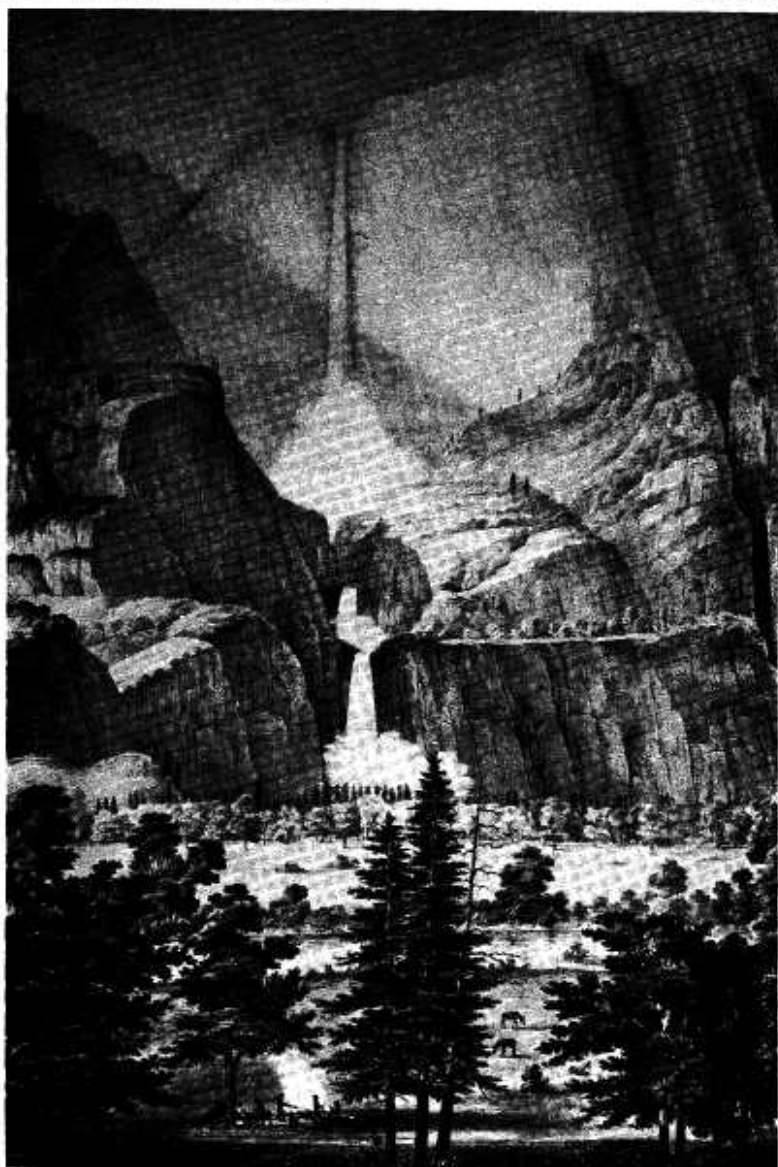


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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First published sketch of a Yosemite scene
—Thomas Ayres, October 1855

1855—FIRST TOURIST VISIT TO YOSEMITE—1955



Yosemite Nature Notes

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YOSEMITE'S FIRST TOURISTS

By Emil Ernst, Park Forester



THE 27th day of this month of July 1955 occurs the 100th anniversary of the visit of the first sightseeing or tourist party to come to the Yosemite Valley. This tourist party composed of James M. Hutchings, Thomas A. Ayres, Walter Millard, Alexander Stair, and two Indian guide's, Kos-sum and So-pin, arrived in Yosemite Valley on Friday, July 27, 1855. Apparently the party made its base camp in the Bridalveil Meadows at the lower end of the now-famed Valley. On Monday the 30th they departed, awed, impressed, and exuberant over the scenes they had seen and Ayres had sketched.

This sightseeing or tourist trip of 1855 was not a casual one. It had been planned for some time by James M. Hutchings. Hutchings was engaged in an extensive fact-finding tour of California extending from the southern mines in the vicinity of Mariposa to the mining communities of southern Oregon and from the Farallones off the Golden Gate to the Carson Valley of the then-Utah Territory. This tour, covering two years and four months of 1853, 1854, and 1855, was to provide the background and material he needed to publish a magazine devoted to extolling California, Californians, and the scenes of wonder and curiosity to be seen in that new State.

