YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR
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Acting Superintendent

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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THE BODIE STAGE, AN OLD MANUSCRIPT

By C. P. Russell

Bodie, that fascinating relic-town near Yosemite, has come in for quite frequent mention in these pages. Neglected as it has been in the literature of the state, it is, perhaps, reasonable to record authentic accounts of the affairs that transpired there during the years of activity. In order that collections might be made and facts learned, members of the Yosemite Museum staff have journeyed to Bodie.

On the final one of these trips Jim Cain, last of the old-timers, gave free access to many of the crumbling buildings that line the deserted streets. One of the most interesting of the structures was the two-story assayer's office, in which A. Soderling did business during the 70's. What may have happened to Mr Soderling was not made clear, but the technical equipment of his office and the personal effects of his living quarters were yet in place. Apparently, a great many years have elapsed since the last gentleman made use of this domicile, and the storms of winter gain entrance through warping walls and roof. Beds and bedding, culinary utensils, furniture, books, papers, wearing apparel, and assayer's equipment were there in profusion, and all were more or less ravaged by time and the elements. Among these effects were more than a few objects of historical interest. These were gathered from the wreckage and brought to the Yosemite Museum.

Among the papers salvaged is a brief manuscript, carefully penned in a neat hand, bearing no date, but apparently written for the enlightenment of the readers of some Indiana newspaper. This portrayal of transportation and communication between early camps anticipates nothing of our present-day gas motor. We believe it will interest our readers and reproduce it verbatim. The sketches of the vehicle discussed were made by Ranger William Godfrey from old photographs in the Yosemite Museum.

The Bodie Stage
(Author Unknown)

The stage coach is to California what the modern express train is to Indiana, and people unaccustomed to mountain life can form but little conception of the vast amount of transportation carried on by means of coaches and freight wagons.

Even though California may truly be termed the "Eden" of America, yet there is not a county in the state but has more or less traffic for the stage coach, and in the northern and eastern part of the state, especially, there is an entire network of well graded roads, resembling eastern pikes. These roads are mostly owned by corporations and, consequently, are toll roads.

Over these are run the fast stages drawn by from two to ten large horses, and the great freight wagons drawn by from fourteen to twenty mules.

The stage lines have divisions, as do railroads, and at the end of each division there is a change of horses, thus giving the greatest possible means for quick conveyance. Over each line there are generally two stages per day, one each way. These carry passengers, mail and all express traffic. At each town is a Wells Fargo office, and business is carried on in a similar manner to that of railroad express offices. Telegraph lines are in use along the most important roads.

The stage lines have time cards similar to railroads, and in case a stage is a few minutes late, it causes as much anxiety as does the delay of an O. & M. express. A crowd is always waiting at the express office; some are there for business, others through mere curiosity and to size up the passengers.

The Shotgun Messenger

A stage from a mining town usually contains a bar of gold bullion worth $25,000, which is being shipped to the mint. Bullion is shipped from each mine once a month, but people always know when this precious metal is aboard by the appearance of a fat, burly officer perched beside the stage driver, with two or three double-barreled shotguns. He, of course, is serving as a kind of scarecrow to the would-be stage robbers.

The average fare for riding on a stage is 15 cents per mile.

The manner in which freight is transported is quite odd, especially to a "Hoosier." Wagons of the largest size are used. Some of these measure twelve feet from the ground to the top of the wagon bed; then bows and canvas are placed over this, making a total height of fifteen feet, at least. Usually three or four of these wagons are coupled together, like so many cars, and then drawn by from fourteen to twenty large mules. All these are handled by a single driver. A team of this kind travels, when heavily loaded, about fifteen miles per day, the same being spoken of always as the slow freight. In some mining districts, however, where business is flush, extra stages are put on for freight alone. These are termed the fast freights. This business involves a large capital, and persons engaged in it are known as forwarding companies. Even the freight or express on goods from New York is sometimes collected a hundred miles from any railroad, and so even to those living in the remote mountain regions, this is about as convenient, and they seem to enjoy life as well as if living in a railroad town.

