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F. A. Kittredge, Superintendent

C. F. Brookman, Park Naturalist

M. E. Beatty, Associate Park Naturalist

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A SHORT SNOW SURVEY TRIP

By Ralph Anderson, Park Photographer

There is something intensely fascinating about a snow survey trip. Just to spend a few days and nights on skis or snowshoes in the white wilderness is to visit another world—a world full of adventure and unexpected happenings.

In the first place, you are truly "on your own," and obliged to make yourself physically and mentally comfortable regardless of storm, sleet, wind or glaring penetrating sun. If you lose the trail, you must be prepared to pay the penalty in extra energy, or even the discomfort of staying out overnight without food or shelter. (It has been done successfully many times!)

But the greatest satisfaction comes with overcoming the many little obstacles to one's comfort rather than enduring uncomplainingly those minor inconveniences. To keep blisters from forming, to have concentrated sweets to carry over the fatiguing climb over a steep ridge, to have warm comfortable gear and proper protection against the sun's glare—all add much to the enjoyment and proper appreciation of the extraordinary aesthetic values of such a trip.

Among the most intriguing things to see on a snow survey trip are the many tracks of animals and birds in the new-fallen snow—vital written records of their activities. Here are spread for all to see, their intimate pranks and encounters with other animals, occasional battles, and sometimes—their tragic ends!

Leaving Yosemite Valley one crisp morning in early February, Sterling Cramer, Douglas Whiteside and I tramped through the shallow snow that lay on the road between the Company Stables and Mirror Lake, carrying snowshoes which had been decided upon as perhaps the most practical for this particular trip.

A few people had hiked the same route before us, and their tracks in the snow were literally covered with the tracks of coyotes, going and coming, crossing and recrossing. Since it had been several days since the last snow, it might have been only a few individuals. But among the tracks was one that challenged attention—only slightly larger than that of a coyote but without the toenail marks and more round in appearance. This was quite likely a young mountain lion or cougar.

Climbing the zig zags of the Tenaya Trail ahead of us went two coyotes, frolicking here and there from one side of the trail to another, occasionally cutting across corners, but generally following the trail all the way to the rim. There it was no longer necessary for them to follow man-made trails, and we saw the tracks no more until on our return trip.



Along Snow Creek were many tracks of chickarees and an occasional pine marten, but around the Snow Creek cabin there was no sign of life. With the welcome shovel under the eaves of the deeply covered cabin, we dug a "cellar" to get to the door, and opened up the stovepipes on the roof that were all but lost from sight.

Into the clammy cold interior we went, built up fires in two stoves, and took down the heavy canvas bags containing an abundant supply of blankets for the coldest nights. Here there was everything for the comfort of a tired snow gauger. Even a gasoline lamp graced the living room table along with several kerosene lamps. Food supplies were intact, and contained the sort of food required after long hours on the snow fields.

After a hearty supper we read the magazines and newspapers dated around 1940. We read to our amazement that peace had finally come to a troubled Europe, and that at Mun-

ich one Adolph Hitler had capitulated and promised not to invade Czecho-Slovakia after all, that everything from then on would be to restore amicable trade relations with the entire world and thus a great crisis had been passed!

Snow sifted down gently during the night. Morning came with dark skies, a foot of new soft snow, and fast and ample lunch prepared, we set off for Snow Flat—a beautiful little meadow along the Tioga Road in summer, but a cold spot in winter where the heaviest snow depths are often found.

All distant landmarks were erased by the hovering snow clouds, and a steady sifting of quiet flakes continued without intermission. High on the ridge leading to Snow Flat we watched our tracks carefully, wondering if there would be any trace of them on our return. The snow was soft and deep, and we were obliged to take turns breaking the trail. Fortunately, we were able to keep on the marked route and locate the necessary snow course.

The sky lightened in the afternoon, and the snow stopped falling somewhat. But in the half-light of a winter day we saw no sign of wildlife—no trace of any animal whatsoever. At one place where we stopped to get water from a snowed-over stream, we were startled by the sound of many small birds in a clump of hemlocks. It was impossible to get a good look at them in the dense foliage, but they appeared to be kinglets or chickadees.