James M. Hutchings, an Englishman of the Midlands, came to the United States in 1848. One of his shipboard companions, and possibly a family friend, was Walter Millard, who also was of the party that visited the Yosemite Valley in 1855. Hutchings came overland to Califor-



James M. Hutchings

nia from the Missouri River in 1849. He traveled with a military escort party under the command of Brevet Captain R. Morris of the United States Mounted Rifles, serving the group occasionally as a wheelwright. This military party had been assigned as escort to "General" John Wilson, who had been appointed Navy Agent at San Francisco by his uncle, President Zachary Taylor. Hutchings left the Wilson party at Salt Lake City and arrived at Hangtown (Placerville) in mid-October. The Wilson train, at the insistence of the "General," took the northern or Goose Lake route to California and ran into disaster in the deep November snows in the Pitt River country. These difficulties, in which "General" Wilson had to abandon his law library reputedly worth \$10,000, are described vividly in J. Goldsborough Bruff's *Gold Rush*,

For some years Hutchings engaged in the hard vocation of mining for gold and, like thousands of others, he had his "ups and downs." By 1853 there were signs that most of the readily-accessible placer gold in the ravines, gulches, flats, and river bars had been found and recovered. Hutchings worked part time as a columnist and substitute editor on the Placerville *Herald*. In this weekly newspaper on July 2, 1853, Hutchings published his well known *The Miners Ten Commandments*. Within a year almost a hundred thousand copies, in one form or another, were sold. He copyrighted the letter-sheet form on December 30, 1853. The success of his Ten Commandments led him to consider literary work as a better means of earning a livelihood than mining. He shortly composed several other lettersheets and embarked on a magazine publishing venture, believing that there was no magazine then being published on the West Coast that did justice to California and Californians.

He had heard of the Yosemite Valley and its waterfalls more than a thousand feet in height. His magazine would not be complete without first hand knowledge of this little known but marvelous valley. Thomas A. Ayres, the artist, who had also tried his hand at mining and found it unrewarding, was employed by Hutchings to make sketches for several of the contemplated articles of the planned magazine. Hutchings employed daguerrotypes, (photographers) in areas where the bulky apparatus of the day could be transported. As the Yosemite trip was known to be arduous the transportation of photographic equipment was a serious and costly problem. Sketches would provide the illustration material needed with less trouble and less cost so Ayres was

enlisted to make the sketches and he thus became a member of the first tourist party.

On Thursday, July 5, Hutchings, Millard, and Ayres took passage at San Francisco on that fast sailing craft, the *Martin White*, for Sacramento on their way to the Yo Semite Valley. Their land journey took them through Jackson, Mokelumne Hill, the Calaveras Grove of Big Trees (where just a year previous Hutchings had a daguerrotype taken of a Big Tree which he used for the engraving illustrating his letter-sheet entitled *The Big Trees*.) Columbia, Sonora, La Grange, French Bar, and on to Mariposa.

Here on Monday the 23rd, Alexander Stair of Coulterville joined the party. While Hutchings was having considerable difficulty (humorously told by Hutchings in his book *In The Heart of the Sierras*) trying to locate a guide from among the volunteers of the Mariposa Battalion that had discovered the Yosemite Valley a short four years previously, Ayres made a sketch of the town of Mariposa. Hutchings was finally compelled to take the advice to seek his needed guide from among the few remaining Yosemite Valley Indians living at Hunt's store on the Fresno River near the present Oakhurst.

At Hunt's store, on the 24th, the party obtained two Indian guides, Kos-sum and So-pin, and they proceeded on their way. On the 26th, the party camped on the South Fork of the Merced River somewhere in the vicinity of Wawona. The next day, Friday, July 27, the party covered 22 miles on the last stretch of the journey to the Yosemite Valley.

Hutchings calls the valley "the Yohamite Valley," from the pronunciation that his Indian guides gave to him whenever the name was mentioned. (Later he engaged in some

controversy with Dr. L. H. Bunnell over the proper pronunciation and unwillingly acceded to Yo Semite or Yosemite). Hutchings also took the name that his guides gave to that outstanding monolith, El Capitan, which is unquestionably Spanish for "The Capitan."

