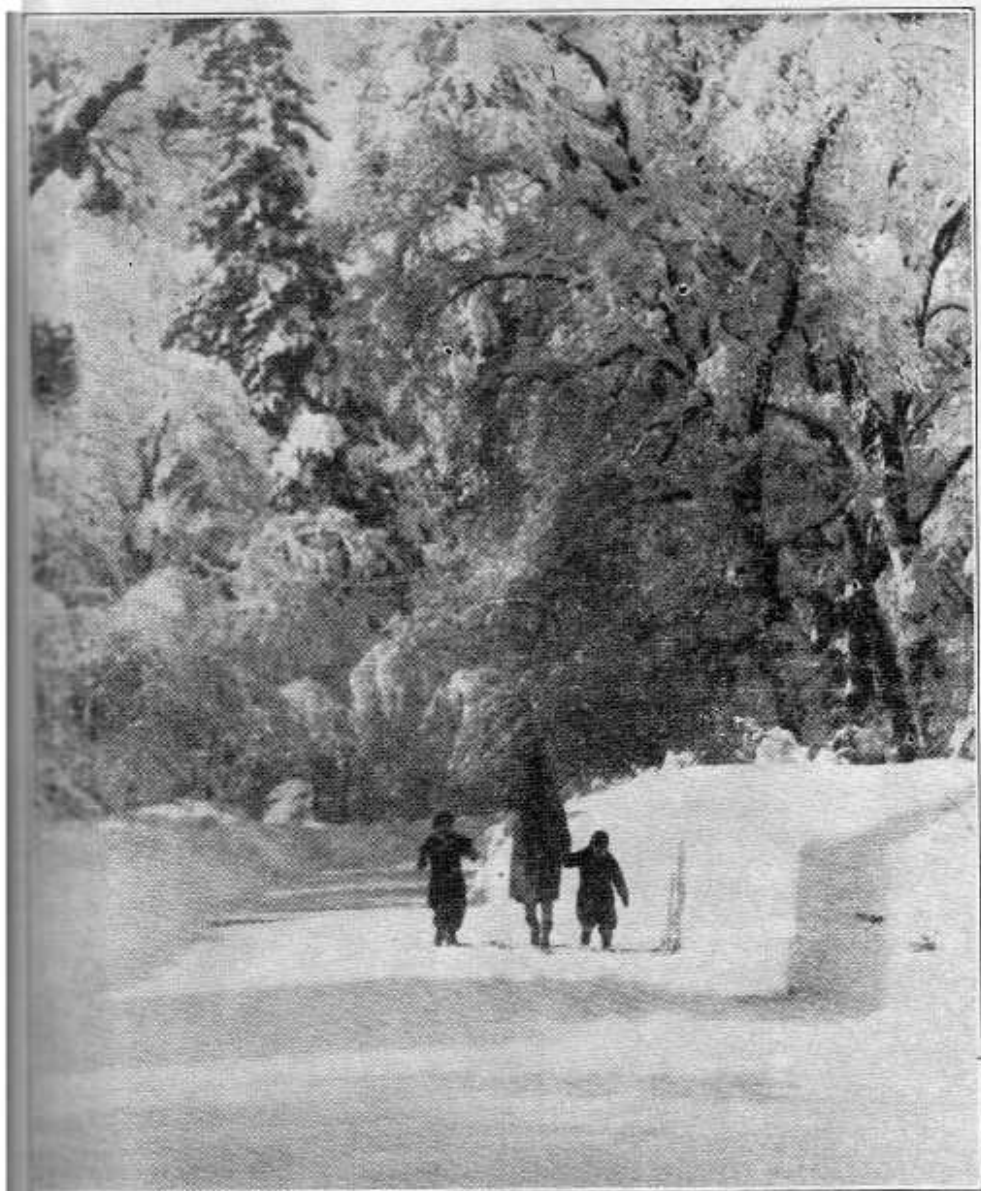


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



Vol. XIII January 1934 No. 1

Yosemite Nature Notes

THE PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DEPARTMENT
AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION
Published Monthly

Volume XLIII

January 1934

Number 1

A Winter Trip to Tuolumne Meadows

A. E. BORELL
Naturalist

Every summer thousands of people enjoy the beauty of the Sierra Nevada, but relatively few know them as they are during the winter. Those who visit the Sierra during the winter find them even more wonderful than in summer. When I was given the privilege of joining a party going to Tuolumne Meadows I was glad to have the opportunity to learn more about winter camping and to become acquainted with the High Sierra and its animal life during mid-winter.

