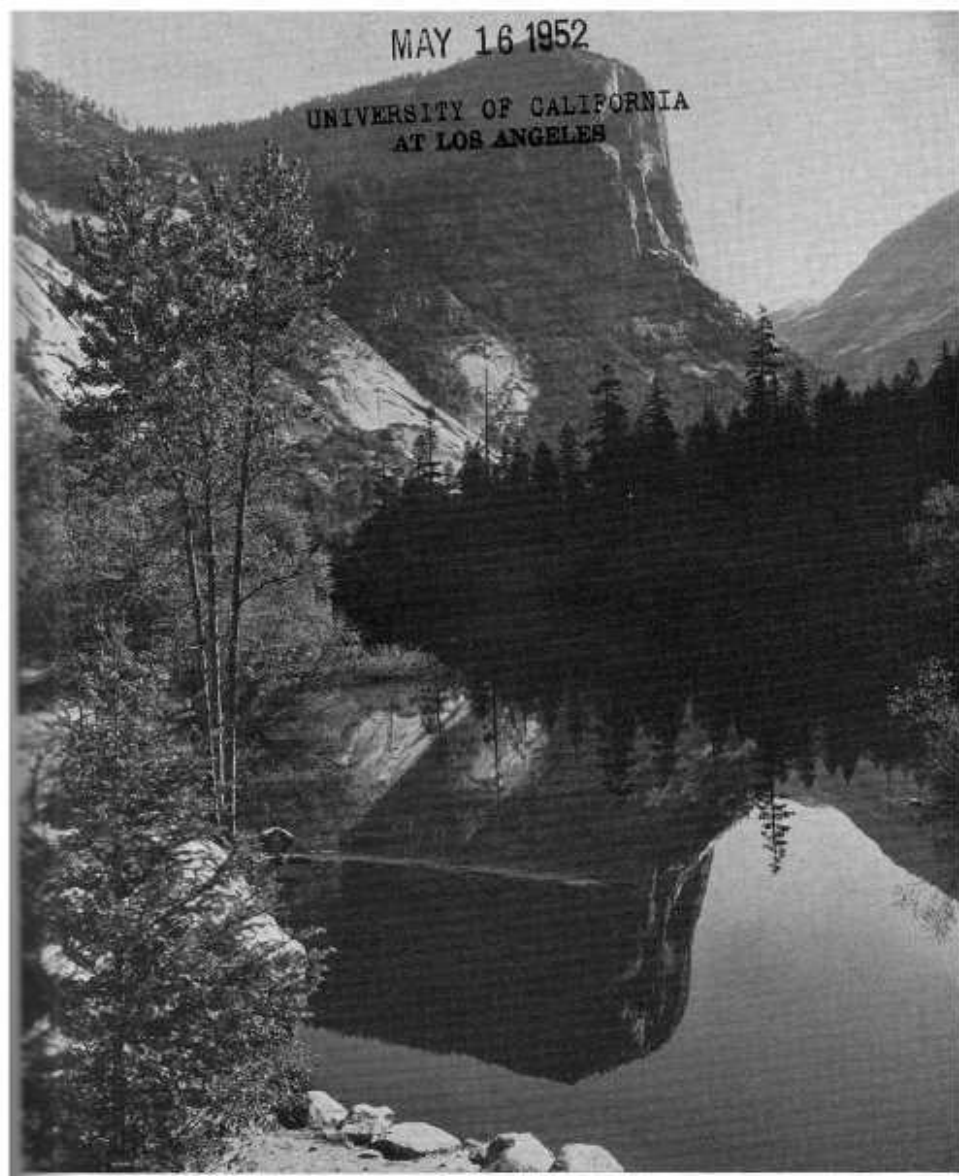


# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

VOLUME XXXI • NUMBER 4

APRIL 1952



*Mirror Lake and Mount Watkins, Morning*  
—Ansel Adams



Mariposa Grove Museum

**Cover Photo: Mirror Lake and Mount Watkins, Morning.** By Ansel Adams from "My Camera in Yosemite Valley." Reproduction by kind permission of Virginia Adams and Houghton Mifflin Company.

