

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



Icicles and Willow Twigs

—Ansel Adams



Children of the Yosemite Valley school (with some adult gate-crashers) on a ride around the valley. Summer of 1889 or 1890. Front seat, left to right: Kate Crippen (driving); Mrs. White (?); Miss F. M. Hall, teacher; Stella Fleming. At rear, left to right: Oniska Kenney (looking over Miss Hall's shoulder); Mrs. Barnard; Charley Kenney (looking over Mrs. Barnard's shoulder); Blanche Kenney (close to and in front of Mrs. Barnard); Guy Barnard (standing); Laurence Degnan (author of this article, with white collar, seated near wheel); Walter Kenney (white cloth hat); Tissie Barnard (seated, near wheel).

Cover illustration from "**Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada**"
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CORRECTION: Some interesting things sneak by the most careful of proof readers. Line one of the right column of page 11 of our January issue should read, "some 180 acres, of which 79 are national parks." Total acreage of Federal land in these areas, 23,886,427.03. DHH.

Yosemite Nature Notes

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THE YOSEMITE VALLEY SCHOOL

By Laurence V. Degnan

Part II

To this school my mother dragged me on Tuesday, April 2, 1889, and for the next eight years I trudged back and forth between home and this same schoolhouse. The session had started the day before, and why I was a day late, I do not remember. The teacher was Miss Frances M. Hall, from Hinsdale, Cattaraugus County, New York — an excellent teacher, very prim and precise, but a little mite severe. She was followed in succession at this same location by Annie Kerrins, Mrs. Winslow Gallison, Nettie Craighan, and May White. During Miss White's tenure we moved to better quarters.

On April 1, the first day of school, four pupils, all from the Kenney family, were enrolled: Oniska, Blanche, Walter, and Charlie. The next day I brought the number up to five, and on April 3, John K. Barnard's two children, Tissie and Guy, who had arrived from Merced, enrolled for the summer. These seven constituted the total student body for the first month.

James McCauley's twin sons, John and Fred, were present for two days, but do not seem to have attended the Yosemite school further during this

term. In later years, however, they attended regularly, and under difficulties. They lived on Glacier Point, and every day, mounted on donkeys, they made that long trip from their home to school and back again. They left home at 7 o'clock in the morning, and reached the schoolhouse about 8:30. The return trip took two and one-half hours, so the teacher let them out at 3:30 in the afternoon, an arrangement that got them home at 6 o'clock, if there were no delays. Now and then, on the return trip, they would load one of the donkeys with supplies for their hotel, would take turns riding the other one. On such occasions they would not reach home until about 7 in the evening. But these difficulties were taken in stride, and the McCauleys, who were used to roughing it, did not consider them hardships.

Besides their educational activities, these same burros had the important job of carrying wood from the near-by forest to the location of the fire-fall. In those days the fire-fall was not a nightly affair, but was generally by special appointment with James McCauley, the sponsor paying a small charge of two dol-

lars. The job of packing the wood and setting it up for the fire belonged to the twins, and the two-dollar fee went into their little bank account. After long and faithful service on the "school run" and the "fire-fall run", one of the poor donkeys was killed by the accidental discharge of a rifle, which McCauley's oldest son Jules had used shortly before to kill a beef at Glacier Point.

Later in the 1889 term, Edith Jacobs, from Merced, arrived at Barnard's for the summer, and enrolled in the school. Then, toward the end of summer, Jack Leidig and his sisters Belle, June, and Alice, returned to the school after a temporary absence in Los Angeles, and our enrollment climbed to about a dozen.

During the time that I was at the school the number of children in attendance ranged from 5 or 6 to 16 or 18; after a few years most of the pupils were supplied by the Kenney family and the Degnan family, just as in earlier times the Leidigs and the Harrises and the Howards constituted the bulk of the student body.

