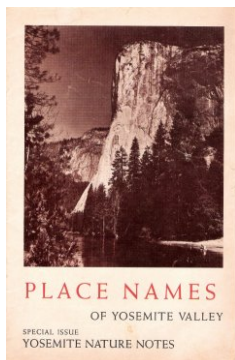

Yosemite Valley Place Names (1955) by Richard J. Hartesveldt

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Cover: El Capitan and Merced River, Yosemite Valley. Courtesy Yosemite Park and Curry Co.

Yosemite Nature Notes

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Yosemite Valley Place Names

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From the earliest days of human languages names have been bestowed upon mountains, lakes, streams and other geographical features that they might be distinguished one from another. The earliest names given were largely descriptive, but as time progressed, people were honored by having their names given to features whose description was not apparent. Although nearly all of the present place names of the Yosemite Valley region have been in use for at least a half a century, some names are falling into disuse while others are favored. The origin of several names is lost in obscurity; others are well preserved in history. The credit for many of these names goes back as far as 1851, the date of the discovery of the Yosemite Valley by the Mariposa Battalion, and especially to Dr. Lafayette H. Bunnell, surgeon for the group, James Hutchings, pioneer hotelman in Yosemite Valley, the Whitney Survey Party, and the members of the U. S. Army Administration are responsible for nearly all of the others. Considerable discrepancy will be noted among the translations of Indian names.

[Editor's note: Bunnell was not the surgeon for the group, never claimed he was, and only earned a sham M.D. degree years later—DEA.],

The names shown on the Geological Survey's Yosemite Valley special sheet (available at the Yosemite Museum) and a few other local names are the only ones that will be given in this article. They appear alphabetically. The location of the places named will be given in relation to the better known features of the valley for facility of use rather than by listing township and range numbers.

It is hoped that readers having further knowledge of Yosemite place names will make this information available to the Yosemite Museum staff.

AGASSIZ COLUMN is located near the Four-mile Trail at Union Point. It is a large rock, standing on end "like a huge ten-pin" 30 feet high and 10 feet in diameter. The shape of this erosional remnant is due to jointing planes. It was undoubtedly named for the great scientist, Louis Agassiz.

AHWAHNEE MEADOW is the largest meadow on the floor of Yosemite Valley and is located between Yosemite Village and the Royal Arches. Because of it, nearly all of the outside Indians called all of Yosemite Valley by this name. There is some uncertainty as to the exact meaning of this Indian word. Seemingly a Yokuts rather than a Miwok word, the translation that has evolved is "deep grassy valley." The Ahwahnee Hotel is located at the northeast corner of the meadow.

[Editor's note: For the correct meaning and origin of the word *Ahwahnee* ("(gaping) bear's mouth") see "Origin of the Word Yosemite."—DEA.]

AHWIYAH POINT is located on the south wall of Tenaya Canyon below Half Dome. James Hutchings claimed that this was an Indian name for Mirror Lake, however, this is not commonly accepted by others and he gives another name to it himself. No translation was found.

ARCH ROCK is a formation of two large rocks leaning together at the top to form an arch through which cars entering the Park on the Merced Road must pass. It is referred to in early accounts as Tunnel Rock and Arched Rocks also.

ARTIST POINT is less than 1,500 feet southeast of the east end of the Wawona Tunnel. Here, on June 20, 1855, Thomas Ayres drew the first picture of Yosemite Valley.

BABY BASKET is the small arch-type

Ahwahnee Meadow with Ahwahnee Hotel (left), Royal Arches (left), Washington Column
(center), and Half Dome (right)

Yosemite Park and Curry Co.





Bridalveil Fall and Cathedral Rocks, thunderstorm, Yosemite Valley.

formation west of the Royal Arches. The name is old and is shown only on the old Wheeler map.

BASKET DOME is located on the north rim of Tenaya Canyon directly across from Half Dome and just east of North Dome. The name comes from the Indian legend of Half Dome, in which the harried wife, Tis-sa-ack, fled from her husband, Nangus, and tossed aside her burden basket which landed upside down and turned to stone.

BIG OAK FLAT ROAD was the second road built into Yosemite Valley from Knights Ferry, through Chinese Camp and Big Oak Flat. It was built to the Hodgden Ranch in 1870 and was completed by the Yosemite Turnpike Company to the Valley floor on July 17, 1874.

The settlement of Big Oak Flat was named for a large valley oak, (*Quercus lobata*) 11 feet in diameter. According to Hutchings the tree had fallen in 1886.

BLACK SPRING is on Yosemite Valley floor near the west end of the rock slides below the old Big Oak Flat Road. It was named for the color of the rich alluvium through which the cold spring water flowed. Ansel Hall gives the Indian name as “Poot-poo-toon” without translation.

BOUNDARY HILL is located north of El Capitan on the original Yosemite Grant boundary of 1864. In that year the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias were given to the State of California as a state park by the Congress of the United States. The bill was signed by President Abraham Lincoln.

BRIDALVEIL FALL is a 620 foot drop of BRIDALVEIL CREEK, which heads in Ostrander Lake and enters Yosemite Valley just west of the Cathedral Rocks. The name was suggested by Warren Baer, editor of the Mariposa Democrat, on August 5, 1856, because of its lacy appearance in late summer. James Hutchings also stated that he was the person who named this beautiful fall.

