

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



Arctic Three-toed
Woodpeckers

*From Drawing by
R. Bruce Horsfall*

Yosemite Nature Notes

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TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

By Carl P. Russell, Park Superintendent

The original Yosemite Museum was established in 1921 by Ansel F. Hall, then park naturalist. It was housed in the one-time Jorgenson Studio, the building near the Sentinel Bridge which today is the residence of Assistant Chief Ranger Homer Robinson. I had my introduction to it in 1922. I worked in it from June, 1923 until May, 1926 at which time its exhibits, workroom, and offices were moved to the "new" Yosemite Museum. Even in 1923, Ansel Hall was optimistic about a "new" museum. He had applied his promotional talents to the idea of a more fitting museum program during the several preceding years while he was ranger and park naturalist. In keeping with his optimism, much of the work done in the Yosemite Naturalist Department in 1923 and 1924 was directed along lines which would advance the anticipated larger museum undertaking even though that program was still entirely visionary and air-built.

Foremost among the local workers who engaged in creative thinking about the future of Yosemite interpretive work was Superintendent W. B. Lewis. He was a most ardent proponent of an adequate Yosemite Museum. His enthusiasm was infectious. Chief Ranger Forrest S. Townsley had applied himself in a very practical way in collecting and preparing bird and mammal specimens over a period of several years.

He encouraged others in his department to do the same, and the rangers' activities were not limited to natural history. Ranger Bill Raymond entered the field of human history in his work for the Yosemite Museum. His forays into the old gold camps west of the park yielded truck loads of historic objects. Mrs. C. W. (Enid) Michael, ranger-naturalist and year-round resident, had worked industriously for years in collecting and preparing botanical specimens and in recording her observations on Yosemite birds. Hers was a most substantial contribution to the earlier scientific work of the Yosemite Museum, and she did important ground work in preparing for the ultimate headquarters establishment. Dr. H. C. Bryant and M. B. Nichols, pioneer nature guides, had devoted their summers for a number of years to the service of Yosemite visitors. They were keenly aware of the importance of improving their central point of public contact. This need was made known by them to any and all listeners who might be in position to lend some help. Dr. Bryant's influence was especially significant. Eventually, as head of the educational branch, Director's Office, he played a leading role in launching a Service-wide museum program.

Outside of the National Park Service there were other local workers who accomplished a great deal in

supporting the museum project—Charles W. Michael, Assistant Postmaster, and Herbert Sonn—"The Bird Man" are notable examples. The Yosemite Park and Curry Co. contributed funds with which to pay the salary of a ranger-naturalist over a period of years. There were many other enthusiastic helpers in nearby communities who lent their aid in preparing for an expansion of the Yosemite interpretive program. Without exception, these men and women recognized the necessity of providing satisfactory offices and workrooms for the naturalists. They also visualized the good results which could be obtained in nature teaching if an adequate library were made available to staff and public alike, and if study collections as well as popular exhibits were developed in a central Yosemite museum. Mr. G. E. ("Elmer") Reynolds, Editor of the "Stockton Record," promoted this idea week after week for several years by featuring entire pages of Yosemite material in the "Out-Door Section" of his splendid and influential newspaper. Francis P. Farquhar, then living in San Francisco, made available to Yosemite workers his remarkable library of Californiana and persistently advocated that library facilities be provided in the park. The Sierra Club under the presidency of Mr. Farquhar made cash donations with which the salary of a ranger-naturalist was paid. Dr. Barton W. Evermann and his staff at the California Academy of Science, San Francisco, also gave more than moral support to the Yosemite Museum idea. In January and February 1924, the Yosemite park naturalist worked with Mr. Frank Tose, Chief Preparator at the Academy, and learned from him the rudiments of certain exhibit preparation, a train-

