

Yosemite Nature Notes





—N.P.S. Photo—Anderson

Left to right—bottom row: Hakala, Reifschneider, Murphy, Barnes, Migliazzo. Second row: Grimes, Diamond, Simonian, Donaghho, Corbin, Massey. Third row: Vessels, Roberts, Downing, Naramore, Robinson.

ROSTER OF THE 1949 YOSEMITE SCHOOL OF FIELD NATURAL HISTORY

Kathleen E. Barnes, Route 6, Box 606, Fresno, California—Teacher
 Duane L. Corbin, 520 Johnson Street, Gary, Indiana—Naturalist
 Rudolph Diamond, 639 St. Lawrence Avenue, Bronx 61, New York—Research
 Walter R. Donaghho, 913 Alena Drive, Honolulu, Hawaii—Research
 George L. Downing, 1118 Short Street, Galena, Kansas—Teacher
 Peter S. Grimes, 37 Loyola Terrace, San Francisco 17, California—Teacher-Student
 Robert D. Hakala, Route Z, Box 120, Ironwood, Michigan—Naturalist
 Hugh Massey, Box 76, Berkeley, California—Counselor
 Charles J. Migliazzo, 6706 Parmelee Ave., Los Angeles 1, Calif.—Teacher
 Marjorie L. Murphy, 335 President Ave., Fall River, Massachusetts—Child Education
 Robert S. Naramore, Penryn, California—Student
 Mrs. Olga Reifschneider, 624 John Fremont Drive, Reno, Nevada—Education—Community Service
 William B. Roberts, 1011 South Fremont Street, Alhambra, California—Engineer of Mines
 Richard H. Robinson, 949 South Hudson Avenue, Los Angeles 6, California—Wildlife Biologist
 Simon Simonian, 522 M Street, Fresno, California—Teacher
 Robert Vessels, Box 242, Big Bear Lake, California—Teacher

Yosemite Nature Notes

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C. P. Russell, Superintendent

D. E. McHenry, Park Naturalist

H. C. Parker, Assoc. Park Naturalist

R. N. McIntyre, Asst. Park Naturalist

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THE FIRST CROSSING OF THE SIERRA NEVADA

By Peter Snook Grimes, Field School, 1949

It is hard to realize, when confronted by early California colonization by the Spanish, that the Sierra Nevada was first explored and crossed by an American, Jedediah Strong Smith. The best evidence to date indicates that Smith, and his party of fur trappers, crossed the Sierra Nevada in the region 25 to 30 miles north of Yosemite Valley, following the course of the Stanislaus River.

Jedediah Smith had engaged in the western fur trade during the early decades of the nineteenth century. He had also become one of the foremost frontiersmen of the time. Seeking richer trapping regions to the west he organized a party of fur trappers with California as their destination.

His party left the Great Salt Lake in 1826. Up to this time absolutely nothing was known about the region between Salt Lake and the Central Valley of California. By traveling continuously west, and following directions given by the Southwest Indians who had contact with the Spanish, they reached the San Gabriel Mission in southern California after grueling hardships, not the least of which was thirst.

They were welcomed by the Spanish missionaries but coldly received

by the Spanish civil authorities. Though Smith and his party were ordered to leave California via their original route, he had no intention of doing so. He had heard from Indians that beaver were abundant to the north. In January of 1827 they left the mission and the kindly fathers and traveled northward, over Tehachapi Pass and into the Central Valley.

The party traveled along the San Joaquin River, encountering many friendly Indian villages. They trapped beaver on the tributaries of the San Joaquin and Smith commented that they found "Elk, deer, and antelope in abundance."

Smith attempted to cross the Sierra Nevada during the month of January 1827 in the vicinity of the Kings River; but the winter snow prevented their passage. He did not know that this was the most rugged region of the range. Continuing northward in search of an eastward crossing the party came to the American River. Again Smith attempted the Sierra Nevada, but failed.

Because the land was virgin and the game abundant they spent much of their time trapping and caused the Spanish much consternation by staying in the region so long. Historians think that the Spanish came

Cover Photo: On the Floor of Yosemite Valley. By Ansel Adams from "Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada," text by John Muir, 64 photographs by Ansel Adams. Reproduced by kind permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.

to call the American River the "Rio de los Americanos" because of their presence.

In May of 1827 the party returned to the San Joaquin Valley and camped on the Stanislaus River. There Smith left most of his men and crossed the Sierra Nevada, with two of the party, somewhere in the vicinity of Sonora Pass. With much difficulty and near starvation they reached the Great Salt Lake, there

to form a new party to succor those left in California.

References

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2. Sullivan, Maurice S. "Jedediah Smith, Trader and Trailbreaker."
3. Neihardt, John G. "The Splendid Wayfaring."