Our party was composed of Oliver Kehrlein, Horace Breed, and Bestor Robinson, Sierra Club members and well experienced in winter mountaineering; Drew Check, Boynton Kaiser and Paul Baldwin, scout naturalists; Elliot Sawyer and Bob Strong, older scouts; Raymond Gilmore and the writer. We assembled in Yosemite valley and prepared for our 50-mile trip on skis and snowshoes to Tuolumne Meadows. Trapper Nelson packboards were loaded and each man carried his sleeping bag, personal equipment and food for an eight-day trip. In addition, there were two light axes, ponchos for shelter,

extra clothing, cooking utensils, rope, three ice axes and crampons for mountain climbing. The packs averaged from 35 to 50 pounds each.

We left the valley via the Snow Creek Trail and for eight days were never off our skis or snowshoes except when in camp. As night overtook us we found a sheltered place among the trees and prepared camp. First a hole about five feet in diameter was scooped out of the snow, in which a fire was built. The snow about the fire was trampled down, making it possible for us to walk about without skis. Where the snow was too deep to dig through, the fire was built on a layer of green boughs. The heel ends of the skis were forced into the ground at an angle, forming a semi-circle on the windward side of the fire. Our ponchos were then fastened together and stretched over the skis, making a windbreak and shelter for the night. While some of the party were making camp, the cooks were preparing hot food and drink in billikans hung over the fire on poles stuck into the snow. Boughs

were spread on the snow beneath the shelter, on top of which we placed our sleeping bags, feet toward the fire. Putting on three pairs of dry woolen socks and a couple of sweaters, we were ready for the night. Our boots served as pillows, which also helped to keep them from freezing. Although the temperature was little above zero we usually slept warm and comfortably.

The region was extremely beautiful, weather and snow conditions were ideal for a ski trip and the experience most interesting. Tenaya lake was completely frozen over. Great snow banners were flying from Mount Hoffmann, Mount Clark and other peaks. The bubbling soda springs at Tuolumne Meadows offered a real treat as we had been drinking melted snow sluce leaving Yosemite Valley. Water obtained by melting snow over an open fire absorbs the unpleasant taste of the smoke. To disguise this taste we added tea, coffee, or a fruit-flavored gelatine to the water.

Although the only mammals seen were two chickarees, tracks in the snow made it possible to learn considerable about the numbers, distribution and behavior of several species. Tracks of a weasel leading from one stump to another indicated it was probably searching for mice. Tracks of a bear told us that occasionally in mid-winter bears come out of their hibernation dens and prowl about over the snow.

During the night when we were camped on Snow creek we heard something breaking into our food supplies. The next morning we found teeth marks on several packages which identified the visitor as a marten. In several other places we crossed the trails left by the

marten. In most parts of California this fur-bearer is rare and may eventually be exterminated, so it is encouraging to know that there are still a number in Yosemite National Park, where they will receive permanent protection. The tracks of white-tailed jack-rabbits were quite common about Tuolumne Meadows, especially among the trees. In a few places about logs and rocks we found tracks of white-footed mice, and in one case a fox had stopped to investigate mouse tracks.

Most of the birds, which are common in the Sierras during summer, migrate at the approach of winter, but a few remain in spite of the deep snow and cold weather. Several blue-fronted jays were seen below 7000-foot altitude. Chickadees were busy searching for insects about the branches of lodgepole pines and hemlocks. A faint note led us to a creeper which was "hitching" itself up the trunk of a dead tree. As usual Clark crows announced their presence with raucous calls. The most exciting observation came when we found a flock of Sierra crossbills foraging among the lodgepole pines in Tuolumne Meadows. Two hairy woodpeckers and a red-breasted nuthatch were also observed.

We returned to the valley without the slightest injury to any member of the party. Although the trip was strenuous, all of us felt well repaid in experience. Under expert leadership we learned something about how to travel in winter with heavy packs, how to make comfortable camps in the snow, kinds of food and clothing to carry, and something of the birds and mammals. It is unfortunate that more people cannot enjoy the mountains during mid-winter; but be-

cause of real hazards involved no one should attempt a trip away from established shelters unless extremely well prepared. Skiing conditions are excellent above Yosemite Valley during winter months and even through April regularly organized ski trips are offered as part of the winter sports program of the Yosemite Winter Club.

Editors Note: This trip was made between December 26, 1932 and January 2, 1933.

A WOODLAND SCENE

By RANGER RUSSELL GRATER

Fortunate is he who has the opportunity of hearing about some interesting episode in nature, but doubly fortunate is he who actually witnesses the scene as it is being portrayed.

