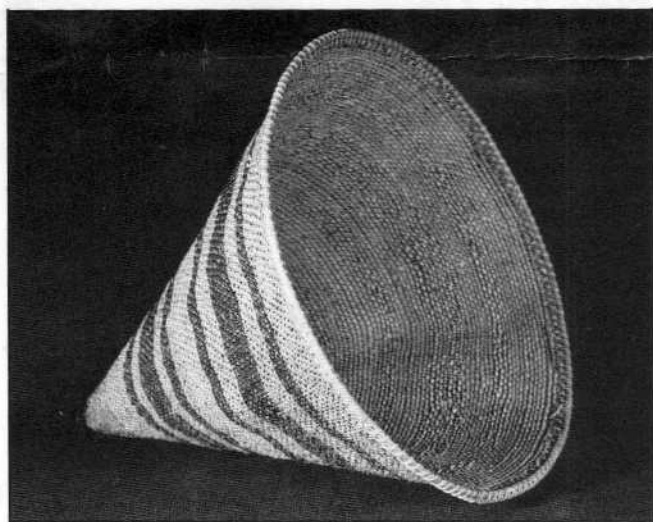


YOSEMITE

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Mary Hunter's burden basket. This example is diagonally-twined with a linear-banded pattern of split redbud shoots.

NPS PHOTO: Dixon

continuing efforts to secure a complete collection of Miwok basketry for study purposes, as well as for display in the Indian Cultural Museum, which is to be materially enlarged.

Miwok baskets, with information regarding the date and locality of collection as well as the maker's name are not common, and so it was with a great deal of interest that we learned of a collection of baskets secured by Pacific Western Traders of Folsom, California. The collection had been sold to them by a member of the Davenport family which had acquired them from Mrs. Mary Hunter (c. 1854-1933), a Miwok woman who had worked for them between 1900 and 1930. Subsequent research revealed that Mary Hunter was from Indian Diggins, the most northern of all Sierra Miwok villages, not far from Placerville. Such information was exciting, for less than a dozen baskets exist from this particular village, whose close proximity to Washoe and Southern Maidu (Nisenan) peoples makes it a crucial point for study. Further research, as well as inquiry among aged Indian people in the foothills, revealed that Mrs. Hunter spoke Northern Miwok and Southern Maidu, as well as English. Such evidence of native bilingualism reinforces the opinion that the border villages integrated neighboring cultural traits, and thus helps us to understand the collection more fully.

MARY HUNTER'S BASKETS: YNHA recently provided \$8,000 to the National Park Service for the purchase of fifteen highly-prized Miwok baskets. These are now a part of the park's outstanding basketry collection. The purchase was arranged through the efforts of Craig Bates, the park's Curator of Ethnography. About the acquisition, Bates provides the following:

YNHA's December purchase of an important group of Miwok baskets provides a valuable addition to the ethnographic collections of Yosemite National Park. Secured in the early years of this century from a Miwok woman named Mary Hunter, these baskets provide us with the most complete collection in existence from the Miwok village of "Indian Diggins" and help us in our



A Mary Hunter cooking basket, used for many years to stone-boil acorn mush. Technically, the basket was produced with an outside work face, in leftward coil direction. *NPS PHOTO: Dixon*

The group of baskets contains one of only two extant close-twined burden baskets collected from the Northern Miwok, and appears to be an imitation of a similar style produced in a different technique by their Maidu neighbors. Other important pieces included culinary baskets used for stone-boiling acorn mush, gift baskets, a winnowing tray, and personal serving baskets for acorn mush. Unique among the items is a model cradlebasket with a rag doll occupant, made by Mrs. Hunter (1910) for one of the girls of the Davenport family.



Further study of this unique collection will allow us to understand better the spread of basketry styles among the Sierra Miwok and their neighbors, as well as to gain a better understanding of the blending of cultures that took place on the frontiers of Miwok territory.

The model cradlebasket and rag doll, made by Mary Hunter for one of the children of the Davenport family of Pleasant Valley for whom she worked. NPS PHOTO: Dixon

WHERE YOUR MONEY'S GOING: The fact that congressional appropriations to fund Yosemite's operation leave the park's managers on the shorts is scarcely new news. This has been a chronic condition for years. As we recall, an exception might have occurred in 1970, following the contretemps between the NPS staff and 400 to 500 disgruntled youths who got into all sorts of mischief during the so-called "4th of July riots." The money supply appeared quite endless, as additional protection people, interpreters and facilities were put on the scene to help cool the climate.

