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**FIRE!**

# Yosemite

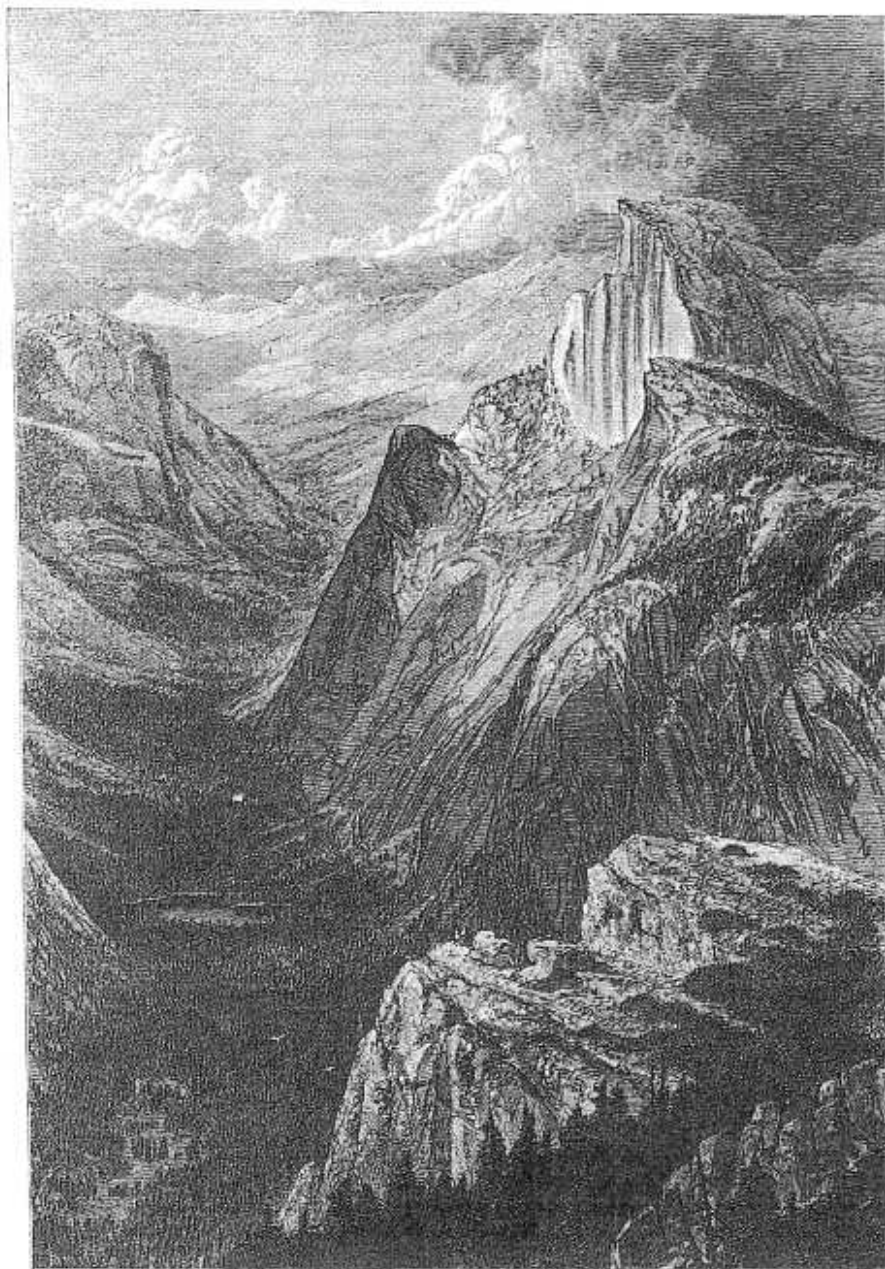


**YOSEMITE  
NATIONAL PARK**

## Centennial Issue

**I**t's been 100 years since President Benjamin Harrison signed into law the act that established a large area around Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees as Yosemite National Park. For the remainder of 1990 and until October, 1991, the National Park Service will be celebrating the park's centennial and asking people to contemplate Yosemite's history and how the preservation idea, engendered in Yosemite, has taken on new meaning in the face of global environmental changes. There are hopes that from history we can learn the lessons that will allow us to manage and use Yosemite with the same foresight and wisdom exemplified by those who first legislated the preservation of the place.

Participation in Yosemite's centennial celebration is open to everyone, and a variety of events has been ongoing throughout the year. 1990 activities will be highlighted by an official ceremony on October 1st which will commemorate the enactment of the Yosemite legislation mentioned above. Though details are still sketchy, the event will probably be held at Tuolumne Meadows and may fea-



ture an appearance by President George Bush, who has been invited. A number of other dignitaries will also be in attendance, and about the time of the ceremony, a time capsule will be buried in front of the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center.

Other centennial programs include a major symposium that has been scheduled from October 13 to 19 in Concord and Yosemite. The focus of the symposium will be on natural and cultural resource issues and on future directions for park management. There are also at least two museum exhibits that will be open through the end of the year. One is at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, the other at Yosemite's own museum. Please call the Yosemite Association at (209) 379-2317 for information about any of these programs or events.

*Continued on page 19*

Tenaya Canyon from Glacier Point, 1870's, published in *Yosemite As We Saw It, A Centennial Collection of Early Writings and Art.*

JAMES D. SMILLIE/YOSEMITE COLLECTION

# Yosemite on Fire!

**Editor's note:** As has been widely reported in the media, large wildfires burned extensive areas of Yosemite National Park in early August. The following article is excerpted from the information sheet prepared by the National Park Service for post-fire visitors to Yosemite. We feel fortunate to report that no Yosemite Association employee or property was harmed by the fires.

**August 7, 1990** is when it all started. Intense thunderstorms raked the broad forests of Yosemite's western flank. In a matter of hours 28 separate lightning fires were burning. The Park responded immediately with all the firefighting resources at its disposal, focusing on the 14 fires which were in areas designated for complete fire

suppression. Most of the battles were won within hours, the budding fires suppressed by human energy, technology and in some cases sheer determination. Yet a few of these strikes grew rapidly beyond containment, becoming the most severe fires in the last 100 years at Yosemite.

While it's true that lightning was the immediate cause of these fires, there were several other environmental factors which contributed greatly to their severity: 1) by the summer of 1990, California was experiencing its fourth consecutive year of drought; 2) some of the areas had not been burned in 10, 20 or in some cases 100 years; and 3) high winds on the second and third days drove the fires to a level of ferocity that couldn't be suppressed.



DENISE GUIDI

## When They Happened

**August 7:** Numerous lightning strikes ignited many small fires.  
**August 8:** Thunderstorms continued with high winds; 1900 acres burned; 100 firefighters with air and bulldozer support were involved.  
**August 9:** Winds up to 60 mph were experienced; a firestorm destroyed Foresta; El Portal and

Yosemite West were saved; over 5,000 acres and 480 firefighters were involved.

**August 10:** 15,000 were evacuated from Yosemite Valley in 4 hours; 567 firefighters were on the fire.

**August 11:** 9,000 total acres burned in the main fires; 1,747 firefighters continued the fight.

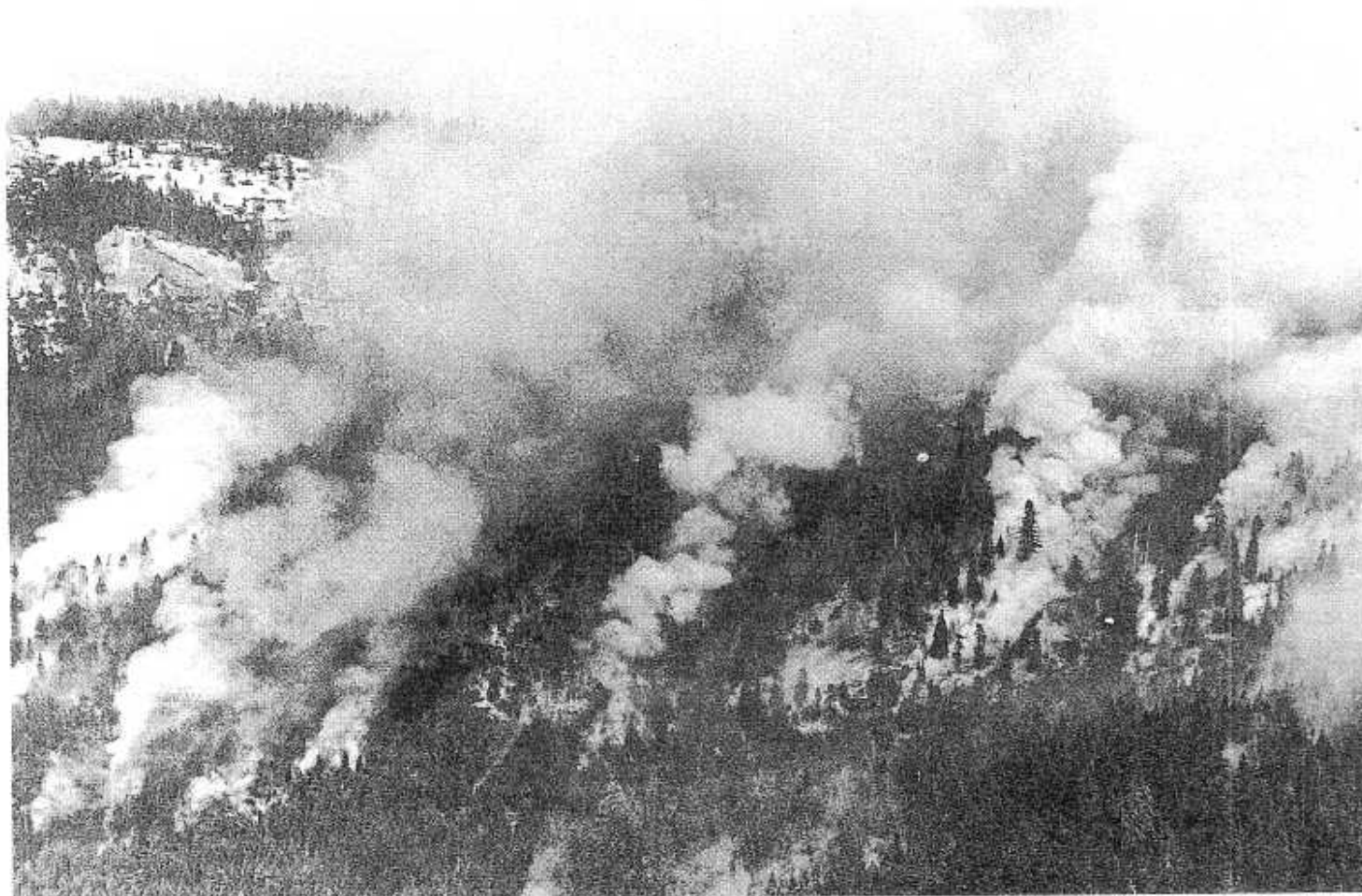
**August 12:** 14,793 total acres burned; 2,508 firefighters were involved.

**August 13:** 18,018 total acres burned; 2,721 firefighters involved.

**August 14:** 22,095 total acres burned; 3,136 firefighters were on the fire; containment approached on the fire.

**August 16:** The T-Grove fire was controlled at 8 p.m.

Above, fire on the Tamarack Ridge, and below, the Steamboat fire.



