YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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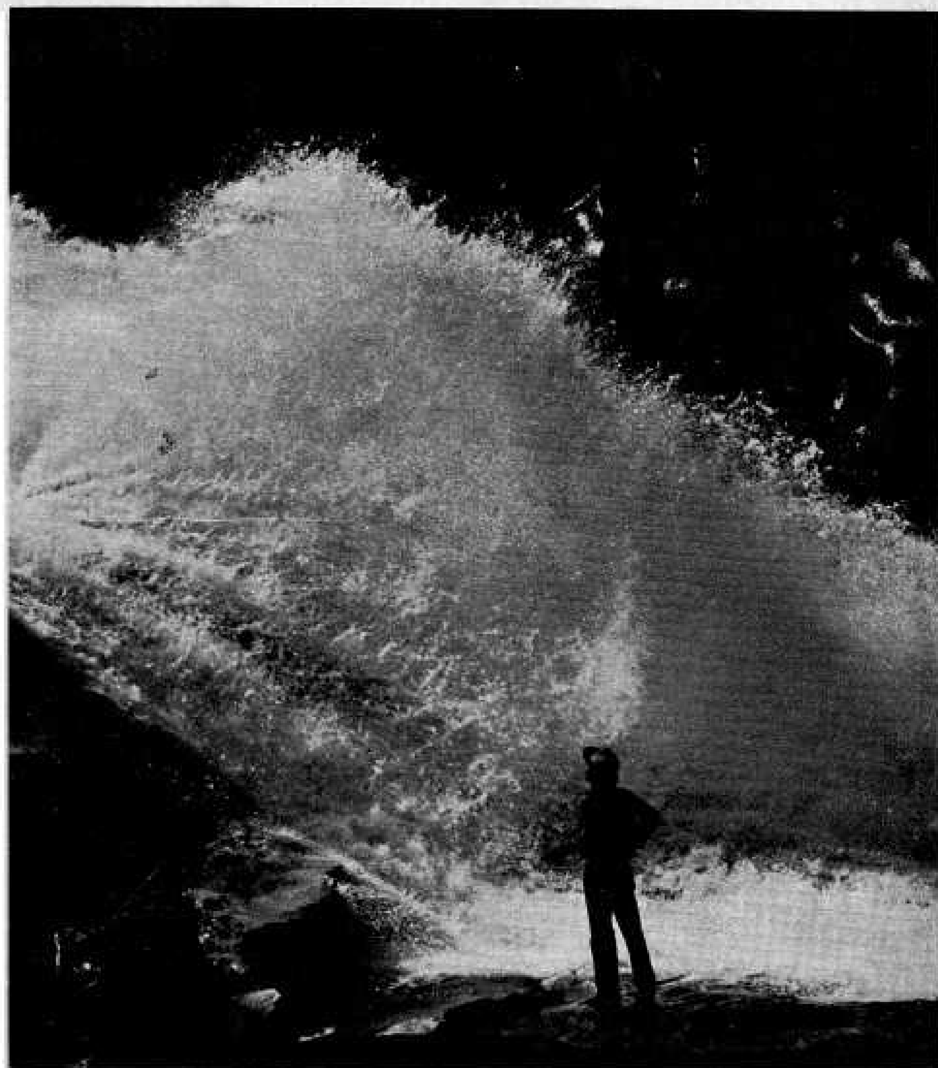

Waterwheel Falls, Yosemite National Park
—Ansel Adams

Yosemite Nature Notes

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QUEER STOREHOUSES IN YOSEMITE

By William S. Rice

EDITOR'S NOTE: The amusing incident recorded below was experienced by Mr. Rice during a visit to Yosemite Valley about 1904 and was first published in *Young People*. We are grateful to Mr. Rice and to his daughter, Mrs. Dorothy Rice Armato, for making it available. Mr. Rice's fine etching (opposite page) hangs in the Yosemite Museum. Several authentic Indian chuckkas, or acorn graneries, may be seen in the Wildflower Garden.

