

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



An outing on Stella Lake

—H. G. Peabody, c. 1883

YOSEMITE TO BENEFIT FROM MISSION 66

Yosemite, famed the world around for the grandeur of its scenery, will be helped by a new National Park Service master plan called MISSION 66. Rugged cliffs, mighty waterfalls, giant sequoia trees, and the primitive wilderness quality of its high Sierra backcountry caused the "Mariposa Big Trees Grove" and the Yosemite Valley to be granted to California by the Congress and Abraham Lincoln in 1864, to be forever unspoiled. Although Yellowstone is considered to be our first national park, here was the beginning of what later (1890) developed into one of America's great national parks.

From a humble start in 1855, when the first group of tourists—5 in number—entered Yosemite Valley, enthusiastic visitors have increased by leaps and bounds to where they now have passed the one-millionth mark, annually.

To meet the challenge of making Yosemite National Park adequate to the needs of the American people, yet preserving it unchanged, the National Park Service has launched MISSION 66, a master plan for future park management and development. Based on the ideal which established the National Park Service, that Yosemite is to be preserved unspoiled "for the enjoyment of future generations"—park officials hasten to point out that park development under MISSION 66 does not mean making changes to the wilderness qualities which have brought inspiration and enjoyment to millions of visitors from all parts of the globe. Rather, it will be a guide to bringing Yosemite, Devils Postpile and other national parks and monuments up to standard by providing manpower to help visitors (an increase of more than 600,000 visitors to Yosemite annually since before World War II

has brought an increase of only 2 men to the permanent ranger force, from 19 men to 21); to provide for basic visitor comforts (Yosemite geared to handle a pre-war half-million visitors, had twice that many in 1955!); and to protect the park from harmful over-use (the delicate root systems of the giant sequoia trees are being damaged by the trampling of millions of visitor feet, and other features show corresponding damage from being "loved to death").

The year 1966 marks the golden anniversary of the National Park Service. To prepare Yosemite for the anticipated 2 million visitors annually by that date, MISSION 66 is making recommendations which include: provision of adequate manpower to meet visitor needs and protect the park; bringing roads up to safe (but not high-speed) standards; giving better naturalist services to increase understanding, appreciation and protection; provision of maximum public use facilities (campgrounds, comfort stations, picnic areas, etc.) consistent with protection of natural features; spreading visitor use over a wider period of the year and to less scenic portions of the park to relieve congested areas such as Yosemite Valley; provide aid to essential park concessioners; encourage development of public-use facilities in nearby areas outside of Yosemite; bring all park utility systems up to standard and make them adequate to ultimate needs; and provide adequate employee housing.

The underlying theme of the entire MISSION 66 program is protection for future generations of the remarkable natural features for which Yosemite National Park was created.

By DOUGLASS H. HUBBARD

Yosemite Nature Notes

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GIANT SEQUOIAS ABROAD

By D. E. McHenry, Chief Park Naturalist

Visitors to our groves of Giant Sequoias often ask how successful these trees will grow in places other than their native habitat. In August 1954 a letter from Count F. M. Knuth of Knuthenborg, Bandholm, Denmark, tells an interesting story of how Sequoias have fared near his home. Sequoias are valued highly

as ornamentals as well as for shelter-belt trees in his part of the country, and Count Knuth has been interested in their successful growth in Denmark. He reports that many of the Giant Sequoias planted about ninety years ago on his estate were killed by frost during a series of severe winters in the 1880's. About

Giant Sequoia in Knuthenborg Park, Gandholm, Denmark, Planted in 1870. It is over 50 ft. high and 5 ft. in diameter 4 ft. above the ground.



ten trees survived and have attained a height of more than 100 feet.

During the last 30 years Count Knuth made repeated plantings of Sequoias, with the same experience as with the older trees: during extremely cold winters (of which there were a series again in the 1940's) a majority of the plants were killed, and only a few remained uninjured. He suggests that perhaps this might indicate that there is great variation in the cold-hardiness among seeds of Sequoias.

