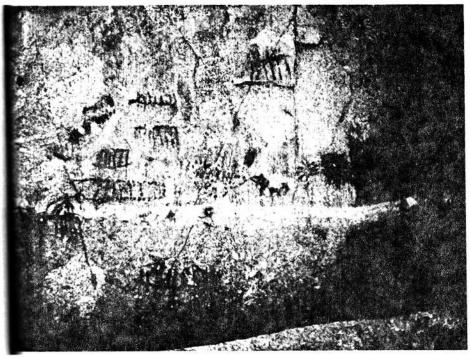
# YOSEMITE

VOLUME FORTY-THREE NUMBER 1

**APRIL 1973** 





Pictographs in Pate Valley

Snyder photo

# A Plea For Yosemite's Past

Hungry, tired, and unsure of his location in his crossing of the Sierra in 1841, Joseph Walker may have wondered, as he became the first white man to peer down into Yosemite Valley, whether these nearly impregnable mountain fastnesses would retain their secrets in spite of the penetrations of men.

Though the numbers of people visiting Yosemite and other places in the Sierra have increased rapidly over the last twenty years, the mountains continue to retain their secrets in one respect at least, for, archaeologically, the Sierra remains only partially known.

There have been surveys of sites in Yosemite — the most important one by the University of California, Berkeley — but there has been too little time and too little money to follow up the surveys with exploratory digging. Excavations have been concentrated in the foothills,

with the exception of some recent digging in El Portal, Crane Flat, and Hodgdon Meadows. But the heart of the Sierra is too remote from the University. The transportation of supplies and artifacts is too difficult; so the backcountry sites, for the most part, have remained undisturbed.

The problems of distance and accessibility have led people to dismiss the backcountry as archaeologically unimportant. The larger sites are in the foothills where permission to dig is more easily granted and travel less burdensome. Findings from these sites can be extrapolated to explain what occurred in the higher mountain areas by working from the site survey maps.

The result is that much of the Indian heritage of Yosemite is being lost. Though backcountry sites are inaccessible to archaeological survey parties, increasing

(Continued on page four)

# Breeding Bird Survey

At 5:06 a.m. sharp on June 1, 1972 — stopwatch in hand — began one of many Breeding Bird Surveys conducted in every State of the country for the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of Interior. This survey route, which like the others was randomly picked for statistical reasons, happened to fall in northern Yosemite along the Crane Flat/Tuolumne Grove/Hetch Hetchy route, covering three life zones, and a multitude of bird life.

A Breeding Bird Survey is very different from the Annual Audubon Christmas Count. It is taken by car along a 25 mile route, on a clear day during the height of the breeding season. Stops are made every half mile for exactly 3 minutes to record all birds within eye and ear-shot. Observations are made and recorded by one or two observers, and the results transferred to rather forbidding looking forms provided by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The literally millions of records from all over the United States are fed into a computer who digests them into distribution maps. The aim is to assess the breeding populations of birds on a large scale, and to gain comparable information from region to region and from year to year by use of standardized methods.

"Sounds rather dull, but easy," I thought to myself when asked to participate in the survey. As it turned out I was wrong on both counts. It's hard work to jump out of the car, count, record, jump in — no less than 50 times in the prescribed 4 and one-half hours. Had it not been for Norm Messinger, District Naturalist at Wawona, who not only helped with the observa-

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# From The Director

This issue of the Member's Bulletin seems to be more than averagely concerned with birds and birding. However, with spring in the foothills and on its way to Yosemite, the local population of resident and migrant birds shortly will make itself seen and heard. So, perhaps bird

news is appropriate.

Our Winter Environmental Seminar program was an unqualified success. We were somewhat timid about attempting it; some advisors were enthusiastic, others negative. As it turned out, Carl Sharsmith, who presented them, had full classes each of the three weekends. And, we were obliged to turn away about as many as we were able to accommodate.

Elsewhere, is the schedule for the Summer Field Seminar Program. You'll note that it's somewhat more ambitious than last year, with three Alpine Botany/ Ecology courses, three Subalpines, plus the two new courses, Wilderness Management and Natural History for the Back-

packer.