Its Indians name is “Pohono”, which, as well as Dr. Bunnell could determine, meant “huckleberry patch”, although he was never quite sure. Another translation was that it meant a puffing wind that came through that area. James Hutchings said that it meant “spirit of the evil wind”, but Dr. Bunnell claimed that he had never heard that usage before Hutchings used it.

The Indians living in the region south of the fall were known as the Pohonochee.

MOUNT BRODERICK is a small dome next to Liberty Cap, just northwest from Nevada Fall. Liberty Cap was called Mt. Broderick originally, but the name was changed in 1865. the dome was named for David Colbert Broderick, born in Ireland in 1820. He was U. S. Senator from California in 1857-1859, and was killed in a duel with David S. Terry, an early justice of the California Supreme Court. (See page 11.)

CAMP CURRY was established in 1899 by Mr. and Mrs. David A. Curry when they set up seven tents, a forerunner of the present Yosemite Park and Curry Company.

CASCADE CLIFFS are a huge massive granite formation on the south side of Little Yosemite Valley, about 2 miles east of Nevada Fall. Water cascades down these cliffs throughout much of the year.

CASCADE CREEK flows into the Merced River over the **CASCADES** at the West end of Yosemite Valley, hence the name. Dr. Lafayette Bunnell reportedly gave the name on the first exploration of Yosemite.

CASTLE CLIFFS lie nearly a half mile east from Yosemite Falls, bordering Indian Canyon on the west. The name is obvious, the origin unknown.

CATHEDRAL ROCKS are the large rocks opposite El Capitan in Yosemite Valley. Galen Clark says that “as viewed from the west they are called the ‘Three Graces’,” but as seen from the east they have a different appearance and are called Cathedral Rocks. **CATHEDRAL SPIRES** are the two closely set symmetrical columns in the large recess just east of Cathedral Rocks. They “appear like the towers of a Gothic Cathedral” and were name by Hutchings in September 1862. The Indian name for the Spires is “Poo-see-na-chuck-ka” is translated to mean “large acorn cache,” or acorn granary, probably because of the likeness of the spires to the poles of a chuck-ka. One translation is “mouse-proof rocks”, which does not seem to be verified in other writings.

CLARK POINT is on the south side of the Merced Canyon near Vernal Fall. It was so named in 1891 by the Yosemite Valley Commissioners in honor of Galen Clark “who has had longer contact, official and otherwise, with the valley than any other, and will always be known as the greatest of Guardians of this indescribable scenery.”

CLOUD’S REST, el. 9,924 feet, is the long high peak bounding Tenaya Canyon on the south side just east from Half Dome. The name was given by the members of the Mariposa Battalion because on the first visit to Little Yosemite Valley, clouds settled down and rested on that peak and foretold of coming snow. (Illustration, page 9.)

COLUMBIA ROCK OR POINT is a jutting piece of rock on the north valley wall about a mile up the Yosemite Falls Trail. Its elevation is 5,031 feet. The COLUMBIA was popular in the early years of the United States and undoubtedly came from the name Columbus. Columbia was commonly used for *United States or America*.

COULTERVILLE ROAD, the first road completed into Yosemite Valley on June 17, 1874. First built to Crane Flat in 1859 by the Coulterville and Yosemite Turnpike Company, the road joins the All-year Highway from Merced about a half mile south of the Cascades in the west end of the Valley. The town of Coulterville, from which the road started, was named for George W. Coulter. A pioneer of the Tuolumne-Merced region, he was one of the first commissioners to manage the Yosemite Grant in 1864.

CROCKER POINT is on the south valley rim, the second point east of Old Inspiration Point along the Pohono Trail. Although there are two Crockers for whom the point could. have been named, it is probably for Charles Crocker of the Central Railroad, since the point west of it is named Stanford Point, after Crocker’s associate, Leland Stanford.

DEWEY POINT, named for the hero of the Spanish American War, Admiral George Dewey, is located on the south valley wall just west from Bridalveil Fall.

EAGLE PEAK, el. 7,773, is the highest of the Three Brothers. It is named because of the eagles that once inhabited the peak. James Hutchings reported having seen seven of them there at one time. (See page 19.)

EAGLE TOWER is the high promontory between Eagle Peak and Yosemite Falls.

Cathedral Spires (slender pinnacles on left) and Cathedral Rocks.

Ward.



EL CAPITAN, a massive piece of granite rock standing more than 3,600 feet above Yosemite Valley floor, was named by Dr. Bunnell of the Mariposa Expedition. The original English name had been Crane Mountain because of the sandhill cranes that entered Yosemite Valley over it. Bunnell did not approve of this name, partly because it did not fit the Indian translation and named it "The Captain" (Spanish).

The Indians called it "Tu-tok-a-nu-la", interpreted by Stephen Powers to mean "measuring-worm stone" from a well-known Indian legend of a measuring worm which saved two Indian children who were stranded when the rock grew. (Cover.)

ELEPHANT ROCK is a point jutting out into the Merced River Gorge west of Turtleback Dome and the Wawona Tunnel. The originator of the obvious name is unknown.

EMERALD POOL, a beautiful greenish pool on the Merced River, is located just above Vernal Fall. It is a glacial lake, carved from solid rock, that has not filled in as have most other glacial lakes in the vicinity. The speed of the water as it rushes down the Silver Apron carries away nearly all of the sediments.

