

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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BADGER PASS SKI HOUSE

Yosemite Nature Notes

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THUMBNAIL SKETCHES OF YOSEMITE ARTISTS

By Elizabeth H. Godfrey

Introduction

"Painting is a music and a melody which the intellect only can appreciate, and that with difficulty."—Michael Angelo.

Whether in the glory of spring's awakening, the dryness of August sun, the golden spell of late October days, or the fairyland aspect of a perfect winter's day, Yosemite National Park has some charm for even those mortals who are least appreciative of its vast mountain splendor. But for those true worshippers of scenic grandeur who climb to mountain tops for a rendezvous with luminous clouds and sky above, and a panorama of boundless, breathtaking view below, it is an approach to a visioned Paradise. There alone, they may feel and commune with the spirit of the infinite as expressed and revealed in nature.

Others have experienced a similar uplift of soul when raising their eyes to waterfalls cascading and booming in rockets, or unfolding like misty veils over massive granite walls, or, when beholding a regal haze of deep purple, blue, mauve, or rosy alpenglow on domes and cliffs and spires. For some the distant snow-capped mountain peaks have been a personification of utter Purity, and massive El Capitan and Half Dome in moonlight have commanded awe and reverence in the heart of man who, when gazing in their ageless forms, comprehends his own meager and transitory existence.

Such spiritual and psychic exaltation experienced through an intimate association with the beauty of the out-of-doors is common to many, but the ability to capture that feeling or emotion on canvas by reproduction of the scene beheld belongs only to an artist.

In the "thumbnail sketches" in this and succeeding issues of Yosemite Nature Notes no attempt will be made to criticize or praise the technique of the various Yosemite artists. Neither will it be possible to include all artists who have painted the Yosemite scenery, since many have doubtless come and gone without leaving record of their visits. The brief, biographical

sketches to be presented are merely to serve as a guide for those interested persons who may wish to delve deeper into the work and lives of the artists who have attempted to reproduce and interpret the beauty of Yosemite National Park on their canvases.

THOMAS A. AYERS

(First Yosemite Artist)

On August 8, 1849, there arrived in San Francisco aboard the "Panama" a group of early gold seekers, among whom was a young artist by the name of Thomas A. Ayers—a native of New Jersey.

Western libraries contain no history of Ayers' early life, but many of his drawings of California scenery bear record today of his tours to gold rush towns and mining country. They tell us also that he was a man of courage and determination, who did not hesitate to suffer the hardships and physical discomforts accompanying early-day modes of transportation in order to find "golden nuggets" of scenic beauty, and to reproduce them on paper with his crayons. This characteristic may well have been a contributing factor in rewarding him with the enviable place of "first" artist in the great "valley" of fame—Yosemite.

It takes no stretch of imagination to visualize Ayers in San Francisco in the spring of 1855, being interviewed by J. M. Hutchings, an ardent nature lover and adventurer, and full of enthusiasm in contemplating the publication of his California Monthly Magazine. Hutchings asked Ayers to accompany him and two others into Yosemite Valley—which

was entered only four years previously by the Mariposa Battalion in seeking out the native Indians. Hutchings explained the rumor of unusual scenery—of a waterfall 1,000 feet high, six times higher than Niagara, and what a sensational article it would make in his new magazine, especially if illustrated by some of Ayers' sketches.

Briefly, Ayers agreed to accompany Hutchings into the wilderness in search of this vaguely reported waterfall. As has been recounted on many occasions, the party arrived at the south rim of the valley in June, 1855, after an arduous three-day journey via approximately the same route of the Mariposa Battalion. There they got a first overwhelming view of the valley with its magnificent cliffs, spires, and waterfall. The scenery far eclipsed their wildest imagination, and Ayers and Hutchings were as eager to tell the world of this practically unknown scenic treasure as were the gold seekers to proclaim their discoveries of gold in the foothills around Mariposa.

