

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



The Yosemite Museum

Volume VIII
NOVEMBER, 1929
Number 11

Department of the Interior
Ray Lyman Wilbur, Secretary
National Park Service
Horace M. Albright, Director

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THE PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT
AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Published monthly

Volume VIII

November 1929

Number 11

THE ASCENT OF RED PEAK

By C. A. Harwell

A brisk one hour ride through the cold morning air of September 26, brought us at 6 o'clock to the trail leading from the Glacier point road down through Mono meadows. A great gray owl, seemingly more surprised to see us than we were to see him, flew across the road with slow, noiseless wing beats and lit near the top of a red fir. He was in plain view and his large size, smooth round head and markings clearly identified him as North America's largest owl.

After we got out of our open machine with purpose in mind of building a fire, warming ourselves, and preparing our bacon and eggs and coffee, we all yelled in childish glee—for what particular reason I know not. Imagine our surprise at this hour of the day to be answered from the meadows a half mile below. One coyote was responding to us, or challenging us, just which we did not care because we were cold and fire and food were things of more importance.

At 7:15 we started on a hike which we estimated would require

about twelve miles each way, with a climb from the lowest part of the trail, the Illilouette creek, of 5200 feet in altitude to reach our summit. There were three of us in the party, Assistant Park Naturalist H. E. Perry, Ranger E. Newton Morris and the park naturalist. Our first three miles led quite abruptly down hill across Mono meadows to Illilouette creek. Our packs were light, containing simply our lunches, small camera and field glasses. We had a strong purpose to explore Red Peak to the top and bring back photographs and rock specimens of this geologically interesting mountain. Many times we had looked at it through glasses from several directions and had often wondered why it stood so red among the other peaks of the Mount Clark range. Merced Peak, 11,722 feet; Ottoway Peak, 11,500; Gray Peak, 11,581, and Mount Clark, 11,506, all of which seem to be composed of the usual rock of the region—granite. We hoped rock specimens we might collect could be identified and exhibited at the Glacier Point Lookout so

that others might be helped to an understanding of the story told by the red coloration of this peak.

The air was clear and crisp and grass by the trail was covered with frost, so we swung along with free stride. We soon crossed Illilouette creek and started a gradual climb along the Merced Pass trail. We had hoped to shorten our distance to the top by climbing over the shoulder of the lateral moraine which flanks Ottoway creek on its eastern side for several miles, but found it so closely brush overgrown that it would have been slow work to make our way through it. We followed the trail to Ottoway creek, then up the creek to the east, entering the large amphitheater carved out by ancient glaciers from the sides of Merced peak, Ottoway peak and Red peak.

After eating our lunch by this stream we started directly to climb the closest shoulder of Red Peak. At the edge of the last rock-bordered meadow in the cirque of Red Peak we saw evidences that the Yosemite cony knew that winter was fast approaching. On several sheltered flat rocks we noticed small bunches of grass and one neat pile consisting of about a dozen stalks of alpine sedge which this small haymaker had placed there to cure for his winter's food supply. The cheerful talkative call note of several Sierra juncos feeding about the frosted buffalo grass made the whole mountain seem quite friendly and close to us. A hundred-foot climb above this last bit of water and we were associated with white barked pine and clinging like it to the sharp edge of a ridge left standing block upon block in between two cirques. Above us soaring easily in wide graceful circles a Swainson hawk

seemed to be trying to demonstrate to us the glories of altitude. Several times in his circles he came down quite close to us, within less than 100 feet, so that we were quite sure he was a Swainson, perhaps on his migration beyond the borders of California on the south to spend the winter months. Our climb was at no time dangerous. We marveled at the view continually unfolding before us as we approached the summit—the deep blue lakes in rocky basins below us and the array of peaks to the north and east.

It was 3 o'clock when we finally reached the monument of rock marking the top. A rusty can inserted in a niche contained this record. "September 14, 1919, Charles Michael, Rufus Joyner, End Michael and William Joyner." In another niche a screw topped metal tube bearing the monogram of the Sierra Club contained the following record: "Ansel E. Adams, May 25, 1920; H. D. Saville, May 25, 1920; Norman Clyde, Beaver Falls, Pa. June 14, 1920." We soon added our names, seemingly the first visitors to this summit in nine years. For three-quarters of an hour we remained to enjoy the view of familiar peaks seen from a new angle—The Minarets, Ritter, Banner, Lyell, Maclure, Conness, the Cathedral Group and, closer to us, Vogelsang, Half Dome, Clouds-Rest, Starr-King and many others stood out much more plainly than we had ever seen them from any one point.

