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Mountain Lion Foiled

By Hamilton MacCaughey

The following is an account of an incident witnessed while working for the National Park Service erecting the new aluminum trail signs on the outlying trails of Yosemite National Park. Our party consisting of the writer, Jim Warford, and two of the Sierra's best mules, Jerry and Shorty, had covered every foot of the 700 miles of trail in the park. We had many experiences but our greatest thrill came the afternoon of September 3, 1936, while traveling up Jack Main Canyon in the far northern part of the Park where we had the rare opportunity of witnessing a scene of Yosemite wild life not often observed by man.

Jack Main Canyon at this point is a typical Sierra Nevada valley, about three quarters of a mile wide, 8500 feet in elevation, with walls rising gradually from talus slopes on either side to ridges and peaks up to 10,500 feet. The valley floor is an exceptionally long meadow

named Grace Meadow. As is typical in all our high meadows Lodgepole Pines are encroaching from either side. These pines are about ten feet high in this vicinity, and together with Willows comprise the major covering.

As we were walking up the narrow trail winding along the floor of the valley our pack animals suddenly stopped, apparently startled by something which we could neither see nor hear. Their ears stood upright and they became very alert. We were not left in a state of bewilderment long, however, for suddenly coming directly towards us came a very loud crashing noise. We were unable to see very far in any direction because of the relatively high brush and tree covering, but it sounded as though a herd of cattle was being driven through the brush. All of a sudden about fifty feet ahead of us and to our right we saw a large buck spring

over a high clump of brush. While he was in the air I let out a loud yell trying to get him to change his direction for our stock was loose and becoming very uneasy. At the same instant I yelled he spotted me and swerved diagonally towards the canyon wall. By this time two does had come into sight in the open space near us. They were on a dead run, wild-eyed, and breathing very heavily. We immediately realized that they were badly frightened, and probably being chased. We had no sooner entertained this thought when another loud crashing noise attracted our attention. Looking in its direction we saw a very large Mountain Lion take two leaps, each at least twenty feet long and each over groups of trees exceeding eight feet in height. It had not seen us, and when it reached the open space I yelled again. It stopped for an instant, then headed diagonally off toward the canyon wall, but at right angles to the deer.

This, however, was not the end of the chase for shortly there appeared two coyotes trotting across the open space. They were after what the lion had intended to leave. Without taking any notice of us or the fact that the lion had changed its direction they continued in the tracks of the deer.

For about a minute we lost sight of everything, but soon the deer ran out into relatively open country on the talus slopes. They stopped, looked nervously around, apparently wondering what had distracted their

pursuer. When the coyotes came into sight the deer were quickly on their way again.

The lion climbed the slope about a quarter of a mile from the deer and stopped in a group of four or five large hemlocks which were in a very steep, narrow, little gorge on the west slope of the canyon.



After rounding up our frightened stock, Jim decided to follow the lion and see how close he could get to it. He worked his way through the brush and finally got to within one hundred yards of the large trees. At this point the lion detected him and in what looked to be about eight leaps, traveled up the gorge about three hundred feet in elevation and onto a small ridge running parallel to the main canyon. It stood for about a minute silhouetted against the mountain waving its tail

slowly back and forth, looking first at us then in the direction of the deer. Finally it turned and slowly walked over the crest of the ridge looking very troubled and dejected.

The scene ended almost as quickly as it had begun, but somewhat quieter.

We concluded that it was only a coincidence of events that afforded us our observation. If it had not been for a brisk wind blowing towards us carrying our scent away from the animal, and the fact that they were all deadly set on a matter which meant life and death, I'm sure that we would have missed our experience. As it turned out, we figured that, at least momentarily, we had saved the life of at least one fine specimen of mule deer.

CRYSTALS

ROBERT JOHNSTON
Ranger-Naturalist

A unique occurrence of large crystals has been found above Nevada Fall. Unique, because in our Yosemite Valley region large, well-shaped crystals are rare.

The trail above Nevada Fall winds upward for half a mile and then descends into Little Yosemite Valley. The crystals are located about fifty feet north of the trail near the crest of the rise. They occur in a concentrated area of about eight by twelve feet in size.

Although a little quartz is sprinkled through the mass, nearly all the crystals consist of the mineral—orthoclase. The crystals are pyramidal in shape, measuring as much as one to one and a half inches on a side, appearing like the roofs of miniature houses. The color varies from light brown to orange, as is typical of orthoclase crystals. A good deal of the surface has been covered with the dark plant growth called lichen.

Crystals, such as occur here, grow and take form in cavities of the earth's crust. Orthoclase constitutes a good percentage of common granite but is not seen as whole crystals because of the surrounding intergrowth of the other mineral. However, where cavities are formed the crystals have an opportunity to grow unhampered into large well-formed shapes. The infrequency of such cavities in the Yosemite region accounts for the scarcity of single crystals to be had. At this particular locality the cavity was formed by a small dislocation in the earth's crust termed a fault. Apparently, after the movement had taken place, a hollow was left which later became lined with the crystals of orthoclase.