A few days ago, while following a ridge back of my ranger station at Gentry, I suddenly heard the sound of some animal approaching through a thick grove of small trees ahead of me. I hastily stepped behind a tree to see what was making the noise. In a few seconds a fine big buck deer appeared proudly carrying a beautiful set of antlers still in the velvet. He was closely followed by a doe and a young fawn. The fawn was a tiny spotted youngster and very appealing. For about 10 seconds the trio stood there facing me. Then as the doe suddenly scented me, she leaped into the air with a shrill, whistling snort, and bounded away up the slope. The buck wheeled and dashed into the thicket from whence he had come. As for the

fawn, he made a wild leap into a nearby gully, and jumped and slid to a thick growth of young trees in which he instantly curled up and remained motionless. Everything happened with startling rapidity.

But the scene was not over, and I was determined to see the final act if at all possible. Accordingly I hunted cover down wind on a nearby slope and watched. I did not have long to wait. The fawn finally decided that the danger was past, and came back up the slope calling in a high-pitched little voice for his mother. To my delight, he stopped about 50 feet from me, where he waited for his mother to appear. During the next five minutes I was treated to a most interesting and appealing scene. There was the fawn, still nervous, carefully hidden from all preying eyes that might be up the slope, confidently waiting for his mother to come get him. I couldn't help sympathizing with the little fellow, and wishing that he might soon be united with his family again.

The wish was soon fulfilled. The doe suddenly appeared on the slope and called. Instantly, with a glad little cry, the fawn hurried to meet her. She gave him a couple of loving caresses with her tongue and then tested the air, obviously very nervous. Looking back of her, I noticed that the buck had appeared and was closely scrutinizing the region, so not wishing to alarm them again, I remained motionless.

Although they did not linger long, but soon bounded away into the forest, the memory of that intimate contact with nature's most graceful and appealing family will stay with me for years to come.



The Five Largest Big Trees

By A. E. COWELL,
Civil Engineer

The Grizzly Giant of the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees in Yosemite National Park has long been considered one of the four largest living *Sequoia gigantea* and probably the oldest of these, since scientists agree that it carries more marks of great age than the General Sherman, General Grant and Boole trees, all of which are larger than the Grizzly Giant. Its age has been estimated at more than 3800 years.

Following accurate measurements recently made by a group of engineers from Fresno, of the four trees—General Sherman, General Grant, Boole and Hart—the engineering department of the National Park Service undertook an equally careful survey of the Grizzly Giant.

From the measurements, it was found that while the Grizzly Giant is not so tall as the four above mentioned trees, its size, however, as compared to mean diameters and volume, is equal to the others throughout the greater portion of its height.

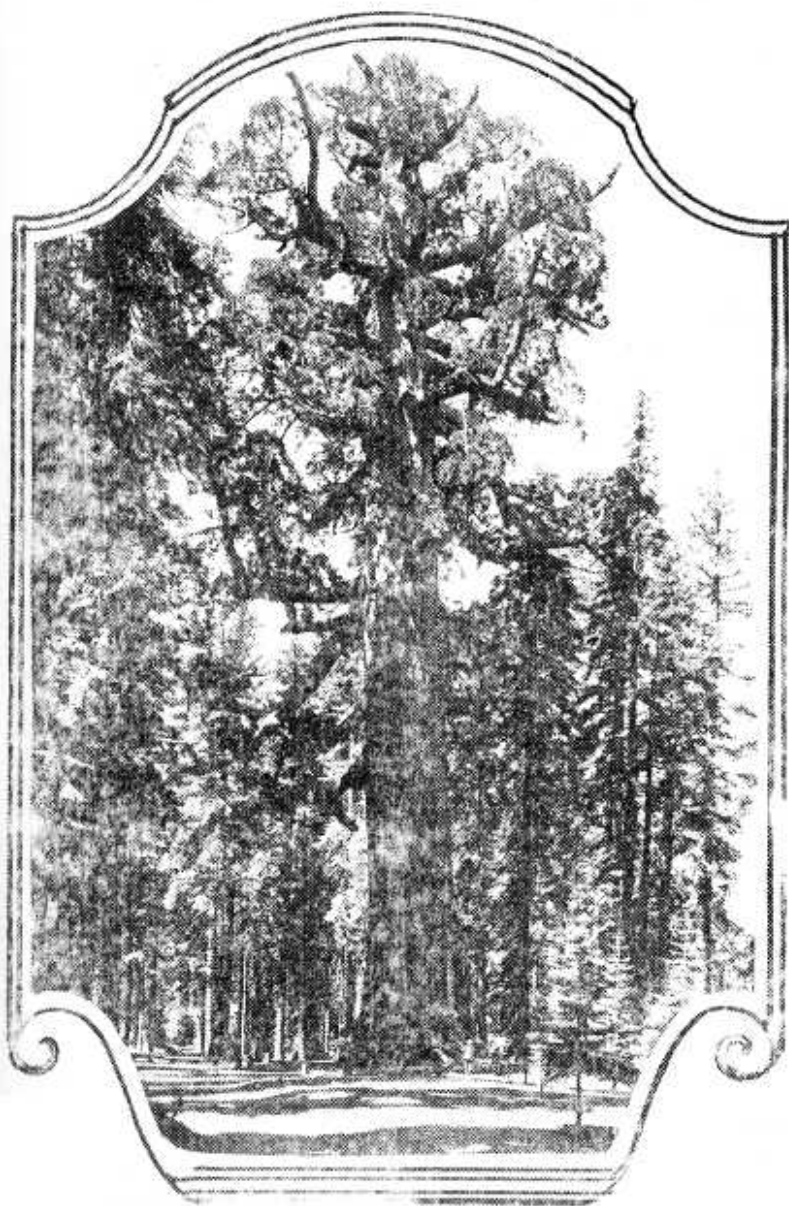
Instead of the Grizzly Giant holding its place as one of the four largest living trees diameter and

