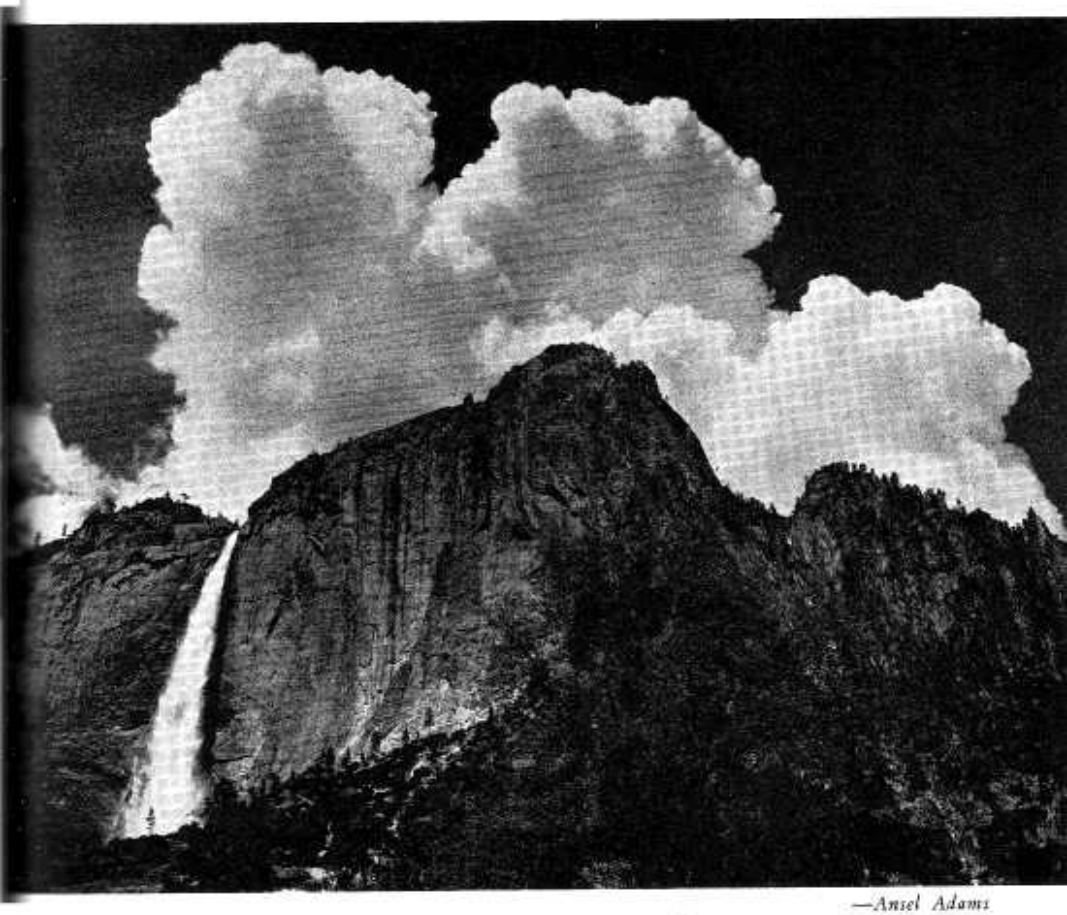
YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

VOLUME XXXIV • NUMBER 7 JULY 1955



—*Ansel Adams*

Thunderheads and Yosemite Falls

(Copy)

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

Washington

October 29, 1909

Dear Sir:

Your letter of August eleventh, enclosing a petition signed by important organizations of California, requesting the opening of the Yosemite National Park to the restricted use of automobiles, was duly received.

In reply you are informed that, after a personal investigation on the ground during the past summer, I am impressed with the belief that to favorably consider the petition would be to limit the travel by stage in the Park, the condition of the roads being such that it would be dangerous for teams and automobiles to meet.

Considering the inaccessibility of the Park, it is not believed that the use of automobiles would result in the accomodation of but a very few people, but would operate to the annoyance of stage passengers, as well as probably result in endangering the lives of such passengers, in consequence of which I am constrained to deny said petition.

The only solution presenting itself at the present time is the construction of independent roads for automobile travel, and in this connection any suggestions that may be made to the department will receive careful attention.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) R. A. Ballinger
Secretary

Mr. Rufus P. Jennings
California Promotion Committee
California Building
San Francisco, Calif.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: 1954 total to Yosemite—autos 287,641; Horse-drawn vehicles, none!)