FERN SPRING is in a beautiful setting of flowering dogwoods and thickly grown with ferns. It is located near the Pohono Bridge, west from Bridalveil Fall.

FIREPLACE BLUFFS, named because of their appearance, are directly north of the junction of the Big Oak Flat Road and the All Year Highway.

FIREPLACE CREEK flows south to the Merced River immediately east of the bluffs.

FISSURES are the large vertical openings in the cliff (south valley rim) just east of Taft Point. Matthes, the geologist, says "probably the rock immediately adjacent to these partings was peculiarly susceptible to weathering, having been minutely sheared and slivered by faulting movements that took place under great pressure shortly after the granite had solidified."

FORT MONROE was a stage station along the Wawona Road, just south of the Wawona Tunnel at an elevation of 5,440 feet. It was named for George F. Monroe, a Negro stage driver working for the A. H. Washburn Co. in the middle 1880's. He was a careful driver and was respected by all who knew him.

There was never any military significance to the name Fort Monroe. It is reported, although verification is lacking, that George Monroe had a flair for army life and was always talking about it, hence the name *Fort*.

GLACIER POINT'S naming is unknown, although it has been used since a very early date. Some writers claim that it was named by members of the Mariposa Battalion. However, this does not seem likely because it is doubtful that any of the men in that group knew enough about glaciers and their action to have recognized the significance of such a name. The point was covered by several hundred feet of glacial ice during the Ice Age and today one can see several different kinds of features wrought by glacial erosion.

The overhanging rock of Glacier Point is commonly listed as having been used as a lookout point by the Indians and was called by them,



Overhanging Rock at Glacier Point (left), Yosemite Folk and Yosemite Valley.

“Patill-ima”, for which there is no known translation. Bancroft, in his Yosemite guide book, gives the Indian name for Glacier Point as, “Oo-woo-yoo-wah”, which he interprets as meaning “Great Rock of the Elk”. This is illogical, since elk have not inhabited this region. Someone had drawn, in pencil, a large cross through the translation in the Yosemite Museum copy.

GRIZZLY PEAK is a small peak southwest of Half Dome and north of the Merced River. Although the origin of the name has not been located, the gray hump of rock may have reminded the person who named it of the hump of a grizzly bear. Others, who climbed the peak in the early days, write that it was a “grizzly climb.” James Hutchings, in his book, “Heart of the Sierras”, published in 1886, gives this name.



Half Dome and Merced River in winter.

HALF DOME, el. 8,852 feet, is the large dome at the eastern extremity of Yosemite Valley having a flat northern face. The name suggests itself. Dr. Bunnell says that the members of the Mariposa Battalion gave the name to it at the time they were here. Half Dome was for a long time called "South Dome."

The Indian name of this feature, "Tis-sa-ack", was the name of an Indian woman who had argued with her husband, Nangus, and had been turned to stone, according to legend. Looking closely at the flat face of the great dome, one, with imagination, can see Tis-sa-ack's face, the tears of anguish streaming down her face. Face and tears are formed by the dark lichen streaks down the cliff. An early day trail leaflet translates "Tis-sa-ack" as "Goddess of the Valley." Appropriate though the title be for the great landmark, the name is not used elsewhere.

HAPPY ISLES were earlier called Island Rapids by James Hutchings. The name, Happy Isles was given by W. E. Dennison, Guardian of Yosemite Valley in 1885. "—no one can visit them without for the while forgetting the grinding strife of his world and being happy."

ILLILOUETTE FALL is the 370 foot drop of the **ILLILOUETTE CREEK** which heads in the Clark Range. After dropping over the fall, the creek flows north through **ILLILOUETTE GORGE** and joins the Merced River below Vernal Fall. Hutchings called the gorge South Canyon (as opposed to North Canyon, now Indian Canyon) or Glacier Canyon, undoubtedly because of its proximity to Glacier Point.

There is some dispute as to the origin of the name. Bunnell claimed that the name was not of Indian origin and "is, therefore, meaningless and absurd." It may, however, have come about as a difficult translation from the Indian to the English. The canyon was called "Too-lool-lo-we-ack" for which no translation has been agreed upon, although it may have meant "the beautiful." [Editor's note: Bunnell, in true discreet Victorian form, translated the meaning of Too-lool-lo-we-ack to Greek, which translated to English means "urinating."—dea.]

INDIAN CAVES are shelters used by the Indians in time of storm or attack and are located along the north valley wall between the Ahwahnee Hotel and Mirror Lake. The "caves" were formed by huge boulders which piled one on the other, leaving spaces with solid rock roofs. Ansel Hall gives Indian names for the caves as "Hol-low", without translation, or sometimes "Lah-koo-hah", which he translates as meaning, "come out."

INDIAN CANYON enters Yosemite Valley from the north behind the Post Office. Bunnell claims it was known to the Indians as Lehamite. meaning the arrowwood, because of the quantities of it found there. Lehamite is the name now applied to the fall of a small creek of the same name on the east wall of Indian Canyon. The Indians also called it "Scho-tal-lo-wi", which is translated as meaning "the way to Fall Creek."

Hutchings calls it North Canyon, but explains that when the Indians made their escape from the Mariposa Battalion through this canyon, the incident gave the presently used name to it. According to recent surveys, the canyon was not a regularly used route by the Indians.

