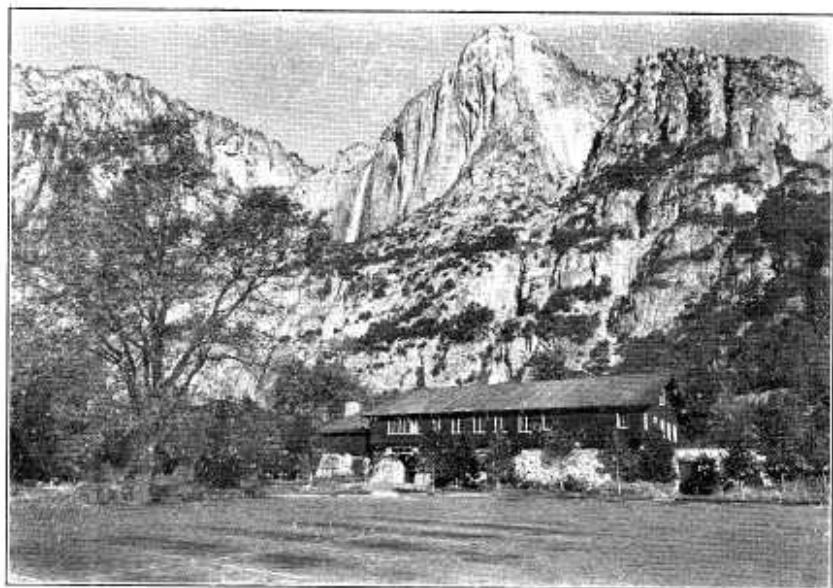


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IN MUIR'S FOOTSTEPS

By Ranger-Naturalist Lee Haines

"This morning I rolled some bread and tea in a pair of blankets with some sugar and a tin cup and set off for my favorite Sunnyside Camp on the first bench of the north wall, east of the head of the lower Yosemite Fall, about five hundred feet above the level of the valley. It is a charming spot with abundance of water close at hand, a wild vineyard, fernery, and flower garden with picturesque groves of live-oak, Libocedrus and pines, and views up and down the valley, while the interesting gorge between the upper and lower falls is near enough for sauntering to at one's leisure"

Thus reads the journal of John Muir for March 10, 1873. Sixty-seven years later, anyone of twenty-eight Yosemite hikers might have made the following entry in his journal for July 11, 1940:

Prepared a large knapsack lunch of sandwiches, fresh fruit and candy, and set off with a ranger naturalist for an "All-day Roughing Hike" to the base of the upper Yosemite Falls via John Muir's Sunnyside Bench. Our party made its way over the boulders of a steep talus slope in

the rear of the Government Museum until we had ascended about 450 feet above the valley floor. There we were faced with a high vertical cliff of granite. Working our way under this cliff, we passed beneath a few scattered Canyon Live Oaks and through the branches of a sturdy manzanita bush which overhung a small but precipitous cliff. We now reached the eastern end of a sloping, oak-covered ledge that was to lead us to the brink of lower Yosemite Fall. Keeping along the upward slope of the ledge, we followed the faint outlines of an old deer trail until we came to an extensive area that was completely overgrown by California wild grape. Descending through the waist-high, natural vineyard, we slipped on the moist ground and stumbled over the hidden stems. A short distance to the west, the ledge pinched out against the canyon wall amidst a wild tangle of manzanita.

Ten feet below us was a beautiful green platform mantled with a carpet of Harvest Brodiaea, Western Pennyroyal, Larkspur, Soap Plant, and Innocence. Dropping down

amidst the flowers, we crossed to the outer edge of the platform and looked down to the brink of the lower Yosemite Fall. Above us we could see a large fall of a hundred feet. The face of the rock over which it pours is not vertical, but, owing to the impetus already received from the steepness of its upper channel, it is enabled to bound forth with all the freedom of motion which a strictly vertical fall would enjoy. After feasting upon the fluidity of this middle fall, our gaze rested upon a beautiful fringe of ferns which John Muir described as being "kept fresh with spray and pulsing in unison with every movement of the fall, registering each sound and motion could we but read the record. The maiden-hair fern of feathery lightness is particularly compliant to the fainter impulses from the waters, fairly floating its fronds on soft wavelets of sound, moving each division separately at times, fingering the music delicately as if playing on invisible keys."

We found a comfortable resting place under the shade of two low-spreading live oaks, which occupied the center of the small platform. Here the naturalist gave us a brief sketch of John Muir's early life and of his activities in Yosemite.