The schoolhouse was a rough unpainted one-room frame shack, 24 feet long by 16 feet wide. The walls were a single thickness of vertical boards and battens, which directly supported the wall plate and shake roof, there being no studding. There was no ceiling or interior lining, not even the white cloth ceiling, so common in other buildings in those days, tacked to the lower chords of roof trusses or to other horizontal ceiling members, and generally sagging under an accumulated load of dust. As a small youngster, noting the absence of studs or columns, I used to gaze at the open rafters and wall plates and shakes, and wonder how in the world the roof remained aloft, supported only by those flimsy

boards and battens. But the structure withstood all the winds and storms of almost a quarter of a century, until it was abandoned for school purposes.

In the shaded, cold nook in which the schoolhouse stood, the accumulated snow on the roof at times became deep enough to threaten the building, and had to be shoveled off. When I became a little older, this snow shoveling job was all mine, and in a few of the heaviest winters I must have shoveled away "sixteen tons" more than once.

As might be inferred from the type of construction, the walls of the schoolhouse contained many knot holes and cracks; through these openings friendly green lizards used to crawl and visit the school, clinging to the walls as we chanted the multiplication table, or rattled off "Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts", and so on. Indeed, in the "Annual Report of the Commission of Common Schools" the under-



Miss Frances M. Hall, Teacher in Yosemite Valley, 1889 and 1890.

statement of the year was the Yosemite Valley District's annual answer "yes", to the question: "Are the schools well ventilated?"! Yet notwithstanding its generous air-conditioning, the schoolhouse was not uncomfortable. The sessions were held in the warmer part of the year, and a large pot-bellied stove took care of the occasional rainy days in summer and the cooler days of spring and autumn.

Our front yard, partly flooded in some seasons by high water, was a breeding ground for mosquitoes, and during a part of our school term we were devoured by these pests. The teacher always had on hand a bottle of spirits of camphor or a cake of camphor ice, which she and the pupils applied copiously to the lumps and welts on face and hands. In addition, sprigs of pungent laurel, or pennyroyal, or both, were placed around the school room, and on the desks and persons of the pupils. But the uninformed mosquitoes did not seem to know that these plants repelled them, and they found that the plump little Yosemite school children and the comely schoolmams, either garnished with laurel and pennyroyal or served up plain, were "mighty good eatin'".

Water was never piped to this particular schoolhouse, but "running water" we had in abundance—in the Merced River about 100 yards distant. One or two of the larger boys were assigned the task of carrying the school supply from the river in a bucket. Then at intervals during the day one of these boys would make the rounds of the schoolroom with the bucket and a tin dipper, ladling out a drink to each youngster in turn, all drinking in succession from the same dipper. Sanitary qualms? None whatsoever. For some reason the job of "watering the ani-



Miss Mary Adaire taught in Yosemite 1882 and 1883.

mals" carried a certain prestige, and was sought after by the big boys.

Our innocent freedom from the bugaboos of germs and contagion is well illustrated by another everyday practice of ours. The dried and hardened resin on the outside of pine trees was an excellent home-grown chewing gum, extensively used by us school children. Its pronounced flavor was not unpleasant, but the gum was a bit more wearying to the jaws than the "store boughten" Adams Tutti-frutti or Black Jack; in addition, in the first stages of the chewing process, it was brittle and crumbly, and required a period of warming and softening up before it became sufficiently plastic. For this reason (as well as general sociability) we habitually saved time and labor by borrowing a chew from the active jaws of some schoolmate who had already processed his chewing gum, and passing the same wad around from one to another. The only indication of a less than com-

plete acceptance of the custom that I can remember came from one of the teachers, who said that she would not chew another person's gum unless she knew that person very well!

Notwithstanding our crude establishment, we were fairly well equipped, with maps and globes, an abacus, an unabridged Webster's dictionary, a blackboard along the southwesterly end of the room, and a small but good library. During my first term or two our furniture consisted of very rough home made benches and tables, but later on these were replaced with factory-made school desks. A manikin, showing the human body in a series of superimposed colored plates, was later added. One of these plates, showing hobnailed liver, and others charting the progressive deterioration of the human stomach from that first wee drap to "the last stages of delirium tremens", were given a good workout by some of the more abstemious teachers.

Next to the blackboard, the most active piece of school equipment was the abacus, which was continu-

ally used in our arithmetic lessons. I do not recall that any fancy tricks were attempted with the abacus, and its use was mostly limited to showing how many sacks of potatoes good old generous A had after he started with seven sacks and gave three of them to B.