# Yosemite Nature Notes

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

C. P. Russell, Superintendent

D. E. McHenry, Park Naturalist

H. C. Parker, Assoc. Park Naturalist

N. B. Herkenham, Asst. Park Naturalist

W. W. Bryant, Junior Park Naturalist

VOL. XXXI

APRIL, 1952

NO. 4

## THE "FIRST" YOSEMITE RANGERS

By Allan Sproul, President, Federal Reserve Bank of New York

I am told there is a gap in the administrative records of Yosemite National Park. This is not surprising. There was a gap in administration as well as in the records. That was in 1914.

The United States Army had been providing supervision for the park (under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior) since it was established in 1890. There was usually an officer-superintendent, and a troop of cavalry to patrol the park, as well as some civilian employees. The troops arrived when much of the snow was gone in the spring and they left in the fall, after the first rains and snows had eliminated fire hazard and other threats—cattle and sheep were driven down to the lowland valleys of California in the autumn and human visitors did not often come to Yosemite after the summer season in those days. During the winter a few civilian employees—"rangers," or better perhaps "scouts"—did what patrolling was done.

In 1914<sup>1</sup> the United States cavalry unit under Maj. William T. Littebrant, which had been expected to perform

its peaceful duties in Yosemite National Park, was ordered to the Mexican border for more warlike purposes. The tourist season was about to begin. There was no one to take the place of the troops.

In this emergency a group of Californians at Washington put their heads together. At least I assume that they put their heads together. There was Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior under President Woodrow Wilson. There was Dr. Adolph C. Miller, an assistant to Secretary Lane in charge of national parks, and a former professor of economics at the University of California. There was Stephen T. Mather, an Assistant Secretary of the Interior who later became the first director of the National Park Service when it was established in 1916. There was Horace Albright, an assistant attorney in the Department of the Interior assigned to work on the problems of national parks, who later became legal adviser to Mather, and eventually succeeded him as head of the National Park Service. The result of the assumed cerebration of these eminent Cali-

<sup>1</sup> The national park now included Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove, which from 1864 to 1906 had together been a state park.

fornians was a call for help to President Benjamin Ide Wheeler of the University of California.

President Wheeler was asked to recommend and provide seven men for work as "rangers" in Yosemite National Park, they to come to the park after the close of the school year in May 1914. While retaining the power of veto (he inquired particularly about me), President Wheeler turned over the actual job of recruiting these men to his then secretary, Clare M. Torrey, a graduate of the university in the class of 1913.<sup>2</sup> That is where I come in. I was about to be graduated from Berkeley (California) High School and as usual I was looking for a summer job. Clare Torrey was an old friend of mine; we had grown up together in San Francisco. Clare thought of me and I was offered one of the seven ranger "commissions," an offer I jumped to accept. What 18-year-old with a love for the mountains and in need of a job wouldn't jump at such an offer? The other six men were recruited in a more orthodox way; they were men who actually were students or graduates, or about to be graduates, of the University of California. These "first Yosemite rangers" were Oliver Haines, Eric Lawson, Leo Meyer, James Short, Dan Sink, Jean Witter and the writer—Allan Sproul.

The job requirements were fairly simple for a group with some experience in outdoor living and having no serious inhibitions about their ability to tackle most anything. We were to provide ourselves with a saddle horse and a pack horse, with necessary riding and packing equipment, a rifle and revolver, an axe, cooking and eating utensils, provisions, and whatever we deemed to be suitable clothing. Outside of the

more obvious requirements—that we should be in good physical condition and that we should be able to saddle and ride a horse and to throw a hitch on a pack animal—no others were laid down. The term "ranger" was then a pretty vague title and it was evidently assumed that we would get whatever scant instruction we needed when we reported for duty at Yosemite Valley. The pay was \$100 per month, out of which we fed ourselves and our animals, and it was good pay, too.