For the current year, we assume that our tax dollars are thought to be more needed by D.O.D. than NPS. So, the local park people continue to mend and make do to keep dear old Yosemite in presentable shape.

Therefore, we find your membership dollars even more needed, and appreciated, as we've budgeted a total of \$124,000 in aid to NPS — here in Yosemite. That's a sizeable sum representing about 20% of the amount spent for all the park's interpretive services and \$9,000 greater than for 1983.

We commend the park staff for stretching its money supply and we thank you all for helping YNHA make a substantial contribution.

Below is shown where the money is to go. Several items of similar nature have been grouped under a single heading.

1. Complete the development of the Yosemite Wayside Exhibit Plan; design and produce first increment of exhibit panels.	\$ 33,000
2. Other exhibit costs (planning, materials and construction) for various projects at the Valley Visitor Center, Happy Isles Nature Center, Parsons Lodge, Big Oak Flat Information Station and a mobile information van.	26,000
3. Complete production of bear management film	5,000
4. Complete series of transcriptions of oral history tapes	500
5. Produce and reprint various free informational literature	13,000
6. Pioneer Yosemite History Center research, construction and materials	6,450
7. Purchase theater lighting for performing arts productions	3,000
8. Aid to park research library	8,000
9. Audio-visual and darkroom equipment	4,150
10. Museum collection acquisitions	9,000
11. Misc. support costs	7,000
12. NPS staff training	2,000
13. Administrative support (time donated by YNHA staff)	7,000
TOTAL	\$124,100

MEETING '84: Our 1984 members meeting is scheduled for September 15 and 16. We hope you'll be pleased that it will be at Tuolumne Meadows again. Certain practical considerations make Tuolumne the ideal place and indeed there can't be a lovelier scene. We've booked nearly all the Tuolumne Meadows Lodge tents for September 14 and 15. Those interested in making reservations should communicate with the Conference Reservations Office, Yosemite Park and Curry Company, Yosemite National Park, CA 95389; phone (209) 252-3003.



Ms. Barbara DeWitt of Los Angeles newly elected to the YNHA Board of Trustees.

1983 and on tap she has family ski treks scheduled for March, 1984, and summer family trips in July and August.

The Board now is made up of: Tom Shephard (chairman), Robert Binnewies (ex-officio), Barbara DeWitt, J. Foster Fluetsch, Carlo Fowler, Robert Griffin, Edward Hardy, Richard Martyr, Leonard McKenzie (ex-officio), Skip McLaughlin, Harvey Rhodes, Lennie Roberts, Phyllis Weber.

Incidental intelligence: In the City and County of San Francisco, 66% of those registered voted in the 1980 presidential election; 40% in a November local election. We mailed 1780 ballots, 521 members responded for a somewhat disappointing 29% return.

THE ELECTION: As is our yearly practice, we mailed ballots to the YNHA membership on November 23, along with the names and profiles of the three candidates nominated to election to our Board of Trustees. There were two seats to be filled, those of Mr. Skip McLaughlin and Dr. Fred Harper, whose terms were to end December 31, 1983; both had been nominated for re-election by the Board of Trustees' nominating committee. Ms. Barbara DeWitt of Los Angeles had submitted a petition in nomination. By December 15, the cut-off date, we'd received 521 ballots, marked thus: for McLaughlin 352; for DeWitt 346; for Harper 312. So, there is now a new member on your association board.

Dr. Harper served well and faithfully as a YNHA trustee since 1977. His contributions were many and his support greatly appreciated.

We've known Ms. DeWitt for several years and have found her to be an energetic woman who appears to have serious interest in YNHA affairs. She successfully organized and led family backpack trips for us in the summer of



YNHA Board member, Mr. J. Foster Fluetsch of Stockton

A NEW MEMBER joined the YNHA Board of Trustees with the appointment in September of Mr. J. Foster Fluetsch to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Mr. Gene Rose. Rose's resignation was regretted by all of us, staff and board members, as he had contributed not only to the board's affairs but also to many of our promotional efforts.

We welcome Mr. Fluetsch and are certain his interest and experience will be of value to the organization.

Mr. Fluetsch, president of State Savings and Loan since 1972, has spent his entire career in the financial field, first in banking, then in the savings and loan business. In 1959 he joined State Savings as a loan officer in the Merced office. He moved through a variety of managerial positions and was transferred to Stockton in 1964.

He has served on State Savings' board of directors since 1968, and also is an executive vice president of Financial Corporation of America, and serves on FCA's board.

