
YOSEMITE—PAST AND PRESENT

[*Sunset* (April 1909)]

By Galen Clark

The writer, who is over ninety years old, has resided in the great Sierra valley for over a half century and was for many years its official guardian



DESCENDANTS OF THE ORIGINAL YO SEMITE (BIG GRIZZLY BEAR) STILL ROAM THROUGH THE DENSE UNDERGROWTH ON THE FLOOR OF THE GREAT VALLEY

[Editor's note: These are black bears. The last known grizzly bear in Yosemite was shot in 1895 at Crescent Lake —dea.]

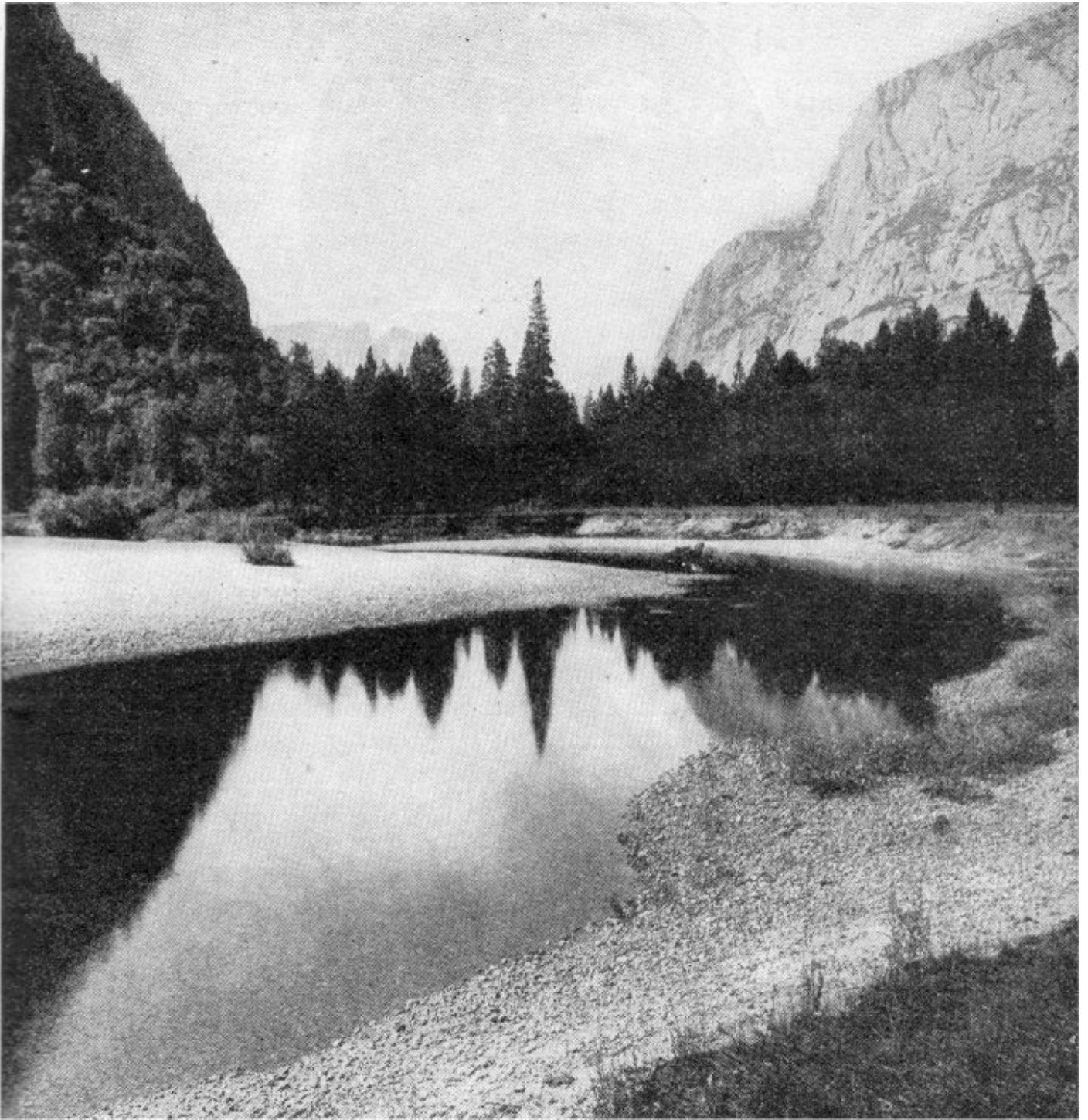
The Yosemite valley was first discovered and made known to the public by Major James D. Savage and Captain John Boling, who with a strong detachment of mounted troops from what was known as the Mariposa Battalion of Volunteers went with friendly Indian guides to the Valley in March, 1851, to capture and take the resident tribe of Indians out and put them on the Fresno Indian reservation.