LISA STRONG AUFHAUSER

*August 17:* The Tioga Road was reopened.

*August 20:* The Steamboat fire was controlled at 6 a.m. Highways 140 and 41 were re-opened.

*August 21:* The A-Rock fire was controlled at 6 p.m. Considering all the fires combined, 24,030 acres burned, 3,400 firefighters were involved, and the total cost exceeded \$11 million.

*August 24:* The Big Oak Flat Road was re-opened.

### How People Responded

On August 9, fires destroyed the community of Foresta and threatened two others, thousands of campers adjacent to the fires were evacuated, and firefighters rolled in from around the nation. Response from communities, concessioners, the public, and land



DENISE GUIDI

management agencies was immediate and the teamwork began.

The fire season is not yet over and other droughts will occur, but it is clear that through cooperative effort we can protect the park and those who love it.

### The Work in the Wake of the Fire

Less than 2% of Yosemite burned in these fires, but some of the hot-

test fires were along roads where they are obvious and could cause problems. Crews have been cutting and will continue to cut hazardous trees, and culverts and signs will be repaired. Erosion will increase and rocks on the roads will be common. In the coming months the Park will contour and revegetate areas where there has been disturbances caused by firefighters and bulldozers, but the forest itself will be left to regenerate as it has always done.

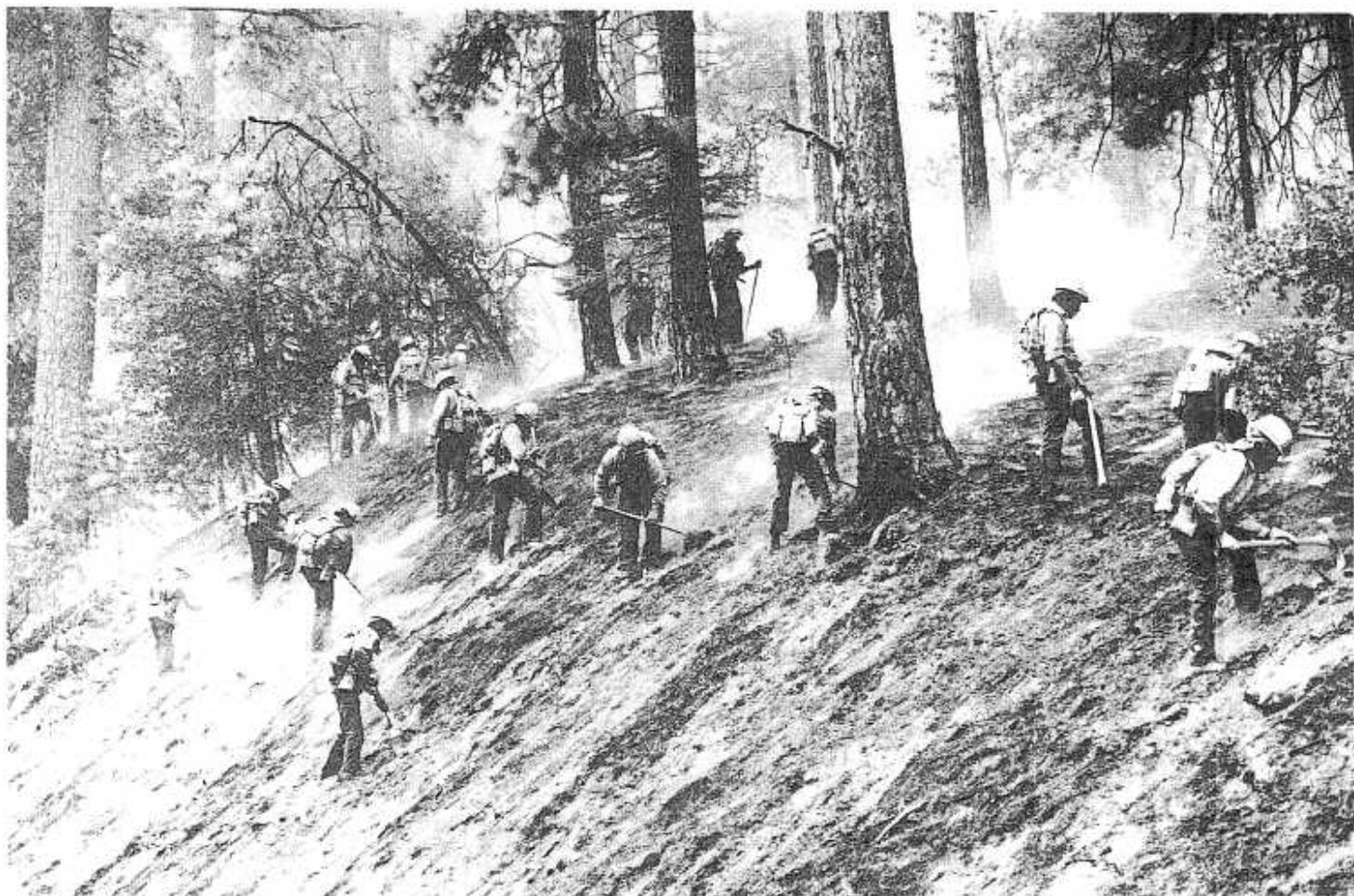
### How Are Yosemite's Plants Affected by Fire?

Yosemite is home to diverse plant communities that have evolved over millennia in response to periodic fires. More recently, they have been affected instead by the

absence of fire — a century of suppression efforts by humans.

Along Highway 140 in the Merced River Canyon the fire burned largely in chaparral, a mixed shrub community found on the lowest, driest slopes of the park. Natural fires here usually occur every 10 to 25 years. Some shrubs in this community are not killed by fire; portions above ground burn, but roots survive and quickly resprout. A few species actually need fire for their seeds to germinate. Many of the best spring wildflower displays occur in chaparral the year after a burn!

Fire crews from the California Dept. of Forestry finishing up at Tamarack Creek, the extension of the A Rock Fire.



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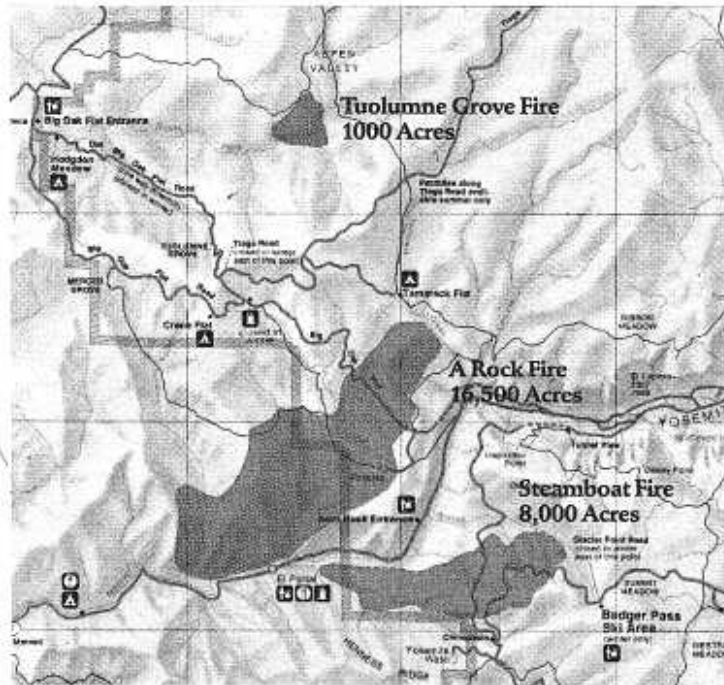
The recent fires have given us reason to look again at the role that fire plays as one of the natural processes involved in the continual re-creation of the marvelous landscape we call Yosemite.

Along the Big Oak Flat and Wawona roads the immediate, sometimes startling effects of fire on the conifer forests are most obvious. The charred trunks are incense cedars and firs that grow well in shade and were favored by years of fire suppression. Without any fire, these often outnumber pines. Pines require bare mineral soil and plenty of sunlight for their seedlings to survive — exactly the conditions that prevail after a fire.

Yosemite's most famous plant species, the sequoia, are actually fire-dependent. Giant sequoia cones may remain closed on the tree for up to 20 years, until heat from a fire opens them. Ironically, the Merced Grove of Big Trees was threatened by the intense fires, but not burned.

#### Effects on Wildlife

Fire is not always as devastating to wildlife as one might think. Many individuals escape, but some die. Of great importance is the preservation of species. Fire plays a role in creating healthy, natural habitats for wildlife populations. Fires tend to burn in an uneven, patchy fashion. This creates a mosaic of diverse areas for wildlife — low green forage in recent burns, sheltering stands of brush and trees in unburned areas, and standing dead trees that provide nesting cavities and insects to eat.



#### Managing Fire in a National Park

One hundred years ago Congress created Yosemite National Park to be enjoyed so as to leave it unimpaired for future generations. To early park managers "unimpaired" meant "unburned." By 25 years ago, scientists had recognized fire's role in maintaining natural vegetation and wildlife habitat.

The National Park Service recognizes two types of fire — "wildfire," which is always suppressed, and "prescribed fire." Human-caused fires are always suppressed. Lightning fires may or may not be, depending on conditions such as location, weather, the national fire situation, and air quality. When certain conditions are met the fire becomes "prescribed."

The fires of August, 1990, began in an area where fire is always suppressed due to the proximity of homes and facilities. However, lightning strikes occurring in remote areas may become "prescribed natural fires." Such fires are monitored and assessed daily.

In areas where it is too dangerous to let lightning call the shots, park managers may opt for "prescribed burning," choosing the time, place, and weather conditions to start a fire whose boundaries are defined and which can be easily controlled.

The recent fires have given us reason to look again at the role that fire plays as one of the natural processes involved in the continual re-creation of the marvelous landscape we call Yosemite.



LISA STRONG/AUPHAUSER



OLD PHOTO

Fires have been common throughout Yosemite's history. This view is of the "Arch Rock" fire that occurred in 1941. Above, a Merced Grove cabin protected with a fireproof covering.

# William Penn Abrams



## Forgotten Yosemite Adventurer

Dennis Kruska

**With soulful smiles and aching hearts,** many argonauts left their families, their farms, and their friends to seek wealth and new beginnings in the fabled goldfields of California. Often these goldseekers would record their daily travels and travails in personal diaries, to share later with loved ones or to remind themselves of the hardships they survived while seeking the "elephant." One such careful diary was kept by William Penn Abrams.

The significance of William Abrams in Yosemite's history has been previously described—he and fellow traveler U. N. Reamer were the first to enjoy the classic view of Yosemite Valley from its west end on October 18, 1849; an entry in Abrams' diary plainly describes Half Dome and Bridalveil Fall. That pencil-written, somewhat illegible diary passage recorded Abrams' journey to the Yosemite Valley area two years prior to the Valley's first entry by the Mariposa Battalion, and represents the first incontestably accurate description of Yosemite's wonders.

Sierra Nevada historian, Francis P. Farquhar, acknowledged that the 1833 Walker expedition almost certainly peered into the Valley from the north rim. While historians have a fairly good idea about the location of the spot from which Zenas Leonard (the party scribe) glimpsed Yosemite Valley, the features he viewed are described poorly. The words of the Abrams diary permit no conceivable mistake of the description of the Valley's wonders.