For some years after I started school, we were all equipped with slates, on which we did most of our writing. Practically every boy quickly learned that the most effective way to clean a slate of written matter in preparation for a new assignment, was to spit on it and then hit it a swipe with the sleeve of his coat or shirt as the case might be. The teachers made every effort to discourage this practice, even to the point of supplying the pupil with cute little sponges or strips of felt set in the edge of a tiny water container, the whole being about the size of present day match books. But all efforts to curb our inelegant method of erasing were stoutly resisted and I do not believe the problem was eliminated until slates were abolished.

(To Be Continued)

The Wawona Covered Bridge



CAN THE WAWONA COVERED BRIDGE BE SAVED?

By Arthur G. Rempel, Ranger Naturalist

The old bridge at Wawona, probably the only covered bridge in the entire National Park System, is about to fall. Time and the Christmas flood of 1955 have taken their toll and unless immediate stabilization can be undertaken this important link with the past will be but a memory.

The following story about the interesting history of the old bridge, which crosses the South Fork of the Merced River at Wawona, was told to me by Mr. Bill Bruce. Mr. Bruce is an old time resident of Wawona and a nephew of Henry Washburn, who succeeded Galen Clark in ownership of Clark's Station. Although his account differs in major points from the commonly accepted idea that the historic bridge was built by Henry Washburn in about 1875, Mr. Bruce's story helps explain the existence of both hand-hewn beams of apparently early date and mill-sawed lumber of a later period in the bridge. It also raises interesting speculations about the early beginnings of the bridge and about activities in the Wawona area in general. According to Mr. Bruce, the facts are as follows:

In an effort to be the first to provide travel facilities into the Yosemite Valley, Galen Clark started road building operations soon after settling on the South Fork of the Merced, a few years after the original discovery of the Yosemite. Pushing north from Clark's Station, he succeeded in completing some three miles of road before the financial strain of this venture led to his bankruptcy and the eventual sale of his property to Henry Washburn. But this early road construction defin-

itely antedated the building of the road from Wawona to Mariposa, which Washburn completed after gaining ownership of the Wawona property. The old bridge, an integral and essential part of Clark's early road, was built in 1858—not as the covered structure now seen—but as an open frame affair, built of great hand-hewn beams of ponderosa pine.

When Henry Washburn and his partners purchased the interests of Galen Clark in 1875 they proceeded to roof over the bridge and enclose the sides to keep water off of the great timbers and to give general protection from the weather. Lumber for this project was cut in Washburn's saw mill, just placed in operation and equipped with a sash saw as well as a circular saw. The former was used to cut large logs into twelve inch cants which were then cut into the side timbers for the bridge with the circular saw. Marks from this saw may be seen upon the side lumber of the bridge to this day, as can axe marks upon the large hand-hewn beams of the main framework.

A further alteration came in 1900, when extensions added at each end brought the structure to its present length. In 1937 general repair work, including addition of stone to the foundations of the bridge, was completed by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

It is hoped that a means will be found of saving this fine old structure, that present day escapists from high-speed travel may pause—and perhaps appreciate—the slower and less comfortable travel of earlier days.

BRYANT LEAVES YOSEMITE FOR BLACK HILLS AREAS

By Donald E. McHenry, Chief Park Naturalist

After almost five years as naturalist and three summers as a ranger-naturalist in Yosemite National Park, Wayne W. Bryant, Assistant Park Naturalist, has accepted an appointment as naturalist-in-charge in the Black Hills Areas of South Dakota. Wayne, whose father, Dr. Harold Bryant, was one of the original founders of the naturalist services for the National Park Service, will be responsible for the interpretive services for Wind Cave National Park, Badlands and Jewel Cave National Monuments, Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota, and Devils Tower National Monument in Wyoming. He will draw upon his knowledge and experience in naturalist work to establish museums and wayside exhibits, set up self-guiding trails, schedule conducted walks, and prepare interpretive literature.



