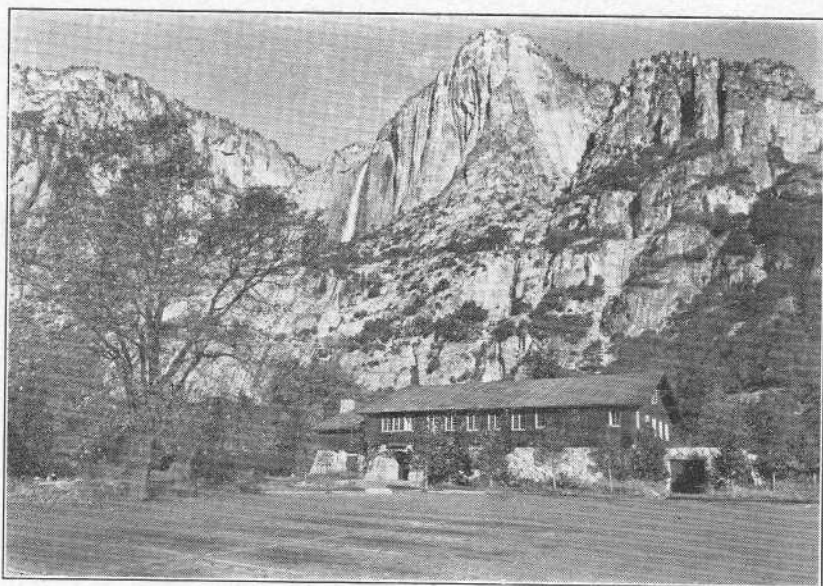


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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No. 10



PARK MUSEUM

Yosemite Nature Notes

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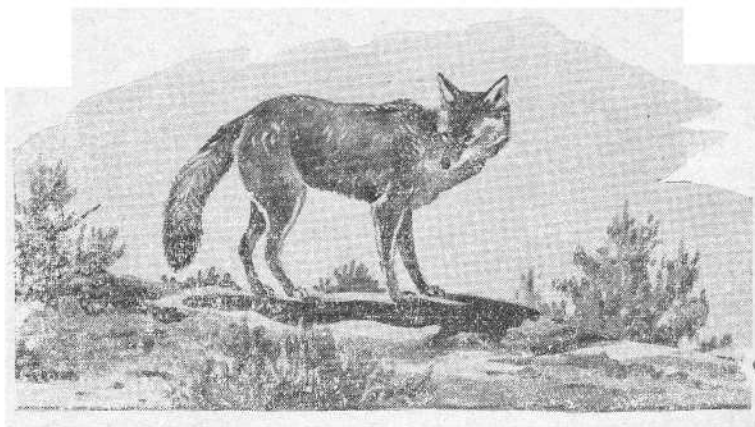
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AUTUMN IN YOSEMITE

By Elizabeth H. Godfrey, NPS Staff

On the cliffs hangs a haze of deep violet blue,
The meadows are bearded with frost,
And into the valley's autumnal bowl
A million gold leaves have been tossed.
The coyotes howl at the break of dawn,
The horned owl hoots at night
As a great full moon peers over Half Dome
To cast its bewitching light.



ALONG THE RED PEAK TRAIL

By Enid Michael

Gingerly I peeked from my sleeping bag. The dazzling brilliance of stars that held the sky an hour ago, has faded—only the morning star and a pale quarter moon remain. Yes, that must be daylight now. Morning has come at last. I wriggle from my sleeping bag into my clothes to stand in the cold, gray mountain dawn of early September. The silvered surface of Washburn Lake is a perfect mirror and reflects with exact nicety the granite wall at its back. The reflection is faultless and one cannot tell at just what point the lake stops and the wall commences. Our burro, Torpedo, tethered nearby has seen me. He pricks up his ears and salutes the dawn as only a donkey can.

The dead embers of last night's fire are quickly scraped away and with a branch of dead fir needles as a starter a snapping fire is soon kindled. Six o'clock now, so says my wrist watch. Yesterday we left Yosemite with Torpedo to carry our things. We had expected to progress further than this on the first day but had failed to reckon with Torpedo, who had his own ideas about just how fast a loaded donkey should travel up hill. Consequently he contrived to put an effective governor on our speed.

The fire has burned down now and the cooking of breakfast cereal is begun. Soon we enjoy our first

breakfast in the open. Breakfast over, we pack our belongings, put the harness on Torpedo, fasten on the kyaks, manipulate the diamond hitch, and are off for our second day's hike.

