

Yosemite Nature Notes





Photo by Ralph Anderson

Tenaya Lake, east of Yosemite Valley. Site of the capture of the Yosemite Indians by Captain Boling's company of the Mariposa Battalion. Named by Dr. L. H. Bunnell after Tenaya, chief of the Yosemite.

Cover Photo: Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, winter, Yosemite National Park. By Ansel Adams from "Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada," text by John Muir, 64 photographs by Ansel Adams. Reproduction by kind permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE MARIPOSA INDIAN WAR (No. 2)

By Carl P. Russell, Park Superintendent

IV. The Second Expedition of the Mariposa Battalion into Yosemite Valley

On May 9, 1851, Captain John Boling and one company of the Mariposa Battalion made a second entry into Yosemite Valley. The Yosemite Indians who had been assembled as a result of the first expedition had faded into the mountain fastnesses; the Yosemitees had never been represented among the tribes held in the Fresno reservation. In reaching the valley for the second time Boling followed the same route pioneered by Savage and his battalion in March.

Boling's first camp in Yosemite Valley on this occasion was near the present Sentinel Bridge. It was during this military invasion that the first letter was dispatched from Yosemite Valley. On May 15, 1851, Captain Boling wrote to Major Savage of his experiences and the letter was published in the *Alta California* on June 12, 1851. Boling explained that he had scoured the valley on both sides of the Merced River and that five Indians had been taken into custody. "One of them proved to be the son of the old Yosemite chief. I informed them if they would come down from the mountains and go with me to the U. S. Indian Commissioners, they



Captain John Boling

would not be hurt; but if they would not, I would remain in their neighborhood as long as there was a fresh track to be found; informing him [Tenaya's son] at the same time that all the Indians except his father's people and the Chouchillas had treated . . . He then informed

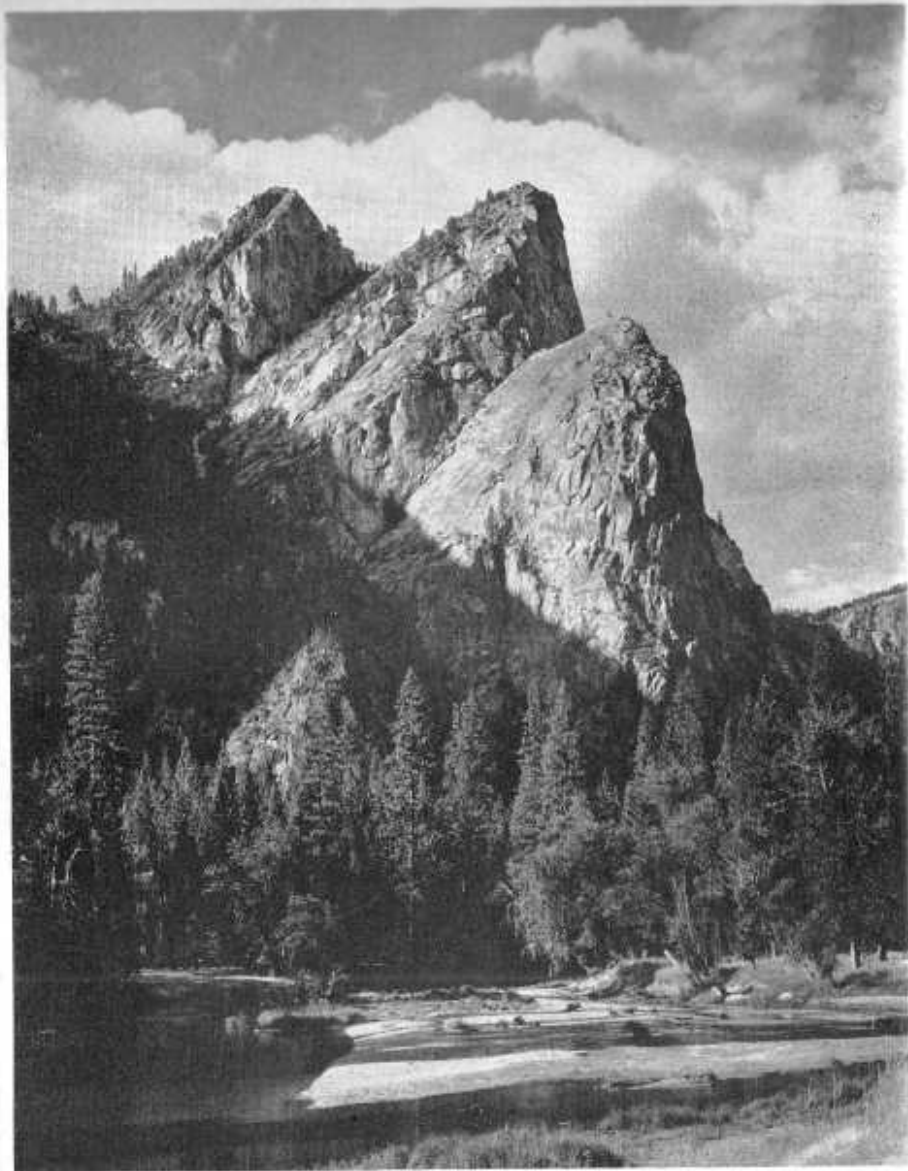


Photo by Ansel Adams from "Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada." Reproduction by kind permission of Houghton Mifflin Co.