It had been decided that we should be ready to go to work on June 1, 1914. The academic year at the University of California ended and the 12-week summer vacation began on May 14. However, my school year at Berkeley High School did not end until May 29. So while the others rode from Berkeley to Yosemite Valley, taking my horses and equipment with them, I had to travel later by more usual and faster conveyances—train to Merced and El Portal, overnight stay at El Portal, and stage into the valley. The others had been in the valley 3 or 4 days when I arrived and may have had some instruction in their about-to-be-assumed duties, although I doubt that they were told very much. Nobody knew very much about what they were going to do. I had a day in the valley and then was off to my post. As I remember it, we met Gabriel Sovulewski who was then acting superintendent of the park, a man named Prien who was called the "chief ranger," and Forest Townsley, Jack Gaylor, and Charles Leidig, who were civilian employees and the nearest thing to rangers then existing. Our general instructions were to look out for fires, to keep cattle and sheep out of the park, to pre-

2. Newton B. Drury, later director of the National Park Service, was Mr. Torrey's successor in the office of secretary to President Wheeler.

vent visitors from bringing firearms or dogs into the park and from damaging the fauna and flora (although these words were not used), and to maintain the telephone lines in our areas.

I was assigned to the station at the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias. Ollie Haines was assigned to Camp A. E. Wood at the Wawona entrance to the main park. The



Photo by O. L. Wallis

Partial of old Wawona entrance to the park as it appeared in 1951.

others were assigned to similar stations on roads or trails leading into the park: Crane Flat, Merced Grove, Soda Springs, Hog Ranch. Haines and I packed up and rode off over the Wawona Road, by way of Inspiration Point and Chinquapin. We made Camp A. E. Wood on the South Fork of the Merced River by evening and found it convenient then (as well as often later) to have dinner at the Wawona Hotel nearby. This was an easy and nourishing introduction to life on the range. After dinner I rode, in the dark, to my cabin at the entrance to Mariposa Grove, about 6 or 7 miles from Wawona by road and some less by

the trail I used when I became more familiar with the lay of the land.

The one-room cabin I was to occupy was situated at the side of the road on a small shoulder near a ravine or creek bed, just before the road reached the Sentinel group of sequoias. It had evidently been used as a headquarters and perhaps as a cook shack by the cavalry squad which had previously been stationed there. Outside the cabin there were the outlines of a campground laid out in white quartz stones, and up the hill on the other side of the road there was a small corral. That is where I made my first mistake. In the dark I turned my two horses loose in the corral. The next morning I found that a section of the corral fence had fallen down or been broken during the winter, and both of my horses had gone looking for greener pastures. One of Uncle Sam's brand new shiny-faced rangers had lost his horses the first day on the job. I spent most of that day finding them and coaxing them back to bridle or rope.

For the next 5 months I was the guardian of the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, the most responsible job I have ever had or ever will have. Fortunately, I did not realize how great were my responsibilities, and fortunately nothing happened to the giant sequoias.

Once on the job, I seldom heard from headquarters in Yosemite Valley. Three or four telephone calls are all that I can remember. Archie Leonard, the dean of the old-time rangers or scouts, was nearby some of the time, his home cabin being at Wawona. But Archie was not very communicative. He was always pleasant, and I should say tolerant of the "college boy rangers," but so far as our duties were concerned there was a gulf between us which



he evidently did not care to try to cross. He knew the park by long association and by years of travel over its trails, but he was too diffident, too inarticulate, too old, to share much of his knowledge with us. I can still see him and hear him, however. His hair was gray and rather long, and his mustache drooped. His uniform was a dirty slouch hat distinguished in its slouchiness, a grayish-colored shirt which wouldn't show the dirt of a season, and overalls (now called jeans) worn low on the belt. He spoke in a soft, indistinct voice, surrounded by a pleasant smile. His badge couldn't lend him authority, but his recognized knowledge of the whole region did. For the rest, Chief Ranger Prien came by and found me playing tennis with Margery ("Midge") MacGowan, the belle of Wawona (daughter of the auditor, cashier, and bookkeeper of the various Washburn enterprises centering around the Wawona Hotel). Prien suggested substituting an axe for the tennis racket and went on. Later in the season Superintendent Mark Daniels and a party made a hurried trip through the grove, waving to me in passing. That was the only supervision I had.