Wayne Bryant has never strayed far from his first love, the National Park Service. Although school and occasional employment of various kinds occupied his interests during winters, summertime found him in some national park. During the summer of 1942, he served as seasonal ranger in Zion National Park and as ranger-naturalist in the same park in 1946 and 1947. During the summers of 1948 to 1950 he was ranger-naturalist in Yosemite National Park. He received his first permanent appointment here in April 1951 as junior park naturalist. He was promoted to assistant park naturalist in April 1955.

During the 1954-55 winter season, Wayne was selected as one of the Region Four Trainees in the 6th Departmental Management Training Program of the Department of the Interior, being one of four from the

Born in Berkeley, California, in December of 1922, Wayne moved at an early age to Washington, D. C., when his father became Assistant Director of the National Park Service in charge of interpretation. After completing early schooling there, he returned west to study at Arizona State College from 1940 to 1943. With World War II, he entered the U. S. Navy, receiving his training at Arizona State, Notre Dame, and Harvard. He subsequently saw active duty in the waters around Japan and the Philippines area on the USS *Mount Olympus* (GC-8). He was released with the rank of lieutenant (j.g.) Following his release to civilian life, Wayne returned to school, receiving his B. A. degree in biology from Stanford University in 1948 and his Master of Science in zoology at Utah State College in 1950.

National Park Service and of thirty in the Department of the Interior. He takes to his Black Hills assignment wide knowledge of museum practices and techniques, having studied under Park Naturalist Louis Schellbach at Grand Canyon, under Edwin McKee, Curator of Geology at the Museum of Northern Arizona, plus considerable experience gained in Yosemite and Washington, D.C.

Bryant, a fine public speaker and leader of campfire songs and nature walks, served with credit on the faculty of the Yosemite Field School. He is a good photographer. There will doubtlessly be much opportunity for Wayne to exercise his skill in square dancing in the Black Hills country. It goes without saying that he will be greatly missed by the Yosemite organization.

FEAST ON THE GRAPEVINE

By John T. Mullady, Park Ranger

The heavy-antlered buck bounded through the cold darkness of the early winter morning. The ice-encrusted brush of Turner Ridge offered little resistance to his massiveness as he crashed headlong through it. Nor did it slow the yelping, gray-coated coyotes running in swift pursuit, their bellies fairly skimming the frosty cover of bear clover. A short distance more and the deer would reach the clearings of the South Fork of the Merced where the open flats would afford room for a full grown buck to attain top-speeded flight or, if necessary, the space to swing his sharp-pointed antlers and the room to maneuver his razor-sharp hooves in frantic defense against the inevitable attack.

The car rolled cautiously up the Grapevine Grade of the Wawona Road. Tire chains and the snaking curves of the icy roadbed made speed undesirable even though Yosemite Valley and its welcome lodging still lay 25 wintery miles ahead. The beams of the headlights

searched through the mist of low lying clouds; now it found a displaced rock to be avoided; now a road sign offering advice or information.

The buck, fearful and excited, hesitated on the brink of the bank. Two leaps more and he would be down and across the main trail. But the dazzling confusion of the blinding lights coming toward him! The clanking racket of steel against macadam! The terrible yapping of the closing coyotes! What to do! Down the bank! Hooves met icy hardness of the road and slid. Chains of steel scraped and dragged across the same icy hardness in a frantic effort to bring the car to a halt. But in spite of the panicky, last minute swerve of wheels and hooves; in spite of the digging of the steel, death came suddenly on the Grapevine at that early morning hour. The car regretfully resumed its cold journey. The coyotes impatiently waited on the brim of the cut until the red lights and the noise faded away up

the hill. Now to the feast! Coyotes, big and little, tore at the warm hide, exposing the firm flesh. Bellies soon



became gorged. An animal would waddle away from the bloody form lying on the road only to be replaced at the carcass by another tawny form loping in from the surrounding wilderness. The telegraph of the wilds was far-reaching and response to its message was rapid. The word got around. Before the sun bathed the pines of the hills the flesh of the full-bodied buck had disappeared before the appetites of many snarling, snapping coyotes. By the time the full morning had dawned there was little left to be torn from the remaining hide and bones. A few shreds of flesh might have been gained from the bare skeleton but then only by judicious gnawing. And what satisfaction would a few shreds yield to full bellies. Slowly and with greedy reluctance the dog-like animals wandered off, alone or with families, to seek a sunny granite bench for a long day of contented leisure.