ing which was put to use even before a new museum building was assured. Mr. and Mrs. C. M. Goethe of Sacramento, to whom can be traced the initial impetus in launching the Nature Guide program in Yosemite, continued to spread the idea of parks interpretive work among Congressmen and Senators. The California Fish and Game Commission maintained its very important support by assigning its educational officer, Dr. H. C. Bryant, to continued duty in Yosemite. The University of California also provided important help. Dr. Joseph Grinnell, Director of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology on the Berkeley campus, had become the authority on Yosemite animal life as a result of field investigations which he and his staff had conducted in the park since 1914. His books and unpublished data were of utmost importance in planning the Yosemite Museum. Joseph Dixon and Donald McLean, participants in the Grinnell survey, became important contributors to the cause of the Yosemite Museum. For a number of years Prof. E. O. Essig brought his entomology classes to Yosemite. Insect collections made by these groups are still important among the exhibits and study collections. Botanists and foresters from the University also helped by collecting and identifying plant materials in the park. E. W. Gifford of the Museum of Anthropology, University of California, cooperated with the park naturalist in giving access to his large collection of Miwok cultural materials and in providing voluminous unpublished notes on his studies which were used to advantage in planning the Yosemite Indian exhibits.

In the East, other friends of the naturalists' programs were at work. Stephen T. Mather, Director of the



Crowded Condition in the Yosemite Museum.

—Photo by Anderson

National Park Service, had a lively personal interest in nature teaching. Fortunately the Yosemite program was very much in his mind as he shaped the grand plan for the Service, and the Yosemite Museum owes much to his well-placed letters and published articles. Mr. Mather personally met the expenses of Dr. L. H. Miller and Dr. H. C. Bryant when in 1921 they engaged in a lecture tour throughout the east and middle west for the purpose of engendering interest in National Park Service interpretive work. In 1924 Dr. Frank R. Oastler of New York City collaborated with Ansel F. Hall, then chief naturalist for the National Park Service, in organizing a comprehensive plan of educational activities and defined park museum objectives for the entire Service. It was in 1924 also that Mr. C. J. Hamlin, President of the American Association of Mu-

seums, authorized a survey of park museum needs. As a result of that survey and the subsequent recommendations made by the Association and the National Park Service, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, just 25 years ago, made funds available with which to construct a Yosemite Museum. Some of the particulars of that support from the American Association of Museums and the Lura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial will be given in a future note on the history of the Yosemite Museum.

There are many omissions in this recapitulation of events, but perhaps it will suffice as a review of some of the cooperation which a quarter of a century ago brought about the combination of interests so necessary to the success of a park museum program. In the light of events which have transpired since 1924, it seems to the writer that it was fortuitous

that a Yosemite naturalist should have been the one to make the first drive for an adequate park museum. The original thinking of Ansel F. Hall did not die a-borning. His proposals fell upon many waiting ears, and the support which was forthcoming was hearty and adequate. In few places within the National Park System could there have been a better combination of obvious public demand and willing agents to give the "long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together." A striking demonstration of an effective park interpretive program was made possible by these coordinated efforts and from the beginning a "central" museum, the Yosemite Museum, was the show window for the demonstrations. As interest in the Yosemite naturalists' programs has spread, the demand made upon the staff and the physical plant have increased mightily. It is not amiss to state here that the time has come for another united effort in behalf of the Yosemite Museum. The unit which in 1924-25 seemed ample for all possible interpretive purposes is now swamped by a flood of users such as was never imagined by park planners in 1924. A fair picture of this inundation may be had upon consideration of the statistics which follow.

In the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1924, and ending June 30, 1925, the Yosemite naturalist organization served 83,000 park visitors; 38,000 of these people visited the "Old Museum." During the next fiscal year July 1, 1925, through June 30, 1926, the first full year of operation in the "New Yosemite Museum" the Naturalist Department served 143,500 people; 82,000 of them visited the Museum.

