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Can We Bring Back the Sierra Bighorn?

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On the 1931 outing of the Sierra Club along the middle High Sierra from Matterhorn and Conness south to Banner and Ritter, mainly within the Yosemite National Park, but also in the Kern and Mono national forests, many old fragments of heads and horns of the Sierra bighorn were found. One almost perfect cranium, minus the horns and lower jaws, was found on the east face of Banner Peak, at 11,000 feet, by Dr. Herbert M. Evans. Most of the relics, however, were merely the heavy bases of skulls with bony horn-cores attached, or fragments of old horns. All were old, probably 40 to 50 years, at least, and had only remained for this length of time because buried for most of the year in snow and ice.

The skulls or fragments seen on the range, at the ranger station, in Yosemite Museum, and in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at Berkeley, represented the following localities: Mounts Conness, Dana, Gibbs, Parker, Parsons, Maclure, Lyell, Banner, Ritter and Alger Lake and Parker Pass. To these localities can be added old records of mountain sheep in Bloody Can-

yon prior to 1874 (John Muir) and on the east slope of Sonora Pass near the junction of Alpine, Mono and Tuolumne counties in 1876-1878 (Grinnell and Storer). A good skull of an old ram now in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, was said to have been obtained in the mountains east of Crescent lake, possibly from Gale Peak or Red Top Peak, or maybe from farther east. It is without date or definite locality. These localities carry the original range of bighorns along the whole eastern part of Yosemite National Park, and the number of localities as well as of specimens and fragments of skulls shows that sheep were once abundant here.

1924 CENSUS

According to reports of the forest service, in 1924 there were 30 mountain sheep in the Red Slate mountain and Mount Humphreys district, 150 in the headwaters of the Kings river section of the range and 50 in the Kaweah Peaks country. In California Fish and Game for January, 1931, E. H. Ober reported about 200 mountain sheep scattered from the Convict lake mountains in southwestern Mono county south to

northeastern Kern county. This places the nearest living mountain sheep within 25 or 30 miles of the present boundary of Yosemite National Park and agrees with last summer's statements of local ranchmen that they were to be found about 25 miles south of Garnet lake.

The question naturally arises as to whether these magnificent native animals could be brought back to their original range and given protection that would insure their future abundance in whatever numbers desired. If it seems desirable to return them to the rocky peaks, crests and ridges along the eastern part of the park, which is so admirably adapted to their needs and habits and where hundreds or thousands of people could see them every summer, it is only necessary to give them intelligent protection until they increase sufficiently to spread back over their old range. But a definite plan must be adopted and followed out, a plan that would apply to many other species and regions and only needs demonstration.

INVESTIGATION NEEDED

The plan must begin with a close study of these animals on their present range by some competent naturalist who can stay with them all summer, night and day; and then all winter. The sheep breed rapidly, and would normally almost double in numbers each year. Now the increase and a little more is taken each year by some enemies and the first thing is to learn what takes it, whether poachers, coyotes, mountain lions, bob-cats, eagles or a combination of all. The man who devotes his time to studying these bighorns should also be able to protect them by eliminating most of their enemies in their vicinity and gradually get so familiar with the habits of the sheep that he can

gently influence their choice of range and work some of the bands toward the park. While they probably could not be definitely herded from one peak or ridge to another, a slight disturbance on one side could undoubtedly be made to urge them in a definite direction to areas already freed from their destructive enemies. In other words, it seems time for us to take a step ahead in game and wild life management that will leave no more to chance and accident than we would in any other industry. Such close practical studies as have just been reported by Joseph Dixon and George M. Wright on the trumpeter swans in Yellowstone National Park are greatly needed in many of our wild life areas, but nowhere more than with these bighorns.

BRINGING TO YOSEMITE

This plan of restoring the mountain sheep to their original range would require funds for the employment of one man with pack horse and saddle horse, and involve moderate field expenses. No final results could be expected before the second or third year, but eventually the work could be perfected so that it could be left in the hands of rangers and local men on the ground. After one year of study it should be possible to capture easily a trio of lambs, a buck and two ewes, to be tamed and placed at some favorable point, such as Merced Lake ranger station, to be raised and gradually given their freedom on the steep canyon walls, where they would find ideal summer and winter range and could establish a protected colony well within the park. Other colonies could be established later with the experience acquired from this group. Either Pate Valley or Muir Gorge would be a good locality for

one colony, and these two would establish the sheep well within the park limits and insure their winter migrations down both the east and west slopes of the mountains. Their winter migrations should eventually reach to Yosemite and Hetch Hetchy valleys as well as down the east slopes of the mountains, where their protection has been difficult.

