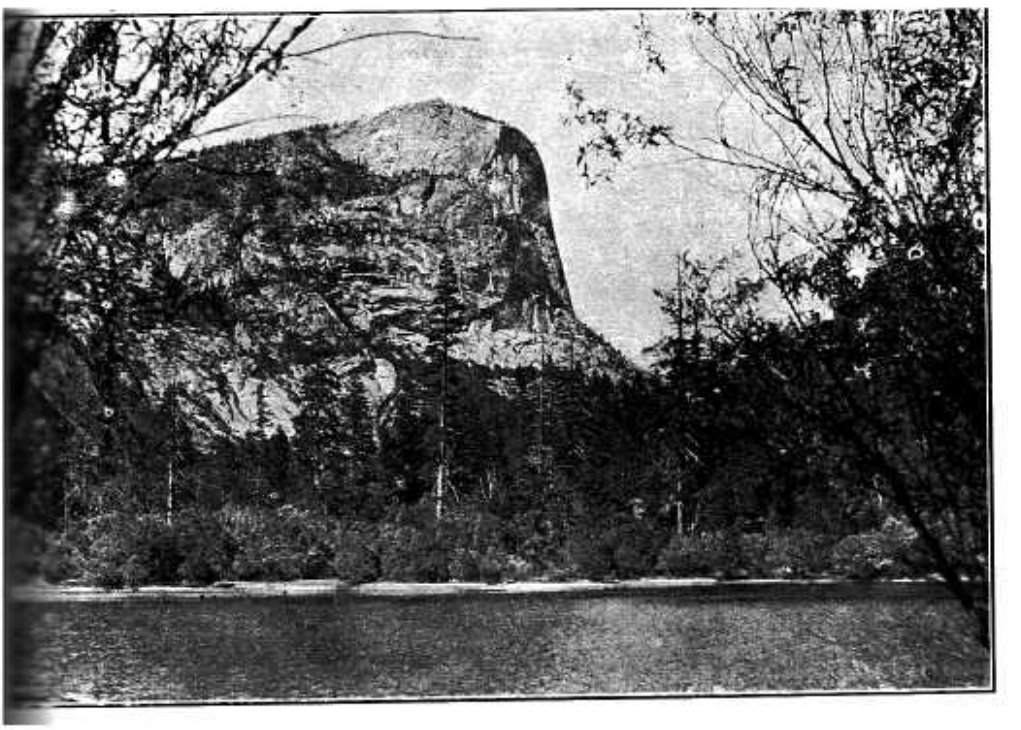
YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



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C. E. Watkins, One of the Early Photographers of Yosemite

(By M. E. BEATTY, Assistant Park Naturalist)

The Yosemite Museum is fortunate in possessing a number of the first photographs ever taken in Yosemite. Among these are the large 18x22 inch pictures taken in the '60s by Carleton E. Watkins, an early California photographer. One of the most popular of Yosemite scenes was that of Mirror Lake with Waijau (Pine Mountain) reflected in it. The Indian name has since been changed to Mt. Watkins in honor of he who spread the fame of Yosemite through his lovely reproductions.

Watkins was born in the State of New York and came to California as a young man. During the early '50s he was employed as a clerk in a San Francisco store. A peculiar combination of circumstances led to the start of his photographic career. He became acquainted with R. H. Vance, who had a photograph gallery in both San Francisco and San Jose. It happened that the operator of his San Jose gallery quit his job and Vance asked young Watkins to go down and take charge until he got a new man. No new operator arrived immediately and young Watkins was forced to hurriedly acquire the art of making daguerrotypes. His great interest and progress soon proved that he had found his natural field. A little later, Watkins left San Jose and took up landscape photography, his travels carrying him to various parts of the State.

Watkins' first visit to the Yosemite region was in 1858 or 1859, when he visited the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees. Drawings of the Big Trees had already appeared in Hutchings California Magazine, but to Watkins goes the credit for the first photographic reproduction. The Museum possesses a print from that first negative, showing Galen Clark

standing at the base of the Grizzly Giant.

