

Yosemite Nature Notes



The First Drawing Made in Yosemite

First pencil sketch of Yosemite Valley made by Thomas Ayers in 1855, exhibited in Yosemite Museum

YOSEMITE CENTENNIAL ISSUE

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Yosemite Nature Notes

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THE YOSEMITE CENTENNIAL

By Carl P. Russell, Park Superintendent

On March 25, 1951, there will be observed the 100th anniversary of the effective discovery of "The Valley Incomparable." There will be no pageant other than the usual beautiful religious pageantry of the traditional Easter Sunrise Service conducted at Mirror Lake by the Reverend Alfred Glass; no jubilee of an old-timers day; no rodeo—none of the celebration of a gala day. The "birthday" warrants celebration, but the physical limitations imposed by road conditions, restricted parking space, lack of early spring camping spots and the natural confines of the valley itself all argue for quiet observances in which no "extra-special" effort is expended in an attempt to attract large crowds of visitors on any particular day or days. The Centennial celebration will be a continuous affair throughout the coming summer and the appropriate special events will be fitted into the regular programs of interpretation conducted by the National Park Service and entertainment conducted by the Yosemite Park and Curry Company.

The Press has been invited to give special attention to the history of the pioneers who discovered Yosemite,

to the far-sighted statesmen who guaranteed that it should be preserved for public enjoyment, to the men and women who built and operated the facilities for visitor accommodations, to the planners who defined standards for protection and use, and to those officials who upheld the standards and enforced the protective laws pertaining to the reservation. Press releases and historic photographs are sent out from the park to newspapers and periodicals all over the country in order that this type of publicity may be widespread and timely. The public schools of the counties (Mono, Inyo, Fresno, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, and Tuolumne) immediately adjacent to or near the park are arranging special programs, and speakers from Yosemite are telling the story of the Yosemite pioneers to these school audiences. Commercial clubs, conservation groups, and historical societies are sponsoring Yosemite programs at luncheon meetings and on other occasions, and the Yosemite Museum is featuring special historical exhibits. An especially determined effort is being made this year by Yosemite personnel to interview the few remaining old-timers

*The sketches on pages 27 and 28 are from Mr. Russell's book, *One Hundred Years in Yosemite*. University of California Press.

of the Yosemite region in order that their first-hand accounts of the human affairs of an earlier day in the park may be recorded, and the Yosemite Museum Library is acquiring especially pertinent documents which have been lacking in its

collections.

During the coming months *Yosemite Nature Notes* will publish a series of short articles on certain important aspects of Yosemite history. The present note is the first of these. It has to do with:

The Geography of the Mariposa Indian War

I. Events Which Led to the Discovery of Yosemite Valley

When early in 1849 gold miners began to swarm into the country just west of the present Yosemite National Park, they invaded a territory which was fairly populous with Indians. Two of the great linguistic groups of the state, the Yokuts and the Miwok, were represented by this population of natives. The east-west boundary line between the Yokuts and the Miwok passed just south of Yosemite, and the two subtribes or bands which were especially re-

sponsible for the precipitation of the Mariposa Indian War, the Chowchillas and the Yosemite, came in the first instance from the Yokuts and in the second instance from the Miwok. On the San Joaquin, Tuolumne, Fresno, Merced, Kings, and Kern Rivers, and around Tulare Lake, was an Indian population numbering some 23,000.

In the earliest stages of the gold rush in the Yosemite region these Indians gave but little trouble. The



Yosemite Valley Indian Diorama, in Yosemite Museum

presence of white men in the mountains meant a supply of the white man's food and clothing which could be had by trade, and the Indians were intrigued by the new order of life. However, as the white population increased and every valley and stream course was taken over by the miners, the Indians began to resent the "squeeze." On the night of December 17, 1850, the Chowchillas and some of the Yosemitees attacked the J. D. Savage establishment on the Fresno River and killed three of the attendants. The Yosemitees, previously, had displayed their hostility by attacking Savage's Merced River post at the mouth of the South Fork.