As everyone knows, the popularity of Yosemite National Park has increased by leaps and bounds since

1926 and the Yosemite Museum has shared in this increased use. In 1948—585,900 people were served by the Yosemite Museum, a gain of some 600% over 1925-26, yet the increased use has not been accompanied by increased support. In 1925-26 the year-around staff of naturalists and museum employees consisted of five men and women; today it is still five men and women. The ranger-naturalist and museum staff of seasonal employees has grown from eight in 1925-26 to fourteen in 1947-48, yet this increase is far from equitable when the limitations of the prevailing 40-hour work week are considered. Today three outpost stations, one of which has a branch museum and another a budding museum exhibit, require two ranger-naturalists each during the summer season, leaving but six ranger-naturalists to serve the very great concentration of visitors in Yosemite Valley itself. Of these, the time of one is devoted entirely to the Yosemite School of Field Natural History. The insufficiency of this increase is further emphasized when it is understood that in 1947-48 more than 2,000,000 interpretive contacts were made as contrasted with the 143,500 instances of service in 1925-26. To state this circumstance in another way—the overall naturalist service extended to the public has increased more than 1300% since 1925-26; the increase in the number of seasonal ranger-naturalists and museum employees is but 46% while there has been no increase whatsoever in the permanent staff since 1926.

With the help of WPA, PWA, CCC, etc., the Yosemite exhibits have been much improved over their 1925 condition but the capacity of the building is unchanged. Present day crowds can not be accommodated properly within it. It is hardly rea-

sonable to expect another gift from a philanthropic foundation. The sources of philanthropy are drying up.

ONE WINTER NIGHT

By **Ralph H. Anderson, Administrative Assistant**

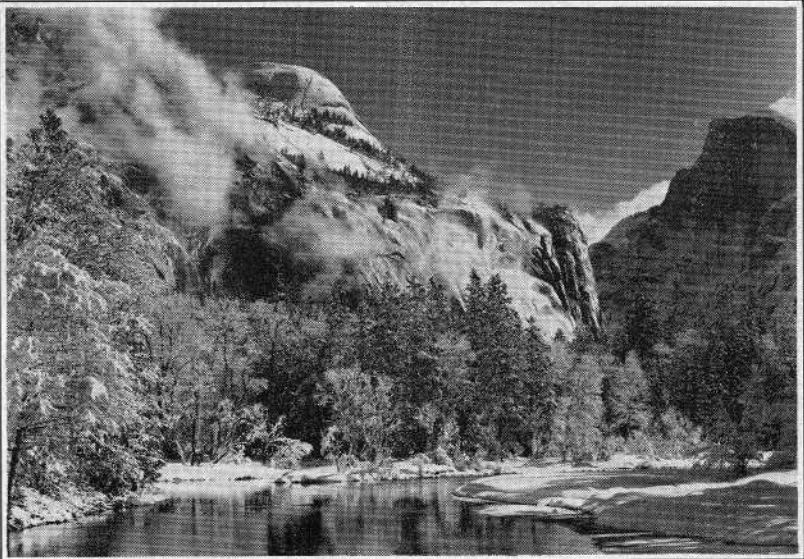
The night of February 4, 1948, will long be remembered by many people in Yosemite. Not that it was different from hundreds of other winter nights, but this one marked the end of a long dry period in which little or no snow fell to blanket the ski slopes above the rim of the Valley or to build the desperately needed water reserves for agriculturalists in the San Joaquin Valley below.

On the afternoon of February 3, a telegram from the Weather Bureau advised the superintendent that a big storm was to be expected the following day. We kept our fingers crossed! Sometimes such storms never materialize. Down went the barometer, darker and darker grew the sky. By dusk of the 4th the snow began to fall.

Some of us were out for dinner that evening, but we gave only slight concern to the possibility of not getting home, knowing that the snowplows would be out clearing the roads to keep ahead of the storm. It was a thrilling sight to see the snow pile up deeper and deeper. Oak trees became ghost trees with every twig swollen with a heavy coating of wet snow. Power and telephone lines became thick white ropes, some as much as nine inches in diameter.

We went to bed, slept soundly, and arose next morning to find 17 inches of snow on the ground. We reached for the light switch, a little apprehensive lest the power might have gone off. It turned on!

Realizing that most of us do not fully appreciate the vast amount of



—N.P.S. Photo by Ralph Anderson

planning and night work necessary to maintain the utilities in the park, it was interesting to look behind the scenes to see just what had happened the night before.

