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Last of the Rainbows gather up to go

By Christopher Smart

The Salt Lake Tribune

It's all over but the chanting.

Fewer than 1,000 members of the Rainbow Family of Living Light remain near Lyman Lake in eastern Utah's Uinta Mountains. Despite concerns about public safety and the environment, the Forest Service has pronounced this year's reunion a "qualified success."

"We mitigated the resource issues," said [REDACTED] the incident commander for the Forest Service law enforcement team that patrols the annual gathering. The challenge for the Forest Service was to keep automobile traffic off alpine meadows and make sure no garbage and human waste got into trout-bearing streams. "We protected those resources the best we could."

The key to this year's success, [REDACTED] said, is that this is the first year the group received a Forest Service use permit. That gave authorities the opportunity to scout the area and instruct Rainbow leaders on where to set up parking, camping, kitchens and latrines.

"We had fewer citations that relate to resource issues," [REDACTED] said Wednesday. "And this was a much better site than Bear Valley," he said referring to the 2001 gathering in Idaho.

[REDACTED] conceded that some Rainbows don't like authorities patrolling the annual event but that the Forest Service would be there "for the duration" of the yearly gatherings. The fact that a permit was obtained may have kept away some Rainbows. The Forest Service official count was 9,000; up to 20,000 had been expected. The smaller numbers also mitigated environmental impact, the incident commander noted.

Sensitive to reports that Rainbow reunions can be harsh on the land, family members labored to instruct and police themselves, said Barry Sacharow, a 48-year-old Rainbow from Hollywood, Fla. Family cleanup crews will make sure

that no paper or cans are left behind.

Evanston, Wyo., bore the brunt of Rainbow traffic entering the Uintas. But despite fears and rumors, authorities there reported only eight arrests: two for alcohol violations, four for shoplifting, one for loitering and two for trespass.

In the Uintas, Forest Service authorities reported one death. Summit County sheriff's deputies Wednesday identified the man as Nathan James Flint Syphus, 18, Salt Lake City, who was found dead in his tent on July 5. Cause of death is pending toxicology reports, police said.

There were 18 arrests, four on felony counts, and a slew of misdemeanor citations that included drug possession, disorderly conduct and parking violations. Eleven medical emergencies were recorded. That's about par for Rainbow Family gatherings, [REDACTED] noted.

But a June 26 melee in which a group of Rainbows pelted a Forest Service patrol with snowballs and rocks, caught authorities by surprise, [REDACTED] said. Two Forest Service patrolmen and two Rainbows were treated at Evanston Regional Hospital. Three men were arrested on felony assault charges.

[REDACTED] who has been following the Rainbow Family for the past 10 years, is due to retire before next year's gathering. The career Forest Service employee said he has enjoyed the challenges of policing the Rainbow reunions.

Nonetheless, at its July Fourth celebration, [REDACTED] demurred when a topless Rainbow woman with a well-tanned chest asked him for a hug.

"I'll shake hands and talk with anyone out there," [REDACTED] said, recalling the incident. "But I don't want to hug a lot of people I don't know."

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Casper, WY Star Tribune

Forest Service says Rainbow Family members threw rocks at officers

June 27, 2003

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) - People attending the Rainbow Family gathering in the Uinta Mountains threw rocks and snowballs at Forest Service officers attempting to tow a car parked in a restricted area, the federal agency said.

Following the melee Wednesday evening, the Forest Service on Thursday closed a 2.5 mile spur off the North Slope Road, meaning the campers will have to hoof it to the campsites scattered around 4,000 acres near the Wyoming border and 70 miles east of Salt Lake City.

Versions of the story vary, but both sides agree a group of young Rainbow members encircled the car, preventing the towing, The Salt Lake Tribune reported. A special mounted police unit was dispatched to disperse the crowd. Snowballs and rocks were hurled at the mounted police, who then rode into the crowd.

Two Forest Service riders suffered minor injuries, Forest Service incident Commander [REDACTED] said. Two Rainbow members were kicked or stepped on and were treated at an Evanston, Wyo., hospital and released. One man was arrested.

[REDACTED] met with Rainbow leaders Thursday afternoon, but said for now the road would remain closed.

[REDACTED] a Rainbow follower who signed the Forest Service's special use permit, said the events were unfortunate.

"Some young people made a peaceful blockade," he said. "The Forest Service called for horses.... Then in an unbelievable move of stupidity, some people threw rocks at the officers. ... It's regrettable that a few young fools would take it into their heads to commit those aggravated acts."

More than 1,300 people already have gathered for the annual event, which is set for July 1-7 and expected to attract 8,000 to 20,000 people.

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Salt Lake Tribune

6/27/2003

Tensions grow at Rainbow camp as melee erupts

By Christopher Smart
The Salt Lake Tribune

BLACK FORK RIVER, North Slope of the Uinta Mountains -- To get to the Rainbow Family gathering, revelers will have to put on their walking shoes. Make that boots -- it's awfully muddy at 9,000 feet.

A special incident team for the U.S. Forest Service closed a spur off the North Slope Road here Thursday morning after a melee in which Forest Service officers and Rainbow members suffered minor injuries.

Early on Thursday afternoon, Forest Service incident Commander [REDACTED] said the 2.5-mile road would be closed until further notice. That left Rainbow Family members hoofing it in to various campsites scattered around 4,000 picturesque acres near the Utah-Wyoming border.

