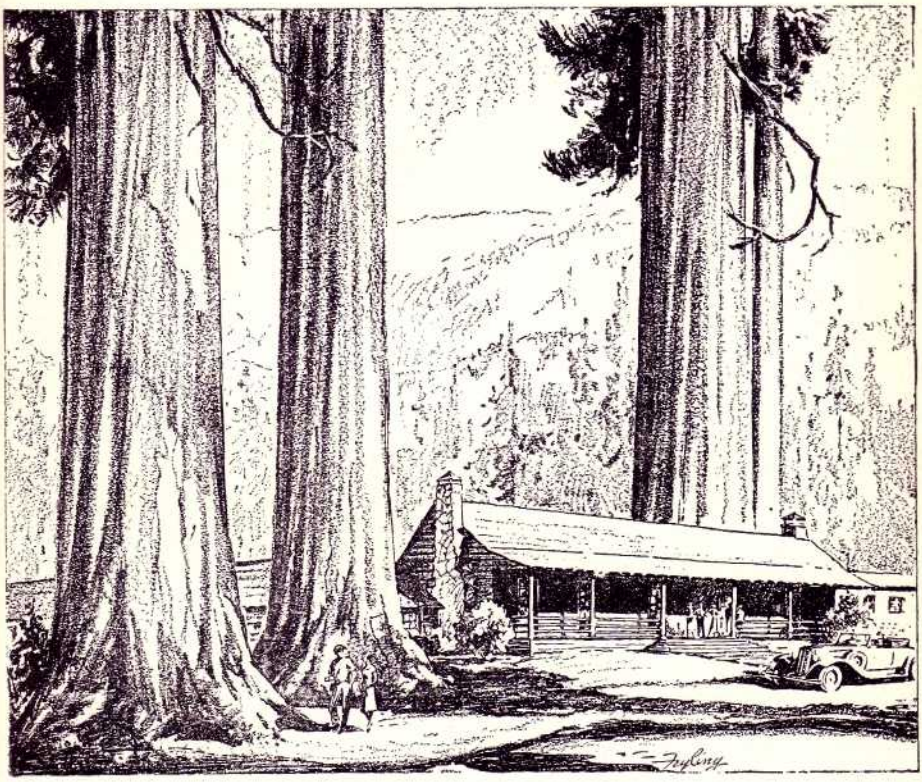
YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



BIG TREE LODGE — Mariposa Grove

Vol. XXVII September, 1948 No. 9

Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DIVISION AND
THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION, INC.

C. P. Russell, Superintendent — D. E. McHenry, Park Naturalist
H. C. Parker, Assoc. Park Naturalist — R. N. McIntrye, Asst. Park Naturalist

VOL. XXVII — SEPTEMBER, 1948 — NO. 9

GOLDEN EAGLE ATTACKS YOUNG DEER

By Mary Montgomery Clawson

Editor's Note: *This interesting account was recently brought to our attention through the kindness of Lowell Summer, Biologist, Region Four, National Park Service.*

Early one morning in August, 1939, Geraldine Bee and I, while on a burro trip through Yosemite National Park, climbed to Burro Pass from the direction of Slide Mountain. As this brought us very near to the Matterhorn, we decided to climb it too. We tethered our burro a short distance below the summit of Burro Pass and started up the mountain, taking none of our equipment, not even a camera.

About half way up to the Matterhorn we saw two eagles sailing overhead not far from us. They seemed to be interested in something on the mountain ahead of us, for they swooped around and around a particular spot. It seems odd to us now, but at the time we were both definitely alarmed because the eagles appeared to have a wing spread of at least 6 feet and seemed excited. We were afraid that to climb the Matterhorn we would have to pass near a nest, and all we knew about eagles was that it was supposed not to be healthy to approach their nests. We have been told since that it would have ben perfectly safe, but at the time we discussed what to do if attacked, and decided to fall on our faces and hope for the best.