Our knapsacks filled with interesting rock specimens, we started on our homeward journey at 4 o'clock knowing that we had 15 miles between us and our automobile. While the other two started directly down the lowest part of the western cirque expecting to take

advantage of the looser rock formation in going down, I followed the knife edge in the direction of Gray Peak to see if it would be possible to approach the mountains from that side. After determining it would be entirely possible to climb Red Peak from the shore of the lake at the head of Red Creek, I picked my way down over sliding blocks of rock to join my party. We found it was necessary for us to make all haste in order to be on our trail by dark. Between the three of us we possessed one flashlight, but discovering its battery was none too strong and realizing we would have at least five hours hiking in the dark we spared the precious battery as much as possible. Ranger Morris, being an experienced mountaineer, led the way and his keen sense of feel of the trail kept us headed in the right direction, although this is a rather untraveled trail and much of it was in deep shadow of forest or overhanging canyon.

Our flashlight had become practically useless by the time we reached Illilouette creek. We would have to depend on three boxes of matches for light in finding the last three miles of our trail, which we knew would be quite steep up grade and for the most part through fir forest. Ranger Morris successfully jumped from one round stone to another and crossed Illilouette creek dry shod. He directed the flickering light and called for me to "come on." Just as I reached the middle of the stream and was prepared to leap to the roundest of the rocks he was seized with a sudden impulse to conserve light and so turned off the flashlight. It was 10 o'clock, we were all tired, and my judgment of distance failed me in the dark

so that I missed my rock, landing knee deep in icy water. To regain my equilibrium both arms were plunged to the elbow in the stream. To make it worse, my pack slipped off and my sweater was plunged in, weighted down by ten pounds of rock specimens. Anyway, one foot remained dry, but it was difficult to keep it so. By the aid of some light and very little encouraged by the hilarious laughing of my two companions, I was able to gain the shore, where I at once demanded that a fire be built. All of us suddenly sobered down and soon a cheerful fire of pine needles and some sticks was drying me off and renewing the courage of the party, which had fallen somewhat.

Our fire extinguished, we found it very difficult to locate the trail we knew must lead away from Illilouette creek toward Mono Meadows. After quite a bit of feeling about trunks of trees for the familiar signs and scraping our feet through pine needles for the feel of the trail, we found ourselves climbing the zig-zags and started our last and hardest three miles with one box of matches and a flashlight reduced by use to glowworm proportions. We reached Mono Meadows at 11 o'clock. A white frost seemed to reflect the light of the stars so that objects about the meadow were very plainly visible. Perhaps for this reason it was all the more dark when we entered the fir forest under the shadow of Ostrander Rocks, and, depending on feel for the most part and a lighted match occasionally, made our way the last half mile of steep trail to the Glacier Point road. Just as we reached our machines at 11:30 o'clock we could see the moon through the forest of fir, a cold crescent hanging above Clouds

Rest. We were soon in Yosemite valley, where hot soup and toast helped us forget the fatiguing part of our 21-hour day.

If our rock specimens collected at Red Peak, which we are sending away to be identified by competent geologists, prove to be of sufficient interest that they will tell our Yo-

osemite visitors the story of metamorphic rocks overlying granite, then our efforts will be well repaid.

The trip in itself was well worth the time and some day we hope to get back to this same ridge to explore Gray Peak and the obelisk of the range, Mt. Clark.

Seasonal Notes on Yosemite Animals

DR. HAROLD C. BRYANT,

Gray Squirrels

This is the first year that a half dozen or more gray squirrels have been reported on the floor of the valley since their disappearance about six years ago. It will be remembered that a serious disease, as the result of a skin mite, destroyed practically all of the gray squirrels on the floor of the valley. Two years ago a pair were reported near El Capitan. Two or more reported again last year in the same vicinity. This year gray squirrels have been seen near Cathedral Rocks and Mirror Lake.