Mr. Fluetsch graduated from high school in Merced, and from Stanford University. While working for State in Merced he began serving in community organizations such as Kiwanis and United Givers. In Stockton he continued this pattern, serving in positions in United Way, Stockton Chamber, California State Chamber of Commerce, California Savings and Loan League, and the Boy Scouts, whose Forty-Niner Council honored him with the Distinguished Citizen of the Year award.

Art is one of Fluetsch's hobbies, and he is both a collector and painter. He and his wife, Jimi Lou, have six children.

SEMINARS '84: The 1984 catalog of summer field classes is at our printer, and if the job moves right along a copy should be in your mail box by March 1. Meanwhile we feel that several new programs are especially worthy of your attention.

Bob Fry, our seminar chief-of-staff, well known to many members, has put together a class he calls *Universals: Fundamental Patterns in Nature*. We won't trade on Bob's classically phrased description of the course but only will say that it develops the theme that things around us are no more than regenerations of natural events and processes. This will be no classroom exercise as he'll take his students to six distinct areas of the park and to the White Mountains, where there are remarkable illustrations of basic forms and functions of nature. Hiking, he says, will be moderate, fewer than six miles a day. Those of you who know Bob will recognize that his classes will provide a highly stimulating experience; those who don't can believe that he will make the examination of a piece of granite or a tree trunk a bewitching event.

Then, there's Steve Cunha's new backpack — *High Sierra Summer Transect*. Steve is one of the top-notch naturalists on the NPS staff at Tuolumne Meadows. He's a robust young man of perhaps twenty-five or six, knows the park's nooks and crannies as we know the back of our hand. He appears to have a sort of Muirish passion for creating converts to a higher state of appreciation of the park's far-off places. His backpack trip starts on the Smith Meadow trail near Hetch Hetchy and ends at Twin Lakes, a 56-mile, strenuous jaunt with seven nights on the trail. It's not for the timid but it's no death march, and with Cunha at the point it should be a great experience for the backpacker with good legs and lungs. Along the way, Cunha will describe and discuss the varied flora and fauna encountered in the sharply differentiated life zones, the climatology of the west and east sides of the Sierra and its effects, the evidences of a dramatic geologic background, the sparse but colorful history of the U.S. Cavalry in the region, and the vestiges of Indians who made their way across the range 2000 years ago. From Twin Lakes, we will transport the group to Lee Vining for overnight and perhaps a session at Bodie Mike's Tavern to relive the hike. Next day, we'll ferry everyone back to the Hetch Hetchy starting point.

IN THE SPRING OF 1983, we added to our roster of field classes a float trip on the Merced River. We'd watched rafters during several springs and figured we'd try to combine a learning experience with a rip-snorting ride down the river. We pulled it all together and it came off nearly without a hitch — but not quite — as you'll read in this account written about the voyage by rafter Bill Sanford of Atwater. Mr. Sanford provided the photographs as well.



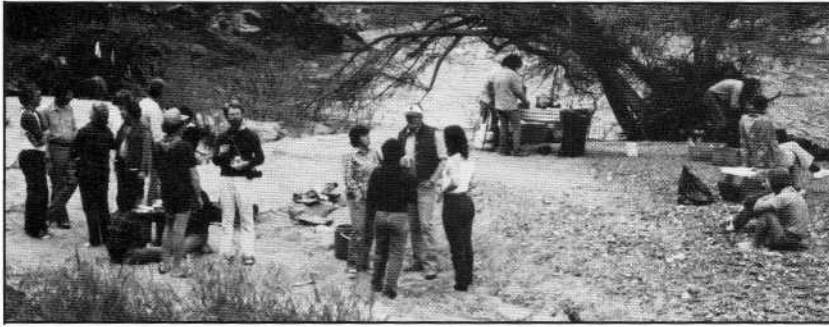
A paddle boat emerging from the rifle-shot ride through "Quarter Mile Rapids."

Grissom's voice rang out, "We've got swimmers." Within seconds we were able to pull our gasping man back aboard, and in short order five who had spilled out of another boat were picked up. We gained a sense of community born of a shared crisis. And more adventure lay ahead.

Our group had assembled the evening before in Yosemite Valley. We found we were eighteen in number — to be joined the next day by a naturalist and five boatpersons (one a woman). We had come from near — Mariposa, Merced, Atwater — and far — Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles and other points. We were quite evenly balanced as to sex, diverse as to age.

"On the River" was the title of a two-day rafting trip sponsored by YNHA last May. Our party had been on river about an hour when a quarter of the group — 6 out of 24 — found the title missed the truth; they were "in" the river, unexpectedly ejected from two different rafts in the turbulence of "Ned's Gulch."