As we watched, one of the eagles flew away, but the other swooped to the right of us, not more than 200 yards away. Then for the first time we saw two deer on the mountain near the point where the eagles had been swooping. They were the same size as far as we could judge, and must have been quite young, for they were the smallest deer either of us had ever seen that did not have spots. One was running up the mountain toward the summit and the other had just started to run toward the right which was the same direction that the eagle was flying.

The Matterhorn above Burro Pass is above timberline, and although there were no bushes or trees to protect this deer, obviously it was trying to find some such protection. Finally it came to a stop at a point about 200 yards from us where there were a very few small shrubs—the only

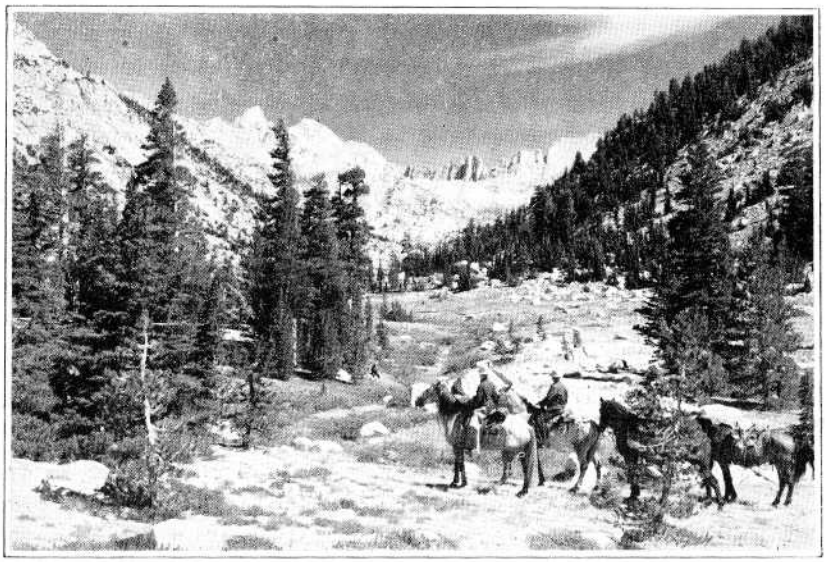
ones for a long distance around—at the foot of a sheer cliff.

The deer paused there, trying to get under the shrubs, but they were too small to cover it. At that moment the eagle flew quite high and then came straight down with what seemed to us tremendous force. The shrubs, although low, obstructed our view just enough so that we could not see exactly how the eagle landed, but it seemed to us to strike with awful force on the deer's head or neck. Once down, the eagle stayed perhaps 2 or 3 minutes, screaming the entire time. The sounds to us were piercing and ghastly. We couldn't see well enough to know whether the eagle knocked the deer down with the force of its swoop, but it was plain the eagle was on the deer, near the front of it, screaming.

After a few minutes the eagle ascended again to a considerable height, seemed to gather its strength, and then came down once again with a terrific impact at the same spot. Again it stayed down 2 or 3 minutes and screamed the same blood-curdling screams. This same performance was repeated at least 8 or 10 times. About the eighth time that the eagle rose, the deer seemed to struggle to its feet and started running frantically. There was no place where it could get away, but apparently it was crazed with pain and fear. It tried to run up the sheer cliff, but fell back.

The eagle again descended and once more stayed down a few minutes, screaming. It dived down only about twice after the cliff episode and then to our amazement sailed away. It has been suggested since that the bird caught sight of us and was frightened away.

We had watched this scene spellbound for about 25 minutes. When the eagle flew away, we debated furiously what to do. We thought the young deer must certainly be dead after the beating it had taken, but we wanted to be sure. On the other hand, if it were not dead we had nothing with which to kill it, and it must be admitted that we were terrified of that huge, screaming eagle.