As the party descended to the Valley from the rim on the south side they came to Old Inspiration Point. This point is on the old Meadows trail from Wawona and is not the Inspiration Point known to the many travelers over the old Wawona Road. Here Ayres made his first sketch, the one best known of his Yosemite Valley works due to the publicity given to it in later years by Hutchings. Ayres' sketching activities delayed somewhat the arrival of the party at their first night's camping place, undoubtedly in Bridalveil Meadows.

After a hearty breakfast the next day they started on an exploration of the Valley. Likening the shimmery spray of the first fall they came to the veil of the bride, they named this fall "Bridalveil." And so it is known today. In three days they explored the valley to its apparent head at Mirror Lake and to Happy Isles where they saw Illilouette Falls.

Ayres was well occupied with his sketching activities. He made the sketches entitled *El Capitan*, *Yosemite Domes*, *Cascades of the Rainbow* (Bridalveil Fall.) *The High Falls*, *Yo-Hamite* (Yosemite Falls), and the *Ford Entrance to YoHemity Valley* (Valley View). These are the titles given by Ayres to his 1855 sketches. (Note should be taken of his three ways of spelling the name of the Valley).

A year later in the *California Magazine* Hutchings said that they enjoyed "five days of luxurious scenic banqueting." The dates in the 1855 diary indicate they were in Yosemite Valley for parts of four days and he

must have been referring to the five days that elapsed between leaving Wawona and the return to Wawona.

The party left the valley on the 30th, making ten miles to their first camp. Mariposa was reached on August 1st. Here they remained two days and must have related some of their adventures to at least one individual, Editor L. A. Holmes, of the *Mariposa Gazette*. Holmes was ill at the time and concerned over copy for his weekly newspaper. He prevailed upon Hutchings to write an article for the paper and this appeared in the issue of August 16, 1855. There is no known copy of the *Mariposa Gazette* of this date but fortunately the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* saw the article and in the custom of the times reprinted it almost in its entirety in the August 18 issue of his newspaper. The editor's comments and the article is as follows:

"J. M. Hutchings writes to the *Mariposa Gazette* a description of the Yo-Semite Valley and its waterfalls. Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Ayers and Mr. Millard, both of San Francisco; and Mr. Stair of Coulterville formed a party to visit the place named. They appear to have started from an Indian village on the Fresno, where they procured two Indian guides. Mr. Hutchings says: From Mr. Hunt's store, we kept east-of-north course up the divide between the Fresno and Chowchillah valleys; thence descending towards the South Fork of the Merced river, and winding around a very rocky point, we climbed nearly to the ridges of the middle or main fork of the Merced, and descending towards the Yo-Semite valley, we came upon a high point, clear of trees, from whence we had our first view of the singular and romantic valley; and, as the scene opened in full view before us, we

were almost speechless with wondering admiration at its wild and sublime grandeur. "What!" exclaimed one at length, "have we come to the end of all things," "Can this be the opening of the Seventh Seal?" cries another. (Revelations 8:1 or Apocalypse) "This far, very far, exceeds Niagara," says a third.

"We had been out from Mariposa about four days, and the fatigue of the journey had made us weary and



a little peevish, but when our eyes looked upon the almost terrific grandeur of this scene, all, all was forgotten. "I never expected to behold so beautiful a sight." "This scene alone amply repays me for the travel!" "I should have lost the most magnificent sight that I ever saw had I not witnessed this!" were exclamations of pleasurable surprise that fell from the lips of all, as we sat down to drink in the varied beauties of this intoxicating and enchanting scene.

"On the north side stands one bold, perpendicular mountain of granite shaped like an immense tower. Its lofty top is covered with great pines, that by distance become mere

shrubs. One Indian guide called this the "Captain." It measures from the Valley to its summit about two thousand eight hundred feet.

Just opposite to this, on the south side of the valley, our attention was first attracted to a magnificent waterfall, about *seven hundred feet in height*, [Bridalveil Fall]. It looked like a broad, long feather of silver, that hung depending over a precipice, a light breeze moved it from side to side, and as the last rays of the setting sun were gilding it with rainbow hues, the red would vie with the purple, and the purple with the yellow, and the yellow with the green, and the green with the silvery sheen of its whitened foam, as it danced in space.

On rushed the water over its rocky bed, and as it reached the valley, it threw up a cloud of mist that made green and flourishing the grass, flowers and shrub that slumbered at the mountain base—while towering three thousand feet above the valley, stood the rugged and pine covered cliffs that, in broken and spiral peaks, girdle in the whole.

