

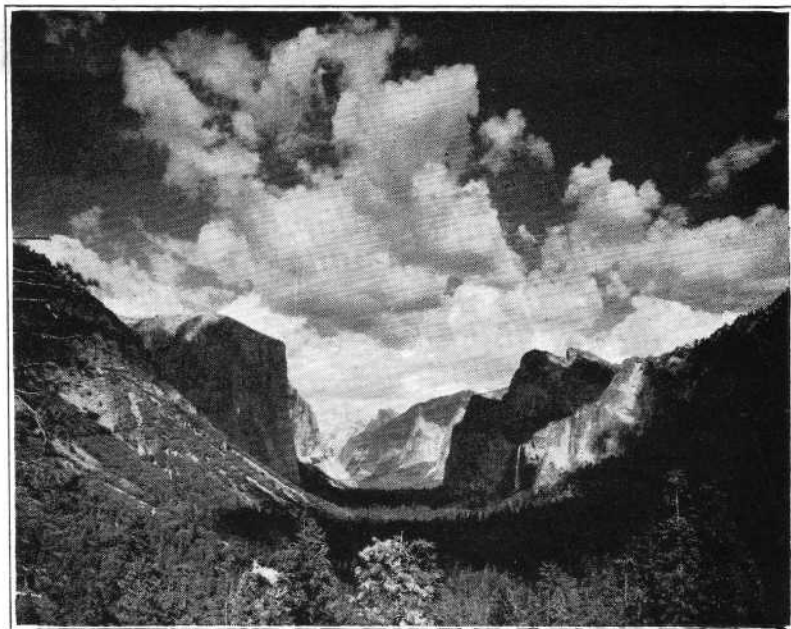
# YOSEMITE

# NATURE NOTES

VOL. XXVI

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NO. 11



*—Photo by Anderson*

# Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF  
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DEPARTMENT  
AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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## TA-BU-CE

By Elizabeth H. Godfrey

Colorful Ta-bu-ce with her kerchief 'round her head,  
In the Museum Garden making acorn bread;  
How skillfully she made it without pans or spoons,  
In the Museum Garden on summer afternoons.

Colorful Ta-bu-ce beneath the cedar tree  
Demonstrating Indian lore and weaving basketry.  
That she was well past eighty is a modest guess;  
What a portrait she'd have made in her cotton dress!

Colorful Ta-bu-ce with her kerchief 'round her head,  
In the Museum Garden making acorn bread.  
Everyone who knew her regrets that she is gone;  
She was like a melody—the last notes of a song.

### THREE NIGHTS

By Ruth Kennedy

After an excursion to the city and the wonder of seeing a bakery with products for sale nothing would do but that I purchase some of their long dreamed of cream puffs. After biting one there was that long hunger satisfied. Then the expression changed for there wasn't the delicious taste that I remembered. The cream puffs were filled with "shaving cream" or some stuff—couldn't get them down.

They stood around home for several days then I decided to give them to the bear. So if the bear is going to get them what is the difference if they are in the can—where we can't see them perform, or on the stump before the door. Stump won! At 9:00 p.m. heard a noise, opened the door quickly and there were two big ones gobbling and slopping their jaws—so good! One fine picture.

At 11:00 that next night heard a noise outside. Couldn't see anything at first but whatever it was, I heard it amble up near the bird bath. Pretty soon a big porcupine walked out into the light—appeared to be crunching acorns at times. I had green tomatoes on the window sill so I rolled one toward it. Just took one bite—no tomatoes, thanks. Still heard the rustling near the bird pan but too dark to see. Well this big porky rambled all around, out in the drive under the arc light, by the cabin next door and back toward our door. I stood outside watching him talking to him now and then. As it came toward me from the arc light it made a queer picture. Quills stood up and the

light reflected on them made a halo (it porkys can have halos). It was a very curious creature nosing at everything. The radio aerial that came down in last winter's wind storm was coiled and hung loosely on a nail next to the door. It came up, stood on its hind legs, leaned against the house and would strike across the wires—seemed to like the sound. I kept talking to it and it came to the door. While very interesting to look at I didn't care to touch it so backed into the house. I had the screen door open about three inches and it stuck its head in and started to push on in but I squeezed the door shut. Although the porky put on a most fascinating performance, I wasn't very keen about having porcupine quills in the rugs where I might plant my bare feet as I plop out of bed at almost any hour of the night whenever I hear unusual sounds to make the rounds of windows—always on the alert for Nature's "movies." It backed out, then tried to climb up the screen door. Just then a bear knocked off the garbage can lids. "Porky" turned towards the noise and took a few steps. The bear had found nothing to its liking so was coming towards the animal trail that passes the corner of the cabin. "Porky" hunched—just one prickly bunch. The bear gave a couple of loud sniffs, circled out about six feet and went its way on up the trail. Just then there came another rustle from near the bird bath and another porcupine came out into the light. I really was "seeing things" and bug-eyed with delight. I watched

them nose around quite awhile—then I slipped back under the blankets chuckling to myself at the woodland's pictures, thinking where else could I find such an interesting place to live.

