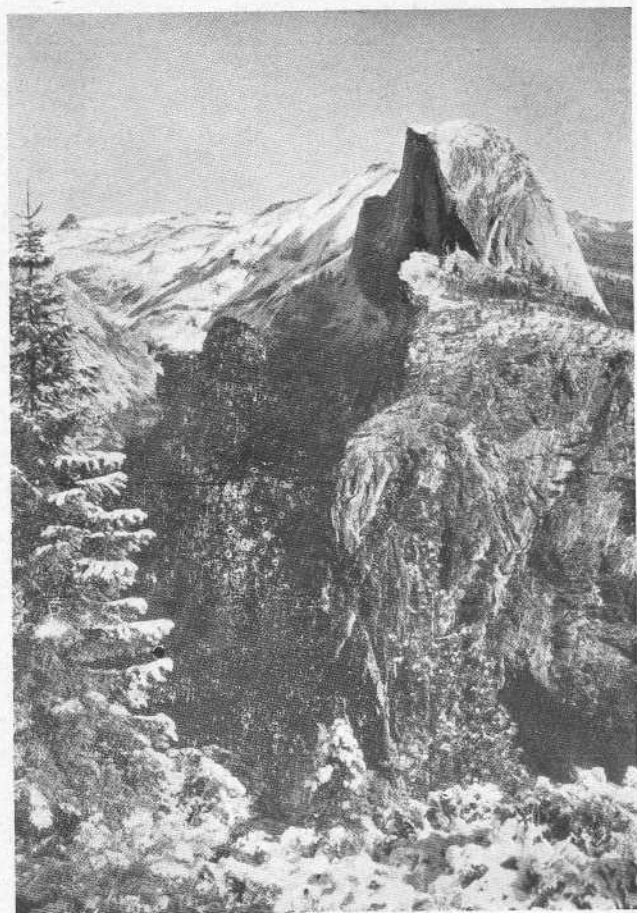


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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No. 3



Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DEPARTMENT
AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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PARK ALBUM

By Lt. John S. Spears *

A finer, faster lens has caught
The sunset's glow atop Half Dome
Than ever fan possessed who sought
The picture there, to carry home.

A firmer print of Badger's snow
Of Grizzly Giant and the falls—
Than ever picture card could show
Is in my heart when memory calls.

There are no photographs of men,
So clearly featured in their frames
As those whose lines I see again
When memory speaks familiar names.

Whether on foreign plain and hill
Or somewhere in our own great land—
Yosemite is with me still
As those who know can understand.

* Lt. Spears, now in the European war theater, is a former seasonal park ranger of Yosemite National Park.



THUMBNAIL SKETCHES OF YOSEMITE ARTISTS

By Elizabeth H. Godfrey, NPS Staff

Harry Cassie Best

Harry Cassie Best was born in the small village of Mt. Pleasant, near Peterboro, Ontario, Canada in 1863.

His talent was inherited from his mother, whose parents, believing that artistic expression was a godless waste of time, forbid her to follow her natural inclination to paint, draw, and combine colors. Nevertheless, after her two sons, Harry and Arthur Best, attained young manhood, she had the satisfaction of watching them develop through rigid application and self-education the talent that she had been forced to hide "under a bushel."

When Harry Best was 12 years of age his family moved from Canada to a farm in North Dakota, near Grand Forks, where he and his brother attended the public school. Both displayed talent for music, and by ear and self-teaching could play most any instrument. Harry Best played the violin and horn well.

At 17, Harry Best returned to Winnipeg, Canada, and worked as an apprentice to a tinsmith. While putting a tin roof on a skating rink, he became fascinated by a band that played for the skaters, and decided that the life of a musician was far more fascinating than that of a tinsmith. A short time later, he and his brother and three other young men had formed an orchestra, and were earning their expenses traveling from one Montana mining camp to

another playing for dances. Their travels took them to Portland, Oregon, and when in that vicinity Harry Best had the opportunity to see Mt. Hood, resplendent in sunset coloring. He stood gazing in awe at the snow-clad mountain, and all the innate artistic impulses inherited from his mother surged within him. He must capture those fleeting colors on canvas. He bought paints and brushes, but the colors faded into oblivion before he could paint them. There was only one way—memory, and he spent hours memorizing their radiant tones.

