

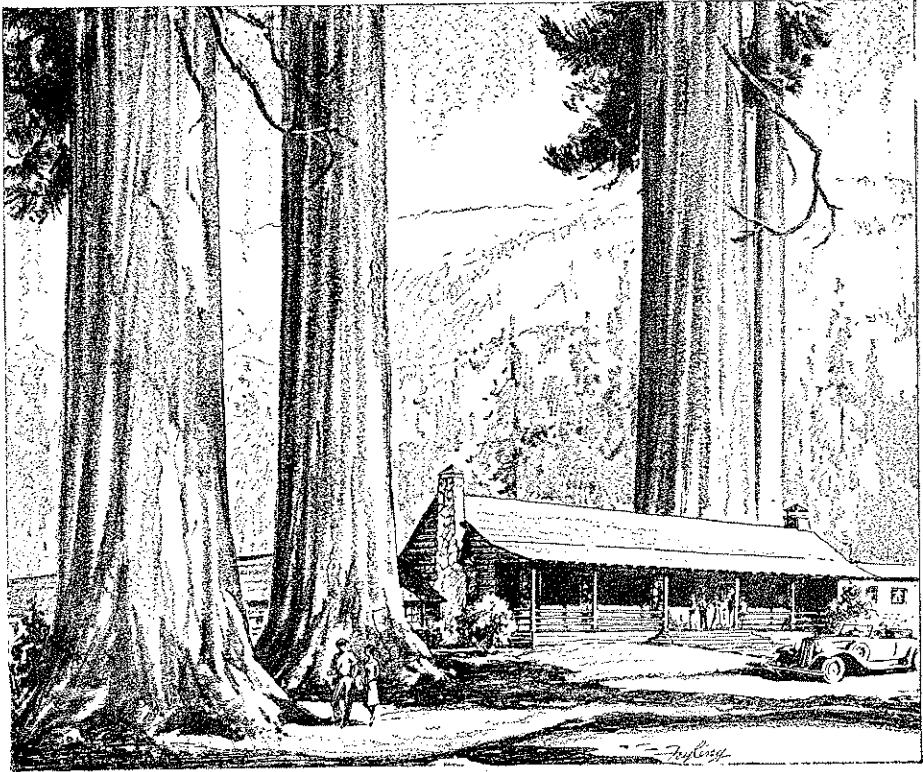
# **Yosemite Nature Notes**



VOL XXX

OCTOBER, 1951

NO. 10



Big Trees Lodge — Mariposa Grove

**Cover Photo:** Aerial view of Leevining Canyon and vicinity, looking west toward Yosemite National Park. Made and donated to Yosemite Museum by Mr. Clarence Srock of Aptos, California. See back cover for outline key.

# Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF  
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DIVISION AND  
THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION, INC.

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## MORE SUMMER VERTEBRATES OF MARIPOSA GROVE

By Orthello L. Wallis, Park Ranger, and Sol A. Karlin, Ranger Naturalist

Apparently little study has been made of the animal life of the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, although rather intensive surveys of the vertebrates have been made in other sections of the park and described in part by Grinnell and Storer (1924), Beatty and Harwell (1938), Walker (1946), Hubbs and Wallis (1948), and Evans and Wallis (1951). With this situation in mind, Beidleman (1950) presented a preliminary annotated checklist of the summer vertebrates of Mariposa Grove. His list included 79 forms. Acknowledging the list was not complete, he expressed confidence that it would stimulate further investigations and recorded observations of the vertebrates. Consequently, the wildlife conditions in Mariposa Grove have been discussed by Wallis (1951), and records of 19 additional vertebrates, seen or collected during the summers of 1950 and

1951, are described in the present article. The 1951 observations were made by the junior author, the 1950 records by the senior.

We do not believe that the list is yet complete. Further research will uncover additions as well as present a clearer view of the abundance and distribution of the known forms.