Well it has really been a red-lettered week. The very next night there was another performance. I detected sounds of scuffling; what could that be. Two little brown cubs were discovered, rolling and playing like pups, just at the edge of the light's circle. Then they came over to the stump near the door, sniffed, one coming to the door. Just then a big black bear with a grey snout came toward "the trail." He made a dash toward toward those cubs—fast action. One shinned up the big oak right before the door and the other made a dash for the hill, but "old blackie" was right behind so that cub scurried up a big incense cedar just in time. The "Boss of the woods" stood there snarling and growling until I went out on the step and yelled. I kept up the chatter and he went on up the hill reluctantly.

Then we watched "First Brownie." These five big oaks by the cabin are



"sky needlers," too close for branching limbs, so Brownie had nothing to rest on but his imagination. He would try to ease the weight on his claws by changing position, or he would claw into a horizontal position and hang there looking like a big brown worm. Then after much grunting and groaning, came scuffling down and ran for the big tree next to his brother brownie. Soon both came down to earth and slipped into the shadows up the hill. Exit Brownies of the woods!

## THE YOSEMITE MAILS — BEFORE THE RAILROAD

By Emil F. Ernst, Park Forester

The present all-year residents of Yosemite Valley have it much easier in many ways than those hardy individuals who wintered in the Valley in the days before the railroad. Except for the irregular mails, this beautiful valley was isolated from the rest of the world from early in November until late the following

spring. The usual stagecoach schedules called for service to the Valley from May 1 until November 1. The arrival of the mails with news of the outside world and of friends and relatives must have been one of the few events to enliven the long winter months. During the open season, May until November, the mails came

in on the famous "Cannonball Express" of the Washburn Brothers stage line from the railhead at Raymond through Wawona and over Inspiration Point to the post office, which was until 1907 officially labeled "Yo Semite." This was a daily service throughout the summer, and the regular summer mail was an established feature of Valley life in 1878.

The situation was altogether different in the winter months. For many years, not more than a dozen persons remained in the Valley. These included Galen Clark, who, in addition to being the Guardian of the Valley, took care of mail upon its arrival. The post office was at times in the Cedar Cottage and in the River Cottage, formerly standing in the Old Village.

According to the available data, apparently the earliest winter mail contracts were for the route over the Big Oak Flat Road from Groveland. There is a record that John M. Phelan carried the mail in from Groveland in 1880 and 1881. He used skis when he encountered the snow in the vicinity of Carl Inn. Whenever the going was too tough he rested or holed up at the cabin at Gin Flat. Remnants of the cabin can still be seen at that point. Phelan reported that at one time the snow was 26 feet deep in the vicinity of Gin Flat. Thirteen feet of snow has been recorded on the snow course at Gin Flat several times in recent years. The well known "Snowshoe" Thompson was not the only person maintaining postal service in the winter months for isolated Sierra Nevada communities. Thompson

used unusually long "snowshoes" (skis) and a single long pole after the old Norwegian manner. Phelan must have known about Thompson and copied after him.

We next hear, in 1884, of the mail coming into the Valley by another and more favorable route. The Big Oak Flat Road route may have proved to be too difficult, dangerous and irregular in delivery for even the hardy pioneers of those days. The winter mails from 1884 until the completion of the Yosemite Valley Railroad in 1907 were carried over the Merced River route from Hites Cove and beyond. The route was Jerseydale, Hites Cove, the trail on the south side of the Merced River to Hennessy's ranch, across the river at El Portal, and up the north side trail to the Valley. The western Terminus of this contract apparently changed from time to time for a Perry Hollond had the contract from Mariposa to Hites Cove from where Charles Leidig, the first male white child born in Yosemite Valley, carried the precious missives and packages to Yo Semite for two winter seasons, one of which was in 1884.