During the summer months the Digger and Piute Indians may be seen at their camps near Indian Canyon, within earshot of the mighty Yosemite Falls, the men engaged in raising and selling ponies, and the women in basket-weaving or beadwork. In autumn when the acorns ripen, they are eagerly gathered by the red men, who regard them as a great delicacy. The women grind the meat of the nuts in stone mortars, converting it into a sort of meal, which, however unpalatable to the American, nevertheless to the Indian tastes quite as good as our best roller flour.

The visitor to the far-famed valley occasionally runs across a group of acorn storehouses or caches, like the ones shown in our illustration. Their construction is most interesting and ingenious. As the tourist comes upon them suddenly in the woods, he is apt to mistake them for some gaunt and grotesque figures. Strictly speaking, they are large baskets supported by a section of tree trunk or stump, and three or four pine poles. The skeleton work of the basket is constructed of long, flexible willow twigs; these are bound together with wild grape vines woven among them and securing the basket to the uprights. The inside of the basket is lined with fir branches, the top thatched with twigs of yellow pine, and sometimes a bit of burlap. Occasionally they are further protected from the rain and snow by a square board.

To the amateur photographer these caches offer a charming subject, as the color effect of their wild setting of rocks, shrubbery and mountains forms a composition that every tourist likes to carry away with him as a souvenir.

The Indians have very queer and superstitious ideas about the white man's making sketches of or photographing their huts, their acorn storehouses or themselves, although one can, with a little persuasion and not a little coin, usually overcome this prejudice, especially in the

minds of the younger folk. The older Indians are not so easily bribed, and are usually very superstitious.

One day, while I was absorbed in painting a water-color sketch of a Digger Indian's hut near the "acorn granaries," I noticed an old crone, whom I had been told was "over a hundred years of age," lying near the dying embers of the camp fire. Her life, too, seemed ebbing away as she pulled her shriveled and almost nude frame together and lay perfectly still.

"Poor old lady!" said her daughter, who sat near by weaving a basket. "She sick; so old; one hundred years!"

"Yes, poor old soul!" I echoed by way of sympathy, and resumed my work. Presently the limbs of the enfeebled and apparently rigid body were observed to relax, and finally she arose. Before I was aware of it, I felt a jarring and bumping of the support of my easel. In trying to save the easel from falling, my paints and brushes were sent scattering in every direction. I looked around, and there was the old "dying" lady tugging away and trying for dear life to break the rear support of my easel across her knees. In startled tones the daughter called to her; and mumbling some inarticulate words, she left me, and disappeared briskly into the brush. Her ruse to solicit alms and sympathy had failed, hence her evident chagrin and disappointment.

Somewhat recovering from my surprise, I picked up the scattered paints and brushes and continued my work uninterrupted — thanks to the fact of my having a "hardwood" easel!

REMINGTON .44

By Douglass H. Hubbard, Associate Park Naturalist

Many a boy—both young and old—will feast his eyes on the beautiful ivory-handled "six-shooter" in the new "Pioneer Hotels" exhibit recently installed in the History Room of the Yosemite Museum. This revolver's interesting story was found in the yellowing pages of the Mariposa *Gazette* for November 1, 1879, and sent to us by Mr. Lawrence V. Degnan who, as a youngster, used to stare at the revolver "with admiration and longing" as it hung on the wall of what was later the Sentinel Hotel, operated for several years by Mr. Barnard:

HANDSOME PRESENT.—Mr. John K. Barnard, of Yo Semite Valley, has recently been made the recipient of a handsome and valuable present, from Col. Squire of the Celebrated Manufacturing Company of E. Remington & Sons, of Ilion, New York. The present consists of a .44 calibre, central fire six-shooter gold and silver plated ivory handle, with the name of the lucky cuss—John K. Barnard engraved on the handle. Now that John has a handle to his name, we hope it will pass muster successfully for scores of years to come. It is a glistening weapon, which will probably be held sacred to the memory of the giver, and as an heirloom to a large family.

WHO FOUND THE GENERAL?