Though not officially designated "wild and scenic" by the federal government, any rafter will assure you the Merced River is certainly wild. As a precautionary measure, we had stopped and surveyed the "Gulch" before running it. Even so, it got us good. I was in the lead boat with head boatman Jimmy Grissom manning the oars. Within a couple seconds of entering the white water our boat seemed to be standing on its left side and I thought it would flip over. It righted itself but only after dumping one passenger overboard.



Dinner, bed and breakfast on a sandbar several miles west of Briceburg.

Some I judged to be in their twenties. The senior member of our group was a 65-year-old woman from Los Altos. Aside from our guides, she proved to be the most experienced rafter of the lot. Already to her credit were two trips on the mighty Colorado, one trip in Alaska and one on California's

American River. She said "Quarter Mile Rapids" which we negotiated our second day was as tough and exciting as anything she had encountered elsewhere.

YNHA had arranged for a National Park Service staff member to give us a slide talk the evening before our embarkation so that we would be somewhat aware of the canyon's geology, flora and fauna.

On Monday morning at 9:00 we gathered at El Portal. There we made final decisions concerning what we could live without for two days, locked our cars, boarded a bus and road several miles down river.

By now we were under the care of O.A.R.S., Inc. — Outdoor Adventure River Specialists — with whom YNHA had arranged the trip. At riverside, opposite Cedar Lodge, we found five river rafts — 16' inflatable "Avon Professionals" awaiting us. Three would be rowed by OARS guides and two would be captained by OARS staff with members of our group paddling. We were briefed on river safety. We put such things as cameras and watches in ammo boxes which were tied down securely. Our sleeping bags and other personal gear would travel by truck to an appointed place down river. Most of our group were first-timers and I was conscious of some anxiety as we pushed off from shore and were grasped by the water flowing at a volume of about 3,200 cubic feet per second.



Phil Tierney, left, YNHA's on-board interpreter and O.A.R.S. head boatman Jimmy Grissom.

Any worries we had were largely allayed by the fact that we were in the hands of skilled, experienced professionals. Grissom, for example, has been running rivers for five years and has over 350 days "on river" to his credit. I failed to ask him about his "in river" experiences. Some things it may be better not to know. Later in the year he was off to Zambia where he will work the churning Zambezi below Victoria Falls.

Not only were the OARS staff superb boat handlers, but ashore they proved to be excellent cooks. It seemed to me that every meal approached banquet proportions. On Monday night, for example, we grilled steaks over a wood fire at our beach campsite. Tuesday morning we were treated to a large omelette, fresh strawberries and cream.

After breakfast we broke camp and ferried our plastic-garbage-bag-encased personal gear a short distance down river to where it could be loaded on a truck. We floated farther toward the top of "Quarter Mile Rapids." Here we stopped for over an hour. During that time our guides scouted the entire stretch of churning white water to which we would soon be committing ourselves.

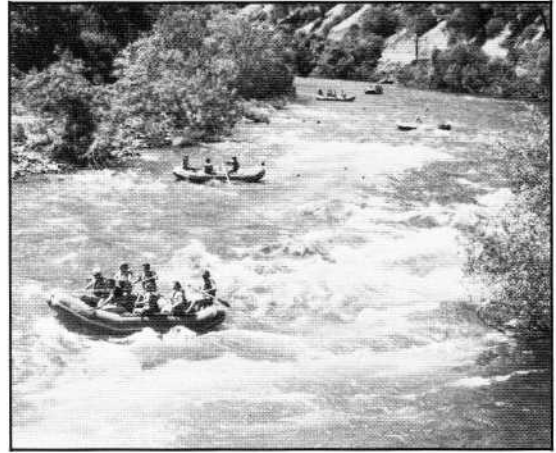
We made sure everything was tied down securely. Life jackets were both a requirement and a comfort. Those with wet suits felt especially well prepared for a possible repeat of the dumping of the day before. We appreciated the ruggedness of our \$2,700 rafts and were glad to know that there were six separate air chambers, and if one got a puncture we would still remain afloat. But could we negotiate such extended turbulence without getting separated from our rafts? That was the question. And many of us admitted to some worry about the answer.

My boat, the Grissom boat, led off. Icy water showered over us again and again. We wondered briefly if we were in a rodeo riding bucking broncos. Then suddenly we took a sharp left into an eddy. We were through — safely! And I couldn't believe how fast. Something like a bullet through the barrel of a rifle, I guess.

We watched the following boats exit the white madness. A couple of boats emerged almost completely swamped, but they were quickly bailed out. One boat came in minus one crew member, but he was reported kicked out very near the river's edge and had been seen to make shore with no difficulty. Sights of relief all around! Still, some hard work lay ahead.

