

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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Ta-bu-ce (Maggie Howard)

Photo by Anderson

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CURRENT GROWS HIGH ON GRIZZLY GIANT

By Eugene A. Down, Park Ranger

Editor's Note: This story is of special interest in view of last month's article on white pine blister rust control.

One of the oldest and most famous inhabitants of Yosemite National Park is harboring a youthful undesirable these days in defiance of eradication crews. Visitors to the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias may view with interest this occurrence as a Sierra currant has established an apparently healthful growing site atop the first major branch of the Grizzly Giant, a lofty perch, nearly 100 feet above the ground level. The Grizzly Giant is the largest tree in the grove and is estimated to be about 3,800 years old. It averages 27.6 feet in diameter at the base and the branch on which the currant grows is six feet in diameter. The age of the currant is not definitely established, but the bush was first observed in the very early 30's. It has since been identified as **Ribes nevadense Kell.**, commonly called Sierra currant.

The currant is one of the species of shrub being eradicated in the park to prevent the spread of white pine blister rust among the sugar pine,

western white pine and whitebark pine. It harbors this fungus during part of its life cycle and, from the diseased Ribes bushes, spores are spread to these most valuable species of pines with devastating, and sometimes fatal, results. Since 1930, however, no eradication crew has figured out a way to eliminate this particular specimen. The Park Forester has entertained many proposals for a method of removal such as "shooting it out," "lassoing it," and even "dropping a paratrooper down on the limb," but to date he has been reluctant to accept any of them.

This spectacle may readily be traced through the common phenomena of nature, although the combination of factors required to sustain growth on such a lofty site are not common in this area. First, such a bush needs soil of some type to supply minerals and second, it needs sufficient water to sustain life. Currants and gooseberries are definitely not parasitic and thus **unable** to se-

cure these from the Grizzly Giant. This growth must, therefore, be sustained in a pocket of dirt, rotted bark and leaves from a seed deposited there by a bird or perhaps a squirrel or other small animal. The Sierra currant has occasionally been found

growing in rotted logs, old stumps and even in dead and rotting snags, but this is probably one of the loftiest growing sites noted. The continued survival of the bush will be an interesting observation for the future.



Boysen Photo

TA-BU-CE

By Ralph Anderson, Administrative Assistant

Ta-bu-ce is dead! Following in the footsteps of her Piute ancestors, she was buried with Indian ceremonial rites at Bishop, California, late in January. The winds howled down from the Sierra Nevada and across the semi-desert plain. Snow drifted on the road south of Mono Lake as Lucy Telles and her brother, Harry Tom, second cousins of Ta-bu-ce, drove to Bishop for the funeral.

Ta-bu-ce was born at Mono Lake. Her mother gave her the name Ta-

bu-ce meaning "grass nut" or "sweet root dug from the ground." Like many other Piute Indians Ta-bu-ce accompanied her family on their migrations from Mono Lake to Yosemite Valley and back again according to the seasons and their needs for hunting, gathering of acorns, pinon nuts.

Many years ago she made Yosemite Valley her home and lived in the Indian Village at the mouth of Indian Canyon east of what is now

Government Center and about the location of the new Tecoya residence section. There a round house was used as a small community hall and for ceremonials. They had crude shelters of cedar bark and old humber. Cooking was done in the open, somewhat camp style. Thus the Yosemite band of Indians lived following the wiping out of their native village on the present site of Yosemite Lodge when the Army moved into the Valley in 1906.

There was considerable travelling between Yosemite Valley and Mono Lake east of the Sierras. The Indians of many groups joined to gather pinon nuts in the fall east of the Park, while the Piutes of Mono Lake visited their Yosemite relatives to gather acorns. Ka-cha-vee was gathered in the late summer as the pupae of the fly was swept up along the sandy alkaline shores of Mono Lake in long windrows. They lived a simple but happy life. They loved their horses, and the young men took naturally to being good horsemen.

During the early 1900's, Ta-bu-ce worked as a maid at the Sentinel Hotel. Later she did cooking and housekeeping for some of the white residents of the Valley. This may surprise many friends who knew her only as a true Indian, living her life according to the customs of her stone-age ancestors, preferring her native acorn water-biscuit to any white man's delicacy, flavoring her gruel with Ka-cha-vee and cooking her food with heated rocks dipped into beautifully decorated baskets so

close-woven as to be watertight.