The city of Bodie has its entire freight and passenger traffic carried on as mentioned above. A short time ago its population was 10,000; there were three daily papers and free mail delivery, and all the improvements necessary to any modern town or city.

TH" "CDIE STAGE WITH A LOAD OF SLOW FREIGHT

In the days of Bodie, wagons of the largest size were coupled together like so many cars, as shown above tes. A team of this kind traveled when heavily loaded

NOTES OF A MID-WINTER WANDERER IN YOSEMITE VALLEY

By George M. Wright

SLEEPLESS BEARS

At least a few Yosemite black bears have decided to keep pace with the sports. Now that the valley is making its name as an all-year playground, the bruins seem to have decided to stay up and see the fun.

Former years have seen the bears making tracks for their dens among the cliff rockpiles after the first storm which left a lasting blanket of snow. Even then an occasional belated individual, though rare, was not unknown. But this winter, at least a few of the bears are giving up the orthodox and uninteresting hibernation of their species for more thrilling activities. Though winter snows came fully a month earlier than in the seasons just passed and low temperatures prevailed thereafter, these individuals have ignored the portents. Sweet music of their discus play with neighborhood ash can tops still assails the light sleeper.

Abundance of food supply is the most nearly tenable theory advanced so far to explain this unusual departure from the habits of countless forebears. There are many watchers in the valley who will wait to see when the bear vigil will end.

WILD CREATURES OF HABIT

In the summer of 1928, Mrs. John Clark, a resident in Yosemite, befriended an orphan mule deer fawn. This time, bottle feeding proved to be successful. The helpless little creature clung to its protector, and the sight of the foster-mother closely followed by "Jiggs," as he has come to be called, is a familiar one to everybody in Yosemite.

Recently we encountered Mrs. Clark standing in the path, calling to Jiggs encouragingly. To a polite query she replied that, whereas it was her usual custom to walk to the old village store from the new village postoffice, today she had headed straight towards home. Jiggs was standing over by the postoffice very evidently puzzled by this interruption of daily routine. Lingeringly and longingly his nose pointed towards the old village. Such are the chains forged by habit.

THREE LITTLE ELK

"Three little sisters are we,"—or maybe it would be more accurate to say half-sisters. For their father is the old bull who has lorded the tule elk herd ever since its establishment in Yosemite valley, according to the belief of many.

The three little calves of 1928 have prospered wonderfully and are fairly two-thirds as large as the old cows now that they emerge into their yearling age. The fact

that the 1928 crop proved to be all females is particularly fortunate, for until then the herd had ten bulls and only six cows. Now the number is almost evenly divided between the sexes. It is to be hoped that females will preponderate greatly among the calves dropped next May, for the herd would be more nearly ideal if there were twice as many or more cows than bulls.

RING-TAILED CATS AT GLACIER POINT

By J. B. Herschler

We usually think of ring-tailed cats (Bassariscus astutus raptor) as belonging to the foothills region or Upper Sonoran zone, but it has been my good fortune to observe them at Glacier Point, an elevation in Yosemite of 7200 feet.

While assigned there as ranger naturalist, employes at the cafeteria told me of seeing them occasionally and it was my desire to see them also, but when my assignment was completed, ring-tailed cats remained more of a myth and a mystery than a reality, for not a single one had shown itself while I was there.

While preparing to return to the floor of the valley a way became apparent that observations might be made. The night watchman was leaving and I could have his place if I cared to. Willingly it was accepted as the work took only a part of the time leaving the balance free for nature study.