volume place it as one of the five largest **Sequoia**.

The Grizzly Giant stands in a class by itself in the Mariposa Grove of some 600 great trees, not counting thousands of young *Sequoias*, as if it might be a parent tree to a host of colossal trees around it. No tree in the Grove or in any other grove of *Sequoias*, appears so rugged, so ripe with age. It is the most impressive tree of the forest.

The thousands of visitors who drive through this grove marvel at the interesting view they receive as they make a turn after passing through the lower grove and find themselves suddenly in view of this stately monarch standing alone as it is, seemingly a sentinel to the many immense trees in the upper grove.

It is the most precious of all our trees in Yosemite. Following reports of highest plant authorities that the excessive tramping of the soil above the shallow root structure of the tree was leading to its destruction, and that roads should not be located near the roots, land scaping has been done by planting



The Grizzly Giant

Comparative Size of Sequoia Trees

Measurements of General Sherman, General Grant, Boole and Hart trees as given in article herein quoted.

(All measurements are in feet and cubic feet)

	Gen. Sherman	Gen. Grant	Boole	Hart	Grizzly Giant
Height of top of trunk	272.4	267.4	268.8	277.9	209.0
Volume, excluding limbs	49,600.0	43,038.0	39,974.0	32,607.0	30,300.0
Perimeter of base on slope . . .	101.6	107.6	112.0	73.8	96.5
Mean diameter of restored base	30.7	33.3	33.2	26.5	27.6
Mean diameter at 60 feet	17.5	16.3	15.3	14.5	15.8
Mean diameter at 120 feet	17.0	15.0	13.9	12.9	13.1
Height first large limb	129.9	129.8	126.0		95.4
Diameter of first large limb	6.8	3.2			6.0

around the tree to protect the roots and to keep visitors at a distance. A new road has been completed at a distance therefrom, affording views to passing motorists from the most interesting points.

Transit points connected by traverse from which the Grizzly Giant was visible were selected around the tree, at distances ranging between 230 and 400 feet from its base, and their elevations determined from Bureau of Public Roads datum.

With transit on these points, elevation angles were read at five-foot intervals to a height of 25 feet, then at increasing intervals to the top; and at each elevation so determined horizontal angles were taken to each side of the trunk. It was not always possible to select sections at equal elevations from the various transit points, but sufficient observations were taken to permit check-

ing elevations and diameters from two or more sets of readings.

A secondary traverse connected by tie to the first was run around the base, from which direct measurements were made, determining the dimensions and elevations at the ground line and horizontal sections at and four feet above the highest ground.

Sectional areas were computed from mean diameters for given heights determined by the angular measurements and the volume computed therefrom by means of Prismatical Formula. In estimating volume, no restoration of burned out sections was made and all limbs were eliminated.

All field and office work was carried out by engineering methods and checked, insuring accurate results.

This tree, eliminating saw cuts and bark, would make 363,600 board feet of lumber, and would inclose

with one-inch lumber a hangar large enough to house the Akron.

This tree is surprisingly circular in form above top o' butt swell at height of nine feet, where it has a mean diameter of 20.50 feet, a perimeter of 64.40 feet and a sectional area of 328 square feet.

The perimeter at ground line and sections taken below top of butt swell show a very irregular form due partly to damage by fires at some time long before discovery of the grove.

