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Winter forest study
—Ansel Adams



J. T. Ross

Stagecoaches on old Big Oak Flat Road, Yosemite Valley, 1903.

Cover Photo: Winter forest study, by Ansel Adams.

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YESTERYEAR'S STAGECOACHING INTO YOSEMITE

By C. M. Goethe, Sacramento, California¹

Some of us, in this Faster-than-Sound Age, still are old-fashioned enough to assert that the only way to see a country is afoot. What could telescope more into that much time than the 1919 Tahoe-to-Yosemite Goethe-Bryant hike? If you must hurry, the stagecoach "isn't 'arf bad." Our family had "dead-axed it" into Yosemite in the 1880's and 1890's to enjoy its peerless scenery. At the century's turn, we-2,² already infected by the hurry bacteria, exchanged dead-ax for coach.

Merced to Snelling then was by a tiny railroad. Its timetable allegedly was accommodatingly so flexible that passengers could call a halt anywhere to pick wildflowers. At Snelling, our first stage driver was a muscular young negro. At a certain lookout along the road he would halt to point upmountain with his whip. "Up thar my mammy's a-cookin' dinner. Ah kin tell by the color of the smoke you-all gwine to have southern fried chicken and sweet taters." Here was a prophet with honor in his own bailiwick!

Dinner over, we again mounted stage for Coulterville, gold-belt mining town. Our six horses skillfully sped around the road's hairpins. The way lay largely through elfin forest. The ceanothus was in full bloom, disclosing unforgettable beauty in the flash of the stage lights. Arriving at our Coulterville hostel about 11 o'clock, we were told we would be called at 3, for a day-break start. Today this may seem cruelly early. I myself was raised in an environment of "Start as soon as you can see." The slogan was: "Get horsework over before the day's heat."

We long ago had reserved box seats next to renowned driver Sleeper. We-2 were all excitement, for here might be the journey's highlight. Mr. Sleeper had an enviable record as a raconteur. No one in all the Great West could excel him in yarning—if he were in the mood. We-2 had planned accordingly, should, perchance, Sleeper be "not in the mood." We did happen into one of his Taciturn Times. Before

1. The birth of the now widespread service of "nature guiding" in the national park system and elsewhere in the United States is traced to the initiative and support of Mr. and Mrs. C. M. Goethe, first at California's Lake Tahoe in 1918, and then at Yosemite in 1920. See Carl P. Russell's "The C. M. Goethes and Nature Protection," *Yosemite Nature Notes* 29(7): 63-64, July 1950.—Ed.

2. Mr. and Mrs. C. M. Goethe.

starting he had had a row with the stableboy. Every few minutes he would "swear under his breath." This, in the presence of Mrs. Goethe, meant that the rumpus had been serious. Horse trouble before starting was no light matter in that day when murder might be overlooked, but a horsethief always got the rope.

Forewarned, our strategy was to greet him, then ignore him, while we-2 told each other yarn after yarn. In about twenty minutes it was evident, being close-packed in the box seat, that the Sleeper ribs under the Sleeper coat were undulating. Another ten minutes and our driver exploded: "Say, you youngsters ain't never seen much of life. Now you'll listen to me." Promptly and expectantly we listened. There followed tale after tale packed with the folk-wisdom and the exaggerated humor of stagecoach driving.

-A sample of this follows: He, never forgetting the "ribbons" in his hand, was laughing at his own jokes so heartily that Mrs. Goethe said, "Why Mr. Sleeper, you're crying!" "Good reason," he ejaculated. "Always do at this turn of the road, about my poor twin brother, Jack. We was orphans but was raised apart, me down in Mariposa, poor Jack up in British Columbia. They struck it rich on Frazer River and Jack larned mining as a kid.