Watkins first visited Yosemite Valley in 1861 and made the first 18x22 landscape photographs of record. With our modern photographic methods, it is almost impossible to conceive the difficulties of the task and the indomitable energy and courage of the man who produced those pictures.

After constructing a special large camera and trying out several test plates, Watkins set out for Yosemite. Travel in those days was entirely by trail and at least 12 pack animals were required to carry his equipment into the Valley. Five mules were required to carry necessary equipment from point to point in the Valley, for it must be remembered that large glass plates were used for negatives. As each picture was made a tent had to be set up, plates coated and immediately exposed and at once developed. Long exposures were necessary due to the nature of the process, in some cases an hour or more time being needed. This explains why the majority of early day pictures fail to have detail in running water and waterfalls, and why the leaves of trees were sometimes blurred. Early morning was the best hour for picture taking for, as a rule, there was little wind to disturb the foliage.

Watkins' later life was spent mainly in San Francisco although many important trips were made throughout the west and British Columbia. Most of his original negatives were destroyed in the San Francisco fire of 1906. Hence, the early day print made by Watkins are now exceedingly rare.

In addition to their value from the standpoint of rarity, the prints possessed by the Yosemite Museum are of great value historically. A series of pictures over a period of ten years shows the changes in the appearance of the Grizzly Giant. One photo in particular shows a burned snag still standing near the base of the Giant and gives a sure clue to the origin of the burns and broken limbs on the west side of the Grizzly Giant. The snag has long since disappeared.

Other pictures showing various Valley scenes enable us to compare the proportion of forest cover and meadow-land to present conditions and prove that there was a greater number of conifers than we had heretofore supposed. A picture of the Cathedral Spires proves definitely that, if there was a third spire, it fell long before the '60s, rather than during the Inyo Earthquake of 1872, as had been reported.

It may thus be seen that as time goes on, these pictures will prove increasingly valuable as a pictorial record of early days in Yosemite

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THE COVER

Mirror Lake and Mt. Watkins

The Nest of the Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker

(By ERNEST A. PAYNE, Member 1935 Field School)

On July 5, 1935, as the Field School hiked toward Research Reserve by way of the Hetch Hetchy trail, Paul Wilson and I had fallen some distance back of the group in our effort to observe the birds along the way. We had left the trail and were making out way through an open grove of lodgepole pine and red fir, at an elevation of approximately 8,000 feet, when we were attracted by a continued hoarse, raucous, scolding twitter emanating from the tree overhead. Such a racket could only come from a member of the woodpecker clan, so we determined to locate its source. After much unsteady walking over the rough debris strewn ground with our necks craned backward as far as possible, we discovered a small opening near the top of a half-dead lodgepole pine. Through this opening the heads of the young inmates protruded, as the call "food-food-food" came to us in no uncertain terms.

Propping ourselves comfortably against a convenient log, we settled down to await the return of the parents. We had watched the opening closely for about ten minutes when an adult appeared and fed the noisy young. Even with glasses accurate observation was difficult as the nest was quite high and the bird's actions were rapid. This observation was at 2:52 p. m. At 3:10 the same bird returned and we were able to complete the notes necessary for identification. After "stoking" the young, the adult flew away and drummed rather passively on the bark of a nearby tree.

The solid black back, light throat and underparts, the light line under the eye, white marking in the secondaries, and a yellow band area on the head with a total absence of red, presented a combination neither of us had seen before. The manner in which the bird supported itself against the tree by means of an out-spread wing was also new to us.

With complete notes, we reached camp and reported the find to Mr. Joseph Dixon, who immediately identified the bird as the Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker.

At 8:15 the following morning the members of the class visited the tree and witnessed a scene similar to the one enacted for us the preceding day. Each parent bird came to the opening once to feed the young. After performing their domestic duties, the adults flew to the tree mentioned above and repeated the pounding. This pounding seemed more or less incidental as if to restore poise, rather than to be an active search for food. The perfunctory hammering done, the birds would disappear with rapid flight into the depths of the neighboring

trees. Between feedings, the young uttered intermittent, metallic, high-pitched squeaks.