Yosemite Nature Notes

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

VOL. XXXIV JULY 1955 NO. 7

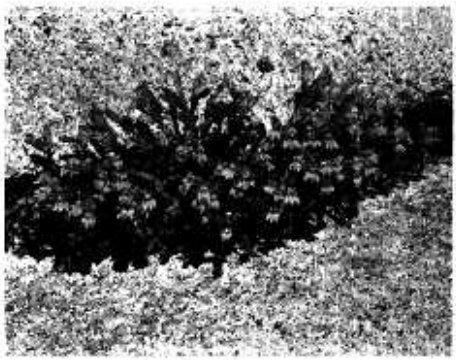
NOTES FROM MY TUOLUMNE JOURNAL

By William L. Neely, Ranger Naturalist

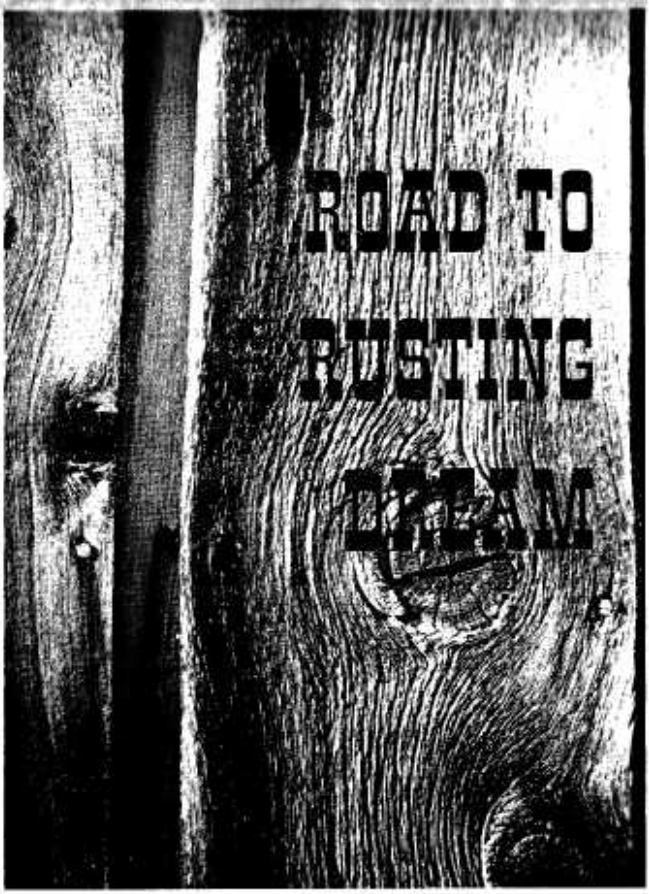
A Day on Mt. Gibbs

There are moments of glorious serenity which come with this occupation as naturalist and mountaineer. After a long tough climb in the raw wind up the stately slopes of Gibbs, we stop at noon on an alpine slope in a tiny meadow above the old mines, out of the wind and near the water, to eat lunch. A little streamlet runs winding through the sod, nearly hidden by the curving banks of sedge and grass. Flowers unknown to the lowlander grow here, and with a background of snow and crags the scene suggests a Swiss post card in color or a travel poster. The slope we sit on is gentle for a distance, then curves abruptly out of sight into the glacier-carved canyon below. I half expected to look down on a Swiss village with church spire and to hear the tinkle of goat bells. The great snowy peaks rise around us, yet the air here is warm and serene.

We located and followed the old mining road of the 1880's that follows this elevated plain on the slopes of Gibbs. It is obliterated in spots, but for the most part quite clear, well banked with stones on steep slopes, coming gradually up the mountain from Mono Pass. Perhaps it was a sledge road in winter. Then we have the long trail from Mono Pass to the Tioga Road, but one falls into a rhythm while walking, and if not trying to reach a goal, or at least to think about it, the terminus comes soon enough. If one enjoys the present moment, the trail has no end nor beginning nor distance. One is tired only when the mind has traveled faster apace and reaches the end, so that the body is left trying ever to catch up.



Scarlet Penstemon
—*Anderson*



By Fran Hubbard

Weathered siding.
Tioga mine building.

High in the Sierra near the boundary of Yosemite National Park is an old mine, its machinery quietly rusting away, and its buildings weathered to a golden brown. This is the Tioga—dream of a fabulous fortune which never came true.