Ta-bu-ce was versatile. She learned the psychology of her white neighbors first hand, and used it often to win extra tips, to turn a good joke, or to win approval of her audience. She was quick witted, as for example the time that an elderly woman asked how old she was, and she replied: "I'm sixteen—how old are you?"

Just how old Ta-bu-ce was when she died January 25, 1947, no one can be sure. Early census figures compiled on the Indian Village gave her age much younger than old-timers believed. Perhaps Johnney Lawrence, elderly Piute Indian of Mariposa, has given us the best estimate of her age. To him, she was over 90 years of age. He based his estimate on the fact that he knew his age to be 77 and Ta-bu-ce was a grown woman when he was a little boy. Lucy Telles recalled that her mother once said that Ta-bu-ce was older than she was, and her mother is now a very old lady.

Thousands upon thousands of visitors to Yosemite knew and loved Ta-bu-ce. They visited with her in the Indian Village back of the Museum where, every day during the summers from 1929 until the war came on, she sat under the oak trees and pounded acorns, sifted the meal, poured it into a sand basin, leached out the bitter tannic acid with successive treatments of hot water, and finally baked small cakes to the delight of the visitor. There under the oak trees she wove baskets, origi-



Photo by Harwell

Tabuce making a Chuck-aw or Acorn Storage Bin.

nated a small replica of a hickey, or baby carrier, and made rag dolls complete with hair from her own combings. These she sold for a nominal sum.

She appeared often at the Camp 14 lecture platform and used the loud speaker system with the composure of the most experienced public speaker.

While she was never very enthusiastic over having her picture taken, she willingly posed. Sometimes inconsiderate visitors would "sneak" a picture of her. She resented this practice thoroughly, for to her it was unsportsmanlike to avoid paying her a small tip. Once she scuntered into the Museum after

a busy day of answering questions, and grunted: "Him take my picture all the same bear!"

During her peak of popularity, Guy D. Haselton, motion picture photographer from Hollywood, made a complete movie story called, "Bread from Acorns." After making the series of pictures and paying Ta-bu-ce well for the trouble, he remarked to a friend in her presence that such a motion picture might be worth \$1,000.

From that time on Ta-bu-ce was wary of motion picture photographers! Every time she heard the buzz of a movie camera she felt she was being imposed upon, that the photographer would likely get a thousand dollars for that picture.

As the years rolled on, Ta-bu-ce developed cataracts on her eyes. A famous eye specialist of San Francisco became interested in her case, offered to perform the operation and it "wouldn't cost a cent." With the aid of Dr. James Asa White, resident minister who always took a great interest in the Indians, Ta-bu-ce was taken to the city for the operation early in March, 1939.

Arriving at the depot in San Francisco, the noise and turmoil of the crowds in the station frightened her. It was her first trip away from her native mountains. To add to the confusion, news photographers were there with flash guns to get her picture. In her partial blindness, the flashes of cameras and the roar of taxis and street cars was almost too much for her. She was thankful for

the comparative quiet of the Stanford University Hospital in San Francisco.

The successful operation was performed. Then followed the trying period of convalescence—first at the home of her friend, Mrs. J. L. Hastings, Albany, California, and later in Yosemite. But her troubles were not over. She had two pairs of glasses, one for distance and another for close work. She was invariably getting them mixed up, and in her despair sometimes felt that it was all to no avail. Adding to her worries was the need for meeting certain hospital and other expenses while in San Francisco. Hadn't the good doctor told her it wouldn't cost her a cent? Why then did she owe anyone money? Not that she was poor. Her frugal mode of living, and the many tips from admiring friends, combined to build up a good bank account.

But Ta-bu-ce eventually learned to use her glasses, and returned to her old cheerful self again. Park visitors enjoyed the rare opportunity to learn first-hand the customs and ceremonies of the early Indian inhabitants. Ta-bu-ce liked being an Indian, yet she was patient and understanding in the presence of hundreds of visitors every day at the replica of an Indian village back of the Museum.

In her own way, Ta-bu-ce was deeply religious. She told her friends that she never ate a meal without offering a prayer to the animal gods whose power over her life she believed in implicitly. She said that if

she didn't pray before eating that the food would hurt her.