The Three Brothers. This prominent landmark on the north side of Yosemite Valley was so named by the Mariposa Battalion in May 1851, because the three sons of old Chief Tenayo had been captured by the soldiers near its base. In *Discovery of the Yosemite* Dr. L. H. Bunnell writes: "The Indian name for the three rocky peaks near which this capture was made was not then known to any of our battalion, but from the strange coincidence of three brothers being made prisoners so near them, we designated the peaks as the 'Three Brothers.' I soon learned that they were called by the Indians 'Kom-po-pai-zes,' from a fancied resemblance of the peaks to the heads of frogs when sitting up *ready to leap*. A fanciful interpretation has been given the Indian name as meaning 'mountains playing leapfrog,'" The highest of the trio is called Eagle Peak.

me that . . . if I would let him loose, with another Indian, he would bring in his father and all his people by twelve o'clock the next day."

After this emissary to Chief Tenaya had been sent out, the other Indian captives attempted a get-away and one did make good his escape. While this one was being searched for, two others still in custody tried to break away. These young Indians were shot and killed by their guards—the first blood to be shed in Yosemite Valley in the course of this Mariposa Indian War.

Boling's men then pursued a small party of Indians which had left a fresh trail up the north wall of the valley. The white men pressed on into the mountains and were led by the Indian tracks to the shores of Tenaya Lake where the Yosemitees were surprised in camp. The Indians surrendered without a struggle. This was the first expedition made into the Yosemite high country from the west and this time the elusive Indians were successfully escorted to the reservation on the Fresno River.

Tenaya and his followers, however, refused to adapt themselves to the conditions under which they were forced to live on the plains. They begged to be permitted by the

authorities to return to the mountains, and upon obtaining his solemn promise to behave, the commissioners permitted Tenaya and the members of his immediate family to leave the reservation. Shortly thereafter others of the Yosemite band slipped away from the confines of the reservation and joined their chief in the mountains. No attempt was made to bring them back.

On July 1, 1851, the Mariposa Battalion was mustered out of service. Major Savage resumed his trading operations and conducted a substantial if not phenomenal business with the Indians and the miners along the Fresno River. Of this trade Savage said to his friend L. H. Bunnell:

If I can make good my losses by the Indians out of the Indians, I am going to do it. I was the best friend the Indians had, and they would have destroyed me. Now that they once more call me "Chief," they shall build me up.

The dispersal of the Mariposa Battalion, however, did not end the "war." The Yosemite Indians could not restrain their desire to take revenge upon the whites for the invasions of their home, and as will be told in a succeeding note more killings in the Incomparable Valley were to follow.

TRAFFIC PROBLEMS OF WILDERNESS CREATURES

By Od'n S. Johnson, District Park Ranger

Sitting in a parked car at the north end of the Pohono Bridge in Yosemite Valley at dawn one January morning, I was waiting for another ranger to join me. Presently I saw a gray fox trotting down the road. He came onto the bridge at the far end and kept coming for several feet before he became aware of the parked car. He stopped short, hesitated, turned tail, and ran back to the end

of the bridge where he paused to turn around and look. He stood that way for a minute or so, and then started to cross the bridge again. After proceeding several feet, perhaps a few feet more than the first time, again he stopped, turned, and ran back. After two or three more attempts were made to cross, the fox returned to the end of the bridge and disappeared over the side of the

road. It was evident that he very much wanted to get on the other side of the river, perhaps to get to his home, or for some other reason. But there was that foreign object standing in his way. Just when I remarked, "Too bad he didn't make it," the fox showed up again, this time advancing rapidly and in a more determined way. As he approached the center of the bridge I could see his front feet and head starting to turn at times, but he kept coming on.

From experience, no doubt, the sly old fox knew that at any moment from this black monster would emanate the most fearful noises to be followed by swift movement. But he kept daring to come on nevertheless, passed the car, and ran up into the talus slope. This was just one more instance, or example, where even animals, including crafty foxes, find the need for building up determination and courage, and then put these virtues into practice.