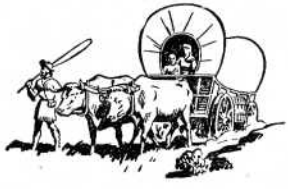


Matterhorn Canyon

We didn't go over to see the deer, and after a minute or so continued our climb up the mountain. At the top we saw the other young deer which had run up the mountain while the eagle was attacking its companion. It seemed to us terrified and forlorn. It was there on the top of the Matterhorn the entire time we were there, wandering around and getting behind boulders in an aimless, confused way.

As we remember it, we noted in the Sierra Club register at the top of the Matterhorn that we had seen an eagle attack a small deer and apparently kill it. However, we are not sure whether we wrote this, as it is against our principles to write more than our names in registers. However, we think that we broke the rule that time.

(See also "The Golden Eagle as a Deer Enemy," by D. D. McLean, Yosemite Nature Notes, Vol. IV, No. 4, April, 1925.—Ed.)



SURVEYING THE TIOGA ROAD

By John V. Ferretti

Editor's Note: *Mr. Ferretti is the only person living in 1948 who was employed on the construction of the Tioga Road.*

In the fall of 1882 the survey of the Tioga Road was begun, branching off from what was known as "Crocker Station" on the Yosemite Road and continued to "White Wolf" where the work was discontinued due to the winter storms. A crew of men started to build the road that same fall and built a little way beyond what is now known as Carl Inn.

The following spring in the month of April, construction was resumed with a force of about 250 men. I was employed as the blacksmith's helper, sharpening all the tools used in construction. I also took a side job chopping all the wood for the Chinese cook who rewarded me with pies, cakes and cookies which no one else got. There was a great deal of wasted food in the camps, such as beans, meat and bread, so that when we moved out, quite a large family of bears moved in and cleaned up.

The road was completed to "White Wolf" about June 1st, the snow having melted, the survey was resumed with Mr. Carpenter, Civil Engineer, Mr. H. P. Medlicott, target man; Mr. Hall, head chainman and Mr. John V. Ferretti, hind chainman, with Sing Lee cook for all of us. We also had four mules which were assigned to my care.

After crossing Yosemite Creek, we surveyed up the mountain side and pitched camp near the top. I staked the mules about one hundred yards above the camp. During the night they were visited by a very large bear, and in the morning when I went to give them water and change their stakes, I found that they had stampeded around the tree and one had slipped into the little stream and hung itself, so we had to continue with the three mules.

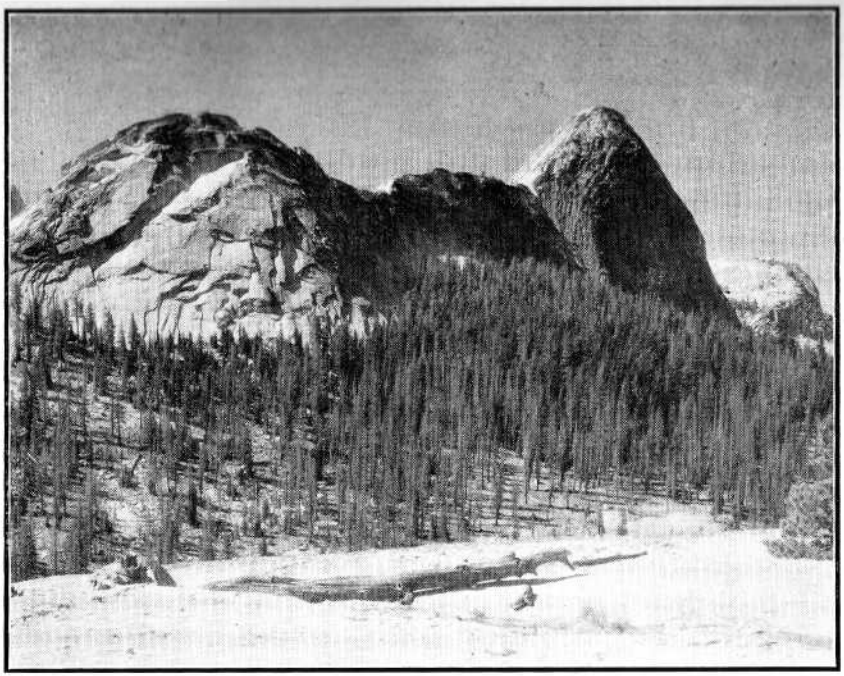
On Saturday we pitched camp at what was known as "Yosemite Flat," about fourteen miles from the Valley on the trail coming in from the Mono country. Our Chief Engineer decided that the next day, being Sunday, we would get an early start and visit the Valley, leaving the Chinese cook in charge of the camp. We arrived in the Valley about 10:00 a.m. This being my first visit, I proceeded to find the general merchandise store, operated by a Mr. Cavagnaro, who had formerly been my father's mining partner. At the store we stocked up with all the good eats we needed and pitched camp in the tall grass under a mammoth oak tree across the river and there enjoyed our noon meal to our heart's content. After which we started walking around enjoying the beautiful scenery that is so abundant in that section and when we were tired we returned to our camp under the oak. We then realized that our pleasure in our noon meal had been almost too great, and we were in need of more provisions, so I was sent back to the store for another consignment. After another substantial meal, it was decided that the day could best be rounded out with a short siesta, so before starting our return journey to our other camp, all stretched out and relaxed.