The first appearance of cats came one evening about 7 o'clock. They had been seen in the woodshed but by the time I arrived they had gone. While making the midnight round several nights later I did see two of them near the roof on top of the wood which was piled there. They were far enough away to feel secure and did not object to the ray from the flashlight being thrown upon them and were not at all frightened. They appeared inquisitive but after a few minutes they disappeared. Some nights later the pantry door had not been fastened securely and shortly after midnight I was attracted by a noise inside and upon entering found that two ring-tails were the originators. When the light was turned on, one took refuge behind some food cases while the other perched on a beam overhead. Evidently the latter had taken a piece of meat along for it soon began chewing and eating as though no one were near. It was perhaps only four or five feet above my head but was not uneasy when I walked under. The other one, not feeling so secure, made several frantic trips around the pantry and finally crawled behind a screened food container where it was pretty well cornered. Having a clear view of it through the screen I reached around behind and stroked it on the tail, which made it very nervous, but even with this discomfort it did not try to escape. Instead it started making a sort of chuckling, hissing noise accompanied by a slight, rapid up and down movement of the head.

One morning later while making the 1 o'clock round I heard a thud on the veranda and hurriedly turning on the flashlight saw one go down over the edge. Upon looking to see where it had jumped from when I heard the noise, I found a

window open in an unoccupied room. Curious to know what it was doing I went inside and found a second one still there. Closing the window so it could not escape I tried to make friends with it but it hid behind the radiator and would not be driven out until I put a cord around its neck. By pulling on the cord and pushing with a stick it was dislodged. After some minutes of frantically trying to get away it became quiet and sullen. And not until after about an hour of handling and petting did the beautiful little creature seem to realize that no harm was intended and it began to be more friendly. Finally I perched it on one arm and held out a piece of beefsteak. It made a fierce grab as though to commit murder but when it got the taste quieted down immediately and began to eat, not stopping until the whole piece had been finished.

In order to get pictures I placed the animal in a large wooden bucket until morning, when I got a series of seven passable photographs that I prize highly.

Always I was on the lookout for cats and did see them several times more but it would usually be from 11 p. m. to 2 a. m. The earliest in the evening I saw them was about 7 o'clock and the latest in the morning was about 4 and never in the daytime. Having never seen more than two at a time I concluded it was a single pair that had ventured so far up the mountain and had decided to make a home under man's protection.

THE BAND-TAILED PIGEON'S NEST

By Enid Michael

On August 3, 1928, a pair of band-tailed pigeons (Columba fasciata) was discovered at work on a nest. The nest was placed on a horizontal branch of an incense cedar. It was some 20 feet above the ground and but a few inches from the main stem of the tree. As is the usual case when we find the nest of a pigeon, our attention was first attracted by the sound of snapping twigs. The band-tailed pigeon gathers no nesting material from the ground. The male bird flies into a tree, usually a living cedar here in the valley, takes a perch, and gazes about in search of a suitable twig. While making up his mind as to just which twig he really wants, he has a strange way of bobbing his head. He draws his head back deliberately and then jabs it forward with a quick, jerky movement. When he decides on the dead twig he wants, he flies to the branch, walks slowly out along the limb, leans over, grasps the twig firmly in his mandibles, and with a quick twist of his head the twig is snapped off. Now with a great clatter of wings he flies to the nest-tree. If the limb containing the nest-site is limber, he does not alight directly upon it but comes to perch above or below and approaches the nest by a series of "flight hops." While the male is out foraging for nesting material, the female waits more or less patiently at the nest-site. She receives the material from her mate and does the actual work of construction. And between the two, if the truth must be known, the nest is no work of art.

By climbing a Douglas spruce

that stood about six feet away from the nest-tree of the pigeons, it was possible for us to get a close-up view of the nest. As has been intimated, pigeons are poor nest builders, but the particular nest under observation happened to be a very good example. However, its soundness was not due to craftmanship, but to a wise choice in selecting the nest-site. The nest was situated in a heavy cluster of twigs and foliage formed by that peculiar growth known as "witches' broom." This growth formed a perfect platform on which to place the nesting material and, besides, the platform was wide enough to obscure completely the nest and setting bird from below. In such a perfect setting it was an easy task for even unskilled workmen to build a perfect nest. And the male pigeon took advantage of the situation and brought in soft and pliable twigs of Douglas spruce instead of the usual stiff twigs of incense cedar. In other words, the platform was already there, and all that was necessary was a lining of softer material. The female placed the twigs so as to form a slight depression to hold the one large egg.