During the Easter Week holidays, the Association sponsored a series of "Mini-Seminars" for park visitors. These were three-hour programs, with Tony Look from the Sierra Club; representatives of park concessioners; Harold Basey, mammologist from Modesto College; Eugene Conrotto, Miwok Indian authority; park environmental education specialist John Krisko and Howard Weamer, outstanding environmental photographer, as leaders.

In my role of Chief of Interpretation for Yosemite, I view the Association's seminars as an especially vital part of the overall park interpretive programming. I feel there is a rising demand for programs of "continuing education" or "enrichment of living", however one chooses to label them, programs which provide a way for the urbanite to break out of his pattern and draw more from life than is available where he lives and works.

We're determined to provide a source whenever we can.



Veratrum californicum

#### P. Lee

# If In Doubt, Don't

In this article, Mr. Virgil Chambers of Mountain View, Calif., relates his frightening experience after eating several plants which might have been corn lilies (Veratrum californicum). It has not been determined that it was this plant that caused Mr. Chamber's grim ordeal. However, it does point out the folly of eating any wild plants unless one knows them to be harmless. The corn lily grows in dense masses in drying meadows throughout Yosemite at elevations of 4,000 to 10,000 ft.

It is sometimes confused with "skunk cabbage" (Lysichiton); the leaves of this plant often are recommended for wilderness survival. The stem and leaves of the corn lily are poisonous to humans and stock.

A friend told me of being able to eat off the land, and, in thinking about the Indians and wild life, I wanted to try it.

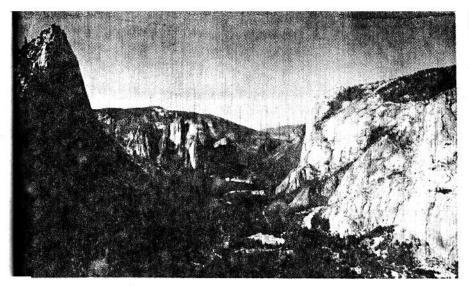
I had reached the pass out of Benson Lake enroute to Pate Valley at an elevation of perhaps 9,000 feet. There were patches of snow, the ground was boggy; there was open forest, and various plants grew here, including what I thought might be a wild onion. The plant was dark green, no flowers, and had a thick white stem at ground level; and they grew from 6" to 15" tall, 3/4 to 1-1/2 diameter with leaves hugging each other.

I broke a stem off next to the ground and touched my tongue to the juices seeping from the stalk. As there was not much taste and no stinging of the tongue, I bit into it. It bit like a tender radish and had a similar nippy taste. So, I ate a 6" plant, which went down quite well, then ate two more of a similar size, and put a 4th plant in my shirt pocket.

I had hiked perhaps 4 miles down the trail alongside a large creek, from which I drank; though oddly I wasn't thirsty. The water had an unpleasant taste, but I drank deeply assuming the plants I had eaten caused the water to taste peculiar. I went on down the trail past Rodger's Lake junction, when I started feeling uneasy in the stomach. As the trail climbed toward Pleasant Valley, my nausea increased and was fearful that what I had eaten was poisonous, I pressed on, hoping to make Pate Valley before nightfall. Just beyond Pleasant Valley trail junction, I suddenly vomited violently and experienced difficulty breathing. Then, to make matters worse I was smitten suddenly by an uncontrollable diarrhea. I kept going, the attacks closely following one another. By this time I was staggering and falling, so I abandoned part of my pack, and soon had so much difficulty getting to my feet that I shed the rest of my pack.

The attacks continued as I lay on the ground choking and gasping for air, but I was unable to clear my passages, and unable to lift myself on my elbows to raise my face from the dirt; but I no longer cared. I knew I was dying. I prayed God to forgive my sins and take care of my family as I was certain I was about to enter the next world. I had been struggling desperately to breathe. Now, my arms and hands tingled so hard they hurt, my heart ached horribly, and ! wondered why it was taking so long to die. I remember lying there and opening my eyes, but

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Yosemite Valley from Union Point.