INDIAN CANYON CREEK is a small tributary to the Merced River entering from the south at El Portal.

INDIAN ROCK is a high point north of Basket and North Domes. **INDIAN RIDGE** is a long ridge northwest from Basket Dome.

INSPIRATION POINT, el. 5,391 feet, is less than 1,000 feet south of the Wawona Tunnel on the old Wawona Road. **OLD INSPIRATION POINT**, el. 6,603 feet lies about a mile southeast on the south rim of the valley

Yosemite Valley from Inspiration Point. El Capitan (left), Clouds Rest (center background), Half Dome and Sentinel Dome (right), Bridalveil Fall (lower right).

Anderson.



and is the point from which the Mariposa Battalion first saw Yosemite Valley. Mt. Beatitude is also given to this point, or a point immediately west of it on some of the early maps. **NEW INSPIRATION POINT** is listed by several writers, including Ansel Hall in his "Guide to Yosemite" (1920) as being at an elevation of 1,200 feet above the valley floor on the old Big Oak Flat Road. The description sounds as though it might be synonymous with O! My! Point.

IRON SPRING is a "fine chalybeate spring that bubbles up on the margin of Ten-ie-ya Creek" near Mirror Lake, staining the stream bed a reddish color. "Chalybeate" indicates water impregnated with the salts of iron.

KAI-AL-AU-WA—Cliffs between Fireplace Bluffs and Ribbon Fall, shown only on Wheeler's map.

LEANING TOWER—A tower of rock standing nearly 2,000 feet above the valley floor immediately to the south of Bridalveil Fall. It is slightly undercut, giving it a leaning appearance. Hutchings called it "Tu-tok-a-nu-la's Citadel" because it is located directly across from El Capitan. On its summit could be seen projecting rocks which reminded him of guns of a citadel.

LEDGE TRAIL—Although long used as a route to Glacier Point, the trail was constructed in 1918. It starts in the Camp Curry bungalow section and climbs steeply along Staircase Creek for 3,200 feet as the shortest route to Glacier Point. The name **LEDGE** is possibly for the overhanging ledge of rock seen on the lower part of the trail. It does not follow a ledge at any point.

LEHAMITE FALLS are steep cascades of Lehamite Creek coming down the east wall of Indian Canyon. Lehamite is Indian for "arrowwood." The Wheeler Map shows the creek as the Little Winkle Branch of Indian Creek, a name which is not used elsewhere. (Illustration, page 19.)

LEIDIG MEADOW is the large meadow west of the Old Village and across from the foot of the Four Mile Trail. Here, Mr. and Mrs. George Leidig built a two-story hotel in 1869 that was known as Leidig's. Their son Charles was the first white boy born in Yosemite Valley.

LIBERTY CAP has had four other names, Mt. Frances, Gwin's Peak, Bellow's Butte (after a Boston clergyman) and Mt. Broderick. It is the glaciated peak on the north side of the Merced River next to Nevada Fall. When Governor Leland Stanford was visiting Yosemite in 1865, he and James Hutchings visited Nevada Fall. The Governor proclaimed his dislike for all of the names, and, looking at an old fashioned half dollar, supposedly produced by Hutchings, he saw the resemblance between the peak and the cap of liberty on the coin and decided that **CAP OF LIBERTY** was more appropriate. The name Mt. Broderick was then given to the smaller peak northwest from it. (See opposite page.)

The Indian name was "Mah-ta", translated as meaning "martyr mountain".

LITTLE YOSEMITE VALLEY is the valley of the Merced River between Nevada Fall and Merced Lake. Its floor is flat throughout a large portion of the valley, indicating the



Liberty Cap (left center), Nevada Fall (right), Vernal Fall (lower right).

presence of a glacial lake which filled in as did Ancient Lake Yosemite. Nearly all of the geological features to be found in Yosemite Valley are found here—domes, exfoliation, Glacial phenomena, “royal arches”, but on a smaller scale.

The Indians called it “Kah-win-na-bah”, for which Ansel Hall gives no translation.

LOST ARROW—The finger-like point of rock standing away from the north Yosemite Valley wall east of Yosemite Fall. Foley’s Souvenir and Guide book calls it the “Giant’s Thumb”.

The Indian name was “Hum-hoo” or “Le Hammo”, coming from lehamite or “arrowwood”, probably because of its likeness to an arrowshaft. (illustration, page 21.)

MERCED RIVER, LAKE, PEAK, GORGE, GROVE—The Merced River is the main river in Yosemite National Park, heading on the high peaks of the Sierra Crest and flowing through Yosemite Valley into the San Joaquin River. Merced Lake is located about 13 miles upstream from Yosemite Valley from Happy Isles. Merced Peak is near the southern end of the Clark Range, close to the southern boundary of the Park. The Merced Gorge is the canyon of the river west of Yosemite Valley, while the Merced Grove of Giant Sequoias is the large grove in the southern part of the park.

The name Merced (mercy) is the shortened form of the Spanish name for the river, “El Rio de las Mercedes”, or is sometimes given as “Nuestra Senora de la Merced.” It was named by Gabriel Moraga in 1806.