Back to the cabin safely, but tired, we thoroughly enjoyed another snow-gauger meal. Fearing the heavy snow load on the roof with the additional snow of February, might overtax the cabin, we worked several hours removing tons of it. This would insure the next snow measuring party a comfortable place to stay, at least, and the clearing of snow around the stove pipes might make them easier to find.

To bed, and how one sleeps after a hard day's trudging through the snow! The next morning we explored the cabin more carefully for any sign of animal life. There were ample evidences that mice were plentiful earlier in the season, but not one recent trace of a mouse could be found—even though our butter was left uncovered.

In an adjoining leanto were the remnants of a large box of individual cakes of soap. Practically all of the soap had been eaten, leaving the loose papers partially chewed.

Around the cabin had stalked a bob-cat during the night, looking in at the windows and sniffing around the outside of the kitchen. In addition, there were tracks which appeared to be that of a pine marten hopping around the cabin area, with more purpose than did the bob-cat with his aimless strides.

The sky was cloudless. The tall red firs stood magnificently in their white robes.

As we approached Snow Creek, the glistening snowbanks were already a maze of tracks in many

places. It must have been a gay morning for all animajdom, for there were large tracks and small tracks—tracks of a marten leisurely looking for breakfast, while other tracks revealed the spirit of the chase. In addition there were a number of tracks of white-footed mice. We did not see a single animal, but they must have watched us from every side. Only a few hours since the snow stopped falling, and the creatures were all out and around.

Eelow the Snow Creek Bridge we saw the coyote tracks again—perhaps the same two animals who preceded us up the Tenaya zig zags. We followed their tracks back to the Valley, and noticed how they used our tracks to make the going easier.

Near Mirror Lake there were tracks resembling those of a gray squirrel, and along the trail in one place we saw the only tracks of a bird on the trip—probably two mountain quail.



Back to warm bathrooms and inner-spring mattresses, we were pleased with modern conveniences. However, we were instilled with a renewed appreciation for the inspiring beauty of the high country in winter, and for a more thorough knowledge of the many outdoor creatures who call it home.

The trip, as described in foregoing paragraphs, was made in February. In accordance with the regular win-

ter snow survey schedule it was repeated one month later. In this instance the party returned to the Valley in a blinding snowstorm and the descent from the north rim, via the Tenaya zig-zags, was replete with interest. A blanket of soft snow had fallen during the night and a high wind filled the air with snow and set the trees to swaying in cadence with its force. Fog and clouds choked the Valley and hid even nearby objects from view, and the thunder of avalanches which swept intermittently over the precipitous canyon walls from the rugged heights about Half Dome and Cloud's Rest, made the return a memorable occasion. The heavy snow made it necessary for us to guard our descent along the zig-zags carefully lest we miss the trail and inadvertently find ourselves upon some dangerous, inhospitable ledge. The intermittent thundering of the avalanches, as someone remarked, was not unlike the periodic rumble and roar of the Chicago elevated. All in all it was an experience that merited the gifted pen of John Muir. (C.F.B.)

The final snow survey of the year was made during the last of March and covered a larger territory than any of the earlier trips. Snow courses were measured at Snow Flat, Tenaya Lake, Tuolumne Meadows, Tioga Pass and Vogelsang.

In contrast to previous trips, the weather was perfect with continuous sunshine during the entire seven

days. As a result each participant returned with a badly sunburned face, which was partially compensated for by countless photographs the weather made possible.

But little wildlife was observed, although obscure tracks in the snow testified to the presence of animal life. Fresh tracks of a large bear, probably just emerging from hibernation, were observed at the top of the Tenaya zig-zags.



Probably the most thrilling experience of the entire trip was the crossing of Tenaya Lake on skis. The continuous warm weather had caused the ice to start breaking up, so no time was lost in getting across, particularly as the ice underfoot would occasionally crack and grind.

On the whole, the trip was a rich experience offering a startling contrast to the usual summer scene. (M.E.B.)