A Sheriff's Posse Organized

The Chowchillas and the Yosemitees, at first, were not alone in making war upon the miners. These first depredations which resulted in deaths among the whites brought quick retaliation, and when the initial volunteer posse under command of Sheriff Burney hunted down the guilty Indians, the hostile camp was found to be made up of members of the Noot-chu, Ho-nah-chee, Po-to-en-cie, Po-ho-no-chee, Kah-we-ah, and Chuc-chan-cie bands, as well as Chowchillas and Yosemitees—all from the Yokuts group except the Noot-Chu, Po-ho-no-chee and Yosemitee. This was the first battle between an organized punitive party of white men and the Indians of the Mariposa region. A number of first-hand accounts written by participants in this affair have been preserved, but the exact location of the battleground is not described. Dr. L. H. Bunnell states that it was "at a point high up on the Fresno" and that the first fight occurred on January 11, 1851. The Indians withdrew

from this place and a few days later took a stand on high ground, "Battle Mountain," above one of the tributaries of the San Joaquin (Bunnell called it the "Little San Joaquin"), where the posse brought this initial campaign to a close. The Indians were dispersed, but not whipped, although the death of Jose Rey, Chief of the Chowchillas and the most hostile of the leaders, resulted from this fight.

The Mariposa Battalion

On January 13, 1851, the Governor of California authorized Sheriff Burney to enlist 100 men as militia; a subsequent order of January 24 increased the number to 200. This was the beginning of the Mariposa Battalion. By February 10, 1851, the unit was recruited to full strength, equipped, mounted, and in training at the J. D. Savage store on Mariposa Creek near Agua Fria. Savage was elected to command the battalion, and John J. Kuykendall, John Boling, and William Dill were named as captains of the three companies which composed the unit.

The U. S. Indian Commissioners McKee, Barbour, and Woozencraft, then in California, came to the Mariposa region for the purpose of making treaties with as many tribes as could be persuaded to quitclaim their ancestral lands. Their visit was timed so as to take advantage of the psychological effect created by the existence of the armed force. By March 19, 1851, a number of the tribes had sent their representatives to talk to the commissioners and to sign the agreement to live on designated reservations. The Yosemitees and the Chowchillas were not among these peaceful signers.



Mariposa in the 1850's (From painting owned by F. W. Schlegeler)

The First Expedition Against the Yosemites

On March 19, 1851, Major J. D. Savage set out from battalion headquarters with the companies of Captains Boling and Dill on an expedition which was to take them into Yosemite Valley. The route followed by the mounted party was a defined Indian trail and the expedition was guided by an Indian boy who knew the country and who was faithful to Major Savage. Bunnell describes the route as one that ascended "the Black Ridge . . . a spur of the Sierra Nevadas [which] separates the Mariposa, Chow-chilla, Fresno and San Joaquin rivers on the south from the Merced on the north." Quite evidently "the Black Ridge" is the present-day Chowchilla Mountain, and it is reasonable to conclude that the old Indian trail followed approximately the same route as does the

Chowchilla Mountain Road into Wawona.

The party crossed the forested top of Chowchilla Mountain and descended to the South Fork of the Merced in the dark, stopping there "about a mile below what is now known as Clark's, or Wah-wo-na." This locality is the present-day public campground (Camp A. E. Wood and Cunningham Flat) maintained by the National Park Service. Without stopping for refreshment, Major Savage and a part of his command proceeded downstream for a few miles to a spot on the left side of the South Fork known to the Indian guide as the camp of the Noot-Chu, one of the bands sought by Savage. The Indians were taken completely by surprise. One of Savage's former wives, Ee-e-ke-no, came from this band and when Savage made himself known, the chief, Pon-wat-chee, surrendered quietly. Savage moved

the Indians across the South Fork to a flat near the mouth of the stream later known as Bishop Creek, named for an employee of the U. S. Indian agency who camped there in the course of his work for the commissioners. Horses could reach this flat, and the rest of the battalion was ordered to report there. This became headquarters from which runners were sent out to notify the nearby Po-ho-no-chees and Yosemite Indians to come in and surrender.

The Po-ho-no-chees who were in their winter camp somewhere west of Bishop Creek, came to battalion headquarters promptly and made

no trouble. Of the Yosemite Indians only Chief Tenaya reported. Major Savage insisted that the old man go back to his villages and bring his people with him to the South Fork. Tenaya promised to do this and departed. The next day he came back to the South Fork camp and assured Major Savage that his people were delayed by deep snow but were en route. When two more days had passed and no Yosemite Indians had appeared, it was decided that a part of the command should hunt them out in their much-touted hiding place. Tenaya was forced to accompany this cavalcade.