N.P.S. photo

# Ahwahnee ...

For decades the commonly accepted translation of the Miwok name for Yosemite Valley, Ahwahnee, has been "deep, grassy valley." This seems an appropriate name, descriptively speaking, but it is not the only

possible one.

If we look at ahwahnee linguistically it is transcribed ?awo\*ni (var. ?owo\*ni), indicating that the original Miwok pronunciation was somewhat different than what white settlers wrote down. Quite similar to ?awo\*ni is the word ?awa\*ja which translates (1) "lake", and (2) "deep". Since Yosemite Valley is a dry glacial lake-bed, as well as very deep, ?awa\*ja might well be the root of ?awa\*ni.

It is equally possible, however, that the root of ?awo\*ni might be ?awo (var. ?owo) which translates "mouth". By simply adding the suffix ni ("place or location of") ?awo becomes ?awo\*ni; "mouth" becomes "location of

the (big) mouth".

Naming Yosemite Valley "Location of the Mouth" seems strange until we consider some other Miwok place names. Half Dome was named "Tis-say-ack" after the lovely young heroine of Ahwahneechee legend whose face (a delicate profile) can be found on the face of the dome. A young man was to signal his bride with an arrow which he dropped as he fell from above Yosemite Falls ("Lost Arrow"). If other geographic features were named for objects, people, or actions which they resembled, why not the valley itself? Looking into the valley from the east end the U-shape appears somewhat like a mouth. Looking down into the valley from a high point (especially on the north side) the curve of the valley might be likened to the curve of a mouth. Perhaps most obviously, the valley as a whole, the area between the walls and above the floor, might be described as a great, cavernous mouth. The idea of naming Yosemite Valley "Location (Valley) of the (Big) Mouth" no longer seems quite so strange.

A 1936 National Geographic Bulletin printed an article entitled "Red Men and White in Yosemite Valley" in which the author states, "To the Indians it (Yosemite Valley) was known as Ahwahnee for the inhabitants called themselves Ahwahneechee, People of the Big Mouth." Perhaps other such references have been overlooked in the past or discarded in favor of the more aesthetic "deep, grassy valley."

It would be difficult to prove which of these two possible translations is most correct. It does not really matter. What does matter is that we not accept 'facts' or statements about other people (in this case the Miwoks of Yosemite Valley) without first questioning them. We strive for total accuracy in the study of natural history; why not the same in the study of human history?

Karen Buehler

Karen Buehler is a student at California State College, Fullerton, working on her master's degree in cultural anthropology. She has worked two summers on the park interpretive staff.



# **Meet Jim Warner**

"Have you ever considered who agitated for much of to-day's environmental protection legislation? Among others, it was the proverbial 'little old ladies in tennis shoes' who were very serious bird watchers, taking a proprietary interest their feathered friends. When they began to measure a decline of a certain species, they wondered why and badgered the scientific world until they found out. Then, they went to work pushing for action to protect bird life."

The above is a part of introduction to Jim Warner's "Tuesday Morning Bird Stalk." Warner, a first rate bird man, takes park visitors out, rain or shine, to acquaint them with Yosemite's bird life, of which there is an abundance (see bird count story). Jim points out that one need not have sharp eyesight to identify birds since each species of bird has its own distinctive call and song and even a blind person can identify birds in the field.

lim came to Yosemite to serve as Assistant Valley District Interpreter. Prior to his assignment here, he was at Catoctin Mountain Park in Maryland. The Warner family, wife Jan, and three sons, Dave 11, Ron 10, and Chris 3, spent last year at Glacier Bay National Monument in Alaska, Jim's first permanent park service position. Prior to going to Alaska, Jim was a naturalist for three summers in Sequoia National Park, between semesters of graduate work at Sacramento State College.

Only last week, Warner tried to nurse back to health an ailing goshawk which had been found behaving in an un-goshawklike fashion, listless and indifferent. His ministrations, and attempts to feed the failing creature were unsuccessful and its spirit soared off to join Jonathan L. Seagull.

### A Plea For Yosemite's Past

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numbers of backpackers continue to disrupt the site surfaces.