Thousands of motorists travel Yosemite's famed Tioga Road, over California's highest mountain pass, every year without knowing the interesting story of high hopes, feverish excitement, and finally heartbreak that went into this mighty effort, for which the road was originally constructed.

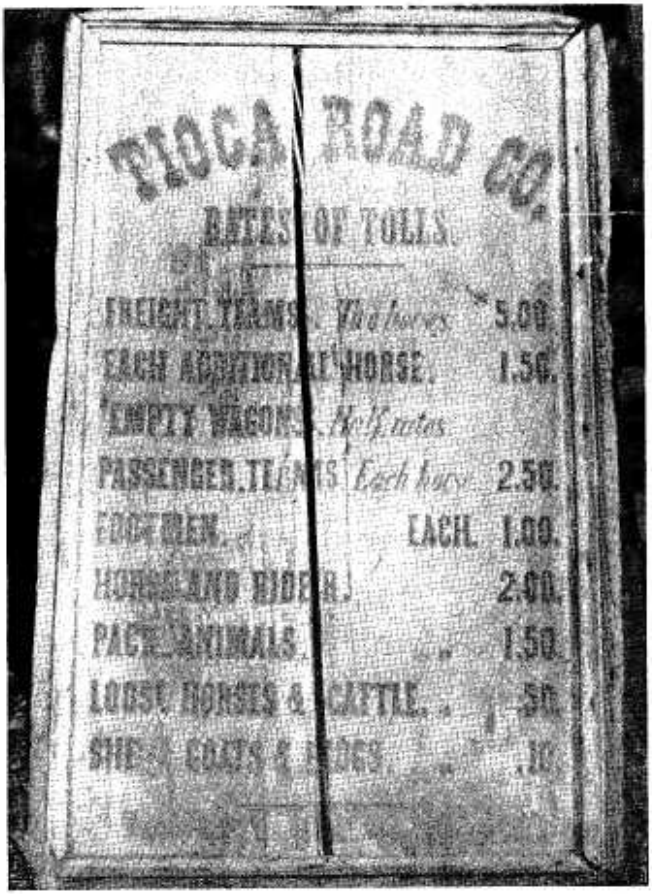
This region of California has long been known for mineral riches. A score of years before Marshall's discovery of gold at Coloma in 1848 electrified the western world, Jedediah Smith, famed trapper and explorer, found gold near Mono Lake, some 15 miles east of Tioga Pass. Lieutenant Tredwell Moore, who led an infantry detachment from Fort Miller in pursuit of Indians in 1852, discovered gold and other minerals while exploring the Bloody Canyon and Mono Lake regions. Two years later Leroy Vining and several companions went to where Moore had found gold, establishing themselves on "Vining's Creek," the Vining Canyon of today, up which winds the eastern portion of the Tioga Road.

So much for the prelude. From W. A. Chaliant's *Gold, Guns and Ghost Towns* we learn that in 1874 a young

man named Brusky, prospecting near the Sierra crest, came upon an old prospect hole marked by a rusted pick and shovel and a tin location notice. The names of the original locators were undecipherable, but "Sheepherder" and "1860" could be read. The first prospectors were assumed to have perished and the mine was thus relocated. At an elevation of 10,000 feet, it is in a region noted both for its summertime beauty and the bitterness of its winters.

Brusky was unable to finance the operation, and the property passed into the hands of a group of men from the East, mainly New Bedford and Boston, who organized The Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company in December 1881 to mine the riches. A survey made at their request by an English mining expert estimated a surface ore value above 12 million dollars, and other experts were equally optimistic. At this time the town of Bennettville was founded and given a post office named for Thomas Bennett, Jr., president of the company. It soon became headquarters for the Tioga Mining District. Preparations were made for driving the Great Sierra Tunnel to cut the Sheepherder and adjoining lodes and to make removal of ore possible through a horizontal tunnel instead of a costlier vertical shaft.