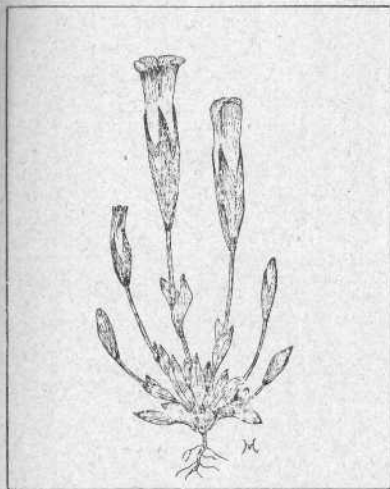
The trail traverses rather open country. Presently we cross Red Peak Fork, coming in on our right, then circle about and commence to ascend an open bluff. Now at an altitude of around eight thousand feet, the pleasant odor of *Artemisia norvegica* mingles with the fragrance of *Western Eupatorium* (*Eupatorium occidentale*). The latter is a rounded bush swarmed over with flowers of pure lavender and smelling for all the world like fresh honey. Progressing up the zig-zag trail is to me like climbing a familiar stairway, for all along the way flowering plants that one may expect to find can be anticipated.

Today Torpedo is beginning to feel acquainted. He travels well but now and then pauses for a bite of bunch grass. The snap of the stems as he pulls them off and the contented crunch is pleasant to the ear. Walking behind Torpedo I am amazed at the flexibility of his feet which look like black velvet slippers. He uses them with supple grace as he steps daintily along.

At the upper reaches of the zig-zags, in light shade, the Woolly-flower Gooseberry (*Ribes lasian-*

thum) is a pleasant addition to the trailside. The bright red, smooth berries, now ripening in tempting bunches, have a delicious, tart flavor.

After leaving the zig-zags the trail winds through the meadow, clear and cool, placid and unhurried — it may well be the spirit of the wilderness into which we have wandered. We have caught up with the springtime for here are fresh beds of blue



gentians, white, blue-striped gentians, and pale Anderson Asters rising from the smiling turf.

This is a delightful place so we turn Torpedo loose to lunch on the succulent grasses, whilst we sit upon the velvet cushion of moss on the stream bank to eat our lunch. Bright as a flame, high mountain Indian Paintbrush leans out over the stream. Torpedo never wanders out of sight. Indeed, from time to time, he turns about to watch us and make sure that we are not going to

desert him. He is a gentle beast and does his best to make friends with us. Indeed he would like to go further and eat lunch with us.

Lunch over, followed by a stimulating dip in the ice water of the stream, and we are on our way again. After the meadow the trail climbs through a series of rough, stony pitches, which are rather hard for Torpedo, but he keeps his spirits up by grabbing a mouthful of flowers, now and then. Creambush Rockspirea (*Hololiscus discolor*) and



Indian Paintbrush create a thrilling combination. Beds of *Arnica nevadensis* are delightful in the shade. Here and there the trail winds through a lawn-like swale all spangled with gay blossoms.

At length we emerge into a level area that seems walled in on every hand by a jumble of mountains. Clouds sweep into the sky; a cold wind blows, but we trudge on. Perhaps we can escape the shadow of

these great mountains, to a warmer camp site further on. Now along the ascending trail are extensive beds of Alpine Beech Fern. The Moss Bearer (*Saxifraga byrophyora*) is another addition to the trailside.

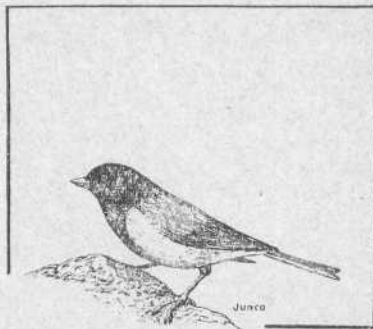
Beautiful Edna Lake we admire and pass, for the cold wind still blows. At length we arrive at a warm sunny meadow that slopes to a little lake. Near the shore a big pile

tiently, and the binding harness that he wears.

Out of the good dry wood we make a fire for cooking our evening meal. We then explore the Whitebark Pines and under the low swung branches, upon the age old mattress of pine needles, we put our sleeping bags. After a good supper we put away our things and climb the little bluff to our boudoir. Sharing our



of wood invites us to camp. Whitebark Pines await us here on a bluff above the lake. Torpedo gladly stops and we quickly relieve him of the packs that he has carried so pa-



pine grove was a flock of Sierra Juncos. In the morning sun we heard their jubilant voices and the sound of hurrying wings over head.