The snow fell lightly at first but the intensity increased rapidly until by 8:00 p.m. Fredrick Martischang, ranger at Badger Pass, telephoned the Chief Ranger's office that the depth of snow had reached approximately three inches. The ranger on duty in the Chief Ranger's office telephoned Wm. Stevenson, General Road Foreman, and informed him of the weather conditions at the moment and what was anticipated. Mr. Stevenson, in turn, immediately called E. C. Smith, Acting Park Engineer, and related the weather information to him and requested authority to place the snowplows in operation immediately. The intensity of the storm indicated that it would be unwise to delay action until midnight. With the go-ahead signal, Mr. Stevenson marshalled the meager forces at his command to commence snow removal operations. He called Charles Lash, road foreman for the Wawona district, and ordered a snowplow be placed on the Wawona Road between South Entrance and Chinquapin and, at the same time, to proceed towards the Wawona Tunnel with the other snowplow. Mr. Stevenson proceeded to the utility area, put chains on his pick-up, and endeavored to round up sufficient drivers and assistants from the road maintenance crew living in the Indian Village to start operations on the Valley Floor. He succeeded in securing Herb Ewing, Ernest Vancil and Paul Cramer, truck drivers, and Robert Barr, Norman James and John Telles, assistants or "swampers." By the time these drivers and swampers could be rounded up and report to work, the intensity of the storm had in-

creased to proportions requiring all snowplows to be placed in operation.

During the beginning of the storm, residents and guests of the Valley became unduly alarmed. They feared that the road would soon become impassable, preventing their leaving the Valley or returning to their homes. It was necessary to calm these fears and give assurance that there was no cause for alarm.

About 10:00 p.m., Ranger Odin Johnson, at Arch Rock, saw flashing lights a short distance below his station. He promptly reported this unusual condition, and electricians Joe Jenkins and Walter Gann started down toward Arch Rock immediately to determine if it was trouble in the 70,000 volt transmission line. A short distance above Arch Rock, they found the All-Year Highway completely blocked by four oak trees which had become uprooted and slid into the road from the mountain side above. Not having the equipment to clear a pass through this tangle of tree trunks and limbs, Jenkins and Gann turned back. They stopped at the power house and reported the condition to E. C. Smith. Mr. Smith, by this time, had taken a position in the Administration Building where he would be readily accessible. Mr. Stevenson was located after several telephone calls and given the information regarding the blockaded road. Not having any more road maintenance men available, he requested authority to call out other personnel to assist in clearing the road. Mr. Bowman, Carpenter Foreman, was called and he and Mr. Stevenson drove to the scene to assist in the work.

In the meantime, after several dimming of lights, the power failed at 11:15 p.m. Power failures, especially at night, and before a storm has reached any size, is a particular

source of anxiety due to overloaded transformers and system. We are always fearful that the failure is on our own system and of such extent that the park functions can be jeopardized. Mr. Smith called the power house at once to determine the cause of the failure. The night operator, Mr. Youd, replied that he was not certain what the trouble was. Before any conclusions were reached, Mr. Homer Crider, Chief Power House Operator, was on the line at his home. He indicated that he would go immediately to the power house and check the trouble.

Mr. Lash called in from the upper end of the Wawona Tunnel and reported the condition of the road in his area and gave the opinion that it would be necessary to exert all efforts to maintain a one-way road between Yosemite Valley and the South Entrance Ranger Station. Almost immediately after Mr. Lash reported on road conditions, Mr. Crider had arrived at the power house and called Mr. Smith to let him know that the trouble was not on the park system but on the Pacific Gas and Electric's line. In addition, the Yosemite power house was not generating sufficient electricity to supply the demands of the Valley and that before these demands could be furnished, many units in the Valley would have to be taken out of the circuit.

Failure of the power left the Lewis Memorial Hospital without lights or means of operating their heating plant, as was the situation in the entire Valley. Fortunately, a short time before, the National Park Service had installed in the hospital a 10 K.V.A. stand-by unit for just such emergencies. Shortly after 12:00 o'clock midnight, Mr. Smith contacted the hospital to see if they had succeeded in placing their stand-by unit in operation. He learned that

everything was operating satisfactorily, and no discomfort was experienced in the hospital because of the storm. This relieved the Park Service of any immediate anxiety regarding the mechanical operation of the hospital.