Beidleman (1950) mentions "Rattlesnake Creek" several times when he obviously had reference to Big Tree Creek, which serves as the southern boundary of the grove. Rattlesnake Creek, the smaller stream, flows through the meadow in front of the museum, past the Big Trees Lodge, behind the campground and ranger station, under the highway at The Sentinels, and then joins Big Tree Creek.

Additional records for the annotated checklist are hereinafter presented.

## COLD-BLOODED VERTEBRATES

### AMPHIBIANS

**Toad, California** (*Bufo boreas halophilus*): In 1951 a specimen was captured near Big Tree Creek, examined, and later released.

**Frog, Yellow-legged** (*Rana boylei*): Adults and "tadpole" larvae of this species were observed in Rattlesnake and Big Tree Creeks. No specimens were collected to determine which subspecies are present. It is probable that both the California (*R. b. boylei*) and the Sierra (*R. b. sierrae*) forms are to be found within the grove.

## REPTILES

- Lizard, Mountain** (*Sceloporus graciosus gracilis*): Found along the trail from the museum to the Wawona tunnel tree and at Wawona Point during 1951. Another species, the Pacific blue-bellied lizard (*S. occidentalis biseriatus*), probably is present also.
- Racer, Western Blue** (*Coluber constrictor mormon*): One was seen working its way through the wet meadow in front of the museum in 1951.
- Snake, Sharp-tailed** (*Contia tenuis*): Walker (1946, p. 44) reports that a sharp-tailed snake was picked up along the roadside near the Big Trees Lodge. This specimen, now in the Yosemite Museum study collection, was found on June 7, 1942, by Robert Fruchomme and collected by Don Gibbs. Only five observations of this species within the entire park have been recorded.
- Snake, Sierra Nevada Garter** (*Thamnophis ordinoides couchii*): A 31-inch individual was discovered along Big Tree Creek in 1951.
- Snake, Mountain Garter** (*Thamnophis ordinoides elegans*): On September 3, 1950, a 12-inch specimen was killed by an automobile at the Massachusetts Tree.

On September 13, 1950, an immature Yosemite skink (*Eumeces gilberti gilberti*) was collected on the fireroad near the park's southern boundary. It may be expected to be found in the grove also.



## WARM-BLOODED VERTEBRATES

## BIRDS

- Woodpecker, Lewis** (*Asyndesmus lewisi*): One individual was flushed from a dying immature sugar pine along the trail from the campground to Big Tree Creek on August 11, 1951.
- Nutcracker, Clark** (*Nucifraga columbiana*): A solitary individual was seen perched on the spire of a white fir at Wawona Point on August 12, 1950. An infrequent visitor from higher elevations.
- Sparrow, Bell** (*Amphispiza belli belli*): On the afternoon of August 4, 1951, a sizeable flock was seen in the upper section of the grove. It is thought that the smoke of the grass and brush fire burning out of control near Bass Lake on this date drove the birds into temporary retreat at the high elevation beyond their normal habitat. *This constitutes the first record of the Bell sparrow entering Yosemite National Park.*
- Sparrow, Lincoln** (*Melospiza lincolni lincolni*): According to Junior Park Naturalist Wayne Bryant this sparrow was one of the most common nesting birds in the grove in 1950, especially in the meadow area near the museum. Nesting groups were also found in 1951.

Two additional birds which may occur within the grove at infrequent intervals are the raven (*Corvus corax sinuatus*) and the long-tailed or California jay (*Aphelocoma californica inornata*). A raven was observed near the southern border of the grove on August 24, 1950; the jay was seen several times in 1950 in the cut-over area at the base of Mt. Raymond.

## MAMMALS

- Shrew, Vagrant** (*Sorex vagrans amoenus*): One was trapped beside a spring located one-half mile west of the California Tree. Shrews appear to be scarce in the grove.
- Bat, Big Brown** (*Eptesicus fuscus*): In 1951 these large bats flew about the Texas Tree at dusk every evening. No specimens were collected; identification was made from size and silhouette only. Several other less distinctive species of bats have been observed but identification has not been attempted without specimens.

