

SELF-GUIDING
AUTO TOUR
of
YOSEMITE VALLEY



N.P.S. Photo by Anderson

Tunnel View

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SELF-GUIDING AUTO TOUR OF YOSEMITE VALLEY

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This self-guiding auto tour has been arranged for the visitor who wants to discover and visit the scenic and historic points of interest in Yosemite Valley. It is a complete circle tour of the valley floor, a total distance of around 22 miles, and will require at least two hours.

We will first visit the upper or eastern end of Yosemite Valley. Principal stopping points will be Indian Caves, Mirror Lake, Happy Isles, Stoneman Meadow, Camp Curry and the Old Village.

GOVERNMENT CENTER TO INDIAN CAVES

(2.0 miles)

Government Center. our starting point, is made up of the Yosemite Museum, National Park Service Administration Building, Post Office, photographic and art studios and the Rangers Club. The **Museum** is a key to the park. We will do well to spend some time studying its well planned exhibits before our trip to



Yosemite Museum

learn what to look for; and again at the close of our tour to review and fix what we have learned and to have questions answered that have arisen.

Leaving Government Center, we head east toward Half Dome which towers nearly a mile in height above the Valley floor. Directly to the left we see **Indian Canyon**, the principal route of the early Indians in their journeys between Yosemite and Mono Lake on the east side of the Sierra Nevada. During spring months **Lehamite Fall** may be seen cascading down a precipitous niche on the right hand wall of this canyon. Lehamite is the Indian name for arrowwood which grows abundantly along Indian Creek. Reaching the first highway intersection our route continues straight ahead. (The road to the right leads to a garage and service station a few yards away.) On the right are the residences of the permanent employees of the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. which operates all hotels, camps, transportation, stores, shops and stables in the park for accommodation of visitors. On the left the **Lewis Memorial Hospital** named in honor of W. B. Lewis, first Superintendent of Yosemite National Park under the National Park Service administration (March 3, 1916 to September 1928.)

At the next intersection we take the short spur road which continues straight ahead through the large stone gates to visit the beautiful **Ah-wahnee Hotel**, completed in 1927 at

a cost of over a million dollars. Its architecture is of rare beauty.

Leaving the hotel grounds we turn south along the open meadow to the next intersection where we turn left. We cross two bridges in quick succession. The Merced River here is a



Ahwahnee Hotel

flavored swimming spot for summer campers. At the far left hand side of the second bridge stands the largest **Sugar Pine** tree on the floor of the valley. It is seven feet in diameter. Note the long cones at the tips of the branches which sometimes reach a length of twenty-three inches. On the Wawona Road and especially along the Big Oak Flat Road may be seen the best stands of this beautiful pine to be found any place in the world. For the next half mile, splendid views of the **Royal Arches** may be obtained on the left wall of the valley. Striking down over the Royal Arches to the left is Royal Arch Cascades, a striking spring waterfall.

The Royal Arches are the result of a combination of exfoliation and glacial plucking and are closely associated with the process of dome



Mt. Lyell (15,095 ft.) and the Lyell Glacier

*Yosemite Valley, with an area of approximately seven square miles, is but a small part of this national park, whose boundaries embrace 1,189 square miles—roughly, about the size of Rhode Island. Over excellent highways one may reach Tuolumne Meadows and famed Tioga Pass, the Mariposa Grove, finest of three groves of big trees (*Sequoia gigantea*) in the park, and Glacier Point where a matchless, breath-taking panorama of the valley, the Clark Range and the Sierra crest is found.*

In addition, over 700 miles of trails enable one to make numerous trips of varying duration to many interesting places "off the beaten track." Thus short strolls in the vicinity of highways as well as longer hikes to the more remote parts of the park, where one encounters some of the most picturesque scenery of the central Sierra region, are available. To know the park is to know its trails.