YOSEMITE'S PAST

THUMBNAIL SKETCHES OF YOSEMITE ARTISTS

By Elizabeth H. Godfrey, NPS Staff

ALBERT BIERSTADT

Of the group of artists who by their paintings revealed the spectacular scenery of the West, none was more financially successful or achieved greater international fame during his lifetime than Albert Bierstadt. He introduced into the market not only the massive splendor of the Western landscape, but portrayed its Indians, buffalo, and other wild-life as well. At the height of his popularity, he received from \$5,000 to \$35,000 apiece for his paintings.

Born near Dusseldorf, Germany, in 1829, Bierstadt was brought to New Bedford, Mass., by his parents when two years old. When 23, he went to Europe where he spent four years in preparing for his career as an artist—three years at the German Art Academy in Dusseldorf, from where he made itinerant summer sketching tours, and one year in Rome. From Rome, the capital of the art world, Bierstadt toured through the Apennine Mountains, through Switzerland, and along the Rhine. When he returned to New Bedford in 1857, he had with him many sketches indicative of these travels.

In 1848, as a member of General Lander's Government Surveying Party, and traveling in a covered wagon, Bierstadt had an opportunity to contrast the majesty of the Rockies with the mountains of Switzerland and Italy. He was a lover of adventure, and heartily joined into the spirit of hunting game for dinner and in sleeping in blankets under the canopy of stars.

After spending three months with the Lander party, Bierstadt was eager to return to his studio and to develop his many sketches. Leaving the party, he started back with two companions through dense forest country inhabited by Indians. One morning while on this journey, his companions encountered a herd of buffalo. Bierstadt was away sketching, and in order that he might have specimens of these line animals to paint, one or two of them were shot. A large male, though vitally wounded, was feebly charging his enemies when Bierstadt arrived. Hastily he made a sketch of the buffalo, and then the life of the suffering animal was ended by another shot. This incident added another

valuable sketch to Bierstadt's collection.

Later, Bierstadt's "Rocky Mountains—Lander's Peak," painted from a sketch made while with the Lander party, brought him the handsome price of \$25,000. The painting created a great stir of enthusiasm, and is now exhibited in the James McHenry collection in Seattle.



Bierstadt's marriage in 1866, to beautiful Rosalie Osborne of Waterville, New York, contributed further to his successful, happy life. The Bierstadts were a handsome couple with mutual education, culture, and interesting personalities, which made them welcome visitors wherever they went. In their beautiful home at Irvington-on-the-Hudson, "Malkasten," (The Painter's Box), they entertained many celebrities

and members of English nobility.

Bierstadt visited Yosemite on numerous occasions, two of which bear record on the "sands of time," James M. Hutchings' **In the Heart of the Sierras**, on Page 441, speaks of the inscription "Camped here August 21, 1863. A. Bierstadt," on Register Rock (near Vernal Fall). In the old Peregrin register from the Mountain View House, once situated at Peregrin Meadows off the Glacier Point Road, there appears "A. Bierstadt . . . May 24, 1872." On another occasion, Mrs. Bierstadt accompanied her husband on a trip to Yosemite Valley and on to Hetch Hetchy, where Bierstadt painted the valley that is now a reservoir.

Bierstadt made three trips to Europe after his student days. In his studio in Rome in 1868, he exhibited his "Yosemite Valley," "The Sentinel Rock," and "El Capitan." Of the entire collection, "Yosemite Valley" was credited as the main attraction. At an exhibition of paintings by the Art Association in San Francisco in June 1872, a critic said of this painting, "Yosemite Valley is a marvel of the brush, a sense of snowdrift and mountain blast that is magnificent." This painting is now in the James Lenox collection in the New York Public Library.

The Yosemite Museum Art Collection has one painting by Bierstadt hung in the foyer to the left of the museum entrance door. This painting was a gift from the Charlotte Bowditch estate.

Congress, impressed with Bier-

stadt's work and wide recognition, paid \$10,000 each for his pictures, "The landing of Hendrik Hudson at Manhattan Island" and "Entrance into Monterey" for the National Capitol at Washington.