Around 1889, the Branson brothers, Joe and Hiram, had the contract for four years. On this contract the mails came from Raymond to Jerseydale on the first day through Grub Gulch, Ahwahnee and Granite Springs. At Jerseydale, the Bransons took over and the mails were delivered at Yo Semite on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. The mails were dispatched from Yo Semite on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

For several winters in the Nineties, Chris Degnan performed the duties of winter mail carrier for Yo Semite. On account of storms he made use several times of the emergency cabin located on the trail between the diversion dam and the Pohono Bridge. The Merced River was crossed below El Portal in the vicinity of the present All-Year Highway bridge where a crude suspension bridge was maintained for many years. A horse was stabled in a barn on the north side of the river for use by the carrier whenever it was not possible to ford the Merced with a horse.

The men who maintained this haz-

ardous winter mail service for over a quarter of a century must have been a hardy and capable lot for we do not hear of any serious accidents ever having befallen them. They were on their own and there must have been many times when storms, slides, and other incidents of a very rough trail caused delays that occasioned many hours of anxious waiting. But the mails came through.

The writer is interested in obtaining further information on the postal history of not only Yosemite Valley but Mariposa County. It is his desire to gather as complete a postal history as possible for these two interesting areas.



## A PERSPECTIVE REPORT ON THE PROGRAM OF INTERPRETATION By Raymond Gregg, Park Naturalist National Capital Parks

(Continued from last issue)

Editor's Note: On October 27, 1947, Mr. Gregg was transferred to Everglades National Park, Florida, as Park Naturalist.

Important scientific and historic resources are preserved in National Park Service areas. It was natural that the 1928 Committee on Study of Educational Problems in the National Parks, and the Educational Advisory Board, created in 1929 upon recommendation of the original committee, should each emphasize the place of research in these areas. The importance of research was re-emphasized in the following resolutions adopted at the 1939 National Park Service Conferences in Washington and Santa Fe, respectively:

"That the interpretation of natural and human history in national park areas be considered as a primary objective. The basis of such interpretation should be organized research by members of the National Park Service, supplemented by the invited cooperation of other interested Federal, scientific, and educational agencies. To accomplish these purposes, research by local field technicians must be recognized, encouraged, and strengthened. The National Park Service should preserve a sense of balance between its research and interpretive functions."

"That to meet its responsibilities, the National Park Service recruit a more adequate staff of research workers."

That these resolutions of 1939 were not idle words is evident from a glance of a summary of current research projects of the National Park

Service, compiled March 20, 1947, for the President's Scientific Research Board. During the fiscal year of 1947 there were twenty-two of these budgeted at a cost of \$750,337.00.

Subjects covered range from exhibit planning to fresh water fisheries. The first fifteen of these twenty-two projects, representing a cost of approximately \$140,000 fall within the immediate province of the Branch of Natural History. While some pure research is involved, in the main this work will produce many practical results readily translatable into improved protective methods and interpretive services and techniques.

Since interpretation depends upon possession of understandable, reliable scientific research results, formal job descriptions for park naturalists include devotion of time to research duties, in some cases as much as 40%. Throughout the parks, naturalists are accomplishing many major or minor pieces of research. Staff alone could not accomplish all needed research work under existing conditions with the heavy demand upon it for public services and interpretive planning. There is some hope for improvement of this situation by further enlarging staffs to include personnel whose function is primarily serious research. In connection with current efforts to formulate national research policy, Secretary of the Interior Krug has expressed himself as favoring implementing research in America through existing agencies rather than through the establishment of a central research bureaucracy.

There will always be demand and

need for research in National Parks by individuals and small research groups. Universities and colleges, generally, are most appreciative of the materials and opportunities for research in our areas. Some scientists have found the well-preserved flora and fauna in some of the national parks bonanzas for enlargement of knowledge in these fields. This has been manifest in the numerous serious individual researches conducted in recent years in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. A great many study and research field excursions visit Yosemite, Rocky Mountain, Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone National Parks, and other areas.

Within the staff of the Branch of Natural History, considerable research is accomplished. For example, wildlife studies such as the moose problem in Isle Royale and other excess population problems have received attention by Biologist Victor H. Cahalane. The Museum Division is continuously busy with research basic to exhibit planning. Assistant Chief Naturalist Doerr is currently carrying on an exhaustive study of trends and potentialities of winter use in national parks. Dr. Carl P. Russell, Chief of the Branch, currently is engaged in research in frontier history as a collaborative pursuit in the program of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis. He is also the National Park Service representative on the Department of the Interior Committee on Scientific Personnel which is obtaining data for the President's Scientific Research Board.



