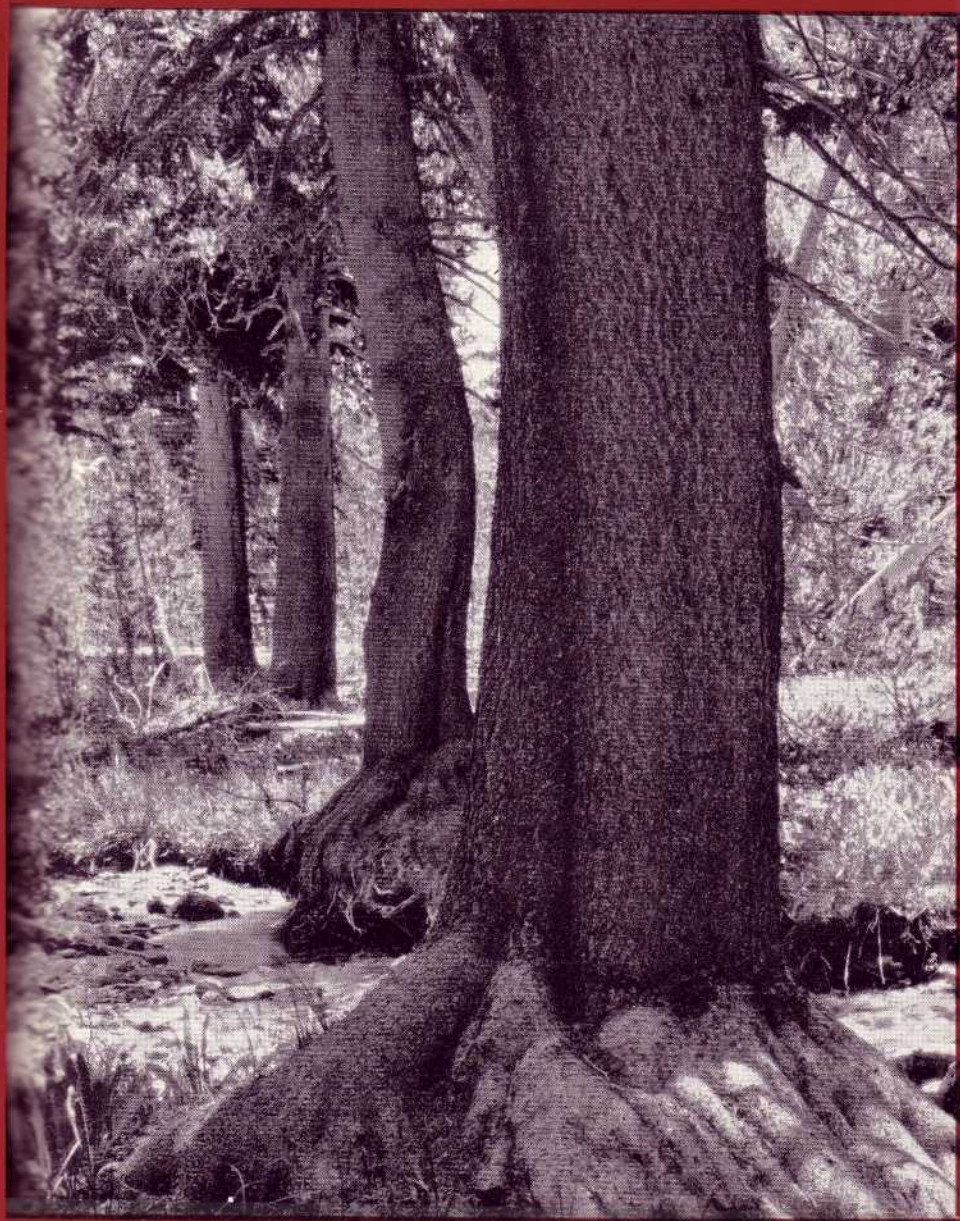


Yosemite Nature Notes





Jean (John) Baptiste Lembert.

—Fiske Photo.