Count Knuth states that "the German botanist and explorer, C. A. Purpus did some collecting [of Sequoia seeds] before the First World War and it was found that plants from seeds collected at higher altitudes in the Sierra showed complete hardiness when grown in Dresden (where winters are colder than here in Denmark) while plants of low-altitude origin winter-killed. Dr. Purpus's Sierra plants were 47 feet high at an age of 14 years while all the rest had disappeared." Count Knuth wonders if the climate is the same in all Sierra groves. Since various groves apparently have similar ecological conditions except for an insignificant difference in latitude, it is likely that differences in cold-hardiness of seeds has some corre-

lation to altitude as suggested by Dr. Purpus's experience.

This factor is but one contributing to the success or failure of Sequoia growth. The nature of the environment in which the plants are to be raised is important. It would appear that *Sequoia gigantea* is especially well suited to its peculiar native environment and is unlikely to thrive outside of it unless great care is exercised to meet the exacting requirements of their natural home through artificial cultivation. Since the root system of the largest trees is relatively shallow, about 2 feet in depth but often covering several acres, the tree in its native range would likely be winter-killed except for the annual blanket of snow which insulates the roots prior to the coming of very cold weather. As a precaution gardeners transplanting Sequoias in the United States outside of their native habitat use a heavy straw type mulch over the roots in cold winters and water them daily in dry summers. Perhaps these requirements have not been recognized in Count Knuth's country. This, together with variations in viability and cold-hardiness of seed stock may be the limiting factor in their successful growth in Denmark and the Dresden area.



THE YOSEMITE VALLEY SCHOOL

By Laurence V. Degnan

Part III

All things considered, we made out pretty well with our rough-and-ready school plant. Our teachers, like the general run of humanity, differed greatly in ability—we had splendid teachers, and poor teachers, but the general average, I think, was high.

A topic that happily was uniformly stressed throughout the whole curriculum was patriotism. Miss Hall in particular made it the subject of a special lecture, attuned to the understanding of the older pupils, which she delivered once in awhile during her two terms. As I was only five years old when I first went to school to her, much of the significance of her talk eluded me, but I remember the general scene and some of her exact words. She was full of her subject and pulled no punches; she stood at the blackboard (which she used to explain or emphasize certain items) and delivered her talk with tense and dramatic emphasis, rounding home each point in the deepest, most sonorous tones that she could muster. I think that on these occasions she would have given anything to be able to swap her soprano voice for a basso profundo. She always began with the question, "Why is the Fourth of July celebrated?". Then she would proceed to tell us why. She stressed particularly the chances taken by the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and I can still hear her dramatic statement of their fate had the Revolution failed: "They would have been hanged for treason!", and I recall her equally dramatic em-

phasis of their attitude in the face of that danger, as exemplified by John Hancock's signing his name in letters so large that "George the Third can read it without his spectacles". But she, and for that matter the other teachers as well, put the message over; I think that we of today could use a little of their patriotic fervor and esteem for the glorious principles on which our Nation was founded!

In those days corporal punishment by the teacher was an accepted institution, but was not often inflicted on the generally well-behaved children of the Yosemite Valley school. Once in a great while someone was rapped on the hand with a ruler, and my younger brother John received a couple of lickings with a willow switch—once for upsetting the school by scratching his head with his toes. (In the summer time all the little boys went barefoot.)

But children came and went, and some, even as today, developed into little hoodlums as they grew older. One day a young bully, about 11 or 12 years old, who had exhausted the teacher's patience, snarled at her as she started to punish him, "Do you know who you're hittin'?" and attacked her with his fists. He raised a small welt on her forehead, and the two scuffled around for a fraction of a minute, until finally the boy subsided, drenched with ink from a bottle on the teacher's desk. Judged on points, the fight was a draw, I would say. The next day the teacher, in self defense, provided herself with a small

rawhide horsewhip, about two and a half feet long, which she thereafter kept close at hand at all times, either on her desk, or hung by its loop under the edge of her close-fitting waist or basque.

Sad to relate, the larger boys, who could have, and should have, kicked the stuffing out of the smart aleck, watched the battle in stunned and motionless silence. But in extenuation it can be surmised that the swift, unexpected course of events caught them by surprise, and by the time they caught their breath the round was over. No issue was made of the affair; in fact the teacher charged us not to say anything about it to our parents. It is only fair to remark that so far as I know, the boy involved grew up to be a solid member of the community in which he afterwards lived.