Torpedo was glad to see us come down and he watched with eager interest the building of the fire and cooking of breakfast. The beauty of this timberline camp caused us to linger for a time. To the east rose the majestic Sierra Crest—Mt. Lyell, Rodgers, Electra, Forester and many others.

The crown of Mt. Ritter and the Minarets rose in the background. Back of camp towered the summit of Red Peak, and at the further side could be seen a granite ridge which turned deep rose in the first light of dawn. The banks of our little lake

are bordered with a mantle of grass and flowers to the water line. On a rock near the further shore bobs a Water Ouzel. In the green carpet that reaches back from the shore the foliage of mats of Dwarf Blueberry have already turned bright red, an indication of the lateness of the season. Bright patches of blossoming Sulphur Flower give gayety to the rocky ledges.

In an area so charming we long to linger, yet home is far away and thither we must direct our steps. Torpedo is quickly packed with our belongings and once again we take up the trail. Winding upward we discover that our camp was at the head of a chain of lakes on successive benches descending the canyon. On the step just below a picturesque rock-bound lake claims our admiration. Still about us are scattered groups of Whitebark Pine. They crouch upon small rock abutments that slope back toward a more or less level area. Most of these pines show the mark of centuries but yonder is a brave youngster with a fresh green crown, as level as a lawn. As we wind up slowly toward the crest we note patches of snow, numerous lakelets, and flowery green gardens creeping up the snow-fed chimneys of the nearby mountains. Pausing for a moment to enjoy the warm mellow air, a backward glance discovers the Minarets, violet colored against the azure sky.

High now at the top of the pass, above timber line at an altitude of about 12,000 feet, we find the yellow

flowers of *Hulsea algida*. Whitestem Goldenweed (*Aplopappus macrone-ma*) grows on a protected ledge. Flowery rose-colored beds of Rock Fringe (*Epilobium obcordatum*) bordered by snowy stars of Prickly



Gilia delight the eye. Many lakes come into view on the western side of the pass; beautiful unnamed lakes reflecting the cobalt blue of the sky.

Down on the western side of Red Peak Pass, beautiful Ottoway Lake awaits us. Torpedo is happy in a green meadow adjoining the lake and, it being lunch time, we enjoy a charming hour on the lake shore. To the right and left of us graceful hemlocks step down the rocky ledges to the water's edge. Charming is a group of twin mountain hemlocks with smaller specimens clustered about their base. As we continue along the trail, portions of the lakes not seen before by us keep opening out before our gaze. Rugged arms of granite reaching out from the shore had obscured these other por-

tions. In the end we have a comprehensive view of Lake Ottoway—a large deep lake, of vivid blue, its charm enhanced by the wild beauty of the rugged setting.

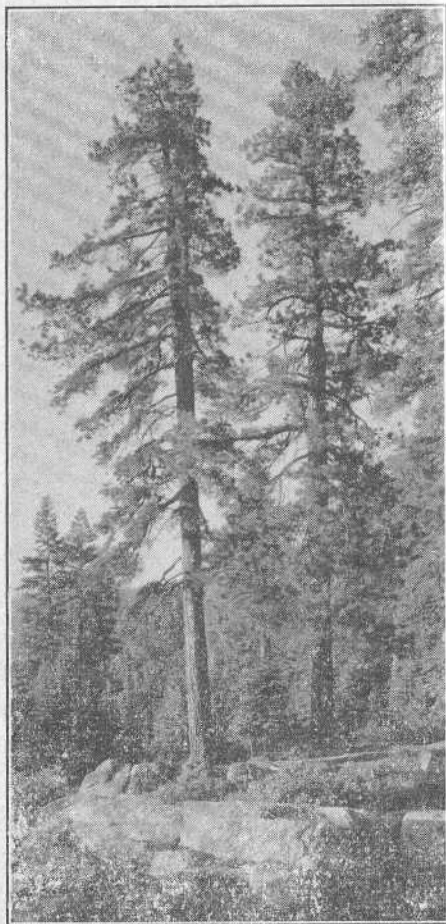
Now, as we begin to lose altitude the scene changes. Red Peak and the Whitebark Pines are left behind. Hemlocks and Western White Pines are our companions. Nearby Sierra Junipers scale the granite heights.