The discovery that he could paint was as joyous as when a miner strikes gold. Without hesitation he abandoned his ambitions for a musical career, and was determined to become an artist. He laid his groundwork by observations from nature—the greatest of artists—a few lessons from Rodriguez and other San Francisco artists, and five years' experience as a cartoonist on a San Francisco newspaper—the latter being a bread and butter medium. In that field, he had contact with, and was a close friend of Homer Davenport, destined for future cartoonist fame. Harry Best made friendships with a group of young contemporary artists, among whom was Thadeus Welch. In 1901, Welch invited Best to accompany him to Yosemite. Welch had been there before, but to

Harry Best the scenery eclipsed anything he had ever dreamed of. Welch made a few sketches, and then gave up, saying that he was on a vacation, and looking up to paint the precipitous cliffs was painful to his neck.

Harry Best's attention was also distracted. In walking through the Old Village, the center of activity, he stopped at the photographic studio (a tent) of Putman and Valentine. In charge was pretty Anne Ripley of Los Angeles, who having successfully run her employer's shop at the Hotel del Coronado the previous winter, had been sent to Yosemite for the summer season. It was love at first sight, and after a whirlwind courtship, the couple was married at the foot of Bridalveil Fall on July 28, 1901.

The newlyweds were so enraptured with Yosemite that they could think of no better place in the world to make their home. The following year Harry Best obtained a concession from the State to construct a studio on the Valley Floor. This he maintained until his death in 1936. He painted hundreds of Yosemite landscapes in all their seasonal moods and changes. He had special pleasure in painting the violet and blue haze that veils the Yosemite cliffs with atmospheric charm, and the alpenglow on snow-capped domes and spires which falls like halos of the setting sun, and contrasts with the turquoise blue of the winter sky.

In 1907, before departing for Europe with his wife and three-year-old daughter, Virginia, for a six-months' stay, Mr. Best was invited by the eminent astrologer, Professor Simon Newcomb, of Washington, D. C. to exhibit his paintings in the gallery of the Cosmos Club, of which he was a member.

Mr. Best's paintings created quite a sensation in Washington and many were sold including "Afterglow on Half Dome," to Franklin K. Lane, who was later appointed Secretary of the Interior.

The last day of the exhibit was for the sole benefit of President Theodore Roosevelt. He had graciously invited Mr. Best to hang some of his paintings in the White House, but as that would have entailed considerable inconvenience, the special exhibit was arranged. The President was impressed with Harry Best's work, and purchased "Evening at Mt. Shasta" to hang in the White House.

The Bests continued on their trip to Europe, where Mr. Best spent three months in Italy and three months in Paris painting and studying the work of the old masters. They returned to Yosemite in the spring of 1908.

The winter months were spent in Santa Barbara or San Diego. One year while in San Diego, Mr. Best painted a picture entitled, "Ramona," his artistic interpretation of the heroine in Helen Hunt Jackson's memorable novel by that name. The painting was the subject of much interest

and enthusiasm in San Diego and received considerable publicity. For six months it was exhibited at Ramona's Marriage Place, Old Town, San Diego, California, and was viewed by thousands of visitors. It now hangs in a private home in Pasadena, California.

In 1916, the Best family visited Honolulu where Mr. Best exhibited his paintings for six months at the University Club. Among the many sold was the painting, "Innocence,"—a semi-nude, which brought him several thousand dollars. At this time Mr. Best made a number of sketches of the volcano Kilauea. In 1920, shortly after the death of his wife, Mr. Best again visited Honolulu with his brother and daughter. On this occasion he completed his paintings of Kilauea and other Hawaiian scenes.

