

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

VOL. XXVI

DECEMBER, 1947

NO. 12



Stagecoach Holdup — Raymond-Wawona Road 1905

Yosemite Nature Notes

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

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THE LAST YOSEMITE HIGHWAY ROBBERY

By Francois E. Matthes

In the summer of 1920, National Headquarters of the Boy Scouts of America commissioned me to take four prize-winning Scouts, one from each borough of New York City, on a tour through the principal western national parks—the cost of the trip being assumed, very generously, by the Far Western Travelers Association. I was selected to lead the party because I was a Scoutmaster, and also, as geologist, was well acquainted with the parks and able to explain the significance of their scenic features to the boys.

The underlying motive was to give these young New Yorkers, whose ideas of the "wild and wooly West" were based chiefly on what they had seen in the movies, some conception of the Far West as it really is. They were to be shown the best of its marvelous scenery, of course, but between times they were to be given opportunity to see for themselves that the West is no longer a raw frontier country infested by scalping Indians and gun-toting badmen, but a peaceful and prosperous land as well-ordered as any of the states in the "effete East."

The party started out in Pullman

cars (which were until then unfamiliar to the lads) and first paid a visit to Denver. Thence the local Scout officials conducted them to Rocky Mountain National Park, where they climbed a peak. Next they went to the Grand Canyon and descended into its awesome, oven-like depths. Los Angeles showed them an ostrich farm, gave them their first swim in the Pacific Ocean, and a ride in the glass-bottomed boat at Catalina Island. And then they entrained for Fresno, where, the next morning, a motor stage stood ready to take them to the Yosemite Valley.

That stage, I should explain, was a three-seater with canvas top, and open at the sides. It was a large "touring car" of the type that was then in vogue. There were four such stages, but ours was accorded the privilege of leading the caravan. The other three stages followed at intervals, to avoid the clouds of golden dust that whirled up, for the "highway" to the Yosemite in those days still was merely a "dirt road."

The hot and seemingly interminable foothills did not interest the boys, and they grew drowsy. So the hours went by, rather monotonously,

until suddenly, upon rounding a sharp turn, we beheld a log stretched across the road, and behind that log a masked man holding a rifle aimed at us. Instantly our driver came to a stop, and we heard the stern command: "Hands up!" It seemed unbelievable—but the hands went up.

For a moment I thought that this was just a practical joke planned, perhaps, by some of my Yosemite friends, to give these eastern tenderfeet a little scare. But as the highwayman advanced upon us with determined mien, and we looked into the muzzle of his gun, I realized that this was no joke but the real thing. Being ensconced in the back seat, under the shadowy top, and behind the upstretched hands of the boys, I quickly pulled my wallet, which contained all the funds for the expedition, from my hip-pocket and slipped it under the leather seat cushion. The robber did not notice the gesture, for our car had stopped rather far from the log, and it took him several seconds to approach.

Our driver, fortunately, kept his wits. "This is just a bunch of Boy Scouts, pard," he said. "They have no money. Leave 'em alone."

The robber looked us over, thought quickly, and said: "All right, boys. Hands down! Drive up to the log and park there. How many more cars coming?" "Three," was the driver's answer.

A moment later the second stage hove in sight. Up went the robber's gun. "Hands up!" he shouted. "Everybody out, and line up in the road." Seven tourists, men and women, and the driver, lined up, ankle-deep in the dust. And then the

third stage arrived. The robber, standing at the side of the road, coolly shifted his rifle to cover the new crowd and ordered them to line up with the others. And the fourth stage was treated in the same way, almost perfunctorily, as if it were a daily routine. His "hands up" command sounded like a train conductor's "tickets please."

To keep all these people, about twenty-four in number, covered with his rifle, the robber waved it back and forth, as if to sprinkle the line with imaginary bullets. He now stood with his back to us, ignoring our presence completely. And we, although tense, felt that we were having grandstand seats at a rare performance.

It being manifestly impossible for the highwayman to rob each individual himself and yet keep the whole crowd covered, he called one of the men, tossed him an empty sugar sack, and ordered him to "go and take up the collection." "No jewelry, no watches," he shouted. "I want only cash."

An elderly lady, evidently in jitters, dropped into the sack her entire handbag, an unusually fine one, with silver mounting and chain. (There was no cheap "costume jewelry" in those days.) But when the collection had been taken up and was handed to him, the robber deftly pulled forth the handbag, emptied it, and tossed it back to its owner.

