to the survey. The questions and findings of the survey are posted here.

Question 1: I would rate my overall experience going through the Youth Camping Program as...

Q1 Analysis: This tells us that overall the youth groups that participate in the program were happy with their experience and are likely to participate again.

Question 2: Two months (Feb. & March) is enough time to complete the application.

Q2 & 3 & 4 Analysis: Each year there are groups that have difficulty scheduling their trip date because of the grant application due dates and the timing of announcing their application results and camping trip dates. However, these responses tell us that the majority of groups would like us to keep the schedule the same in 2020 as it was in 2019.

Question 3: Receiving notification of our application approval and camping dates in April worked well for our group’s scheduling.

Question 4: Our grant application and trip scheduling would be more successful if the application dates were moved to...

Q4 & 5 Analysis: There are groups that have to adjust their camping trip dates because of the grant application process, and created an online survey to help groups accommodate their schedules. In these cases, we use an online calendar to identify availability with the camp.

Q5 & 6 Analysis: This tells us that availability of the application online and the navigability of the online form are easy enough for the majority of our applicants to get through without difficulty.

Question 5: The application form was easy to find on LassenParkFoundation.org.

Question 6: The application was easy to use.

Question 7: Once my application was approved and my trip dates selected, I did not have to adjust my camping trip dates.

Q7 & 8 Analysis: We request primary and secondary camping trip dates as part of the application process, and can usually accommodate one of those choices. In some cases we have had to find entirely different dates to help groups accommodate their schedules. In these cases, we use an online calendar to identify availability with the camp.

Question 8: If I had to adjust my camping trip dates, I used the calendar on LassenParkFoundation.org to find available dates at the VAC.

Q8 & 9 Analysis: The Final Grant Report form was easily accessible.

Question 9: The Final Grant Report was easy to understand.

Q9 & 10 Analysis: The Final Grant Report is a fillable pdf form that groups can download from our website. We also email a copy of it to them when we send their reminder after their trip.

Questions 9 & 10 tell us that the availability of the downloadable, fillable form and the ease of completing are enough for the majority of our applicants to get through without difficulty.

Question 10: The Final Grant Report was easy to understand.
Fifty-four youth focused organizations took advantage of the youth camping facility in Lassen Volcanic National Park (a 51% increase over 2018). They came from all over California, and even Oregon and Nevada. They represented Boys and Girls Clubs, foster care homes, public and private schools, group homes, Boy and Girl Scouts, and numerous community based youth programs. The demographics for these campers included low socio-economic status, inner city and rural communities, at-risk youth, and children with special needs.

In total, over 1,200 people made connections with Lassen Volcanic National Park this summer and fall, thanks to the youth camping initiative of the Lassen Park Foundation. Many groups were new participants this year, others have been coming to Lassen Volcanic National Park for many years. Mr. William Flink, from James McKee Elementary in Elk Grove, accompanied his 27th (and last) class of 6th graders to camp in the park.

Park staff worked closely with each group to plan an itinerary specific to that group’s needs. Group leaders chose from an extensive menu that included in-camp and field ranger-led activities, public ranger programs, and activities conducted by the group leader.

Ranger led activities included:
- Required orientation and closure meetings with the youth camp ranger
- Volcanoes of Lassen Course
- VAC and Lily Pond compass courses
- Campfire programs focusing on Leave No Trace principles, LVNP history, and Women’s Roles in the Parks
- Discovery Hikes (Manzanita Lake, Lily Pond Trail, Paradise Meadows, Kings Creek Falls, Bumpass Hell)
- Rock Cycle Course

Close attention was given to the pre-trip planning that went into every excellent youth camping experience at the Volcano Adventure Camp (VAC) in Lassen Volcanic National Park.

The youth camp rangers worked closely with each group to plan an itinerary specific to that group’s needs. Group leaders chose from an extensive menu that included in-camp and field ranger-led activities, public ranger programs, and activities conducted by the group leader.

