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Camping Scene in Yosemite Valley

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NEW PLANT DISCOVERIES MADE BY THE 1939 FIELD SCHOOL

By Ranger Naturalist Carl Sharsmith

The 1939 Field School was especially fortunate in discovering several plants which are rare, or which have been previously unreported for Yosemite National Park. Early in the summer the seldom collected **Eysanthes dubia** Barnh. was found by Mr. Gerald Baden near Swamp Lake in the upland just west of Hetch Hetchy. This plant is a small annual of the Figwort Family.

The most notable and numerous discoveries, however, were made on the High Sierra trip in the northern part of the Park. In the Lodgepole Pine and Hemlock forest near lower McCabe Lake, a diminutive species of Wintergreen, **Gaultheria humifusa** (Graham) Rydb. was found in great abundance. In one place the plant formed a nearly continuous carpet on an area ten feet square. This plant is reputedly rare in the Sierra Nevada, but after thoroughly fixing in mind the rounded shiny leaves, prostrate habit, and pink urn-shaped flowers and scarlet berries hidden by the leaves, the group found it to be quite frequent. Thus it was found not only forming carpets, but also fringing boulders and stream

banks in the forest, as well as being scattered among the grasses and fringing morainal boulders in meadows. Its altitudinal preference in Yosemite is mainly around 9,500 feet.

At the head of Virginia Canyon in the northwest corner of the Park, the metamorphic rock areas yielded the largest number of discoveries. At 10,800 feet altitude, Mr. Edward Butts found some interesting forms of Polystichum or Sword Fern, and gave an account of them in Nature Notes for June, 1940. At 11,200 feet on the south base of Twin Peak in the same region, a species of Moonwort Fern, **Botrychium lunaria** (L.) Sw. was found, which represents the first observation of this species in the Park. Near the summit of Twin Peaks (11,500-12,000 feet), two further species which are scarcely known in Yosemite Park, or in the Sierra Nevada for that matter, were found to be abundant. These were **Cerastium Beeringianum** C. & S. (an alpine Chickweed), and **Potentilla pseudosericea** Rydb. (an alpine Potentilla or Cinquefoil). **Carex danensis** Stacey, a new species of Sedge

discovered a year or so ago on Mount Dana, was common on these slopes.

On the broad slopes of Excelsior Mountain east of Virginia Canyon, likewise composed of metamorphics, two more new plant records for Yosemite were discovered. One of these was **Anelsonia eurycarpa** (Gray) Macbr. & Pays., a species sometimes but probably erroneously referred to the arctic genus *Parrya*. It is a Mustard, forming low-tufted mats of hairy lanceolate leaves, with erect, lanceolate pods an inch or so long at the ends of

very short stems. On this west facing slope composed of finely frost comminuted metamorphics, were scores of these plants. With them but far more abundant was an alpine Daisy which was not only seen for the first time within the bounds of Yosemite Park, but which also indubitably fixed the occurrence of this species in the Sierra Nevada. This plant was **Erigeron vagus** Pays. a species which has hitherto been known with certainty only from the high mountains of southwestern Utah.

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL — A LATE RISER

By Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael

The Golden-Mantled Ground Squirrel is a late riser, but if I happen to be sitting in the tent any time after nine in the morning he is likely to pay me a visit. He scrambles up the netting of the screen door to attract my attention and of course I open the door and invite him in. Once inside the tent he stands up on his hind legs and lifts up his little fore-paws. In this attitude the little beggar is quite irresistible and he always gets a hand-out. He will eat bread if nothing else is offered, but he prefers cake and knowing his taste for sweets he always gets cake if there is any in the cupboard. He dearly loves prunes and raisens. Today, thinking to give him a special treat I offered him a walnut. He simply turned up his nose, he would have

nothing to do with the walnut, even when I broke it open for him. I got him a piece of raisenbread with sugar coating on the crust. This offering quite met with his approval. First he ate the sugar coating, then the raisens and finally the bread.