Scant attention has been given to William Abrams' early life or to the events that followed his visit to Yosemite. This sketch tracks Abrams from his early childhood through his maturity as a manager of several successful saw mills and other ventures in the Pacific Northwest. Much of this information was not available previously to researchers—

only recently the author was afforded the chance to peruse the Abrams family's worn, leather trunk, to read early Abrams letters, to trace the branching family trees, and to analyze notes written by family members describing William's later years.

William Abrams was born on August 15, 1820 in Sanbornton, New Hampshire, where his father and grandfather worked as lumbermen, millwrights and farmers. While growing up in his New England surroundings, young William was put to work in the family fields and in the mill, attending school only briefly when chores would so allow. He learned milling well, but the relentless labor schedule proved too hard on him. In 1838, with health failing, he left home for five months to recuperate.

In the summer of 1839 he suffered another sick spell, and



The only known photograph of William Penn Abrams.

he and his cousin, Cyrus Colby, with \$180 between them, left home to travel to the southern timber states. It was at this time that William began to keep the careful diaries, of which five yet survive, that recorded the events of his ensuing adventures and of his sighting of Yosemite.

William and Cyrus proceeded to Boston, and then by boat to New York, through the Erie Canal and across the Great Lakes to Chicago. There they transferred their goods to a horse and wagon and traveled through "unbroken prairies" arriving at the town of Peru on the head of the Illinois River. Heading southward on steamers, rail, and finally on foot they reached Gainsville, Alabama on December 12, 1839.

Along the way William encour-

tered all kinds of people, "from gentlemen down to cut throats and gamblers." In Mobile they witnessed the mass graveyards of recent yellow fever victims, and their Congregationalist mores were insulted by the public auction of slaves.

In Gainsville, William was employed as superintendent of a saw and grist mill for several years, relying on the knowledge he gained while growing up on the family farm.

During 1842 he returned to New England and married an old schoolmate, Sarah Lavina Phelps, whom he brought back to live in Gainsville. Their family grew with the addition of two daughters, Sarah Lavina and Georgiana Lee, over the next three years. In 1847, Abrams noted in his journal "...many changes have occurred in my little family. When I last wrote we were in my native state," (for a visit) "since then we returned to this place (Gainsville) and spent my time attending my business closely. We have lost our little Georgiana, (to yellow fever) and have had a son given us, William Rollins Abrams, born at Gainsville, Ala., July 2nd, 1848."

The arduous work and his continual sickness ravaged William. His condition worsened to the point that his doctor advised him to depart for some healthier climate. California and the stories of gold were the great attractions of this time, and he and some friends, including U. N. Reamer, pooled their funds to form a company to travel to the goldfields. Abrams closed up his business, bid a heartbreaking adieu to his young family, and struck out to California in March of 1849. The company booked passage on the steamer *Oregon* for New Orleans. On Abrams' handwritten passenger list he classified himself as an engineer and fellow traveler Reamer as a carpenter.

The Abrams diaries for those traveling days speak of the trip from New Orleans on the steamer *Predaza*, the seasickness in the Gulf, and the legion cholera cases

COURTESY OF DENNIS KRUSKA

"NOT FAR OFF, A WATERFALL DROPS FROM A CLIFF BELOW THREE JAGGED PEAKS INTO THE VALLEY WHILE FARTHER BEYOND A ROUNDED MOUNTAIN STOOD, THE VALLEY SIDE OF WHICH LOOKED AS THOUGH IT HAD BEEN SLICED WITH A KNIFE . . ." OCTOBER 1849

aboard the vessel on the way to the Isthmus and Panama. One melancholy entry declared that "if I ever get to Chargas I will go home through the woods." Upon reaching Chargas in April, Abrams wrote: "3500 people waiting here and no vessel at Panama." The prevalent California gold rumors were discouraging, but the disheartened company continued toward Panama in two dug-out canoes and later on foot. In the jungle, monkeys electrified their days and sickness plagued the band most of the time. After 46 days of trudging, the weary party finally stumbled into Panama.

As luck would have it, they quickly secured a \$250 cabin passage in the brig *Copiabo*, and after several weeks delay in embarking, the vessel finally made its slow progression up the coast. One hundred and thirty-seven argonauts were registered on the passenger list for the little brig. On its 34th day out, the craft reached Acapulco and took on fresh water. The oceanic days dragged on, and Abrams wrote of a small mutiny precipitated by the steerage passengers demanding more bread. The mutiny ended quickly without extra provisions for the insurgents. At the end of a rough sea journey of 96 days, they arrived at the port of San Francisco on August 15th, 1849. Here Abrams received the first word from his family in over five months: letters mailed by his wife and dated March.

The company decided to chance its luck in the mines. Purchasing an outfit and storing their trunks, the party re-embarked with valises, blankets, and provisions on the little schooner, *Mary*, for Stockton. Conversation centered around the exorbitant prices in San Francisco for the goods their company purchased. Flour—\$6 per hundred pounds; gold pans—\$4 each; coffee—4 1/8 cents per pound; and loaf sugar at 18 cents. When they made the San Joaquin River on August 27, 1849, they were welcomed by overwhelming swarms of mosquitoes.



WATKINS 1866/NPS LIBRARY

Sleep aboard the schooner was impossible. Some of the men's faces were so swollen they hardly could see, and they began to mumble that "... they were viewing the elephant broadside, whereas they had only seen the tip of the tail before."

At Stockton the weary men hired a packer to take their outfit to the Stanislaus River. Abrams remarked in his diary upon his delight in the grand scenery. On the way to the mountains they encountered several miners near death; the company doctor dispensed medicine to ease the pain of their last hours. Abrams wrote of the graves of "... Two poor fellows who were hung but a few days since" for stealing up in the "diggings." Shaken by these sights, the party marched on and arrived at a "beautiful spot" on the Stanislaus River with "feet so sore, to see the boys move about reminded me of a Shaker dance in New Hampshire." At this point, Abrams noted that they all proceeded to prospect and mine with varying levels of success.

Sickness still plagued the members of the party. Abrams spent several hours in daily prayer and read and reread his wife's letters which caused him "... a

touch of the blues." He wished himself "... at home and in easy circumstances." Days of bone-chilling and backbreaking work were yielding only one or two ounces of gold which netted the argonauts only two or three dollars a day. Abrams maintained his humor at tasks like washing his own clothes, and sustained himself by prayer during these difficult, affliction-riddled days. Following one of its typical prayer meetings under a grand oak tree, the company, by a majority vote, decided to disband; Abrams and Reamer trudged back to Stockton on September 24th.

There they met a man who wanted to establish a steam mill in the San Jose Valley town of Pueblo. Disappointment followed a rugged ride to the mill site—the place was so unsuitable and the man in charge acted so offensively that their spirits ebbed very low.

Abrams became obsessed during this time with securing a contract to set up a mill. It would allow him to return home for the necessary machinery and to retrieve his family at the same time. Homesickness haunted him continuously during these days. Following the aborted Pueblo deal,

he returned to Stockton, and secured work as a carpenter for \$8 a day. On September 29th he wrote that they were "... fortunate enough to get some hay to lay between us and the floor last night and had a full night's rest..." Such were the lives of men in 1849 in gold rush California.

Abrams next affiliated himself with a fellow named Murphy who hoped to construct a mill once he found a good location. Abrams worked to persuade Murphy to build "... a steam mill instead of a water mill in which I would be on my way to my loved ones by the next steamer." On October 3rd, Abrams and Reamer started for Murphy's ranch to investigate possible mill sites on the Merced River to supply lumber for the nearby mining camps.

Following an entry in his diary for October 7th in which he chides himself for inadvertently committing a horrible sin of shooting an elk on the Holy Sabbath, the diary is totally silent until October 18th. The diary then picks up, in a literal transcription:

*"Returned to S.F. after visit to Savage's property on Merced R. (river). prospects none too good for a mill. Savage is a blaspheming fellow who has five squaws for wives for which he*

"THIS PASSAGE FIXES THE UNIQUE STATUS OF ABRAMS AND REAMER AS THE FIRST NON-INDIANS TO ENJOY THE CLASSIC YOSEMITE VALLEY VIEW FROM ITS SOUTHWESTERN RIM, AND TO RECORD WHAT THEY SAW IN UNQUESTIONABLE TERMS."

*takes his authority from the Scriptures While at Savages Reamer and I saw grizzly bear tracks and went out to hunt him down getting lost in the mountains and not returning until the following evening found our way to camp over an Indian trail that led past a valley enclosed by stupendous cliffs rising perhaps 3000 feet from their base and which gave us cause for wonder. Not far off a water fall drops from a cliff below three jagged peaks into the valley while farther beyond a rounded mountain stood, the valley side of which looked as though it has been sliced with a knife as one would slice a loaf of bread and which Reamer and I called the Rock of Ages."*

Doubtless Abrams was recounting the features of the Yosemite Valley. This passage fixes the unique status of Abrams and Reamer as the first non-Indians to enjoy the classic Yosemite Valley view from its southwestern rim, and to record what they saw in unquestionable terms. Perhaps they looked upon the Valley from the vicinity of Old Inspiration Point if they wandered, as Abrams related, on "an Indian trail" and did not follow the Merced River directly into the Valley from Savages on the South Fork.

William Abrams habitually made the original entries in his diaries in pencil and later inked over them. The Yosemite entry, however, was never inked over. It remained legible, however, when the significant diaries were discovered in 1947. Curiously, the diaries were reviewed previously in 1910 for the Oregon Historical Society, but the compiler failed to connect the features Abrams described with the famed Yosemite Valley. The original pencil writing in Abrams' diary has faded slightly but can be discerned to this day.

The Abrams day-to-day journal took up again with an account of his footsore return to San Francisco. He worked as a carpenter for \$12 a day before meeting Mr. Coffin of Portland, Oregon. Coffin employed Abrams to go to Portland to erect and man-



Joseph Rutherford Walker, the leader of the Walker party. Members of that group almost certainly looked down into Yosemite Valley in 1833.

age a mill for a salary of \$300 per month.

He boarded the brig *Seguin* for the northwest in early November, 1849, reaching Bakers Bay at the end of the month. Abrams and Coffin hired a canoe and a crew of Indians for the journey up the Columbia River, arriving in Portland about the 13th of December, 1849. Messrs. Coffin, Reed, and Abrams set up a sawmill on the Willamette River in 1850, and passed a stormy and hard first winter. Abrams made no entry in his diary for several weeks. On February 9th, 1850 he wrote, "I am sitting at what I may call my own table, in my own house and would say that I would be happy most emphatically if my wife and little ones were with me." He had not heard from his

family for over seven months and did not receive any letters until April 10th (they had been sent the previous December).

In June, 1850, the first steamer, named *Caroline*, entered the Columbia River and arrived at Portland. Coffin agreed that Abrams should return to the eastern states on the steamer to deliver dispatches in New York concerning a new mill at Oregon City. Abrams arranged papers, gave final instructions regarding the work at the mill and reached the steamer as it was weighing anchor. He wrote: "this morning I am very happy . . ." It was one of his more positive

The view from Inspiration Point painted by Harry Cassie Best a little later on.



