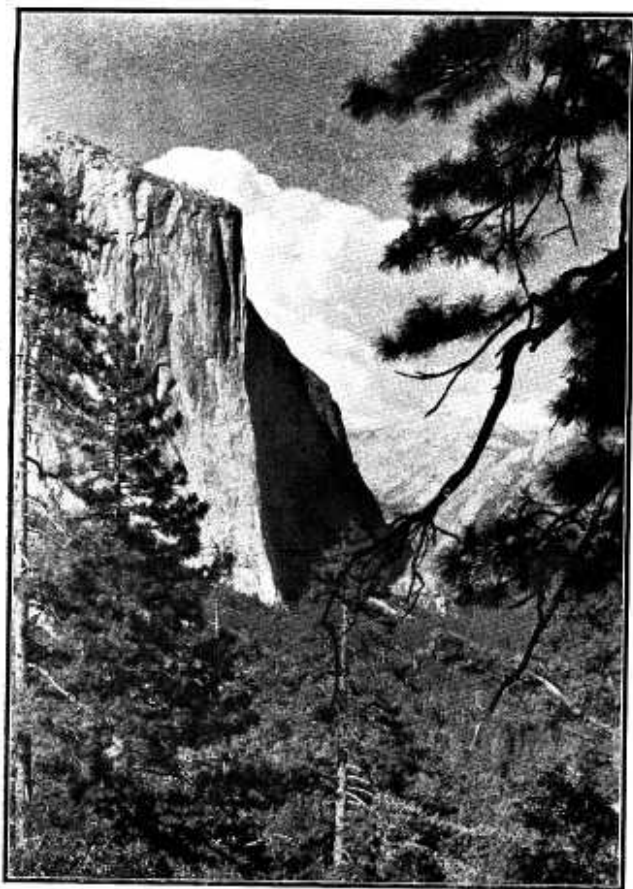


# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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# Yosemite Nature Notes

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## DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO YOSEMITE

By C. Frank Brockman, Park Naturalist

### Part II—The Era of Wheels

During the initial years of Yosemite's fame it was not only difficult to reach the Valley from any one of the several "gateway" towns in the nearby foothills but the achievement of these preliminary destinations was also a task with which to be reckoned. Until about 1870 Yosemite travelers left San Francisco for Stockton via steamboat at 4 p.m., arriving at the latter city early the following morning. By 1871 the two cities were linked by railroad so, for those preferring it, a four-hour train trip could be substituted for the overnight journey by boat. Nevertheless, until several years later, when the Central Pacific Railroad had extended its San Joaquin division to Merced and had constructed the Oakdale and Copperopolis branches, Stockton served as the center of distribution for Yosemite travel, horse-drawn stages being boarded there for such towns as Mariposa, Coulterville and Big Oak Flat, where the last lap of the journey to Yosemite began. In regard to the nature of travel in these conveyances "The Yosemite Guide

Book," (1869 and 1871), sounds an ominous warning, as follows:

"Those who can afford it will do well to hire private conveyances at Stockton, as the stages are often overcrowded and uncomfortable, the arrangements on the route not having been hitherto made with reference to the comfort of pleasure travelers."

A more pointed reference to the inconveniences of such a journey will be found in "Teresina in America," (1875), by Therese Yelverton. Her impressions of her stage journey from Stockton to Mariposa are as follows:

"The coach is constructed to carry four inside, but nine are thrust unceremoniously into it. Three are wedged on each seat, and then a narrow plank is placed between the two doors—which had to be taken up when the doors are opened—on which plank three more . . . are squeezed. . . This state of things you must endure for fifteen hours, with the thermometer at ninety, and amid clouds of fine dust, which insinuates itself into mouth, nose and ears, and even under the eyelids. . . If your neighbors are gentlemen, they enliven proceedings by chewing, spitting copiously out of the window, and—unless some lady pro-

tests—smoking in a most cloud compelling style."

Such conditions were characteristic of what early visitors could expect when they undertook a journey to Yosemite.

common carrier. In that year the trend changed and the majority arrived in their own cars. Today over 95 per cent of park visitors reach Yosemite National Park by means of private automobile.