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Yosemite Nature Notes

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JEAN (JOHN) BAPTISTE LEMBERT — PERSONAL MEMORIES

By William E. Colby

With two Sierra Club members, E. C. Bonner and Leon Solomons, I had started out the last of May, 1894, on a most ambitious college vacation in the Sierra. We originally planned to visit Lake Tahoe and thence travel down the Sierra as near the crest as possible, winding up at Mt. Whitney. This proved to be too great an undertaking for one summer and, though we were in the mountains for nearly three months, we did not get south of Mt. Lyell. We had a base camp for nearly a month in the Tuolumne Meadows on the Soda Springs property, now owned by the Sierra Club, and climbed all of the nearby peaks, visited Mono Lake and knapsacked down the then seldom penetrated "Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne."

It was while we were at this base camp, affording such a wonderful opportunity for exploration of the main nearby points of interest, that we met Jean Baptiste Lember. A few days after we had established camp on the river just below the Soda Springs we saw a tall individual coming across the meadows accompanied by a fine large donkey, packed with supplies. They forded the river some little distance below the Soda Springs and came on up to the log cabin which at that time was located a few feet in front of and a little toward the Soda Springs from the present Parsons Memorial

Lodge. The new arrival was Lember, who had built the cabin and who had filed a homestead on the quarter section, including the Soda Springs. At first he did not seem entirely pleased with our camping on his property without permission, but as we got to know him better, he became quite friendly. His small cabin was of very rough log construction with a crude fireplace and chimney of granite rocks. On the east side he had recently added an extension or shed in which he stored dry grass for his donkey and in which he stabled the beast in rough weather. This addition was poorly constructed and already had a decided cant due to the heavy winter snows.

Lember was a picturesque character about six feet tall with a Roman nose and rather pronounced features. He had a fairly long grey-white beard and was striking in appearance. During the month that we had our base camp on the river below his cabin, I saw him frequently, and oftentimes, in the evening after dinner, would sit in the doorway of his cabin talking with him until long after dark. He evidently enjoyed companionship, and as I came to know him better, he talked quite freely about himself and his life. I have no recollection of anything he may have said about his early life, but I do recall some of his accounts of his Yosemite experiences.

He evidently knew the Yosemite Indians quite well, both in the Valley itself and those who lived down below the Valley along the Merced River where he spent the winter in his own cabin there. I wish I could recall all he told me about their customs and traditions. He apparently was in disfavor because he and others had dug up some of their graves in order to get the wampum and other buried relics. He told me it was a striking sight when Yosemite and Mono Indians met and camped out on the rocky moraines in the middle of the Tuolumne Meadow as they had sometimes in the late summer in previous years. They selected these camp sites in order to be out where the breezes blew strongest, thus to minimize winged pests. Their colored blankets and clothes and teepees made a gala appearance. Here they traded skins and acorns for pine nuts and obsidian. On the large moraine just east of the Soda Springs they used to fashion their arrow heads as evidenced in the earlier days by the quantities of volcanic glass flakes, with an occasional fine point that had been overlooked. Practically all of these have since been removed by collectors.

Lembert was very fond of the Soda Springs and realized their importance. Several years earlier he had erected a small cabin enclosure over three of the larger ones. This rude structure, now roofless, is still in existence. It has been erroneously stated that he lived and slept in this cabin. This would have been a practical impossibility because of the existence of the three springs in such a confined area. The fact that the other cabin above mentioned was built first would preclude any such idea.

I was impressed by Lembert's gen-

eral intelligence, though he evidently had had no advanced schooling. He had written long poems about his surroundings but, as I recall these from the remoteness of over half a century, they had little artistic merit, consisting mainly of a recital of the names of the surrounding peaks with comments on the storms and grandeur and impressive power of the blinding flashes of lightning and deafening thunder peals which followed. He had thought up fanciful legends and peopled each outstanding feature with imaginary characters.