"BUT WORD OF YOSEMITE DIDN'T REACH ABRAMS IN THE SMALL FRONTIER TOWN OF THE DALLES, WITH ITS THREE SANDY STREETS BELOW THE BLUFFS AND 'NOT A GREEN THING TO BE SEEN'. HIS YOSEMITE CONNECTION WENT UNRECOGNIZED IN THE 1860'S."

diary entries during this trying period. In San Francisco, Abrams boarded the steamer *California* where he "found a comfortable berth which with passage cost \$300 and at night was at sea again." Arriving in Panama, he rode a mule to Cruces, reaching Chargas in time to catch the steamer *Georgia* for New York.

After quickly delivering his mail in New York, Abrams rushed to Gainsville, and completed his remaining business. With his long-separated wife and children, he rode the stage to Richmond, then on to New Hampshire to start preparations to ship his family around Cape Horn.

The two-hundred-and-sixty ton bark *Francis and Louise* was chartered, and Abrams loaded it with general merchandise, house furnishings, and plenty of relatives, including his father, brother and sister. They sailed from New York on November 7th, 1850. As the ship headed south the weather grew colder, and the family members spent most of their time in their berths. The ship passed Cape Horn on January 27th, 1851, and after a passage of one hundred fifty-eight days landed at Portland without incident. Upon arrival in Oregon, Abrams constructed the family house at a cost of \$4,000.

Abrams worked in the lumber business for several years until a fire consumed the mills in 1854. Following this financial loss, he moved his family to Corvallis in 1855. He continued his diaries intermittently. Much of the following information relating to the years after 1855 was taken from an unpublished manuscript by a friend of the Abrams family, Seth L. Pope of Portland.

In the summer of 1857, with a new daughter, Clara Minnie, he returned to Portland to manage another mill near the location where the Columbia River opens to the seaways. Two more children were born to the Abrams family in Portland. The family made several more moves around the central Oregon area before



JAMES D. SMILLIE/YOSEMITE COLLECTION

settling in The Dalles, Oregon, a key business location in the upper country. The Dalles was growing as a crucial center of development of the interior, and served as a junction for the long wagon train journeys reaching river transportation.

Meanwhile, in California word was broadcasting about the grand and sublime valley called "Yo Semite." Hundreds of tourists visited the Valley yearly and were accommodated in the rough, newly constructed hotels. Another hardy pioneer, James Hutchings, published his first book entitled *Scenes of Wonder and Curiosity* which proclaimed the merits of this unique natural area. But word of Yosemite didn't reach Abrams

The Big Trees at Mariposa Grove, originally published in *Picturesque America* in the 1870's.

in the small, frontier town of The Dalles, with its three sandy streets below the bluffs and "not a green thing to be seen." His Yosemite connection went unrecognized in the 1860s.

When gold was unearthed in the Blackfoot district of Montana, Abrams was drawn again to the goldfields. This time it was not to mine, but rather to examine the lumber prospects there. During the trip he actively recorded events in his diary and provided much background history for any

student of this northwestern gold rush of 1864.

The Abrams family persevered at The Dalles, and in the spring of 1867 William helped organize the projected Wasco Woolen Mill. Nevertheless, he continued at lumbering during 1868 and 1869, as the mill was slow to take shape. The children grew, and two were married by 1870 when the Abrams relocated once again to Portland.

In a tragic turn of events, on November 20, 1873, William Abrams slipped on a lightless, narrow stairway in the saw mill and plunged nineteen feet to the ground. He was severely paralyzed and endured untold suffering before he died six days later.

William Penn Abrams had lived to the age of fifty-three years, three months, and one day. He was buried at Lone Fir Cemetery, but his remains and those of his three children were removed in 1886 to Riverview Cemetery in Portland.

The diaries of William Abrams illustrate the difficulties and hardships of nineteenth century life in the west. But they also reveal a man with enormous resolve and independence. While the chance visit by Abrams and Reamer to Yosemite's perimeter and the significance of the view they beheld may have been unappreciated by them, the men certainly deserve a respected place in Yosemite's history. And William Penn Abrams, thanks to his meticulous diaries, may one day earn the recognition he deserves as a Yosemite pioneer.

*Dennis Kruska is a member of the Association residing in Sherman Oaks, CA. He is an avid collector of literature and art relating to Yosemite and the Big Trees, and authored Sierra Nevada Big Trees — A History of the Exhibitions, 1850–1903.*



# How to Go to Yosemite Valley



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*Editor's note: The following article first appeared in the Carson Daily Index dated May 28, 1887. Y.A. member Steve Harrison forwarded the piece which tells the "Eastern-built tenderfoot" how to go to Yosemite Valley. Harrison calls it "a classic case of frontier journalistic boosterism." See what you think, and try to imagine what a challenge to the early traveler this route must have been.*

**The average tourist** is a poor ignorant concern who knows hardly enough to get off at a way station and eat a hastily-snatched meal, or to worry the car conductor with questions that naturally furnish their own answers.

The Eastern-built tenderfoot thinks that there is but one beaten trail to the various points of interests on this coast.

Yosemite Valley, being the Mecca of many gaping Down-Easters, is thought to be a hidden wonder which can only be viewed after weeks of arduous travel, while, in fact, it is so easily reached from Carson that the average tramp can get there without a very protracted siege of hunger.

We will give explicit directions, so that all who wish to visit this wonderful rift in the Sierra, which is regarded as one of the

most stupendous things in nature, can do so without going astray.

Tourists may take the cars of the C. & C. road to Hawthorne; then there is a ride of 37 miles to Bodie by stage along a route which is full of interest to an inquiring mind. After pondering upon the wickedness of that camp for a few hours the tourist will start for Mill (now known as Lundy) Creek, 24 miles distant, encountering a chain of wonders. The picturesque wildness of the scenery on both sides of the route is a marvel to the beholder. The snow-capped ridges of the Sierra on one side and the "Dead Sea of America" on the other, form a panorama of dissolving views that even the movements of the slow stage change with startling vividness.

When the mouth of Mill Creek (Lundy) Canyon is reached the most wondrous things on the world's surface begin to heave in sight, and they multiply and pile upon each other, so to speak, until the viewer is utterly lost in contemplating them.

Mill Creek Canyon itself is a terminal moraine chiseled out of the eternal granite of the mountains and littered with the debris created by a thousand centuries

A group of campers in Yosemite Valley in 1890.

of glacial action, after volcanic disturbances had torn and twisted the face of the earth into a daze of fantastic shape.

From this point to Yosemite Valley the scenery is constantly changing. There are scenes of thrilling grandeur on every hand. Riding along the narrow trail the tourist encounters scenes of absorbing interest. The face of the earth has been pitched hither and yon as if God had made a pastime of tossing mountains about. There are beautiful lakes that seem to hang at right angles upon the side of the mountains, with monoliths rising from them to towering heights like fish jumping from the water. After emerging from Lake Canyon, a lateral moraine at right angles south from Mill Creek Canyon, Mount Warren Divide is crossed, at an altitude of nearly 13,000 feet, almost even with the summit of Mount Dana, which lies directly opposite, its sides plastered with living glaciers that have attracted the attention of geologists ever since they were discovered by Prof. Muir, some 12 years ago.

The outlook from this high

perch is almost appalling in its grandeur. It takes time to drink it in, and the looker on is never surfeited. From here it is all down hill, along the shores of beautiful Lake Tenaya, a mile higher than Tahoe, so high and so lovely in its surroundings that hunters and prospectors say that they have heard angels singing in the New Jerusalem; across the Tuolumne Meadows, which is a sea of verdure fringed with towering tamaracks, — only a few miles further on, and Yosemite, that wonderful gash in the crust of the earth, yawns before the tourist, 3,000 feet below him; but his eyes have become so dilated by the sequence of wonders he has encountered during his three days ride from Carson that he can at first sight hardly comprehend the magnitude of the panorama which he scans for three miles on either side. It is the wonderful valley, to be sure, but the traveler confesses to himself that he has encountered a dozen scenes almost as grand since he left Carson.

That is the real route to the Yosemite. There are game and fish all the way, the loveliest spots for camping places if one wishes to go by easy stages, and during the Summer the weather is perfection.

# The Yosemite Field School: A Reminiscence

Paul Allen, Class of '36

**The Yosemite School of Field Natural History** was the cumbersome title of Yosemite's early program emphasizing the study of natural history in the field, which name gave way to the simpler "Yosemite Field School" over the years. The school would never have been without several important men like Harold C. Bryant, Joseph Dixon and Bert Harwell.

Dr. Bryant was Assistant Director of the National Park Service, and in a position to get official backing, financial and otherwise. Bert Harwell, a teacher, could not attend the first session in 1925, but came in 1926. Later, he was Field School Director for some years, as well as Chief Park Naturalist.

In the 1920s and 30s, potential young naturalists were not so busy, and could spend several weeks of a summer without too much economic hardship. Or they were unemployed and hoped to enhance their qualifications for a naturalist job. Some were teachers with summer leisure. Most were single, but marriage was no barrier to participation.

Dr. Bryant's motive seemed to be to train potential naturalists, and to spread the gospel of nature study and appreciation. That a few students would develop into good NPS naturalists was to be expected. A higher percentage of women was accepted during the 1920s, but in the 30s, each class was limited to a total of 20, about 14 men and six women. By that time, college graduation was a prerequisite, usually with a degree in a natural science.

In the early 1930s, Bert Harwell headed the Field School; Joe Dixon was NPS Field Naturalist and Assistant Director. Dr. Bryant had duties elsewhere, but showed up occasionally. Field school students shared Camp 19 with several NPS employees and marauding bears which visited too frequently.

In 1936 I teamed up with Carsten Ahrens, a teacher from Pittsburgh, PA, and Harry "Scoop"



Parker. Our yearbook from that year (and others like it from other field school classes) is full of interesting accounts of attempts to outwit the bears, and other aspects of our summer experiences in Camp 19. For example, one evening we responded to a scream at the foot of the talus slope where two of our girls were cooking a pot of beans centered with a large chunk of ham. We arrived to note the beans scattered over a flat rock, and the bear making his way up the slope, juggling the hot ham.

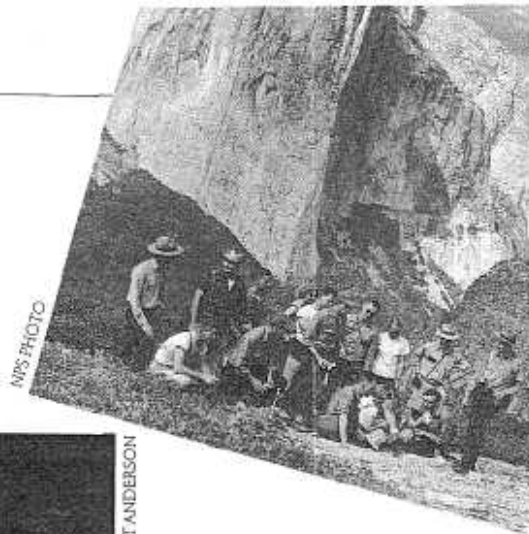
NPS staff and visiting professors gave us the basics at Museum headquarters: NPS policies, geology, botany, ornithology, mammalogy, taxidermy, entomology and more. We all had to do a little of everything. I had no difficulty with insects, but spent a long time doing a poor job of skinning a bird and a mouse. Laboratory sessions were interspersed with one and two day field trips, led by the able and inspiring staff. There was a good balance of work, study and recreation. The schedule was tight, but there was time for social events and some leisure. In recognition of our furious schedule, a graffiti-type sign was placed over the Camp 19 mail box in 1939

which read "CAMP HURRY!"

