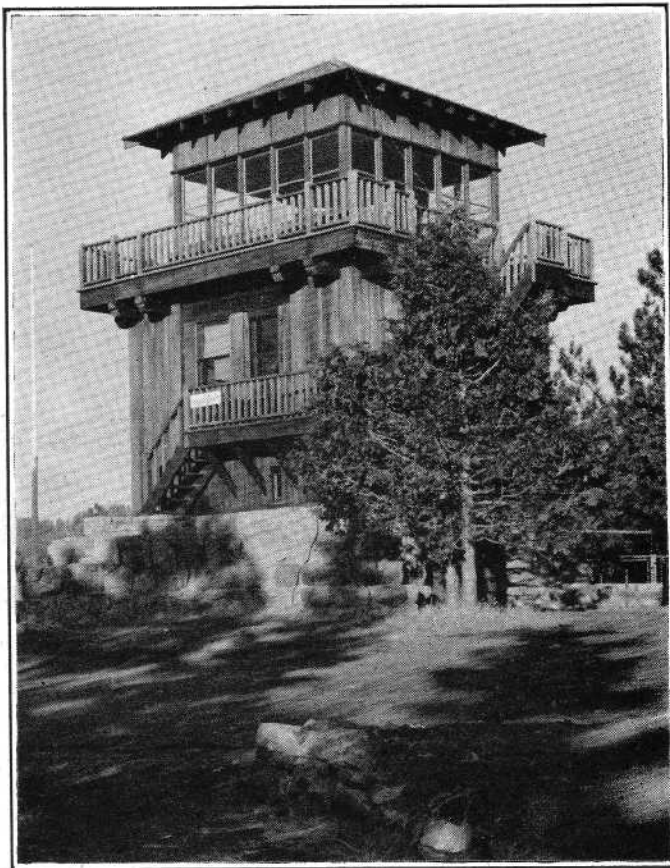


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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No. 9



Craneflat Fire Lookout

Photo by Anderson

Yosemite Nature Notes

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

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A STRANGE VISITOR IN YOSEMITE HEAVENS

By Harold E. Perry, Ranger Naturalist

About 4:20 in the afternoon of August 14, 1947, having just arrived at the top of Nevada Fall, I walked over to the edge of the river at a point slightly above the trail bridge. Facing downstream, I was soon engaged in conversation with someone whom I had seen a short time earlier at the top of Vernal Fall. Suddenly her voice grew animated as she pointed over my shoulder and exclaimed, "What is that!"

I turned quickly in the direction toward which she pointed and as a result of what I saw, there flashed to mind the many stories of "flying saucers" in recent news. Then almost instantly, the thought of a jet plane leaped into prominence.

The object which caused this rapid succession of mental images appeared to be a ball of brilliant, blue-white fire with a tail of deeper blue, out of which flew yellowish-white sparks. It seemed to move with the rapidity of an airplane which might have been no more than half a mile away, and yet no sound came from it. The direction of flight was from

east to west. In altitude it was even with a point about two-thirds of the way up Liberty Cap. It was moving rapidly toward Liberty Cap and I sensed that it would soon disappear behind that dome-like monolith. However, it burned itself out and vanished into thin air without leaving a trace of smoke while still some distance away from the Liberty Cap perspective.

My view of this heavenly visitor lasted about four seconds. How long it had been burning previously, I have no way of knowing. It seemed to be very near, yet it traveled in perfect silence, so it may have been much farther away than I realized. Sometime later I talked with another person who apparently saw the same fiery object from the vicinity of Sentinel Bridge where she was swimming at the time. From her viewpoint, it was in the direction of Tenaya Canyon. This leads me to believe that it must have been traveling towards Yosemite Valley in the region just north and west of Cloud's Rest.

What was it? From whence did it come? Who knows! Suffice it to say that it was heavenly visitor of fiery hue, probably a meteor of considerable size.

Had it timed its flight during the hours of darkness instead of during the brightly lighted hours of a Sierran afternoon, it would have attracted

major attention, for undoubtedly its brilliance would have parted the curtains of night for a considerable distance.

(Note: The Perseids, the meteoric shower expected annually in August, was expected to have its maximum display on the 12th. The display was expected to be observable several days before and after this date.—Ed.)