Lembert's Dome represented his own life and development. Looked at from the site of his cabin, if one tures of a young man could be seen in the face of the dome. As one went easterly, part way to the south side, the visage of a middle aged man appeared, and looking at the dome from directly across the river to the south, the dome had the appearance of an elderly man with a long flowing beard sweeping out toward the Soda Springs from the base.

In his fancy he was king and ruler of all the Tuolumne Meadows region. He told me of a young woman in Yosemite whom in real life he had vainly courted but whom in his dream world he had wedded and who had shared his throne in the meadows. However, she fell into disfavor and he turned her into a tree (*Pinus albicaulis*) which could be seen from his cabin growing on the dome and which had the shape of a hen. This he said was because he had been a henpecked husband.

The upper part of Cathedral Peak toward evening had the appearance of a woman kneeling in prayer. This represented a fancied woman friend of his queen-wife who had had the temerity to intercede in her behalf

and as a penalty and been turned into stone.

A rather humorous and erratic mental quirk was evidenced by a pile of waterworn stones near his cabin, all shaped like a hen's egg, only larger, which he had picked up during his wanderings and which in his fancy had been laid by his wife turned hen.

Much of interest has faded from my memory, but Lembert was very frank about his fantasies. He said many thought him mentally unbalanced, but he realized very clearly what was reality and what was fiction. Without doubt, this dream world of his, peopled with visionary beings, was the result of living his life of a hermit with his thoughts introverted most of the time. He was especially hurt because some of the members of a government scientific expedition which had camped for a time on his homestead had decided that he was "balmy," to use a common English expression.

However, the botanists and entomologists of this party had brought a great source of interest into Lembert's life. Little collecting had previously taken place in the Sierra where there were many plants and insects new to science. In the time available these visiting scientists could not do more than make a start, so they instructed Lembert in the art of collecting and left with him addresses where specimens he collected might be sent. Collecting became a source of great interest to him and of limited revenue as well. He was paid by museums in various parts of the world for specimens that he might send them. He told me that some of the new discoveries that he sent on had been given his name, both plants and insects. He realized that he was greatly handicapped by lack of basic knowledge, but I found

him eager to learn and later sent him a scientific book on insects.

Lembert was greatly worried over obtaining title to his homestead, but if my memory serves me right, while I was there he received from the Land Office in Washington, forwarded from Yosemite, a letter advising him that a patent would shortly be issued to him. He told me that he had had great difficulty in his final proof because the creation of the Yosemite National Park in 1890 had resulted in keeping out the sheep which had been devastating the area, "hoofed locusts" as John Muir described them, and the sheepherders who had been witnesses to his original proof were not available to make the affidavits necessary to complete his showing. At one time he had become so doubtful of his ability to satisfy the government's homestead requirements that he filed a mining claim on the property and actually sank a small shaft a few feet into the solid granite on the river side of the large rock which still stands in front of the Parsons Memorial Lodge. This has since been filled in.

Lembert missed the companionship of the sheepmen who had furnished him with mutton and made his eremitic life less lonely. He had established firm friendships with some of them, so that after the park was first created, he used to warn those who continued to trespass with their flocks, of the movements of the army patrols which were sent out from Wawona to intercept and arrest them. As a result he enabled some of them to elude arrest. It was not long, however, before the vigilance of Uncle Sam made it too costly for the sheepherders to take the risk of being found in the park.

This brings me to another interesting phase of the sheep question.

Lembert bemoaned the fact that there were no seedlings or young trees to be found anywhere in the vicinity of the Soda Springs. The sheep scourge and possible also the custom of the Indians and sheepherders to set fire to the dry grass as they left the region in the fall had effectively obliterated all young forest growth. Lembert would rejoice today to see how well the forest is recovering and reproducing—too well, in fact, in certain areas where the young "tamarack" (*Pinus contorta*) growth is so dense and spreading so fast that it threatens to invade and wipe out some of the fine meadow lands of the park.