TWO FLATLANDERS IN THE HIGH COUNTRY

By Geo. L. Downing, Field School, 1949

We had been given to understand that from Clouds Rest on is strictly mountaineering country. Bob Vessels and I don't consider ourselves experts but after successfully attacking Clouds Rest we feel we aren't novices anymore.

On Sunday morning, July 3, 1949, after camping out with the other three in our party near the foot of the Half Dome-Clouds Rest Trail, we began our climb. Along the trail, shaded by incense-cedars, Jeffrey pine and red fir, we stopped occasionally to admire the azalea, which was in full bloom and fed upon by sphinx moths, and listen to the beautiful song of the first hermit thrush we had heard since being in Yosemite. Mountain chickadees sang their distinctive song of fee-bee-bee, fee-bee-bee all along the trail. We recorded our first Oregon junco just before we hit the fork. After branching off for the final four and eight-tenths miles to the top we passed a clump of snow manzanita and heard the fox sparrow singing lustily, crawling down the trunk of a tall Jeffrey pine a pygmy nuthatch went about his endless hunt for the small insects and larvae that are found on its bark.

The trail began a steep incline

and before starting up we filled our canteens and took a long cool drink from the mountain spring beside the trail. On our way up we spotted a western wood peewee perched atop the dead trunk of a red fir. After observing him through glasses and recording it, we continued.

Soon we heard an unfamiliar "rumpf, rumpf, rumpf, rumpf." We stopped and looked around. Not an animal was in sight. No other sound could be heard except that drumming, resonant "rumpf." Sierra grouse, we thought, but where was he? We walked off the trail in what we thought was the direction of the noise. Suddenly we realized that the drumming noise was no longer in front of us but almost directly behind us, in the direction from which we had just come. We were befuddled. Where could he be? The sound came first from a clump of azalea, then to one side in the middle of some manzanita and again to our left behind a fallen pine tree. It was impossible to catch the barest glimpse of the bird that was such an adept ventriloquist. By this time we knew it to be a Sierra grouse.

Not wanting to spend more time looking for the grouse but eager to continue our trip to the top we

stopped our search and followed on up the trail. For fully half a mile we heard all about us the ghostlike "rumpf, rumpf, rumpf" but never did we see the bird.

Soon we reached the continuous series of switch-backs which are found on any steep mountain incline. The trail was well defined and in good condition.

While we stopped to rest and were looking up toward the top of the trail we saw a mule deer doe bounding away from us through the low-growing manzanita. What a thrill it is to see these animals in the truly wild state, fleeing from man instead of mincing daintily up to him to take candy and fruit right out of his hand!

We started again on our upward climb and an awe-inspiring view of the Sierras began to unfold. Snow-covered peaks sprawled across the horizon. The view surpassed any we had yet had. While we were still exclaiming over the beauty of the distant mountains we saw a red-tailed hawk riding high in lazy circles over the valley below. This hawk was also recorded on our bird list.

Negotiating switch-back after switch-back, we made our way up the mountain. We were beginning to tire but Clouds Rest was so close and that was an incentive. We finally reached what we thought was our goal, a flat granite shoulder high on the side of the trail. We breathed a sigh of relief. Then we looked at a sign on a Jeffrey pine—"Clouds Rest, 0.6 mile"! We began our trek again. The trail was faint, proof enough that few people had gone beyond this point. This last part of the trail was the most rugged and much of it was marked by the usual three stones, one placed on top of the other. At last we reached the top. It was the culmination of our hot and tiring, but

gloriously worthwhile, struggle upward.

What a magnificent panorama spread before us! In all directions the view was incomparable. Clouds nestled snugly among the mountain peaks. The day was clear and the sun was bright but the prominent features of Yosemite Valley were shrouded in a misty haze. Tenaya Lake was visible in the distance, huddled like a great blue gem in the mountains. We sat in silence, failing to find words to express our feelings at the lovely expanse of wonderful mountainous country.

We signed the Sierra Club log book which is located on top in a metal receptacle. Sharing our only food, a chocolate bar, we began our descent. The downward trip was without event. We were tired and not a little hungry. We were also very eager to get to our camp and soak our feet in the cool water before packing our gear and hiking back to the valley and Camp 19. The trip from the summit of Clouds Rest to our overnight spot in Little Yosemite took one and one-half hours. We arrived there at two-thirty in the afternoon.

After resting and eating a light lunch we packed our gear and, with the three who had remained behind, started our descent into Yosemite Valley. We followed the horse trail from Nevada Fall and made good time. Crossing the Vernal Falls Bridge we were gaped at by the vacationists whose looks seemed to say, "What manner of animal is this that comes from out the mountains—hot, dusty and tired?"