Passing further up the valley, one is struck with the awful grandeur of the immense mountains on either side—some perpendicular, some a little sloping. One looks like a lighthouse, another a giant capital of immense dimensions—all are singular and surmounted by pines.

Now we crossed the river, and still advancing up the valley, turned a point, and before us was an indescribable sight—a waterfall *two thousand two hundred feet in height* [Yosemite Falls]—the highest in the world. It rushes over the cliffs, and with one bold leap falls one thousand two hundred feet, then a second of five hundred feet more, then a third of over five hundred feet more

—the third leaps making two thousand two hundred feet.

Standing upon the opposite side of the valley, and looking at the tall pines below, the great height of these falls can at a glance be comprehended.

About ten miles from the lower end of the valley, there is another fall of *not less than fifteen hundred feet* [Illilouette Fall]. This with lesser falls and a lake, make the head of the Yo-Semity valley, so that this valley is about ten miles in length, and from a half to one mile in width; and although there is good land enough for several farms, it cannot be considered upon the whole as a good farming valley. Speckled trout, grouse, and pigeons are quite numerous."

"We understand that Mr. Hutchings (now of San Francisco, formerly of Placerville), the writer of the above glowing description, has in preparation a large lithograph of the two-thousand-odd-feet waterfall. The print is being executed by C. C. Kuchel of San Francisco, after drawing by Mr. Ayres, already mentioned as being one of the expedition to the Yo-Semity Valley [See cover]. If the description of Mr. Hutchings be not exaggerated, the scenery of that quarter must be of the most sublime character. Next perhaps to the mammoth trees of Calavaras, these extraordinary waterfalls, and steep mountains—'some perpendicular, some a little sloping,' like the falling tower of Pisa, it may be—will serve to immortalize the natural features of California, and draw from all parts of the world admiring tourists to visit them."

Although there are records of other parties having visited the Yosemite Valley in earlier years the Hutchings party is undoubtedly the first party to journey there for the express pur-

pose of viewing the scenery that had become known to the members, particularly Hutchings. He had started something.

Within two weeks Editor Holmes of the *Gazette*, having recovered from his illness, was himself gazing upon the wonders that Hutchings had so well described in his necessity-of-the-moment article. The same two Indians, Kos-sum and So-pin, were obtained at Hunt's store on the Fresno to guide Holmes and his party to the marvelous valley.

Records exist of other parties in the Yosemite Valley or its immediate vicinity in 1855. Engineer George K. Peterson of the Yo-Semite and Mariposa Water Company entered the Valley in the summer to survey it for a reservation site to supply water to the mines lower down the Merced River. They built the first known structure, a small shack, the traces of which have long since disappeared along with knowledge of its probable location. Engineer Peterson made some measurements of the heights and falls of the valley and these measurements were published in San Francisco papers. Another party was a government contract survey party headed by Alexis Waldemar von Schmidt, later the constructor of the Spring Valley Water System of the City of San Francisco and grandfather of Harold von Schmidt, well known historical artist of the present day. Von Schmidt was surveying the Mount Diablo Base Line from Oakdale to the boundary line between California and the Territory of Utah south and east of Mono Lake. This party crossed Yosemite Creek about five miles above Yosemite Falls. This sketch, probably the first made of the falls, has not been found.

Hutchings continued on his fact finding tour of California upon his return from the Yosemite Valley.

The most spectacular of Ayres' sketches, *The Yo-Hamite* or *Great Falls* was copyrighted on September 8, 1855 with the Library of Congress, where it is listed as "Stonecut Engraving: Hutchings' California Scenes: The Yo-Hamite Falls." Shortly thereafter the editor of the San Francisco *Chronicle* commented on the receipt of a copy of the published lithograph in the paper's edition of October 19 with the following: "Hutchings Panoramic Scenes of California. We are indebted to James M. Hutchings for copies of two of his Panoramic Scenes in California. They are: *The Golden Gate* and *The Yo-Hamite Waterfalls*. These pictures are of large size, the former being thirty-two inches in length by some sixteen inches in breadth (the lithographed portion alone) and the latter being nearly the same dimensions. Both subjects are sketched from nature by T. A. Ayres, and drawn on stone by Kuchel and Dresel, lithographers here. We understand Mr. Hutchings has been engaged during the last year and a half in traveling through the State, taking numerous sketches of whatever most curious picturesque, grand or interesting, his sketches being the materials for executing a grand painted panorama of California to be exhibited in the Eastern states. The *Golden Gate* and the *Yo-Hamite Waterfalls* are two of the most striking of Mr. Hutchings' subjects."