Golden-Mantled Ground Squirrels are common above the rim of the Valley, but it is a rare sight to see one on the floor of the Valley. This fellow appeared in Camp 19 last summer on the day that Ranger-Naturalist Harold Perry got back from Glacier Point and there is the strong suspicion that he bummed a ride in Harold's car. Perhaps inadvertently, locked up in the food trunk. Anyway he seems quite at home in Camp 19. He spent the winter here and I was glad to see him when I came in this spring.



MT. CONNESS GLACIER

By Lloyd Parratt, Field School '39

Jerry Baden and I visited Conness Glacier July 31, 1939, and attempted to climb the peak from the glacier-side of the mountain. First it was necessary to climb the shoulder of Sheep Peak and then to continue over to the west shoulder of North Mountain. From there we dropped down the talus slope to the large frontal moraine of the Conness Glacier.

We noticed several glacial tables, large boulders perched on ice masses near the glacial lake at the foot of the glacier. The glacial lake was characteristically a milky-green due to the suspension of fine glacial material in the water. Farther down and to the south we could see two small lakes, or tarns, near the snout of the glacier which offered a considerable contrast in color. The one, having fine glacial flour suspended in it, was a muddy green, the other slightly to the west was a beautiful azure-blue, having received its melt-water from snowbanks.

We went up the slope of the glacier, which was mushy enough to walk on if we stamped our feet

down firmly since it was near noon and the sun was warm. En route we came upon several small crevasses through which we could see exposed ice of many feet in depth.

Then we came to the Berg-



schrund, where the snow and ice bank rested against the sloping cliff leaving crevasses between the rock and the ice. We noted that these crevasses were almost choked up with stone blocks and hence were not deep.

Detouring around the Bergschrund we started to climb over the loosely-piled granite boulders toward the summit of the peak. Climbing at an angle of about 80 degrees,

the man ahead would get a hold on a large boulder to draw himself up and the boulder would come crashing down, narrowly missing the man climbing below, and slithering on down to near the base of the glacier. This was extremely dangerous as there was little opportunity for dodging these boulders and also a rock-slide could easily have been started in this loose mass of rocks. Deciding that we would like to live happily ever after, we carefully made the treacherous descent back to the glacier.

According to our experience and to the reports of Ranger-Naturalist Tex Bryant, the peak is getting to be very difficult to climb, because the gradient is being steepened continually by the glacier. Of course we attempted to climb the peak at one of the most difficult places. It

can be climbed easily from the south, the regular route via Young Lakes. It can also be climbed from the north, the glacier side, if one chooses the correct approach to the summit.

Climbing over the huge moraine we made our way slowly up to the shoulder of North Peak where we were interested to see the stripping of fine and coarse rock material as if the side of the mountain had been carefully raked. The larger rock materials it seems are turned up on end by the action of frost and the sun, giving this unusual effect—the process is called solifluction.

This was the only attempt, on the part of the Field School, camped on one of the McCabe Lakes, at the base of Sheep Peak, to explore the Conness Glacier or to climb the mountain.

SUNNYSIDE BENCH

By Ranger-Naturalist Verlin G. Baysinger

The magnificence of Yosemite is so great that we may neglect some of the smaller elements of beauty. Such is the case of Sunnyside Bench, a beautiful ledge on the north wall of Yosemite Valley. This particular ledge is about five hundred feet above the valley floor and is located between the Yosemite Falls and Indian Canyon. It is readily discernible from the valley by a line of trees and a grassy bench. This ledge has been made famous by the writing of John Muir who spent many days and

nights camping on it. For a description you should read Sunnyside Observations in chapter Four of *John of the Mountains*. Since this book came out we have had so many inquiries about its location that it seemed well to describe it in *Nature Notes*.

The scramble up the talus slope is begun just back of the Government shops. It is by no means an easy climb. A definite ledge is soon reached which is followed along to the left. There is a dim trail under the Canyon Live Oaks and

Cedars which is interesting because of its seemingly unplotted course across the sandy and sliding talus. It has been principally made by deer and other wild animals. The trail soon brings the hiker to a wide ledge in the granite. It is here that one finds sufficient reward for all his work. Flower beds in the early weeks of summer are exquisite.