As we marveled at this act of courtesy (or was self-protection his real motive? we heard a rumbling noise, and looking back, we saw an automobile coming down the road behind the log. Calmly the robber

turned around, leveled his gun at the newcomer and shouted: "Get out of your car and wait 'till I see you." He thereupon ordered all the tourists back into their stages, admonished the driver not to start until he gave the signal, and walked up to the man behind the log. Having relieved him of his cash, the robber, still holding his gun in one hand, with a finger on the trigger, stooped over and with the other hand dragged the log out of the road. How he managed to do this with so little effort, was a mystery to us. Did he have an accomplice hiding in the manzanita bushes to help him remove that log?

The road being clear, he shouted: "Now drive on, and drive like hell!"

As we passed the robber, one of the older Scouts, self-possessed as always, smiled and flipped him a penny. Adroitly he caught it in the sugar sack. "Thanks, boy," he said. It all had a comic opera flavor. Where now was this well-ordered western civilization I had been sent to demonstrate?

We could not but admire the robber's careful planning of this hold-up, and the cool businesslike way in which he carried it off. But one serious error he did make. Instead of masking himself in the conventional way, with a black band slit at the

eyes, he had covered his head (under his hat) with a sugar sack, cutting out a piece which allowed his eyebrows, eyes and nose to be in plain sight. His mouth and shin were invisible, but enough of his face was exposed to reveal his identity.

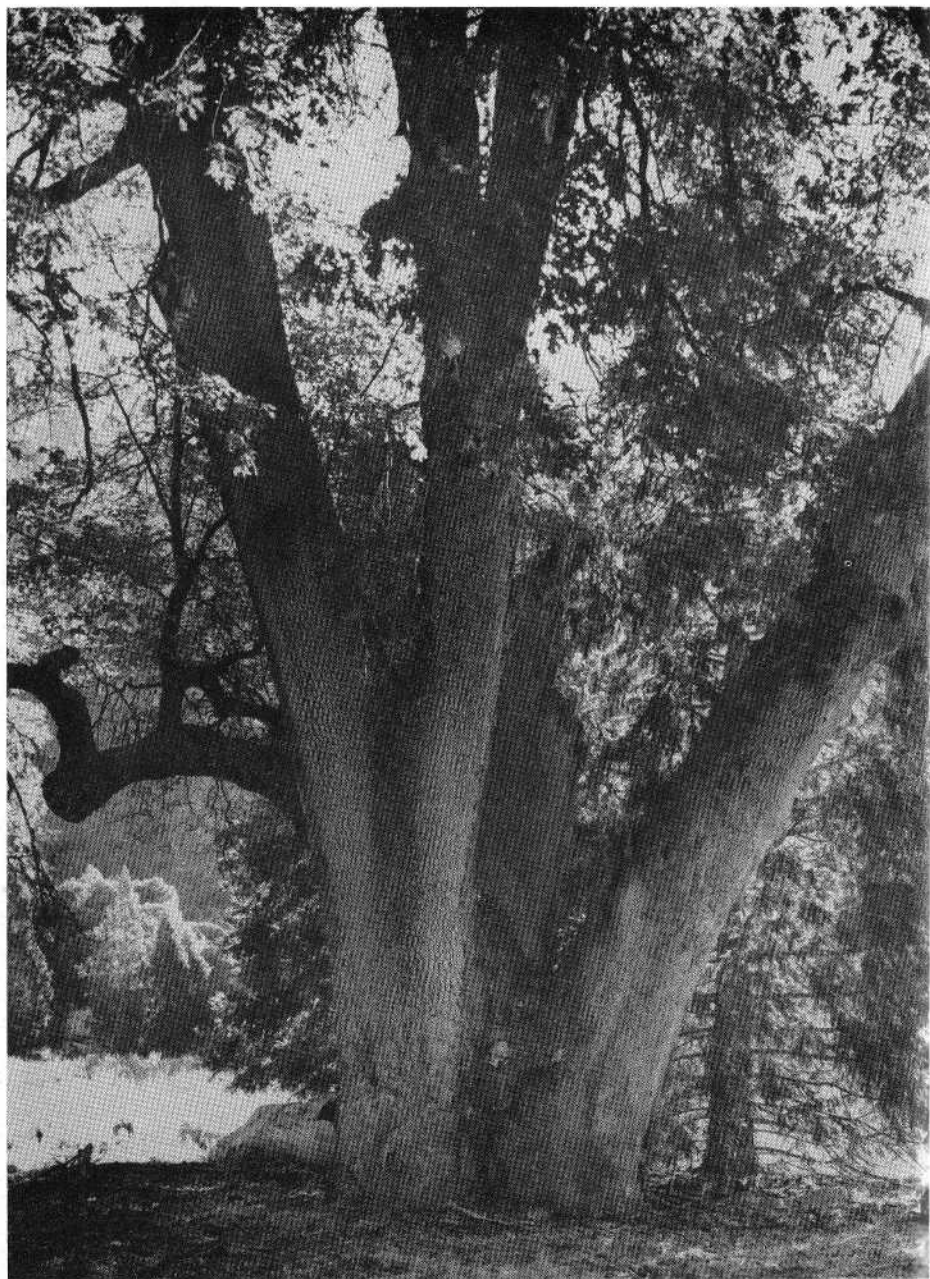
About six months later, when the members of our party were back in their respective homes, I received from the sheriff of Madera County a bulky envelope containing the pictures of four "bad-men" already in jail for various offenses, and any one of whom might possibly have been guilty of the hold-up. I identified our robber at a glance. Then, according to plan, the pictures were mailed to each of the Scouts in turn, with strict instructions to notify the sheriff of his identification, but to keep it secret from the other boys. It was a satisfaction to learn, later, that all the members of our party, independently of each other, had picked out the same man. And this unanimous agreement among the members of the Scout party doubtless added strength to the evidence upon which the robber was sentenced to the penitentiary.