About 10:00 p.m. the alarm, in the person of Mr. Carpenter, went off and he ordered the march for camp to proceed, with the survey to start promptly at seven the next morning. The moon was just peeping out over Glacier Point so we began to climb, arriving back at our own camp about 4:00 a.m. Upon entering the tent we stumbled into a pile of bedding in the middle of the floor, at the bottom of which we found Sing Lee, the Chinese cook, who thought the bears had finally arrived.

Sing Lee knew that there were bears around and to prove how right he was, let me relate this experience of my own that very morning. Starting at 7:00 a.m. we proceeded along the old Mono Trail toward our last stake, about a mile from the camp. Arriving there, I discovered that one of the handles on the chain was missing, so I informed Mr. Carpenter who sent me back to find it, so I started back, following our track. I had not gone more than three hundred yards when I discovered a bear track on our own tracks; fortunately I also saw the missing handle, and after getting it, I am sure I broke all traffic rules on my return trip to the stake and Mr. Carpenter. As previously stated we lost one of our mules due to a visit from a bear, therefore, we decided to stake the mules near our tent and also to build a fire at night to keep the bears away.

Arriving at Tuolumne Meadows, I was informed about the hermit named Lembert who had some Merino goats and quite a piece of land fenced in where it would be very good to turn the mules loose. I was ordered to find Mr. Lembert and ask his permission to do so. I was cautioned not to mention anything about surveyors as he was rather skeptical about them. I got the directions to his cabin; and, taking the mules with me, started off in the general direction pointed out. The sky was very dark as there was a thunderstorm brewing and it was getting darker every moment.

Finally I discovered in the distance a sort of hut that looked more like a bear trap than a place for human habitation. I tied the mules and approached. The closer I got the more I became convinced that no one could be living in such a place so I walked up to the door and shoved it open. Instantly a head popped up



Fairview Dome, Tuolumne Meadows

that looked more like the head of an ox than that of a human being. A heavy shock of matted grey hair covered his shoulders and a beard of equal size and texture covered his chest. He was about six feet, four inches tall, giving him the appearance of an unkempt patriarch of old. That was all bad enough, but when he remarked that he had been looking for me I realized that my only salvation was in speed — The start was instantaneous and the record for the first fifty feet I believe was then and has never yet been surpassed.

Then I heard him calling, "Come back, boy, I'm not going to hurt you. I have been looking for a boy to bring me some provisions from the Valley." I was satisfied and went back. His hut was about eight by ten feet in size with a dirt floor, in the center of which there bubbled a spring of soda water. In one corner there was a small stove and a little table in the other, on the side next to the door was his bed where he had evidently been resting when I shoved the door open. After a short conversation he offered me the "pipe of peace" in the form of an old, rusty oyster can full of his precious soda water from the spring in the center of the floor and ordered me to drink it for my health.