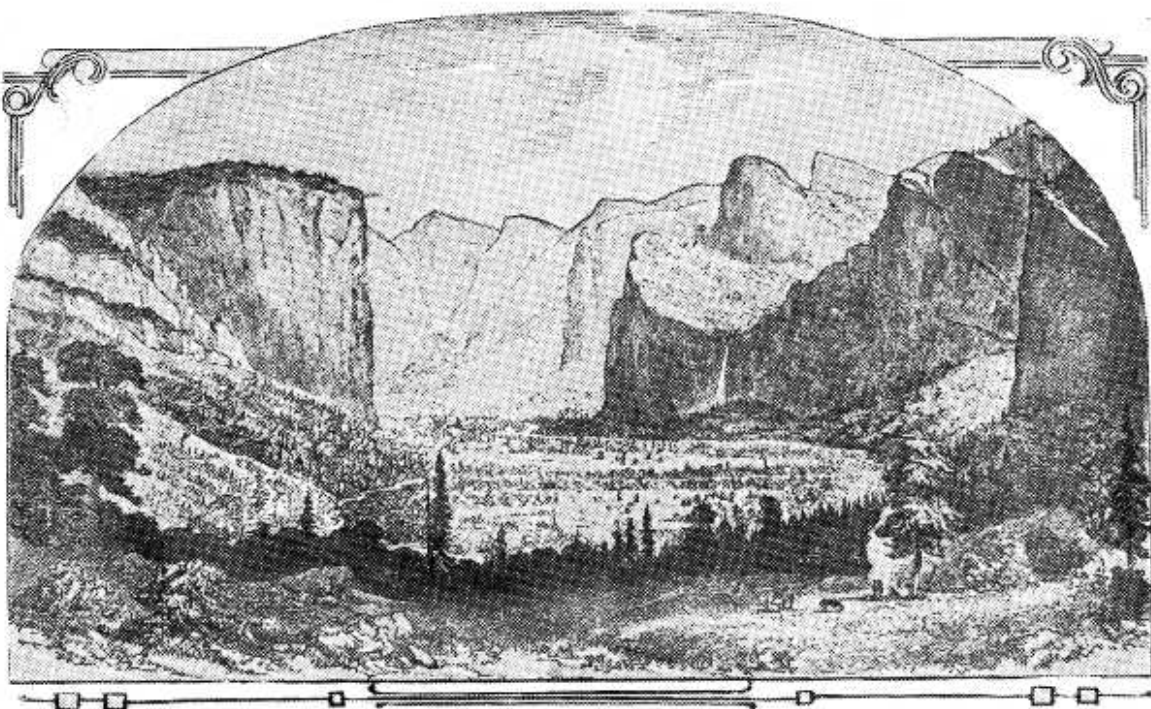
Records indicate that Ayers decided then and there to make his sketch of the drawing (now exhibited in the History Room of the Yosemite Museum) entitled, "A Gen-

eral View of the Great Yosemite Valley." In the foreground we note what might well have been the campsite of their party.

The first sketch finished, the men went on down to the valley floor

to have a close-up view of beautiful Bridalveil Fall. Hutchings gives Ayers and himself credit for the name "Bridalveil," but other authorities dispute him on this point.

The following morning they viewed



Ayres' first sketch: - A General View of the Great Yosemite Valley.

with equal delight unsurpassed Yosemite Falls—not a mere drop of 1,000 feet, but two falls of magnificent splendor with an intervening cascades, having a total drop of 2,452 feet, and embellished by a massive, granite wall over which they plunged in a mad passion of springtime release — personifying Power, Beauty, Force! Booming with rockets, the falls resounded their deep, ceaseless, mighty tones, akin to thunder.

With sketches of Bridalveil, Yosemite Falls, and the panoramic view as seen from Inspiration Point, the party continued on up as far as Mirror Lake, which Hutchings also claims was so named by this group.

Ayers made a number of other sketches including "The Domes of Yosemite," also exhibited in the Yosemite Museum History Room, "the domes" being Half Dome, Basket Dome, North Dome, and the Royal Arches.

"We spent five glorious days," states Hutchings in his book, *In the Heart of the Sierra*, "in luxurious scenic banqueting . . . We left reluctantly even when our sketch and note books were full to repletion with elevating treasures."

In a later passage of the same book, Hutchings gives this interesting statement, proving that he accomplished the purpose of his trip into the Yosemite:

"In October, 1885, was published a lithograph view of Yosemite Falls (then called Yo-Ham-i-te) from the sketch taken by Thomas Ayers, in the preceding June, and which was the

first pictorial representation of any scene in the great valley ever given to the public."

In 1856, Ayers again visited Yosemite Valley with another group, one of whom was Dr. L. H. Bunnell (ever to be remembered as that member of the "discovery party" who suggested naming the valley "Yosemite.") On this trip Ayers made other pencil drawings which included Illilouette, Vernal, and Nevada Falls. In his book *Discovery of Yosemite*, Dr. Bunnell says of Ayers: "His ingenuity and adaptability to circumstances, with his uniform kindness and good nature, made him the very soul of the party."