The rest of the field school staff included such notables as Granville "Bud" Ashcraft, a skillful taxidermist, Ed Beatty, geologist, Jim Cole (Field School '33), mammalogist, Carl Sharsmith (Field School '30), botanist, and Cliff Shirley, botanist. Their expertise was not limited to their specialties.

Visiting professors contributed greatly to Field School. Their enthusiastic participation is indicated by their willingness to work without pay—all they received for their help was a place to stay in Camp 19. Among them were Dr. H. L. Mason, botanist, and E. O. Essig, W. B. Herms and E. G. Linsley, entomologists, all from the University of California at Berkeley.

By the early 1930s there were other good nature schools, but the Yosemite Field School was the most outstanding and desirable, if one could get in. Applications for the 20 spots may have numbered in the hundreds. Top staff picked a few. Dr. Mason told me years later that selection of the remainder was turned over to him and Professor Essig. The task was difficult. They first eliminated from consideration any applicants



KAT ANDERSON

A lesson in the wild. A Field School class in training on Yosemite Valley's south rim.

The 1936 class of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History at its summer banquet.

who mentioned any political figure or affiliation. Representation of various specialties, geographic areas and educational institutions was carefully considered.

Establishment of research quadrats in 1933 did much to enhance continuity of the Field School experience, both scientifically and socially. This was Joseph Dixon's project. The ideas was to establish, study and record in detail 100 square foot quadrats of varying types, then return after 20 years or so and note any changes. The research area chosen was located on what is known as Boundary Hill, where there has been very little human influence. Quadrats are typically representative of ridgetop, granite, cirque, meadow, streamside, pond and chaparral. The 1933 class set up three quadrats; the 1934 and 1935 classes two each. Our 1936 class did well to "complete" one quadrat (as if such an all-inclusive study is ever complete!).

In 1936 we hiked up the Yosemite Creek trail and set up camp on a beautiful Monday just after July 4. Baggage, scientific and community gear were transported to the campsite near the old Tioga Road by truck. That night it began to rain; not a High Sierra thunderstorm but steady, winter-like rain. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, day and night, we contended with intermittent rain. Between showers we went down to the quadrat and worked.

By general agreement, the seven women (six Field Schoolers and the cook) had the privilege of sleeping, as best they could, in the already-full baggage and commis-

**A  
Little  
History**



sary tent. The men scattered, seeking shelter of trees, rocks, anything. By morning everything was well dampened but our spirits. We stood in a circle around a large bonfire, holding between us sleeping bags for drying — and singing as usual. When we ran out of songs we made up our own (some doggerel, some very good). Saturday, the storm over, we hiked from Porcupine Flat down stairway-like Indian Canyon into Yosemite Valley.

The traditional High Trip, two weeks toward the last of Field School, was approaching. A central commissary on a share-alike basis, was arranged. Our 55 cents per pound jerky arrived late, and I helped carry it, between heavy rainshowers, from Tioga Pass to Gaylor Lakes, where we were camped.

Bert Harwell had somewhat of a reputation as a daredevil. Without the wholehearted approval of some wiser heads, he led a few of us up Tenaya Canyon to Tenaya Lake the first day of the High Trip. There were a few close calls, but all made it without injury. The others climbed up via good trail. We climbed lots of peaks, and camped every night at about 10,000 feet.

The route taken by the 1936 Field School class on its high country trip.

The High Trip was an outing with a purpose, and it gave us the opportunity to pursue our personal natural history specialties in the field and to share what we learned around the evening campfire. We had plenty of rain (the violent thunderstorm type) and singing! Joe Dixon, Professor Herms and Dr. Mason were with us the whole trip; Bert Harwell, Carl Sharnsmith and other staff intermittently.

We were allowed 20 pounds of baggage each to be carried from camp to camp, about four moves, by government provided truck and pack horses, at cost. Each individual's share of total expenses, including food, came to \$19.27. That covered the cook, who went for free.

The Field School continued with no major changes through 1941, except that Bert Harwell left Yosemite in 1940 to work for the Audubon Society. Beginning in 1938, research efforts were concentrated in the Swamp Lake area in northwest Yosemite, where there are unique geological and biological phenomena. World War



One of the Yosemite Field School classes relaxes around the camp fire.

II abruptly ended this era of the school.

In 1948, the Field School was revived, but it would never be the same. Bryant, Dixon and Harwell were gone. There was no attempt to resume the Research Reserve work. Times were changing. Young naturalists found positions with economic security, and married earlier. Fewer had a summer to spend without immediate monetary reward. Experiences that were once high adventure and only occasional were becoming commonplace.

Other good nature schools had begun operation. The Park Service, with plenty of funds and personnel to support the Field School during the depression, no longer had money for such purposes during post-war prosperity. In 1953, there were only 19 applicants for what would prove to be the last field school class. All were accepted, and 15 attended. In the face of these various factors, the decision was made to discontinue the program.

Alumni continued to meet semi-annually with reasonable enthusiasm, and various outings alternated with mid-winter dinner meetings. In 1953, 20 years after the first research quadrats had been established, a group of old field schoolers assembled at Yosemite Creek Campground with Bert Harwell to work on the Research Reserve project. We did not quite know what to do, but with the original volumes made notes of the changes we saw. Some were striking, some were minimal.

With the exception of one year of very heavy snowfall and all the



The 1934 class of the Yosemite Field School assembled atop Matterhorn Peak.

"regulars" being otherwise occupied, there has been a research party every summer since. Some of the work has been amateurish, some very professional. Beginning in 1954 we had some excellent non-Field School help. After 36 years we are now assured that, with the gradual demise of the originals, the younger researchers will carry on the work indefinitely.

Present seminars sponsored by the Yosemite Association no doubt are more scientific, thorough, serve many more people, and provide similar opportunities for good fellowship. But there will never again be anything like the Yosemite Field School.

*Paul Allen is a Y.A. member who is still active with Field School alumni activities. He resides in LaGrange, California.*

NES PHOTO

JOE DIXON/NPS

# Yosemite's Native Plants and the Southern Sierra Miwok

Kat Anderson

**The secrets of Yosemite's early human history** are locked up in her native plants. The Southern Sierra Miwok who inhabited this region for over 800 years, probably gathered every kind of plant that grew in Yosemite Valley for such creative uses as basketry, foods, medicine, games, shelters, clothing, and ceremonies.

Although the original cedar bark houses, acorn granaries, and sweat lodges of the Miwok have long since vanished, many of the plants that they cared for and gathered still grow in groves, clumps, or singly in obscure nooks and crannies in the Valley. They remind us of a former way of life. In fact, there are few vistas anywhere in the Valley where one does not see a waterfall or granite cliff framed by plants once used by the Miwok.

Although some of these plants were planted by the National Park Service, most are natives. For example, the oldest black oaks (*Quercus kelloggii*) were here long before Anglos entered the Valley and would have been harvested for acorns by the Miwok in Chief Tenaya's time. The California bay (*Umbellularia californica*) trees which border the path up to Bridalveil Fall are perhaps descendants of the very trees harvested by the Miwok of their bay fruits which they roasted and ate. Lafayette Bunnell states in his book *Discovery of the Yosemite, and the Indian War of 1851* that the Mariposa Battalion found caches stored with California bay fruits near Cathedral Rocks in Yosemite Valley in March of 1851.

The Miwok had names for every kind of plant and knew where they grew and when they flowered. Special stories were told about certain plants. For example, in the beginning of the world the elderberry tree, as it swayed to and fro in the breeze, made sweet music for the star-maidens and kept them from falling asleep. Thus, elderberry branches were harvested by the Miwok and



made into musical instruments such as clapper sticks and flutes.

Knowledge of Yosemite's native plants increases our appreciation of the native people. It is also enriching to learn that a given branch was used to make a pipe; that a seed stalk made a meal; that the moss growing on the old oak served as a dye; that the sharp end of a leaf performed as a needle. The character of each plant takes on new dimensions when transformed by human hands through scraping, skinning, soaking, peeling, boiling, mashing, grinding, fire-hardening, splitting, and decorating.

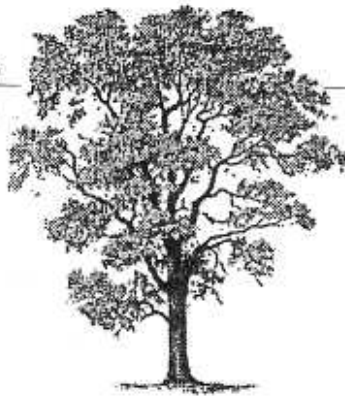
## Gathering the Mountains

The Miwok tapped nature's creative ferment and hidden dimensions in all their activities: tasting the sweet juice of wild grapes; shaping small pockets in granite while pounding all kinds of seeds; weaving branches and roots into beautiful baskets; smell-

NPS PHOTO  
Indian women leaching acorn flour, around 1900. Yosemite resident Tabuce hulling acorns in Yosemite Valley in 1936, and harvesting manzanita berries in 1931.



Black Oak



Quercus Kelloggii



ing bear clover that is carried on a light wind; tasting the mild potato-like flavor of a wild bulb or corn.

Grasses, sedges, vines, ferns, herbs, shrubs and trees, all the life forms of nature, were gathered to meet Miwok cultural needs. Plant parts harvested included: bark, berries, branches, bulbs, rhizomes, corms, tubers, cones, flowers, leaves, pitch, roots, seeds and stems. For example, the branches of willows (*Salix* spp.), the flower stalks of deergrass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*), the branches of Bull Pine (*Pinus sabiniana*), and the rhizomes of bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum* var. *pubescens*) were gathered for basketry material.

The special relationship the Miwok had with plants can never be fully described. For instance, the sensory and spiritual impressions experienced by an elder Miwok basketmaker can't well be captured by words. The smell

of fresh bark, the play of light through the branches, the sounds, the coolness of earth to the touch are all uniquely personal. As well, there are a number of cultural associations such as the secret rituals performed for each plant, the memories of gathering with one's grandmother, and the searching out and development of a favorite gathering spot, that can never be fully revealed to the interested non-Indian.

The Southern Sierra Miwok did not engage in "plant taking." Their familiar phrase for collecting plant resources was "gathering." The definition of "gather" is "to unite" or "to get or collect gradually from various places, sources, etc." Gathering brings humans and plants together. On the other hand, to "take" is "to get possession of by force or skill; seize, grasp, catch, capture, win,

etc.; to get by conquering." Taking is the retrieving of something—without giving anything back.

#### Renewable Resources

It was possible to exhaust the sources of gathering, but that was not the Miwoks' aim. The aim was to gather enough—enough for one's family, friends, and neighbors and perhaps extra to trade.

Tending of favored plants in the Valley was a common phenomenon. Through the horticultural techniques of burning, pruning, weeding, tillage, sowing of seed, and selective harvesting the Miwok encouraged selected plant and animal resources.