While the tree gets its name from its old and grizzly appearance, its top is well provided with limbs and new branches and foliage bearing numerous clusters of new cones, all promising a long continuation of its distinction of being one of the oldest living things on earth. While the extreme top is a limb without foliage, the foliage reaches to a height of only 8 foot or so below the topmost point.

The tree has a natural lean in the form of a uniform curve extending from the base to the top, where it leans south 17.5 feet and west 5.5 feet. This lean, together with the largest of the limbs which are on the south side, causes the only hazard to the tree long continuing to live, as evidenced by the healthy condition of its foliage, much of which is on the north side balancing the forces.

CLARK CROWS IN YOSEMITE VALLEY

By CHARLES W. MICHAEL,
Assistant Postmaster, Yosemite
National Park

O. Sunday, October 15, Mrs. Michael and I had an interesting

experience. We were loafing in the oak grove opposite the postoffice enjoying the sunshine, when we were suddenly startled by a strange swish of sound—a reminiscent sound, but for the moment mystifying. Then a flock of Clark crows was seen settling in the dead top of a tall pine. Now the mystery was solved and back across the years our memory flashed to camping days at the head of Bloody canyon. It was late in September and the nights at the 10,000-foot elevation were getting cold.

Each morning a company of Clark crows would wing upward from the canyon to the summit crags to greet the rising sun. Here perched among the crags they would exchange gossip in a coarse-voiced garrulous manner until the sun had reached the valley at the base of the mountain. And then, one after another, or in little flocks, the crows would take the long plunge. With set wings, almost closed, they would whizz past our camp dropping four or five thousand feet down the sheer east face of the mountain. Once or twice, or perhaps three times on their way down they would spread their wings and leap upward to break the terrific speed.

There was something peculiar and fascinating about the swish of sound that came from the bullet-speeded dives of the Clark crows. Every morning while we were in the Bloody canyon camp we waited and watched for the thrilling dive of the Clark crows and now, after years, the sound of whistling feathers we have heard again.

It is very unusual to find these birds this low in Yosemite.



Old Friends From Afar

By CARL AND HELEN SHARSMITH

Yosemite's mountains are never far from the thoughts of those who intimately know her many peaks. However vividly they present themselves in mental picture, remote and distant they seem in actuality when the mountain lover becomes a jaded city dweller.

Driving to the top of Mount Diablo on November 12, we left our car and the mountain-top full of "city folk," climbed down the steep northeast slope and up to the deserted top of North Peak, a subsidiary mountain some 3560 feet high. A vast panorama confronted us. The day was not clear, yet through the low-lying haze we could distinguish, in the Coast Ranges, Mount Tamalpais and Mount St. Helena to the north, Mount Hamilton to the south. These three peaks, together with Diablo, constitute the major prominences in the central Coast Ranges. To the east below us lay the great valley, the tented arms of its two huge drainage systems, the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers, soon lost in the murky haze.

But far beyond the great valley, rising above the fog, lay clearly visible the Sierran crest. Without realizing what would be in store for us, we pointed the binoculars approximately Yosemiteward, and searched the horizon. Moments passed. A clustered group of saw-toothed peaks took on excitingly familiar form. It couldn't be—yet, swinging a few degrees toward the north, a bold round mountain, rising free and isolated, made us intensify our search. When a little farther north we beheld the precipitous craggy face and square summit of another, there was no longer

any doubt in our minds.

The sheer southwest face of Conness was unmistakable, and Dana we would know anywhere. Soon we could dimly discern Dana even without the glasses. The identity of all the others now came quickly—Kuna Crest, Mount Maclure, Mount Lyell, the pyramidal form of Mount Florence and Mount Rodgers, and a little to the front the Clark range, with Mount Clark, Red, Gray and Merced peaks. Finally, far to the north, we located Tower Peak, the northern boundary of Yosemite National Park. Had the lower reaches of the range been free of haze, we felt we might have seen Cloud's Rest, or perhaps Hall's Dome. One hundred and thirty miles away by air-line, yet here were Yosemite's peaks, as individually familiar as if we were actually among them. And so indeed we called ourselves to be.



A. E. BORELL JOINS STAFF

Yosemite is happy to announce the appointment of Adrey E. Borell as Jr. Park Naturalist to fill the position of Museum Preparator left vacant by the transfer of Cliff Prenal to the Park Naturalist position at Zion National Park.

Mr. Borell brings to this work a wide background of experience. He has served on our Ranger-Naturalist staff the past three summers. He is a graduate of the University of California with a Masters degree in the field of mammalogy. He has done extensive field and technical work with the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University.





Digitized by
Yosemite Online Library

<http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library>

Dan Anderson