Ranger Naturalist Ashcraft climbed a tree close by to photograph the birds at the nest, but after vainly waiting over an hour for the parents return, he gave up. Later, however, Jack Applegarth, a member of the class, was able to secure several pictures which show the young and adults at the nest-hole.

The finding of the nest was indeed well-timed, for when we visited the area two days later the young had left the nest.

We felled the tree in which the hole was located and removed a section about five feet long containing the nest, and this is now on exhibition in the Yosemite Museum. Close observation revealed that the nest hole was 64 feet from the ground; the opening 2¼ inches wide and 1½ inches deep. The tree was 18 inches in diameter at the base and seven inches in diameter at the nest opening. The tree was alive about four feet above the nest, but the heart wood in the region of the nest was decayed, making an ideal location for a woodpecker's home.

No sticks, fibre or similar material had been used in the nest other than the few chips that had fallen to the bottom of the hole during construction. The nest was clean except for a small quantity of fresh droppings that had, no doubt, been left immediately preceding abandonment by the young. The height at which the nest was found does not seem to correlate with most records for the species. The nest is usually reported as being between eight and fifteen feet above the ground.

For a distance of about two feet above and below the hole the tree had been completely denuded of all bark and the cleared area was a thick mass of exuded pitch. Whether this pitch comprises a part of the diet of the bird, whether it serves as a tangle foot for all flated insects, or whether it is the functionless result of the incidental hammering of which we have spoken, we were unable to determine.

Several days later, on July 10, we saw a single male of this species near the crest of Boundary Ridge, perhaps two miles from the site of the above nest.

According to the literature, the Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker is a relatively rare bird, and the finding of the nest is an item of extreme interest. According to Grinnell and Storer in their "Animal Life of the Yosemite," the only nest found in the Yosemite National Park was reported on June 20, 1915, near the bank of Bridalveil creek.

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PICTURE ON RIGHT

Arctic Three-toed Woodpeckers

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Ancient Campsites

By IRWIN B. DOUGLASS
Field School 1935

Human beings cannot camp at a given location for even a few days without leaving their imprint upon it. For a short time trampled vegetation, food refuse, and discarded articles of clothing will mark the spot. For a longer period the blackened embers of the campfires will remain. But allow a century to pass and all such signs will be gone.

In the case of the Indians who once inhabited the Yosemite Park region, however, many of their campsites still can be located readily. On the floor of the valley many granite boulders retain the cavities produced by the pounding of rock pestals through countless hours as the Indian squaws ground their acorns to make acorn meal, one of the principal items of food of the Yosemites. In the high country the ancient campsites can be identified in quite a different manner.

Before the coming of the whites the Indians were in the stone age of culture. Their weapons were tipped with obsidian and their knives were fashioned of the same material. The source of this volcanic glass, at least for the Indians of the Yosemite region, was a large deposit at Mono Lake. The Mono Indians gathered it and used it as a medium of exchange in obtaining from other tribes food and articles which they lacked.

If we can reconstruct the picture accurately, they must have loaded themselves and moved up into the mountains to camping sites near passes, through which the tribes from the western slope would come to trade with them.

After exchanging their deer skins and acorns for obsidian, the western Indians began the task of fashioning the crude chunks of obsidian into arrowheads. The larger pieces were broken into thin flakes and the flakes were fashioned by delicate chipping. Some flakes were curved and showed plainly that they would not produce a head that would carry an arrow true. Occasionally one would be ruined as it was almost completed. These were discarded as were also the smaller chips produced in the final fashioning.

Today these black chips remain as definite evidence of the industry of the Indians who once passed that way. As a hiker wearily climbs to

the top of Donohue Pass he may sit down to rest. More than likely, if he looks around his feet he will find obsidian chips, and then as he rests he can imagine the copper skinned warrior sitting there beside him, also resting, but putting his time to good advantage by fashioning a new arrowhead.