In *One Hundred Years in Yosemite*, Carl Russell states that the company apparently suffered from no lack of funds: "Great quantities of supplies and equipment were packed into the camp at enormous expenditure of labor and money. At first the place was accessible only via the Bloody Canyon trail, and Mexican

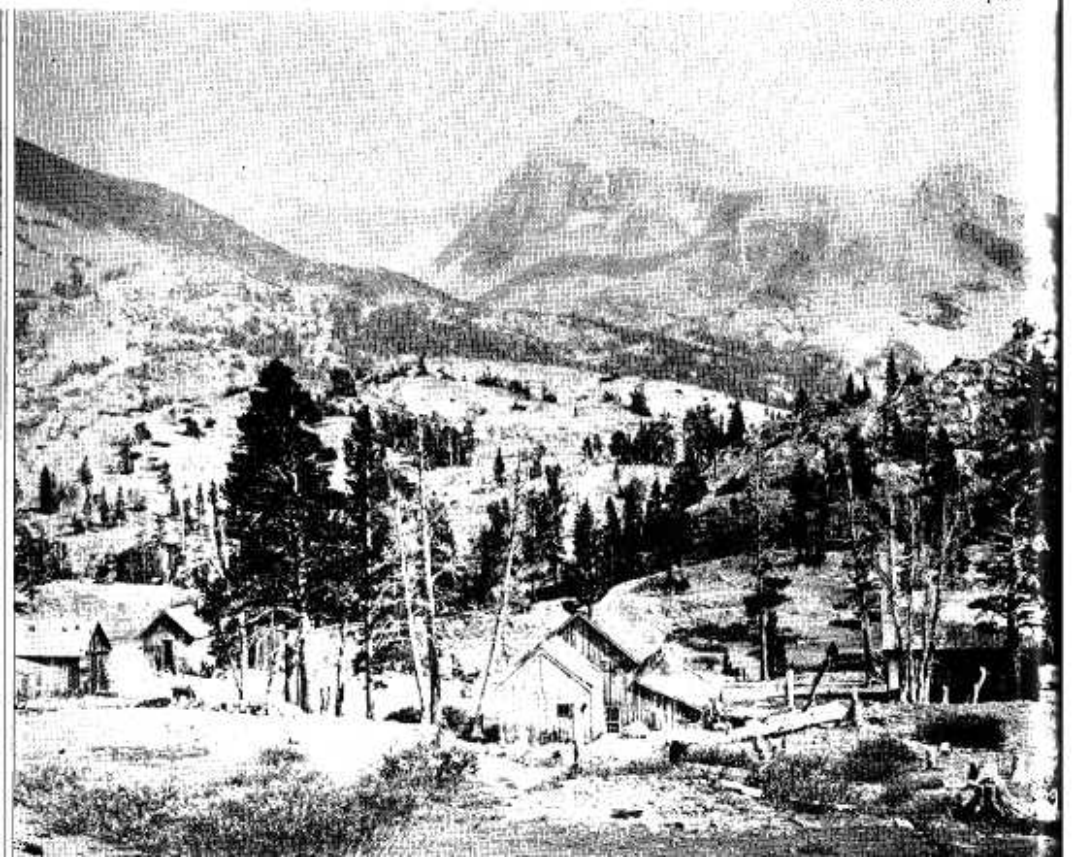


The Tioga was a toll road, rates high!

packers contracted to keep their pack animals active on this spectacular mountain highway." It is said that Bloody Canyon received its name from bloodstains of unfortunate pack animals scraping along the narrow, steep trail.

Machinery, including a steam engine, boiler, air compressor, and drills were essential to drive a shaft into the hard rock of the region, and the story of how this was dragged by sheer manpower up the almost-vertical face of the Sierra, in the dead of winter, will go down in history. Let us turn to the *Homer Mining Index*, published in Lundy, starting point of the trip, for March 4, 1882: "The transportation of 16,000 pounds of machinery across one of the highest and most rugged branches of the Sierra Nevada mountains in mid winter, where no roads exist, over vast fields and huge embankments of yielding snow and in the face of furious wind-storms laden with drifting snow, and the mercury dancing attendance on zero, is a task calculated to appall the sturdiest mountaineer; and yet J. C. Kemp, manager of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company of Tioga, is now engaged in such an undertaking, and with every prospect of perfect success at an early day—so complete has been the arrangement of details . . . The machinery will probably be hoisted straight up to the summit of Mount Warren ridge . . . an almost-vertical rise of 2,160 feet.