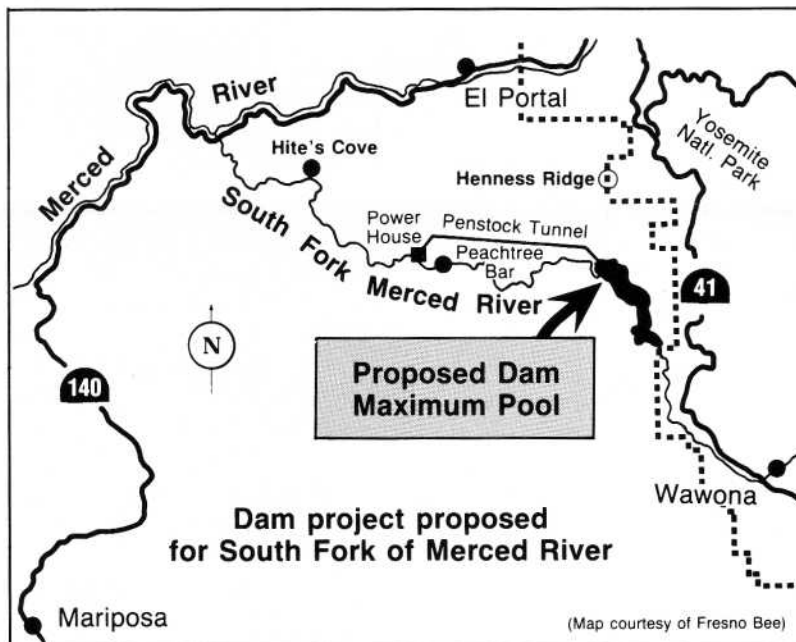
We found ourselves within about 50 yards of the upper lip of "North Fork Falls." The falls are actually on the main river, but only a hundred yards from the confluence of the North Fork. The river crashes twenty feet in a distance of perhaps 50 feet. "Unnavigable" is the firm opinion of any sane boatman. So, portage time. Each boat in turn was hoisted up to the old Yosemite Railroad right-of-way, carried a hundred yards and then lowered by rope back into the river. A very considerable effort! By now it is 2:00 p.m. and time for a most welcome lunch.

The remainder of the trip was a "piece of cake." We bottomed out at a much drawn down Lake McClure. We beached our boats and were bussed back to our cars at El Portal — though not without a stop. Yes, we had to make a from-the-road inspection of renowned "Ned's Gulch." Did we really go through that? You better believe it!



A not-so-vicious stretch of the Merced.

WE'VE BEEN AWARE for some years that the Merced River proper, its South Fork and the Tuolumne have been eyed as sources of water or power, or both, by water districts or power companies in the San Joaquin Valley and elsewhere. Yosemite's resources management people have expressed concern over some of these prospects, particularly as they would affect the South Fork of the Merced. But as the proposed activity here is outside the park, no formal steps can be taken. An Association friend, Ralph Mendershausen of Mariposa, has been assembling data and opinions on the South Fork dam project. He has written the following for us. We hope our members will read Ralph's piece and, if and when public hearings are held, will express their opinions, hopefully in opposition to damming a splendidly wild and scenic stream.



TROUBLED TIMES FOR THE MERCED RIVER'S SOUTH FORK

High in Yosemite on the slopes of Triple Divide Peak run the first waters of the South Fork of the Merced. The South Fork is little known except for where it is crossed by Highway 41 at Wawona and by Highway 140 at Savage's Trading Post. The latter is at the river's mouth, six miles west of El Portal. Although hundreds annually walk up to Chilnualna Falls above Wawona and thousands visit Hite's Cove, four miles up river from Savage's, the river itself is not perceived as

an ecosystem or an experience to the degree it deserves. This is because the roadless South Fork is only beginning to come into its own as the source of an outdoor experience. In its own time the

South Fork will gain its large following of habitues, but this process has now been accelerated with the discovery and projected development of the river by hydro-electric planners in Merced.

The South Fork is about forty miles long and runs for half of its length inside Yosemite. The remainder is in a very wild region of the Sierra National Forest, just west of the park. The easiest access is from Savage's Trading Post, but the river is followed by a good trail running from just north of the Alder Creek bridge (Hwy. 41) to its mouth. The trail is interrupted by two unavoidable and perilous river crossings.