At about this same time—maybe a little earlier, as I do not remember that the teacher had yet acquired her rawhide—another boy, about 14, tried a similar performance with this same teacher. But he did not actively retaliate, and he let her push his big hulk around with only a token resistance, so to speak. This boy, who sat next to me in the school-room, had previously told me what he would do if the teacher ever tried to punish him: he would grab her by the ankles and yank her feet from under her, and then pound her as she lay on the floor. During their scuffle he settled toward the floor in a half-kneeling position, perhaps with the idea of doing just that; if so, his nerve failed him at the last moment.

But events such as these were extremely rare, (although minor trials, due generally to one or two individuals, were plentiful enough) and as a general rule the Yosemite Valley school was as idyllic as its surroundings.



Miss Mamie Kerrins (seated) taught from 1885 to 88. Her sister Annie is standing.

The playfield for the school was the small meadow in front of the schoolhouse, now largely overgrown with trees. The narrow gravelled stage road between the Old Village and the Stoneman House (where Camp Curry now is) crossed this meadow in approximately the location of the present paved road dividing the meadow into two parts, the larger of which, between the road and the river, was generally the scene of our limited repertoire of games: "prisoner's base", "one foot over the gutter", "leap frog", and the like. Guy Barnard owned a football, and once in a while we had the rare privilege of kicking it around. Occasionally we would wander beyond the limits of the meadow with "run sheep run", and in 1892 and 1893

we enthusiastically played a variation of "cops and robbers" that we had invented ourselves.

During those years the neighboring counties of Fresno and Tulare were the scene of one of California's greatest man hunts, the culmination of a series of train robberies in the San Joaquin Valley, attributed to Chris Evans and the Sontag brothers. It attracted nationwide attention, and the people of the Yosemite region had ringside seats. In fact the participants, pursuers and pursued, were known personally by some of our local people. George Sontag, the brother of John Sontag, Chris Evans' fellow fugitive, had been one of a group that visited our home in the valley (not long before his brother became a hunted desperado), perhaps to buy bread, or have shoes mended "while you wait". (My father, after working all day with a pick and shovel, used to work nearly all night mending shoes, to eke out his small pay as a State employe). While the man hunt was on, I used to hear my mother comment on this visit, and remark how unlike

a criminal George Sontag appeared. Hi Rapelje, a deputy sheriff of Fresno County, who took an active part in the chase, was once a well known stage driver on the Yosemite route.

There were many gun battles, and several men were killed before the bandits were captured, and during the long drawn out period of tense excitement, it was inevitable that the game of "Evans and Sontag" should monopolize the play periods of our school.

The rules of the game were simple; two youngsters in the role of Evans and Sontag, with a short headstart, would quickly lose themselves in the trees and brush and rocks that surrounded the schoolhouse. Then the sheriff's posse, comprising the rest of the boys, would take after the fugitives, and the game, if not interrupted by the school bell, ended when Evans and Sontag were captured or "killed". Of course, plenty of "shootin'" was of the essence; our bullets consisted of acorns (gathered ahead of time), which Evans and Sontag, and the posse threw at each other when they



John Sontag lies mortally wounded, while around him stand the victors of the Battle of Stone Corral in June 1893. Hi Rapelje, second from left was the deputy sheriff.

made contact. Anyone who was "shot" three times in any one encounter was "dead" and had to withdraw from the game.

Another favorite sport was swimming, which, throughout its short season, we indulged in at every opportunity, particularly at the midday recess, and after school. During high water the river was not suitable, but a small slough, or branch of the main river, which bounded the meadow on one side, served after a fashion until later in the summer. As a rule, bathing suits did not exist, although in Annie Kerrins' time some of the boys wore light rapid-drying polka dot shorts, which doubled as a school garment and as a swim suit, and enabled one to go from schoolhouse to creek and back again with no loss of time. Of course, there were times when the girls insisted on swimming too, and then we did have a bathing suit problem. It was solved with improvised trunks made by chopping off the legs of an old pair of overalls, and other weird devices of varying degrees of effectiveness. But for the most part swimming was a boys' sport, and the girls kept to their own part of the campus.