formation. The curved shells comprising the Arches vary in thickness from ten to eighty feet and several of them unite at the top of the main arch to form one shell nearly 200 feet thick. This arch rises 1,000 feet (measured from the underside) and has a span of 1,800 feet and can be likened to a cross-section of **North Dome**, rising directly above the valley rim here. To the right of the



Royal Arches and Washington Column

Royal Arches, **Washington Column** rises like a tall skyscraper 1952 feet above the valley floor. Although not particularly striking as compared to the other rock features along the valley wall, Washington Column would make nearly four Washington Monuments in height. The road takes us along the edge of Camp 9, on the right, reserved for organization camping groups in summer. Shortly we arrive at the road sign designating **Indian Caves** and turn left on a small loop road and park the car.

Indian Caves is the site of the old Indian Village Hol-low or Lah-koo-hah which means "come out." Bark dwellings or umu-tcas have been re-constructed on original sites. On the huge flat-topped granite rock in front of the umu-tcas, **deep mortar** holes in the granite show where acorns, the principal food of the Indian, were pounded. The lower Indian Cave is easy of access, a low, broad, deep recess under a huge rock near the base of Washington Column. The upper cave perhaps shows more and longer use by Indians. It is reached by a short, steep scramble up from the umu-tcas. Smoke from many campfires has blackened the ceilings. Although it is believed that the caves were not used as permanent dwellings, undoubtedly they were used as places of storage and shelter from severe storms or as a retreat and hiding place from their enemies. Yosemite Indians left the valley in the winter. El Portal and desirable sites in that region were their winter homes. Palutes who spent the summer here wintered around Mono Lake. This is the most easterly of thirty-five old Indian villages and camps located in the valley. At least six of them were occupied by Indians as late as 1898. Indians of the park now live in the new Indian Village below Yosemite Lodge.

INDIAN CAVES TO MIRROR LAKE

(1.5 miles)

Leaving Indian Caves, we continue east keeping left at the nearby intersection. The road winds slightly upgrade as we start up **Tenaya Canyon**, named after old Chief Tenaya, last chief of the Yosemite. On the right we pass **Iron Springs** with its thick rusty colored mineral deposit. From here to **Mirror Lake**, the road follows Tenaya Creek, where Water Ouzels may often be seen and heard at any time of year that there is water in the stream.



Water Ouzel

One of their moss nests is visible from the road. The road ends at the Mirror Lake parking area where we leave our car and walk the short distance to the lake. Although practically all other of the 300 natural lakes in Yosemite National Park's 1,189 square miles are of glacial origin, Mirror Lake was formed by a rock slide from the cliff walls which dammed Tenaya Can-

yon not many hundred years ago. The usual absence of wind during the early morning hours together with the relative darkness of the deep canyon is responsible for the perfect reflections. The best time is around sunrise, which is rather late at this point due to the sun having to rise over **Ahwyah Point** on the rim of **Half Dome**. Beyond Half Dome on the right wall of the canyon is



Mirror Lake and Mt. Watkins

Clouds Rest, which is nearly 10,000 feet above sea level. Looking across the canyon from Clouds Rest, we see **Mt. Watkins**, the dome reflected in the waters of Mirror Lake and further to the left is **Basket Dome**.

A short stroll along the border of the lake takes us to the main foot

and bridle trail leading to Snow Creek and to Tenaya Lake and other points beyond the rim. Only a few hundred yards along this trail is to be found one of the two remaining places where **Glacier Polish** is still evident on the granite walls of the valley. It is well worth the short walk to rub your hand over this polish and to realize the tremendous influence ice exerted in the sculpturing of this valley.

MIRROR LAKE TO HAPPY ISLES (1.7 miles)

We retrace our route to the first intersection just beyond Iron Springs, where we turn left. We cross Tenaya Creek and pass some large specimens of Douglas Fir. As we approach the next intersection we see ahead one of the few morainal ridges still existing on the valley floor. This is commonly known as the **Medial Moraine** or Ski Hill, a former beginners slope for winter skiing. We turn left at the intersection and the road cuts through the moraine exposing large boulders carried down by the Tenaya and Merced Glaciers during the Ice Age. The road then parallels the Merced River and several fine views may be seen of the rapids as the river tumbles swiftly downward. We cross the river turning left at the far side of the bridge to the **Happy Isles** parking area where we leave our car.