This reminds me of an experience

a lady had with a bear one autumn on the footpath to the top of Vernal Fall. She was coming down the trail and in a very narrow place met the bear coming up. Both stood looking at each other, each petrified with fear and not knowing what to do. While standing thus a man hiker coming down the trail caught up with the lady.

Sizing up the situation, and seeing the predicament both the bear and the lady were in, he said calmly, "I think, lady, if we'll squeeze off the path as much as we can, we will let the bear go by." So they did, and before they could think, the bear swooshed by them and kept going to what he thought was a safe distance, then turned around and stopped, looking at them as if to say, "My, I'm glad you two let me by so that I wouldn't have to go up the long trail." Apparently all that bear wanted was to get up into the hills, perhaps for his winter hibernation.

THE JACK MCGURK REVOLVER

By Marshall B. Evans, District Park Ranger

In materials recently donated to the Yosemite Museum by Mr. and Mrs. E. T. Schaller pertaining to the life of Jack McGurk, Yosemite pioneer, was a Smith and Wesson revolver. It was recognized as one of the rare models of early Smith and Wesson history.

Examination of the arm showed it to be a 44 caliber, single-action, model No. 3. It was manufactured between 1869 and 1870. There is no record of the number manufactured but it is known that the U.S. Army ordered 1,000 and that they were subsequently delivered in 1871. Due to the fact that this arm fired the first successful center-fire cartridge

and was the first revolver with automatic ejection it was a highly prized weapon.

This arm was followed by the model No. 3 (improved). It was at this time that 250,000 were ordered by Russia through the Russian Grand Duke's association with William Cody who possessed this model. For 3 years Smith and Wesson manufactured the "44" for Russia. At this time the West was being developed in tremendous strides. Colt had developed his Frontier model in 1871 and enjoyed unlimited sales in America. This model placed Colt's reputation very high and also put the Colt business



Jack I. McGurk

well on its feet. However, the Colt Frontier, although a wonderful arm and remains so today, was and is considered by many authorities to be inferior to the Smith and Wesson improved model No. 3. Had Russia not placed its order with Smith and Wesson undoubtedly their 44 would have been very popular in America and would have had a larger share of victories in winning the West.

The McGurk gun bears the serial number 21503, which possibly would

indicate that a considerable number of Smith and Wessons had been manufactured previously. However, recorded history and arms collections do not indicate this and the early models of Smith and Wesson revolvers are not common.

Close examination when disassembling and cleaning the McGurk gun disclosed that up until a few years ago it had received good care. Extreme exposure had caused the shallow oxidation or rusting. The arm did not have noticeable holster wear marks. Subsequent findings showed that McGurk, a cattleman who once grazed lands now in the park, as a rule did not carry a gun previous to his law enforcement work. As a deputy sheriff of Madera County the gun was worn and used.

This old Smith and Wesson 44 deserves the security and attention that it will receive in the Yosemite National Park Museum. It not only represents an important step in the progress of firearms but also is one of the very few items left by the early pioneers which indicates something of frontier life and activity in the development of the West. The McGurk gun is a fine addition to the Yosemite collection of historic objects which have special local significance.



The McGurk revolver, exhibited in History Room of Yosemite Museum

BRUIN OPENS BEAR SEASON AT GLACIER POINT

By Dorothy R. Mayer¹

It was March 18 and spring had definitely arrived. That day we stepped out the door and almost fell over a huge black bear. He was busily occupied, with his nose buried in the snow, trying to get at a garbage can which had been covered since the early part of the season. He did not notice us as we crept closer to get a good photograph of his huge black bulk silhouetted against the snow. His fur was in excellent condition and he didn't look as though he had just emerged from hibernation. Perhaps he had been below in the valley for some time, but we were astonished to see a bear at this elevation so early, with so much snow still on the ground. We later noticed his trail coming straight up the mountainside beneath the hotel.

Suddenly sensing our presence, our bear lifted his snow-bedecked nose to the wind, his small squinting eyes finally focused on us, and he turned away ambling off in the snow, up to his shoulders at every step. He circled the house and made straight for the hotel where he obviously knew his way around, for he went directly to the storeroom door, passing up all others. No doubt he remembered it from previous years and he may have been the same one who moved in on one occasion, taking up residence in the storeroom, having a glorious time before he was finally discovered and evicted as a non-paying guest.

After a futile attempt at the storeroom door he next turned to a

boarded-up door at the rear of the hotel, where he finally made an entrance, pulling out nailed boards as if they were straws. George came upon him in the rear hall and, not wishing to argue the question of precedence with one who was so obviously at home, he made plans to scare the bear off before he became too well established in the neighborhood. Knowing the effectiveness of noise in such a situation, George pulled the fire alarm, expecting a moderate whistle or siren. At first there was no response, and thinking the alarm was not working, he walked away planning another attack. A few minutes later, just as he reached the porch steps, a blood-curdling cacophony of sound let loose upon the still air, reverberating from peak to peak, loosening a dozen avalanches and vibrating the entire house. George, taken completely by surprise, missed his step and went sprawling in the snow, while the bear shot out from under the porch and made a very undignified exit, wallowing through the drifts across the mountaintop. His great lumbering form appeared briefly on the horizon and vanished, leaving mammoth footprints in his wake.