By Vada Flowers

Many an Indian scout trudging along the south rim of the Yosemite Valley, a century or more ago, must have stopped in his tracks and stood still with unbelief when he looked up and saw General Washington gazing across the now-famous national park. There was George, and he is there today, above the lovely valley, with his chin resting upon the colossal upright pillar of granite which towers some 1700 feet skyward from the valley floor. His patrician features seem chiseled from the rocky slopes at the base of bald North Dome, which rises another 1600 feet above the column. For the last 100 years this monument has been known as Washington Tower or Washington Column, but no one knows who actually named the rocky cliff.

The General's famous face can be seen so clearly in the granite rock that it is easy to imagine him in military regalia, with high gold braided collar and all. But the question still remains unanswered: Who was the first to find the General and name him?

Frank Flowers

"TEETER-TAIL"—THE SANDPIPER

By Genevieve Swick

Nature has tought the spotted sandpiper many tricks which help it in its way of life.

One day in summer, while taking a wildlife census of Yosemite Valley with other member of the Yosemite Field School, two of ,us were coming across the sandy greenness of Leidig Meadow, to the spot where our group was to meet for lunch. During the morning, we had frequently heard the *peet-weet* of the spotted sandpiper. Suddenly, a rapid whir of wings and an excited chatter of high-pitched calls drew our attention to the right. It was a spotted sandpiper and from its actions we assumed it to be a mother bird. She flitted off to the left, landed, and fluffed herself as if she were settling on a nest. Promptly she buzzed on to another site and repeated the performance. I would have been fooled into following, hoping that she would lead us to her nest. My companion, however, had been scanning the area from where the bird took wing. Sure enough, in almost the exact spot from where the sandpiper first flew off, we spied a baby sandpiper, huddled down against the sand close to the roots of the grasses and sedges. Its coloration was such good camouflage that the little bird was almost impossible to see.

While we stood watching, the yougster did not move; it hardly seemed to breathe. Frozen in a tail-up position it waited for the danger to pass. We looked around for others as there are usually from 2 to 4 in a brood; we found just the one. As we watched the parent continued its shrill calling and excited teetering and fluttering. These actions are typical of this widely-distributed and familiar shore bird.

A small bird, the spotted sandpiper is just a bit larger than a sparrow, and likes to be alone. Recognition in the field is based on the spotted underparts, grayish-brown back, and a broken white bar along the wing when the bird is in flight. Perhaps the best two characteristics, if the bird is difficult to see or is in silhouette, are the habit it has of teetering up and down while picking its way along the short, and manner of flight—seldom lifting its wings above the level of its back. Even when not teetering the bird holds its head down and forward, as though bowing. Hoffman, in his *Birds of the Pacific States,* describes this flight: "the Spotted Sandpiper holds its wings stiffly outspread, and vibrates

the downward curved tips, not bringing the wings in their strokes above the back."

The young "teeter-tail" is a good illustration of Nature's use of protective coloration. Its fluffy, buff and gray spotted back and white underparts blend perfectly with the sand and gravel of the shore and the dunes which it frequents. The baby sandpiper "freezes" when there is danger, tucks its head down and with tail up, waits until the parent bird "peets" that all is clear.

If sandpipers are disturbed, whether they have young or not, they will often buzz ahead and veer in a circle until the intruder has passed, and then return to almost the same spot. In the case of our friend in Leidig Meadow, as soon as we had gone on a little way, the adult bird circled back to where we had found the baby.

The next time you are along stream banks or near the shore, listen for the *peet-weet* of the sandpiper. Watch for the crescent of his down-swept wings while in flight, and play the game of follow-the-leader as he leads you here and there. If you look closely you might find the fluffy little feather ball with its short tail tipped up, waiting for the "all-clear" signal from its parent. He may be there, but to find him you will have to walk softly and watch sharply!