- Ringtailed Cat (*Bassariscus astutus*):** A ringtailed cat was seen on the road near The Sentinels on August 8, 1950. Carl Phillips, Blister Rust Control foreman, observed another above Sunset Point and the Big Trees Lodge in September 1950. This species is not common in the grove, which is above the normal altitudinal range.
- Skunk, Striped (*Mephitis mephitis*):** Park Ranger Kenneth Ashley (1950) observed a striped skunk in June 1950 on the lower loop trail near the Grizzly Giant. Their presence, also, was scented along other trails during the summer of 1950.
- Lion, Mountain (*Felis concolor*):** This mammal appears to be a definite member of the animal life of Mariposa Grove although its numbers are of course limited. Mr. C. S. Etter of Los Angeles gave one of the writers, Wallis, the following account of his experience with a cougar kill within the grove: "Near the end of July 1949 I took an early morning walk from the campground along the loop trail to the Wawona trail. As I was returning about 8 o'clock I discovered a freshly killed fawn on the lower trail, 50 yards south of the Wawona trail junction. I had passed this spot less than 20 minutes earlier. The still warm body was torn in half and the head section was missing. Near the carcass I saw cougar tracks which identified the killer without doubt." On October 30, 1950, C. R. Wilson, park employee, found mountain lion tracks near the Fallen Monarch. Park Ranger Thomas R. Tucker and Wilson observed a mountain lion a short distance from the grove in a meadow near the south boundary on October 4, 1950.
- Wildcat (*Felis rufa*):** Wilson Worthen, manager of the Big Trees Lodge, reported the experience of seeing a wildcat (or bobcat) by the road just below the Clothspin Tree at 8:45 a.m. on July 26, 1950. A few days later, July 29, the senior writer found bobcat tracks on the fire-road at the park boundary and made plaster casts of them.
- Squirrel, Sierra Flying (*Glaucomys sabrinus lascius*):** Several flying squirrels were noticed on two occasions near the ranger's cabin during 1951.
- Mouse, Long-tailed Meadow (*Microtus longicaudus sierrae*):** This species is common along the waterways. During the summer of 1950 six were trapped along Rattlesnake Creek near the Big Trees Lodge.



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## A RARE SPOTTED BAT IN YOSEMITE

By Sam W. Elkins, Ranger Naturalist

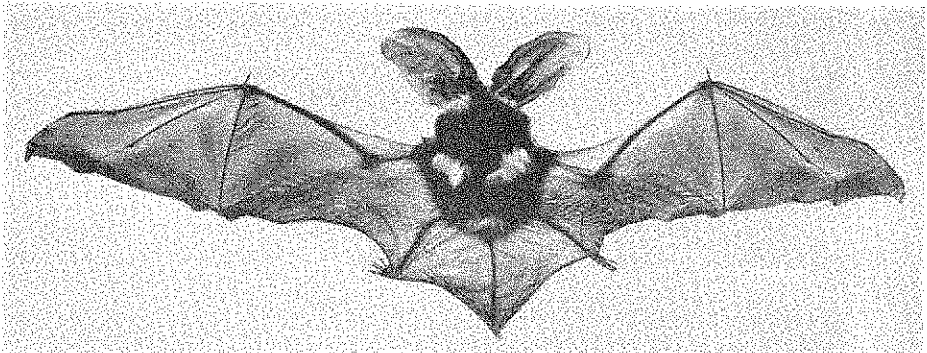
Yosemite naturalists were given a thrill of a lifetime on August 15 of this year when an extremely rare species of bat was brought into the museum. This animal, a spotted bat (*Euderma maculatum*), is so rare that this appears to be only the tenth specimen found anywhere in the world. Strange as it may be, this is the second individual collected in Yosemite. The first one was found almost exactly 20 years ago, on August 17, 1931.