Chickarees have been unusually abundant and unusually tame this past year. On almost any morning's trip one of the red squirrels could be seen scurrying from tree to tree or in the tree-top. It seems reasonable to believe that with the disappearance of gray squirrels the chickaree has become most abundant on the floor of the valley.

Mule Deer

Deer continue very numerous and very tame. A few black-tailed deer (recognized by their smaller size, shorter muzzle and ears, and black, well haired tail) have been noted on the floor of the valley this summer. In each instance it has been evident that mule deer dislike this

species. They immediately show their dislike by lowered ears and by chasing the smaller species.

The gardeners at the Ahwahnee Hotel have found difficulty in keeping deer out, in spite of a supposedly deer-proof fence.

Deer are reported as more numerous along the Tuolumne river than at any time since the foot and mouth disease control measures were instituted in 1924 and more than 20,000 deer were killed in the Stanislaus National Forest.

Marmots

William E. Colby, secretary of the Sierra Club, has called attention to the disappearance of marmots in the Sierra Nevada. He stated that the Sierra Club in making the 1929 trip from Huntington Lake up the Muir trail to Tuolumne Meadows, failed to see a single marmot. On the back country trip of the Yosemite Schol of Field Natural History during August no marmots were seen at Merced Lake, where they are usually common, and on the entire trip but one was observed, that one near the top of Vogelsang Pass. It is certainly true that this animal ten years ago was to be seen almost everywhere near the timber line. It was even common in back of the Parson's Lodge

in Tuolumne Meadows, where now it seems to have totally disappeared. There are some still left near Tenaya Lake, where they have always been fairly abundant. The park naturalist reported seeing four marmots two miles west of Tenaya Lake on the Tioga road August 3. It is difficult to explain this disappearance of this large mammal over much of the territory formerly occupied. Of course, it may be just a fluctuation in numbers. Certainly a prolific breeder, it may be expected that the high country will in time become repopulated.

Red Fox

Joseph Dixon photographed a red fox near Saddlebag Lakes this past summer. A member of the Sierra Club observed one and others were observed by rangers patrolling the northern part of the park. It is pleasing to note that the red fox of the Sierra Nevada is sufficiently abundant within the park that several have been observed during the past summer.

Badger

Campers in Tuolumne Meadows have reported seeing several badgers this past summer.

Pine Marten

Ralph Teall saw a pine marten along the Tioga road about two miles west of Soda Springs. Another one was observed near Tioga Lake by Mr. Lambert of the Tenaya Lake Lodge.

Flying Squirrel

As in past years flying squirrels

were occasionally reported by campers in Camp 19. They were seen almost nightly during the latter part of August.

Fish

Although no extra large fish have been reported as being caught in the Merced, yet the more skilled fishermen have had no difficulty in making good catches. Earlier in the year splendid fishing was had below the power house. As in past years Washburn Lake has furnished excellent fishing in late summer. Likewise Dog Lake, Gaylor Lakes and Young Lakes, in the Tuolumne Meadows region, have produced excellent fishing. The Lyell fork of the Tuolumne, the upper part of Fletcher creek, Fletcher Lake and Townsley Lake were closed this year to allow recuperation. By fishing deeply, fine catches have been made in Tenaya Lake. There were a few instances where fish were taken by fly from this lake.

In recent years two splendid examples of great improvement in lake fishing are to be noted. Os-trander Lake and Dog Lake four or five years ago appeared to be fished out. This year both of these lakes have furnished splendid sport. Alder creek was heavily fished this year by a road crew so that late in the season it afforded very poor fishing near the Wawona road. However, the upper reaches of the stream above the falls furnished many good catches during the season.

RECENT MUSEUM ACCESSIONS

The Yosemite Museum, built in 1925 through the gift of the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, depends almost entirely upon the gen-

erosity of its friends for new exhibit material. Through gifts and loans its nature library, its Mather collection of historical material per-

taining to Yosemite and the Sierras, and its exhibits of early history and Indian materials are fast being built up. Even now, after only four years occupancy of this new building, park visitors are very much pleased with the story of Yosemite as told by our exhibits.