Anderson

Mt. Lyell and the Lyell Glacier

THE NAMING OF MOUNT LYELL

By Lloyd M. Smith

Of the few glaciers still to be found within Yosemite National Park, perhaps none is better known than the Lyell Glacier, which lies on the slopes of Yosemite's highest peak. Many visitors have hiked to the top of Mt. Lyell, which rises to more than 13,000 feet into the clear, alpine air, and enjoyed the breath taking view to be had from the summit. Few, however, have taken the time to ponder over the name of this lofty peak.

Mt. Lyell was named by members of the Whitney Expedition, to honor a famous scientist. Charles Lyell was born in Scotland in 1797. While still in his teens he attended Oxford University, his interest at that time being entomology. It was here that he was encouraged to study geology by William Buckland, professor of that subject. But to please his father, young Lyell studied law, and in 1825 was accredited to the bar. He then devoted half of his time to law practice and the remainder to his hobby, geology.

He was enthused about writing a textbook of geology, but needed more original data than were then available. As a consequence he teamed up with Roderick Murchison for a summer-long field trip through Europe. The first volume of his *Principles of Geology*, based upon findings made on this trip, appeared in 1830. The second volume was published in 1832 and the third in 1833. By this time the first two volumes were in such demand that a revision was needed.

While Lyell was completing this revision he was made professor of geology at King's College in 1831. He visited the United States and Canada in 1841, lecturing extensively. In 1845 he published his two-volume work, *Travels in North America*. In these he was much concerned with social problems. His *Principles* he continued to revise and supplement, until it had been increased to four volumes. After reading Darwin's newly-published treatise, Lyell added 15 chapters on that subject alone to a new edition of his works.

So strongly stirred was he by Darwin's theory that for the next three years Lyell tramped through France in search of artifacts and other evidences of prehistoric man, and in 1863 he published his *Antiquity of Man*.

He was knighted in 1848, an occasion which pleased but did not flatter him. He combined the trip to attend that ceremony with a visit to the banks of the Dee River to search for new geological evidence.

As he grew older, his eyesight grew steadily worse. The death of his beloved wife in 1873 was a distinct shock to the scientist. His health continued to fail, and a year later Sir Charles Lyell died. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, recognized the world over as one of the great geologists of all times.

So it is fitting indeed that the name of Lyell should be perpetuated in one of the most extensive natural geological laboratories in the world — the great Yosemite.

UNDER TREES

By Leonard G. Nattkemper

I walked beneath great trees today. They are called *Sequoiadendron gigantea.* The name isn't important — neither the size nor the age. A tree has something more than size and age. There is more to a tree than lumber to build houses. There is something sacred and lovable about mountain trees.

Few people ever see trees, although thousands upon thousands look at them. It is too bad that more people do not see them. There would be fewer trees destroyed if more people could really see them.

"How tall is that tree? How big around is it? How old is it? What are they good for? Who planted them?" People who ask such questions do not see the trees.

These great monarchs of the forest are not native to our modern civilization. They can never be acclimatized. They will never come to us. If we would see them we must go to them in their everlasting world of elemental things.

How glad I was that I saw, or rather felt, the trees again today. I seemed to get so near to them. The day was just right — a bit of sun at sunrise, then a robe flung wide across the sky; and then rain without wind, just a quiet, steady rain.

When the wind blows in the trees they seemed too occupied for visitors. But when everything is dry and thirsty, and it rains softly, the trees are in an hospitable mood. Then is the time to enter into the sanctuary of freedom.