II. The White Man's First Entry into Yosemite Valley

The exact route followed by the discovery party cannot be determined now, but Bunnell explains that a laborious climb was made out of the canyon of the South Fork to the top of the dividing high lands which separate the South Fork drainage from the Merced proper. Here the snow was 3 to 5 feet deep and the horses had great difficulty in plunging through it. After some 10 miles of travel 72 Yosemite Indians were encountered making their slow way toward the South Fork. Major Savage was not convinced that this group represented the entire band, and in spite of

Tenaya's protestations that none of his people would be found in the valley, Savage determined to push on to the Yosemite stronghold. Tenaya was permitted to return to the South Fork and one of the young men of the Yosemite Indians turned about and accompanied the battalion. Shortly thereafter the white men looked upon the awe-inspiring sight of Yosemite Valley as viewed from "Mount Beatitude," and from there they descended to the valley where they camped near Bridalveil Fall. It was here that the name "Yosemite" was agreed upon as the appellation for the wondrous valley.

It is a foregone conclusion that the Yosemite Indians were following their usual winter trail southward and that Tenaya also guided Savage along the Indians' defined route to Yosemite until the southbound Indians were met. In later years this trail was the regular saddle trail for the earlier Yosemite tourists and eventually it became the Wawona-Yosemite wagon road. Bunnell's "Mount Beatitude" became "Inspiration Point," a vantage which is seldom visited by present-day tourists.

Tenaya had not told the truth regarding the evacuation of Yosemite Valley; evidences of Indians were everywhere, but with the exception of one ancient squaw who was too feeble to climb into the rocks, they evaded the explorers. The valley and the Merced Canyon as far east as Little Yosemite were explored by the battalion and a second overnight camp was made at the mouth of Indian Canyon. On the third day Savage and his followers returned to the South Fork of the Merced.

Captain Dill's company preceded that part of the battalion which escorted the Noot-Chus, Po-ho-no-chees, and Yosemitees from the South Fork to the Fresno River. While en route to the Fresno, Dill was joined by about 100 Indians who had decided to accompany him to the In-

dian agency. Captain Boling's company and the Indian "captives" were several days en route to the Fresno. On the last day of their journey camp was made but a few miles from the commissioners' camp. Only Captain Boling and nine of his men remained with the Indians; Major Savage and the rest of the company rode on to the agency. That night the Indians in Boling's custody stole a march on him and returned to the wilds. One lone Indian at Boling's personal campfire out of the some 350 remained in camp at daybreak. It was a crestfallen Captain Boling who reported to Savage that day.

Ultimately the Noot-Chus and Po-ho-no-chees had a change of heart and gave themselves up to the commissioners, but no Yosemitees surrendered.

The Fresno Indian Reservation was established a few miles east of the present town of Madera on lands that later became the property of Mr. J. G. Stitt, who called it the "Adobe Ranch." Here were assembled all of the friendly Indians of the Merced, Chowchilla, Fresno, and the San Joaquin Rivers, and here the peace treaty drafted by the commissioners was signed by the several chiefs. Like the Yosemitees the Chowchillas were conspicuous by their absence among the signers.



III. Pursuit of the Chowchillas on the San Joaquin

From some of the friendly Indians at the Fresno Reservation Major Savage learned that delegates from the Chowchillas had slipped into Captain Boling's camp the night of the "stampede" and by telling lies as to what awaited them at the commissioners' camp induced the surrendering Indians to make their get-away. Savage proposed to go after the Chowchillas for the purpose of whipping them well. The commissioners agreed to his plan and Boling's and Dill's companies, with Savage in command, set out for a northern tributary of the San Joaquin River where the hostiles were believed to be in hiding. Bunnell writes, "The route selected was by way of 'Coarse Gold Gulch,' to the headwaters of the Fresno, and thence to the North Fork of the San Joaquin." Probably this route took the party northeasterly up the Fresno River and up Coarse Gold Gulch to the vicinity of the present town of Coarsegold, thence over the Goat Mountain heights to the present Bass Lake-North Fork locality. Bunnell identifies the place of rendezvous as "near a double fall on the North Fork of the San Joaquin," a feature which is close to the north end of the present Bass Lake. It is further identifiable because of the place name, "Crane Valley," a geographic name applied by this party and which is still in use. Bunnell's "North Fork" quite obviously is the present Willow Creek and Bass Lake now occupies the greater part of his Crane Valley.

At this place Savage was called back to the Fresno Reservation and Captain Boling was placed in command. The party moved on up "the North Fork" (or Willow Creek) to the

mouth of a tributary which Bunnell refers to as the Little San Joaquin (in all likelihood the present northern extremity of Willow Creek), where camp was made. The "Battle Mountain" of the Burney fight, January 1851, was west of this camp and before nightfall it was visited by some members of the command. The present-day Sivels Mountain is in the vicinity described by Bunnell. Perhaps this 5,800-foot mountain is the site of that opening event in the Mariposa Indian war.