The first improved trail for saddle animals to Yosemite was made by a livery stable firm in Mariposa, the Mann Brothers, in 1856, from Mariposa by way of the South Fork of the Merced river, crossing the stream at a point now known as Wawona. In 1857 the regular tourist travel to Yosemite may be said to have commenced, although a few persons had gone there in the previous years. All parties at that time went with camping outfits. The first house in Yosemite was built in the fall of 1856 and was opened up the next spring as a saloon for the entertainment of that class of visitors who loved whisky and gambling. The next year it was fitted up and used as a restaurant. Several years later it was enlarged and known as Black's hotel. The first building for a hotel was built in 1859, and is now a part of the Sentinel hotel premises known as the Cedar cottage.

Most of the early visitors to Yosemite were Californians, and the number did not amount to one thousand in any one season until the completion of the Union and Central Pacific railroads. Soon after that the number increased to many thousands annually.

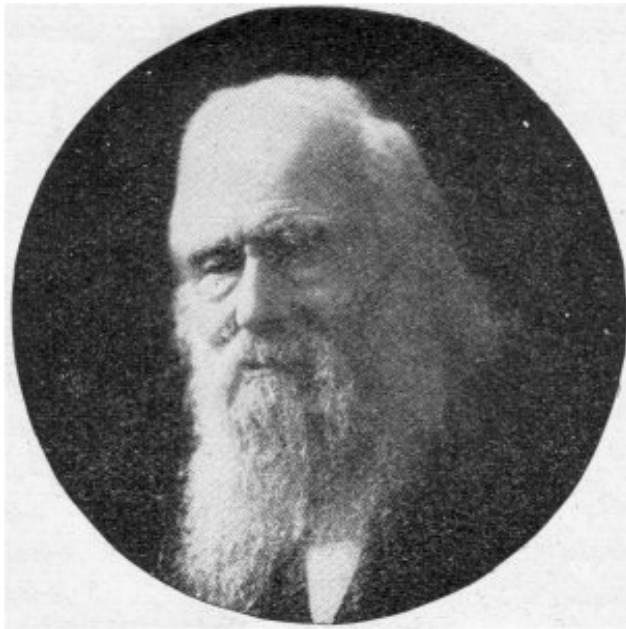
All the necessary supplies for the hotels and other purposes were taken into the Valley by pack mule trains from Coulterville and Mariposa, a distance of fifty miles, until the completion of the first wagonroads into Yosemite in 1874.

The grand features and great variety of Yosemite scenery were early and widely made known throughout the civilized world, by pen and press. public speech, paint brush, camera and kodak. But no painting or photograph gives its vivid, thrilling life expression. I have seen persons of emotional temperament stand with tearful eyes, spellbound and dumb with awe, as they got their first view of the Valley front Inspiration point, overwhelmed in the sudden presence of the unspeakable, stupendous grandeur.