The drawings made on his second trip into the valley were exhibited in 1857, at the Art Union in New York, and some of them eventually went to England. Ayers' work was brought to the attention of Harper and Bros., who engaged him to illustrate a series of articles on Southern California. It was in connection with the completion of this commission, that he set sail in stormy weather from San Pedro, California, for San Buenaventura on the schooner "Laura Bevan."

On the night of April 26, 1858, there were washed ashore at Malaga Rancho, 40 miles northward of San Pedro, some hatchets which were identified as belonging to the "Laura Bevan." Thus, there is no doubt that talented Ayers met an untimely death, and perished in this shipwreck. With him was lost the

portfolio of sketches he had made for Harper and Bros. An article in the San Francisco Alta California, May 27, 1858, stated: "Mr. Ayers leaves two orphan children in this city, to whose support his unremitting exertions were devoted. His care of them, while it endeared them mutually to each other, was a model of tender affection and solicitude for their welfare. Mr. Ayers was aged about forty years."

The round-about manner in which the Yosemite Museum came into possession of ten original Yosemite drawings by Ayers and one lithograph, some 70 years after the artist's sketching trips to Yosemite National Park in 1855 and 1856, is indeed paradoxical. The inception of the story dates back to 1853, (Yosemite Nature Notes Vol. V., September 30, 1926) when one James Alden came to California as a commander in the U. S. Navy to serve on a commission to settle the boundary between Mexico and California. Sometime between 1856 and 1860, James Alden (later commissioned Admiral) visited Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees. Upon returning to San Francisco, he purchased a number of the Ayers' drawings mentioned, as mementos of the marvelous scenery he had witnessed.

Years passed, and the Ayers' drawings in frames were handed

down in the Alden family as prized possessions. In 1926, one of these descendants, Mrs. Ernest Bowditch of Milton, Massachusetts, was a visitor to the Yosemite Museum, and sought Dr. Carl P. Russell, then park naturalist, to tell him of the cherished pencil drawings of the Yosemite landscape inherited by herself, her sister, Mrs. G. W. Hubbard, and her daughter, Mrs. A. Eustis, from her great uncle, Admiral Alden.

Upon returning home, Mrs. Bowditch removed the drawings from their frames, and discovered the signature, "Thomas Ayers, Del. 1855." Realizing their significance, Mrs. Bowditch asked Mrs. Hubbard and Mrs. Eustis to join her in making a gift to the Yosemite Museum of ten Ayers' drawings and one lithograph --all that were in their entire possession. Thus, through the generosity of these three women, Yosemite Museum visitors have the opportunity of seeing on exhibition a fine representation of the work of the first Yosemite artist, Thomas Ayers.

Ayers' drawings, which are typical in technique to that done during the middle of the 19th century, contributed immeasurably to awakening interest in the spectacular scenery of Yosemite Valley, and in luring thousands of people to come and see for themselves what no tongue, pen, or brush has ever been able to adequately define or interpret.

(Next month's Thumbnail Sketch, "Thomas Hill")



NEW BOOKS AVAILABLE AT THE MUSEUM

Guide to the John Muir Trail and the High Sierra Region —Walter A. Starr, Jr., 1943. 145 pp., 1 map.....	\$2.00
The Yosemite —John Muir, 1939. 284 pp., 8 illustrations.....	\$4.00
Meeting the Mammals —Victor H. Cahalane, 1943. 133 pp., 52 illustrations.....	\$1.75
Manual of Ski Mountaineering —National Ski Assoc. of America, 1942. 135 pp., 14 illustrations.....	\$1.50
Handbook of American Mountaineering —American Alpine Club, 1942. 239 pp., 150 illustrations.....	\$2.75

SPECIAL NUMBERS OF YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

Fishes of Yosemite National Park —Willis A. Evans, January, 1944. 20 pp., 9 illustrations.....	\$0.25
Brief Story of the Geology of Yosemite Valley —M. E. Beatty, April, 1943. 8 pp., 12 illustrations.....	\$0.10
Bears of Yosemite —M. E. Beatty, January, 1943. 16 pp., 12 illustrations.....	\$0.25
Birds of Yosemite —M. E. Beatty and C. A. Harwell, 4th edition, revised and reprinted March, 1942. 36 pp., 31 illustrations.....	\$0.25
Self-guiding Auto Tour of Yosemite Valley —M. E. Beatty and C. A. Harwell, January, 1942. 16 pp., 18 illustrations.....	\$0.10
101 Wildflowers of Yosemite —Beatty, Harwell and Cole. Revised and reprinted January, 1942. 40 pp., 101 illustrations.....	\$0.25
Yosemite Indians, Yesterday and Today —Elizabeth H. Godfrey, July, 1941, 24 pp., 15 illustrations.....	\$0.25
Cone-bearing Trees of Yosemite —James E. Cole, May, 1939. 40 pp., 21 illustrations.....	\$0.25