On one of my later trips into the Valley I inquired of one of the rangers as to what had become of the old hermit and he informed me that he had been found murdered in his cabin. Forty-seven years after the first experience with him I visited the spot and found three sides of the walls still standing although the front of the hut had disappeared. The spring was still there in its natural state and we used the place for our lunch that day.

We completed the survey through the Tioga Pass to the Sheepherder's Mine on July 14, 1883. The next day we surveyed the mine. The discovery of the "Sheepherder's Mine" was made at the top of Mount Gibbs by a sheepherder. The quartz ledge bearing gold was about sixty feet wide so a tunnel was driven at the base of the mountain to cross cut the ledge if it ran to that depth. We first surveyed up the face of the mountain and over the top to the ledge. Burly drills driven by air compressors were used to drive the tunnel. After the completion of the road I have been informed that everything was shut down and never opened again.

July 16 I left Tioga Pass for the construction camp where I intended to resume my job again, helping the blacksmith and the Chinese cook. On my arrival I found the camp on the same spot where we had camped when we lost the mule. When I informed them that there was a dead mule lying in the stream just above the camp, the water from which they used for cooking and drinking, there was quite a bit of consternation. We found the mule pretty well devoured so it was decided to set a bear trap so as to "even scores" with the bear.

So a large caliber Ballard rifle was mounted behind a cribbing with a string attached to the trigger and a piece of beef on the end of the string. The building of the trap had been engineered by a Portugese sheepherder who happend to be in the camp at the time, so all went to bed with great expectations. About 1:00 a.m. the Ballard spoke and the whole camp arose in a body and rushed for the trap only to find that the sheepherder's dog had unsuspectingly gone after the meat and was shot from stem to stern

In the morning I resumed my former task of chopping wood for my old friend the cook, and while doing so I struck a knot which caused the axe to glance off, striking my big toe, splitting it almost in half. Then the "first aid man," another woodchopper, applied a large chew of tobacco, took a rag and tied it up, guaranteeing that it would be as good as new in a few days. At that moment the butcher's wagon was ready to leave and I got aboard and severed my connections with the Tioga Road for all time.

CAMP VISITORS IN THE NIGHT

By Robert N. McIntyre, Assistant Park Naturalist

It was clear and cold at Ten Lakes Camp on the evening of August 7, 1948. The down-canyon breeze was nipping the green tops of the corn lilies in the meadow and a real promise of morning frost was in the air. I chunked up the fire with pitchy knots from a rotten western pine and made preparation for a well earned rest. As darkness settled in the lake basin the rosy glow of the small, but hot, campfire seemed to warm the trees and rocks for a great distance around the camp.

During the course of my first bedtime cigarette, my eye caught a movement in the heather near the outer perimeter of firelight. Eyes sparkled, a digging noise could be heard occasionally, but the visitor did not choose to enter the firelight. The beam of my flashlight centered on the spot of movement and there, licking a tin can, sat a huge yellow-haired porcupine. The light seemed to make him feel too conspicuous and he moved behind a granite rock, pushing his tin can.

Behind camp in the meadow a mother coyote caused the cliffs to echo with her sharp, staccato bark and eerie wail. The cry was repeated in miniature by one or more of her pups from across the lake until the ear could hear a tintinnabulation of sound from the cliffs that might have come from a riveting machine.

The lone mother deer that had been feeding contentedly in the meadow before darkness had fallen moved within the circle of firelight. I shifted from one elbow to a sitting position. She gave me a trusting glance and with rump to the fire, looked nervously into the darkness where the young coyotes were serenading their mother. She pawed the ground occasionally with a show of reluctant belligerence toward the fanged travelers of the night. Some twenty minutes later as I dropped off into sleep, she was still within the glow from the fire.