Ranger led activities included:
- Devastated Area Hike & History
- Ecology of Manzanita Lake
- Many group leaders chose to have their campers complete the requirements to become Junior Rangers or members of the Volcano Club.
- The Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center and Loomis Museum were visited by most groups, with groups often completing the Discovery Hunts.
- Most groups completed one or more independent hikes. Cinder Cone, Lassen Peak and Kings Creek Falls were favorites. Approximately a third of the groups took the opportunity to attend at least one public ranger program.
- The evening programs at Summit and Manzanita Lakes were well attended, as was the Pioneers program. Groups also opted to visit the Discovery Center during open hours.
- While the focus of the program is obviously on the youth, most adult leaders and chaperones also benefited from the experience. For many this was their first time to Lassen Volcanic (or any national park).
- As they came to understand that the park belongs to them, the same sense of awe and wonder seen in the youth became obvious in the adults also.
BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF THE NORTH VALLEY, OROVILLE, CA

Without the distraction of cell phones and their regular activities the kids were forced to step out of their comfort zone and work together. By the end of the trip they were not only a team, but were also able to gain friendships that extend into different towns.

GIRLS INC. OF NORTHERN SACRAMENTO VALLEY, SACRAMENTO, CA

The Dark Sky Festival provided an extra “cool” factor for the girls and was a great opportunity for our more STEM focused students. They experienced how STEM isn’t just in a lab but is out in nature, and how our national parks and public lands play a huge role in STEM education.

GIRL SCOUTS TROOP 70031, MOUNT SHASTA, CA

Through shared leadership and supportive team building activities, girls developed trust and appreciation for the differences found in our diverse group. I believe these girls will be life-long friends and supporters after this trip, that they developed a deep sense of the need and value of diversity.

HILL COUNTRY HEALTH & WELLNESS, REDDING, CA

As a Youth Case Manager, I have worked with young people professionally for 25 years and I believe this experience was one of the most therapeutic and team building occurrences I have been a part of.

TEAM OF YOUTH CARE CLUB, CARMICHAEL, CA

I believe our trip brought to our youth a big change: They felt nature, friendships, and happy interactions. By the end of the trip many expressed excitement for next year’s trip which, considering their initial reluctance to abandon video games and internet, is a huge success.

PHASE II

Phase two of the Volcano Adventure Camp (VAC) is intended to expand the size of the facility and to accommodate smaller youth groups in tent cabins.

Grant funding was originally secured through the State of California’s Outdoor Environmental Education Facilities. Unfortunately due to a contracting issue Lassen Park Foundation had to cancel the grant funds. Alternate sources of funding to build Phase II are being explored, including securing sponsors and donors to cover the projected $90,000 cost of construction.

Phase II construction will include four additional tent cabins, each with a picnic table and camp fire pit. The cabins will be individually reserved for small youth groups (ranging in size from 6-14 people), those that are too small to stay in half of the facility as the larger groups do.

The increased cabins will bring the facility capacity up to 112, necessitating a fourth vault toilet. With the remaining funds raised for Phase I, an additional $70,000 is needed to complete the construction of Phase II.

Lassen Park Foundation and Lassen Volcanic National Park will be continuing the Youth Camping Program at the Volcano Adventure Camp during the summer of 2020 while working on fundraising and construction plans for Phase II.

COMMENTS

At the end of every camping season, the grant recipients are asked to share their stories and experiences with us. This helps both Lassen Park Foundation and Lassen Volcanic National Park to enhance the programming for the coming season. It also allows us to identify areas for improvement.

This is often our staff’s favorite part of the entire program because they get to read about a more intimate side of the groups learning experience and the positive impacts their trips have made on the youth who enjoyed them.

Sometimes the comments come from the youth, other times the comments come from the adult chaperones who guide their youth through these life-changing experiences. Those stories are always heartfelt and worth sharing. These comments are some of our favorites, and were made by group leaders who participated in the 2019 Youth Camping Program at the Volcano Adventure Camp.

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