It is a great temptation to the romantic hiker to gather up some of these flakes and partially completed points. The supply seems inexhaustible but if they are carelessly thrown away along the trail as the tiring hiker seeks to lighten his pack they will bear a false message to the next observant student of nature.

Before the record has been too greatly confused in this way it might be valuable to prepare a map of the park showing where obsidian chips can be found. Such a map would be interesting in that it would show the favorite camping sites and chief trails of the Indian tribes.

The All-day Hike as a Socializing Agent

(Ranger-Naturalist Harold E. Ferry)

There will be little disagreement with the statement that the foremost responsibility of a ranger-naturalist is to interpret nature in its local setting to the Park visitors, and to help these visitors learn to read and appreciate the trailside for themselves. Conscientious effort on the part of the ranger-naturalist to fill this duty will tax his initiative as well as his energy, but if he stops there he will miss additional opportunities for service and a great deal of personal pleasure.

National Park visitors represent a selected cross section of society, or should one say a cross section of society under rather selective conditions. In other words, Park visitors represent society on a vacation, in its most carefree state. Knowing this, it is wisdom on the part of the ranger-naturalist to recognize the value of social expression in his educational program and to make use of it in vitalizing his work.

The all-day trip with a ranger-naturalist offers an ideal opportunity for social development within a party of hikers. To begin with, the spirit of the day's adventure pervades the group and makes for social consciousness at the outset. There is an understanding which springs up among people bound toward a common goal. Recognition of this bond makes for social expression almost immediately.

As progress is made along the trail, many opportunities for questioning present themselves, and each question should be brought to the attention of and be considered by the entire group. Whether or not any member can answer it, the practice of bringing the group into the problem makes for alertness and interest.

The bulk of the day's nature study

will doubtlessly be done on the "up" trip. Rest periods are required more frequently then and if the ranger-naturalist keeps in mind the value of socializing this part of the work, the members of his party will grow to feel "group conscious" as well as very close to him by the time the lunch hour approaches.

Mealtime is always a great socializing agent, but consider the possibilities where lunches are eaten along a mountain stream in the welcome shade of fragrant pines after a group has spent the morning in hiking and enjoying nature together. Then indeed the individual becomes at one with the group if the ranger-naturalist is alert to the social possibilities of the occasion. Goodwill and conviviality are easily brought to fruition with a gentle amount of guidance.

Following luncheon, a comfortable period of relaxation ensues during which a group can become even better acquanited. A practice which has proved successful and interesting is to have each person give his name, the location of his home, the place of his birth, his profession, and his hobby, the ranger-naturalist leading off and acting as host. It is quite an illuminating experience for the individuals of such a group to become aware of the calibre of the rest of the party. The writer remembers one instance in particular where a women expressed her appreciation for the "get acquainted" hour, for as she said, she was quick to make snap judgments and that day she was pleased to have them corrected.

Many interesting people are discovered by this practice and usually they are very willing to make contributions to the informal program. On one such occasion, three persons, born in Russia, England and Denmark, consented to talk about their respective countries. The group listened most attentively and afterwards plied the speakers with many questions. On another occasion which came to the writer's notice, an individual in the party was discovered to be a member of an opera company and she generously thrilled the noontime group with her singing of Joyce Kilmer's "Trees."

Such experiences under conditions described above do much to develop and cement social loyalties in any group participating in an all-day hike. This is frequently evidenced during the return trip. It is almost as if an entirely different group were coming back. Each member feels a bond of friendship with the others and it is not uncommon for them all to engage in group singing as they go down the trail. The day is usually counted as a success when the end of the trail is reached and the party is ready to disband. The ranger-naturalist has performed his duty by helping his fellow hikers to learn to read and appreciate the trailside but he has really accomplished much more if he has also been alert to the values gained in socializing the day's experiences.