The South Fork passes through a number of vegetational zones: yellow pine forest, foothill woodlands, chapparal, and grasslands. At the higher elevations, near the park boundary, one encounters ponderosa pine, black oak, and incense cedar, but along most of the river's course, the trees and shrubs are typical of the foothill woodlands and chapparal areas. In general, the south and west facing slopes are covered either by grasslands or chapparal, but the north and east facing slopes support trees. Like the familiar Merced River canyon, which it joins, the South Fork canyon is both deep and possessed of very steep sides. The portion in the National Forest was never glaciated.

Those who visit the South Fork do so for a variety of reasons. The largest number of visitors hike in from Savage's between the end of March and the middle of June. The great and growing attraction then is the fabulous and breathtaking profusion of wildflowers. The area is roadless and the predominant sound is that of the rush of the river in the canyon below. Since the South Fork is one of the state's few Wild Trout Streams, it is a favorite angling spot for sport fishermen who enjoy the excellent pools and solitude of the river. In late fall they are joined by hunters who take advantage of seasonal deer migrations which extend down almost to Hite's Cove. Hunter and fisherman alike are not of the sedentary variety, for to enjoy their skills they must make a long trek, often in rough terrain. Casual and overnight hikers can be found along the river at any time of year, but few choose to walk the river's entire length. Aside from the qualities already mentioned, the hiker seeks the wildness of the region and occasionally a scramble up a steep side canyon.

So what's special about the South Fork? The river canyon's wildness is adjacent to Yosemite and is a wonderful invitation to day hikes, particularly in the spring when most of Yosemite is still buried in snow. The South Fork, in fact, was an early snow-free route to Yosemite Valley in the 1870's. Although the flowers along the Merced proper are spectacular as well, only the South Fork offers even the casual passerby an opportunity for a quiet walk in floral splendor. It is used increasingly for botany walks by colleges and environmental education organizations.

The South Fork has been nominated for National Wild and Scenic River status, a recommendation that must be studied by the U.S. Forest Service, before any development affecting the area could be undertaken. Botanically, the South Fork is the habitat for several rare plant species, including the Yosemite Onion; (*Allium yosemitense*) this rare plant generally grows in the middle portion of the canyon which is seldom visited. The existence of these species may be in part due to unique soil conditions in the area between Bishop Creek and Zip Creek.

The South Fork has been a migration route for hundreds and possibly thousands of years. The Yosemite Indians overwintered along its warm, south-facing slopes. They followed the deer and today still the Yosemite deer herd follows the river downstream during the cold season. They are still hunted by mountain lion which is more often seen here than elsewhere in the park or Mariposa County. The black bear, too, is common here, especially during the fall when they come down in search of manzanita berries.

The South Fork was inventoried in 1980 by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service and was found to have "outstandingly remarkable values" in the following areas: scenic, geologic, fish, wildlife, historic, cultural, and botanical. The South Fork was ranked higher in more categories than any other Sierran river. Today, recreation would have to be added to that list of values.

The South Fork is a cultural and historic resource for Yosemite and California. The Bishop Creek area was on the path of the Yosemite discovery party (1851), and may be of archaeological significance. The South Fork Trail was used to supply the Wawona cavalry detachment at the turn of the century. Until 1904, the entire South Fork was actually part of Yosemite National Park but because of mining and railroad interests, the entire canyon west of Wawona was removed from the park. The river's mining history locates numerous historic sites and provides much interesting lore.

In assessing the special characteristics of the South Fork, much could be made of its special relationship to Yosemite National Park. A good step in this direction was taken by William J. Whalen when, as Director of the National Park Service, he told the House Subcommittee on Public lands that:

"... this (South Fork) area is adjacent to the western park boundary and includes part of the key wintering range for the Yosemite deer herd. Most of the intermediate and summer range for these deer and their associated predators, such as mountain lions, is inside the park. The ecosystem which includes these animals is divided between the park and the forest. The area in the national forest is still very wild and many of the predatory birds, such as hawks, eagles, and falcons which find refuge in its rugged canyon country also use portions of the park as an extension of their range." (June 25, 1979)

Not only is the South Fork a special place in and of itself, but it enjoys a special interdependent relationship with Yosemite. Any project to develop the South Fork would pose a serious threat to the integrity of Yosemite National Park.

Such a project exists today in the form of a proposed 80 megawatt hydro-electric plant. The sponsor of the project, Merced Irrigation District (MID) is seeking to raise revenue with which to modernize its 700 miles of irrigation ditches and canals. At present some 15-20% of the system's water is "lost" into the ground through seepage. MID would like to pave its ditches with concrete. The water of the South Fork already makes its way into MID's canals, but now power is the primary issue.