Miwoks who gather today still believe that the plants yearn to be used and if they're not used they'll die. Through gathering, each plant is honored.

#### Seeds

Historically, California has been called a "wild seed garden." The Southern Sierra Miwok gathered no less than 42 kinds of seeds (using seedbeaters) from herbaceous plants and wild grasses such as clarkias, owls clover, Indian paint brush, wild oats, California buttercup, and red maids. Seeds were the main protein source and the most significant plant part in the Miwok diet.

John Muir, in *My First Summer in the Sierra*, described the Valley as follows: "The level bottom seemed to be dressed like a garden—sunny meadows here and there, and groves of pine and oak."

When the first Anglos entered the Valley it was a mosaic of ponderosa pine stands, oak groves and large meadows with lengthy vistas up and down the Valley. The plant composition was drastically different from today's as were the food plants collected.

The drier meadows were probably laden with California native grasses and would have been eagerly harvested in the summer by the Indians. Joseph Smeaton Chase describes the grasses of the Valley sometime around 1911: "As midsummer comes on, nature takes up the

full burden of her labor of love. Grasses grow knee-high, and, ripening their humble fruitage, roll in russet tides over the meadows and surge against the forest wall."

Muir's description of the women gathering grass seed on the east side of the Sierra would probably have been applicable to Yosemite Valley as well. "I came to a patch of *Elymus*, or wildrye, growing in magnificent waving clumps, bearing heads six to eight inches long. The crop was ripe, and Indian women were gathering the grain in baskets by bending down large handfuls, beating out the seed, and fanning it in the wind."

Other native grass seeds that may have been harvested in Yosemite Valley are nodding stipa,



C.A. HARTWELL/NEP



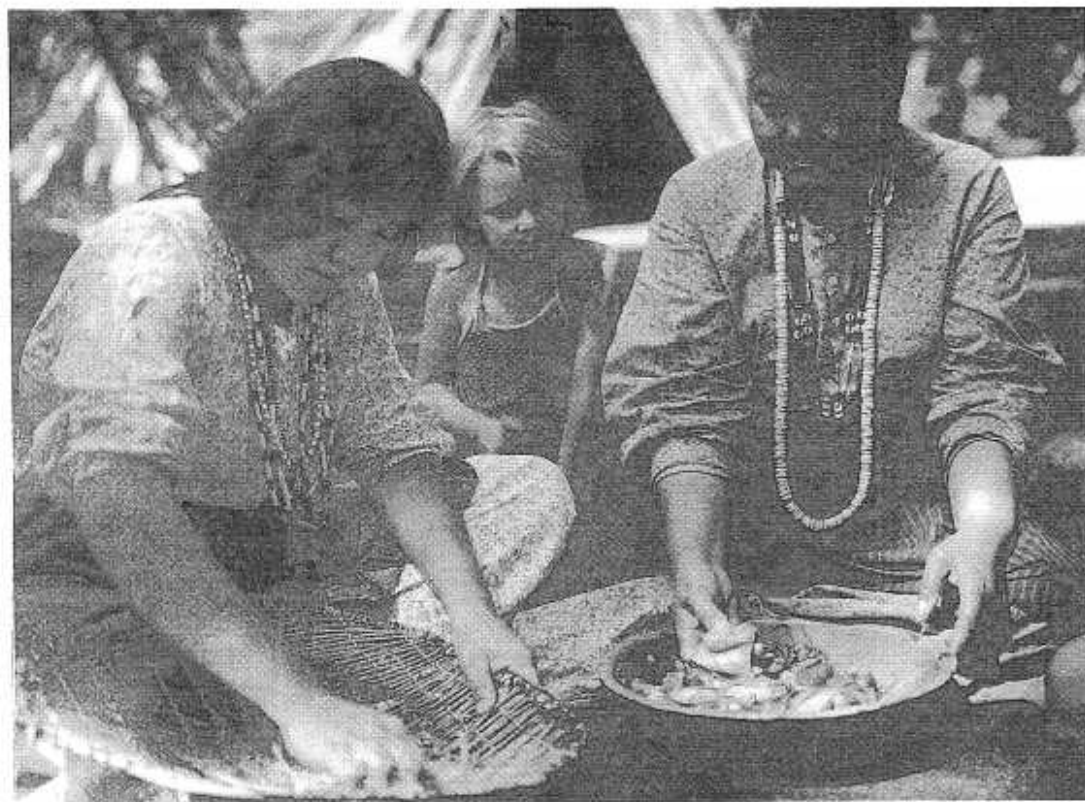
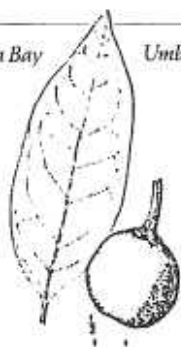
KAT ANDERSON

Florence Brocchini collecting elderberry in the Mariposa County foothills.

meadow barley, and California oatgrass. Today in place of those grasses we have exotics. Notable among them is the wild oat (*Avena fatua*) called "To-lo-ma" in Miwok. In later times, the Miwok harvested these seeds in place of the native grasses using a seed-beater and burden basket. As early as 1851, Bunnell came upon an abandoned rancheria near Cathedral Rocks and discovered caches of scorched oats. After

California Bay

Umbellularia californica



NPS PHOTO

Anglo contact, pinole consisting of tarweed seeds and wild oats was nearly as important as acorns in the Miwok diet.

The black oak groves in the Valley were much more extensive in 1851 than they are today. Muir wrote that the black oak trunks sometimes reached a thickness of from four to nearly seven feet and that the trees occupied the greater part of the broad sandy flats of the upper end of the Valley (*The Yosemite*).

According to Galen Clark in *Indians of the Yosemite*, the black oak (*Quercus kelloggii*) acorns were considered the best and most nutritious by the Indians. Chase noted that under the hot Indian summer sun "the acorns ripened suddenly, falling in showers at every push of wind like raindrops rattling on a roof."

If there was a poor crop of acorns from the black oak, the Miwok collected acorns from the gold cup oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*), which acorns were reputed hard

to shell. Muir indicated that the gold cup oak grew on the earthquake taluses and benches of the sunny north wall of the Valley, and said: "In tough, unwedgeable, knotty strength, it is the oak of oaks, a magnificent tree."

C. H. Merriam, an early ethnographer of the Miwok, visited Yosemite Valley in 1910 and discovered that: "The Indians were cooking acorns of the black oak in baskets by means of hot stones. Newly gathered acorns were spread out drying in the shallow flattish baskets and circular ones of their own making, called hettal and the snowshoe shaped ones of the Mono Piute called wonah."

Merriam also saw the old-time acorn granaries in the Valley. Today acorns are stored in gunnysacks, wooded boxes and cardboard boxes. In fact, black oak acorns are still gathered by about 65% of the Southern Sierra Miwok families. Biscuits, soup, and mush are prepared from acorns,

Indian Cultural Demonstrators in Yosemite Valley continue to share Southern Sierra Miwok traditions and practices with thousands of visitors each year.

and it is not uncommon to find acorn mush in the refrigerator when visiting Indian families in the fall. Miwok families share this tradition with people of other ethnic backgrounds, by teaching thousands of visitors each year the intricacies of acorn processing and cooking in the Indian Village behind the Visitor's Center.

### Greens

The Southern Sierra Miwok used at least 48 species of plants as greens such as cow parsnip, alum root, buckwheat, Indian rhubarb, and monkey flower. "Greens" here are defined as leaves or stems of plants. These were eaten raw, stone-boiled in a basket, or steamed in an earthen oven. They were often served with acorn soup.

Different types of clovers

(*Trifolium* spp.) known as "Ha-ker" must have been very common in the Valley at one time. According to Bunnell, while Tenaya was held captive in this Valley he was "turned loose to graze upon the young clovers."

Clover was eaten raw when the plants were young and tender prior to the flowering stage, while some species were steamed before eating. Miwok people remember gathering clover when children. One type of clover gathered was called "cochoche" and bunches of it were rolled up and eaten with salt.

Other popular greens harvested from the Valley floor were different species of lupine (*Lupinus* spp.) called "Wa-ta-ka." Early in the spring their leaves and flowers were stripped from the stalk then steamed in an earthen oven or boiled. The leaves were sometimes eaten with acorn soup, or as a relish with manzanita cider.

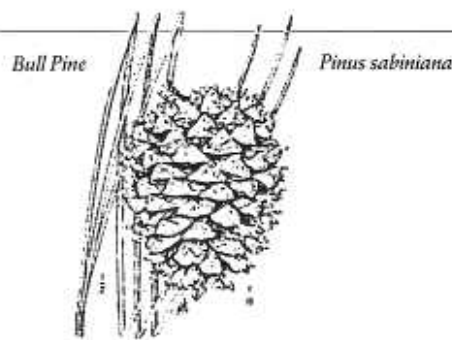
The shoots of the bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum* var. *pubescens*), which commonly grows in moist, shaded regions on the Valley floor and along side canyon walls, were cut as they began to uncurl in the spring and eaten as greens by the Yosemite Miwok.

The leaves of several species of sour docks (*Rumex* spp.) were gathered in Yosemite Valley and either steamed or eaten raw depending on the species. Many Indians can remember gathering the leaves as children, especially along the Merced River. Lots of it grew by the old swinging bridge near Yosemite Lodge. Kids always brought salt with them to sprinkle on the leaves which they rolled up to make little sour balls. The greens are still gathered, especially in the springtime.

### Berries

Berries provided and continue to provide snacks for the Southern Sierra Miwok. At least 31 species were eaten in the past such as sourberry, salmonberry, raspberry, huckleberry and serviceberry.

According to Galen Clark, manzanita (*Arctostaphylos* spp.)



KAT ANDERSON

berries were the main berries used by the Yosemite Indians. Though hard to digest, they were cracked and eaten raw. Barrett and Gifford reported in 1933 that the berries were chewed to extract the flavor, but not swallowed. Manzanita flowers were eaten raw.

Muir noted that "The pleasant acid berries, about the size of peas, look like little apples, and a hungry mountaineer is glad to eat them though half their bulk is made up of hard seeds. Indians, bears, coyotes, foxes, birds and other mountain people live on them for weeks and months."

The manzanita berries were selected by hand and dropped into a burden basket, or a flat sifting basket was held under different parts of a shrub to catch the berries as the bush was shaken or struck with a stick.

In his journal for 1869, Muir wrote about manzanita berries that: "the Indians are said to make a kind of beer or cider out of them." Merriam described the cider as "less sweet than new made apple

Amy Rhoan gathering sourberry (*Rhus trilobata*) for basketmaking.

cider and slightly more acid, yet cooling and delicious."

Indian descendants can remember relatives gathering the berries for eating and making cider, and manzanita cider is still prepared the traditional way. The berries are crushed with a mortar and pestle, either cold or hot water is poured over them, and the resulting mixture is steeped and then strained.

Another berry that at one time grew profusely on the Valley floor is the native strawberry (*Fragaria californica*). Although small in size, the native berry has a flavor that is much stronger than the commercial varieties. One Miwok elder remembers that the best strawberries grew in front of the old Superintendent's house (now the Resource Management Building), and she can remember gathering strawberries there with her grandmother in the 1920s and at

Camp Curry in the 1930s.