When the war came on, Ta-bu-ce moved to Mono Lake to be near her son, the son to whom she had mailed many packages of groceries from Yosemite. But she returned several times to Yosemite in summer. On one occasion she stayed overnight with her friends, the Carl Sharsmiths, at Tuolumne Meadows. They revelled in seeing her again, and having her good company overnight. As they sat down to supper in the evening, Ta-bu-ce jumped up suddenly and went into the bedroom. After rummaging through her flour sack which she used as an "overnight case" she returned with a dirty cloth sack. It contained her sugar! She knew how hard it was to get rationed sugar and she would not impose upon her friends by using theirs.

True to the superstitions of her people, she felt that enemies or witches were seeking to do her harm. She sometimes told her more intimate friends of how on one occasion an Indian medicine man had taken a large rock right out of her—a rock that some witch had inflicted upon her. She described dramatically how the medicine man hovered over her, waving his hands back and forth and chanting a prayer. Then suddenly he held up the rock that was causing all the trouble!

While she could not read, she was methodical about her banking. First one and another sympathetic individual would help her with her

business affairs. Often she would become suspicious that she was being imposed upon, and would transfer her banking to another person.

She became acquainted with Mrs. Fred Alexander in 1912 when she did cleaning for her mother, Mrs. Leavitt, mother of Ernest Leavitt now Superintendent of Crater Lake National Park. Amy recalls Ta-bu-ce's honesty: On one occasion she found a valuable ring on the floor and though it would appeal to any Indian she returned it at once. Throughout the later years of her life, Ta-bu-ce looked to Amy Alexander for help and guidance. She would come at the end of each summer day with her little sack of coins from tips and sales of basketry and acorn bread, and have Amy count it and give her a receipt. This was done carefully, and Ta-bu-ce was always given her "paper." In due time her bank account grew until the time of her death it is reported to have amounted, together with a U. S. Treasury Bond, to about \$1,800.

During the summer before her death, the Sharsmiths called on Ta-bu-ce at her little shelter near the mouth of Bloody Canyon (See Yosemite Nature Notes, November, 1946). The charming old lady was delighted to see her friends, and gave each of the children one of her unique hickies and dolls.

Late in the fall of 1946 Ta-bu-ce seemed to sense that her days were numbered. She sought out her niece, Annie Sam, at Bishop, here she failed rapidly, made out wills with the aid of an Indian Agent to distribute her estate and passed away on January 25, 1947. In keeping with what she would have wished, she was buried with the ceremonies of her Piute ancestors. Old songs were sung. Lucy Telles went through a terrific winter storm to attend the ceremonies, and later reported: "When I got there they bring the body to where she died. They gave her a sing and the next morning had a sing then took her to the undertaker parlor. The body was outside and they sang around the body. They danced. I didn't dance 'cause I was so tired. The other girls danced. They made a fire—the body on one side and the dancers crying there and going around the fire—men, women, everybody. They danced five songs."

In keeping with Miwok Indian custom, her quaint homemade dresses were buried with her.

A writer for the Fresno Bee appropriately stated, ". . . her passing severed one of the last links in the chain which connects the present with the days when Indians roamed the valleys and mountains, free from restraint of the White Man."

Further References

- "Ta-bu-ce, Conservationist," by Lowell Adams, Yosemite Nature Notes, October, 1939.
 "Ta-bu-ce as a Weather Prophetess," by Ernest A. Payne, Yosemite Nature Notes, Feb., 1938.
 "A Visit with Ta-bu-ce., by Carl W. Sharsmith, Yosemite Nature Notes, November, 1946.