We pictured ourselves sitting upon the exact spot, that many years ago was occupied by Muir's camp when he wrote, "My camp is glorious in sounds, for not only is the lower fall near, but the upper also. And all the falls and cascades between are blended into a massy roar like the

sea in storm on a rockbound coast, and marked by thunderous explosions of air caught against ledge and pavement, with innumerable under-and-over-tones carried past on the varying currents of wind. I seem to be in the heart of the great Yosemite organ, and the sounds and songs flow past in surging cascades like water, interrupted now and then by stormwinds, but kept well together in the main, not dissipated like spray or smoke.

"Though I am thus in a kind of instrument, a fountain of music, I cannot rest much, for masses of wind from the fall occasionally come tumbling down on me with so sudden and heavy a pressure, and are so suddenly removed, that I am left vibrating on the elastic branches of my bed, while all about me is motionless. Now and then a small air berg drops plump in my direction. . . . These air masses are of a wide variety of form and size and temperature; almost all are rugged in outline and angular more like rocks than air would be thought capable of becoming."

In order that our party might get above Sunnyside Bench and proceed to the base of the upper fall, it was necessary to ascend the broken face of a thirty-foot shelf of granite. This obstacle was surmounted by the use of a rope that had been brought especially for this purpose.

With our party all above the shelf and the rope drawn up, we proceeded in a northeastwardly direction along an oblique fracture in the

valley wall that brought us out upon a steep slope of bare granite. It was at this time that we realized why we had been told to wear rubber-soled shoes. Although a few shaking knees were in evidence, we traversed this two hundred yards of granite without mishap and clambered over a pile of large boulders to get our first view of the magnificent upper fall. After a fifteen minute scramble among brush and talus, we reached a large granite apron at the



base of the upper fall. Lunches were hastily unpacked and then slowly eaten while we leaned back and gazed at the 1430-foot column of snow-white water that seemingly dropped from a hole in the blue sky to leap forever downward and alight not more than 150 yards from where we sat.

Refreshed by the cooling spray and lulled by the pulsing sounds of the fall as the water would be alternately smashed against the cliff and snatched free by the wind, our eyes followed the descending "comets" of water as they unexpectedly broke into eddying nebulae of fine mist that would drift slowly downward to again join the main column of water where it splashed upon a narrow projecting ledge. This particular ledge is defined by a horizontal master joint that extends westward across the face to and slightly beyond the path of the fall, about 450 feet above the base. On looking up at this ledge we marveled at John Muir's daring midnight climb behind the fall which he recorded in the following words:

"I thought it would be a fine thing to get back of the down-rushing waters and see them in all their glory with the moonlight sifting through them. I got out safely, though the ledge is only about six inches wide in one place, and was gazing up and out through the thin half-translucent edge of the fall, when some heavy splashes striking the wall above me caught my attention; then suddenly all was dark, and down came a dash of outside gauze tissue made of spent comets, thin and harmless to look at a mile off, but desperately solid and stony when they strike one's shoulders. It seemed as if I was being pelted with a mixture of choking spray and gravel. I grasped an angle of the ledge and held hard with my knees

and submitted to my frightful baptism with but little faith. When I dared to look up after the pelting had nearly ceased, and the column swaying back admitted the light, I hastily pounced back of a block of ice that was frozen to the ledge, squeezing myself in between the ice and the wall, and no longer feared being washed off.

"When the moonbeams again slanted past the ever-changing edge of the torrent, I took courage to make a dash for freedom and escaped, made a fire and partially warmed my benumbed limbs, then ran down home to my cabin (on the floor of Yosemite Valley), reached it some time toward morning, changed my clothing, got an hour or two of sleep and awoke sane and comfortable, some of the earthiness washed out of me and Yosemite virtue washed in, better, not worse for my wild bath in lunar bows, spent comet-tails, ice, drizzle, and moonshine. . ."

During our three-hour sojourn at the base of the upper fall, each of us had some of Yosemite's "virtue washed in" but I am afraid that the "earthiness" was not washed out of us. For instead of running back to the valley floor in the footsteps of John Muir, we spent two and a half hours in making the descent.

NOTES ON SPRING

By Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael

In this year of 1941, spring came late to the flowering plants of Yosemite Valley. The dogwoods had

not reached the full perfection of flowery whiteness until the middle of May, and as late as this many azalea thickets in different sections of the valley were still quite leafless. A few shooting-stars were beginning to appear in the meadows, and under the pine and oaks little *Nemophila exilis* was making a brave show. There were other blooming things, tiny plants that my old friend Mr. Bourne used to class under the general description as microscopical plants, and the violets that always bloom early, five different species—three yellows, a blue and a white one. The only large-flowered plant that came into bloom on its early schedule was a member of the sunflower tribe, *Balsamorhiza deltoidea*. The delicate green, arrow-shaped leaves eight and ten inches long bunch close together and apparently spring directly from the ground; the sunflower-like flowers each on its own stalk rise but a few inches above the leaves. The closely bunched blossoms and leave give to the plant a potted appearance, and altogether it is one of the most showy of the early blossoming plants. A colony of yellow-flowered, low-growing tarweed spreads a sheet of color in a certain section near Happy Isles.