As an indication of Bierstadt's popularity abroad, he had special honors conferred upon him by the Czar of Russia and the Sultan of Turkey. He received five medals

from foreign countries and held honorary memberships in several art societies. Because he was the first artist to bring the Rocky Mountains into prominence as paintings, one of their lofty peaks bears his name.

Bierstadt had a second marriage in 1895 to a Mrs. Stewart, following the death of his first wife in 1893. His death came in New York at the age of 72 on February 19, 1902.

(Next Thumbnail Sketch, "Thomas Moran")

OBSERVATIONS ON YOSEMITE MAMMALS

By Jackson Dan Webster

Because the furry denizens of the forest are not as vocal nor as diurnal as are the feathered residents, actual observations are more difficult. Mammalogists have to get much of their information from tracks, pellets, and other clues. However, one can see many of them face to face on Yosemite trails if he hikes far enough and keeps his eyes open.

On August 14, 1942, my brother David and I saw a Mink (*Mustela vison energumenos*). It ran down a log and into a brush pile beside the Merced River, about a mile downstream from Merced Lake.

On August 4, 1943, David and I watched a Sierra Marten (*Martes caurina sierrae*). We came around a bend in the trail just west of Washburn Lake, to see the graceful, tawny hunter bound across a

stretch of woodland, then out of sight up a brushy hillside. He was carrying a small mammal, which looked like a *Microtus*, but the load bothered him not at all as he jumped casually from one fallen log to another.

Two California Ground Squirrels (*Citellus b. beecheyi*) ran across the top of Rancheria Mountain (9000 feet) on August 12, 1941, then scolded from one of the lava promontories fifty yards to the east. It seemed a paradox to find this Sonoran rodent only a few feet from Western White Pine and Western Juniper trees growing in typical dwarfed Hudsonian fashion. So far as I can ascertain, this represents the highest altitude at which the California Ground Squirrel has been seen in the park.

TUG OF WAR

By Frank Ewing, Employment
Manager

In many years of residence in the Sierra I have never observed a more unusual encounter between a deer and a coyote than the near-fatal "tug of war" which occurred just outside my home a short time ago.

Early one Sunday morning (March 5, 1944) my attention was attracted by the unusual actions of a deer which was visible through the dining room window. Its head, which was just out of sight, was lowered and its neck extended as, with feet firmly braced, its body saw-sawed back and forth. The entire animal was brought into view as I approached the window and thus the reason for its strange actions was immediately perceived. The deer was indeed in an unfortunate predicament for a large coyote had a firm grip upon its snout and was viciously tugging at its prey. This was the cause of its peculiar saw-sawing motion and its effect, as the coyote tugged, pulled and twisted the deer's head, was not unlike that of a cowpuncher bulldogging a steer.

So unorthodox was this encounter that several minutes elapsed before I realized that the deer was beginning to lose ground in the peculiar struggle. Then, as I stepped from the house, the coyote released its hold and dashed across the meadow. The deer, quite spent from its effort to pull free of its tormentor, staggered to the wall of a nearby residence, against which it leaned,

panting and trembling, as it slowly recuperated from its bizarre experience.

JANUARY WILDLIFE AT BADGER PASS

By Park Ranger M. B. (Buck) Evans

A set of Fisher tracks were seen on January 2nd near Chinquapin Ranger Station. Fisher tracks were also seen at this location last year.

Two Blue-fronted Stellar Jays are wintering here. It is rather unusual for jays to winter at this elevation. Their food is scraps of meat and bread discarded by skiers from their lunches. They do their feeding early in the morning on the porch of the Ski Lodge and spend the rest of the day in the nearby trees. I have never seen them come to rest on the snow.

Marten sign is common and several have been seen in this vicinity. Until disturbed, one of these interesting animals made its home in a woodpile.

Believe it or not, we have tadpoles and frogs in a small, nearby stream. However, the water is from the Ski Lodge and is quite warm, which probably accounts for the fact that the frogs have apparently got their seasons mixed up.

Coyotes forage in the parking area every night looking for scraps of food. Each day they travel up the road from below Chinquapin Ranger Station where the deer winter, returning after checking over the possibilities in the Badger Pass parking area. (From Evans' monthly wildlife report.)



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Dan Anderson