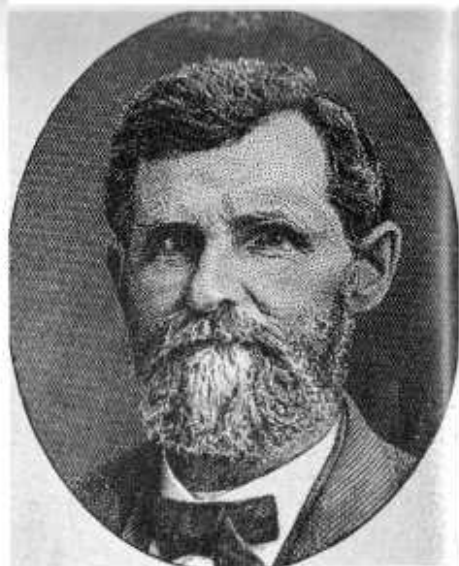
Scouts working out of the Willow Creek camp reported that an Indian pow-wow was in progress on the "main San Joaquin" to the east. In the early dawn of the following morning, Captain Boling's command struck eastward from the Crane Valley camp. Bunnell writes, "A short ride brought us in sight of the main river." It is difficult to reconcile this entry in the record with the topography of the region referred to. It is 14 miles, air-line, from Crane Valley to the main stream of the San Joaquin River and in traveling between the two places it would have been necessary for the mounted party to follow a circuitous route over or around the 8,000-foot high Chiquito Ridge.

At any rate Bunnell is definite in stating that the party found the Chowchilla Indians encamped on the east side of the San Joaquin River at the place where a tributary flows in from the east. He calls this tributary "the South Fork." Except for his "short ride" all of the rest of his description applies very well to the physiography that exists at the confluence of the river now known as the South Fork with the San Joaquin proper. The Indian camp was

on a point of tableland between the two streams. Rugged canyons of the two rivers debouched at that place and an open view of the country south and west was to be had from the campsite. Behind it arose the very steep slopes of a mountain. It "could have only been approached through the rugged canyons of the forks."

The Indians did not wait for the battalion to cross the raging San Joaquin. They decamped before the crossing was made and the whites walked in to find a deserted funeral pyre with manzanita brands still blazing. Around the fire the ground was well trampled indicating that a crowd had been there. Examination of the coals revealed that a body had been cremated. Incombustible objects such as the remains of iron implements and weapons were raked from the embers—"trinkets and articles of various kinds, such as arrow-heads of different shapes and sizes, . . . a knife-blade, a metal looking-glass frame, beads and other articles melted into a mass." Sandino, a friendly Indian with the battalion, examined these things, devoutly crossed himself and exclaimed, "Jose Rey, ah! he is dead!" Bunnell asked Sandino how he knew that the cremated body was that of the Chowchilla Chief, Jose Rey. "He said: (picking up the knife-blade) 'This was the knife of Jose Rey,' " and explained further " 'that a chief's property was known to all of his people and to many other tribes . . . and only a great chief would have so many come to do honor to his remains.' " Sometime afterward the identity of the cremated remains was confirmed by the Chowchillas themselves.

Boling's men searched the canyons of the San Joaquin and its South Fork for several miles above



Lafayette H. Bunnell

the Indian camp, but no Chowchillas stood to do battle. The whites destroyed all Indian food stores here and dropped back south and westward to other tributaries of the river, but caught no Indians. Boling ordered his men to return to their headquarters. Bunnell explains that they traveled westward to the headwaters of Fine Gold Creek and followed down that stream course to the San Joaquin, and thence to a point opposite Fort Miller, a regular U. S. Army post, which at that moment was under construction on the south side of the San Joaquin. From here the battalion returned to the Fresno Reservation and it was but a short time before the Chowchillas voluntarily came to that gathering place of the tribes. Savage gave them "a grand feast, which lasted several days; during which time arrangements were completed for treaties with all of the remaining bands of the Kah-we-ah tribe, and with the Chowchillas."

(First in a series of articles)

DIGEST OF THE PURPOSES OF THE
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INCORPORATED for the purpose of cooperating with the National Park Service by assisting the Naturalist Department of Yosemite National Park in the development of a broad public understanding of the geology, plant and animal life, history, Indians and related interests in Yosemite National Park and nearby regions. It aids in the development of the Yosemite Museum and library, fosters scientific investigations along lines of greatest popular interest, offers books on natural history applicable to this area for sale to the public, and cooperates in the publication of

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