THE INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM IN YOSEMITE— TODAY AND TOMORROW

By Donald Edward McHenry, Park Naturalist

(Continued from the last issue)

When sufficient funds become available the Yosemite School of Field Natural History will be opened again. This school, authorized by Congress, has been a leader in its field for many years. Under its influence many similar field schools have been established all over the country. To these hundreds of people go yearly to gain field knowledge in natural history in a manner not usually available in college courses. In the face of this present development of these nature field schools, it is thought that the reopening of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History should emphasize training in methods and techniques of interpretation for the special needs of the National Park Service, rather than offering training in elementary field sciences. These methods and techniques will, of course, apply equally well to the interpretive work of other agencies such as state, county and metropolitan parks, as well as to National Parks. The workshop method will be employed under the guidance of vari-

ous officials active in the several fields of scientific interpretation in the National Park Service. The course will also include some experiences in the field of park administration with which the park naturalist should be familiar in order to do effective work. Under existing appropriations, it is not likely that the school can be reopened very soon.

There is little anticipation of any new buildings in the park in the very near future. It is therefore, our hope that existing facilities can be adapted to do a better job than is now possible. The Yosemite Museum is one of the very best in the Service. But it was never designed for the extremely heavy use to which it is being subjected today. Because of the increased visitor use it has become very noisy. This, together with hard floors and failure to take full advantage of lighting facilities, creates museum fatigue. Some way must be found to soundproof at least the downstairs, to place a resilient covering on the floor, to redesign the



1941 Class, Yosemite Field School

Photo by Anderson

lighting system and to repaint the walls. Eventually some scheme must be devised to overcome the problem of the overcrowded conditions at the geology talks in the Museum. Under such conditions the models of various stages of geological development can be seen by only those nearest to them. Some day proper and adequate measures will be taken by building additional exhibit rooms and an auditorium where people will not have to stand during a talk, and where the speaker can be heard.

A more adequate amphitheatre for the campfire programs, centrally located for the visitor population should be anticipated in the not too distant future. This will, of course, be furnished with the most up-to-date, professional equipment. In addition to this central development there are

plans to have small, informal campfire circles in the various camps for those who prefer the informal evening gatherings, or who, for some reason or other, wish to remain in their own campground. Such installations would be designed to accommodate around 200 or even less. Similar campfire programs are now being held at outpost stations as far as the limited supply of fire wood permits.

Most important to the interpretive program is the development of an observation station at Glacier Point similar to the Yavapai Station at Grand Canyon or the Sinnott Memorial at Crater Lake. General plans for this station are reasonably well crystalized and await only the necessary means for further development and building. Such a station would be a means of telling directly

the story of the scene actually before one, a scene which is at once outstanding and unique scenically and profound in its meaning.

Another interesting interpretive station can be developed by modification of the present fire lookout station near Crane Flat. This could be turned into a three story structure, possibly somewhat enlarged. The actual fire lookout, under this scheme, would be confined to the third story where the public would not be admitted. The second floor would be designed for visitor orientation, for naming the peaks and telling the story of the forest. Below is a cutover area of sugar pine, with its accompanying erosion, as well as evidence of other problems of forest control. The forest stretches from the San Joaquin Valley through various life zones to the Sierra peaks. The mechanics of forest fire fighting could be graphically told at this station, and would include the manipulation of an alidade placed in the exhibit room specifically for visitors' use. Historic old roads stretch out below while the Merced Grove of Giant Sequoias can be seen on the hillside across the valley. This is not far from Crane Flat checking station and has been visited by about 1,000 visitors during the 1947 summer season. There is no place in the park where the visitor can more easily and more forcibly learn the story of the forest in its various aspects.

Expansion of the small interpretive library in the Valley museum is an obvious necessity for an effective in-

terpretive program. During the present summer and autumn, Mrs. Lois B. Payson, an accomplished librarian, has been putting the library in order after the long period of neglect necessitated by the recent war. There should be added to the existing collection of books and pamphlets a microfilm library which will greatly extend the usefulness of the library. Hand in hand with this development should go a program of increasing the reference material for use at the various outpost stations.

The Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias has not yet revealed to the visitor the full significance of its primeval nature. Research, the foundation upon which any program of interpretation is built, must be undertaken in this area in order to discover new meanings in this forest.

Plans have been formulated for extending the interpretive services to the High Sierra Camps. Many questions arise in the minds of hikers or horseback riders during their journey along this circuit mountain trail, questions which they are anxious to have answered while they are resting or stoying overnight at one of these tent camp lodges. These plans include the establishment of small reference libraries at each camp, literature dealing primarily with the meaning of the area through which the hiker has traveled and the natural history of the vicinity of the camp itself. This will be supplemented by an exhibit of illuminated transparencies of the flowers, geology, and wildlife of that part of the High Sierra. The limited

experimental basis upon which this has been tried using the present season suggests that this type of interpretive service will be much appreciated in these places.