Happy Isles has much to offer the nature lover. Fifteen species of trees may be studied around this parking

area, which is practically the entire list for the valley floor. See how many of them you can distinguish. They are listed (common to rare for Happy Isles) as follows: Ponderosa Pine, Incense Cedar, Douglas Fir, White Fir, Alder, Black Oak, Maple, Dogwood, Canyon Live Oak, Bay, Cottonwood, Willow, Lodgepole Pine, Sugar Pine and Red Fir. Here the great white blossoms of the Pacific or Flowering Dogwood may be seen at their best during early spring. This same tree is glorious in reds during the season of fall coloring.



State Fish Hatchery at Happy Isles

A visit to the **Fish Hatchery** is well worth while. The hatchery was built in 1926 by the California State Fish and Game Commission and is operated by them. This is one of twenty-five hatcheries maintained in California through funds provided by fishing license fees. The planting of trout is done by National Park Service rangers. The output of the hatchery is close to a million and a half trout annually and the visitor generally has the opportunity to see fish of all sizes from the egg to fully grown specimens exhibited in the

aquaria and exhibit pool.

Leaving the hatchery a visit to the Happy Isles themselves is in order. Rustic foot bridges cross the river to the islands and the visitor is urged to continue to the upper end of the second island where a fine view of the tumbling and roaring Merced may be obtained as the river descends rapidly after dropping over Vernal Fall. Even on a hot day the Happy Isles are cool and consequently this is a favorite picnic site for visitors. If time permits, we may continue to the far side of the river and return to the parking area by the main Vernal and Nevada Falls trail. The Happy Isles concrete foot bridge is the starting place for many short or long trail trips. If you have an hour to spend the climb to Sierra Point gives you the effect of being on the rim of the valley. Nevada, Vernal, Illilouette, Royal Arch and Yosemite Falls are all in view from this point. From the bridge note the excellent view of North Dome, Basket Dome and Washington Column.

HAPPY ISLES TO OLD VILLAGE (2.1 miles)

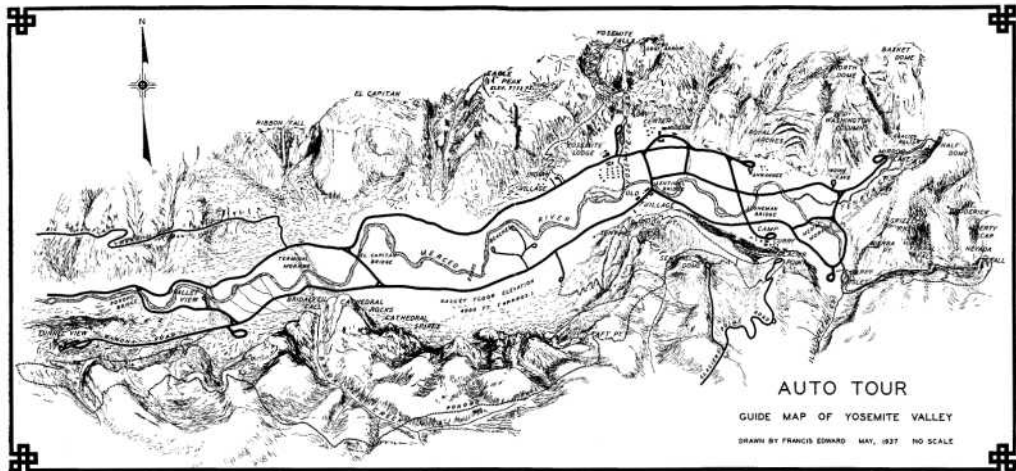
Leaving Happy Isles we turn left at the intersection and continue toward Camp Curry. On the right we pass Government Camp 11, one of the many free camps maintained for visitors with their own camping equipment. We continue straight ahead at the next intersection passing **Government Camp 14**, where

nightly (except Sunday) an outdoor program on the natural history of the park is presented by National Park Service personnel during summer months. Just beyond Camp 14 we see on the left an old **Apple Orchard**, planted in the early 60's by James Lamon, first homesteader in the valley. We now cross the **Stoneman Meadow**, where once stood the four story Stoneman House