### First Roads to Yosemite Valley

Visitors who sought the wonders of Yosemite via the long, arduous journey in the saddle increased to such proportions by the late 60's that the need for better transportation facilities was readily apparent.

Enterprising citizens in the towns along the various routes, as well as residents of the Valley itself, were active in promoting this need so that wagon roads were gradually extended, thus substituting to a large extent travel on wheels for travel in the saddle. In 1871 a wagon road had been extended 21 miles from Big Oak Flat to Hardin's Ranch, approximately 25 miles from the Valley, and before the end of that year it had been completed to the edge of the Yosemite Grant (\*) at Gentry Stage travel was also available on the Coulterville Road to Black, about 32 miles from the Valley, and in addition a road had been completed from Mariposa to Clark's (Wawona), about 25 miles south of the Valley by trail.

The years 1874 and 1875, however, were among the most memorable insofar as transportation to Yosemite was concerned for during



With the passing of the years travel facilities naturally improved but it was not until the development of the automobile and improved motor highways to this region that there was developed the degree of comfort expected by modern visitors. Until 1917 the majority of visitors reached Yosemite National Park by

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(\*) Care and administration of Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees were entrusted to the State of California by the Federal Government in 1864

that period the Coulterville, Big Oak Flat and Wawona roads were completed. Later, continued extension of the Central Pacific Railroad made possible additional terminals for horse-drawn stages and by 1886 seven different routes to Yosemite were bidding for the tourist. Those routes which approached the Valley from the south originated at Merced, Raymond and Madera, all of which converged at Wawona (the former via Mariposa), from which point they achieved their destination by means of the Wawona Road. From the north visitors boarded stages at either Milton or Oakdale for travel over one of two routes which converged at Chinese Camp and followed the Big Oak Flat Road to the Valley; or chose the Coulterville route, which originated at the town of the same name, and which was reached by stage from the railroad at either Merced or Modesto.

### The Coulterville Road

Plans for a stage road to Yosemite Valley took definite form in 1867 when the Yosemite Turnpike Road Co., projectors of the Big Oak Flat route, were given permission to undertake their project by the Park Commissioners. Although it was the original plan to complete this road by July 1871 it was still several miles short of its goal in 1872, largely due to lack of funds. Consequently in that year the efforts of Dr. John T. McClean and his associates, who in 1870 had organized the Coulterville and Yosemite Turnpike Road Co.,

were rewarded since they gave assurance of early completion of their plan. The original intention was to bring the Coulterville Road through Crane Flat but during the initial survey of the route the Merced Grove of Big Trees was located and, because of the obvious appeal of these great trees to prospective visitors, the route was altered so that it would pass through that area. A short spur road was also constructed from Hazel Green to Crane Flat, joining the Big Oak Flat Road at that point. On June 17, 1874, the first horse-drawn stages entered Yosemite Valley via the Coulterville Road. Thus to Dr. McClean and his associates goes the honor of pioneering the "era of wheels" in Yosemite history.

The original cost of this road from Bower Cave to Yosemite Valley was \$71,000.00. The four-mile section within the Yosemite Grant was purchased by the State in 1886 for \$10,000.00. It originally boasted a width of from eight to twenty feet, turnouts being provided at narrow sections so that teams could pass. Being a toll road the rates which varied little from year to year were as follows:

|                                   |        |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| For passenger teams, per person   | \$1.00 |
| For horse and rider.....          | 1.00   |
| For freight teams, loaded,        |        |
| per animal .....                  | 1.00   |
| For freight teams, empty,         |        |
| per animal .....                  | .50    |
| For pack animals, each way.....   | .75    |
| For animals, loose, each way..... | .37½   |
| For sheep and hogs, each.....     | .10    |
| For bicycle and rider, each.....  | .50    |

Through 1899 toll collections amounted to \$33,932.71, or about \$2000.00 annually. It was normally open from April to November, slightly longer than its principal competing route, since it utilized the warmer southern exposures of the mountains in reaching its objective.