The Indians called the main branch, “Ahwahnee”. Up to Vernal Fall it was called “Can-o-pah” or “Yan-o-pah”, meaning water cloud. and above Vernal to Nevada Fall, “Yo-wy-we-ack”, the twisting rock branch. The north branch of the Merced, or Tenaya Creek, was called “Py-we-ack” which means “glistening rocks” because of the glacial polish. The south branch, or Illilouette Creek was called “Too-lolo-we-ack” which may have meant “the beautiful.”

MIRROR LAKE—The small lake in the mouth of Tenaya Canyon near the east end of Yosemite Valley, so named because of the reflection of Mt. Watkins on its surface. The name was first suggested by Bunnell but was objected to by others. Bunnell said that if a more appropriate name was found that it could be rechristened. It was called on the back of an old stereo photo “the toilet glass of Yosemite.”

The Indian name is commonly given as “Wai-ack”, meaning “water rock,” and was sometimes applied to Mt. Watkins too (see Mt. Watkins). Bancroft in his early guide book, and Hutchings, give the name “Ke-ko-too-yem” which they translate as meaning “sleeping waters”.

MORaine DOME, el. 8,012 feet, is the first dome east of Half Dome on the north side of Little Yosemite Valley. It was named for the great spiral of glacial moraine deposited on its south side.

MORAN POINT is located on the south valley wall just east from Union Point. It was named for the famed painter of western scenes, Thomas Moran.

NEVADA FALL is the 596 foot drop of the Merced River above Vernal



Mirror Lake reflects Mount Watkins

Fall, just south of Liberty Cap. Dr. Bunnell suggested “Nevada” for the upper of the two falls because it was nearest the crest of the Sierra Nevada and also because “nevada” in Spanish means “snowy”. The white froth of the fall reminded Bunnell of an avalanche of snow.

The Indian name is “Yo-wi-we”, which means “twisted water”, from the manner in which the water is deflected to one side by the slanting obstruction at the base of the fall. The translation is sometimes given as “meandering” which does not seem as applicable. (Page 11.)

NORTH DOME is the beautifully shaped dome across Tenaya Canyon from Half Dome on the north side of Tenaya Canyon. It was named by the members of the Mariposa Battalion in 1851. (Page 15.)

The Indian name is “To-ko-ya”, meaning “the basket.”

O! MY! POINT was the point of the first view of Yosemite Valley entering on the old Big Oak Flat Road. It was later called “Rainbow View” because of the rainbow which may be in Bridalveil Fall in summer mid-afternoons.

PANORAMA POINT, CLIFF, AND TRAIL—A high sheer cliff and point east of Illilouette Gorge. It was probably named because of the fine panoramic view to be had from there, taking in Illilouette Ridge, the north Yosemite Valley wall, Half Dome and Cloud’s Rest. The Panorama Trail leads for some distance along the rim of the cliff between Glacier Point and Nevada Fall. When constructed in 1886, it was called the “Echo Wall Trail.”

POHONO TRAIL—The trail along the south valley rim from Glacier Point to the Wawona Tunnel. The name POHONO is discussed under Bridalveil Fall.

POTHOLE MEADOWS are on the Sentinel Creek drainage along the Glacier Point Road about a mile and a half south of Sentinel Dome. They were so named because of the large sub-glacial potholes located there.

PROFILE CLIFF is located at Taft Point on the south valley wall and is sometimes referred to in the older literature as “Fissure Mountain.” Hutchings says, “—on the northeastern edge of which is prominently silhouetted any kind of face imagination could suggest.”

PULPIT ROCK is a rock formation on the south valley wall between the Wawona Tunnel and the Merced River that looks like a raised pulpit.

QUARTER DOME—Two heavily glaciated domes midway between Cloud’s Rest and Half Dome on the south wall of Tenaya Canyon. They were named by Francois Matthes, the famed Yosemite geologist.

RAINBOW VIEW is a point on the old Big Oak Flat Road from which a fine view of Bridalveil Fall and its rainbow could be had. (See O! My! Point).

RIBBON FALL is the 1,612 foot drop of Ribbon Creek into Yosemite Valley west of El Capitan. The Indian name was “Lung-yo to-co-ya” and means “pigeon basket or nest”, Probably because of the band-tailed pigeons that lived in that area. James Hutchings translated it to mean “long and slender” and named it “Ribbon Fall”. Dr. Bunnell thought that this was a poor translation and called it “Pigeon Creek Fall.”

The fall is also referred to as the “Virgin’s Tears”, supposedly named by a sentimental woman in the 1860’s, because the fall is of short duration, as a maiden’s tears should also be.

ROCKY POINT is a point of talus on the north valley wall opposite Sentinel Falls and under the Three Brothers. Ansel Hall gives the Indian name as “We-ack” or “the rocks”. The huge boulders that fell down here reportedly covered up part of an Indian trail, hence the Indians’ interest in it.

ROYAL ARCHES—The huge rock arches, 1800 feet long, on the north valley wall, opposite Glacier Point. It was named by a Royal Arch Mason prior to 1880. The Indians called it “Scho-ko-ni”, meaning “baby basket”, or the shade for a baby



The Royal Arches with North Dome and Washington Column (right).

basket. It is sometimes given as “”Cho-ko-nip-o-deh” similar in translation. One student of Indian language claims that “Cho-ko-ni” means “dog house.” Bancroft gives the name as “Hun-to”, meaning the “watching eye”. This name is also given to an unidentified feature in another early leaflet, called the Round Tower.