MID foresees a \$139 million plant with a dam 260 feet high located near the park boundary at a sharp, narrow bend in the river — 2,000 feet below Bishop Creek. The concrete dam would back 50,000 acre feet of water close to the park boundary. From here the water would flow through five miles of tunnel 12 feet in diameter before plunging down a penstock into the main river channel near Peachtree Bar. At this point, the project calls for a generator, an afterbay, and the commencement of a long transmission line capable of carrying 80MW to a major power grid. The preliminary engineer's report predicts that the project could net an annual \$6.8 million for MID, or \$1.39 for every dollar spent.

At the present MID has only a three-year preliminary permit from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to do the studies and research necessary. The District needs to determine if the project is feasible and if it is environmentally mitigable. Each of these studies would require a significant investment, but to date, MID's investment in the proposal has been small. Once a feasibility study is undertaken (\$50,000-75,000), the nature of the District's commitment is likely to change from query to commitment.

The MID project is one of many similar projects proposed in response to the Public Utilities Regulatory Policies Act of 1978. This act offered smaller hydro-electric projects (80MW or less) incentives such as guaranteeing that power distributors "must buy" power using an "avoided cost" formula based on the cost of oil. The small hydro-producers would, in fact, be paid for their water-generated electricity as if it has been produced with oil. At the same time the Act offered low interest loans. MID is considering a 12 percent loan to be paid over a 35-year period. The MID project is one of many profit-making ideas which the law of 1978 unleashed on the virgin streams and rivers of the western United States.

Today the South Fork is at a crossroads. In the next year, commitments may be made which will threaten the integrity of the river and Yosemite. The choice comes down to one of concrete irrigation ditches versus a wild and scenic river. In this situation Friends of the Merced River have set about to incorporate, with the purpose of preventing dams and transmission lines on the South Fork. Their efforts have been endorsed by the Sierra Club's Tehipite Chapter (Fresno), the California State Park Rangers Association and the Yosemite Audubon Society. But Mariposa County, too, has its interests in the South Fork and is exploring ways in which it could tap into MID's project and resolve its own longstanding water shortage problems. Mariposa may seek to serve its development needs by pumping water from the South Fork to reservoirs above Mariposa. This possible modification of the MID project would, of course, only serve to increase the overall impact on the South Fork region.

Yes, the South Fork is at a turning point, and its fate is of concern to friends of Yosemite and the wilderness.

Dr. Mendershausen lives in Mariposa and has recently completed a book entitled *Treasure of the South Fork*, Fresno, 1983. Questions regarding this article may be addressed to him at 4675 Usona Road, Mariposa, CA 95338 or Jay Anderson, Manager, Merced Irrigation District, 2423 L Street, Merced, CA 95340.

LOCAL GIRL MAKES GOOD: Laurel Munson has worked for the National Park Service in Yosemite for 8 years. It is somewhat to be expected that she'd work for NPS as she was born here, her father having been manager of the Yosemite Lodge.

We've known Laurel all her life and recall that she was a fascinating child and now a fascinating woman. She's traveled widely but seems to have chosen out-of-way places, such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Chile, over the more traditional destinations. Her most recent role with NPS has been as a Backcountry Supervisor which involves managing the activities of 13 backcountry people who see to it that backpackers, trail riders, bears and fires all are under some sort of control, albeit loose control.

Last fall, Laurel was selected to represent the National Park Service at an equestrian training course conducted by the U.S. Park Police, an agency of the Interior Department. The Park Police has the law enforcement responsibility for the Golden Gate National Recreation area; the program was based at Ft. Miley in San Francisco. The Park Police was founded in 1791 and is the oldest police force in the nation. Laurel is the third woman ever to complete the training program.



Above, Laurel Munson, astride Baldy, on her beat at Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Her companion is Sgt. Dennis Hays of the San Francisco Park Police.



Left, graduation ceremonies took place in a rain storm; Laurel's third from the right. One chaps hat evidently washed away. S.F. CHRONICLE PHOTO: Gary Fong.

Though she'd had considerable experience with horses, her training will make her more valuable in her duties with the Park Service.

We don't know all the formal reasons for Laurel's having been selected, but whoever made the decision made the right one. We suspect she gave a lot to the class, learned a lot and made things merrier for her classmates.

Here is Laurel's sketch of the highlights of her ten-week training tour.

It seemed a little hard to believe — me, Laurel, riding a huge racehorse through the streets of San Francisco? And living in view of the Point Bonita Lighthouse on the edge of the Pacific, where I could see the lights of the City, and the Bay Bridge silhouetted under the Golden Gate Bridge from my living room window. Both situations were daily events for a ten-week period when I was a National Park Service representative in an equestrian training course organized and taught by the U.S. Park Police. I have always felt fortunate to be employed by the Park Service, and this experience was a prime example of why.