Another interesting phase resulting from the sheepherders' life in the Sierra was noted by us in 1894. The Clark Crows (*Nucifraga columbiana*) were very tame, particularly at our Lake Tenaya and Tuolumne Meadows camps, and would hop around on the ground just out of reach, picking up whatever food we would toss them. The sheepherders with their abundant supply of mutton had made camp pets of these shy birds. Only a short time after the sheep were kept out of the park, the crow reverted to its former wild unapproachable state, and is seldom seen near even by the camper.

Lembert, in order to strengthen his status as a homesteader, drove a considerable band of goats up to his place in the Meadows. Unluckily one fall he kept them up there too late, and they all perished in the snow.

Poor Lembert was murdered in his cabin in the Merced Canyon below El Portal one winter not long after. He had accumulated quite a little money from his sale of plant and insect specimens and some said it was for motives of robbery that he was killed, and others were sure it was because of the grudge the Indians

held against him because he had participated in disturbing the graves of their ancestors.

Some time after his death some members of the Sierra Club who were camping at the Soda Springs discovered in a hiding place in a hollow stump some of Lembert's old papers which they turned over to the Club. Unfortunately these were destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake fire of 1906. Among them I remember a little diary which recorded the details of his love affair with a young woman who was employed in George Fiske's photographic studio in Yosemite Valley. Her first name was Nellie, and in this diary he tells of going frequently down into the Valley from Snow's Hotel in front of Nevada Falls where he was caretaker for the winter and calling on her. The recording of these visits was in many instances followed by repeating the capital letter "N" of her first name in fine ornamented penmanship. This corroborated what he had told me about her when I talked with him in the Meadows. This incident had a rather amusing sequel, for Lembert had told me that she had been severely punished for refusing to marry him in that the man she did marry was a worthless, good-for-nothing drunkard. In 1898, when I had charge of the Sierra Club headquarters in Yosemite Valley in the Sinning cottage across the roadway from the Sentinel Hotel, I became quite well acquainted with the Atkinsons who lived in the rear portion of the cottage. Mr. Atkinson had charge of trail and road building and general construction in the Valley which was then a State park. He was a very fine type of person. One evening I told him of my talks with Lembert four years earlier and narrated the story of Lembert's love

affair. Imagine my embarrassment when I concluded and he said, "I am the worthless drunk, for I married the girl to whom Lembert paid court.

Lembert was one of the romantic characters of the Sierra and in mental attainments and aspirations far above the average hermit type.

McCauley, formerly hotel proprietor at Glacier Point, purchased the Soda Springs homestead from

the Lembert estate and built the log cabin which is a little west of Parsons Memorial Lodge. With money contributed by members and friends, the Sierra Club purchased the property from the McCauley heirs and later erected the stone lodge in memory of one of its outstanding directors, Edward Taylor Parsons. At that time there was little left of the old Lembert cabin and no trace of it exists today.