As the summer progressed, and the water receded, our "swimmin' holes" moved from place to place, and at times were pretty close to the road. But traffic in those days was light—very light—and besides, we were only kids, anyway. We gave that circumstance due weight, and solemnly conceding that "if we wuz men it 'ud be different", worried no further about the nonexistent bathing suits. We had a lot of fun in that icy (and sometimes dangerous) Merced River, and in its warmer, but short-lived high water sloughs.

The smaller portion of the meadow, between the road and the school-

house, was sometimes the scene of "buckin' horse" contests (copied from a familiar adult activity of that time), in which a small youngster like me tried to see how long he could stay on the back of a bucking bronco, namely, one of the big boys on all fours. About the first black eye that I ever received—and it was a beauty—was bestowed on me when Walter Kenney sunfished and threw me over his head, face down on the grass ahead of him, where I skidded on my eye for a foot or so before coming to rest.

Within the schoolroom, during my first term or two, life was made a little easier for us tiny tots by certain privileges that were not granted to the older pupils. I remember raising my hand once in a while and asking, on behalf of myself and another small companion, "Please can we go out and play?", and the forthcoming permission was accorded as a matter of course. And then to my shocked surprise, the day came when the request met a stern and emphatic "No!"—from a new teacher, if I remember correctly—and I had the sad feeling that a lovely tradition had now become a memory.

Another indoor diversion, likewise reserved for the extreme youth, was watching Edith Jacobs draw. She was 17 years old, about the oldest girl in school, and was quite an artist with pen or pencil. Often when she was drawing in school we realized how boring our own work was; up would go a hand: "Please can we watch Edie draw?", and two or three fascinated urchins would gather around her table, to watch an animal scene, or a landscape, take form on her paper or slate.

The drudgery of school was further alleviated once in a while when the teacher would read aloud to the entire school. I remember one

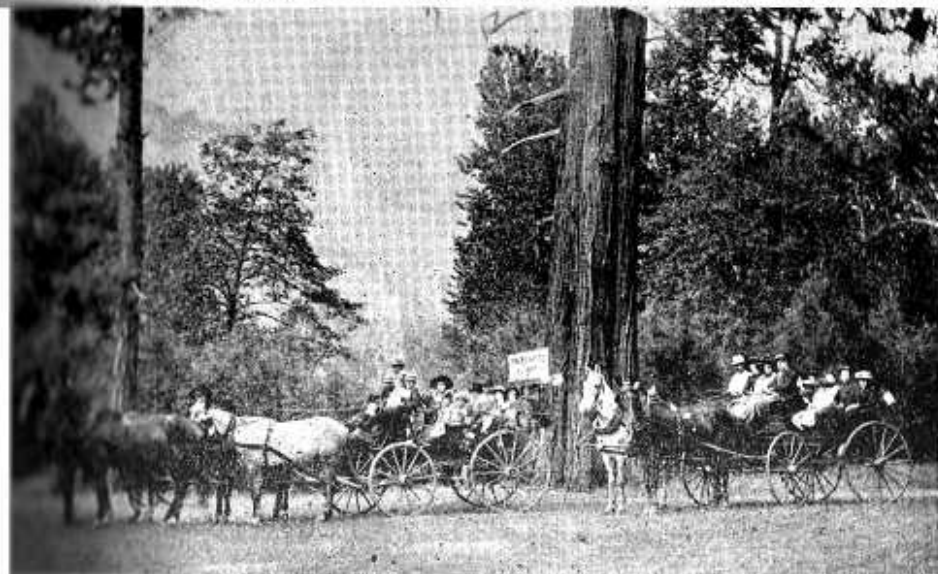
book in particular that Miss Hall read to us: Joel Chandler Harris' *Uncle Remus* stories; then at recess time, in our meadow playground, or among the boulders, we would quickly translate into improvised games, the exploits of Brer Rabbit, Brer B'ar, Brer Fox, and the other Uncle Remus characters.