The wood of the elderberry (*Sambucus caerulea*) served for flutes and clapper-sticks for the Miwok, and its berries were eaten cooked. Sometimes the Indians dried large amounts of elderberries for winter food, re-cooking it when needed. Commenting upon a visit to Yosemite Valley in the early 1900s, Hudson reported that elderberries were commonly used as food.

Several Miwok families still gather elderberries and make them into jellies and pies. The berries are not gathered one by one, but in clumps, by pruning a cluster of fruits. The berries are then put into a paper sack and taken home. Immediately, the berries are delicately removed from the branches, and leaf and stem litter is picked out. After a light washing, they are ready to be used in recipes.

### Bulbs, Corms and Tubers

At least 29 different types of bulbs, corms and tubers ("Indian potatoes") were eaten by the Southern Sierra Miwok, and they were probably the second most important plant part consumed, after seeds. Bulbs and corms were transported in burden baskets to the cooking place for baking in an earthen oven or roasting in the coals of a fire. Those roasted were sifted in a winnowing basket to remove the ashes before eating. Several species were eaten raw. If the quantity of bulbs and corms gathered was small, they were stone-boiled in baskets.

According to Godfrey, the best bulbs for eating were squawroot, the various brodiaeas (especially the harvest brodiaea) and camas. Yosemite's meadows at one time were laden in the spring and summertime with edible Indian potato plants, forming tints of white and blue across large stretches of the landscape. These were interspersed with the native grasses and clovers. The soil in these meadows was soft and pliable from centuries of digging. The women often carried digging

sticks made of mountain mahogany when they traveled, which sticks were used almost exclusively to retrieve this plant part.

Maria Lebrado, the granddaughter of Tenaya, returned for the first time to the place of her birth, Yosemite Valley, in 1929 (78 years had passed). She pointed to Eagle Peak and told of the gathering of Indian potatoes along the slope and up the trail. Brodiaea was probably one of the corms she gathered. There are several species that grow in the Sierra foothills amongst the poppies and in the drier areas of the meadows in Yosemite Valley. All are edible. Miwoks still gather several kinds of brodiaeas and eat them raw or boiled like potatoes. They can be gathered in the spring before flowering or in the summer after flowering has finished.

The bulbs of the wild onion (*Allium* spp.) were eaten, and the bulbs flavored soups and stew. Hall and Hall reported in 1912 the plants growing in small beds in the Yosemite region. Many elders can remember gathering the bulbs with relatives in the spring before flowering. The bulbs are today gathered by many Southern Miwok families and accompany major meals.

Several Southern Miwok descendants still gather the tubers of sanicles (*Sanicula* spp.) and call them "tunis." The black skin is scraped off before the tuber is eaten. The plants are found in yellow pine forests and are harvested with a stick or crow bar in spring or summer. They are often identified by the smell of the leaves. The tuber has a stronger flavor when the flower has gone to seed.

*Kat Anderson has spent four years conducting ethnographic and ethnohistoric work with the Southern Sierra Miwok. She holds a master's degree in Wildland Resource Science from UC Berkeley, and is enrolled in a PhD program there in the same field. Her areas of interest are ethnographic research methods, botany, ecology and anthropology.*

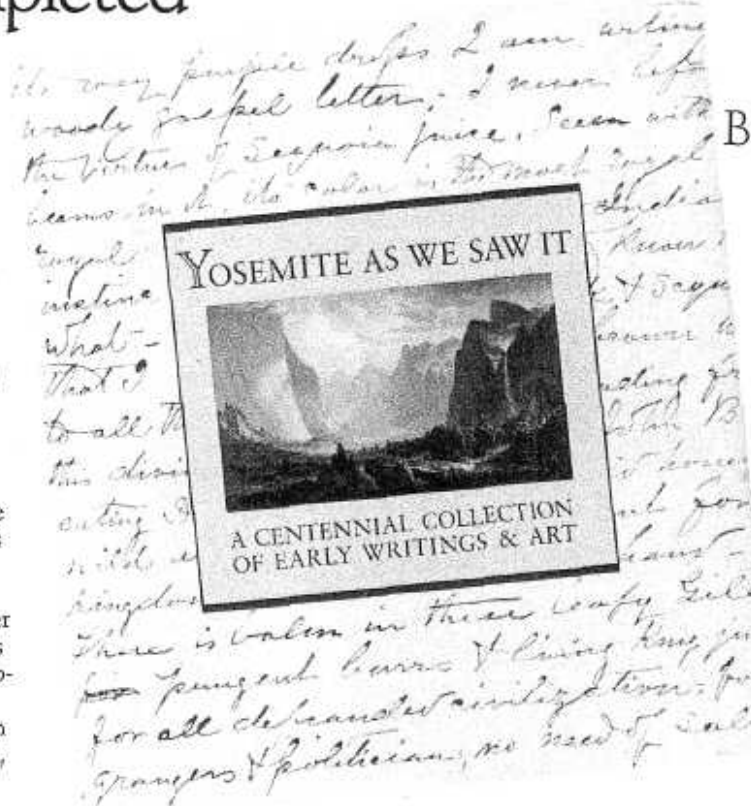
# Association's New Centennial Book Completed

The Yosemite Association is pleased to announce the publication of its new book to commemorate Yosemite's centennial anniversary as a national park. Titled *Yosemite As We Saw It—A Centennial Collection of Early Writings and Art*, the elegantly printed anthology was the project of David Robertson assisted by Henry Berrey.

*Yosemite As We Saw It* is a many-paged banquet of literature and art, emphasizing the decades before and after 1890. Diarists, travel writers, essayists, poets, photographers, painters and other graphic artists are included in this bill of fare, amateur as well as professional. The aim of the editors is to let the artists serve their own specialties as they prepared them, and to add a few seasonings in the form of a narrative line or a commentary here and there.

The initial chapter presents the thoughts and feelings of the uninitiated at the moment of their first entry into Yosemite Valley. The last chapter contains an account of one particularly moving departure from the park, and provides, as well, an occasion for Yosemite veterans to reflect on its lasting meaning and value. In between are chapters on its major features: monoliths, waterfalls, and big trees.

These significant and entertaining excerpts from Yosemite's literature are arranged thematically and paired with contemporaneous works of art that are illustrative of the period and theme. The result is a fascinating



anthology that brings historical perspective to Yosemite's 100th birthday as a national park.

Poet Gary Snyder has said of the book: "David Robertson's fine survey of the diverse ways the Euro-American mind was triggered by the archetypal grandeur

of Yosemite is astonishing. Divinity, wrath, sublimity, ecstasy, sarcasm and boredom all flooded out of it. One wonders what travelers of the future will yet see. Is it the great universe that provokes us thus? Or some hidden aspect of ourselves? A splendid compact

gathering of passionate views."

In his foreword, historian Kevin Starr writes: "*Yosemite As We Saw It* is a distinctive form of book, a hybrid between an anthology and an analytical monograph... it functions as the most comprehensive anthology of Yosemite literature ever to be made available to the public... and celebrates more than 130 years of American encounter with the Yosemite."

Book collectors will no doubt appreciate that the volume was printed by Meriden-Stinehour Press of Lunenburg, Vermont, on Mohawk Superfine paper. The 24 color plates reproduce early art works (many from the Yosemite Museum collection which have not before appeared in a publication) and were meticulously handled with amazingly fine results. The book designer was Desne Border of San Francisco, and the Sabon type was set by Mackenzie-Harris, also of San Francisco. Two thousand cloth-bound only copies were produced.

YA members and friends will recognize David Robertson as the author of *West of Eden*, as a gifted photographer and professor of English at UC Davis, and as a Yosemite Association board member. Henry Berrey served for fifteen years as the Managing Editor of the Yosemite Natural History Association and has contributed his talents to many fine publications over the years.

Ordering information for *Yosemite As We Saw It* is provided in the catalog section of this journal.

## The Booklist Review

**Editor's note:** The following review appeared in the September 1, 1990 issue of *Booklist*, the journal of the American Library Association.

**Celebrating Yosemite's** one hundredth anniversary of national parkhood, this is a handsome anthology of literature and art about a place that "has emerged in the national imagination as an icon of identity." The editors have put together an assortment of impressions of Yosemite beginning with the account of the first white man's view of the potent panorama by the Mariposa Battalion in 1851. All narratives encompass the same experience of "incomparable grandeur, the mystic ecstasy... the struggle... to find metaphors that might measure the height of mountains and the depth of personal feelings, and a strange sense of peace so pervasive that even death loses its sting." More recent works include a poem by Gary Snyder. The chromolithographs, drawings, engravings, and paintings (24 in color) attempting accurate depictions of monoliths, waterfalls, and giant trees are from the earlier half of the period. For broad American history, specialized national park, and nature collections. All proceeds support the park. — Donna Seaman

209-379-2317

If you're planning a trip to Yosemite and have questions, give our Members' phone line a call between the hours of 9:00 am and 4:30 pm Monday through Friday. We don't make reservations, but we can give the appropriate phone numbers and usually lots of helpful advice.

## Association Dates

- September 8, 1990:** Members' Meeting, Wawona
- December 1, 1990:** Deadline for Grant Applications.
- March 23, 1991:** Spring Open House, Yosemite Valley
- September 14, 1991:** Members' Meeting, Tuolumne Meadows





**A** *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* by Alfred Runte. In this long-awaited work, the author details the history of the tension and shifting balances between preservation, an ideal from the park's beginning, and use in Yosemite. The preservation ideal has been compromised, Runte asserts, by the need to accommodate people and by a competing set of management values under which the National Park Service has toiled. Because Yosemite is too important "to be just another place," Runte believes that this fact should guide all future management policies for the park. With 6 color and 50 black and white illustrations. University of Nebraska Press, 1990. #19350 (clothbound): \$24.95.

**B** *Yosemite As We Saw It—A Centennial Collection of Early Writings and Art* by David Robertson. This is Y.A.'s new centennial book mentioned in this journal. Representative excerpts from the early literature of Yosemite have been paired with beautiful four-color reproductions of art primarily from the Yosemite Museum. Gary Snyder called the book "a splendid compact gathering of passionate views." *Yosemite As We Saw It* elegantly celebrates more than 130 years of American encounter with the Yosemite. 104 pages with 24 color plates. Yosemite Association, 1990. #800 (clothbound): \$34.95.

**C** *Trains of Discovery* by Alfred Runte. Revised edition. In this updated version of a classic national parks train book, Runte has explored the roughly 80 years during which Americans used passenger railroads to travel to their national parks. There are chapters discussing the various lines to Glacier, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and other locations. Liberally illustrated with both color and black-and-white photographs, the book also looks to the future with the hope that trains will become a viable transportation alternative for our parks again. 86 pages. Roberts Rinehart, Inc., 1990. #17225 (paper): \$16.95.

**D** *Yosemite—An American Treasure* by Kenneth Brower. The National Geographic Society has produced this handsome new book for Yosemite's centennial, and it's only available from the Society and from us. Written by David Brower's son, Kenneth, the volume is a personal study of Yosemite that's full of optimism. Brower looks at every aspect of the park from its natural history to the people who frequent it (there are great sketches of Howard Weamer, Jim Snyder, Julia Parker, and others), and finishes with a chapter on the park's prospects for the future. Illustrated with over one hundred color photographs, the book is 200 pages long. National Geographic Society, 1990. #18590 (hardbound): \$8.95.