Some of the most recent acquisitions are as follows:

Henry G. Peabody of Pasadena presented "Domes of Yosemite," a framed enlargement made by carbon process of a photo taken by him in 1901. He also presented "The Yosemite National Park," one of his illustrated lectures.

Arthur S. Rosenblatt of San Francisco, presented J. D. Whit-

ney's "Yosemite Guide Book of 1869."

The Yosemite Natural History Association presented "Promenades-Autour du Monde," in two volumes, by Baron de Hubner, published in France, 1871, containing 30 pages on Yosemite.

Mrs Albert Jannapolis of San Francisco presented 43 very old photographs of Yosemite scenes. These were taken during the 70's by George Fiske, one of the best of Yosemite's early photographers.

R. M. Tapscott, member of Sierra Club, presented a skull of a young mountain sheep found at Lyell glacier.

YOSEMITE BIRD REPORT FOR SEPTEMBER

By Enid Michael

In the Yosemite Valley the first 18 days of September passed under cloudless skies. The nights were warm, the days were warmer. Then came the long hoped for change of weather and the morning of the nineteenth started off with a heavy shower. Friday the twentieth was an overcast day with threatening storm clouds which brought a heavy downpour late in the afternoon. Sheets of rain falling on the granite pavements above the rim of the valley brought life to Yosemite Falls, but life only for a few days. When the storm cleared once more came sunny days that led away to the end of the month. After the storm the nights were cool and on several occasions there was frost on the early morning meadows. At the end of the month the first spangles of autumn color were showing in the exotic elms along the village street, but the native trees for most part were still adhering to the spring color fashion.

Early in the month the slump in the bird population of the valley became quite apparent. Robins and

blackbirds who formed a large percentage of the summer population had gone for a lark to the higher sections of the park. Actually on many of our morning walks observations seemed to indicate that the California woodpecker was the most common bird. There was, however, no apparent slump in the jay population and as these birds were to be found in all sections of the valley they were probably more numerous than the California woodpeckers, who confine their activities to the Kellogg oak groves.

While there was a falling off in the number of individuals during the month the number of species held up well inasmuch as there were 80 listed. Erratic wanderings of individuals of certain species and the normal migratory movements of other species helped to pad the September bird report. For instance, the week beginning September 16 was sparrow week in the valley. Among the regulars of the sparrow tribe there were evening grosbeak, California purple finch, green-backed goldfinch, chip ping sparrow, Sierra junco, Sacra-

mento towhee and black-headed grosbeak. Besides the regulars there was an influx of transient sparrows stopping for a few days en route to their winter homes. Among the tourists of the tribe were white-crowned sparrow, Lincoln sparrow, song sparrow and fox sparrow. Besides the above named sparrows there were two other species which we could not positively identify. One little brown sparrow that kept in the close cover of the tall meadow grass we are inclined to believe belonged to the race of Savannah sparrows. This bird would spring up suddenly from almost underfoot, a zig-zag flight would carry him a hundred yards across the meadow and then he would dive once more to the cover of grass. We never did get clear views of this sparrow for always he would spring up before we could locate him in rest.

The unknown was represented by four plump little sparrows about the size of song sparrows. Plain buffy white under bodies, tails very much notched, outer tail feathers apparently bordered with white, brown streaked backs and wings marked with whitish bars, no marks of any sort on head or face. When seen these birds were sitting along on the fence wire and feeding in the manner of fly-catching Audubon warblers. From the fence they went to perch on dead twigs of an apple tree. From here they continued to dive into the air after insects. When they left they flew away and were not seen again.

During the last of the month a migratory wave of warblers swept through the valley. The migrating warblers were found most common in the oaks and as they confined their foraging mostly to the upper

foliage sprays it was often difficult to identify individuals as they flitted about among the leaves. We did, however, manage to learn that the majority of the warblers were of the black-throated gray species. Other warblers of the company were positively identified as Audubon, pileated, and in the lower shrubs under the oaks were two yellowthroats. We were inclined to believe that there were also Lutescent and Townsend warblers, and possibly a few Calaveras warblers. However, Townsend and Lutescent are very rare warblers in Yosemite valley and the Calaveras while common in spring is not found in the valley during the fall months. Rare likewise are the yellowthroats, but the yellowthroats came close to us and spoke in their own peculiar manner. Had the other warblers been as accommodating as the yellowthroats there need have been no question of identity.