My duties were not onerous; my days were pleasant. Although Yosemite Valley had been opened to automobiles in 1913, Mariposa Grove was still closed to them during the early part of the 1914 season. Since the auto had replaced the horse some years before as a means of travel in most places, this meant that the majority of my visitors came in groups by horse-drawn stage from Wawona. The rest, hikers, and

a few in wagons, on bicycles, and with saddle and pack animals, did not make much trouble. There were two stage trips through the grove each day—the number of stages each trip depending on the number of tourists. The early morning stage from Wawona went through the grove and back to the Wawona Hotel for lunch. The later stage trip brought hotel lunches for the travelers which were eaten at the old log cabin<sup>3</sup> in the heart of the grove.

This cabin was then some sort of a concession, cooperating with the Wawona Hotel. Coffee was prepared there to supplement the hotel lunches which were pretty substantial. There was a curio shop where various articles made out of redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) were sold as souvenirs of a visit to Mariposa Grove (*Sequoia gigantea*) with as little misrepresentation as possible. There was a photographer who took individual pictures on request, and practically always took pictures of the stages going through the tunneled Wawona tree. There was also a boy-of-all-work. The man in charge was a skittish old customer named Ed Baxter who, in the winter, represented the district in the California State Assembly. The photographer was Albert Henry ("Bert") Bruce, one of several brothers native to the Mariposa country including Jay Bruce, California state lion hunter for many years. The big day for the concessionaires was the annual visit by the girls from Happy Camp, an adjunct of the not too distant operations of the Sugar Pine Lumber Company outside the park. As Bruce put it, on that day old Baxter was jumping over toothpicks.

3. Originally built by the State of California in 1885 on the site of an older cabin put up by Galen Clark and called Galen's Hospice, the cabin mentioned here was later torn down because of its unsafe condition. But because of its historical value an exact replica of it was built on the same spot in 1930 by the National Park Service, and this became the Mariposa Grove Museum.—Ed.

When I was not elsewhere I usually followed the late morning stages into the grove to keep an eye on the tourists and to pick up a lunch I did not have to cook for myself. There was always plenty left at the cabin after the tourists had finished, including the best pies I had ever tasted, the product of the Chinese cook at the Wawona Hotel. As I look back, I was at the cabin pretty regularly for lunch—like a sea gull following a ferryboat. Not that I didn't like my own cooking. I became pretty accomplished with the pots and pans, including the baking of bread in a Dutch oven. This was my cooking tour de force; a hole in the ground into which the Dutch oven fitted, and plenty of hot wood coals to surround it and cover it for the baking period.

I had other company at the grove. There was a brush-clearing gang there for 2 or 3 months, removing the underbrush which represented a possible fire hazard. The party camped in the lower grove. It was in charge of John Canova from Coulterville, and was a motley crew, including two more Bruce boys and a fellow who told me confidentially that Archie Leonard was his father (Archie gave no evidence of recognizing the relationship). The gang did a good workmanlike job. Canova, who grew a soft black beard which gave him a Christ-like appearance, was deceptively soft-spoken. Whenever the boys got a little obstreperous he broke it up with a club. The one who visited me most often was Bob Bruce, a fellow of about my age with certain of the homespun qualities and rugged appearance of a natural backwoodsman. I represented some of the educational opportunities he wanted and had been unable to get. We spent many evenings arguing and

talking about things neither of us understood.