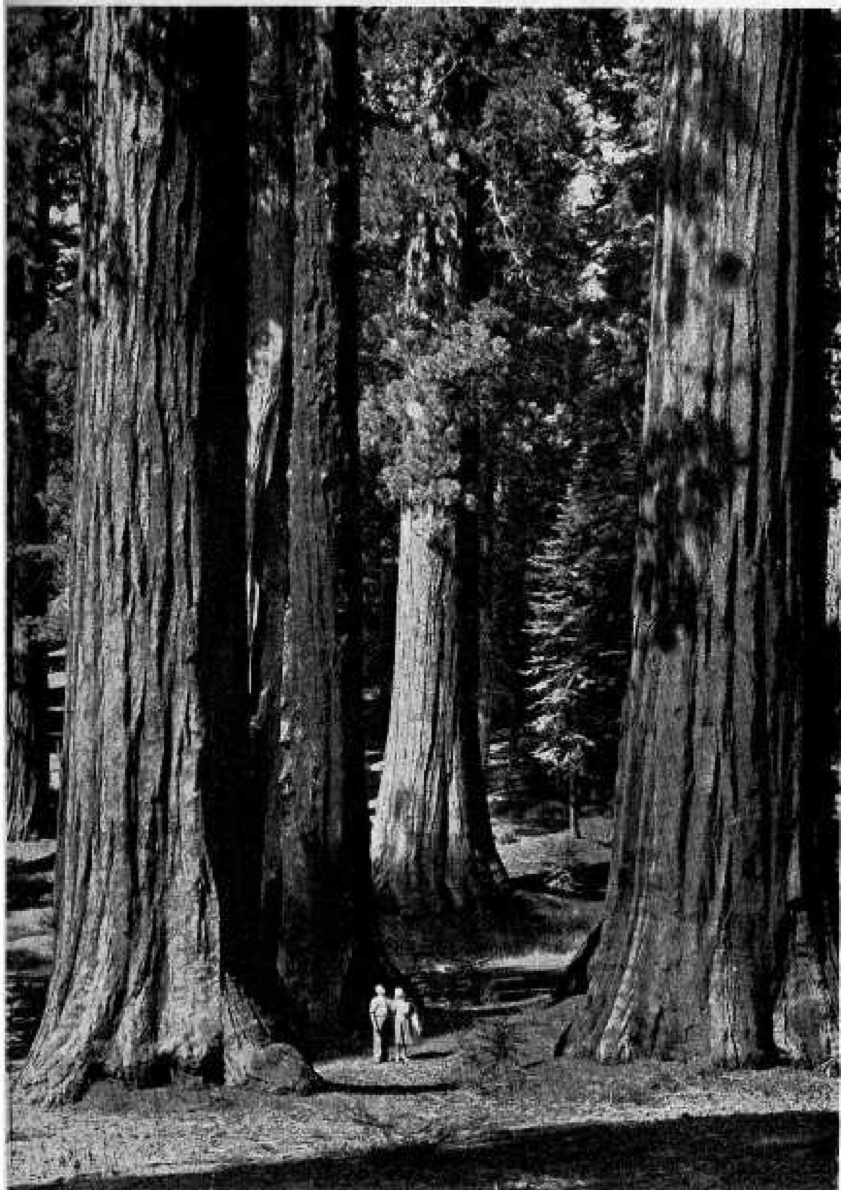
The trees that I saw today stood in the rain, silent, majestic, like benignant sages full of wisdom. They seemed to know that a rainprayer was being answered. The few birds about the high branches scarcely moved. Their notes were short and hushed. The wild creatures, the birds and squirrels, know the habit of trees. They are courteous and polite. They know what is, and what is not, proper. They respect and respond to the moods of the trees.

And then I noticed how polite the trees are. I saw one tree supporting another one that had too little firm earth for its roots. And another one was bending away over to give room for a younger and less sturdy tree to find the sun.

How glad I was to be a guest of nature's true nobility today. How proud and superbly aloof my hosts stand with their great rounded trunks glistening in a baptismal rain.

The trees know things they will not tell. Nobody knows what the trees know. Perhaps the birds and the animals do, but they will not tell the secrets of the forest. How I wish that I had the understanding trees have. I am sure if we had their understanding we would be happier. They are not concerned with our small affairs. They are occupied with deep spiritual things. These great silent fluted columns make man shrink into pygmy size.

Tread softly among the trees. Worship at their feet. They will minister to you when you become attuned to them. Trees are medicinal. They sober our impatience and heal our soul-wounds. They lead us away from the tyranny of little things. Guard and preserve them for generations to come. Enter often into their realm of enchantment, nature's supreme art gallery.



Governor's Group, Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias
—Ralph Anderson

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