To Eastern tourists and Scouts of today, looking for western thrills, it may be disappointing to learn that since this hold-up in 1920 no others have been perpetrated on any highway leading to Yosemite.

NEW BIRD RECORD

The American pintail (***Dafila acuta taitzihoa***) may now be included among the species of ducks recorded in Yosemite National Park. Mr. Walter J. Fitzpatrick, Yosemite National Park Post Office, observed a female

of this form, together with five female cinnamon teal (***Querquedula cyanoptera***) October 11, 1947. The birds were on the Merced River at Sentinel Creek Beach. (H.C.P.)



Champion California Black Oak

—Photo by Anderson

YOSEMITE GETS TWO MORE NATIONAL TREE CHAMPIONS

By Emil F. Ernst, Park Forester

According to a letter received from the American Forestry Association, Yosemite National Park now has three national tree champions. For some years the large incense cedar (27 feet 6 inches in circumference) near the El Capitan bridge has held undisputed claim to being the largest of its species. This tree is located a very short distance on the south bank of the Merced River just west of the bridge.

The past summer a very large lodgepole pine was discovered at Smedberg Lake by the writer. Although larger in circumference by six-tenths of a foot (19 feet 7½ inches) than the national champion for this species its claim was not recognized because it had lost most of its top in some long forgotten storm. The loss of the top was responsible for the lower figure obtained from the formula used by the association.

The formula concludes that one inch of circumference should be equal to one foot of height or four feet of spread. The formula is circumference in inches plus height in feet (plus one-fourth of the spread in feet). This formula gives a figure of 334 for the Sierra National Forest champion while our lodgepole pine tree figure was 295. We expect to wrest the lodgepole pine tree champion title some time in the future from the Sierra National Forest, for very large



—Photo by Anderson

The Champion Incense Cedar

lodgepole pines are fairly common in this park.

However, the other two trees submitted for consideration at the same time were readily accorded the accolades of being the national champions of their species. These new champions are the white fir, **Abies concolor** L. & G., (25 feet 5 inches in circumference, 189 feet in height) located at Merced Lake, and the California black oak, **Quercus kelloggii** Newb., (35 feet 11 inches in circumference) located at Pate Valley.

The white fir at Merced Lake stands right beside the trail to the High Sierra Camp and about an eighth of a mile west of that camp. The black oak will be seen by very few people on account of the relative inaccessibility of Pate Valley and its location off the regular paths of visitors to the High Sierras.

It is possible that Yosemite National Park may have yet another national champion of a species which was not included in the latest list of national tree champions. An isolated stand of the Pinon Pine, **Pinus monophylla** Torrey and Fremont, exists just north of the Hetch Hetchy reservoir. In this stand there is a tree having a diameter of 4 feet 1 inch (approximately 12 feet 10 inches in circumference) a height of 43 feet and a spread of 57 feet. The data on this tree will also be submitted after an authentic photograph is available.



—Photo by Anderson
The Champion White Fir

FRANK A. KITTREDGE APPOINTED TO NEW POSITION**By Ralph Anderson, Administrative Assistant**

Effective December 1, Frank A. Kittredge, for the past six and one-half years Superintendent of Yosemite National Park, was appointed to the position of Chief Engineer of the National Park Service at Washington, D. C.