This was Bennettville (Tioga) on August 8, 1898, with red Mt. Dana in the background.
—*Celia Crocker Thompson*



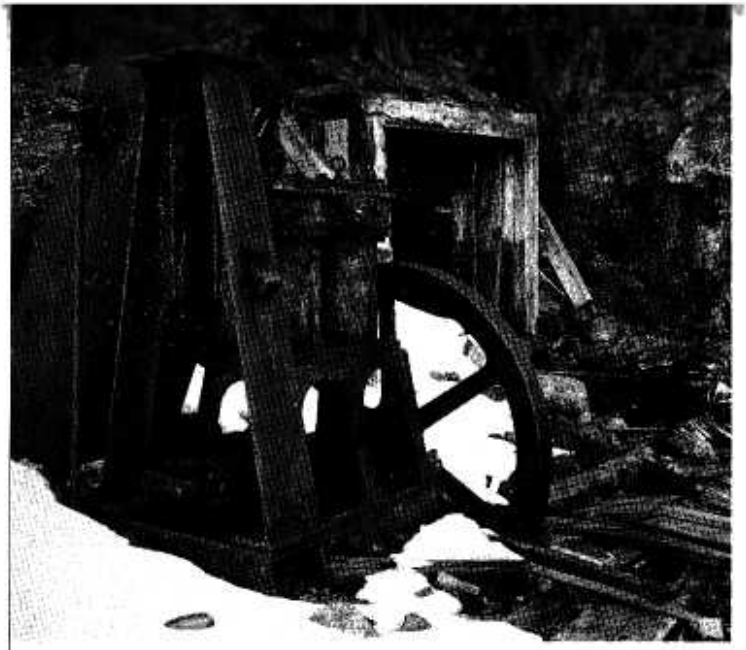
Some old mine buildings still stand

From the summit the descent will be made to Saddlebags Lake, thence down to and along Lee Vining Creek. The machinery consists of an engine, boiler, air compressor, Ingersoll drills, iron pipe, etc., for use in driving the Great Sierra tunnel. It is being transported on six heavy sleds admirably constructed of hardwood . . . A pair of bobsleds accompanies the expedition . . . laden with bedding, provisions, cooking utensils, etc. The heaviest load is 4,200 pounds. Ten or twelve men, two mules, 4,500 feet of one-inch Manila rope, heavy double block and tackle, and all the available trees along the route are employed in 'making' the machinery up the mountain . . ."

Chalfant adds: "As each capstan was reached the apparatus was dismantled and carried forward to the next stage. Inch by inch the traction rope was wound in . . . The loaded sledges broke through the snow again and again, wedging themselves so that they had to be pried out with pole and crowbar, or block and tackle snubbed to trees, or to steel arduously set into rocks. Every ounce of propulsive effort was furnished by human muscle." The 10-mile trip required more than two months. Little was recorded of the suffering of the men, but it is not surprising that Mr. Kemp remarked at the completion of the task, "It's no wonder that men grow old!"

Such difficulties prompted the construction in 1863 of the Tioga Road, then called "The Great Sierra Wagon Road," to facilitate hauling materials and supplies to the mine. Extending some 56 miles from Crocker's Station to Tioga, it was built in less than five months, largely by Chinese labor, at a cost of $62,000. Work proceeded at fever pitch at the mine. A sawmill was erected to furnish mine timbers and lumber for buildings. The tunnel was driven more than 1,700 feet through rock so hard that from three to five shifts of miners frequently labored to drill a single round of blasting holes.

As the tunnel neared the fabulous Sheepherder Lode, the board of directors decided that a survey of the

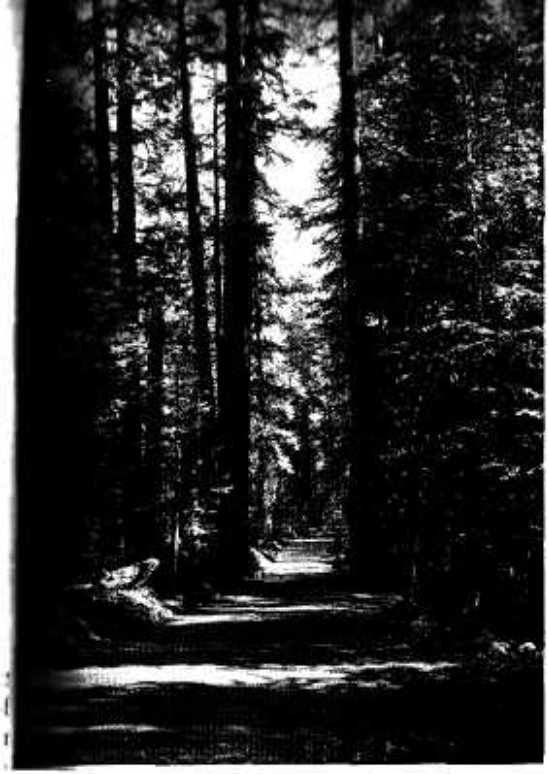


Tioga's machinery quietly rusts away.