Due to later wearing away by streams and glaciers, a part of one side of the cavity has been carried away exposing the opposite crystal lined wall. As the occurrence is near the trail, it would be well worth one's time to examine the site.

Our Changing Bears

C. A. Harwell, Park Naturalist

April marks the sure emergence from hibernation of Yosemite bears each year. Some come out in March. Bear feeding and bear control operations are now starting for the season so a discussion of changes coming over some members of the species is in order. Bear feeding started just a few years ago. Before the thought of an incinerator in the valley, garbage was dumped in great pits to be covered with earth. Night prowling bears discovered a new source of food. Night prowling tourists discovered a new source for bear observations. An alert traffic manager discovered a new source of revenue and soon park visitors were being transported to the "Bear Pit," armed with flashlights. The first issue of Yosemite Nature Notes of July 10, 1922 declared "Many visitors to the Bear Pits have been well rewarded this year. At dusk or after dark is the time when they are usually seen, but this season they are even to be seen in broad daylight and are becoming very tame." To dignify this feeding, special platforms were built, electric lights installed, a parking area arranged and larger and larger crowds assembled for a nightly Bear Show and lecture. Numbers of bears adjusted readily to this special feeding. Nature Notes for June 7, 1924 states, "Although a few years ago near approach was all that

could be expected, this summer many are having thrilling experiences having bears . . . eat from their hands in their own camps."

Now feeding became necessary as a control measure. Camp grounds and residence areas were being raided. Heavy day and night feeding was undertaken by the park to keep bears in the western portion of the valley and an ingenious trailer trap was constructed to move bears from the crowded eastern section. Bears were increasing in numbers throughout the park, four hundred was estimated as a census figure. An additional control had to be exercised and in November 1933 twenty-eight bears were caught, especially on the valley floor, and transported by the California State Fish and Game Commission for liberation in the Angeles National Forest. These control measures have served to keep bears in fair check.

This past winter has given accent to another change in habit of this animal. Certainly a half-dozen of them have been observed on the valley floor all winter. If they hibernated it was intermittent. They were seen most often about the incinerator where scraps of food could be had. Weather conditions do not furnish the answer as the following data indicate: The first snow storm of the season on the

valley floor occurred December 26. That month fifty-three inches of snow fell; January added seventy-eight and one-half inches; February nine and one-half inches and March ten and one-half inches making a total of one hundred fifty-one and one-half inches of snow for the floor of the valley. This is an unusually heavy precipitation. Coupled with this, temperatures reached the lowest level ever recorded for the valley.

We stopped bear feeding December 28. For several weeks tourists enjoyed watching bears seemingly frolicking in fresh snow. On January 22 there were twenty-eight inches of snow on the ground and on that day I snapped a good picture of a bear near the incinerator. I had disturbed its eating so it carried a large bone off over the snow. Tracks were well marked leading up into Indian Canyon and on February 18, Assistant Park Naturalist M. E. Beatty and I decided to track a bear to a den. We soon came across evidences of activity besides tracks leading every direction. Incense Cedar bark on snow showed where several trees had been climbed; there were temporary dens under rocks, and finally some 400 feet above the valley Mr. Beatty came across unusual evidences. A Douglas Fir felled in 1935 in the control of Bark Beetles had been recently clawed up and down its entire length by a bear. There were fresh scratches in the snow

and fresh signs all about. Claw marks on Canyon Live Oaks indicated a bear must have been responsible for the quantity of mistletoe noticeable on snow under several of the oaks. Mr. Beatty crawled up over the snow to investigate a likely hole and found himself face to face with a bear. The two of us ventured far enough under the large talus slope rock to observe the den which extended well back and that this opening furnished the bear its only apparent means of escape. We could see the bear slowly backing away. It moved its head from side to side and whined to arouse our sympathy. We showed none so it lunged forward puffing loudly and striking the floor of the den sharply with front feet to arouse our fear. This was more successful. We retreated. Mr. Beatty guarded the den while I secured help, flashlights and cameras. After considerable maneuvering Junior Park Naturalist James E. Cole and Park Photographer Ralph Anderson succeeded in securing a flashlight photograph showing a wild bear in its natural den. Such opportunities for photography are rare.

A subsequent trip on March 6 showed the bear had evidently quit the den that day and had not returned. The granite at the entrance had been worn perfectly smooth by the comings and goings of bears, certainly for many years.

American Black Bears are such adaptable creatures that we fear the

problem of their control in so congested an area as Yosemite Valley will become increasingly difficult. They have learned to like our food and already demand the right to

secure it; they will continue to increase under our protection; they may learn to shorten or even omit their hibernation periods to take advantage of our solicitous care.