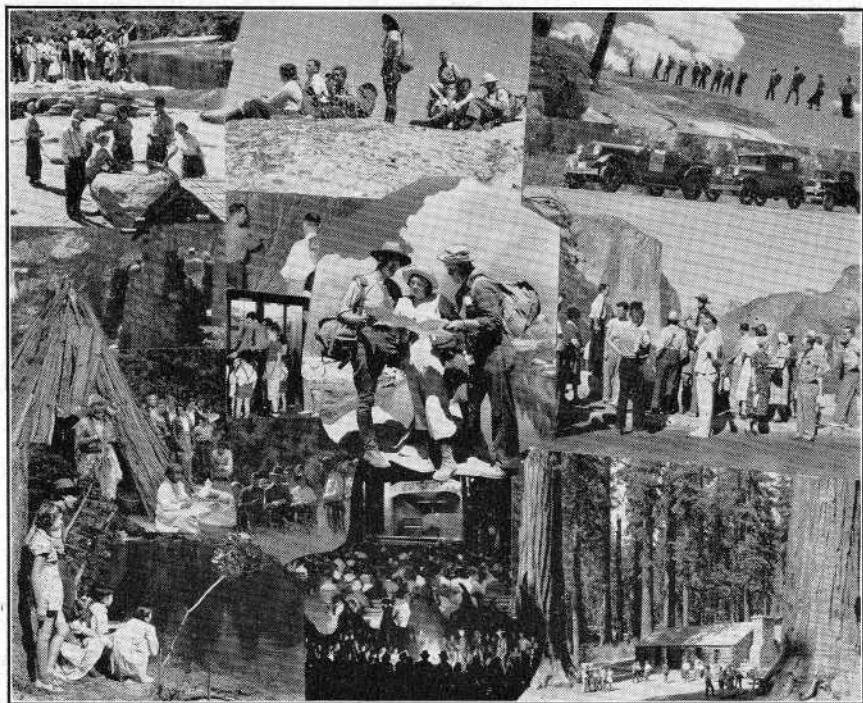
BOOK REVIEW

SAM WARD IN THE GOLD RUSH, by Samuel Ward, edited by Carvel Collins. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1949. 189 pp. \$3.50. End-paper map, illustrations.

This book reprints a sequence of fourteen numbers from the *New York Spirit of the Times* for 1861. In these a wealthy and literary New Yorker, brother of Julia Ward Howe,

tells of his experiences on the Merced River at Belt's Ferry (near Merced Falls) in 1851-52.

Ward makes no mention of Yosemite but gives fresh glimpses of Major James Savage, who figures in Carl Russell's *100 Years in Yosemite*, and of gold mining, hunting, and stage travel during pioneer days in the foothills of Mariposa County. He gives a vivid account of the great



A busy summer in Yosemite.

flood of rain water in the Merced in November, 1851. There are detailed accounts of Indian customs on the *rancheria* at Belt's Ferry and of crises in the relationships of Indians and traders. Ward calls the tribe the Potoyensee, and two leaders appear—Bau-tis-ta and Trypoxi.

Ward briefly records his reaction to a "queer bird"—a roadrunner—that he calls a "*paisano* or 'chaparral cock'." Of special importance to naturalists is an account (pp. 136-40) of the springtime run up the Merced River of salmon, "the only food, save acorns, vouchsafed by nature" to the Indians. Ward labels these

salmon "hawk's bills" and narrates in detail how he saw a native spear a twelve-pound fish.

I have seen a salmon this large in the Yuba River near Marysville, and pioneer literature records salmon runs in the Sacramento River before the era of hydraulic mining. But there is no evidence in "Fishes of Yosemite National Park" (*Yosemite Nature Notes*, January, 1944) or "The Native Fish Fauna of Yosemite National 'Park and Its Preservation'" (*Yosemite Nature Notes*, December, 1948) that so large a species ever swam inside the present Park boundaries.—Richard G. Lillard, Ranger Naturalist.

BELDING GROUND SQUIRRELS AND CHIPMUNKS AT LUNCH

By Ranger Naturalist Allen W. Waldo

Visitors to Tuolumne Meadows have always been interested in the Belding ground squirrels (*Citellus b. beldingi*), or "picket pins" as they are commonly called. These squirrels are interesting because of the way in which they sit up on their hind legs watching people while often giving a sharp whistling warning call.

Close observation reveals numerous small, black hairless areas showing through the fur. One often wonders whether they are due to lice or to fighting. After observing three of these animals trying to get some seeds from a rock located near the boundary of the territory of each, I feel that it is possible that these marks really are scars due to fighting.

A fight between these animals is usually more or less like a bear fight, a big bluff game. One will chase the other as fast as he can run. The front one will eventually give a sudden zig, causing the chasing squirrel to overrun his mark. A

quick turn immediately makes the pursued the pursuer. This goes on time after time, with first one chasing the other and then the reverse, until one gives up.

Occasionally, however, they really seem to become angry at one another. Then the true winner is determined. The two grab and bite at each other for all they are worth. While hanging on to one another by their teeth, they roll over and over in the dust, throwing clouds of dirt in the air. Finally one really seems to bite through the fur, and the other quits and runs off as fast as possible. Each shows numerous very wet and rather well-chewed places on his anatomy.