SENTINEL DOME, CREEK, ROCK, FALL—Sentinel Dome is a beautifully formed dome south of the valley wall along the Glacier Point Road. The Only Indian name listed for it is “Loy-e-ma”, given without translation in Bancroft’s early guide. Although earlier called “”South Dome” it probably received its name from its proximity to **SENTINEL ROCK** which is the high precipitous peak of rocks on the south valley wall across the valley from Yosemite Falls. The rock was named by the Whitney party because of the high tower-like position it occupied. It was used by Indians, according to James Hutchings, as a lookout rock. He gives the name “Loya” to the rock without translation. However, Ansel Hall in his guide book claims that “”long water basket” is the meaning of the Indian word. (See page 16.)

Sentinel Creek, or Loia Brook as it is shown on the Wheeler map, cascades down the valley wall just west of Sentinel Rock as **SENTINEL FALL**.

SIERRA POINT was named in honor of the Sierra Club by Charles A. Bailey in 1897. He had searched for a point from which the five waterfalls (Upper and Lower Yosemite, Illilouette, Vernal and Nevada) could be seen. It was first plotted by triangulation. Impressed by the view, he thought it appropriate to name it in honor of the mountaineering club.



Sentinel Rock, Yosemite Valley.

SILVER APRON—A sheet of water flowing down an incline of solid rock into Emerald Pool just above Vernal Fall, the water spreading out into an apron of silvery hue. It was also called the Silver Chain in one early guide book.

SILVER STRAND FALLS—The 1,170 foot drop of Meadow Brook, west of Bridalveil Fall. Probably named because of the narrow silvery appearance of the falls. They were earlier called “Widow’s Tears”, because, according to one author, the early stage drivers would explain that they only lasted two weeks.

SNOW CREEK FALLS, the 2,000 foot drop of Snow Creek on the north side of Tenaya Canyon above Mirror Lake. Earlier listed as Glacier Creek on a few maps.

STAIRCASE FALLS—A series of small falls coming down the south valley wall just west from Camp Curry, giving the appearance of a large staircase. The creek originates near Glacier Point and flows through the narrow cleft in the valley wall west of the point, and then drops 1,300 feet to the valley floor. The Ledge Trail follows the stream and the cleft up to Glacier Point.

STANFORD POINT is on the south valley rim, the first point east of Old Inspiration Point along the Pohono Trail. It was probably named for Leland Stanford of the Central Pacific Railroad fame, later the governor of California. A place called “Standpoint of Silence” is shown on early maps in the some locality may be the same point.

Wheeler’s map shows the bluff composed of Stanford, Crocker and Dewey Points as having the name “To-pi-ne-me-te Bluffs”, but this name is not used elsewhere.

MOUNT STARR KING is a bald pointed mountain south of Nevada Fall named for Thomas Starr King, a Unitarian Minister from Boston, who pled the Union Cause in California in 1861-1864. He visited the Yosemite and was much impressed. Through his orations he brought considerable attention to the region. A meadow to the east of the mountain bears the same name.

Bancroft’s guide book gives the Indian name as “See-wah-lam”, but without translation.

STEAMBOAT BAY is a large quiet stretch of the Merced River near Arch Rock where great pieces of granite appear like the prows of large ships. It was also called Battleship Harbor by a few authors.

STONEMAN MEADOW was named for Stoneman House, a three-story hotel located at the east side of the meadow near the present site of the Camp Curry Garage. Built in 1885 by the State of California, it was bulky and of poor design. It burned to the ground in 1896. It was named for George Stoneman, Governor of California at that time.

TAFT POINT is a point on the south side of Yosemite Valley, west of Sentinel Rock, along the Pohono Trail. It was named by R. B. Marshall at the time William Howard Taft was in office as President.

TAMARACK FLAT, CREEK—Tamarack Flat is located on the Old Big Oak Flat Road just north of Yosemite Valley. It may still be reached by that road, leaving the Tioga Road at Gin Flat. It was named by Bunnell, probably in 1851, for the lodgepole pine (*Pinus murryana* var. *contorta*) commonly called “tamarack”, (also the accepted name for the eastern larch.)

TENAYA LAKE, CREEK, CANYON—Tenaya Lake, the largest natural lake in Yosemite National Park, is located along the Tioga Road west from Tuolumne Meadows. It is the headwaters of **TENAYA CREEK** which flows through primitive **TENAYA CANYON** and joins the Merced River in Yosemite Valley. The lake was named at the time of discovery in 1851 for old Chief Tenaya, leader of the Yosemite who objected to giving a name to a lake already called “Pywiack” by them. The meaning is translated as “shining rocks”, referring to the glacial polish so common about the lake.



Tenaya Lake.

THREE BROTHERS—The three peaks in echelon, just east from El Capitan, were named by members of the Mariposa Battalion following the capture of the three sons of Chief Tenaya near the base of that formation. (Illustration, opposite page.)

The Indian name, “Kom-po-pai-zes”, or sometimes “Pompomposus”, is translated by Bunnell as meaning “mountains with heads like frogs when ready to leap”. The suggestion that the translation means “mountains playing leapfrog” has no basis because no one ever saw Indians playing the game, making it unlikely that Indians would have so named it.

[Editor’s note: the correct translation is “a couple copulating”—dea.]

THREE GRACES is an old name for the Cathedral Rocks as seen from the west, as from Inspiration Point, or Tunnel View.