These thoughts do not, of course, exhaust the possibilities for further extension of the interpretive program in Yosemite National Park. Nor do they include details of many needed physical improvements and much necessary rehabilitation of existing facilities. Other museums, such as the one needed at Tuolumne Mead-

ows where the mountain peaks and meadows are the theme; numerous wayside exhibits in many places; modest and unobtrusive roadside signs along the Tioga road naming peaks seen ahead; and other and new methods of approach are to be anticipated. Ever greater crowds are going to come to Yosemite. It is through their proper understanding of the scenes that they see about them that they will gain awareness of park values. It is to such people that we can safely entrust the future of the National Park concept of land use.

DANA GLACIER'S ICE CAVE REAPPEARS

By Allen W. Waldo, Ranger Naturalist

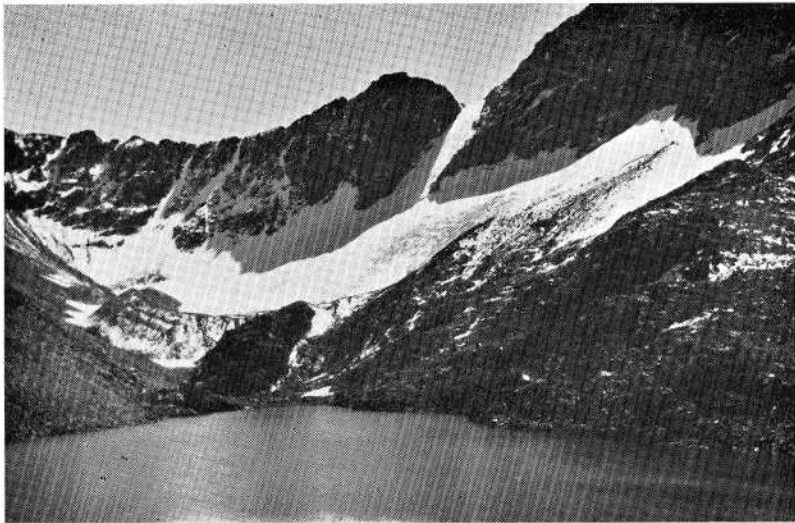
It was on one of the naturalist-conducted trips to Dana Glacier during the first part of August, 1947, that the writer and his group discovered the ice cave in the glacier. Although at this time of the year there is usually a considerable snow pack remaining in this region, this summer there was almost no snow left covering any part of the glacier. It was possible, therefore, for us to see the solid, shining, crystalline ice. There were the usual scattered, large blocks of rock on small pedestals, and the smaller debris common to a glacier surface. Some of this smaller material, which readily absorbs the sun's heat, had melted wells into the ice.

The light snowfall this winter may have been unfortunate from the standpoint of farmers in the San Joaquin Valley who depend upon this source of water for irrigation in raising their crops, but it played into

our hands on this trip.

Although I had no ropes and crampons for climbing, I was able, with the help of an ice ax, to ascend at least half the distance from the base of the ice to the top. Here it became too steep to try a higher ascent with safety. However, from this point I could readily see the bergschrund, which was already well developed and about four feet wide. It would have been very difficult, even with proper equipment, for one to have crossed it in order to ascend the chute above to the ridge leading to the summit of the mountain.

Of particular interest to the group, however, was the appearance of quite a large ice cave, which was exposed because of the complete melting of this year's thin layer of snow. In Yosemite Nature Notes, volume 19, number 12, December, 1940, Dr. Carl



Dana Glacier

Photo by Anderson

Sharsmith reported the presence of this or another cave on Dana Glacier. Since that time it has never been visible until this summer.

The cave is located near the right hand end of the glacier as one faces toward it, very slightly less than half way to the top. This coincides with the location of the cave previously reported by Dr. Sharsmith. The opening is about five feet in diameter and is surrounded by rock debris. Because it is nearly vertical, the cave cannot be entered without the aid of a rope, which we unfortunately lacked. The cave dropped almost directly down some twenty or thirty feet, where a rushing torrent of water could be heard flowing through an open tunnel beneath. The cave angled off steeply down the slope, so that a none too thick layer of ice was all there was to stand on in order

to peek down the opening. This tunnel apparently followed through the ice down along the underlying rock surface nearly to the base of the glacier. Judging from the sound, I should guess that it carries a major part of the melt water from that portion of the glacier. Near the foot of the ice, below the cave opening, a considerable amount of water was present, part of which may have been a resurgence of this stream from the base of the ice.