At about 2:30 a.m., I was awakened by a noise above my head and by a scattering of bark from the tree above me. My first reaction was to grab my flashlight and see if my fishing creel, which had been suspended above my head from a limb, was yet intact. As I fumbled for the flashlight, a flat furry body propelled itself from my sleeping bag to the pine trunk some five feet to my left. There the little marauder scurried up the tree in a shower of bark particles. A quick inspection showed my creel of fish to be swinging, but unharmed.

My first thought was that a pine marten had been trying to steal my fish but on second thought I realized that the small body felt on my bed couldn't have been so large an animal. I resolved to wait for the return of the nocturnal visitor, and, with flashlight out, I changed the position of my sleeping bag and waited. Time passed slowly. My fire was almost out and frost could be seen under the brilliant carpet of stars. I dozed off with thoughts of the adventure that is tomorrow when I was rudely awakened by a new shower of bark particles. I was not hurried as I studied the location of my furry friend in the darkness. I could hear one or more small animals in the tree above my head and occasionally the thump of a small body landing on the creel.

With little movement, I turned on my flashlight and focused it on the creel. I was not surprised by the type

of animal I saw, but I was surprised by the number present. Three sets of shoe-button eyes greeted my light as three young flying squirrels **(Glaucomys sabrinus lascivus)** cautiously looked over the situation and decided that a trout dinner was more important than a man. Around and 'round the swinging creel they crawled, seeking an opening, stopping, one or two at a time, to investigate the wire wesh ventilators which emitted the tempting odor. Fortunately the creel was strapped tightly. Feeble attempts were made at ripping the canvas but to no avail. As one little fellow gave up in disgust and leaped to the tree trunk, his place was taken by an adult whose weight almost pulled the creel from the limb. Gray to brown in color, with dark ears and yellow belly, the mother gave the impression of being out of a child's story book as she swarmed over her young to aid them. Hanging upside down, she attacked the screen bottom of the creel with vigor. Every muscle of her seven or eight inch body seemed to quiver with frustration.

As I watched the group, time seemed to stand still. Eventually, without a visible signal, the mother and young dropped to the ground with a plunking sound and scurried to a mountain hemlock which they climbed in lazy spirals as though playing follow the leader.

SNAKE CLIMBS STAIRS

Gerald Carrier, Fire Lookout, at Henness Ridge reports finding a Pacific rattlesnake **(Crotalus viridus oreganus)** on the eleventh step of the lookout station. The rattler was 41 inches long, having seven rattles, some of which had been lost previously. (G. R., 1947).

MORE ABOUT THE FIRST POST OFFICE

By Emil F. Ernst, Park Forester

In the May, 1947, issue of **Yosemite Nature Notes** there appeared an article on "The First Postmaster." Since then, some additional information on this subject has become available through the research services of The National Archives at Washington, D. C. The National Archives is the official repository for historical data and information of importance to the American scene. Highly scientific methods of preserving such data have reached the peak of present development at The National Archives.

According to records of the Post Office Department for the period 1789-1910 on file, James M. Hutchings was appointed as Postmaster and the post office was established at Yo Semite, Mariposa County, California, on August 9, 1869. In the Post Office Department, considered the official source for town names, Yo Semite did not change to Yosemite until some time in 1907. Mr. Hutchings started to receive the princely salary of $12 as Postmaster on that day in 1869. He continued to serve as Postmaster until January 26, 1876, when George W. Carter was appointed, perhaps as a reward ($12 per annum) for political faithfulness and success in getting out the votes.

The National Archives do not show the date of inauguration of mail service to the Yo Semite postoffice. This information will more than likely be obtained through studies yet to be made of local newspapers published at the time.

Perhaps Mr. Hutchings' initial stock of stamps contained a pane or two (sheets) of the very valuable "1869" Inverts" so eagerly sought by philatelists.