Most of the backcountry sites have very little depth to them, situated as they are on thin layers of decomposed granite soils on the edges of meadows, streams, or lakes. Any considerable disturbance of their surfaces ruins them for future survey and analysis. In fact, the artifacts originally on the site surfaces are now almost gone, except for those that wash up every spring in the runoff. Oldtimers in the park recall when many of the sites in the northern backcountry were strewn with large pieces of obsidian, many worked, but most simply trading pieces. Now even these are gone, and the different uses of particular sites by the Indians are more difficult to ascertain.

One of the best sites in the backcountry, as yet largely untouched but increasingly vulnerable to passing travellers, is that in Pate Valley on the Tuolumne River. It is important because it is one of the few in the deep backcountry that has some stratigraphy - a depth of use more than the usual six inches found in most high country sites. Pate Valley was a permanent site, the last one on the Tuolumne River above Hetch Hetchy. There are housepits, there are many mortars, though gradually fewer pestles. Just north of the site itself is what seems to have been a cremation grounds, for the earth there is

black, deep, and full of ash. On the wall of granite immediately behind the site are hundreds of pictographs done in red, orange, and even white and gray paints. Unlike the picto-graphs in Yosemite Valley, which have been destroyed by campfires made near them and by weathering, these picto-graphs are for the most part clear, though they, too, are suffering some damage from the weathering of the granite face.

The exact meaning of the pictographs is unknown. Rather than representing the doodles of idleness, they were probably

mic life of the Pate Valley Indians, counts of families or game, possibly guides to game trails or favored hunting spots, records of weather or trade. The lack of use of the circle makes the Pate Valley pictographs unique. The predominantly linear designs, similar to those found on the eastern slope of the Sierra, rather than to those found in the San Joaquin, suggests the eastern orientation of this group of Indians.

Pate Valley was a natural fortress: upstream was Muir Gorge and downstream, near another permanent site, was another gorge, not so spectacular but making upriver passage difficult. Far above the valley was another site from which all the area of the Tuolumne River and Piute Creek canyons was visible and anyone coming or going through them could be watched. It was up Piute Creek that the people of Pate Valley hunted and traded with Indians of eastern California and Nevada. At least one of the Indians' deer blinds still exists near Pate Valley, and the sites of summer occupation continue up Piute Creek to the eastern edge of the park. The sites near the Sawtooth Range were trading rather than hunting sites, for the pieces of obsidian found there on the surface are usually unworked "blanks."

The importance of Pate Valley, then, is not just that it is a large backcountry site, but that it was also the last permanent "outpost" on a major trading route across the Sierra. As such, work on it would provide information about the Hetch Hetchy subculture as well as about the contacts these Indians had with other Indians across the mountains. And, because of the depth of the site, archaeologists could get some idea of the timing and chronological extent of those contacts. Unless the Pate Valley site is excavated by the National Park Service or some other organization, however, it will gradually be destroyed by those people who see in it only a source of souvenirs.

The mountains then will have lost but kept their secrets.

# 1972 Christmas **Bird Count**

The annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count was held on December 23, 1972 with a greatly increased number (36) of observers than the past thirteen years. Two parties operated in Yosemite Valley, two from Cascades to El Portal, one in the Foresta area, and one south of Yosemite Valley.

Weather clear, calm, warm: 26°F at Chinquapin at 6:00 a.m., 46°F at Peregoy Meadow at 3:00 p.m., 32° - 50°+F in El Portal. Snow line about 4,000 feet with about 3 feet on the ground at 7,000 feet. The weather had been quite warm for about a week following a few days of

sub-zero weather.

The El Portal area yielded the greatest number of species and individuals. The highly qualified and increased number of observers (and perhaps the warm period of weather) made this year's count the most successful in this count area: 71 species, 4079 individuals.