Other favorite books—they may well have been first editions too—were Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These were read and reread, in part aloud by the teacher, but mostly from cover to cover by the individual pupils. Another boy and I used to sit under a tree by ourselves, and I would read *Huckleberry Finn* to him. This book is in many respects one for adults, and many of its subtleties and nuances were lost on us. The episode of the "king" and the "duke" for instance, left us cold, and we took time out to discuss its inanity and wonder "why they wanted to spoil a good book by puttin' that stuff in it".

Incidentally, a very interesting sidelight on the book was given to me many years later, when I was

working with the late Francois E. Matthes on the mapping of the Yosemite Valley, and he described his reactions to the story as he read it at different times. He first read it, he told me, in his native language, Dutch, before coming to America. Later, after graduating from an American college (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and covering every corner of the United States with U. S. Geological Survey topographic parties, he read it again, in English. Needless to say, he got infinitely more out of the book the second time. A foreign language, he truthfully observed, can at best cope only imperfectly with the unique American scene described, or with Mark Twain's presentation of it.

Of all the school diversions, the greatest was the thrilling "ride around the valley", to which, in my earlier school years, we were treated at least once during each term. In those days the horse-drawn carriages took all afternoon for the excursion, which was no small project. The Yosemite Museum contains a copy of D. J. Foley's newspaper, the *Yosemite Tourist* (printed in the valley), for June 6, 1889, from which I



Ride around the valley in former years.

quote the following account of one of these tours. In copying this I take the liberty of correcting the spelling of several of the names.

A PICNIC

On Thursday last, Memorial day, Hon. W. F. Coffman took one of Coffman & Kenney's coaches and loaded it with children; at one o'clock a start was made to the Cascades and return. Mr. Coffman took a supply of candies, nuts, etc. for his young load, and they did not get back with any of it. The horses and coach were beautifully decorated. It was a pleasant day for the little folks and they were loud in their praise of Mr. Coffman's efforts in their behalf. In the party were:

Walter Kenney, Oniska Kenney, Blanche Kenney, Alice Kenney, Charley Kenney, Guy Barnard, Tissie Barnard, Ethel Becht, Geo. Becht, Laurence Degnan and Jake Jones.

The last-named person on the list, Jake Jones, was a young man from Merced, a friend of the Barnards, who spent the summer at their hotel. He played the cornet (I believe he afterwards led the Merced band), and enhanced the joy of the trip with his music.

A less pretentious, but enjoyable tour was once made in the State dump cart.

Another one, when Annie Kerrins was teacher, required two carriages to accommodate the increased student body and the non-school guests. On one occasion our chariot was a four-horse freight wagon, driven by Jules McCauley, a former pupil of the Yosemite Valley school. He was only about 16 years old, but he handled those four horses like one of Yosemite's famous teamsters or stage drivers; indeed, as we shall see, it was well for us that he was a skilled reinsman.

At that time (about the beginning of the nineties), the old style bicycle, with the very large wheel in front, and the very small wheel in the rear, was gradually giving way to the "safety" bicycle, so-called, with two wheels of equal diameter, very similar to the bicycle of today. Strange

as it may seem, some of these old style bicycles found their way into Yosemite, and whatever may have been the difficulties on the grades over the foothills and the mountains, they scooted with ease over the level roads on the floor of the valley. The bicycles were of course, totally new to the horses of Yosemite. Jules McCauley and his four horses, with their wagon load of school children and friends, had arrived at a point on the "back road" about half way between Indian Creek and Kenneyville (the site of the present Ahwahnee Hotel) when one of these apparitions suddenly swept toward us from around a curve. The frightened horses started to dance and turn handsprings, but Jules quickly got them under control, to the great relief and admiration of his passengers.

A similar scene was doubtless enacted on other occasions, and not long after our own experience, every bicycle rider, probably in compliance with warnings by the Guardian, (the local state official in charge of the valley) dismounted at the approach of horses, and stood motionless at the side of the road until the animals had passed by.