While the squirrels are fighting, a chipmunk usually comes up and settles himself by the seeds. His eating is quite different from that of the squirrel, at least as far as sunflower seeds are concerned. The chipmunk sits up straight and, while holding and turning the seed in his paws, bites off the edge all around, thus

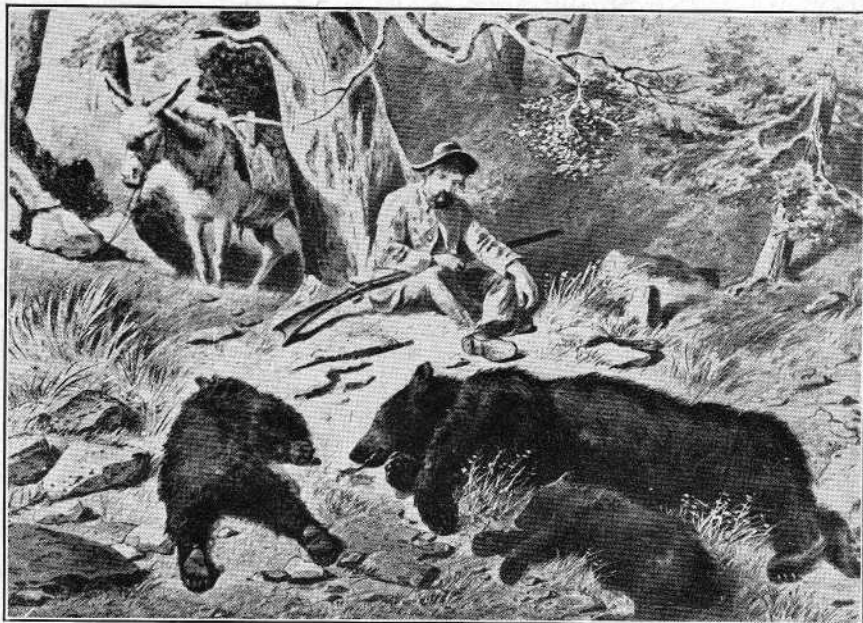
"unlacing" the two covers. The meat is then eaten. The squirrel seems merely to chew it up, husks and all.

It is interesting to note that usually when the squirrel returns from his fight he does not in turn drive the chipmunk away, although the latter

is much smaller, but allows him to sit and eat peacefully. Sometimes two or three chipmunks will be eating at once, alone or with a squirrel. At other times chipmunks will chase each other from the food. Seldom do the squirrels and chipmunks chase each other.

THE DEATH OF TWO GRIZZLY BEARS

By Edward C. Crabtree, Ranger Naturalist 1947



The stories, which I am about to relate are heretofore unpublished accounts of grizzly bears in action. These stories are provided by authentic studies from stories told to Mr. A. P. O. Crabtree by his father, Mr. William Newton Crabtree, an early settler in Tulare County, California.

The fall of 1858 found the sheep gathered in their corrals after the drive from their summer pasture high in the Sierras. In the corrals, most every evening a large grizzly bear would come and carry away a sheep, leaving eight or ten mangled to death. The Crabtree brothers

sought the aid of a friend, Sam Cruthers of Gilroy, California, who had had experience with grizzlies. The Indian shepherders would have nothing to do with grizzlies, knowing what one could do if mortally wounded.

Mr. Cruthers and the Crabtree brothers with the aid of the Indians built a scaffold in the center of the corral. The men discussed the reactions of the bear and Mr. Cruthers and the Indians agreed that it would charge in a horrible rage toward the sound in spite of mortal wounds.

Two men, Sam Cruthers and John Crabtree, climbed upon the com-

pleted scaffold and waited from sun-down until the bear appeared. It had been in the habit for several weeks of coming to the corral and taking over the sheep business. The men had only a few minutes to wait before the animal appeared, caught a sheep, and with the sheep in its mouth reared upon his hind legs. In this posture it determined to locate the scent of man so strong in its nostrals and to find out the meaning of the strange contrivance on its, the bear's, premises.