Half Dome from Glacier Point

built by the State of California in 1887 and destroyed by fire in 1896. We pause by the side of the road for a better vista. To our left are the buildings comprising **Camp Curry**, established in 1899 by Mr. and Mrs. David A. Curry and one of the most popular Valley accommodations. As we gaze skyward, we can clearly see the famous Overhanging Rock at



HIGHWAY DISTANCES FROM GOVERNMENT CENTER, YOSEMITE VALLEY

Yosemite Valley Area (see above map)

Ahwahnee Hotel	..... .8 mi.	Camp 16 (housekeeping tents)	..... 1.0 mi.
Bridalveil Fall	..... 4.5 mi.	El Capitan Bridge	..... 3.5 mi.
Camp Curry	..... 1.4 mi.	Happy Isles	..... 2.5 mi.
Camp 4 (public campground)	..... .8 mi.	Mirror Lake	..... 2.5 mi.
Camp 7 (public campground)	..... 1.0 mi.	Old Village (store, etc.)	..... .6 mi.
Camp 9 (organization camp)	..... 1.5 mi.	Pohono Bridge	..... 5.6 mi.
Camp 11 (public campground)	..... 1.8 mi.	Park Company stables	..... 1.9 mi.
Camp 12 (public campground)	..... 1.9 mi.	Tunnel (east portal)	..... 6.0 mi.
Camp 14 (public campground)	..... 1.8 mi.	Yosemite Falls parking area	..... .7 mi.
Camp 15 (public campground)	..... 1.0 mi.	Yosemite Lodge	..... .8 mi.

Points Outside Yosemite Valley Area

Arch Rock Ranger Station	..... 11.0 mi.	Mono Lake	..... 76.0 mi.
Bodger Pass (winter ski area)	..... 20.0 mi.	Reno (via Tioga Road)	..... 218.0 mi.
Fresno (via Wawona Road)	..... 94.0 mi.	(via All-Year Highway	
Glacier Point	..... 30.0 mi.	and Sacramento)	..... 334.0 mi.
Hetch Hetchy (via B.O. Flat Rd.)	..... 38.0 mi.	San Francisco (via All-Year	
Los Angeles (via Wawona Road)	..... 313.0 mi.	Highway)	..... 211.0 mi.
(via All-Year Highway)	..... 356.0 mi.	(via Big Oak Flat Road)	..... 195.0 mi.
(via Tioga Pass)	..... 419.0 mi.	South Entrance Ranger Station	..... 31.0 mi.
Mariposa (All-Year Highway)	..... 44.0 mi.	Tioga Pass Ranger Station	..... 62.0 mi.
Mariposa Grove (Wawona Road)	..... 36.0 mi.	Tuolumne Meadows	..... 55.0 mi.
Merced (via All-Year Highway)	..... 81.0 mi.	Wawona	..... 27.0 mi.

Glacier Point, 3,254 feet above Camp Curry sticking out like an index finger. Just to the left of the Overhanging Rock, the path of the Firefall may easily be distinguished by the gray coloration on the face of the cliff where the embers have burned away the dark lichen streaks. During the summer and week-ends through the winter the Firefall is a regular nine o'clock nightly feature, the embers dropping about 1000 feet before striking a projecting ledge, which prevents any forest fires from starting. The main ledge below Glacier Point, marked by a line of trees, is the route of the famous **Ledge Trail** to Glacier Point. The newcomer will probably gasp at the nerve of anyone using this route but should be assured that the ledge is 300 to 500 feet wide at most points and is not so hazardous as it might appear.