The flora along the trail is in tune with the other changes and here, Torpedo wins the name of "Posy Picker" by the way he improves every opportunity to grab a mouthful of flowers. With a mixed bouquet in his mouth he presents an amusing picture.

The last night out we camp in a forest of Lodgepole Pines and Red Firs beside the waters of Red Peak Fork.

On our last day out we follow the Merced Pass Trail, a lovely route through a great park-like stand of Jeffrey Pine and Sugar Pine. The balmy atmosphere takes on the sweet essence of the Jeffrey Pine bark and with every breath one drinks to the full of this soothing perfume. Meanwhile overhead the pine needles are singing in the wind the age-old song that, through the centuries, has soothed the sad and restless hearts of men and to their innermost being, whispers peace. In these mountains one may find wilderness and solitude. Not a person had we met since

leaving the Merced Canyon. Now a certain inkling of the wild freedom affects Torpedo. His slow walk of the



first day is the last day replaced by a run. Merrily and rhythmically sound his feet behind me as we drift along toward Yosemite Valley, the end of our four day journey.





A FEATHERED ST. PATRICK?

By Ralph Anderson, Park Photographer

Many of the N. P. S. employees whose work keeps them pretty well confined to the Administration Building at Government Center do not have a great deal of opportunity to see interesting "animal antics" that are so often noted along outlying roads and trails in the Park. However, occasionally there are examples of animal behavior that occur outside the windows and attract attention, such as a recent encounter a Blue-fronted Stellar Jay had with a Gopher Snake.

Although the noisy, raucous cry of the jay is a common sound everywhere throughout the Valley, on this particular occasion the commotion that developed was decidedly out of the ordinary, and employees looked out the back windows of the Administration Building to see what was happening in the small parking area. A large gopher snake, leisurely crossing the pavement had been sighted by a Blue-fronted Stellar Jay.

When we looked out the excitement was at its height. The jay, apparently unafraid, hopped excitedly

from one side of the snake to the other as it worried its antagonist. Upon occasion the jay would strike



the snake's tail with its powerful beak. The latter would quickly coil in offensive preparations of its own, but the jay would quickly flutter away to a safe distance, only to return and resume its assault.

This quarrel continued for several minutes — the time required for the snake to make the crossing. Finally the uncomfortable snake reached its more normal environment. Slither-

ing between the barrier logs on the edge of the parking area, it disappeared into the sheltering jungle

of grass and ferns while the jay, squawking proudly, disappeared in the nearby trees.

A STUDY IN BLACK AND WHITE

By Park Ranger Paul Easterbrook

Skunks are interesting animals—in the proper place. And the proper place is decidedly not beneath the floor boards of one's tent! But then, perhaps, these particular animals had a few points of law on their side for they had apparently arrived and set up housekeeping first. At any rate, shortly after being assigned to tent quarters at Camp 12 early in July, we noticed occasional rustling sounds beneath the floor boards of our quarters. Attributing these noises to mice we thought little about it. Even an occasional acrid odor that prevailed in the vicinity caused us little concern for, since the odor was only faintly discernable, it was not definitely connected with the possibility of its originating from any near neighbors.

Later, however, we were very grateful for the fact that these animals had been very well behaved. On the evening of July 21 our attention was called to a disturbance along one side of our tent and we investigated immediately. As the beam of the flashlight penetrated the dark recess beneath the tent we were greeted with the reflections of several pair of eyes. Startling to be sure. But not as startling as subsequent events for there soon emerged a parade of skunks—an entire fami-

ly, including the mother and about eight young. Seemingly fascinated by the flashlight they advanced boldly toward me, retreating immediately to the safety of their den when the light was extinguished. For some time we watched them. The young were hardly more than five inches in length, not including their tails, which were large, handsome and plume-like. On several occasions they emerged from numerous nooks and crannies in answer to the beckoning beam of the flash. It was such a fascinating experience that it was not until later that I realized that I had but one uniform and had thus exposed myself to a considerably embarrassing situation. Finally, probably due to the considerable interest by members of my family, as well as campground neighbors who had been attracted by the ensuing commotion, the mother skunk decided that such was not a good environment for the rearing of her numerous offspring. Picking up one of her brood by the nap of its neck, she stalked off sedately, tail waving in the air, toward the shadows of the nearby forest. In single file her progeny followed, equally haughty and equally sedate, and one by one like their mother disappeared into the shadows .



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Dan Anderson