This is the story of a midnight feast as Ralph Jessen (seasonal ranger and old-timer) and I pieced it together on that Sunday morning in December. Perhaps it is not an unusual story, for many deer are killed — others critically injured — by automobiles. Most often, as in

this case, their flesh goes to satisfying the hunger of coyotes and other carnivores. It is perhaps unusual in that coyotes presumably do not attack full grown, healthy deer in preference to individuals already weakened by disease or injury. Even a concentrated attack by several animals would not assure a meal of venison if the deer were in physical condition to retreat or fight.

Jessen and I feel, however, that the story is unusual and important with respect to the number of coyotes which were present at the feast. The evidence was there on the road. We examined it carefully. We think our deductions are correct.

The carcass of the buck as it was found, was stripped of practically all flesh. Only the head (with the exception of the fleshy tip of the nose) was intact. The symmetrical four point antlers were massive, possessing a maximum spread of 18 inches. The limp hide had not been torn haphazardly from the body but had been ripped open generally from the belly side. The entire skeleton was intact, the bones still articulated. All of the entrails were gone. The flesh of the neck had been removed by access through the body cavity; the cape of the hide had not been torn.

From the size of the antlers, the head, and the hooves as well as from the general appearance of the hide, Jessen and I concluded that this buck must have weighed no less than 180 pounds. This agrees with known weights of similar bucks killed along adjacent park boundaries. The hide was in fine, sleek condition indicating a healthy individual.

The time of the accident was placed at not more than 6 hours (and probably much less) prior to

the discovery of the carcass at 8 a. m. This estimate was based on freshness of the blood, suppleness of the hide in spite of the freezing weather (17 degrees F at South Entrance) and through questioning local travelers who used the road that night.

At the time of discovery the entire remains which, incidentally, were found in the middle of the road, did not exceed 50 pounds. There was no evidence that any quantity of flesh had been carried from the scene; the fact that the skeleton was complete would indicate that this had not been done. If our estimates are correct (and they certainly cannot be substantially wrong), about 130 pounds of meat was devoured on the spot within a maximum time of six hours. Probably the meal took much less time.

Two references were found in the literature regarding food capacity of coyotes. J. Frank Dobie, on page 160 of his *The Voice of the Coyote* (Boston, 1949), gives the report of a trapper who examined the stomach contents of a female coyote which had just killed a lamb. He reported that it contained "five or six pounds of select meat." Joseph Dixon, noted for his meticulous wildlife observations, reported in the *Journal of Mammalogy* (6:1, p. 41): "I have . . . been able to determine how much food constitutes a square meal for each species in the wild . . ." For the coyote it was 791 grams (1.74 pounds) or the equivalent of two ground squirrels. Grinnell, Dixon and Linsdale in *The Fur Bearing Mammals of California* (Berkeley, 1937) states that stomach records show that from 5 to 8 pounds of meat is a large meal for a full-grown mountain lion.

One medical authority has told me that he would not expect an animal the size of a large dog or coy-



The morning after . . .

ote to be able to consume more than 1/10 of his weight in fresh meat at a single meal. A state trapper, working on lands adjacent to the park, felt this figure to be sound. On this basis we could reason that a mature mountain coyote with an average winter weight of about 40 pounds (Grinnell, Dixon and Linsdale, *op. cit.*) would not be able to devour more than 3½ to 4 pounds of meat during the course of an uninterrupted meal. This perhaps could be stretched to 5 pounds if he were really hungry. Hungry! At least some of these coyotes had fed on other venison within the previous afternoon and evening for no less than 10 large piles of droppings were found on the road along the road shoulders at the scene. Deer hair was much in evidence in all of the scats. It is unlikely that this represented food digested at that meal.

Those are the facts. How many coyotes fed on this mule deer? Who knows? It may seem a fantastic number but evidence indicated that no less than 25 must have gathered to participate in that grisly feast on the Wawona Road that cold December morning.



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