When the power failed, Miss Eunice Jones, telephone operator, called Mr. Hauck, Master Plumber, using her hand-cranking stand-by magneto. The electric pumps in the Yosemite Creek pump house were, of course, out of operation and it became Mr. Hauck's duty to start the gasoline stand-by units to prevent the overflow of sewage into Yosemite Creek. Mr. Hauck notified Mr. Jean Charron, Foreman Plumber, of the condition and made an agreement to meet at the plumbing shop in two hours, provided the power had not been restored. A few minutes before 3:00 a.m., Mr. Charron arrived at the plumbing shop, prepared to go to the Yosemite Creek pump house.

Power was restored at approximately 3:00 a.m. Not long thereafter, the electricians who had been below Arch Rock trying to ascertain the trouble, called Mr. Smith and told him that the power had been restored without any action on their part. As near as they could determine, there had been a short circuit somewhere along the P.G.&E. transmission line which automatically opened the switch at the Bear Valley substation.

The morning dawned on a snow-covered Yosemite. Lights were turned on in dozens of comfortable homes. Breakfasts were prepared. Youngsters went off to school. Men and women trudged through the snow to go to work, meeting excited visitors out with their cameras enjoying the thrill of a lifetime. Comparatively few people were aware of the weary night workers who kept the park utilities operating. These

workers had the satisfaction of a job well done, safeguarding the com-

fort and enjoyment of the visitors and residents alike.

A NEW RABBIT FOR YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

By Emil F. Ernst, Park Forester

For a number of years, possibly ten, there have been recurrent rumors circulated among the personnel of the Blister Rust Control eradication crews that rabbits were being encountered during the eradication operation on park lands. The park forester himself has seen snowshoe rabbits at Tuolumne Meadows and had observed their tracks elsewhere in the park. Jack rabbits have been reported on Trumbull Ridge in the vicinity of the site of old Camp 15 of the former Yosemite Lumber Company. Before the War the park forester, while on the ridge above Chinquapin Ranger Station, was told by one of the eradication men that he had just scared up a brush rabbit. This man was a resident of the town of Mariposa and said he knew a brush rabbit when he saw it.

Recently the park forester, while on a routine inspection of field operations with Forester Maurice Thede in the Wawona-South Entrance area captured a light brush rabbit. This rabbit had dived into a snow bank built up by the snow plows and had apparently completely disappeared. However, intrigued by the peculiar brown hole in the snow bank into which the rabbit had supposedly jumped, the party stopped their car for closer examination. Imagine their surprise in discovering that their brown "hole" was actually the

rear end of the rabbit itself. With its head hidden it apparently supposed, like the proverbial ostrich, that it was entirely concealed and made no move while the park forester approached and gently picked it out of the snow bank.

The rabbit was taken to the Yosemite Museum where it was definitely identified as a Mariposa brush rabbit.* According to available records at the Yosemite Museum, this is the first authenticated report of the presence of the brush rabbit on Yosemite National Park lands. Ranger John Mullady at South Entrance says there are several such rabbits near the station and that they have been there for several years. Since the capture of this specimen additional reports place similar rabbits in the Wawona Meadows.

This specimen was captured on the highway about three-fourths of a mile north of South Entrance Station at an elevation of approximately 5,000 feet above sea level and in Section 12, Township 5 South, Range 21 East, Mount Diablo Baseline and Meridian. Date of capture was December 14, 1948.

Now that this Mariposa brush rabbit is known to be present on park lands additional observations should be forthcoming and the full range in the park be determined.

Copies of the August, 1946, number of Yosemite Nature Notes are badly needed for our files. If you can

spare one of these, please send it to Box 545, Yosemite National Park, California.

**Sylvilagus bachmani Mariposae*, Grinnell and Storer.



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Dan Anderson