In spite of the late season for flowering plants, most of the summer nesting birds arrived on schedule—only the Traill Flycatchers were late. The Black Swifts were four or five days ahead of time. Strange about the Traill Flycatchers, for the last twenty years they arrived in the val-

ley during the second week in May; this year they did not appear until May 30.

Including a domestic pigeon, sixty-nine species of birds were seen during the month. The domestic pigeon is included because it is a very rare bird in the valley, none having been seen for many years.

May had no freezing nights, no really hot days, many cloudy days, and a number of days on which no rain fell. The storm of May 23 reached cloudburst proportions during mid-afternoon, bringing a great fall of heavy hail which no doubt brought disaster to many nesting birds. The ouzel's nest on Tenaya Creek was washed away by the downpour, and flood waters coming down the Merced River swept away the ouzel nest under the Sentinel Bridge. The Black Phoebes also lost a nest under the Sentinel Bridge. On the night of this storm, Yosemite Creek reached its peak flow at an unusually late date, and the highest water of the season came to both the river and Yosemite Falls.

A NEW SNAKE FOR YOSEMITE

By Park Forester Emil Ernst

During an inspection of Ribes eradication work near the Merced Grove of Big Trees, one of the workers brought to my attention a small snake in his possession. As the naturalist department was interested in obtaining live specimens for summer display at the museum, this small snake was taken to the muse-

um preparator. It soon developed that this snake represented a genus not previously reported for the park.

According to available literature, the snake appears to belong to the genus *Contia* or Sharp-tailed Snake. Natural color Kodachrome pictures were taken of the specimen, and sent to Mr. L. M. Klauber of the Natural History Museum of San Diego for identification. Mr. Klauber identified the snake as *Contia tenuis*, due to the dark cross marks on each scale of the ventral surface, which is quite characteristic of the species.

This species has been taken elsewhere in the Sierra Nevada, but this appears to be the first record for Yosemite National Park, and also the first printed record for Mariposa and Tuolumne Counties. The specimen was collected on May 28, 1941, at an elevation of 6,000 feet on a westerly facing slope of cutover land near the former location of the Yosemite Lumber Company's Camp 15.

NATURE NOTELET

On the morning of May 16, 1941 a rather small coyote was observed by Ranger-Naturalist Sweeney and myself just south of the buildings at Government Center. It was traveling west down the valley among the Black Oak trees. Suddenly, it stopped short, and charged off to the left in hot pursuit of a California Ground Squirrel. With squeals of mortal fear, the ground squirrel luckily made his burrow, and the disappointed coyote trotted off down the valley.

—Willis A. Evans

A YOUNG RED-SHAFTED FLICKER LEAVES HOME

By Ranger-Naturalist Lloyd P. Parratt

Park Photographer Ralph Anderson heard the cries of young Red-shafted Flickers (*Colaptes cafer collaris*) while taking pictures of the auto caravan from above the Wawona Tunnel on the afternoon of July 17, 1940. In company with the writer the nesting hole was discovered some 30 feet up in a dead snag or stub, which was located about 100 yards up the slope from the east end of the tunnel. As we arrived, a young bird was sticking its head out of the hole and squeaking for food. Fed at 3:40 p. m., it became very impatient after thirty minutes had elapsed, and called repeatedly with a whining note. Every few minutes it stuck its head out of the hole, and

was a female. By now it was evident that there was only one young left in the nest.

Returning to the nest the next afternoon, as the sun was best in the afternoon for this west-facing nest, we set up the telephoto lens. After waiting for some time, we could hear the call of adults and of the young uttering its juvenile note in response. Looking up, I saw the young one suddenly leave the nesting site. It had been perching unnoticed on the end of a limb not far from the nest and at that moment flew off in pursuit of the adult calling in the distance. The young flicker was apparently leaving its home site, as the rest of the brood had probably done before, and all was quiet and still in the old dead snag so recently reverberating with life.



ducked back again. After fifty minutes the female adult arrived, but flew from tree to tree before feeding. The young flicker had added a staccato note to the whining, and on sighting its mother called vociferously. The female fed the young again at 4:35 and 4:40, fifty-five and sixty minutes since the last feeding, which afforded a splendid chance for color photography.