EFFECT OF THE WAR AND GAS RATIONING ON PARK TRAVEL**By M. E. Beatty, Associate Park Naturalist**

The contribution of the national parks during war time in supplying rest, relaxation and inspiration for both civilians and military personnel has been adequately covered in a previous article by Dr. Carl Russell, Chief, Naturalist Division (See Yosemite Nature Notes, October, 1942). The purpose of this article is to record the effect of the war and gas rationing on travel to Yosemite National Park as indicated by the travel report for 1943.

In the pre-war years travel to Yosemite had increased yearly until for the travel year of 1941 a peak of 594,062 visitors had been reached. With our entry into the war and restrictions on travel, a tremendous drop was anticipated for the war years. No abrupt drop in park travel took place, however, as the Pacific Coast area was the last to feel the tightening restrictions of gas rationing. During the travel year ending September 30, 1942, a total of 332,550 people were able to visit the park.

The full effect of gas rationing was evident in the travel figures for the current travel year ending September 30, 1943, when the total of park visitors dropped to 127,643, a loss of 61.6% over the previous year. This figure represents but little more than twenty per cent of the normal pre-war count yet with the sharp reduction of both park personnel and funds, facilities and personnel were

taxed to the utmost to care for the visitors.

Out-of-state travel showed the greatest drop while in-state travel remained high. More people utilized train and bus transportation with the result that transportation by stage showed a 50% gain for the year.

Probably the most outstanding trend in park travel this last year has been the large increase in the use of the park by members of the armed services. A total of 28,057 military men in uniform visited the park, nearly half of whom came in organized army convoys. These groups were given special attention by rangers and naturalists through special museum and campground talks, conducted hikes on trails, and conducted tours to Glacier Point and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees.

Forty-five different military groups with a total of 5,182 men used the public campgrounds with an average stay of 3½ days. These groups were undergoing training in convoy operations and field camping while at the same time feasting on the beauties of the scenery. One battalion of negro soldiers hiked all the way in from Merced by the all year highway, returning to their base by an alternate route, thus conditioning their men to long continuous marches.

In addition to civilian and military visitors, the park was used in

other ways. The Ahwahnee Hotel was taken over by the Navy as a convalescent hospital and alterations have now been completed so that they will be able to accommodate more than 500 patients. The

Army utilized two areas, one at Wawona and the other at Badger Pass for training Signal Corp groups and it is possible that even greater use will be made of the park area as the war continues.

SAGE HEN—A NEW BIRD RECORD FOR THE PARK

By Marshall B. Evans, Wildlife Ranger

Several times during the past summer fishermen who had been in the Gaylor Lakes and Granite Lake vicinity reported seeing large birds on the ground resembling small turkeys. On September 17, 1943, Arthur Gallison, NPS Purchasing Clerk, reported seeing a group of seven sage hens at least 300 yards within the park boundaries in this vicinity and another group of about forty just outside the boundary.

On September 27, Ranger Carl Danner and I went to this same location and found a group of seven birds that were immediately identified as the sage hens commonly seen from Inyo County north on the east side of the Sierra. The birds had the characteristic dark underparts and long tails with sharp-pointed feathers that spread somewhat in flight. They flushed at about forty yards and flew farther into the park and were not seen again. It was not possible to tell the proportion of males and females nor whether the group consisted of a single family.

The natural cover in this location consisted of a few small White-bark

Pines. Apparently the birds had spent most of their time in the small drainage which led into the upper Gaylor Lake and which contained a considerable quantity of green grass. To the west is a flat of decomposed granite containing some sage of stunted growth which would provide suitable forage for the birds. The elevation here is 10,600 feet.

It is supposed that the birds worked up to the crest by way of Leevining Canyon as they are ordinarily seen at much lower elevations in the Mono Lake region along highway 395. Undoubtedly, they will return to their normal elevation range for the winter.

As this is the first record of Sage Hen (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) in Yosemite National Park, our eastern boundary will be watched for more occurrences in future years. These birds are protected at all times and should therefore be increasing in numbers. Future observations at this elevation might well indicate a change in food habits and range that will be worthy of special study.



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Dan Anderson