As seems so often to be the case, the capture of this specimen hinged on the most precarious circumstances. On Tuesday, August 14, a 9-year-old boy, Jack Unger of Burbank, California, came into the museum and reported to me that the day before he had found a bat by the Merced River in Camp 15. It had been in the water, and when he saw it, it was on the bank being harassed by a yellowjacket that had stung its wings and was attempting to sting its body. Since the bat was not able to navigate, I asked Jack to bring it into the museum. As it turned out the bat was not under restraint of any kind, but when the boy went back he found it in virtually the same spot it had been in 2 days before! This was a semi-protected place beneath

the exposed roots of a ponderosa pine just a few feet from the river. The bat was found alive and placed in a milk carton and brought into the museum. When it was taken upstairs and examined it was found to have a large white spot on each shoulder at the base of each wing, and a third large white spot just at the base of the tail. The rest of the fur was black. It also had extremely large and "expressive" ears. From this Associate Park Naturalist Harry Parker was able to identify it immediately as the rare spotted bat.

The specimen was kept alive for the rest of that day, during which time it was admired by many and thoroughly photographed. Although given food and water, it died in its cage sometime before the next morning. The animal was later carefully measured and mounted and is now a part of the Yosemite Museum collection.

By such lucky happenstance—finding the bat in the first place, reporting it to a ranger naturalist, then finding it again 2 days later alive and in almost the same spot—we have added to our collection and to our scientific literature one more record of this extremely interesting and rare mammal.



## ALPINE ENIGMA

By Martha Gale, Field School, 1951

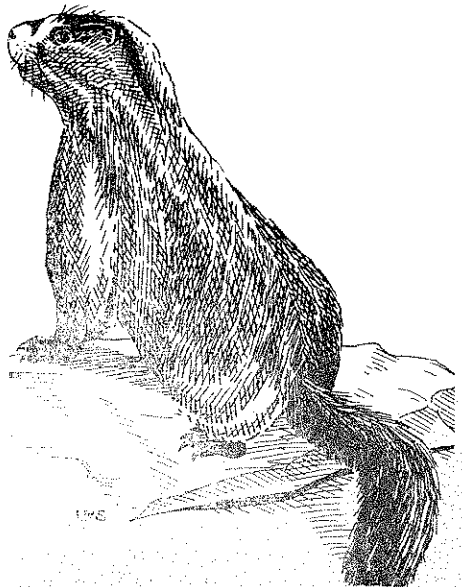
We were asleep on an alp<sup>1</sup> on the lower flank of Mt. Dana when something startled me. However, a bout with mountain sickness combined with a nap in the midday sun do not make for quick reactions, and by the time I could raise my head, the meadow showed only its clumps of blue lupine with yellow monkey-flowers, half-hid in a dense mat of grass, sedge, and rush which continued down to the distant timberline.

Still I waited, but the only sound was that of water running from the spring above.

And then I saw it. About 4 feet from me and directly overhanging the spring was a large, rounded boulder—one of the giant stones of the rockfield which tumbled in irregular masses from the mountain skyline. And there, past a shoulder of the gray granite, but rounder and darker than even the rock, rose a bit of brown fur, just enough expanse to enclose one immense, unblinking brown eye. Even as I looked, it dropped wholly behind the rock.

For a few minutes nothing more happened, until a slight movement far to the side betrayed the marmot peering over another rock. My camera was now aimed and that new factor may have been disturbing, for again he disappeared instantly. Several times the marmot slipped back into the shelter of the rocks, each time to reappear at a new vantage point. Then my camera shutter clicked, but after his first fright the creature sensed that here was no danger. Gradually, with numerous hesitations and periods of panic, he scrambled into the open meadow and up to within a few feet

of me. There he stayed for some time, his head cocked first to the right and then to the left, but always oriented toward the camera. Then, apparently for the first time, he noticed my shoes and socks which had been thrown on the ground nearby. At first he shied away, but before many minutes he was in the middle of the objects. More than that, he suddenly reached down, caught up the back of one shoe in his teeth, and dragged that heavy oxford 2 feet up a bank of at least 45 degrees of inclination. A cry from me frightened him into dropping the shoe at that point and scrambling back to the shelter of the rockfield. It was but a matter of minutes, however, before the big-jowled face again watched from over a rock top. Over the period of an hour the marmot tried several times more to reach the



Yellow-bellied marmot

1. In this usage, a high upland meadow.

shoe, and each time that he ambled onto the meadow he uttered a series of muted chuckles.