As late as 1934, the National Park Service was about the only agency in the country offering full-time employment opportunity for professional park naturalists. And there were only some 30 such employees at that time. But this small company of men, with seasonal staffs of relatively small size for the volume of work accomplished, were able to demonstrate the value of interpretation as a park function, and by the beginning of World War II, there were some 350 professional park naturalists in the United States, all but about 15% employed by state, county, and metropolitan park and forest agencies. Many state and local organizations are providing excellent public service programs adapted from the national park pattern to fit local situations.

Specifically, the National Park Service has contributed directly by developing a model plan for metropolitan areas in the program of historic and natural history interpretation carried on in National Capital Parks. At this point, I would like to pay tribute to the achievements of former Park Naturalist Donald Edward McHenry, now of Yosemite National Park, for his patient efforts over a period of eleven years during which he established here an outstanding example of interpretive planning and execution. The National Park Service showed the way, and still commands leadership in the interpretive field, but in number and volume of personnel and service rendered, it is now only a part of a national picture.

I can recall in the 1930's when there were many applicants for every

available ranger-naturalist vacancy. In 1946, positions went begging for applicants in some parks. This year, conditions are only relatively better. We are competing (for the best naturalists) with other agencies now working in this field. Dr. William G. Vinal, Professor of Nature Education at Massachusetts State College, informs me that this year, the demand for naturalists over the country will far exceed the supply. There is another straw in the wind. Recently I received a request from the personnel placement office of the National Recreation Association for help in locating potential applicants for two positions in Houston, Texas, as nature and garden education workers with schools and organizations. We may soon find it necessary to upgrade our seasonal ranger naturalists, and to re-allocate our lower naturalist positions in order that we may attract the quality of talent we seek.

In this connection, it is regrettable that the Yosemite School of Field Natural History could not operate in 1947 as planned. Because of the 50 hour week, the allowed requests for increases in seasonal personnel for the 1948 fiscal year in Yosemite are not adequate even to bring naturalist man-days up to the level required for interpretive services for park visitors. If this important medium for training quality field naturalists for national park work is to be restored, there will have to be budget increases for the 1949 fiscal year adequate to support it.

Museum and interpretation programs in our national parks are not confined to our borders in influence.



At a recent meeting in Philadelphia of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Council on Museums, devoted a day to discussions of museum problems, including the status of park museums. Wherever national park programs are under way in the world many of the American patterns for historic and natural history presentation and interpretation developed in our national parks are being followed. The Chief Naturalist of the National Park Service has been appointed Chairman of the committee on National Parks and Nature Preserves. This committee, with other units of UNESCO, will meet in Mexico City in November this year. At that time, representatives from most nations in the Western Hemisphere now operating or interested in national parks will be present. Out of the meeting a comprehensive review of the western

world situation on nature education should emerge.

We have found that the American public is appreciative of and solidly in support of the interpretive work as carried on by the National Park Service. A sampling survey to obtain a public appraisal of this program was conducted in 1940. Some 7,000 letters were received from park patrons. The uniform high praise was gratifying. Following war-time discontinuance of most of these services, there were many mail inquiries from interested persons during the winter of 1945-46, as to whether the program would be restored in 1946. Most of these letters were offers to wage campaigns, if necessary, to see that funds and personnel were provided. Fortunately, we were able to assure these correspondents that it was the intention of the National Park Service, with Congressional blessing, to resume this important work.

### A HARD NUT TO CRACK By George Ross, Ranger Naturalist

While walking through the flower garden recently I observed a blue-fronted jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri frontalis*) hopping along in a small irrigation ditch originating from the northeast corner of the garden. Approaching just a little closer I saw the jay ducking its head beneath the surface of the water in a most unusual manner, seemingly trying to dislodge some insect. A few moments later, with the find in its beak, the bird flew from the streamlet into a nearby tree. Upon closer observation it was discovered that the little round object

which seemed so highly prized, was an acorn.

While perched in a comfortable spot the jay pecked away at the acorn, trying to break the hard outer shell but with little success. After several minutes of hard work, he flew down to the streamlet again to the exact spot in which the acorn was found and proceeded to hide his prize beneath the surface of the water. Painstakingly the jay covered every evidence of his cache from view, and, seeming satisfied with his labors, flew away in search of more edible morsels.



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Dan Anderson