Eventually we trudged on into Camp 19 and were showered, fed and rested by seven o'clock that evening. In retrospect we feel that no experience surpasses that of ascending Clouds Rest. Remember-

ing the view from the summit we now readily understand why the

Sierra Nevada is called The Range of Light.

SHY GUYS

By Simon Simonian, Field School, 1949

The gnawed bark of fir trees in the Yosemite Museum Garden indicated the presence of porcupines. Although the garden is provided for visitors to acquaint them with the various trees and plants of the Yosemite region, in this case "visitors" did not mean porcupines. Since the animals were damaging the trees, it was necessary to remove them to another area.

Assistant Park Naturalist, McIntyre, upon discovering the gnawed bark on the trees, set out in search of the quilled quadrupeds. The first night's search did not produce any tangible results.

On the second night McIntyre was joined by some members of the Field School with one flashlight. After walking slowly through the garden, flashing the light up and down each tree, we finally saw movement among the plants. McIntyre spotted a small porcupine and almost simultaneously the group saw a large porcupine. Possessing only one flashlight, it was decided that we pursue the mother. We knew if we captured her we could catch the young, as it probably would not leave the area.

The mother was eventually cornered in the light. It took the aid of several students with sticks to persuade the reluctant porcupine to back up into a barrel.

With the mother safely "put away," we set out in pursuit of the remaining porcupine. After an extended search, I heard a rasping noise in a pine tree. Soon the young porcupine fell into the light of my flashlight about ten feet above the ground.

Our next step was to get it down to the ground. Two of the party climbed the tree with a barrel in an attempt to induce the porcupine into it. While they were in the tree I was directly below them with the light. Bending down to avoid the low branches of the young pine tree and holding my flashlight up, I expected the two in the tree to capture the animal. With this thought in mind, I was startled to hear an object s-swish by my face, fall with a "plop," and give forth a sound like "boop." The poor little fellow had decided to let go of the tree and thus fell to the ground, narrowly missing my head. We had no trouble coaxing young "porky" into a barrel.

With a mother porcupine and her young in our possession, we saw an excellent opportunity to take kodachrome and black and white pictures of this family.

The next afternoon while the sun was at its best we brought the mother and her young back into the gardens and proceeded to look for a natural location for pictures. After inspecting almost every tree in the gardens, we decided on a small yellow pine tree for the setting. The first subject of the many photographers in the field school was the youngster. It was placed with a broom near the tip of the eight foot tree. The next problem was to encourage it to face the right way. This was rather difficult because porcupines are exceedingly "shy guys." Dropping from the trees a few times, the little fellow finally decided to sit still for a brief period. The results of this episode were not too satisfactory,

however, as one could not tell the porcupine's quills from the yellow pine needles.

Not to be discouraged by unfavorable surroundings, we sighted another location. A long dead limb of a pine about six feet from the ground was the locale for the second attempt at photographing the porcupines. Due to the shyness of these animals this location also proved unsuitable.

Still determined to secure pictures of a mother porcupine and her young in a natural setting, we placed the animals back in the barrels and drove from the museum to Camp 19. A large log in this area was chosen for location No. 3.

Both mother and young were placed on the log and then enticed into a nice sunny area. With approximately seven would-be photographers standing four feet from the porcupines aiming their cameras at them, the animals, I believe, must have felt like traitors facing a firing squad. The young one cooperated, but evidently the mother could not face being shot by the cameras



without a blindfold over her eyes. She kept turning her quilled end towards the camera.

After a two hour attempt and the clicking of many shutters, the group took pity on the porcupines. As a reward for their efforts, the animals were given their freedom on the spot, while the photographers departed, hoping that some of their prints would serve as proof of their photographic abilities.

NATURE — SO WHAT?

An Insight into Interpretation

By Robert D. Hakala, Field School, 1949

So what? Because that's what we all depend on, friend. Nature is why we do things, how we do things, and where and when we do things. We are all a part of nature and everything, visible or invisible, living or dead is nature. If you are interested in yourself, aware of your friends, worried about your job or health, planning for your family, enjoying a vacation—if you've a breath of life and vestige of consciousness about you, you're interested in nature, which is all of these things too. So get off that pedestal of indifference and gain some nature sense.

You are interested in nature after all, a naturalist at heart. Here's

something else to be aware of—you're an interpreter also, we all are interpreters of everything we survey. We seek an explanation of that which is obscure, as life and death, we experiment with natural forces to comprehend nature's laws, we give meaning to signs to appease our uncomprehending minds, we translate into familiar language the natural phenomena about us just as we convert nature's forces into a form of power available to us. Through our five senses, the sensations of nature are transmitted to our minds where the wrinkles of memory are formed and the relations of these phenomena to our own

welfare impressed.