Eventually he wandered to a farther part of the rockslide so that I abandoned my camera and went back to the spring. The episode had roused my friend and we had been talking for perhaps half an hour when he glanced up the slope and yelled. The marmot had not only returned very quietly, but had seized my woolen sock and was already far up over the rocks at a speed that caused the sock to swing back horizontally past his shoulder. Not until a second yell did he drop that article and again disappear.

For another half hour our visitor kept to a point on the slope which

was 200 feet away or more. The next time that we noticed him the marmot had returned to our alp, chosen the strap of my camera case, and already chewed well into the leather. This time we found an actual chase necessary to save the item. Whether or not he would have returned I do not know. At that time it seemed more convenient to continue up the mountain.

No one has yet explained the conduct of this marmot, but there is the possibility that some salt accumulation on the strap and other articles may have attracted him. Actually, this individual marmot seemed to be unafraid of people, and the whole episode may be directly attributable to a form of rodent curiosity.

## MEADOWS

By William L. Neely, Ranger Naturalist

I sometimes wonder if, in our reporting of natural events, we feel that no news is worth mentioning unless it pertains to some rare species from a far corner, or a seldom-witnessed phenomenon, or if we must write about mosquitoes we must of necessity choose those from Boundary Peak and disregard the one on the arm. But I would rather not go so far for information when the very grass under my feet seethes with news. The ground squirrel outside carries as much information as he does fleas. Too often we feel compelled to report the Rare and the Little-Known, feeling that the Obvious has been mentioned before. But Nature will bear infinite and repeated inspection. Why, because someone has written about the red fir or cascade, shouldn't we also write of

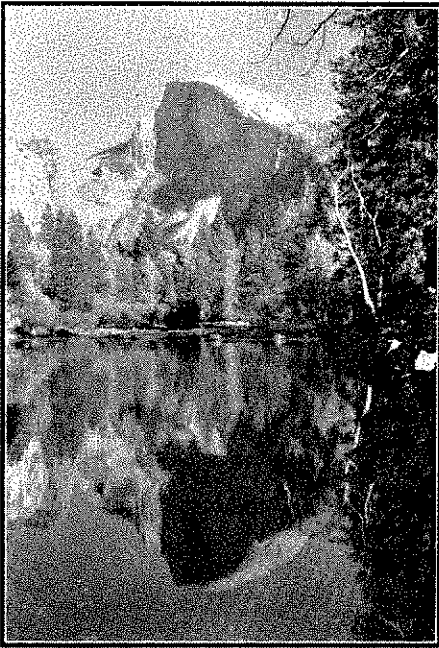
them, and not presume that everything has been said?

Each year there are new eyes to examine Yosemite, new generations to view the most familiar sights with wonder. It is said that our bodies are remade every so-many weeks, new cells replacing older ones, that even our eye tissues grow and replace older cells. What!—with new eyes should we look at Yosemite's meadows and forests in a callous manner?

And each year Yosemite, like some great organism, is reborn and parts replaced. Each year new grass springs in the meadow where the old grew, totally new, feeling the sun for the first time. And that familiar old oak by the tent, which probably produced acorns for Tenaya's people: it is new, with leaf



cells growing fiercely in the summer sun, new layers of bark pushing off the old, and new twigs shading out last year's branches. Somewhat like bark, even the rock of Half Dome is exfoliating, losing its layers in a geological manner. A leaf of rock flakes off and we are able to see a sight no eyes have seen—the sparkling crystals of the granite, hidden for millions of years, never before exposed.



*Photo by Ralph Anderson*

Half Dome and Merced River

The old Merced River flows as it has done for many years, under bridges and through channels, new water under old bridges gliding along endlessly until you come to regard the water as a permanent thing always there, when actually probably every drop is making this journey for the first time. Who knows how long it takes before one drop of the Merced's water, reaching the sea, merging with it, evaporating into the air again, and then borne

as cloud vapor to the summit, is at last released as a crystal of snow on Mt. Lyell or Red Peak, only to melt again and flow downhill in some distant summer?