"See that avalanche scar yonder?" He pointed with his whip to a line of bare rocks down a sugarpine-clad escarpment. "Well, poor Jack died at the foot of that slide. It was this-a-way: He heard I was driving stage down here in Mariposa. He decided to join me. He had no money, but he owned a burro, with pick, shovel, and miner's pan. As he traveled along he always panned enuf to pay his grub. He was coming

along that ridge" (again a sweep of his whip). "He saw the dust of my stage. He knew he was too late. But no Sleeper is a piker. He yanked his miner's pan off'n his burro. He sat in it, and came sliding down that avalanche scar. And so we twins, separated since our mother nursed us, one at each breast, finally were reunited." There was a dramatic pause. Sleeper, with his bandana, wiped another tear from his cheek. Mrs. Goethe sympathetically queried, "Why the sorrow?" "Well, you see ma'am, his miner's pan came down so fast it got red hot! My poor twin brother were burned to a crisp like bacon!" Thus Sleeper made time fly until he landed us at 6 p.m. at Camp Curry.

One of our passengers that day was a Parisian. She had an inside seat. When we arrived at Camp Curry it was dusk, and at her departure next morning at 6 a.m. it still was dark. She sighed as she settled into her stage seat, to exclaim, "*J'ai fait le Yosemite!*" She thus scratched Yosemite Valley off her list. Sleeper, on the return trip, making a bull's-eye with his cud of tobacco, sarcastically said, "She's gwine to write a book on Yosemite!"

On one such century-turn stage trip we had, returning, two unusual passengers. The first was a spectacled New England spinster, a fanatical fruititarian. She once bustled late into the dinner at Camp Curry, proclaiming, "Climbed Clouds Rest today on two DRIED APRICOTS!" She was offensive in her persistent efforts to convert all to her own peculiar brand of Hinduism. Meat diet was taboo. As with the Jain priests, an ant or a spider was to be lifted unharmed out of one's path; who knew but that the soul of one's deceased father had slipped in such reincarnation?



Historic photograph of Hetch Hetchy Valley before permanent inundation by O'Shaughnessy Dam in 1923 for San Francisco's water supply.

The second was Father Kelley. This good priest had been born behind the Purple Mountain across from McCarthy Moore's ruined castle on Lake Killarney's shores. Although the Emerald Isle's religious education is thorough, the spinster undertook to convert Father Kelley. The jolly fat priest countered by joking the spinster from Salem, who grew more and more angry. She must have found it exhausting. Anyhow, we arrived at Fred Harvey's in Merced. She was absent when we other passengers sat down together for luncheon. Father Kelley had left his purse in his overcoat and went back to the stagecoach for it. Returning, he whispered in my ear, "Do ye desire to see our friend, old 'Dried Apricots'?" We went to the short-order lunch counter outside. There she was, devouring a T-bone steak of that thickness which today is legendary.

On one of these coachtrips of the early 1900's, we-2 accepted the Sierra Club's challenge that several successive parties of volunteers should camp in Hetch Hetchy, to substantiate that organization's claim that this valley was a gem of scenery—a miniature Yosemite. The Hetch Hetchy trail left the stage road at Hazel Green.

Here we met a trapper. His wife was dead, and their only daughter was betrothed to a cowboy named Jim, who was to be our guide. Jim was as handsome as a Hollywood actor. He was a skilled horseman, knew cattle, and was an encyclopedia of woodland lore. En route we camped overnight where there were four university undergraduates. They had conspired to flirt with this sun-bonneted daughter of the backwoods. Her dad had warned me at Hazel Green of the heartlessness of it all. He said: "She's so verdant she

does not understand how they are deceiving her. I do and so does her lover, Jim. I can't give her a dowry like San Francisco girls would get. But there ain't anyone in New York or Paris that'll ever have finer furs than I've been saving for her all these years in the big home-made cedar chest."

The ride of us-2 next day with Jim into Hetch Hetchy was unforgettable. Hour after hour the trail lay through 200-foot sugar pines. It was the most magnificent timber I ever saw. I understand that today all of it has screeched as the lumber companies' saws ripped it open.

Yosemite a half century ago was unbelievably beautiful in wildflower time. Teen-agers today can have little conception of how the valley floor then was carpeted with massed color. The conservation movement, none too strong today, came too late to save the most picturesque color show of all.