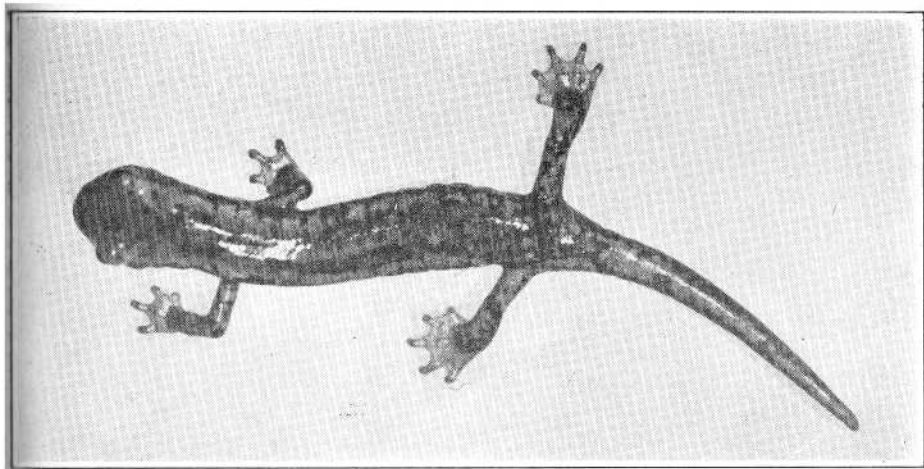


Photo by Anderson

NOTES ON BEHAVIOR OF MOUNT LYELL SALAMANDERS

By M. V. Walker

Early in the spring of 1946, several Mount Lyell salamanders were collected from the top of Half Dome and placed in the live reptile exhibit. As fall approached they were brought inside and kept in the park naturalist's office for some time. A fruit fly culture was developed upon which they fed for several days. Their feeding behavior seemed rather unusual for salamanders and is described rather briefly in the following notes.

While most salamanders appear to be rather sluggish and slow in their manner, the Mount Lyell Salamander seems very alert and quick to sense the direction and distance of the fruit flies which were being attracted to the jar. Whenever a fly would enter the jar containing the salamanders, they would quickly turn the head in the direction of the fly, and then stand high and straight on their slender

front legs. On a few occasions they were observed to take two or three quick steps toward the fly before throwing out the slender tongue to catch the insects "toad" fashion. Although there were a few misses, no doubt due to faulty judgment of distance, most of the tries were successful and food was captured. One salamander seemed very alert and active and moved around the jar quickly enough to capture five or six flies in a period not exceeding two or three minutes.

The eyes of the Mount Lyell salamander seem unusually large for so small a salamander, and in addition, they seem to protrude and stand out from the head. This seemed to be even more noticeable when the salamanders were "looking" for the fruit flies.

BOOK REVIEWS

Your Western National Parks by Dorr G. Yeager, Regional Park Naturalist, has recently been added to the list of books on sale at the Museum. This is a book replete with practical suggestions of what to see in our western parks and monuments and how and when. Mr. Yeager has lived and worked in many of these areas. He tells of their wonders not as in a guide book, but with the familiarity of long acquaintance. One might well have met him on a trail beside some mountain stream and paused to talk of the country ahead, the number of miles to an alpine lake, what flowers you might see along the way and whether or not you would need a jacket as you climbed a pass. A fine book to have along while touring our monuments and parks, it is also good reading for armchair travelers who visit and enjoy these areas with Mr. Yeager even though they must remain at home. The book is priced at \$3.50 and published by Dodd, Mead and Company. (K. J. P.)

The publication of the revised edition of **One Hundred Years in Yosemite*** by Carl Parcher Russell, Chief Naturalist of the National Park Service, is a welcome event among both those interested in Yosemite National Park and those who enjoy fine historical literature. Replacing the 1931 edition, which has been out of print for some five years, the new publication has been brought up to date with the addition of much new

material and more effective display of an increased number of illustrations. The well chosen photographs secured from the files of the Yosemite Museum constitute in themselves a valuable record of historic scenes ranging from the activities and buildings of the early pioneers to a view of Hetch Hetchy Valley before inundation.

Dr. Russell has enhanced an already splendid narrative through a commendable sense of reevaluation of his material in the light of new findings and more recent events. Some of the interesting documentary material and side lights appearing in the first edition had been condensed to make room for the addition of such new material as the chapter entitled "The Interpretators." In this chapter Dr. Russell presents an excellent discussion of the inception and development of the program of scientific interpretation for park visitors. The section on the chronology of events with sources and the extensive bibliography at the end of the book will prove valuable to the casual reader as well as the student.

"One Hundred Years in Yosemite" is a most readable book with its historical facts presented in a scholarly and yet dramatic style. Newton B. Drury, Director of the National Park Service, says, "The book . . . is more than a history of Yosemite. It traces the evolution of an idea." Dr. Russell has written a strong statement for the sort of conservation for which the National Park Service stands, a statement which will be read with interest and enjoyment by many people. (D. E. M.)

*"100 Years in Yosemite" by Carl P. Russell. University of California Press, 226 pp., \$3.75.



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Dan Anderson