In the August bird report mention was made of the abundant food supply of berries and acorns. Well, at the end of September we find the berry crop almost completely consumed. The robins remaining in the valley have fallen back on dry fruit of the manzanita and the scanty crop of dogwood berries. The band-tailed pigeons and the evening grosbeaks who consumed their full share of cherries and coffee berries have practically deserted the valley. The acorn crop that looked so promising on the Kellogg oaks during August did not come up to expectations as many of the acorns were worm-eaten and fell before maturity. As it looks now many of the jays and woodpeckers may be forced to leave the valley this winter, owing to a shortage of their favorite winter food.

FAUNA AND FLORA REPORT FOR SEPTEMBER

By C. A. Harwell, Park Naturalist

BEARS—Yosemite visitors have been able to see black bears in good numbers at the daylight feeding platforms maintained by the ranger department near El Capitan. As many as twelve have been

about the feeding tables on several occasions. The bears are more hungry and seemingly more gentle than during the earlier months. They are not only eating for the present at this time of year but

seem to know that by about the middle of December they will need to find some rock shelter for the winter, where they will hibernate for three or four months while deep snow covers them. They are attempting to put on a goodly surplus of fat to carry them through their long sleep and these feeding tables, kept supplied with the scraps from camps and hotels, they have learned furnish a much quicker means than the slow process of gathering brown manzanita berries, trying to catch fish in the river, digging termites from rotten logs, or searching valley and talus slope for their natural food. Their insistent search for food makes them very bold. They walk in and among tourists and about the feeding platforms searching people and cars for food. It seems remarkable that there are no serious accidents reported. Perhaps it is because the cubs, now approximately eight months old, are able to take pretty good care of themselves and their mothers are more interested in finding their own food than they are in what eager visitors may be doing to get their babies to pose for "cute" pictures.

Regular bus trips to the bear pits after 9 o'clock were discontinued about the middle of the month by the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, but the feeding under electric lights has been kept up through the month.

DEER—The mule deer continue common on the floor of the valley. The bucks have completed shedding velvet from their antlers, so that they are now getting into fighting trim for the approaching mating season. About September 25 the first preliminary clash of antlers was noticed near the Rangers' Club. The lighter coloring of grayish tan is fast being replaced by the darker bluish tinted winter coat.

COYOTES—Coyotes have been seen and heard several times during the month along the Glacier Point road.

MOUNTAIN LION—The two mountain lions in the so-called "cave" continue in good condition. The male, from the Yellowstone Park, and the female, from Manzanita, are now 11 years old.

They have never mated.

FISH—On September 30 the planting of fish from the Yosemite hatchery was completed for this year. The fish remaining will be held over through the winter in the outdoor retaining tanks. The troughs inside the hatchery are being cleaned and will be painted, in preparation for the shipments of eggs soon to arrive. There has been an improvement this year in fish planting, due to the fact that the State Fish and Game Commission has turned over the entire matter of fish planting to the Yosemite Ranger Department.

REPTILES—The eighth live rubber snake of this season was brought to the museum just a few days ago, September 23, and placed in the exhibit case by Bob Selby. It measured 23 inches in length and was the largest specimen of the year. The next day it was gone. Our only assumption is that, like seven others of its kind which have disappeared since June, it was taken by someone interested in it as a pet. During the six years of intensive study of this region by Dr. Grinnell and party, prior to 1920 they only encountered one rubber snake in the Yosemite region. This summer's record seems to indicate that, though tourist travel has increased very greatly, this interesting reptile has been able to survive and seemingly increase in numbers. On the other hand, the rattler is becoming increasingly scarce.

FLORA—Flowers have practically disappeared by the close of September. Fall colorings in trees are taking their place in giving variety of coloring to the park. The green of the black oak and maple is softening toward yellow. Dogwood is a blaze of color in oranges and reds. The ripening seeds with contrasting brilliant hues in rich clusters rival in beauty the showy white flowers of four months ago.

On several trips to outlying districts the park naturalist has gathered seeds of sun-loving plants, which are being scattered about the museum in an attempt to get ahead of the too numerous deer and the tramping of many feet.



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Dan Anderson