company's finances was imperative, before the lode was cut, according to a report made by Bennett. Though indications were that the lode may not have been more than 50 feet ahead, the private telegraph line of the company clicked out a message to the superintendent on July 3, 1884, ordering him to close everything down. The orders were obeyed promptly—tools were left in the tunnel and dishes remained on the tables in the mess hall. More than $350,000 had been expended in the endeavor, with not a penny in return. Intentions to reopen the mine after a brief shutdown were never carried out. Several subsequent efforts have been made to continue the tunnel and reach the lode, one as recently as 1936, but all have failed.

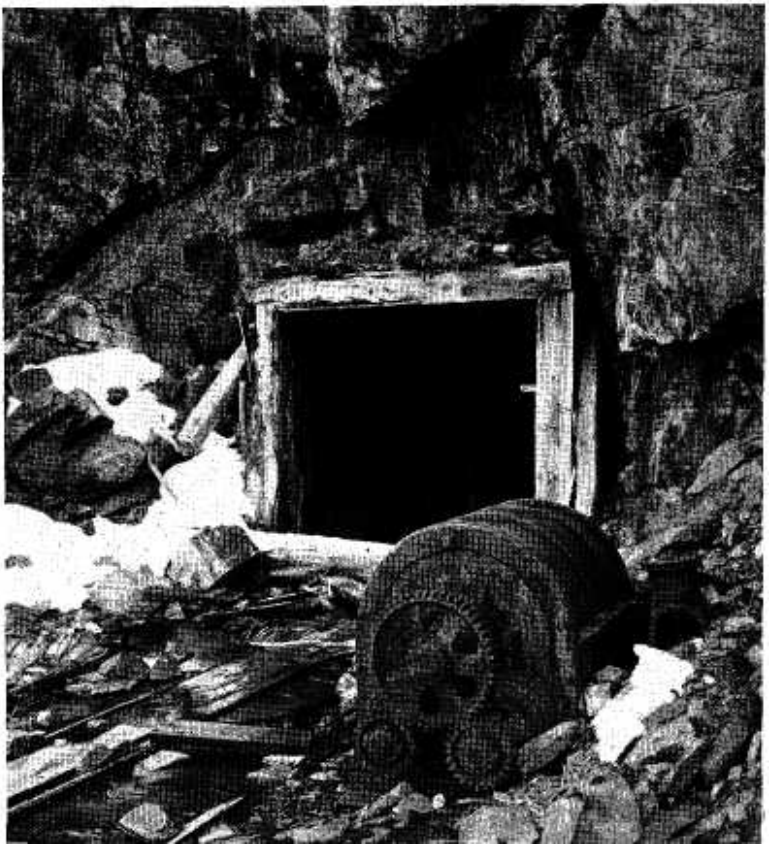
The Great Sierra Wagon Road fell into disuse and disrepair following the closing of the mine. Although much of it was within the boundaries of Yosemite National Park, it remained the property of heirs of the founders of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company. Dyna[illegible] Stephen T. Mather, first director [illegible] the National Park Service, started [illegible] drive to acquire public ownership [illegible] of the road. Donating about half [illegible] the $15,500 purchase price from his own pocket, Mather deeded the road to the Federal government in 191[illegible] Several leading automobile clubs financed needed repairs. The road joins the so-called "Lee Vining Creek Road" near Tioga, making a crossing over the Sierra Nevada possible by a route once considered for the transcontinental railroad!

Much original alignment has been improved. Curves have been straightened and super-elevation added. Twenty-one miles of the old road remain in-use, however, inviting the traveler to slow down and enjoy some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in the West. Only this, together with the rusting machinery of the ghost town of Bennettville, remains to remind the present generation of the fortitude and effort which went into one of the West's greatest mining ventures--for naught.



EDITOR'S NOTE: We are indebted to *Pacific Discovery*, bi-monthly of the California Academy of Sciences, for permission to reprint this article which appeared in their issue for September-October 1954, and for the generous loan of their engravings. Photographs are by the National Park Service except where otherwise indicated.