Visitors to the school were many and varied. As might be expected some were teachers themselves, from grade schools or colleges, and now and then, in response to the teacher's invitation, would give us a short talk. Some of these speakers were evidently outstanding professors, and through a combination of personality and delivery, made such a clear and interesting presentation that after all these years, I still remember their words. One man, for instance, discussed standards of weights and measures, and I was astonished to hear of master stand-

ards carefully preserved in vaults in Paris or London or Washington. It seemed like a lot of monkey business to me; Shucks! when I wanted to see how long an inch, or a foot, or a yard was, all I had to do was pick up my ruler, or the school yardstick, and there it was!

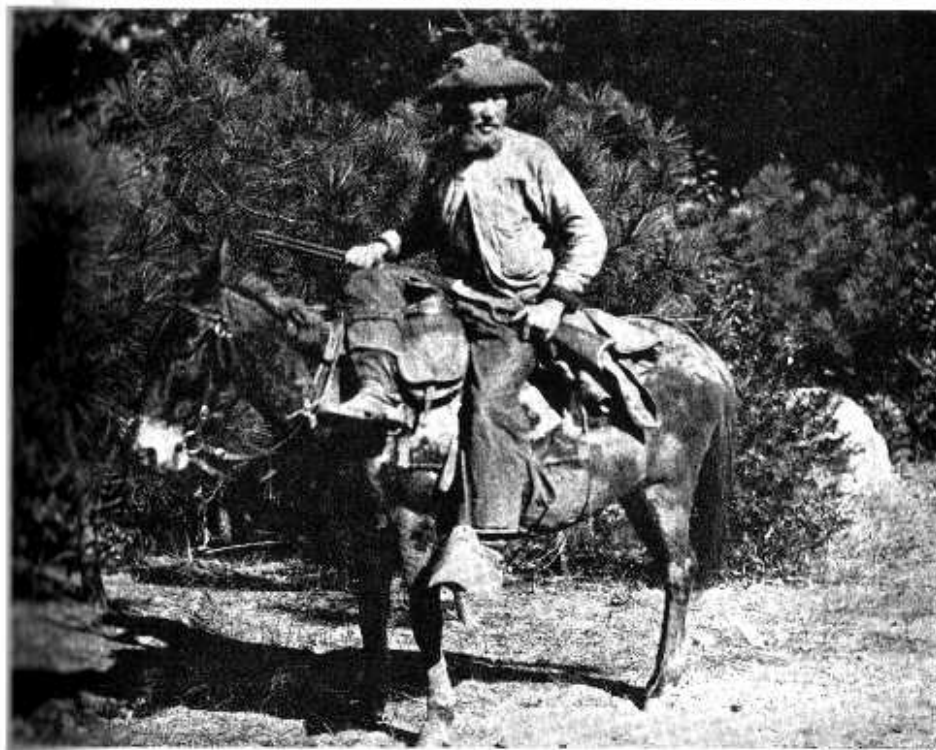
Once in a while a local character would drop in, maybe sober, maybe drunk, but I do not recall that such visitors ever caused any great unpleasantness. One of these an old time guide, Nathan B. Phillips, a relic of very early Yosemite days, was in circulation in my time. He was said to have come from Pike County, Missouri, and was known to everyone as "Pike". Because of some affliction in his vocal cords, he always spoke in a hoarse, guttural whisper, loud enough, however, and distinct enough, for ordinary conversation.

One day Pike, pretty drunk, rode his horse, or maybe his mule Brig-

ham, up to the door of the schoolhouse, leaned over shakily in the saddle, and called to the teacher, in that hoarse whisper of his, "I'm goin' away tomorrhah; I came to say good bye; I'm goin' away tomorrhah". Poor Miss Hall, prim and precise, wrestled with the problem a moment, and then decided to let the children go out on the porch, two by two, and say good-bye to Pike. The oldest two, Walter Kenney and Tissie Barnard, I think, went out first and duly said good-bye; the two next in age followed, but by the time the third couple reached the porch, Pike was disappearing down the path toward the road. Miss Hall regained her composure, but I do not know whether her reaction was one of relief at being rid of her visitor, or of chagrin at his spurning of her courtesy.

(To Be Concluded)

"Pike" (Nathan Bennett Phillips) a pioneer Yosemite guide, on his mule "Brigham",





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