Two Indian names are given for the Three Graces, each without translation. They are, “Ko-su-kong” and “Wah-wah-le-na.”

TURTLEBACK DOME is located just west of the Wawona Tunnel, the name suggested by the configuration. Dr. Francois Matthes is thought to have given this name.

UNION POINT, el. 6,314 feet, is a point on the south valley wall behind the Old Village on the Four Mile Trail to Glacier Point. The exact time of naming is not known, but this was a favorite patriotic name in the country during the Civil War days.

VALLEY VIEW is the first good point along the Merced Road from which almost the entire Valley can be viewed. The name is used by Hutchings in his “Heart of the Sierras” so was given prior to 1886. (Page 20.)

VERNAL FALL, the 317 foot drop of the Merced River, is located about one mile up the upper Merced Canyon from Happy Isles. Bunnell’s recollection of the fall before naming it was one of “cool, moist air, and newly-springing Kentucky bluegrass, at the Vernal, with the sun shining through the spray as in an April shower, suggested the sensation of spring.” (See page 11.)

Again, there is argument as to the correct Indian name. The more commonly used name is “Yan-o-pah” or “little cloud” or “mist”. The great quantity of mist formed along that trail in the spring and early summer makes this translation plausible. Bancroft and Hutchings both give its name as “Pi-wa-ack” which is supposed to mean a “show of crystals” or a “cataract of diamonds”. This name is almost identical to Pywiack, the name for Tenaya Lake, meaning “shining rocks”. If this name was actually used by the Indians, the latter translation was probably more nearly their own, since it is not too likely that they knew what diamonds or crystals were. Dr. Bunnell thought that “worm- and acorn-eating Indians” would never be responsible for such a name.

The little fall above Vernal Fall and the Silver Apron is often referred to as the Diamond Cascade. Bancroft calls it Wildcat Falls or Kachoomah.

WASHINGTON COLUMN, el. 5,912 feet. It is a straight column of rock at the east end of the Royal Arches about at the junction of Tenaya Canyon and Yosemite Valley. Probably named for the Father of Our Country, it was often called Washington Tower in the early days. (Page 15.)



The Three Brothers. Lahamite Creek (far right).

WASHBURN POINT, el. approx. 7,400 feet, is located along the Glacier Point Road and affords a fine view looking east into the upper Merced Canyon to Vernal and Nevada Falls. It was undoubtedly named for Albert Washburn of Wawona. He and two other men, Coffman and Chapman, took over Clark's and Moore's Station when the mortgage was foreclosed. **WASHBURN SLIDE** is a talus below Silver Strand Falls, just east of old Inspiration Point. (See page 11.)

MOUNT WATKINS is the peak opposite Cloud's Rest whose reflection is seen in Mirror Lake. It was named after Carleton E. Watkins, an early day Yosemite photographer of wide fame. According to Josiah Whitney, the Indian name was "Waijau", meaning "pine mountain". Ansel Hall translates "Wei-you",



Yosemite Valley from Valley View. El Capitan (left), Clouds Rest (center background), Cathedral Rocks and Bridalveil Fall (right).

the name given in his guide book, as meaning “juniper mountain.” (Illustration, page 13.)

WAWONA TUNNEL, ROAD— Named because of the settlement of that name south of Yosemite Valley. The origin of the name is uncertain, but Galen Clark says that it meant “big tree”, referring to the giant sequoia. The Wawona road passes through the settlement of that name and continues to the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias.

WILDCAT FALLS AND CREEK were probably named for the local species of bobcat. Wildcat Creek joins the Merced River at the west end of the valley between the Cascades and the Coulterville Road.

YOSEMITE—When this valley was discovered on March 25, 1851 by the members of the Mariposa Battalion, Dr. Lafayette Bunnell, surgeon for the group, alone could see the beauty of Tenaya’s fortress. The others, were more interested in finding the Indians, make jokes and wisecracks about the valley which “jarred” his more devout feelings. He asked that names be suggested for the valley. Those suggested were mostly European, Biblical or sentimental, each unsatisfactory to the doctor who thought that an American name would be more appropriate. He suggested “Yo-sem-i-ty” to perpetuate the name of the Indians they were trying to capture. A few of the men rebelled at naming anything after the “treacherous savages”. Several of the men who began to realize the beauty of the place suggested “Paradise Valley” for its name. Bunnell asked for a vote and the name “Yosemity” was adopted.

[Editor’s note: Bunnell was not the surgeon for the group, never claimed he was, and only earned a sham M.D. degree years later—DEA.]

This name was never used by the local Indians for this Valley. The name “Ahwahnee” was generally applied to most of the Valley, although it is believed that it was applied at first only to the large meadow in the east end of the Valley. This name is translated as meaning “deep grassy valley”, although Bunnell was never quite sure if it was correct. The Indians, known as Ahwahneechees, were divided into two groups, those living on the north side of the river being called the “Oo-soo-mah-ty’s” or grizzly bears. The name was also given as “Yo-hem-ah-ty” and by one Indian, as “Er-her-ma-te”. It usually referred to a full grown grizzly bear. Major Savage, the commanding officer of the Mariposa Battalion claimed that the word was pronounced as it is pronounced today. Why the entire tribe was given this name is not known. Earlier the word was commonly split, “Yo Semity”.