**E** *Challenge of the Big Trees* by Lary M. Dilsaver and William C. Tweed. This "resource history" of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks presents the significant causes and effects of man's influence there. The authors explore the campaigns to establish these parks and the critical decisions that have controlled their use and development. For students and aficionados of the Sierra Nevada, the book is full of important information about the past and takes a look at new directions for the coming years. Sequoia Natural History Association, 1990. #6740 (paper): \$14.95; #6741 (clothbound): \$24.95.

**F** *Hetch Hetchy and its Dam Railroad* by Ted Wurm. For railroad buffs and Yosemite historians, this is one of the essential volumes, and it's been out of print for quite some time. This is the second printing with no apparent changes from the first. But it's still full of information available nowhere else and illustrated with over 480 photographs, maps and drawings. The 298-page book shows that the Hetch Hetchy project was one of the most ambitious and enduring works ever undertaken. Trans-Angio Books, 1990. #11150 (hardbound): \$54.95.

**G** Yosemite Association Cap. Complete your outdoor wardrobe with this trendy item from the Association collection! It's the perfect hat for a hot, sunny day in the great outdoors—mesh fabric to keep a cool head, a generous bill to shade your face, and adjustable strap in the back to insure a good fit for everyone. All of this plus the Yosemite Association patch to let everyone know what your favorite organization is! Brown with white accent. #1600, \$6.00.

**K** Pelican Pouch, *Wilderness Belt Bag*. The Pelican Pouch is not only perfect for carrying field guides, but also offers instant access to all the small items that are usually buried in your pack—pocket camera, lenses, maps, or your favorite trail mix! The Pouch is designed with front snap fasten-

ers on the straps. This allows comfortable positioning on your belt—even between belt loops; no need to take your belt off first. The material is high quality Cordura pack cloth with a waterproof coating on one side. Beige with the dark brown and white Yosemite Association patch, the Pelican Pouch measures 8 x 5 x 2½ inches. #1690, \$11.95.

**L** Yosemite Association Decals and Patches. Our association logo, depicting Half Dome is offered to our members in these two

useful forms. Help announce your affiliation with our organization to others by purchasing and using Yosemite Association patches and decals. Patch #1635, \$1.50; Decal #1636, \$1.00.

**J** Yosemite Enamel Pin. Designed especially for the Association, our enameled metal pin is a work of art. Each of the 10 different glazes is hand placed and separately fired. The result, from William Spear Design, is an eye-catching and colorful piece. The metal enamel pins are relief engraved in a 7/8 x 2" size. #1695, \$11.95.



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## Next Step in Master Plan Implementation

**Park Service Director James Ridenour**, at a news conference in Yosemite in early August, announced that he is requesting some \$40 million for the construction of a new maintenance and warehouse complex in El Portal so that those operations can be relocated from the park. Such an effort could result in the removal of 20 buildings from Yosemite Valley.

If funding is received, construction could begin in 1992 and be phased over five years, ending in 1996. The existing maintenance building (known by locals as "Fort Yosemite") would be converted for use as a multi-purpose facility, to house interpretation and law enforcement, among others.

Ridenour estimated that the project and relocation would enable the movement of most of the 350 NPS vehicles to El Portal along with 88 jobs.

Key to the success of the proposal is funding. Ridenour's initial request will be for \$16 million, and he has made the maintenance/warehouse complex one of the Service's top priorities for the coming years.

During the press conference, Ridenour alluded to the fact that comments to last year's General Management Plan Examination Report showed that 54% of the public still favors implementation of the original 1980 Master Plan as it was written. He characterized the construction project as one of the key elements of that plan.

## Comparing Yosemite and Yellowstone Fires

**Many have wondered about size comparisons** that can be made between the Yellowstone fires of 1988 and the Yosemite fires of last month. Despite the high level of news coverage, the Yosemite fires did not come close to reaching the magnitude of those in Yellowstone, either in total acreage or in percentage of park area. More than a third of Yellowstone's 2.2 million acres were burned, while barely 2% of Yosemite's acreage (slightly more than 24,000 acres) were involved,

## Photo Book Due Soon

**A beautiful new all-color photographic book** about people in Yosemite by Sacramento Bee photographer Jay Mather will be available for sale by the end of September. Entitled *Yosemite - A Landscape of Life*, the book is a joint publication of the Yosemite Association and the Sacramento Bee.

Mather is a talented artist who has won a number of photo-journalism awards including a Pulitzer Prize. Jay's fellow Bee employee, Dale Maharidge, prepared the text for the book which portrays the reality of man's presence in the park. Maharidge received a Pulitzer Prize for journalism in 1990.

*Yosemite - A Landscape of Life*, a paperback, is filled with numerous full-color photographs. Its format is 9 inches by 12 inches, and it's 120 pages long. Retail price is \$14.95. Members interested in purchasing this fine and unusual new publication should use the catalog order form and request the book by title.

## About This Issue

Continued from page 4

This special edition of the journal includes a variety of articles devoted to different aspects of Yosemite's history, both recent and not so recent. An article about the Southern Sierra Miwok appears, among other reasons, to remind us that Yosemite's history did not begin in the 1800s. Native Americans frequented the park for thousands of years before Euro-Americans came on the scene.

The piece on Yosemite pioneer William Penn Abrams is full of information which only recently became available. And the reminiscence about the Yosemite Field School allows us a glimpse into the fairly recent past and an opportunity to reflect on the evolution of park interpretation and management.

Also in this issue, we are proud to announce the publication of the Yosemite Association's handsome new centennial book entitled *Yosemite As We Saw It* by David Robertson assisted by Henry Berrey. The volume is one of the finest YA has ever produced, and is meant to commemorate this significant event in Yosemite's history.

We wish Yosemite National Park a happy 100th birthday, and encourage all of the Yosemite Association's members and friends to share in the celebration!

### Other Yosemite Centennials

**1833-1933.** The 100th anniversary of the first sighting of Yosemite Valley by the Joseph Walker party.

**1851-1951.** The centennial of the Mariposa Battalion's entry into Yosemite Valley; their's was the first visit by Euro-Americans.

**1864-1964.** The 100th anniversary of the signing of the Yosemite Grant which set aside Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees to be protected by the State of California.

## New Members

We would like to welcome to the Yosemite Association the following fine persons who became members within the past three months. Your support is greatly appreciated.

### Regular Members

Janet Adams, Frances Ades, Evan Adkins, Rebecca Ornelas Alarcon, Mrs A W Allen, D Hawkins & L Allouise, Susan J Anderson, Dr Herb Andrews, Bryan & Liza Apper, Don & Jackie Appleton, Catherine & SJ Armstrong, Margaret Aron, Mrs Joan Ashton, Frances O Aurich, Bonnie Badenoch, Erika Baker, David Baldwin, Lee Bardwell, Bruce & Marian Batten, Brendan J Bausback, Augusta & George Bell, James & Pat Blackburn, Bob Blohm, David J Boiano, Lennea Borg, Barbara Born, Christine D Boyce, Richard & Julie Brady, Jerome Brandmueller, Elizabeth Braun, Patti J Browder, Dorothy Brownold, Mr & Mrs David Brubaker, Richard Burdick, Carolyn & Bob Calhoun, Glenn Campbell, John Cappello, Robert Carloni, Cristina Carreon, Janis & Marty Cassel, Russell Cheney, David & Chor-Jee Chow, Steve Churchman, Kay Clark, Gertrude & Gerald Clawson, John Coad, Lisa D Cochran, Robert Colvin, Lynne & Thomas Cooper, Saul Cooper, William & Arlene Creitz, Judy Curry, Craig Dale, David & Susan Dana, Mary Emma Dean, Sam Deus, Michael Dodds, H Nguyen & M Donahoe, James M Duff, Ann S Duffy, Janine DuFour, Michael Durant, Barbara Dye, Bruce Edmundson, Dale & Pat Edwards, Nick Edwards, Christopher & Tola Eley, Twila Elliot, Eleanor Elliott, Bill Emerson, L A English, Louis M Epperson, Jane & Frank Fedorczyk, William Fee, Susannah Ferson, Steve Fetterhoff, Therese Ann Flood, Carlo & Ruth Flores, Dr & Mrs Wm T Follette, Michael P Fontana, Jean Ford, Dao Foster, Michael Fox, Susannah Freeman, Norma Fritsche, Troy & Susan Frye, Tammi Gabrys, James J Garagan, Mr & Mrs Dee Garrett, P J & Kathy Gaughan, John C Giles, John Gillespie, Susan T Giniger, Susan Gladstone, Joel & Julia Goldstein, Melissa Ann Grant, Myrna Green, Maro & Karin, Jim & Mimi Haff, Dorothy Hamer, Jon D Hanson, James Hare, Joyce Harris, Stephen Hartney, Barbara Haslinger, James & Eleanor Haugh, Sarah Ann B Hay, Alan Hedge, Ruth Ann Heidelberg, David & Mary Hickey, Kathryn Hieb, Bonnie & Eugene Hill, Susan Hillenbrand, Kenneth Hisel, R W Hooper, Wendy L Howell, Forrest Huff, Anne H Isbister, Jim Jarrett, Mary Jensen, Shirley Joe MD, Mark Raymond Johnson, Paul Johnson, Robert R Johnson, Steve & Karyn Johnson, Dan Jonasen, William A Kelly, Mr & Mrs John Kennedy, Jaewook Kim, Jessie Kitching, Susan Light & Ed Kovachy,

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## Join the Yosemite Association

**You can help support** the work of the Yosemite Association by becoming a member. Revenues generated by the Association's activities are used to fund a variety of National Park Service programs in Yosemite. Not only does the Yosemite Association publish and sell literature and maps, it sponsors field seminars, the park's Art Activity Center, and the Ostrander Lake Ski Hut.

A critical element in the success of the Association is its membership. Individuals and families throughout the country have long supported the Yosemite Association through their dues and their personal commitments. Won't you join us in our effort to make Yosemite an even better place?

### Member Benefits

As a member of the Yosemite Association, you will enjoy the following benefits:

☆ *Yosemite*, the Association bulletin, published on a quarterly basis;

☆ A 15% discount on all books, maps, posters, calendars and publications stocked for sale by the Association;

☆ A 10% discount on most of the field seminars conducted by the Association in Yosemite National Park;

☆ The opportunity to participate in the annual Members' Meeting held in the park each fall, along with other Association activities;

☆ A Yosemite Association decal; and

☆ Special membership gifts as follows:

*Supporting Members:* A selection of 8 handsome notecards (with envelopes) featuring beautiful photographs of Yosemite;

*Contributing Members:* Full color poster of Yosemite's wildflowers by Walter Sydoriak;

*Sustaining Members:* A colorful enameled pin depicting a Yosemite waterfall by William Spear,

*Life Member:* Matted color photograph by Howard Weamer of a Yosemite scene; and

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Membership dues are tax-deductible beyond the value of the benefits provided to the member.

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If you are moving, or have recently moved, don't forget to notify us. You are a valued member of the Association, and we'd like to keep in touch with you.

# Yosemite

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Dan Anderson