Two thousand mountain sheep in the mountains of Yosemite National Park would not overstock the range or conflict with other forms of wild life, except for some of the larger

carnivores, mainly coyotes, which would necessarily have to be somewhat reduced from their present numbers. The restoration of the bighorns should be of equal interest to the National Park Service, the Biological Survey, the Forest Service and the California Fish and Game Commission, and could be taken up jointly or individually by them. To be of any value it should be continuous for several years with assurance that the sheep would be permanently protected when re-established.

Snow Plant Flower Display at Mariposa Grove

J. C. SHIRLEY

Ranger-Naturalist

There is an unusually beautiful display of snow plant (*Sarcodes sanguinea*) at the Mariposa grove this spring. Within one-half hour, 100 of these beautiful red plants were counted, all within a few rods of the public camp ground, which is near the ranger station. There was one clump of eight plants, two clumps of 10 each, and one clump of 12 plants. In one place, within a circle of 15 feet, there were 20 plants. Many of these plants are just beginning to peep through the moist soil, but in three plants, the beautiful red flowers are showing forth below the overlapping red scales. In the majority of the plants the scales are still tightly closed about the developing flower stalk. One of the finest specimens in the number counted measured two and one-quarter inches in diameter and was six inches tall. It had not yet begun to show the underlying red blossoms. During the first two weeks of June these 100 plants should be in full blossom and make an extraordinarily beautiful sight.

These plants are saprophytes, thus securing their nourishment

from decaying organic material. The plant has a fleshy stem, with red scales, red calyx and red corolla. The stigma is also red. There is a rather popular conception that these plants never come up in the same place. However, a careful examination of several of these clumps showed that in one clump of four plants there were three withered stalks from last season. These three old stalks appeared to be joined together with new plants springing up from them. Another clump of five plants had two old stalks and a third clump of 10 plants showed remnants of at least one old stalk.

MARIPOSA GROVE BIRDS OF LATE MAY

Many birds have been seen and heard during the past week in the Mariposa grove. A few of the most common birds observed are the robin, blue-fronted jay, western tanager, Sierra junco and white-headed woodpecker. A single pileated woodpecker was observed during the week.



The Mariposa Grove Museum

By C. C. PRESNALL

Junior Park Naturalist

Yosemite will soon have a very comprehensive exhibit descriptive of Big Trees, *Sequoia gigantea*. In 1930 the National Park Service tore down the log cabin at Mariposa Grove, which was built by the State of California in 1885 on the site of an older cabin put up by Galen Clark and called "Galen's Hospice." This historic old cabin, known all over the world from photographs, was unsafe for use, but too valuable to be lost, so an exact replica of it was erected on the same spot, to be used as the Mariposa Grove Museum.

It has been my work for the past two winters to prepare and assemble exhibit materials for this project. The work of installing will be completed by June 1.

The exhibits in this museum are devoted exclusively to the story of the Big Trees, hence the cabin and its furnishings are designed to harmonize with the surrounding se-

quoias. The massive furniture was hewed by hand from a Big Tree that fell in the lower part of the grove in 1919, the same tree that supplied the 10-foot cross section exhibited outside this museum and the Yosemite Museum. All the exhibit panels are made of sequoia wood, and even the ink furnished for signing in the museum register is extracted from the heartwood of Big Trees.

FROM DAYS OF GALEN CLARK

Two exhibit panels portray the human history of the grove from its discovery by Galen Clark until the present time, a period of 83 years.

Another prominent exhibit shows the life of a single Big Tree, a relatively young one, with a history dating back over a period of slightly more than 1800 years. This exhibit includes an actual section of the tree with a panel showing six important historical events that

occurred during the life of the tree, and a panel of photographs showing the appearance of the tree at each one of the six growth stages. It is interesting to note that the earliest event portrayed is the imprisonment of St. Paul in 58 A. D., thus identifying the life of the tree with the duration of the Christian era.