Of the many interests in Yosemite Valley then, perhaps the most fascinating were the humans—from

Old Lucy, the squaw, to David Curry and to Galen Clark. John Muir then was still active. Some of us had been asked to undergird his efforts to convert the Kings Canyon country into national park status, the same as Yosemite. It was a discouragingly long fight, and probably would never have been successful had not the Sierra Club persisted. Herein we must never forget the intelligent obstinacy of W. E. Colby and Dr. H. C. Bryant. After Muir came the late Stephen Mather, who really built the national park system in the United States. He was the first director of the National Park Service when it was created in 1916. There followed in 1920 the transfer of our nature-guide experiment from Lake Tahoe to Yosemite. Of this Dr. Loye Miller, a leader therein, said that year to Mrs. Goethe and the writer, "This work is of infinite horizon." Most of the "Mather men" have passed into the Great Beyond. A few still live, among whom are Colonel White, Carl Russell, and Horace Albright. Their number grows steadily less.

BIRDLAND'S HAPPIEST MARRIAGE

By Henry G. Weston, Jr., Ranger Naturalist

Aside from the blue-fronted jay, probably no species of bird is better known to summer campers on the floor of Yosemite Valley than the black-headed grosbeak (*Hedymeles m. melanocephalus*). Yet few of these campers realize how well mated the grosbeaks are. In the bird kingdom a pair of them stands as the perfect match, with the male the devoted husband sharing in the various household and parental chores.

This ideal marriage, so rarely found among birds, is seldom observed by casual Yosemite visitors.

Rather, the grosbeak is most likely to be remembered for its friendly forays to the camptable. Not as bold nor raucous as the jay, it nevertheless is wont to visit the dinner tables in the campgrounds and to pilfer bits of food. It seems especially fond of fruits, and its taste for butter (nowadays oleomargarine?) is responsible for its nickname, "butter bird." Unlike the jay, we can forgive these grosbeak misdemeanors, for in return the male grosbeak provides color as well as pleasing music to our ears.



Winter visitors to Yosemite miss these friendly, colorful songsters, for, like many of our feathered residents, grosbeaks leave the park to travel south each winter. While Yosemite shivers in the cold, they bask somewhere south in the tropical sun.

Grosbeak "visiting hours" in the Yosemite region run approximately from mid-April through mid-September of each year. This is the season when they return to beautiful Yosemite to raise a family. This is also the season when Mr. Grosbeak puts all other birds in the Yosemite area to shame with his willingness to help with the family tasks.

The males are the first to arrive each spring, generally preceding the females by several days. With the arrival of the females, frenzied courtship antics take place as the showy males vie for the attention of the females. Two or even three males can be seen singing and flying about in the vicinity of one female, occasionally chasing her. Rival males also frequently chase one another. The whole picture seems to be one of utter confusion as we watch.

Soon after the female makes her selection of a mate, the two settle down to housekeeping, usually in some shrub or dense tree, not too far from water. There, from 6 to 12 feet above the ground, they place the flimsy structure that answers for a nest. Literature on this subject al-

most invariably mentions the frail construction. Grinnell and Storer in *Animal Life in the Yosemite*, for example, write that it "is so thin in weave that the contents can be seen, at least in outline, from beneath."

Building of the nest is done by the female, and here is one of the few places where Mr. Grosbeak shirks his family obligations. He frequently follows his wife while she gathers nesting material, but seems to offer no assistance in the task except to accompany her on her trips with vigorous, rollicking songs.

Continuous incubation normally starts with the laying of the next-to-last egg in the set of three to four. At this time Mr. Grosbeak chips in and carries on almost half of the incubation duties. He does not serve his wife her meals but he does the next best thing: he sits on the eggs while she goes off in search of her own meals. This cooperation by both sexes means the eggs are covered over 99 per cent of the time.

The male, for some unknown reason, occasionally sings while incubating. How strange this is!—when most birds strive to prevent disclosure of the nest's location to searching predators. Mr. Grosbeak's bright colors make the nest conspicuous enough without his making the location even more apparent by uttering loud songs. Not to be outdone by her mate, the female also sings from the nest. Her songs are not loud nor are they long, but nevertheless they are highly melodic. Very few females of other kinds of birds sing. In some ways this trait is rather unique with the grosbeaks.