For decades, Forest Service law enforcement officers and the Rainbow Family have danced around each other at this annual gathering. But the waltzing turned ugly Wednesday evening when officials decided to tow a car that was in a restricted parking area, said [REDACTED]

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Two Forest Service riders suffered minor injuries, said [REDACTED]. And two Rainbow members were kicked or stepped on and taken to an Evanston, Wyo., hospital, where they were treated and released.

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"Some young people made a peaceful blockade," he explained. "The Forest Service called for horses . . . Then in an unbelievable move of stupidity, some people threw rocks at the officers . . . It's regrettable that a few young fools would take it into their heads to commit those aggravated acts."

In the coming days as the Rainbow gathering grows, people will see the celebration as a peaceful one, [REDACTED] said. "People will see this as a very good scene, a very cooperative scene -- learning community values, learning respect for nature and making the gathering an example of peaceful cooperation."

Nonetheless, many Rainbows were rankled at the incident, including a man known by the

handle Free Rainbow Hugs, who was kicked in the hip by a horse and taken to the hospital where an x-ray revealed no broken bones.

"We circled up in the middle of the road," said Hugs, still limping. "They told us to get out of the way, and then charged in."

Some of Hugs' family members described it as the action of a police state. The Rainbows will pray for peace on July 4.

Casper Star Tribune, WY

With gathering numbers growing, citations are being issued

6/25/2003

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) - As members of a countercultural group begin gathering in the Wasatch-Cache National Forest - 1,344 Rainbow Family members at last count - the infractions against them are adding up.

Each summer, the Forest Service dispatches a special Incident Management Team to police the annual gathering of the group. And each year, the team keeps a tally of the infractions racked up.

In its report this week, which includes 18 categories from "DUI" to "assault," it also lists the number of warnings, violations, arrests and incident reports.

So far there have been 47 incident reports, 75 warning, 43 violations and four arrests for various infractions. Law enforcement officers responded primarily to "traffic and vehicle" incidents. They handed out 47 warnings and noted 16 violations.

The next largest category was "drug related" in which 12 incident reports were filed, along with three warnings, 11 violations and two arrests. The report lacks specifics on which drugs were involved.

With a group that has the potential to draw nearly 20,000 people to the Little West Fork Black's Fork area, about 70 miles east of Salt Lake City on the north slope of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest, it's not surprising that there might be some arrests.

Missing so far from the tally: any incidents of nudity.

Apparently even the most free of spirits keep their clothes on when the temperatures drop drastically as they have in the last few days in Utah.

"I'd hazard a guess, that's why there were no nudity citations," said [REDACTED] Banker, information officer for the Forest Service. "It's snowing up here right now and there's 8 inches on Elizabeth Ridge."

The gathering reaches its crescendo on July 4 with a meditation for peace.

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File Code: 2720

Date: September 19, 2003

Mr. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Santa Fe, NM 87505

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b7c

Dear [REDACTED]

This letter documents the cleanup and rehabilitation work the cleanup crew completed under the special use authorization issued to you for a non-commercial group use event. The event occurred in the Little West Fork Blacks Fork area of the Evanston Ranger District, Wasatch-Cache National Forest, during June and July of 2003.

The special use permit, issued to you on June 17, included specific site rehabilitation requirements as listed below. I have commented on each requirement. Overall, resource damage was less than we expected and the land authorized by the special use permit should return to its original condition within a few years. The cleanup crew completed the site rehabilitation work in an acceptable and timely manner.

1. All parking areas, roads, trails, and concentrated use areas will be scarified and seeded with a native seed mix approved by the Forest Service.

The rehabilitation work coordinated between Resource Advisor Bernard Asay and you relied on a light on the land approach with natural processes allowed to restore many of the impacted areas. Our inspections of these concentrated use areas indicate that they are returning to their original condition. The inspections also showed that water bars have been constructed on trails as requested and that the areas where we were planning to seed are recovering sufficiently as to not require you to return to seed them.

2. All improvements, structures, vehicles, garbage, and personal equipment will be removed.

On our inspection visits we did not see any improvements, structures, vehicles, garbage, or personal equipment. Kitchens have been dismantled and the area around them restored by scattering duff, rotten wood, twigs, needles, and logs over the impacted areas.



Mr. [REDACTED]

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3. Slit trenches will be filled and seeded and any surface waste removed from the area.

Slit trenches, gray water pits, and fire pits have been filled in and covered with rotten wood, needles, and branches. No surface waste is apparent.

4. No removal of cultural resources (artifacts) during rehabilitation.

To our knowledge, no cultural resources were removed during rehabilitation.

5. A joint inspection between the Forest Service and the Permit Holder will be conducted prior to final departure from the site.

Resource Advisor Bernard Asay inspected the authorized area on July 25 along with you and members of the cleanup crew. In addition, Bernard visited the area on subsequent days to perform more systematic inspections. These inspections showed that you and the cleanup crew complied with the objectives of the Rehabilitation Plan.

I appreciate the rehabilitation work conducted by the cleanup crew; the work was well done and will accelerate recovery of the impacted sites. For future events, I believe the workload of the clean up crew could be reduced if event participants would cooperate with the Forest Service earlier in the scouting process, selection of the site, and during the event.

Sincerely,

/s/ Stephen M. Ryberg

STEPHEN M. RYBERG
District Ranger

Cc:

Lynn Bidlack, Jeanne Evenden, Liz Close
[REDACTED]