The condition of this cave is at considerable variance with that reported by Dr. Sharsmith. Whereas this cave is vertical and could not be entered, the one he found seven years ago could easily be entered. It was reported to be horizontal, or approximately so, at the entrance, and the bed rock floor sloped upward steeply until it contacted the ice roof. The

probability is that these two caves represent the same sub-glacial tunnel, since the location and steeply sloping rock floor seem identical in both cases, but that the hole melted into the tunnel to form the opening may be at a slightly different position or elevation along the tunnel.

FURTHER NOTES ON MOUNT LYELL SALAMANDERS

By M. V. Walker, Formerly Associate Park Naturalist
Yosemite National Park

On May 7, 1946, Douglas Whiteside came to the museum to inform us that he was going to climb Half Dome the next day in an effort to get some kodachrome pictures. He asked if there was anything that he might do for us or any observations that he might make while on top of Half Dome. This was just the opportunity we had been waiting for. We were anxious to have someone collect Mount Lyell salamanders as early in the spring as possible.

We gave him a rather lengthy "briefing" on the life history and habits of Mount Lyell salamanders, and explained that he would be most likely to find them if he would turn over the thin, flat granite slabs along the edge of the melting and retreating snow bank which persists late into the spring at that elevation. Although we had hopes that he would find one or two specimens, we were not too optimistic.

Mr. Whiteside has always been rather indefinite as to the exact hour when he started for the top of Half Dome the next day. What we do know, however, is that about 3:30

A series of winters of deficient snowfall like the last one may leave this cave open to view for several summers. If, however, we have a normal or heavy snowfall for the next few years, history indicates that this cave may well be sealed once more for an indefinite period of time.

the next afternoon someone came dashing into the museum, up the stairs and into the office and fairly shouted, "I got 'em, I got 'em." Such enthusiasm brought us to investigate immediately. He had been far more successful than we had anticipated, for he had seven fine adult Mount Lyell salamanders, squirming and wiggling around in their moist sack container.

We had just started to collect specimens for the live amphibian and reptile exhibit which attracts so much attention each summer season, and we were very happy to add these specimens to our collection. They were kept on exhibit throughout the summer and well into the fall, and there is little doubt but that several thousand people—probably for the first time—learned of the interesting characteristics and habits of this salamander, one of the most unique animal forms on the North American continent.

During the summer, Dr. Harold Kirby, parasitologist from the University of California, visited the museum and expressed his interest in

investigating the possibility of these salamanders serving as hosts for certain parasites. In the name of science it was decided to sacrifice two specimens. Dr. Kirby then proceeded to kill and preserve two of them in the proper manner, and at the same time to secure some blood smears. When placed under the microscope the smears revealed some most interesting internal parasites, the first ever to be taken from live Mount Lyell salamander material.

Finally, on October 14, due to the extremely cold nights, it was decided to bring the salamanders "inside" for the winter. They were moved to the naturalist's office where they might be readily observed at all times. In order to provide them with food, a

fruit fly culture was developed with apples and peaches, and for several days they fed on the abundant fruit flies. Their method of catching the fruit flies (by throwing out their tongues, very much like a toad) was most interesting.

On the morning of October 17, 1946, all specimens were found dead. Just what caused their death is not known. The room may have been too warm for them, or perhaps their feast of fruit flies was more than their delicate digestive organs could accommodate. However, their sacrifice to science was not in vain for numerous observations were made, some of which have already been reported in previous issues of Yosemite Nature Notes.

BOOK REVIEW

YOSEMITE AND KINGS CANYON TROUT

By Charles McDermind. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, \$3.50. 178 pp. 16 illustrations.

The author has an unusual appreciation of the Sierra and has quite evidently been willing to subject himself to undue hardship in order to fish and enjoy the mountains. On several occasions he frankly admits mistakes in woodmanship and mountaineering, but his admissions are proof of his having learned more of mountain country and its many moods. I would say that McDermind is one of a rapidly dwindling group who love the out-of-doors; is a true conservationist at heart; and is by comparison a real sportsman and an expert fisherman.

The story is mostly a narrative whose main value would be to those who are in the novice class as mountaineers and fishermen, and to those whose day has gone by and who in the past have enjoyed similar trips and wish a stimulant for their memories. The technicalities of fishing for trout are in the main very general and have been used sparingly perhaps in order not to clutter up a good narrative. They do provide a good basis for the newcomer to the High Sierra, however.

One important point that cannot be overlooked is that the book does have a very definite message for the young sportsman and is a real challenge to the coming generation who seem to us at times to be without legs. (L.W.H.)



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Dan Anderson