When I was not actually doing my housework or in the grove watching tourists and cadging lunch, I was riding around the limited area of that part of the park keeping an eye out for fires and for trespassing livestock, or visiting my nearest ranger-neighbor—Ollie Haines at Camp A. E. Wood. Once or twice during the night small bands of cattle had thundered by my cabin, waking me with a noise like a herd of elephants charging through an echoing void. I was scared, but from under the covers I couldn't actually see these animals. I saw only one small band of cattle in the daytime during my 5 months of patrol (there wasn't much pasture thereabouts, and anyway the cavalry troops had pretty well scared out the cattle- and sheepmen who were tempted to trespass within the park). That was the only time I fired my rifle. Thinking to stampede the animals and get them started on their way out of the park, I fired over their heads. That is, I fired over the heads of all but one which, unseen, was up the hillside from the main group. I hit him with a 30-30 bullet and dropped him cold. The rest of the cattle got under way fast and I never returned to claim my kill.

My visits to Camp A. E. Wood at Wawona were frequent. I often spent the night there with my fellow ranger, Ollie. There was the attraction of his genial company, there was the possibility of dinner at the Wawona Hotel, and there was the fascination of the noble sport of skunk hunting. A family of skunks had taken up its abode under the floor of the old cabin at Camp A. E. Wood. We would hear their tap-tapping around the cabin in search of food after we had gone to bed in our double bunk. When we lit a candle the skunk or

skunks would retreat under the floor which was full of good-sized knotholes. When we caught one under the knothole in the candlelight we shot it with our revolvers (the only use to which we ever put the revolvers, except for target shooting), and then dragged it out through the knothole and disposed of the carcass. Never one betrayed us, but looking back it seems to me we took an awful chance.



"Ranger" Allan Sproul at his cabin headquarters, Mariposa Grove, 1914.

The Wawona Hotel in those days, except for its location near Mariposa Grove and Yosemite Valley, was a more or less typical summer hotel of that time. The guests, if they stayed more than overnight, were supposed to be happy just to be there and do nothing. There was no planned entertainment or whipped-up sociability. There was no swimming pool; the meadow was still a hayfield and

pasture, not the golf course it is now. The scenery and the climate provided the pleasures of the spirit and a Chinese cook provided good food. The present main building was the only one then. The porch was full of rocking chairs, and a dreamy, dusty calm surrounded the enchanted spot. Down toward the creek on the right were stables and barns, a working blacksmith's shop, a general store, and a sort of hall where once in a while there was music for a dance, usually attended by the two local rangers.

Old John Washburn, who had taken over the land from Galen Clark in 1875 by mortgage foreclosure and given it the name Wawona, was still around. With his full white beard, and general elder-of-the-church appearance, he provided the place with an air of pioneer dignity whatever may have been his and its earlier history. His sister, Mrs. Higgins, also spent the entire season at the hotel, showing ample evidence of a more slender, youthful beauty. The whole was run by his son Clarence, a graduate of the University of California who was responsible for the hotel's tennis court, but who otherwise hadn't changed things much. Finally, there was an itinerant barber, a godsend to travelers and rangers. The "rigors" of life as a ranger at Camp A. E. Wood or Mariposa Grove in 1914 were certainly tempered by the amenities of the Wawona Hotel.

In midseason 1914 automobiles were allowed to drive through the grove. This added to my duties and held me closer to my camp than before. The autos had to be checked in, the prohibition of dogs and firearms became a little more of a problem, and it was more difficult to keep track of the visitors when they came in their own cars rather than



by the stageload with prescribed stopping places. Perhaps a few dried-up snow plants disappeared as a result (they seemed to attract tourists), but nothing serious happened to the grove. I strung a rope across the road by my cabin with a hand-lettered sign hanging from it which said STOP. That kept cars from going by in the daytime without noticing me, and from going by at night when they still were not permitted in the grove. It also, sometimes, stopped the early stage (still horse-drawn) when I slept late. Since the drivers were not allowed to leave their seats, and the passengers wouldn't, the stage had to wait until I got up, pulled on my pants, and ran out to take down the rope. I can still hear such drivers as Jim Gordon or Phoenix ("Sport") Ashworth yelling for me.