On August 9 the nest was apparently complete, but there was as yet no egg. On August 17, when the tree was again climbed, the female was incubating. She was reluctant to leave the nest, and it was not until I had approached within ten feet of her that she began to show signs of nervousness. She stood up and craned her neck and finally decided to move. There resting in a cradle of twigs was the one large, white egg. The owner of the egg stood on a limb a few feet away and bobbed her head in a strange, nervous manner, but she was apparently not particularly frightened and held her ground until I left the tree. Nothing was seen of the male bird.

No other Yosemite bird nests so late as the pigeon, and I am wondering if they do not sometimes rear two young in a season.

POHONO TRAIL ACQUAINTANCES

By James S. Smith

The Yosemite School of Field Natural History left Camp Curry the morning of July 20, anticipating two days in the open—the first to be spent on the Ledge Trail to Glacier Point and its vicinity, the second on the fourteen-mile Pohono Trail back of the rim.

Pohono Trail, which skirts Bridal Veil Fall, takes its name from the evil spirit with which Indian legend invests the fall. Some of the members had covered the trail before, but with the guidance of Mrs. Michael discovered many plants and other interesting life which had previously escaped their attention. With this alert naturalist afield, no "flower is born to blush unseen." Borrowing a John Muir expression, the class "sauntered" up the trail, halting frequently to make a study of life along the way.

Zones Change as Altitude Gained

With the gain in altitude, the change of life zones became apparent, the familiar acquaintances of the transition zone gradually diminishing in numbers as the new-

er ones of the Canadian zone increased at about 6000 feet. Sentinel Dome, elevation 8117 feet, the highest point reached, approaches the lower limit of the Hudsonian zone.

In moist, shady haunts, lovely flowers refreshed the eye and breathed an invitation to repose and enjoy their beauty. Where the water hurried over rocks, scarlet mimulus displayed brilliant lips above the modest rein-orchis. At higher altitudes its relatives, the sunny mimulus luteus and the delicately colored pink mimulus were encountered.

Not all flowers consort with the stream, but where the trail followed or crossed it there against a background of boulders and shaded by creek dogwood, chokecherry and conifers, lived enchanter's nightshade, blue-belled mertensia, false hellebore, Indian paintbrush, and scarlet gilia in a congenial state of existence. Had the society been better organized, the paintbrush, because of its parasitic propensities, would have been voted out as a bad citizen.

From under boulders and out of soil-filled crevices along shade walls alum-root pushed an airy fringe of soft pink and scarlet penstemons posed in bright relief against green foliage or gray granite.

Many Flowers Near Trails

Other flower people, fond of the shade but not requiring running water in their homes, were found among the pine woods. Giant hyssop, arnica, harebell, false Solomon's seal, hound's tongue, Kellogia, larkspur, monkshood, thimble berry, and innumerable others lightened the shadows with their appealing blossoms. The trees changed from yellow pine, incense cedar, Douglas fir, white fir, and golden cup oak on the lower trails to lodgepole pine, Jeffrey pine, red fir, and low-growing huckleberry oak on the upper ones.

It was, however, in the glacial meadows and near the meadow brook that the greatest variety and luxuriance of floral life prevailed. Here individuals of the sunflower, lily, mint, pea, buttercup, figwort, borage and primrose families flourished in a most delightful and abundant array.

Hardier clans of golden aster, everlasting flower, loco-weed, yarrow and their associates relieved the barrenness of the gravel slopes and provided other interesting illustrations for this ever-unfolding story of the flowers.