Following the marriage of his daughter, Virginia, in 1928, to the well-known photographer Ansel Adams, Mr. Best continued to live in Yosemite alone, deriving happiness in his work, and participating in the social life of the community. He enjoyed bridge, and during the skating season cut graceful figures on the open air rink at Camp Curry up to and including the winter preceding his death. With a full-head of hair that was only slightly gray, and his youthful spirit, no one would have

guessed that he had passed the 70 mark.

Mr. Best was interrupted in his painting constantly during the day by numerous friends and customers tripping in and out of his cheery studio. He was never too busy to stop his work and engage in friendly conversation. He was generous with his paintings—selling them to friends for a small sum, or sometimes giving them away as presents.

On October 14, 1936, after spending a delightful evening with his grandchildren in his daughter's home in San Francisco, Mr. Best was stricken with a sudden heart attack, and passed away almost instantly.

Since his death, Best's Studio has been operated by his daughter, Virginia, and her husband, Ansel Adams. There are still to be seen on the walls a number of paintings by Mr. Best.

He was perhaps the last of that group of pioneer painters of the West, who had the unique opportunity of showing to the world the beauty and color of such amazing natural wonders as Yellowstone, Grand Canyon and the Yosemite. His paintings of Yosemite and other scenery are monuments to his name, and he will remain one of the outstanding Yosemite artists long after those who knew him personally have passed on.

Sources

Note—A considerable portion of the above material was furnished the writer by the artist's daughter Mrs. Virginia Adams.

JAMES, George Wharton, "Harry Cassie Best—Painter of Yosemite Valley, California Oaks and California Mountains,"—"OUT WEST," January 1914.



YOSEMITE ANIMALS

SPIKE BUCKS STAGE A BATTLE

By Myrl V. Walker, Associate Park Naturalist

On Christmas day two spike bucks were observed in the open area south of the school house, participating in what at first appeared to be "a fight to the finish." The terrific pace of the battle was so apparent that a number of people soon gathered to watch the progress of the battle with some concern.

The two bucks appeared to be about the same size, and they each had spikes of approximately the same length, so that they were apparently well matched. When first observed each was standing his ground very well, with legs outstretched and well braced, and meeting his opponent head on. They were fighting with lightning like thrusts of their short, sharp antlers which were parried each time by a quick turn of the head and a resultant counter. This rapid fire attack at close quarters continued without let-up for three or four minutes, neither one being able to push his opponent more than a step or so. The speed and vicious-

ness of the thrusts were almost unbelievable.

Suddenly one of the bucks seemed to get a slight advantage. It was noted that the other was slowly retreating, step by step, but still carefully parrying every thrust. This was apparently the "break" they had each been playing for, for now the one who had gained the advantage gave a terrific lunge and actually "scooted" the other one over the ground as if he were on ice, sliding him along for forty to fifty feet.

At this point the vanquished somehow regained his balance, extricated himself from the charging opponent, turned tail and ran—thus breaking off the encounter. The winner followed for a short distance but soon stopped, for it was apparent that both participants were nearly exhausted. They stood with open mouths and tongues hanging out, panting heavily, and wobbling on their outstretched legs.



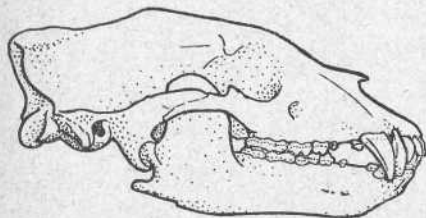
FOOD HABITS OF YOSEMITE MAMMALS AS INDICATED BY THEIR TEETH

By Lt. (jg) Richard G. Miller

PART II

Flesh Eating Mammals (Carnivora)

The Sierra Nevada black bear, which varies in color from jet black to light brown, is abundant in Yosemite National Park. It is an animal of great interest to Park visitors, yet few people seem to be aware of the imposing dental equipment of this



Black Bear
YMNH #359

6 inches

$$\frac{3}{3} \frac{1}{7} \frac{4}{4} \frac{2}{3} = 42$$

creature. An average adult bear has heavy canine tusks, measuring more than an inch from gum line to tip, and jaws that are very powerful. The incisors are heavy and strong and protrude forward from the jaw. These features together make the animal a formidable enemy, capable of grasping and tearing. The broad flat crowns of a bear's molar teeth show no scissor-like specialization as the teeth of some meat-eaters do, but seem to be intended for

mastication of a variety of foods. The molars, instead of cutting meat, are used for grinding such various foods as grasses, berries, roots, ants, animal prey and carrion.