Interior of den showing bear under overhanging wall.

UPSIDE DOWN TREE

By ROBERT JOHNSTON
Ranger-Naturalist

Believe it or not, in the Mariposa Grove near the Big Tree Lodge there is a sugar pine tree that at first glance appears to have reversed the laws of nature and seems to be growing upside down.

However, on closer approach the tree is seen to be quite dead. Evidently, it is merely a portion of a parent tree, and has come into its present un-tree-like position through some catastrophe. The illusion is so complete, because of the untapering

shape of the trunk for its full fifty feet, and because the tree is quite by itself in a small clearing.

There is a larger sugar pine tree about forty feet uphill. The smaller, broken "upside-down" tree leans toward the larger section indicating its former position. Apparently during some high wind or perhaps when struck by lightning the smaller portion was broken off and shot towards the earth like a gigantic spear. It thrust itself several feet into the ground as it struck, remaining as one of the many examples of nature's freaks.

An Unwelcome Poacher

By E. L. LUCAS Ranger-Naturalist

"To your dens! To your dens!" came the cry of the chipmunk sentinel, as he called from the highest weathered fragment atop a big granite boulder. A score or so of chipmunks, needing no further warning, immediately scampered double quick under cover, followed by their signal giver himself. They knew the cunning ways of some of their enemies. After some five minutes, about fifteen little noses began to appear from under the scattered huckleberry oak patches. They ventured forth one by one, as if they were testing thin ice. Then an occasional "Pst" accompanied by a sudden change of position was indulged in by all. Soon they were scurrying about the rocks in an effort to find food, but not for long.

Suddenly, as if in the throes of a great calamity, the alarm was sounded again, "Run for your lives!" But too late. A swiftly moving body caught my eye and it chanced to be the long, slender body of a weasel. One poor little chipmunk fell a victim. The weasel pounced upon it in

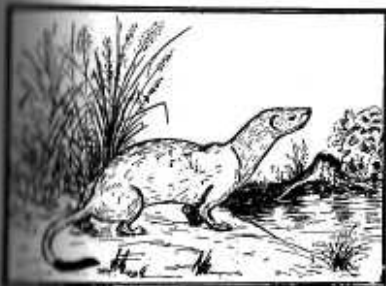
a flash. It squeaked and tried to fight its way to freedom, but the heavier bodied animal was too much for it.

The weasel's mouth was clamped about the neck of the chipmunk, and



though it was still kicking, the weasel dragged it on down the slope into a huckleberry oak growth.

The chipmunks seemed to sense the loss of one of their number, and stood up on their hind legs and squeaked and squeaked. They con-



tinued to squeak and move about among themselves for sometime, apparently trying to comfort each other. Then, just as if a tornado had passed by taking the life of a member of their tribe, they milled about the scene of disaster. Suddenly, the squeaking ceased and quiet and peace were restored, but the little chipmunks appeared to show a deep resolve that the next time Mr. Weasel approached their domain they would hustle to their hiding places, and remain until very sure their enemy was completely out of the vicinity of the Glacier Point Lookout.

OBSERVATIONS ON A SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

By WALTER G. HEIL
Ranger-Naturalist

Early one morning the noisy scolding of jays awakened the residents of Camp 19 and aroused their curiosity. Upon inspection a feud was taking place between jays and a Sharp-hinned Hawk which had taken refuge upon a log. The hawk, apparently injured or ill, was unable to protect itself. I easily captured it and placed it in a large crate for observation.

The wings and especially the legs of the bird were apparently paralyzed. The back part of its head was bare and raw from the attacks of the jays who had evidently found it the most accessible as well as the most vulnerable spot to strike.

During the time that the bird was

kept in captivity it was fed upon raw meat and mice for which it showed a preference, especially the live ones to the recently killed ones.

In about a week the bird seemed to be quite active with its legs and talons, transfixing a mouse almost immediately after seeing it in the crate. At the end of about two weeks it was released and broke into half flight and made its way satisfactorily across an opening disappearing through the azaleas.

Hoping to find some clue as to the reason for the hawk's paralysis, its case was presented to the members of the Cooper Ornithological Club, southern section, at a recent meeting. A possible explanation was given by Dr. Sherman F. Wood of Los Angeles Junior College and Mary Louis Foster of the University of Southern California. Both have recently been working on intestinal parasites in birds and other animals. From their statements birds are subject to a great many of these parasites. Thus far it has been found that both intestinal worms and intestinal bacteria common to birds give off poisons to their systems which result in paralysis and this might have been the case with the aforementioned hawk.

The study of parasites in birds is attracting several workers and much more knowledge will surely be gained in the future. Perhaps several problems regarding the disappearance of large numbers of birds from certain areas will find answers with the enlarging of this study.



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Dan Anderson