I walk to the Yosemite Museum and for the hundredth time see the meadow grasses in wonderment. I never tire of them, yet have not learned all their various names, whether grass, sedge, or rush; they probably grew there before science was born. I watched them from early June, fresh and green, springing up from the boggy soil to reach maturity in midsummer, bending lazily in July's full heat, and then in August to show signs of wear, drooping more in the sun and browning a little at the edges.

I can't extract them, however, and study them as things in themselves, nor write an article strictly scientific, such as "Report on the Carex of Sentinel Meadow." I see them too well in their vital relationship to the earth they are in, to the frogs and snakes that crawl over their roots, to the weather and storms of winter and the heat of July, to the very disintegration of the rocks. John Muir recognized this when he wrote:

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe . . . The whole wilderness in unity and interrelation is alive and familiar . . . the very stones seem talkative, sympathetic, brotherly . . . No particle is ever wasted or worn out but eternally flowing from use to use.

The meadows, if they re-create themselves each summer, growing upon the roots of the last year, serve also for our re-creation. They are a restorative, but must be more than just viewed. It is unfortunate in a way that modern travel reduces our contact with Nature to such an extent that it becomes mere seeing—"sight-seeing." That is scarcely contact. On the road to Glacier Point,

about 5 or 6 miles from it, one comes to the trail to Mono Meadow, which is about half a mile below. Here is a large meadow illuminated with an astronomical number of shooting stars, along with a galaxy of buttercups and blue camases. The trail gets lost in the swampy middle and one wades through moss pits filled with amber water, while underfoot one feels a primordial black, cold mud or ooze. On the edges of the bog where it is drier one finds a whole world in the space of a foot-print. At one inch distant we get a beetle's-eye view of new forests of moss and tiny flowers, even caverns and stream-eroded valleys, with old vegetation lying criss-crossed beneath the underbrush all patrolled by ants and monstrous bugs. Sand grains lie like miniature glacial erratics among the mosses and liverworts, and the passage of a garter snake leaves a broad valley as sinuous as the Merced River. Like some great prehistoric bird a blue damselfly alights on a sedge stem and bends it under her weight, while a mole pushes up a Mt. Dana of fresh earth and leaves morainal ridges through the forests.

Thoreau wrote:

The very sod is replete with mechanism far finer than that of a watch, and yet it is cast under our feet to be trampled on. The process that goes on in the sod and the dark, about the minute fibers of the grass—the chemistry and the mechanics—before a single green blade can appear above the withered herbage, if it could be adequately described, would supplant all other revelations.

After setting foot in the meadow I find it hard to observe objectively, coolly, impersonally. If possessed of chlorophyll I should probably root there and grow. As it is, the limits that divide flesh from grass are not so sharp. Scientists tell us that just a few iron molecules distinguish the chemistry of the hemoglobin of red blood from the green chlorophyll of plant leaves. With feet in the mud, head in the clouds, and the meadow all around, one strikes a healthy balance with Nature.

In summer afternoons the meadows are drowned in serenity. Hardly a grass blade moves, and drawn out by the heat a musty smell of sedge rises like the gases of Delphi and turns the observing scientist to philosopher and poet.