Birds Add Color

There were flashes of color from birds on the wing, flutterings and calls in the trees and shrubs, and songs from hidden musicians demanding immediate attention. Flowers await the return of a group of prying naturalists; with birds it is "catch as catch can." If, therefore, a sentence begun about flowers was finished about birds the speaker's mental condition was not challenged nor were the flowers neglected.

A fox sparrow foraging under the bushes, the antics of an olive-sided flycatcher or Western wood pewee, a "chick-a-dee-dee" from the leafy branches, the loud song of the canyon wren, the high, clear notes of the junco or the Sierra creeper, a nuthatch against the red bark of a pine, or a bright flare of the tanager or pileolated warbler were incidents to engage the eye and ear. Thirty-five birds were seen or heard on the trip.

We had intimate glimpses of squirrels, chipmunks and the Sierra chickaree. A gray squirrel of the Transition zone and a red of the Canadian zone posed obligingly for photographs.

And panoramas! Pictures are wholly inadequate and unsatisfactory, and a word description of Yosemite Valley and the high Sierra as seen from several viewpoints at the edge of the rim and especially from the bold outlook of the Jeffry pine on Sentinel Dome is a mere patter of words as of rain against El Capitan or Half Dome. One can only say, "Come and see!"—James S. Smith,

WHY NOT BRING BACK THE BIG HORN?

By Robert P. Hays

It has long been the hope of many who are interested in natural history and conservation that the day would come when the number of most of our big game mammals would be on the increase. Such a condition has in many places been brought about with great success with certain forms, such as two species of elk, deer, bison, moose and caribou. Where properly protected and encouraged, these animals have been found to increase and become a valuable asset in the form of creating an interest in their welfare among the people.

Could we not well afford to bring back to the higher Yosemite country our once common Sierra mountain sheep? With the few remaining flocks of this form, the Sierra Nevada Big Horn (Ovis canadensis sierrae) isolated in regions where they have very little chance to enlarge their numbers, would it not be a fitting and advantageous opportunity to re-establish them and put them back on their once native mountain home? The record that these splendid animals have left on the higher slopes of the Yosemite peaks, showing that they lived here in considerable numbers, would justify the capture of a small band for restocking.

It is estimated by Joseph Dixon that there may still be in the neighborhood of 500 individuals alive in California. It has been hoped that, given sufficient time, these animals would gradually return into the northern Sierras under the protection now afforded them. However, it would be quicker and surer to bring a few healthy young mountain sheep here for restocking purposes. Why would this project not be worth while from the standpoint of the lesson in mammal conservation?

Just as the Tule Elk (Cervus nannodes), brought into Yosemite by the California Academy of Science, have been one of the finest instruments in showing the people what manner of game mammals once ranged over large areas of plains and foothill country, a thriving band of Big Horn sheep to stir up the minds of tourists would certainly be worth while.

Let us give the mountain sheep even more consideration than we have, by encouraging and helping to put it back on this part of its former domain.

GIANT YELLOW PINE THREATENED

by C. H. Oneal

The giant yellow pine located below the old village is in danger of dying. This noble monarch, after having withstood the ravages of draught, fire, decay, wind and old age for centuries, is in serious danger of being starved to death by its ardent admirers. Even now its major branches have large quantities of needles that are dead, stunted or sickly in appearance. Many of the lower limbs hang lifeless. Only immediate action can save this glorious tree; born in the age of colonization; rejoicing in its mature strength at the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence; grandparent of a multitude of sturdy offspring when Lee surrendered; now doomed to die unless some thoughtful friend gives it nourishment.

Every day during the summer months large numbers of autos and pedestrians encircle its base. In order to provide for the comfort of the people, a well made, hard rolled road has been built close to its base. The soil that should be covered with loose earth, decaying needles, humus and ferns is packed hard, barren, devoid of decaying organic matter and parched. All hope of getting the soil aerated so that decay bacteria can liberate the minerals so much needed is impossible under present conditions. Water cannot penetrate this pavement-like crust. The tree is starving.