	TOTAL
Goshawk	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	5
Cooper's Hawk	5
Red-tailed Hawk	22
Golden Eagle	1
Sparrow Hawk	2
California Quail	15
Mountain Quail	27
Band-tailed Pigeon	967
Screech Owl	1
Pygmy Owl	7
Saw-whet Owl	1
"Large" Owl	1
Anna's Hummingbird	11
Belted Kingfisher	3
Red-shafted Flicker	37
Pileated Woodpecker	3
Acorn Woodpecker	121
Lewis' Woodpecker	1
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	8
Williamson's Sapsucker	3
Hairy Woodpecker	10
Downy Woodpecker	18
Nuttall's Woodpecker	9
White-headed Woodpecker	34
Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker	1

(Continued on page six)

Jim Snyder has spent eight summers in Yosemite as a member of a trail crew; for five, he has been a foreman. He received his master's in American History from U.C. Davis in 1967 and is working now on his PhD: "American Indian Education." To us, Jim puts forth a sensible, objective and ethical attitude about Yosemite's

### If In Doubt, Don't

(Continued from page two)

being able to see only gray light; my vision was gone. I went into racking convulsions and my entire body jerked. I do not know how long I was unconscious, but I discovered I could suck a little air through my nostrils, and then through my mouth. I gulped in great quantites of air for what seemed like an hour, before I could breathe. Then I slept, lying in my filth with my face on the ground. Some time during the night I awakened and found I could roll over, but when I raised my head, dizziness would engulf me and I would collapse again. When morning came, I found I could sit up for brief periods. I was extremely thirsty, and wondered at my being alive, knowing it was a miracle from

I was able to crawl a bit, and finally I staggered to my feet. Though I had to sit down repeatedly, I made my way back up the almost level trail to my pack. I arranged it on the ground so that I could wriggle into it, and then with the help of my staff, I tumbled my way down the trail toward Pate Valley. Shortly, I came upon a forest fire and with despair wondered if I might possibly be burned up, but I thought there will be fire-fighters and assistance. But no firefighters were in sight. I cautiously circumvented the small blaze, as I now saw it was, and scraped dirt onto a few smouldering logs and embers. Eventually, I came to Piute Creek where I dropped my pack, and drank and drank and drank. Then on I went the short distance to Pate Valley where, after frequent resting, built a fire, filled some water cans on the stove, stripped and scrubbed myself, then put on my poncho and scrubbed my clothes and hung them to dry.

Thunder and lightning continued, but in the afternoon a helicopter landed near the fire and I hoped help would be coming my way. Around 6 p.m. the rain poured down and soon Rangers Jack Fry and Dick Powell came wet and weary from fighting the fire, and I knew all would be well.



Saw-whet Owl

N.P.S. photo

# June Birding Seminar

Dave DeSante, who presented a one-day birding program here before the annual Christmas count, has agreed to come back in June the 9th, 10th and 11th. This will be a credit-earning course for those who wish; two quarter units from UCD Extension.

There will be seven hours of lecture, thirteen of field trips, and life zones between Upper Sonoran and Arctic-Alpine will be covered on four field trips. These will involve camp-outs at Bridalveil Creek and at Crane Flat Campgrounds. These, Dave says, will simplify the travel for the field and will put the class in position for observing in the more desirable early morning and evening hours.

Lecture material to be covered will be the bird as a flying organism, the structure of bird communities in the Sierra, beginning and advanced discussion of bird populations and the phenomena of their migration.

De Sante's audience at his earlier program was entranced by his information, delivery and enthusiasm. To get this, along with the field trips, will make for a great experience. The charge for the course is \$30.00; registration for credit will be \$15.00.

The course is limited to 25. Once those who attended De-Sante's other program learn of this one, we anticipate a prompt registration.

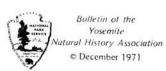
# Life Members

We welcome the following members in the Association:

JAMES SCHWABACHER, JR.
San Francisco, CA
DAVID COLBERT, M.D.
Sacramento, CA
MR. AND MRS. IRVIN M. DUNCAN, Yosemite National Park
MS. SARAH J. ROGALLO
Los Altos Hills, CA
DONALD M. JONTE
Orinda, CA
R.A. ULLRICH, M.D.
Rolling Hills, CA
EDWARD J. RINGROSE, M.D.
Berkeley, CA

# An Invitation

Members of Yosemite Natural History Association are invited to join Golden Gate Audubon Society of San Francisco on a weekend trip to the survey area on May 19-20 this year. The group will retrace some of the lower parts of the route to Hetch Hetchy. Meet at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, May 19, at the Big Oak Flat Road Entrance Station, or inquire at the Station as to the whereabouts of the group.