While it remained in the upright position, not four feet away from the edge of the scaffold, John fired. The blast struck the monster in the neck, severing the juglar vein as a butcher would stick a hog. The double-barrel shotgun was loaded with sixteen pellets of lead from the bullets of a 44 calibre rifle and with two chunks of lead molded to fit the barrels of the gun.

As the charge went home, the great grizzly dropped the sheep, belled like a cow, the noise being similar, and scrambled out of the corral to travel about six hundred feet before expiring. At the supper table some one remarked that some one had shot a cow, but as Newton and the others rushed out of the cabin they beheld John and Sam hurrying in the direction in which the bear had gone. The men were jubilant over John's shot.

Newton said, "John, what a monster! What do you think he weighs?"

"Make a guess, Sam," John suggested.

Sam replied, "From the size of him, I'd say that he weighed close to fifteen hundred pounds."

"I's going to measure that forearm with my belt," John said.

John took off his belt and slipped it around the forearm of the great grizzly. Although John was a tall

slim youth of twenty-two the belt tightened to the last two belt holes. This would indicate that this California grizzly was very large indeed.

Other men in the vicinity came to view the carcass and marvelled at the monstrous size of the sheep-killing grizzly bear. Their estimation was that it weighed about 1,500 pounds.

About a month later Newton and John Crabtree rigged up a set gun for another of these mauraders, using an old lead cow as bait, to see the reaction of the animal when hit. The two young men after making sure that the trap was right, climbed a leaning tree about seventy-five feet from the set gun. They waited until nearly dawn. Finally impatience drove them home, about one-half mile away.

No sooner had they arrived at the cabin when they heard the report of the gun. Of course, they were excited; but waited until daylight to see the results of their planning.

Arriving at the trap, they found that the bear had climbed the same leaning tree, after being shot, to the exact spot where the two Crabtree brothers had waited, and had fallen out dead.

This bear was found to be smaller than the great grizzly recently killed by John; but was estimated to weigh over a thousand pounds.

This writer has searched the family archives and relics for authentic accounts of these stories and has concluded that, although there might have been some exaggeration in the retelling into the third generation of the killing of the grizzly bears. Grizzly Adams in his "Adventures of James C. Adams," substantiates the sizes and weights of the California grizzly bears, which were

larger than the Yellowstone or British Columbian grizzly.

In the article, "The Grizzly Bear of California," By E. Raymond Hall,

published in *California Fish and Game* for July 1939, Mr. Hall states that the last grizzly bear in California was killed August 1922 at Horse Corral Meadows, Tulare County.



YOUNG FLICKER HAS A MISHAP

By Harry C. Parker, Associate Park Naturalist

Sometime ago the rangers¹ picked up an injured young male red-shafted flicker (*Colaptes cafer colianis*) and brought him to the Rangers' Office. The disabled bird was found along the north road on the Valley Floor between the Pohono and El Capitan Bridges late one afternoon on one of the regular ranger Valley patrols.

When I examined the flicker at the Rangers' Office, I found no external evidence of injury and noted that his eyes seemed bright and clear. However, he seemed unwilling to fly so I took him home with me.

He lay quietly in my hand while I gave him a drink by squeezing water from a pledget of cotton into his beak, which I propped open with thumb and forefinger. He was then fed a number of artificial "worms" made by rolling raw hamburger on a flat surface with the palm of my

free hand. At first he did not get the idea so, using a match, I pushed the meat well into his throat whereupon he swallowed eagerly.

By the time the feeding process was finished it was nearly dark. I put the bird in a hollow in the side of an oak tree in my yard. He seemed quite content to remain in this shelter and I left him for the night.

Early the next morning the bird was gone. Since there were no signs of violence around the spot, I like to think that full recovery was achieved. It seems possible that he may have been the victim of a motorist and was still dazed when picked up by the rangers. At any rate it is to be hoped that he is now as well as ever, brightening the Yosemite scene with the flash of his salmon-colored wing and tail linings as he forages about in the trees and on the ground for insects.





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Dan Anderson