It all started last August, when a non-descript flier came through the backcountry office announcing this training opportunity. I have always loved horses, and since the use of stock has been an important part of my wilderness use and management work in Yosemite, I had campaigned for years for a place in Walt Castle's well-regarded horsemanship school. (Castle is the boss of the Yosemite stables and an extraordinary horseman.) I was told "maybe next year." My hopes for the training school rose and fell — was this my chance? — But what about the competition? — Go for it! encouraged friends.

This time it worked. I learned on a Wednesday that Baldy, the horse, and I were due in San Francisco on Monday. This gave me five days to tie up more than a few ends, among them the summer wilderness permit program, buying another car ('54 Chevy trucks aren't ideal for city commutes), and finding a pair of English boots and riding breeches in a cowboy town like Fresno. I managed to get it all together.

The training school was based at the Park Police stables near Fort Miley (near 42nd & Clement). A converted WW II bunker served as home and campus for the 12 horses, 7 trainees and 3 instructors. The deep, dark hallways and rooms that once held ammunition now held hay and tack, or were used for an office, classrooms and locker rooms. A new paddock had been built on one side of the earth-covered building.

My "beat" was Golden Gate National Recreation Area, a great urban park administered by the National Park Service. Established in 1972, GGNRA protects the Bay Area's finest natural areas, from Stinson Beach, Muir Woods and Marin Headlands (where I was housed), to Ocean Beach, the Cliff House/Sutro Baths, around Lands End and under the Bridge to Aquatic Park next to Fisherman's Wharf. The U.S. Park Police, a Department of the Interior agency, has the law enforcement responsibility for these park lands. It has been found that horse patrols are one of the more effective enforcement tools, as they can cover areas of difficult access, and are highly visible. Most people are fascinated by the horses, most know little about them and seem inherently to fear their great size and strength. This aspect of public relations/law enforcement works especially well when the horses are beautiful, well-kept thoroughbreds, 16-17 hands tall (about five and one-half feet).

Our daily activities centered around the animals. Usually we had 2 hours of classroom work each morning, during which we studied subjects ranging from horse psychology to the protein content of various feeds to the rudiments of corrective shoeing. We learned some basic veterinary skills, including a study of all sorts, sizes and shapes of internal parasites and how to deal with them. We also learned how to deal with various sorts, sizes, and shapes of human gatherings, and later practiced crowd formations while the instructors waved placards and threw fire crackers, to make things more realistic.

The remainder of the day was spent with the horses and their care. Grooming was an important time, not only to clean the horses but to establish a rapport with them. We rode a different horse each week, and it was during this grooming period that we tried to learn their personalities and how to read their body language. We also developed some skills in shoveling manure — not a hard thing to master.

We rode at least four, sometimes six hours a day. Many of the animals had been racehorses and almost all had been bred for speed, not calmness; so at first, it was disconcerting to enter downtown city traffic on these spirited 12-14 hundred-pound animals, particularly when things like flapping black plastic can send them into a full panic.

Although many of our rides took us through Golden Gate Park, down the beaches, by the forts, or through city streets, much of our time was spent in the ring, riding in circles with or without stirrups, jumping, or working on certain applicable dressage movements.

The aches and pains, bruises and rubbed raw places eventually subsided, though didn't disappear, as the rigorous training got us into shape. We all ended up being pretty good riders — at times it seemed a matter of survival.

Graduation Day arrived, I'm sure to the relief of everyone involved, particularly since we had all managed to get through it without injury, and had, indeed, learned a great deal. Although the Park Police are the oldest police force still in existence in the nation, they are based in Washington D.C., and are fairly new on the West Coast. This was the first time this training had been held other than in Washington, and I was the third woman ever to complete it.

The graduation ceremony involved a synchronized ride to music, which demanded all our skills. TV & newspaper reporters were coming, the Mayor and assorted San Francisco dignitaries were invited. We were all quite excited. Our spirits, etc., were literally dampened, however, as the first torrential rainstorm of the year poured down on graduation day, turning the riding arena into a lake. There was no stopping us, though, and a big photo on the front page of the Chronicle showed us splashing through the mud, grimacing only a little. Friends in Yosemite and even as far off as June Lake saw me on TV, and Mayor Feinstein issued a proclamation that "November 10, 1983, was hereby resolved as Horse Mounted Patrol Day in San Francisco," and commended its observance to all San Franciscans.

Yes, for a Yosemite backcountry ranger, it was all pretty hard to believe and an adventure I'll never forget.



Laurel, in repose.

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