DURING THE SPRING FLOODS, THE MERCED RIVER CUTS AWAY GREAT PORTIONS OF ITS GRAVELLY BANKS

Since the completion of the Yosemite valley railroad up the Merced river to El Portal, near the western boundary of the Yosemite national park, the Government is having some excellent work done on the road leading up into the Valley, and if ample means are appropriated by the present congress the good work will continue on up to the hotel, public camps and around the Valley on the interesting carriage drives. It is to be hoped that the California delegation in congress may be successful in getting liberal appropriations for continuing, not only this good work, but all other important work for the protection and nracarvatinn of the scenic beauty of the Valley. [ILLEGIBLE] has taken place in here [ILLEGIBLE] from the control of the native Indians. In the early years, when first visited by white people, three-fourths of the Valley was open ground, meadows with grasses waist high, and flowering plants. On the dryer parts were scattering forest trees, pines, cedars and oaks, too widely separated to be called groves, clear of underbrush, leaving clear, open, extensive vision up and down and across the Valley from wall to wall on either side. The Indians had kept the Valley clear of thickets of young trees and brushwood shrubbery so they could not be waylaid, ambushed or surprised by enemies from outside and to afford no hiding places for bears or other predatory animals, and also to clear the ground for gathering acorns, which constituted one of their main articles of food.



GALEN CLARK. THE DISCOVER
OF THE MARIPOSA GROVE
OF GIANT SEQUOIAS

At the present time there is not more than one-fourth of the floor of the Valley clear, open ground as it was fifty years ago; nearly all the open ground between the large scattering trees is covered with a dense growth of young trees which also extend out over hundreds of acres of the driest portion of the meadow land. Every pine tree on the floor of the Valley, less than seventy-five feet high, has grown from the seed within the last fifty years.

During recent years considerable work has been done in clearing up the young growth of trees and brush-wood to afford better views of the distant scenery and to be better able to control fires, which accidentally get started during the dry season. In many localities where the work of thinning out and trimming up the young growth has been done, are desirable clean, shady groves for camping parties. There are still hundreds of acres where this reclaiming work needs to be continued to make the greater portion of the Valley accessible to visitors, and to break up the hidden retreats of bears which have taken up their permanent residence at several points. This last season an old female bear with two cubs has had a free pass throughout the Valley and has given ferocious chase to every photo artist who has attempted to get a picture of herself and family.

As this work of clearing up and reclaiming a large portion of Yosemite valley is one of great importance and national interest, it should be done in accordance with plans submitted by the best landscape engineers, after a careful survey and study of the whole field, so as to show all scenery, local and surrounding, to the best advantage from the carriage roads, private walks and local resting places. Much of this work can be done at very little expense; all the larger growth to be cleared away can be cut into firewood and readily sold to residents for the cost of the cutting.

Another matter of paramount importance is the protection of the banks of the Merced river, as it runs its winding, crooked course through the length of the Valley. In the spring, when the flood waters from the melting snow on the surrounding heights pour over the great falls and fill the river channel to overflowing in many places, the strong current impinging against the gravelly substratum cuts it away and undermines the top surface grass sod, leaving it a loose deathtrap for man or beast that goes near its edge, until it breaks down of its own weight. A space several feet in width is cut away annually. During the past thirty years the river channel in many places has changed sidewise three times its original width, leaving a wide, barren waste of sand and gravel on the opposite side, thus destroying its original beauty.

It may be interesting to the public to know the cause of there being in recent years so much more activity in the river currents than during the earlier known history of Yosemite. When the El Capitan iron bridge was built in 1870 it was located across the narrow channel of the river between the two points of what retrains of an old glacial terminal moraine. The river channel at this place was filled with large boulders, which greatly obstructed the free outflow of the flood waters in the spring, causing extensive overflow of the low meadow land above, and greatly interfering with travel, especially to Yosemite falls and Mirror lake. In order to remedy this matter the large boulders in the channel were blasted and the fragments leveled down so as to give a free outflow of the flood waters. This increased the force of the river current, which now commenced its greater eroding work on the river banks, and as the winding turns become more abrupt the destructive force annually increases. Some thorough system of protection should be promptly used to save the river banks from further damage.

Bibliographical Information

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