The eggs begin hatching on the 12th day of incubation. With that the change in the parents' daily routine is surprisingly little at first, then gradually more as the young birds develop. The two adults continue to

cooperate in the care of their family—brooding and feeding them, attending to nest sanitation, and acting in their defense. As the young grosbeaks grow, both parents spend progressively longer periods off the nest, so that by the 12th and last day of the young at the nest they are brooded only at infrequent intervals, depending on the weather.

The activities of the parents and young for several days after the latter leave the nest are difficult to observe, as all become quiet and extremely secretive in their movements. Both parents, however, do aid

in the care of the young during the critical days immediately following the departure from the nest.

As the cycle of parental duties comes to a close, one realizes what an active role is played in it by the male grosbeak. When we consider that a great majority of the males in the bird kingdom devote little if any energy to aiding the females in the raising of a family, we can indeed say the black-headed grosbeaks make ideal mates. What a shame that more visitors to Yosemite are not aware of Mr. Grosbeak's finest attribute.



MINERAL CURIOSITIES ON RAGGED PEAK

By William L. Neely, Ranger Naturalist

There is a sandy flat just below the final rise of Ragged Peak north of Tuolumne Meadows where it is very natural to pause and rest. A bank of snow provides water, a small meadow of short grass offers green relief from the glare of granite, and clumps of red heather soften the edges of fallen boulders.

Here we rested and here we discovered basalt. This black, dull rock was conspicuous amid the ever-present granite. In the white and gleaming world we were in, the dark basalt was a somber invader from Pluto's realm that had somehow pushed up in ancient times.

Our find was not the spectacular columnar form of basalt as exemplified in the Devil Postpile,* nor even

like the "miniature Devil Postpile" on the Tuolumne River near Glen Aulin High Sierra Camp. It was just a clump of rocks, or rather three clumps, forming a rough circle, possibly an old volcanic core within the granite and rising about 2 or 3 feet above its surface, which is to say that the granite was weathered away that much more than the basalt. It will be there for others to find, and no one would remark over it unless aware that basalt—though it is a common volcanic rock in other regions—is extremely rare in Yosemite National Park, a remnant of fire and brimstone in a land of glacier-cleaned granite.

And then on the north face of Ragged Peak we discovered a mass of pegmatite of enormous propor-

*See "The Devil Postpile National Monument," *Yosemite Nature Notes* 31(10), October 1952.

tions, like a great bubble in the granite that had been filled with two of its unmixed ingredients, quartz and feldspar. A lens-shaped layer of quartz 20 to 25 feet wide and 12 to 14 feet high was overlain by an equally large mass of pure orthoclase feldspar in great angular crystals. At the base of the cliff we picked up large specimens of both minerals, choosing among them for the best examples to lug back to Tuolumne Meadows for a future mineral display.

Why these masses of the pure ingredients that make up the white part of granite should occur amid the common rock was a geological

question we couldn't answer on the spot. Our suspicion was that the crystalline mass was once a huge bubble in the granite, perhaps formed by superheated gases and vapors while the granite was still rather plastic, and then later filled like dikes by an intrusion of molten rock, in this case quartz and feldspar which crystallized separately, the quartz below, the feldspar above.

How deep the intrusion went into the mountain we couldn't tell, but at any rate it is there, shining like a magnificent jewel on the side of Ragged Peak, and most likely will continue to be there long after our civilization has gone.



"PUDDLING"—IN YOSEMITE AND ELSEWHERE

By Alice E. Snow, Field School, 1952

Natural science and things to do out-of-doors are generally more enjoyable and attractive to children than many of the other school studies. Most boys and girls have a natural curiosity about the plants and animals, rocks and stars. They are quick to notice things about them and seldom need to be reminded to observe, although they often need someone to interpret what they see.

The varying of children's interests with their ages seems to follow a general pattern. Through the age of about 8, I have found that the youngsters primarily enjoy those fairly large mammals and birds that do a good deal of moving about. Mammals and their young are interesting "stories" and something

that children can understand. The older ones, from 11 on up, generally like insect hunting and mounting. They are quick to learn the insect names. Stalking insects with a net is an excellent way to learn their habits.