It would be better even now, if we were not all in such a hurry, to see the grove by horse-drawn stage rather than by auto stage or private automobile. Mariposa Grove is no place for a paved road. The horse-drawn stage, leisurely and in tune with its surroundings, used to put one in the right mood for the giant sequoias. And the drivers were more picturesque and more interesting than chauffeurs. Their story of how the grove was discovered always seemed to please the visitors. According to them, when the Fallen Monarch fell it made a great noise and the echo lasted 2 weeks. Some people down Mariposa way heard

the echo and followed it until they came to the grove.

Along about the end of October travel into the park had pretty well stopped in 1914, and when the first rains came, dispelling the fire hazard, Ollie Haines and I began to pack up. The others of our group had left the park earlier. We rode from Wawona to Yosemite Valley, still beautiful in its autumn coloring, then checked in with the "authorities"—the chain of command was still rather vague—and said goodbye to the finest summer job we ever had. As we rode our horses out over the Big Oak Flat Road on our way to Merced my saddle horse was packing a load of pleasant memories, and 20 more pounds of me than when I came to the valley 5 months earlier.

In my present work I am chief executive officer of an institution with over \$12 billion of assets, with over \$5 billion of gold belonging to foreign governments and central banks in its custody, and with many more billions of unissued currency and securities in its vaults. There are about 4,000 people to help me with the job. I had something much more precious in my care when I was the "lone ranger" stationed at the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias in 1914. In my ignorance I felt little weight of responsibility then, but I feel it now when I go back to the grove to worship in the shade of the giant sequoias. I thank God they are still there.



## RAIN AT LYELL BASE CAMP

By Joseph E. Wright, Yosemite Field School, 1951

A hiker must be prepared to accept many things, including inclement weather which can occur so quickly at the higher elevations.

As we progressed along the meadows of the Lyell Fork of the Tuolumne, heading for Lyell Base Camp, thunderheads were gathering around Mount Dana to our left. Lunch in the meadow was barely completed when a peppering sprinkle began and then stopped. It left the air fragrant with the intimate scents of lodgepole pine and dampened grasses.

Having made the pleasant climb along the switchbacks to the upper base camp, we were hardly free of our outer equipment when the rain came, shaken loose by rolls of thunder. Inadequate tarpaulins and

exposed commissary materials made necessary some mad scrambling to get as much under cover as possible. Meanwhile the uncovered fire sputtered under the kettles, and warm foods seemed not too remote, though our soaked, shivering bodies toiled on, seeking some little benefit for the group as a whole. Wet shoulders chilled us thoroughly; but order came out of the apparent chaos, and the rain ceased even as the meal became ready. At the same time three or four of our bunch who had been fishing below in the meadow appeared with their catches, no wetter than themselves.

Despite the heavy rain, sleeping quarters under the whitebark pines were available with only a little scraping away of the duff. The pud-



Mount Lyell and the Lyell Glacier

*Photo by Ralph Anderson*

dies soon soaked away or evaporated. The clouds lifted, and the subdued magnificence of the Lyell snowfield and glacier came into view through the screen of pines sheltering the campsite. Stars soon brightened the sky. Our faces and

hopes lightened as our animal heat received additions from warm food and a campfire. Songs and drying socks around the blazing logs brought a soothing close to the day. No more were we to meet rain during our time in the high country.



#### BOOK REVIEW

**THE DUSKY-FOOTED WOOD RAT**, by Jean M. Linsdale and Lloyd P. Tevis, Jr. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951. 664 + vii pp. Illustrations, tables, and graphs. \$7.50.

Subtitled "A Record of Observations Made on the Hastings Natural History Reservation," this is an intensive, sociologic account of the wood rat based on the histories of 880 individuals, and covering 10 years of continuous observation. It is mainly concerned with the affairs of individual wood rats. As might be

expected from a study of such intensity, many phases of the wood rat's life history are here revealed for the first time.

As a valuable guide for the study of any single rodent species, this volume undoubtedly will be wanted by technical workers because of the account of the methods used by the authors. However, it also contains much that will be useful to those who merely have a general interest in small mammals, especially in the Pacific coastal area of the United States and Lower California.—H.C.P.

~



Digitized by  
Yosemite Online Library

<http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library>

Dan Anderson