The Hutchings Yosemite Valley article in the *Mariposa Gazette* and its republishing in San Francisco papers, particularly in the San Francisco *Chronicle* on August 18, undoubtedly sparked the inception of travel to the Yosemite Valley on purely sightseeing grounds. Publication of the Yo-Hamite Falls lithograph early in October added fuel to the flames of discussion in the Bay area. How many were influenced to under-

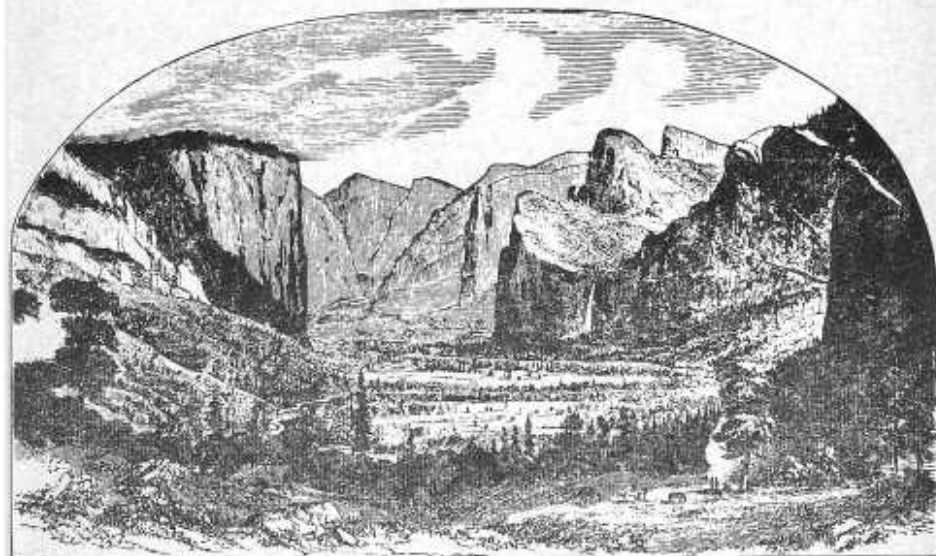
take the journey in 1855 will remain unknown but at least one more party visited the Valley that year. The San Francisco *Chronicle* of October 18 records that "Col. Redick McKee, Dr. Scott, and about a dozen others, started yesterday on a jaunt to the famous Yo-Hamity Falls, in Mariposa County." October was a little late in the year to be attempting a "jaunt" into the rugged Sierra Nevada in those days.

The first number of Hutchings' *California Magazine*, for which he had been gathering material for more than two years, was in the hands of subscribers and reviewers in the middle of June 1856. This first number bears the date of July 1856. It continued to be published for five full years under the editorship of Hutchings until the June number of 1861. Brooks and Lawrence, of *Golden Era* fame, bought it and combined it with *The Mountaineer*. It ceased to exist three years later.

The feature article of the first number of the *California Magazine* was entitled "THE YO-HAM-I-TE VAL-

LEY." Eight pages, six by nine and one-half inches in size, and four engravings from the Ayres' sketches were devoted to a well written and illustrated description of the then remote and little known mountain valley. One prominent reviewer bypassed the important lead article and commented at length on an article to the effect that silkworm culture would become an important California industry. Today *Hutchings' California Magazine* is considered as excellent contemporary source material on the scenes of the Gold Rush. The Yosemite Museum is fortunate in having a complete file of the 60 numbers edited by Hutchings.

Thus so inauspiciously in July 1855 began tourist visitation to the Yosemite Valley. The leader of this tourist party, James Mason Hutchings, fell a victim to his own blandishments. He became a permanent resident of the valley and occupied a pre-eminent position in the spreading of the word of the existence and the beauties of the Incomparable Valley of the Yosemite.



Engraved by Theo. Ayres, June 26, 1855—first engraving.

GENERAL VIEW OF THE YOSEMITE VALLEY.

(From Open the book, as to old Indian Trail.)







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Dan Anderson