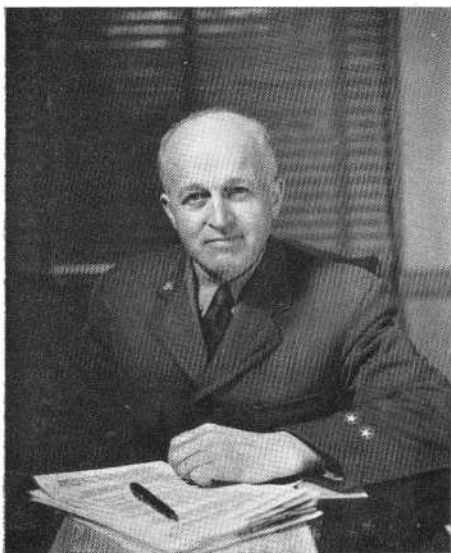
Mr. Kittredge was born March 29, 1883, at Glyndon, Minnesota. His interest in engineering engendered by hero worship of his famous engineer uncle, led him to major in that field, and resulted in his graduation from the University of Washington in 1912 with a B.S. degree in Civil Engineering. In 1915 he received his Master's degree in Civil Engineering at the same university.

Born of pioneer stock, Mr. Kittredge carried on the family tradition by pioneering, shovelling sand in sluice boxes, in Alaska the summer of 1904. In 1905 and 1906 he worked on the location and construction of two Alaskan railroads. He returned to Alaska in 1917 and 1918 for the Bureau of Public Roads as a highway engineer.

In the meantime, he married Catherine Mears at Medford, Oregon, on March 11, 1915. The Kittredges have one daughter, Catherine Jane, now married to Major Robert Andrews and living with their small son at Boise, Idaho.

Following graduation, Mr. Kittredge pioneered in the development of road systems in Washington, Oregon and California under some of the early masters in road construction.

This experience was valuable to



—Photo by Anderson

him in later years when he became Senior Highway Engineer for the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads. During the period from 1917 to 1927 Mr. Kittredge was given the responsibility, and for him the pleasure, of making a great many important reconnaissance surveys of routes as well as location and construction of highways. Among these were the trunk highway from Barstow, California, to Las Vegas, Nevada, and to Kingman, Arizona. This involved weeks of travel across the desert by automobile, by saddle horse, and afoot depending upon the nature of the country.

During World War I, Mr. Kittredge served as Lieutenant and Captain in the Army Corp of Engineers and spent 13 months in France. As Company Commander of a road-building

organization, his outfit carried on maintenance and construction of highways and a logging operation for the furnishing of materials for the troops at the front.

In 1927, Mr. Kittredge was transferred from the Bureau of Public Roads to the position of Chief Engineer for the National Park Service under Director Horace M. Albright. In this capacity he laid the foundations for the development of many park areas. This was a particularly active period in engineering, for during these ten years many of the public utility systems had to be redesigned and built anew to provide increased service to the public. The CCC activities also made this period one of particular importance in the planning and construction of engineering projects. He held this position until he became Regional Director, Region Four. The newly established Region Four contained many of the old-line parks, carrying with it some of the fundamental problems and responsibilities of protection and conservation not only of natural resources but of the Park Service objectives.

It was during this period that the campaign for the establishment of the Kings Canyon National Park was renewed and the Regional Director carried the burden in the West for the Director of the National Park Service and the Secretary of the Interior by building up friends for the movement to support the Secretary and Congressman Gearhart. It was a period of constant attention to the personal approach in order that all differences between bureaus might be minimized, and the issue be confined to a basis of land use values.

Since 1940, Mr. Kittredge has given valuable service as Superintendent, first in Grand Canyon and then in Yosemite National Park. Throughout his career in the National Park Service he has given unstintingly of his time and energy to the furtherance of National Park objectives, and courageous defense of National Park standards.

Outstanding examples of his engineering skill are found in the Going-to-the-Sun Highway crossing Glacier National Park; in the highways of Hawaii, Zion National Park and many other national parks and monuments.

Mr. Kittredge also took a leading part in negotiations leading to the establishment of Olympic National Park. This, with the Kings Canyon effort, constitutes one of his greatest contributions to the National Park Service, and earned for him the credit for being one of the nation's outstanding conservationists.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Kittredge will be missed by the many friends they have made in Yosemite where they have taken an active part in everything benefiting the community. They are noted for their gracious hospitality, democratic spirit and their consideration for the welfare of every employee in the park.

His successor to the superintendency of Yosemite National Park, Dr. Carl P. Russell, has stated in his recently revised 100 YEARS IN YOSEMITE, "... In all this varied experience with the scenic masterpieces of the National Park System, Frank Kittredge maintained a sincerity of purpose in safeguarding the natural and historic values of the parks."



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Dan Anderson