We turn left at the next intersection for a visit to Camp Curry. If it is summer there will be many interesting activities. If it is winter the parking area will be converted into an ice rink and we will find Camp Curry the skating center of the Yosemite Valley area. Leaving Camp Curry, we return to the main intersection and turn left, continuing our journey in a westerly direction. After about half a mile, we see on the left the **Le Conte Memorial Lodge**, a Sierra Club building containing a small library and photo exhibit. Directly across the highway is Camp 16, the housekeeping unit where tents and all equipment may be rented either by the day or week

during the summer season. The road here closely follows the Merced River. On the left we pass Government Camp 19. Beyond, at the nearby intersection a road to the right crosses the **Sentinel Bridge** and leads to the Museum or to Yosemite Lodge.



Half Dome from Sentinel Bridge

Proceeding left, we pass through the **Old Village**, center of activity in Yosemite Valley prior to 1916. This was the site of the Sentinel Hotel, Cedar Cottage, Smith's Cosmopolitan House, and numerous other buildings. It is planned to eventually remove all man-made structures and return the area to its natural state. As we leave the Old Village, we see on the left the **Old Chapel**, built in 1879 from funds collected a penny at a time from Sunday School

children all over the country.

OLD VILLAGE TO TUNNEL VIEW

(5.7 miles)

The road continues west through a large open meadow where unobstructed views of the entire **Yosemite Falls** may be obtained. The Up-



Yosemite Falls

per Fall drops a sheer 1,430 feet, which is several hundred feet greater than the height of America's tallest skyscraper. The Lower Fall drops 320 feet or about twice the height of Niagara Falls. The little known Middle Fall can be seen just above the Lower Fall which with the intervening cascades make the total Yosemite Falls nearly 2,500 feet in height, from rim to valley floor.

The Yosemite Falls trail makes its way up the draw to the left of the

Upper Fall and continues along the rim to **Eagle Peak**, showing as a jagged pile of brown-stained rock above the main canyon rim. This peak is the highest of the **Three Brothers**. It rises 3,813 feet above the valley floor and is the highest point on the north rim of the valley. To the right of the Upper Fall may be seen the **Lost Arrow**, a slender shaft of granite separated from the main cliff face for a distance of several hundred feet. Above and slightly to the right of the top of the Lost Arrow is **Yosemite Point**, a favorite vantage point for the valley and high country panorama.



Sentinel Rock and Sentinel Falls

We continue our journey westward pausing for a moment along the highway where a short road turns left toward the base of **Sentinel**

Rock, looming high against the rim of the valley. Here starts the **Four Mile Trail** to Glacier Point and here was the original site of early hotel development in Yosemite. The Lower Hotel was built near this point in 1856. It and the Cedar Cottage were sole competitors for a decade. In 1869 "Black's" was built on the site of the Lower Hotel and "Leidig's" built nearby. The clump of Locust trees marks the location of Leidig's Hotel. To the right of Sentinel Rock is **Sentinel Fall**, prominent only in early summer. This is the highest hanging valley in this vicinity, the waterfall cascading down the cliff face over 3,000 feet.

A short distance further down the main highway, a branch road turns right leading to several fine beaches on the bank of the Merced River and also to the **Giant Yellow Pine**. This old tree, the largest example of its kind known to exist, died several years ago from old age and bark beetle attack but has been allowed to stand due to its enormous size, having a diameter of close to nine feet.

Along the highway we pass some fine old specimens of Incense Cedar, the tree with the brown fibrous bark, that is commonly mistaken for Giant Sequoia. During the next two-mile stretch of road note the heavy natural reproduction of young Incense Cedar and Ponderosa Pine. Most of the tree growth in the valley is less than a hundred years old. At the next highway intersection the road to the right crosses the Merced River over the **El Capitan Bridge**.

We continue on the left hand road along the south side of the valley.