The life-giving remedy is simple. There should be about a 25-foot radius fence placed entirely around the tree and so constructed as to keep people out. The hard, lifeless crust of earth inside the circle should be loosened, covered with leaf mold and planted to ferns. The road should be set back so as to permit this clearance around the tree. The expense would be trivial and this giant, over nine feet in diameter, would be saved. Our children's children have the right to see and enjoy this "blessed sun fed monutaineer rejoicing in its strength."

BABY FISH EXERCISE AT FISH HATCHERY

By Ralph Teall

Perhaps no habit of the tiny trout at the fish hatchery at Happy Isles interests more people than the number continually jumping from the water. It is a fascinating sight to watch them as they jockey for position and then, with a sudden rush, throw themselves clear of the water surface. Occasionally the angle at which they leave their trough is poorly chosen, and they land on the little board which separates two adjacent troughs, high and dry. Then it requires a considerable number of vigorous flips and flops for them to find their way back into their normal environment.

People are prone to assume that this jumping habit is an attempt to get insects from the air, but a little observation gives no verification for such a belief. Almost all of the jumps are made at the upper end of the trough and in the inflowing stream of water. There is little reason for assuming any localization of tiny insects there

Moreover, no insects can be observed, even though the jumping may be seen to continue throughout the day. It is altogether probable that the little fish are only trying to make their way upstream, and jumping is the only method of conquering the obstacle interposed by the upper end of the trough. Perhaps it is only a manifestation of the normal habit or instinct of baby trout in the streams to seek the shallow pools at the sides or the heads of the streams in which they live, an instinct of great value in preventing aunts and uncles and big brothers from using them as the main course of a somewhat cannibalistic dinner.

RECENT MUSEUM ACCESSIONS

By George M. Wright

While on a tour of the United States, making museum studies under the auspices of the American Association of Museums and the National Park Service, Park Naturalist C. P. Russell obtained the following volumes to be presented to the Yosemite Museum as a gift from the Yosemite Natural History Association:

"The Yosemite Valley and the Mammoth Trees," T. Nelson and Son.

"Lobo, Rag and Vixen," by Ernest Seton Thompson.

"Preservation of Wild Animals of North America," by H. F. Osborn.

"The Trail of the Sandhill Stag," by Ernest Seton Thompson.

"New California Tourists' Guide," Sam Miller Agency, 1886.

"On and Off the Saddle," by Lispenard Rutgers, 1894.

"The Splendid Wayfaring," by John G. Neihardt, 1920.

"The Shotgun and Sporting Rifle," by Stonehenge, 1859.

"Wrinkles; or Hints to Sportsmen," by the old Shekarry, 1874.

"The Still-hunter," by Theodore S. Van Dyke, 1904.

"The Biography of a Silver Fox," by Ernest Seton Thompson, 1909.

"The Pacific Coast Scenic Tour," by H. T. Finck, 1891

"Photography for the Sportsman Naturalist," by L. W. Brownell. 1904.

"A History of Land Mammals in the Western Hemisphere," by W. B. Scott, 1913.

"History of the State of California," by John Frost, 1851.

"The Hell-roarin' Forty-niners," by R. W Ritchie, 1928.

"In the Footprints of the Padres," by Charles Warren Stoddard, 1911.

"Yosemite and the Big Trees of California," by J. M. Hutchings, 1894.

"Stories of the Great West," by Theodore Roosevelt, 1910.

"A-Birding on a Bronco," by Florence A. Merriam, 1896.

"Birds of California," by I. G. Wheelock, 1904.

"Winning the Oregon Country," by John T. Faris.

"The Extermination of the American Bison," by Hornaday, 1889.