21 miles of the
old Tioga road
are in use today.



Entrance to the old mine was in solid rock.

NOTES FROM MY TUOLUMNE JOURNAL

By William L. Neely, Ranger Naturalist

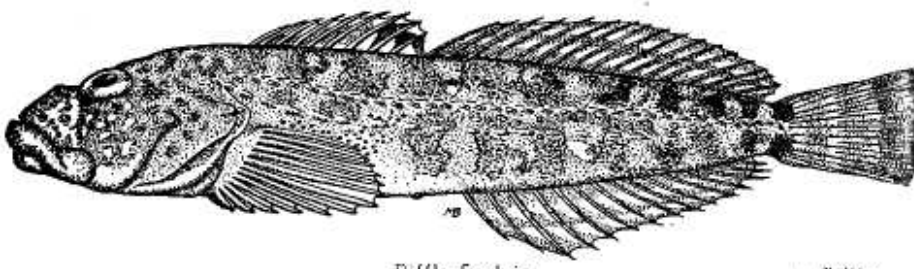
All-Day Children's Hike Down the Tuolumne

Like the Pied Piper I play my flute through the camp and lead the children away with me down the river. I entice them on with stories of bears and squirrels, and show them the footprints of these creatures, lead them from man-trail to bear-trail to deer trail to glacier trail, down, down the river. I lead them, piping all the time, "Come, see this pool of water! Let us take a swim! Was that a deer down there? Come, see what I have found!" And on we go-they scarcely knowing they have gone so far, but clamoring for more until at last they are leading me, and we hop from rock to rock along the river or eddy into the quiet forest.

How hard it is to bring them back again by afternoon, for by now they have become half mythological creatures, lost in time. How hard to return them to their parents and to their daily lives of growing older, of being converted into "responsible members of society," to tame the wilderness in them, a change—not metamorphosis but monomorphosis, until all alike and homogenized, they have forgotten the other world they once danced in.

I would lead them across some magic river, or into some enchanted grove that they might disappear, only to be seen from time to time, century to century, as creatures with pointed ears and cloven hooves.

But, I bring them back and put my flute away and once more become the respectable ranger-naturalist. Yet some have little idea how far or into what strange lands I have ranged.



Riffle Sculpin — Brittan

LEARNING THE HARD WAY

By L. D. Moore

Last fall, while fishing in the Merced river below Cascades, I watched a garter snake catch and eat one of the least known of our Yosemite fish, a riffle sculpin.

The sculpin (*Cottus bairdi gulosus*) feeds by moving to a bit of fast water in a stream and anchoring itself to the bottom by wedging its pectoral fins in the gravel bottom. In this manner the fish can remain stationary and by merely opening its mouth can let food be carried in by the current. A lazy but efficient mode of food-getting.

The fish which I watched was about 5 inches long. It was feeding in the customary manner when, sneaking up from behind, along came a red-sided garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis tetrataenia*) which caught the sculpin, then made for shore, emerging almost at my feet. I remained motionless so as to not disturb the snake as I wanted to watch it.

When first caught, the fish was tail first and I fully expected to see the snake reverse it, since snakes usually swallow their prey head first. This particular snake may have been very hungry as it attempted to swallow the fish just as it had caught it. Had the snake been longer than about 16 inches or had the fish been of a different species, it might have been successful. As things turned out, the snake was unable to swallow past the large, fan-shaped pectoral fins which were at least two inches across.

In swallowing anything, a snake first disarticulates the jaws, making it possible to swallow objects larger than its own head. Next the snake proceeds to work its jaws around its food until it passes down the throat. At this point the throat muscles come into play and by a series of contractions, squeeze the food on down in to the stomach.

The garter snake I was watching tried three times to swallow the sculpin. Each time it would get to the fins but no farther. All this time the sculpin was flipping about vigorously in an attempt to free itself. Several times it seemed that the fish would get away as the snake had little holding power with its jaws distended as they were.

After a struggle of about 15 minutes the snake finally realized the error of its ways. It turned the sculpin around in its jaws and was able to swallow it with little or no difficulty. By swallowing the fish headfirst, the pectoral fins were folded back against the body so the snake's jaws could slip by without difficulty.

It was only after the snake had succeeded in swallowing the sculpin that I realized that perhaps I should have taken the fish from the snake for a museum specimen, as none that large have been taken in Yosemite. Average size for the sculpin is about 3 to 4 inches.