Cathedral Rocks

We now approach the **Cathedral Spires** and **Cathedral Rocks** which may be seen ahead down the highway. A sign located on the left hand side of the road at a small turnout place marks the best spot



Ribbon Fall

for viewing the Cathedral Spires, which were climbed for the first time in 1935 by members of the Sierra Club.

As the highway rounds the projecting Cathedral Rocks, we get our



Bridalveil Fall

first glimpse of **Bridalveil Fall**. Across the valley, **El Capitan's** bulk dwarfs the canyon rim while to the left of El Capitan, **Ribbon Fall** plunges over 1,600 feet in a deep niche. For a more intimate view of Bridalveil we continue left at the next intersection and several hundred feet further on turn into the Bridalveil Parking Area where we leave our car. A short hike up the trail leading from the end of the parking area brings us close to the base of the fall, which makes a

sheer drop of 620 feet. The Indians knew this fall as Pohono, "the spirit of the evil wind." A study of its constant shifting by changing wind currents gives the explanation of this name. Bridalveil is truly a plaything of the winds.

Leaving the parking area, we turn left and continue on the **Wawona Road** a distance of two miles to the **Wawona Tunnel**. Here from the parking area, Yosemite Valley unfolds its charms in panorama. Near the granite curb is a titled photograph giving the names of all features and their heights above sea level. Late afternoons, during summer months, brilliant rainbow colors play on the mists of Bridalveil Fall. Leaving the parking area we return to Bridalveil Fall, although the visitor may first desire to drive through the tunnel. This tunnel was drilled through solid granite and is 4,230 feet long. It is twenty-eight feet wide and nineteen feet high. Opened June 10, 1933, it cost \$837,000. It is equipped with the latest word in automatic safety devices to free the tunnel of deadly carbon monoxide gas. It was bored to permit the construction of a modern mountain highway through instead of around these granite cliffs, which would have made an unsightly scar.

TUNNEL VIEW TO YOSEMITE FALLS (8 miles)

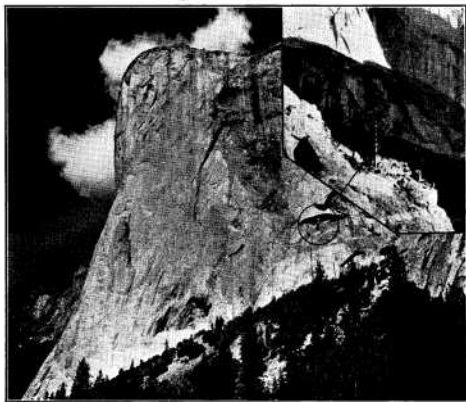
Retracing our route to the Bridalveil intersection, we turn left and continue for a short time westward. Watch for a narrow oiled road to the

right which leads to the river bank. This road runs alongside a **Terminal Moraine** (embankment of glacially carried boulders) of the last invasion of ice in Yosemite Valley during the close of the Ice Age, some 20,000 years ago. At the end of this road is a huge granite boulder on which has been placed a plaque in honor of L. H. Bunnell who was a member of the Mariposa Battalion, first white men to enter this valley—March 25, 1851. Mr. Bunnell proposed the name Yosemite since they were chasing a band of Indians known as Yosemite, (Grizzly Bears, Killers.) Later it was

learned the Indian name for the valley was Ah-wah-nee and the band called themselves Ah-wah-nee-chees. The highway continues across lovely Bridalveil Meadow and after rounding several turns comes to **Fern Spring**.

Fern Spring is an ideal stopping place on a warm summer day for the water here is always ice cold and pure enough for use in automobile storage batteries. Pacific Dogwood and a great variety of ferns help make this a delightful spot.

We soon cross the Merced River on the **Pohono Bridge** and meet the



El Capitan Showing "Map of North America" and El Capitan pine

main highway. The road to the left goes to Arch Rock, El Portal, and on out to Merced while the right hand turn takes us back up the valley on the north side.