"California Sketches, New and Old," by Bishop Fitzgerald, 1897.

"Last Leaves of American History," by Emma Willard, 1853.

"Northwestern Wyoming, Including Yellowstone National Park," by W. A. Jones, 1873.

"History of American State Geological and Natural History Surveys," by Merrill, 1920.

"The Ice Age in North America," by C. F. Wright, 1891.

"Yosemite Legends," by Bertha H. Smith, 1904.

John Howell gave two volumes, "Sir Francis Drake's Voyage Around the World," by H. R. Wagner, 1926, and "Sketches of the Sixties," by Bret Harte and Mark Twain, 1926, both of his own publishing. He also contributed an old railroad schedule of 1871, "Shortest Route to the Big Trees."

Mrs. Herbert Fleishhacker presented three volumes on firearms, "Firearms in American History" by C. W. Sawyer, 1910; "Our Rifles" by C. W. Sawyer, 1920, and "A History of Firearms" by H. B. C. Pollard, 1926.

Horace M. Albright was the donor of Volume I of the "History of the Expedition Under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark," 1814 edition. Special interest attached to this book because it was the property of John Muir.

A set of four framed pictures illustrating the operation of Stream Flow Measurement Stations in California were received from the United States Geological Survey.

THE VAGABOND SONG

Orville O. Hiestand

I know the time when the first larks rise,
The pure, clear pools where the rainbows leap;
I know the nest where the shy deer lies,
The shadowy woods where the panthers creep.
I need no money to pay my rent,
And there's never a mortgage to bear.
I thank the Lord for my star-gemmed tent.
With its bright walls like old paintings rare.
My comrades are the friendly stars
That peer through rifts in my leafy tent;
My draperies are silver spangles and bars
Through the branches by the pale moon sent.
I sow no seed, no debt I owe,
With shy wood folk I hold converse;
I am richer than any man I know,
I'm lord of the whole great universe.

YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK
CALIFORNIA

YOSEMITE [illegible]

ear Friend:

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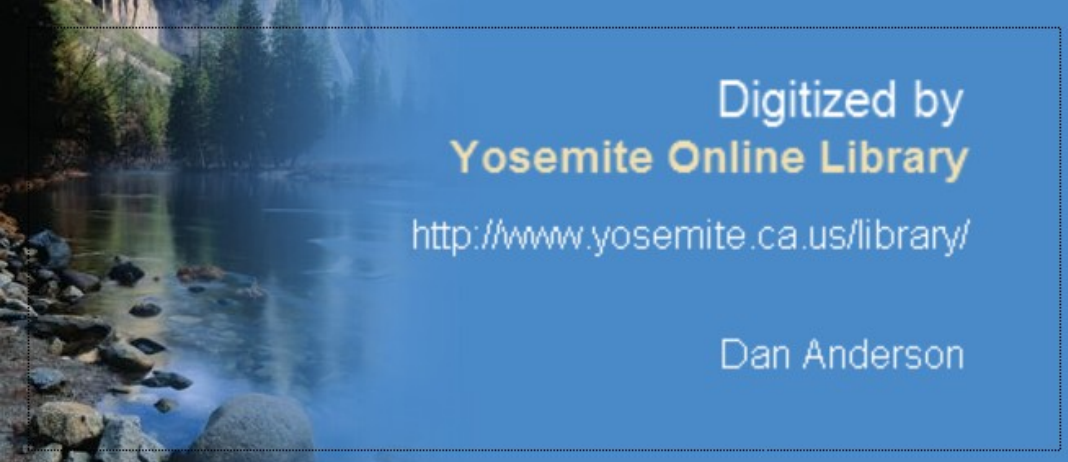
Please read a sample of "Yosemite Nature Notes", consider our purposes, and don't overlook the benefits of the combination offers with the American Nature Association and the American Forestry Association. Remit by check or money order.

Cordially yours,

C. P. Russell
Park Naturalist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