Passing through a great tangle of wild grape one is reminded that for hundreds of years the Indians of the valley climbed here to gather the fruit and to secure the long stems of the vines which they used in tying some of the elements of their bark structures and

especially their acorn storing devices called chuckas. Here also was a good place to find soaproot. It was on this very ledge that members of the immediate family of Chief Tenaya were hidden in 1851 watching the Mariposa Battalion, the discovery party, searching out and burning their villages and homes just below them.

Following the bench to its western end a remarkable view of the Lower Yosemite Fall is obtained as well as views of the smaller falls and pools of the cascades between the lower and upper falls. From this point a sloping ledge may be followed by hardy climbers to the great bench fronting the upper fall.

A NOTE ON THE YELLOW-LEGGED FROG

By James P. Huss—Field School '39

A difference of coloration was noticed between the yellow-legged frogs inhabiting the McCabe Lakes (granite) and those found in the lakes of the metamorphic rock region of the Park that we visited last summer. In particular, the unnamed lake at the head of Virginia Canyon, close to the site of the 1939 Field School camp abounded with amphibians.

Their backs were a dark, almost black hue, while the undersides were lighter although not as light as those of the lower McCabe Lake. These blackish frogs, when sitting on a metamorphic rock in shallow water, were difficult to see unless there was movement. At lower Mc-

Cabe Lake these animals were of a black and yellow coloration, the typical condition as found elsewhere in Yosemite. The streaking of the backs as in the McCabe Lake frogs was less pronounced due to the lack of contrasting colors.

This would apparently indicate protective coloration, i.e., the dark phase blending with the dark metamorphics and the more brilliant type with the white granites.

It would be interesting to check on other types of life inhabiting these two areas to determine whether or not this rock difference produces color phases in other species also.

WHAT! A CLARK NUTCRACKER IN YOSEMITE VALLEY?

By M. H. Carothers

A Clark Nutcracker is at home among the White-bark Pines of timberline and is to be expected amidst the Western White Pines of the Hudsonian Life Zone. But when one is seen on the floor of Yosemite Valley, that is news.

This particular Clark Nutcracker was seen on April 1, 1940, at about 5:00 p.m. It flew down from the lower branches of a moderate sized Western Yellow Pine located at the northeastern edge of Camp 6. The bird seemed to become absorbed with the job of pecking industriously at a discarded fragment of food upon the ground.

The unusualness of this bird's appearance in Yosemite Valley led me to examine available records to determine just how infrequently it had been seen.

The first record for the Clark Nutcracker on the floor of Yosemite Valley was September 27, 1922. The notes of C. W. and Enid Michael state that though they had been making observations for three years, the bird had not been previously observed by them at this relatively low elevation. That autumn, winter, and spring (1922-1923) these birds were almost common, having been

frequently seen on successive days. In these same notes the Michaels considered that the presence of the Clark Nutcrackers that year might have been attributed to the numerous cones left upon the trees in the absence of the California Gray Squirrels, which had been depleted by an epidemic. During the remainder of the careful and interesting reports kept by the Michaels in Yosemite up to and including 1932, there was only one other time that the Nutcracker was observed—two birds near Mirror Lake on November 5, 1928.

A lapse of steadily recorded bird notes in the Valley followed until 1935 when Walter Fitzpatrick began systematic monthly reports. From that year until the present he has only one record of this bird in the Valley. On October 3, 1935, Mr. Fitzpatrick saw the unmistakable markings of a Nutcracker as it flew overhead.

Nearly twenty years of records report this species nearly common for half of one year, two widely spaced appearances, and this one of April 1940. It is news when a Clark Nutcracker is seen on the floor of Yosemite Valley.

WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER NEST

By Ranger-Naturalist Enid Michael

Of all the nine species of woodpeckers that nest in Yosemite National Park the White-headed Wood-

pecker drills its nest-hole closest to the ground. Of all nine woodpeckers the White-headed is the only one

where choice of nesting site would average less than nine feet above the ground. In a logged-over district the White-headed Woodpeckers often drill into the remaining stumps, with nest-hole only two or three feet above the ground. In other cases they will drill their nest-holes into a fallen tree. In the Yosemite Valley



they build in all sorts of places, but never very high above the ground. They do not seem to mind human associations, they nest in gate posts, log cabins, the woodwork of bridges and the stringers under the bridges. And this year a pair carved out a home in one of the log seats where tourists sit to enjoy the view. Strange to say, in spite of close association with human neighbors they successfully reared their family.

Knowing the nesting habits of the White-headed as I do I met up with a surprise last June when I discovered a pair of White-heads that had broken the habit of the tribe. It was in a coniferous forest above the rim of the Valley; "sawdust" on the snow attracted my attention to the nest,

and looking up I saw a hole in the great Red Fir and heard the squealy notes of young woodpeckers.

Strange thing, it seems that no young woodpecker has sense enough to keep its mouth shut; bad thing, too, because bears are attracted by the squeals and if the nest-hole be in rotten wood a bear can easily rip into the nesting cavity—and they often do.

The surprising thing about this particular nest-hole was that it was situated fourteen feet above the ground and was drilled through the thick bark of a Red Fir. I stepped back and waited, expecting to see a Williamson or Red-breasted Sapsucker come to the hole, but instead there came a male White-headed Woodpecker. Which just goes to show that one never can tell.

NATURE NOTELETS

By Vincent Mowbray

The California Gull (*Larus californicus*) nests at Mono Lake and is frequently observed on the lakes of the High Sierra. However, it is of rather rare occurrence in Yosemite Valley. On May 20, 1940, a single gull of this species was observed on Mirror Lake at 2:00 p.m. and again at 4:20 p.m. by the group which I was leading on a nature walk. I returned at 7:00 p.m. but the bird had left.

On May 31, Park Naturalist C. A. Harwell observed a gull of this species light in the grass near the Museum. It remained for five minutes, then flew toward the river,

**SUMMARY OF AREAS ADMINISTERED BY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
AS OF APRIL 15, 1940**

Type of Area—	Number	Area (Sq. Miles)	Area (Acres)
National Parks.....	26	16,109.91	10,310,339.80
National Historical Parks.....	4	11.97	7,658.27
National Monuments.....	82	14,764.40	9,449,214.35
National Military Parks.....	11	32.70	20,921.48
National Battlefield Sites.....	7	2.70	1,728.09
National Historical Sites.....	4	0.35	223.59
National Recreational Area.....	1	2,655.58	1,699,573.03
National Memorials.....	8	.50	317.11
National Cemeteries.....	11	.55	353.46
National Capital Parks.....	1	16.88	10,803.16
National Parkways.....	3	51.95	33,245.15
TOTAL.....	158	33,647.49	21,543,377.46

WHITE PELICANS ABOVE GLACIER POINT

By Park Naturalist C. A. Harwell

On June 6, 1940, Mrs. Bess Hoffmann of Los Angeles with her sister observed a flock of some seventy White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) above the Glacier Point area. They were flying north-east, at first in two flocks, which merged to one as the birds passed high above the Starr King Domes, evidently headed for the Mono Lake region. The black tips of the wings, the great size of the birds, their white plumage and the fact that they were flying in loose "V" formation, all observed through eight-power binoculars, establishes the species.

On June 30, 1933, Mr. C. H. Oneal observed White Pelicans from this same observation point. (Yosemite Nature Notes October 1933) He saw

them 2,000 feet below him, flying in Yosemite Valley while Mrs. Hoffmann saw them "higher than the tops of any of the peaks."

YOSEMITE

When the sun across the valley
Gilds the face of old Half Dome
Giving notice day is waning;
Then the lengthening shadows
come.

Softly evening steals upon us,
Still the peaceful valley lies
While the Merced's rippling waters
Sing unending lullabies.

Quickly overhead the darkness
Shuts the peaks from out our sight
Lo, behold, the sky is studded
With the jewels of the night.

Day time, night time, wondrous
valley,

Oh! that man could only see
All of nature's many virtues
Gathered at Yosemite.

—G. T. Seater.



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Dan Anderson