Valley View is reached very shortly and one gets another fine view of the valley similar to the tunnel view. During early summer, the fragrant blossoms of Azalea form beautiful mass effects along the water's edge. Here is a stretch of the Merced River where Water Ouzels may always be found summer or winter. Another mile brings us to the **El Capitan Moraine** which shows as a prominent ridge across the valley. It is another terminal moraine of the last ice invasion. When this last glacier melted back this moraine served as a dam to form a lake several hundred feet deep in the valley. This lake has filled with sediments to give us the level floored valley of the present.

Our road now leaves the heavy forest cover behind and crosses the **El Capitan Meadow**. The visitor is urged to park on the right hand road shoulder several hundred yards before reaching El Capitan bridge intersection. Here we will study **El Capitan** in detail.

El Capitan's rim rises 3,000 feet above the valley floor while its domed top rises over 3,600 feet. It is hard to realize the vast quantity of granite composing this great feature but a comparison with well known world features will cause one to appreciate how well it blends into the natural setting. El Capitan would make three Empire State Buildings

in height. It is one of the largest granite monoliths in the world. Look for the dark area on the south face of El Capitan that resembles the **Map Of North America**. The dark area is not a stain but a dark colored granite known as diorite. **A Pine Tree** is growing out of a small crack on the face of El Capitan. It can easily be located by following the map of North America downward through Central America to an overhanging ledge. Above the ledge is a white vertical streak, directly under which is the top of the tree. Measured by triangulation from the valley floor in 1938, the tree was found to be 80.5 feet high and two feet in diameter which serves as a good measuring stick for estimating the height of El Capitan.

Leaving El Capitan, we proceed left at the next intersection, soon reaching a spot where an intimate view of the Merced River may be had.



The Three Brothers

A short distance further on we see above us on the north wall of the valley, three distinct peaks set like oblique steps one above the other. They are identified as the **Three Brothers**. Our next stop is at **Rocky Point**.

under the second of the Three Brothers. Here former rock slides have come well out on the valley floor and our road winds along the edge of the talus slope. A clearing on the left furnishes ample parking space and from here several fine views are to be had.

Across the valley, we again see Sentinel Rock and numerous spring waterfalls, also the winding zigs and zags of the four mile trail making its way up over **Union Point** on the way to Glacier Point. Closer at hand on the north wall we see evidence on the cliffs above as to the origin of the rock slide material so prominent in the foreground. This, the greatest slide in recent valley history occurred in February, 1923. Just above the line of trees to the right of the slide **Glacier Polish** is still evident although it has been around 20,000 years since the last glacier retreated from Yosemite Valley. The polished granite appears lighter than the surrounding cliff face. Note the horizontal striations where large boulders have ground their sharp edges in causing washboard-like grooves.

Leaving Rocky Point, our road leads past the new **Indian Village** on the left where a number of Indians are now housed in modern cabins provided by the Government.

Still further we come to the

Yosemite Lodge area, one of the year-round housing units operated by the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. for visitors. A short distance further on we turn left for our last stop of the day at the base of **Yosemite Falls**. Fine views of the entire fall can be seen as we drive up this road but the visitor should park at the loop end of this road and walk the few hundred feet up the trail to see the base of the Lower Fall more intimately.



Every winter an ice cone forms at the base of the Upper Yosemite Fall

We have now practically completed our tour of the valley and the visitor is invited to return to the **Museum** to examine exhibits or consult a member of the Naturalist Staff on any questions not covered by this Guide.

DIGEST OF THE PURPOSES OF THE
YOSEMITE
NATURAL HISTORY
ASSOCIATION
Yosemite National Park, California

ORGANIZED for the purpose of cooperating with the National Park Service by assisting the Naturalist Department of Yosemite National Park in the development of a broad public understanding of the geology, plant and animal life, history, Indians and related interests in Yosemite National Park and nearby regions. It aids in the development of the Yosemite Museum and library, fosters scientific investigations along lines of greatest popular interest, offers books on natural history applicable to this area for sale to the public, and cooperates in the publication of

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