On and on went the blast of sound, and we felt something like the "sorcerer's apprentice" who could not stop his magic once it was started. If there were any hibernating animals still asleep before this rock-splitting din, they must surely be aroused by now, and the poor

1. George and Dorothy Mayer were in charge of the Glacier Point hotel properties during the winters of 1949 and 1950 and were isolated most of the time.—Ed.



Photo by Ralph Anderson
Glacier Point interpretive lookout station, Half Dome in the distance

bear must have been shocked out of a year's growth.

Eventually peace and quiet were resumed on our mountain. It was fortunate that the siren could not be heard in the valley below or there might have been some repercussions.

Our bear, however, was not so easily discouraged as we had imagined. He evidently had pleasant memories of this place and was determined to have another try before returning to the valley. It had started to snow again and, wishing to spend the night up here, he sought shelter in the interpretive lookout station nearby. Here he showed remarkable ingenuity and cleverness in making the best possible use of whatever was available. The lookout offered protection from the wind and snow, but the floor was covered with drifts and was too wet and cold to lie on. Looking about, there was no sign of vegetation above the snow

with which to make a bed. The only promising thing he could find was an old broom standing in the corner of the shelter. With great patience and care he removed the snow from the floor, tore the broom apart, and then, straw by straw, built a perfect bed of a proportion one could hardly imagine could be provided by a single broom. No broom was ever put to better use, and no one but a bear, perhaps, would ever think of using it for a mattress.



YOSEMITE'S EARTH-STARS

By O. L. Wallis, Park Ranger

A Yosemite plant which serves as Nature's hygrometer is the earth-star, *Astraeus hygrometricus* (Pers.) Morg. By its action it roughly indicates the humidity, the amount of moisture in the atmosphere. For this reason the earth-star is sometimes known as the "poor man's weather-glass."

The earth-star is a specialized form of puffball which has a thick leathery covering. When the plant is mature the outer wall splits into pointed segments, exposing the puffball.

In wet weather the lining of the wall becomes soft and pliable and the segments spread out in a star-like pattern. Dry conditions cause the lining to become hard and rigid and the segments to curl inward into a tight ball. This ball rolls readily in the wind, spreading the spores from the opening in the puffball.

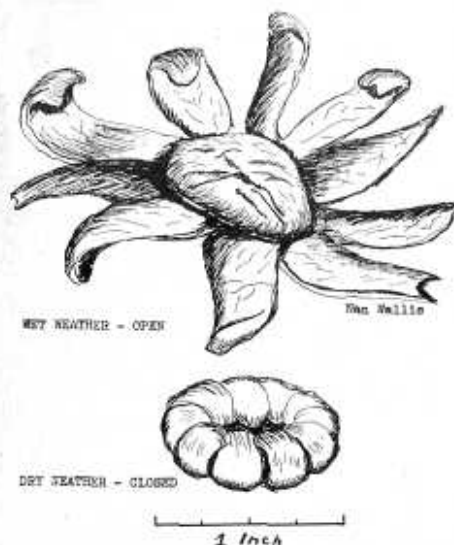
Late last summer while I was walking over an open sandy spot

above Big Creek, I came across the first earth-stars I have found in Yosemite. In December, additional specimens were discovered on a ridge near the South Entrance Ranger Station and in the Mariposa Grove. More were collected along the Mirror Lake trail on February 18, 1951.

This is the first recording of earth-stars being found in Yosemite National Park. Other specimens are not present in the museum's study collection. It is obvious that this fungus, which is world-wide in distribution, can be expected on sandy soils of fields and woods in other locations in the park.

The Yosemite specimens possess an average of 13 segments. When wet, they open out to a breadth of 2 to 3 inches. One of them, an unusually large one, expanded to nearly 7 inches when placed in a dish of water for 25 minutes. It took several days for it to dry out and completely close again.

Other puffballs which are found in Yosemite and represented in the museum collections include: Pear-shaped puffball (*Lycoperdon pyriforme*); sculptured puffball (*Calvatia sculpta*); carved puffball (*Calvatia caelata*); giant puffball (*Calvatia gigantea*); and leaden-colored bovista (*Bovista plumbea*). Puffballs of the genus *Calvatia* are the largest known and have a breadth up to 2 feet.



Editor's note: Identification of the Yosemite earth-stars was verified by Herbarium Botanist Phyllis G. McMillan, University of California.

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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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