The young was quite mature, showing the familiar black crescent and having a brown stripe on the side of the head, which indicated it

NATURE NOTELET

While on a nature walk just above Mirror Lake on June 4, 1941, our group was able to watch the courtship antics of the Dwarf Cowbird. The male, who had been singing from a perch in a Black Oak flew down on the ground beside the female. With back arched, wings extended and feathers fluffed out, he strutted back and forth before the female. The female did not appreciate his ardent efforts at attraction, and pecked at him whenever he came within reach. Finally the male flew up in the tree once more and continued singing.—Willis A. Evans

MIGRATION OF WHITE PELICANS

By Ranger-Naturalist Verlin G. Baysinger

Routine of duty often dulls an individual's sense of observation and definitely limits the chances for such endeavor. However, the occasional jaunt into the open brings surprising results.

On the afternoon of June 19, 1941, while making a visit to Wawona Point, a flock of White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) was observed in flight.

Past observation and reports have been made of these migration flights. Yosemite Nature Notes, October, 1933, records the observation by Mr. C. H. O'Neal. This writing tells about the flight of the birds on June 30, 1933, through Yosemite Valley, 2,000 feet below the observer, who was on Glacier Point. Yosemite Nature Notes, July, 1940, records another observation made from Glacier Point by Mrs. Bess Hoffman, on June 6, 1940. On that same date, I saw and reported the same flock of pelicans flying over Mariposa Grove of Big Trees in the early afternoon sunlight—spiraling in flight, gaining altitude, then taking formation and flying northeastward.

My observation this year, on June 19, 1941, was made in the company of a number of park visitors who marveled at the beauty of the sight. These large white birds came into view at 2:25 P. M., as they flew from the San Joaquin Valley over the crest of the Chowchilla Mountains, directly west of Wawona Point and south of Signal Peak at an estimated ele-

vation of 6500 feet. From the time of this first observation until they disappeared in the northeastern sky we enjoyed a grand study of the flock, using both the unaided eye and the binoculars.

Apparently as the pelicans approached the crest of the Chowchilla Mountains, they took advantage of the ascending air currents and began their spiral flight in order that they might gain altitude and direction, flashing snow-white in the bright sunlight and displaying their black wing primaries. Then, as they wheeled in irregular formation, the birds would pass through the shadow and light alternately and individually. This flight maneuver lasted for about ten minutes until they gained an altitude of about 10,000 feet or more, then suddenly a single bird led out of the flock and in several irregular V-formations, the entire flock of pelicans, which numbered over 100 birds, followed.

The course set was N. NE., and in the short time of about three minutes the large white birds disappeared in the high cumulus clouds forming over the Sierra Nevada northeast of Yosemite Valley.

This flight should have been observed elsewhere; yet, due to the high silent course of the pelicans, it is very likely that few people chanced to sight these beautiful birds. Evidently, this migration flight took the pelicans to the Mono Lake country, or farther north for the

nesting season. Observations such as these noted are of importance to our knowledge of the natural history of this area.

lone bird in mature plumage was observed on this same body of water.

A SECOND RECORD FOR LARUS DELEWARENSIS IN YOSEMITE

By Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael

Gulls are rare visitors to Yosemite Valley; however, California Gulls (*Larus californicus*) breed on the rocky islands of Mono Lake, and in moving from the California beaches where they spend the winter, many pass over Yosemite National Park on their way to their summer nesting grounds. A few loafers stop over in the higher sections of the park, and follow the fishermen from lake to lake to share in the loot. A fisherman cleaning fish on any of the larger lakes is likely to be visited by a gull or two. On rare occasions a gull may drop down into the Yosemite Valley and be seen along the river. I should say in the last twenty years there are perhaps ten records of the California Gull in the valley.

Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delewarensis*), commonly associated with California gulls on the beaches of Southern California during the winter months, breed farther north than do the California gulls, and therefore are not to be expected in Yosemite National Park; nevertheless, about ten years ago a lone Ring-billed gull was seen on the wide river pool in Yosemite Valley, and a second record for this gull was established on May 13, 1941, when a

LONG LIVE THE TREES

By Park Forester Emil Ernst

Through the medium of naturalists, rangers, and government publications, the public is fairly well acquainted with the great ages estimated for some of the better known giant Sequoias. These estimates are based on ring counts made on stumps of fallen and felled trees. That the sugar and ponderosa pines reach great ages commensurate with their size is a fact known mainly to forest workers. In 1937, age counts were made of stumps on lumber company lands in the Carl Inn area adjacent to Yosemite National Park, and in addition ages have been obtained from time to time from the stumps of trees necessarily felled in insect control operations within the park.

The greatest ages recorded in these studies show for the sugar pine 581 years, and for the ponderosa pine 326 years. There are numerous larger ponderosa pines than those from which this data was obtained, and it is to be expected that a greater age for ponderosa pine will eventually be determined.

Of the fifty-one tree ages recorded, nine are from trees that were living at the time of the discovery of land in the Western Hemisphere by Christopher Columbus in October 1492.



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