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A non-profit, educational association dedicated to the interpretation of the natural and human history of Yosemite National Park, in cooperation with the National Park Service. Contributions and donations are tax deductible.

# Summer Seminar Schedule

The Association's Summer Field Seminar Program has been firmed: it is shown below. Members will recognize that two new seminars are offerred.

Yosemite Wildlife and Field Ecology — July 9-13; July 23-27 Subalpine Botany and Ecology — July 9-13; July 23-27; Aug. 6-10 Alpine Botany and Ecology -July 16-20; July 30-Aug 3; Aug.

Wilderness Management — July 16-21 (inc.)

Yosemite's Geology of Rock and Ice - July 30-Aug. 3; Aug. 6-10 Living Glaciers of the Yosemite Region - Aug. 6-10; Aug. 20-24 Interpretive Techniques — Aug. 13-17

Natural History for the Backpacker - Aug. 13-17

Yosemite-Laboratory for Teaching - Aug. 20-24

### 1972 Christmas Bird Count

(Continued from page four)

Black Phoebe 2 226 Steller's Jay Scrub Jay Common Raven Clark's Nutcracker Mountain Chickadee 560 Chestnut-backed Chickadee 11 35 Plain Titmouse Common Bushtit White-breasted Nuthatch Red-breasted Nuthatch Brown Creeper Wrentit Dipper Winter Wren Bewick's Wren Canyon Wren Rock Wren California Thrasher Robin Varied Thrush 57 17 102 Hermit Thrush Western Bluebird Townsend's Solitaire 11 232 Golden-crowned Kinglet Ruby-crowned Kinglet 89 Cedar Waxwing Starling Hutton's Vireo Audubon's Warbler House Sparrow Evening Grosbeak Purple Finch Cassin's Finch Pine Siskin Lesser Goldfinch 1 50 20 130 53 3 246 1 79 Red Cossbill Rufous-sided Towhee Brown Towhee Slate-colored Junco Oregon Junco White-crowned Sparrow Golden-crowned Sparrow Fox Sparrow Song Sparrow GRAND TOTAL SPECIES

GRAND TOTAL INDIVIDUALS

### **Breeding Bird Survey**

(Continued from page one)

tions but did the stop-go driving, the survey probably would have collapsed at about Hodgdon Meadow for breakfast! The reward? An experience not easy to surpass. The overwhelming dawn chorus at Crane Flat. The voices of our most prized American songsters — Hermit Thrush, Townsend's Solitaire, and Winter Wren. The songs of Goldencrowned Kinglets in the Tuo-Grove and Canvon Wrens in the sparse, rocky country at Hetch Hetchy. And last but not least, the good feeling of having helped in a minuscule way to lay the ground for more thorough studies of our wildlife resources.

Even if you are only casually interested in the sounds and sights around you, I urge you to get up, just once, half an hour before the sun on a clear spring day, listen and walk for one hour - and then go back to bed, if you wish. You won't forget it

and you'll do it again.

The brief statistics of the 1972 survey: 60 species were recorded on the census day, estimated to represent at least 90% of the breeding population. Not surprising to anyone who knows the Sierra mountains, Western Wood Pewees and Robins were the most common individuals. As a family, the warblers (7 different species) were most abundantly represented at all altitudes. An additional 43 species were observed along the same route from April to September, mostly small numbers of migrants and up-mountain wanderers, for a total of 103 species surely an amazing variety of bird life for such a relatively restricted area. The results of the survey were deposited with the Park Service in Yosemite and sent to the Fish and Wildlife Service, from where they came back as a neat computer print out - for checking!

Marie Mans

My introduction to the "language of nature" dates back to trips with my family's hunting parties in Europe, attracting deer and ducks by imitating their

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calls. Learning more about the vast variety of animal sounds has been an intriguing avocation ever since, and often great solace throughout many years of war and travel. When coming to California (20 years ago), this interest led to some detailed breeding bird censusing for the National Audubon Society, and more recently to tape recording of bird songs and calls. It's strictly an avocation.

M.M.