Two more exhibits take us back millions of years beyond human history to the Age of Reptiles, when sequoias first appeared on the earth. Specimens of fossils from various parts of the northern hemisphere are displayed to prove that the ancestors of the Big Trees were at one time numerous and widespread.

WHERE THEY SURVIVE

The present limited distribution of sequoias is shown on a large re-

lief map of California. This map shows the only area in the world where *Sequoia gigantea*, the Big Tree, is native—the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada—and also the much larger area along the California and Oregon coast where *Sequoia sempervirens*, the redwood, is found. Photographs and Riker mounts aid in further distinguishing the two species.

Photographs and dimensions of the four largest Big Trees are displayed—the General Sherman, the General Grant, the Boole and the Grizzly Giant. The first three are located in or near Sequoia National Park, which contains 60 per cent of all the living Big Trees in the world, although the Mariposa Grove, in which the Grizzly Giant is located, is undoubtedly the best known of all the groves.

Wild Life Seen on the Snow Patrol

By C. C. PRESNALL

Junior Park Naturalist

Among the most interesting of the many nature observations made in Yosemite National Park are those contributed by the rangers and snow gaugers who patrol the high mountains on skis once each month during the winter. These observations disclose many valuable facts about the winter denizens of the high Sierra, doubly valuable because the same territory is covered four times each winter, thus giving a series of records. This is well illustrated in the reports from the Buck Camp and Moraine Meadows patrol. The writer was privileged to join this patrol on their first trip in January of this year, and on the succeeding three trips Snow Gauger Sam King continued the natural history work effectively. On his last trip, April

20-May 3, accompanied by Ranger Duaine Jacobs, who has made numerous observations of winter life in Lassen Volcanic National Park, he was able to correlate several interesting records.

On the first three trips, January, February, and March, Sierra grouse had been apparently absent in regions between 6000 and 8000 feet elevation, but they were abundant during the April patrol. They were heard booming very frequently and were often seen. On two occasions birds were flushed from the snow beneath some pines. This corroborates my own observations and those of Park Naturalist Bert Harwell to the effect that the grouse spend the winter in the Hudsonian Zone, descending to the Canadian Zone for the breeding and nesting

season.

The movements of deer seem to have been down hill also. During the first three months of the winter deer and deer signs were numerous around Chinquapin (6256 feet), but in April they were absent, and lack of any sign above that elevation indicated a downward migration. It is quite probable, however, that this movement was caused by the storms of the previous week.

Other interesting notes reported by King and Jacobs are as follows: Fresh bear tracks were seen on the Alder Creek trail at 7500 feet. The tracks ended at a rotten log which the boys wisely refrained from investigating. A ferocious battle between a weasel and chickaree was written in the snow near Crescent Lake, blood and tracks indicated the usual victory for the weasel. Another tragedy was the finding of a frozen chipmunk. Only one fox track was seen on the entire trip, but coyote tracks were numerous everywhere. Marten tracks were seen in three places along the south fork of the Merced between elevations of 8000 and 9000.

THE UPPER YOSEMITE FALL

By C. C. Presnall
Junior Park Naturalist

Any sublime spectacle in nature makes its chief impression on the observer through the optic nerves. Often it is only when a desired and expected object cannot be seen that the mind calls upon the other senses for impressions. A near approach to the foot of the Upper Yosemite Fall illustrates this very well, since sharply differentiated impressions of the fall are recorded

by each of the five senses.

The sound of the fall is omnipresent and all-pervading, a restful sound, like breakers on the beach. Always the same melody of rushing water with an accompaniment of deep, crashing chords, yet never is it monotonous. This music of the leaping water announces its presence long before it is seen.

When in full flood, the fall is felt before it can be seen from the trail. The air becomes cool and moist; a gentle mist continuously bathes the atmosphere for a quarter of a mile on all sides of the fall. The moisture condenses on eyebrows and beard with a peculiar tickling sensation. The grass and trees are dripping wet, recalling boyhood memories of rainsoaked forests of the Oregon coast.

MOISTURE FILLS AIR

This washing of the foliage and air helps the dull olfactory nerves to record their impressions more clearly. The delightful, undefinable odor of warm spring showers is noticed while rocks and foliage still hide the fall from view. An attempt to analyze this refreshing sensation is only partially successful. Ceanothus along the trail seems sweeter because of the beads of moisture on the blossoms, and doubtless every plant adds its own essence to the perfect perfume in the air.