An unbelievable attraction for water is likely to be built up among 9-year-old groups, which makes it almost physically impossible for them to walk *around* a mud puddle. This fascination frequently carries through to adolescence and sometimes into adulthood. With a little guidance, this natural delight in "puddling" may be turned into a very profitable hobby. Organized field trips as a beginning may soon develop an interest in individual study. Many organizations—scouts,

trailside museums, day camps, and, in some places, schools—recognize and take advantage of this ideal learning situation.

One hot day last July, I had an opportunity, as part of Field School training, to participate in instructing children in the Yosemite Junior Nature School under the supervision of Mrs. Mary V. Hood. My partner and I chose to take a pond-life trip with our group of young naturalists. I was already convinced that a pond trip is a perfect field excursion for 9- and 10-year-olds. The boys and girls, on setting off from the museum in Yosemite Valley, carried nets of substantial material through which they could see. At least two pails with handles were essential equipment. I have found that it is more satisfactory for each child to have his own net. He can have fun making it at home.

Before the pond was reached, the group was given final instructions on the best places to "dredge." It was suggested that they not only watch for the larger, more familiar animals (frogs, tadpoles, etc.), but that they should use their sharp eyes to spot the smaller, yet often more intriguing, swimmers that are likely to be so casually passed off as mere "bugs."

With this the group dispersed themselves along the pond bank, each to his own chosen spot. Soon there were shrieks of excitement from first one bank and then the other—"I've got a tadpole!" "Here's a beetle!" "What *is* this long thing swimming around?" "I've got *something*—bring the pail!" And so a brief morning went all too quickly. We leaders found ourselves hurrying from one site to the next, identifying and "telling the story" about each catch.

Such a trip can almost always be successful because each boy and

girl can catch something; the children are active as well as the leader. Participation is at its fullest. This type of trip provides good opportunities for group "socializing." In the midst of exciting catches, shyness and other difficulties are, momentarily at least, forgotten. "Emergency" situations arise—someone's catch gets away or a girl spies a snake but is afraid to pick it up, etc.—and are met by the children themselves.

The "treasures" of our trip were taken back to an aquarium at the Yosemite Museum for further study. Surely there is no more enjoyable follow-up than this, when the group may watch these animals by the hour as they go about their business in an almost natural environment.

When we leaders suggested that the group hunt for smaller animals, we had had in mind such water insects as backswimmers and water boatmen. These true bugs have long hind legs which seem out of proportion to the others, and, in being so, are adapted for use as "oars." Backswimmers actually swim on their backs which helps them to approach their prey, since their true back is a shiny white and more easily seen.

Common water striders are fun to study. Children will want to know why it is that they are able to walk on the surface of the water. The terrifying water scorpion that preys on anything smaller than himself and holds his victim in tight-grasping forelegs makes an impressive aquarium study.

Those "long things swimming around" were the young dragonflies and damselflies, known as nymphs. Dragonfly nymphs have an extendible lower jaw plus a unique system of jet propulsion which makes of them valuable "hauls."

The young of the predacious diving beetles, called water tigers, do

exceedingly well at upholding their reputation as tigers, despite their small size. The adult beetle may be seen with head down and tail up to the surface of the water, since he, like so many water insects, breathes through his tail. He frequently is seen carrying a bubble of air close to the rear part of his body as he dives beneath the surface.

Other meat-eating creatures seen on our trip were the whirligig beetle (he may always be counted on to provide a circus), giant water bugs, and some of the segmented worms we call leeches.

In some ponds, snails are common plant eaters, though in several places in Yosemite we have found the larvae of the caddisflies to be far more numerous. These larvae, with their little homes of sticks or

stones, offer one of the most thrilling pond experiences for the uninitiated.

As children learn about the eating habits of these animals, they may begin, perhaps for the first time, to understand something of the intricate chain of events—the eat-or-be-eaten laws which take place in a pond and are, indeed, a part of all Nature.

A pond is such a clear example of plants and animals living together—well adapted to their environment—that it may be used as a stepping stone to the study of other, less distinctive, communities. I feel certain that a carefully guided pond trip, followed up by similar trips or further study, has rewarding and lasting values exceeding those of other nature-study trips.



Ralph Anderson

Guided field trip for children in Yosemite Junior Nature School.



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Dan Anderson