[Editor’s note: For the correct meaning and origin of the words *Yosemite* (“they are killers”) and *Ahwahnee* (“(gaping) bear’s mouth”) see “Origin of the Word Yosemite.”—DEA.]

YOSEMITE CREEK heads behind Mt. Hoffman and drops over the wall of Yosemite Valley a total distance of 2,425 feet as **YOSEMITE FALLS**. The Indian name for Yosemite Creek is given as “Scho-tol-to-wi”, which is the same as that given for Indian Canyon. Here the translation is given as “the creek of the fall”.

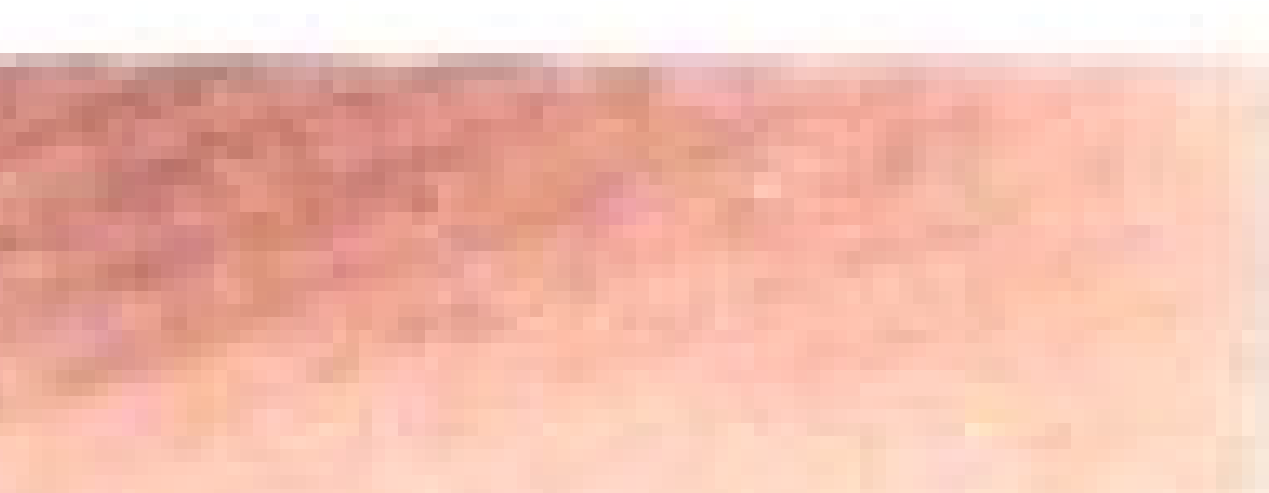
The name **YOSEMITE FALLS** was given by Dr. Bunnell. The Indian name for the falls is “Choo-look” or “Scholook”, meaning, “the fall.”

Yosemite Point juts out into the Valley just east of Yosemite Falls, near the Lost Arrow.

Yosemite Falls from near Old Village. Lost Arrow to right of upper fall.

Ansel Adams.





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NOTES

Revenue derived from the activities of the Yosemite Natural History Association is devoted entirely to assisting the park naturalist division in the furtherance of research and the interpretation of the natural and human story in Yosemite National Park.

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About the Author



*Dick Hartesveldt coring a
giant Sequoia tree*

Richard J. "Dick" Hartesveldt was born October 29, 1921. He was a Ranger Naturalist in Yosemite National Park in the mid-1950s. In 1956 Hartesveldt, started a series of studies on the Giant Sequoias for his doctoral studies. Dr. Hartesveldt received his Ph.D. 1962 from University of Michigan. His dissertation was *Effects of Human Impact upon Sequoia gigantea and Its Environment in the Mariposa Grove, Yosemite National Park, California*. As professor at San José State University in the 1960s to his death he continued his studies with his colleagues, shifting his studies to Sequoia National Park. One such study found that fire was necessary for the Sequoia to propagate, as the seeds required bare mineral soil to germinate. Another study found insects unique to the crowns of Sequoia trees. Dr. Hartesveldt died in Mendocino county, California March 27, 1975.

Additional Resources

Editor's note: These additional resources, not cited in *Yosemite Valley Place Names*, also discuss area place names —DEA.

- *The Yosemite Book*, chapter 1 by Josiah D. Whitney (1869)
- *Tribes of California*, chapter 24, by Stephen Powers (1877)
- *Discovery of the Yosemite* by Lafayette H. Bunnell (1892)
- "Indian Village and Camp Sites in Yosemite Valley," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 10(2) by C. Hart Merriam (1917)
- "Place Names," "The Miwok," *Handbook of Indians of California* by A. L. Kroeber (1919)
- "Glossary," *Myths of the Southern Sierra Miwok* by S. A. Barrett (1919)
- *Place Names of the High Sierra* by Francis P. Farquhar (1926)
- *The Southern Sierra Miwok Language* by Sylvia M. Broadbent (1964)
- "Names and Meanings for Yosemite Valley," *Yosemite Nature Notes* 47(3) by Craig Bates (1978)

Bibliographical Information

Richard J. Hartesveldt (1921 - 1975), *Yosemite Valley Place Names* (Yosemite: Yosemite Natural History Association, 1955). 22 pages. Illustrated. 23 cm. Saddle stitched with a paper wrapper. Originally published as *Yosemite Nature Notes* 34(1):1-22 (January 1955).

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