The voice, the touch, and the perfume of the fall all announce the close presence of power and beauty. But, forewarned though we are, the first sight of Yosemite Fall far exceeds our expectations. The eye is unable to immediately grasp the sublimity of the whole feathery canopy of foam, and can only note individual features, one at a time: the "rockets" of water shooting rapidly down and out; the

narrow white lip of the fall, like cotton coming from a gin; the scattered fragments below, strangely resembling shredded cocoanut; or the thin gossamer veil that partially conceals the broad expanse of granite near the bottom. Only after hours and days of observation does the full glory of the fall become apparent. Then comes a realization of the futility of a mere word picture.

Finally, to thoroughly know the fall, we drink the sparkling water, purified by falling through a quarter of a mile and more of clean mountain air. Now each sense has become imbued with the fall. It is our own to keep always.

SEASONAL OBSERVATIONS

By C. A. HARWELL, Park Naturalist

BIRDS ARE EARLY

Both in the arrival of our summer visitors and in nesting operations our Yosemite birds seem quite ahead of average this year. After the heaviest winter since 1906 it would seem the opposite should be expected, but not so. The first black-headed grosbeaks arrived this year on their trip up from Mexico, April 13. During the past 11 years April 15 was the earliest date recorded for them, while April 21 would be average. The vireos were a full week ahead of schedule, while tanagers, warblers, sparrows and our other spring arrivals were quite on time.

OUZELS NESTING

I discovered a practically completed nest of water ouzels at El Portal, February 29 this year, which is certainly a very early record

This is the third year of occupancy of this same nest at this location. Each year the pair repair and re-line it. April 9 I observed both parents feeding young in the nest. Our nesting pair at Valley View, on the floor of the valley, were also early. Last year they finished building April 16. This year the nest was ready March 25. Robins were observed building at the winter picnic grounds the last of April, which is surely early for them. There were many nests of blue-fronted jays by May 1.

ELK CALF BORN

Our herd of dwarf elk (*Cervus nannodes*), brought to Yosemite in 1921 to help save this vanishing California species from extinction, is thriving well. April 23 a baby calf was born to bring the present number of the herd up to 19 animals—6 bulls, 10 cows, two yearlings and this vigorous young calf.

CINNAMON TEAL VISIT YOSEMITE

On May 3 a pair of cinnamon teal were observed at the rival pool near Sentinel bridge. This is the second recorded visit of this species in the last 12 years.

WILD FLOWER GARDEN

On April 4 this year the museum nature garden spring planting program of wild flowers and shrubs native to the region was begun under the supervision of Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael. For years we have been exhibiting cut specimens of our flora here at the museum in a special exhibit stand that supplied running water to stems and space for labeling varieties. Now, through the generosity of a friend of Yosemite, Miss Marjorie Montgomery Ward of Chicago, we are developing an extensive garden on the sunny slopes just back of the museum.

The area has been fenced to prevent the encroachment of deer. Paths have been laid out and a lovely small stream with appropriate pools has been developed. Though the show of native flora will not be so pretentious this year, the whole project promises

well. Flower lovers and botany students will be able to study many of our plants in this one area, growing naturally, which might require many long trips to special locations of the park otherwise. Our naturalist staff is watching the growth of this garden with great interest.

THE ANCIENT VALE

By Edw. B. Hall

Low murmurs her wind in forest,
 Sweetly her song bird calls;
 Musically tinkles her water,
 Gurgling o'er stones, it falls;
 Bright is her light, soft is her shade.
 Dreamy, her cloud ships sail
 O'er this lovely child of Muir
 Whose softest moods prevail.
 But 'tis a dignified softness
 Born of that far-back hour
 When her granite cliffs were chiseled
 By Ice King's mighty power.
 She can afford to be pleasant,
 She with the gentle face
 Who has stood, while passed the
 millions,
 And race succeeded race.
 For 'tis not the sounding trumpet
 That stands for power and might—
 But quiet things of earth and sky
 And silent, like the night,
 O valley of peaceful beauty,
 Grand old Yosemite!
 Smile on, while us fleeting mortals
 Pass to eternity.

* * *





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Dan Anderson