### The Big Oak Flat Road

With the activity on the Coulterville route those connected with the original plans for the Big Oak Flat Road were spurred to activity. As this road had previously been extended to Gentry at the boundary of the Yosemite Grant, permission to complete the project was requested of the Park Commissioners. Although denied by that body, who felt that but one road was needed from the north side and that the Coulterville Road satisfied that requirement, this decision was reversed by the State Legislature and the difficult three-mile section from Gentry to the Valley floor was completed on July 17, 1874. Being entirely within the Yosemite Grant, this portion of the road was purchased by the State in 1886.

The original cost of the Big Oak Flat Road from its point of origin to Gentry was \$45,000.00. It was approximately 13 feet wide and had maximum grades of 16 per cent. Normally open to travel from May 15 to November 1 some idea of the travel over this route can be obtained from the fact that 8500 people reached Yosemite Valley during the period of 1895-1899 by means of this road. Toll collections, up to 1899,

averaged approximately \$1800.00 annually and were at the following rates—\$1.00 for each person each way; for one two-horse team, \$3.00 each way; for each additional animal, 50c; for each footman, 50c each way; loose cattle and horses, 10c per head; sheep and hogs, 5c per head.

Thus two competing routes were available from the north side of the Valley, a fact that materially affected the revenue of both. Considerable litigation resulted but the claims of the Coulterville company were disallowed and the two roads continued in operation.

### The Wawona Road

Road activity on the north spurred similar interests in a route from the south. In 1874 a group of men united with Washburn, Chapman and Moore, who were operating Wawona at the time, in the formation of a company to build and operate a toll road from Wawona to the Valley. This organization was later (1877) incorporated as the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Company. Construction began on December 4, 1874. The initiation of the work on this date indicates the interest manifested in the completion of this route—a fact that was further complicated by the unusual severity of the winter of that year. Starting at Alder Creek the construction crew originally composed of 50 men and later increased to 300, was divided into two groups, the second going to the Valley to undertake construction in

the opposite direction. By April 18 of the following year the Wawona Road was complete with the exception of about 300 yards in the vicinity of Inspiration Point and until the gap was closed stages from Wawona arriving at that point would be dismantled, carried over the unfinished section by hand, and re-assembled. Passengers negotiated the short distance on foot. Apparently the unusual nature of this outweighed its inconvenience for it was claimed that many visitors selected this route because of this novelty. However, on July 22, 1875, amid much celebration, the Wawona Road was completed and the first wheeled vehicles began to arrive without the necessity of being dismantled at Inspiration Point. The Wawona Road was originally 16 feet wide. Construction of the section from Wawo-

na to the Valley required an expenditure of \$35,000.00. The cost of the total system, including sections from Raymond to Wawona, the route to the Mariposa Grove, and the unit from Chinquapin to Glacier Point (completed in 1882) was \$76,750.00. As a rule it was open to travel from March to December. From 1883 to 1899 over 10,000 people entered Yosemite Valley over this road. The seven-mile section within the original Yosemite Grant was purchased by the State in 1886. In 1917 the toll system from Wawona to the South rim of the Valley, including the Glacier Point road, was turned over to the Federal Government and tolls were abolished.

#### Adventures of Stage Travel

With the development of more modern and comfortable means of travel, which we enjoy today, much



Celebration of Completion of the Wawona Road, July 22, 1875.



of the romance and adventure characteristic of the early days has been eliminated. In Hutchins' "In the Heart of the Sierras" (1886) we catch a few glimpses of those times, as follows:

"... as everyone knows the most desirable of all places on a stage coach is that known as the 'box seat.' This is with the coachman; for, if he is intelligent, and in a good humor, he can tell you of all the sights by the way; with the personal history of nearly every man and woman you meet; the qualities and 'points' of every horse on the road; with all the adventures, jokes, and other good things that he has seen and heard during his thousand and one trips, under all kinds of circumstances, and in all sorts of weather. In short he is a living road encyclopedia, to be read and studied at intervals by the occupant of the 'box seat.'"