The incisors, broad and blunt, are used in grasping or raking berries from bushes, cutting roots or stems of plants, and in breaking away wood in getting at insects or honey. The black bear is a voracious feeder and takes food in great quantities, gorging himself whenever the opportunity occurs. In the fall, this practice reaches a peak, and serves to build up the layer of fat which carries him through his winter of inactivity.

The black bear captures some small animals and occasionally kills fawns when the opportunity arises. It also captures fish in shallow streams, although this practice seldom has been reported of Yosemite bears. The handicap of poor eyesight has led the bear to become a scavenger and a bully. Frequently it feeds on the remains of another predator's kill. In fact, it is not above driving a lesser animal off and taking over its unfinished meal.



The bear is really equipped with tooth and claw to indulge its own preferences, a fact learned by many a camper in Yosemite Valley and which holds true throughout the park. The black bear is the largest of Yosemite predators.

The great teeth and claws of even the most ordinary bear, its speed of movement and unpredictability put it entirely outside the realm of the teddy bear, appearances to the contrary. It is to be kept at a distance and not encouraged. It is dangerous and for good reason it is forbidden by law to feed bears in the National Parks.

The grizzly bear of early days had food habits similar to those of the black bear but was much more able to provide his own kill. The California grizzly, now gone completely from the Sierra, was more of a meat eater, less a scavenger. Its extermination resulted from shooting, trapping and poisoning by stockmen in protection of their cattle and sheep.

The California grizzly was larger and more magnificent than the black bear and in the days when it was found in the Sierra could be readily identified by its size. Today, however, with skulls of both animals before us, the most apparent difference



is in the teeth. In the black bear, the last molar is never as much as $1\frac{1}{4}$



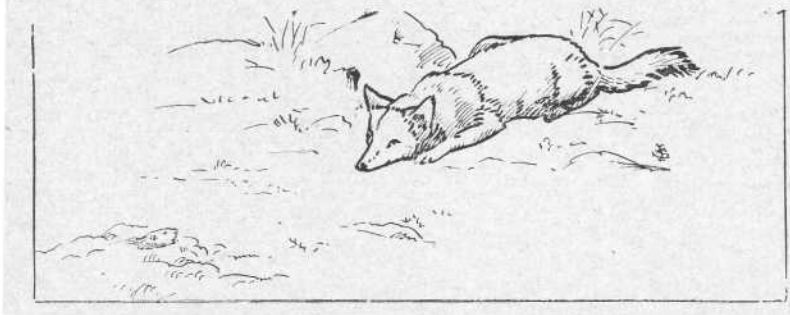
inches long, while in the grizzly it was never less than $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

In other carnivorous mammals the incisors for cutting, the canines for grasping and tearing, and the molars for chewing are present, as in the bear, but their numbers may differ with the species. The food habits and mode of life vary considerably, but they are essentially meat-eaters, and can be recognized as such by their teeth.

Some carnivorous mammals of Yosemite, together with an outline of their principal foods, are noted below:

Animal	Food
California gray fox	Small rodents, quail, grouse, large insects, berries, nuts and fruit.
Mountain coyote	Rodents, moles, deer.
Northwestern mountain lion, (cougar)	Deer, rodents.
California wildcat	Small rodents, porcupine, birds.
California badger	Rodents and other burrowing animals.
Pacific fisher	Porcupine, squirrels, snowshoe rabbits, frogs, fish and all small forms of wildlife.
Mountain weasel	Rodents, moles, shrews, birds, insects.
California spotted and striped skunk	Rodents, insects, lizards, birds, frogs, fruits.
California ring-tail cat	Smaller animals birds, insects, fruits.

Part III—Moles and Shrews (Insectivora), and Bats (Chiroptera), will appear in the next issue.





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Dan Anderson