1851-YOSEMITE-CENTENNIAL-1951

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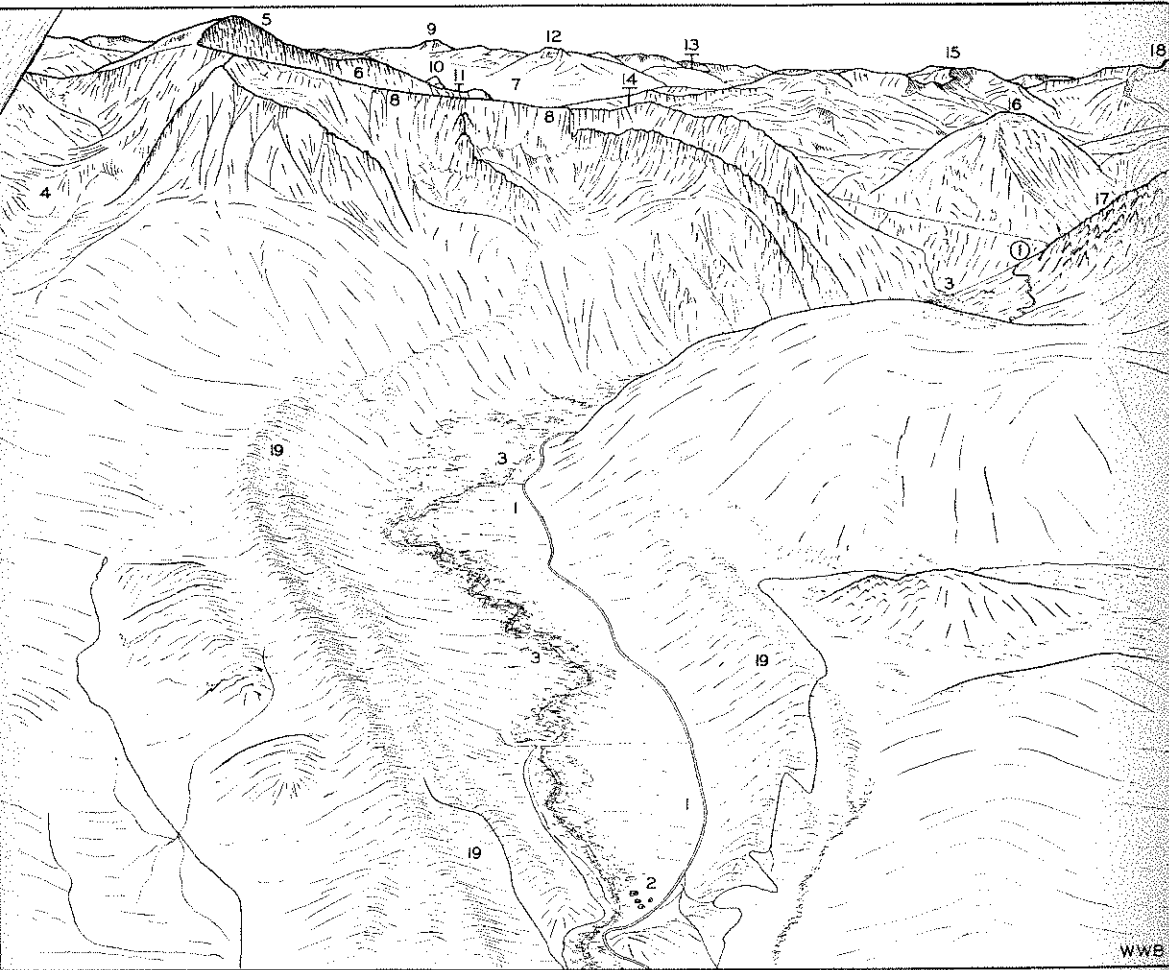
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Outline index chart accompanying photo on front cover.



- |   |                               |                              |
|---|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Tioga Road   | 7. Tioga Pass                 | 13. Ten Lakes                |
| 2. Forest Ranger Sta., 6,900 ft.                        | 8. Dana Plateau, 11,500 + ft. | 14. Gaylor Lakes             |
| 3. Leevining Creek and Canyon                           | 9. Mt. Hoffmann, 10,921 ft.   | 15. White Mtn., 11,800 + ft. |
| 4. Gibbs Canyon   | 10. Fairview Dome, 9,737 ft.  | 16. Tioga Peak, 11,532 ft.   |
| 5. Mt. Dana, 13,055 ft.                                 | 11. Tuolumne Meadows          | 17. Warren Creek             |
| 6. Glacier Canyon                                       | 12. Tuolumne Peak, 10,875 ft. | 18. Mt. Conness, 12,556 ft.  |
| 19. Lateral moraines of ancient Leevining Creek Clacier |                               |                              |



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