One may well imagine these sages of the dashboard spinning, tall, but nevertheless interesting yarns, such as the one about the precocious dog

at Priest's, a lunch stop on the Big Oak Flat Road. This unusual animal, so it was claimed, would carefully size up the number in the party upon the arrival of each stage, then dash off to the chicken yard from which he would return at intervals with a plump fowl in his mouth until the required number of hens were available for the provision of a bounteous repast. Or perhaps the stories would be of a more factual variety such as a description of the method of transporting stages or wagons over the snow, at which time the horses would often be equipped with "snowshoes" of ash planks, 13 inches long and 11 inches wide, fastened to their hoofs by wide bands of iron. Yes, there must have been many compensations for the dust and other inconveniences of travel by stage coach in the early days!

On one or two occasions the trip to Yosemite via stage was enlivened



The Old Village, center of activities, in the 80's.

by a holdup. As late as July 6, 1906, one such episode occurred at the top of the old Chowchilla grade on the Raymond-Wawona run. An ac-

count of this, originally printed in J. D. Foley's "Yosemite Tourist" of July 10, 1906, will be found in Russell's "100 Years in Yosemite."

(Continued in next month's issue.)

### AN EMBLEM OF VICTORY

By John H. Wegner, Assistant Chief Ranger

This observation concerns a lesson in self defense administered "the hard way" by a full grown coyote to a young, frightened, yet courageous deer—a fawn of the previous summer. Although it has been a little over a year since it occurred, the event was sufficiently unusual, and the result of the final outcome so amusing and interesting, that the episode remains clear in mind.

Awakened early one winter morning by a sudden commotion just outside my bedroom window, I witnessed what at first glance appeared likely to be the final chapter of this very young deer's existence. In an all out effort to escape through flight, it had either fallen or had been thrown to the ground and, bleating wildly, was pawing the air with flailing hoofs in a frenzied, last-ditch stand. Surprisingly, its efforts were rewarded for suddenly it regained its feet and in desperation parried the attack of its pursuer by rising upon its hind legs and striking out with the sharp hoofs of its fore feet. The coyote was undoubtedly dismayed at this sudden turn of events and nonplused by the unexpected

display of courage on the part of its intended victim.

In the ensuing actions of both, a battle of wits seemed to be in progress with each planning its own best method of attack and defense. The coyote demonstrated its cunning by endeavoring to hide itself behind adjacent bushes in the apparent hope that the intended prey would turn and again run. Then, by hamstringing its victim from a rear attack, it could cut it down with much



less likelihood of having to take a severe beating in the process.



By its alert watchfulness of every move of its hungry enemy, the deer seemed to realize that headlong flight was of little avail and elected to stand its ground. It continued to bleat excitedly for aid, glancing about occasionally in an effort to determine whether these vain cries for help were to be rewarded. On each of these occasions when the attention of the deer was momentarily diverted, the coyote charged in, only to be met and diverted by another barrage of flailing hoofs. Thus, the coyote could neither close with its less experienced foe nor put it to flight. Five or six times these rushes were beaten off by the deer, with diminishing pleas for reinforcements depicting a growing self-confidence, and, as if in acknowledgment of a superior courage, the coyote finally left the field.

But then the most amusing feature of the encounter took place. As the distance between the coyote and the deer increased, the self-respect of the latter mounted as indicated by the

elevation of its tail. At first, standing in fear of another charge which might conceivably be the end, the tail of the deer drooped despairingly at the prospect. Then, with each step of the retreating coyote, the tip of the young deer's tail increased in elevation until, with the coyote's inclination to retreat, it stood erect and proud—literally a banner of victory.

When last seen some fifteen minutes later, the entire situation was in complete reverse with the coyote being the pursued, this with apparent recklessness and thorough contempt for a creature that would not stop and fight.

Older deer make potent use of the sharp hoofs on their fore feet and have often been observed successfully combatting attacks by a coyote in a like manner. But on this occasion the deer was a veritable youngster, and it was evident from its bearing, as the coyote retreated, that it was aware of the fact that it had figuratively won its spurs.





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Dan Anderson