This, then, constitutes interpretation—impressions of nature translated into ideas which we can understand and associated in our minds with our own welfare. The tools of interpretation are thus our senses that transmit impressions and our minds which translate them.

The quality or soundness of our interpretation will depend upon the knowledge and intelligence with which we create associations and develop ideas. The interpretations which we give natural phenomena will determine the intelligence of our attitudes toward nature. Does it not follow then that we, the reasoning members of the natural society, we who are able to use nature to our advantage, should endeavor to equip ourselves with a sound fundamental philosophy concerning our place in the natural scheme? We are a part of, not apart from, nature so our interpretations and subsequent uses of nature must be based on proper ideals, lots of common sense, and a store of nature facts.

Unfortunately a great portion of our population does not appear to be so equipped. Among that inadequate lot must be included, regrettably, many of the policy makers of our government, great monied in-

terests who have derived their wealth from our natural resources, and many, many John Does whose only apparent dependence on nature is for a place to vacation. All of these people do not deliberately ignore the ideals and practices of wise use of our resources. They just don't know better.

And that's where the professional interpreter comes in, the man or woman imbued with an intellectual, spiritual, and practical comprehension of man's place in nature and equipped with the enthusiasm, energy and personality necessary to conveying her lessons. These, it seems to me, are the greatest attributes of man; the profession they typify is a grassroot calling of humanity.

We all will not make a living in an interpretive profession. But remembering that we really are interested in nature, that we will interpret her illimitable manifestations and use her to best advantage, let us also remember that nature is the foundation of our existence. Our attitudes and uses of our natural resources will determine our health, wealth, and happiness today and that of all generations to follow.

We cannot deny nature—that's what!

NATURE NOTELET

Many flowers rely upon insects for pollination. The milkweeds have traps which are so arranged that the feet of the visiting bees are caught. In freeing themselves they carry the anthers with them from one flower to another. The insect has to have a great deal of wing power to pull out of these traps. Many butterflies and moths can get away because of the length of their proboscis and their wing power. There are al-

ways some that can't get out of these traps. On July 10, 1949 upon the showy milkweed¹ growing by M. R. McIntyre's home I found a pine white butterfly² that was caught in the pollen trap of this to get some nectar and the milkweed plant. The butterfly had attempted to get some nectar and the milkweed adaption had held the butterfly that was too weak to get out of the pollen trap. (R.D.V.)

1. *Asclepias apocynosa*

2. *Neophysis menapia*

EXOTIC GRASSES IN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

By Robert S. Naramore, Field School, 1949

The invasion of National Park areas by exotic, or non-native, species of plants is a constant problem if these areas are to be retained in their natural state.

In Yosemite Valley, the invading grasses have presented a distinct problem for many years; since certain non-native grasses have become well established in the valley meadows and have been replacing native grasses.

Enid Michael, in Volume II of "Yosemite Ranger Naturalist Handbook," 1929, states that blue grass¹, red top², velvet grass³ and rye grass⁴ are the principle non-native species found in the Yosemite Valley meadows.

In many localized areas of the meadows certain of those grasses have completely replaced the native grass species. Blue grass and red

top are most abundant and the other two grasses are present in scattered areas only.

The environment in the meadows is such that these non-native grasses will continue to spread at the expense of the native grasses.

Probably other non-native grasses were introduced by the hauling in of hay from outside regions to feed domestic stock. Hay is now being hauled into Yosemite Valley to feed pack and saddle animals, and hay has, on certain occasions, been transported into the back country.

While avoiding depletion of native meadows by using hay for feed, the seeds of non-native grasses are brought into the park in this manner. Thus it seems probable that the range of non-native grasses will be extended rather than diminished by present practices.

THE CLOWN OF YOSEMITE

By Duane Corbin, Field School, 1949

Upon approaching the cool spray of lower Yosemite Falls, I noticed a red-shafted flicker, a mother no doubt, in a knothole full of hungry nestlings. She was busily at work on an old deformed trunk of an incense-cedar which was being used as a highway by endless lines of ants following the ridges of the broken plates of bark.

Another observer of this busy mother flicker was the "clown of Yosemite" watching with great dignity every precise movement. This great imitator and entertainer of the camp grounds who now was undoubtedly learning a new stunt was a blue-fronted jay—sometimes mistaken by our eastern visitors as

their common blue jay.

The flicker landed on the trunk of this old cedar and with two or three scoops of its long pointed bill spilled a number of large winged ants onto a flat-topped granite boulder. Then she too dropped down on the boulder and picked up as many of these ants as her bill would hold. I think what must have amazed our "clown of the woods," the jay' was the continuous dancing movement the mother flicker found necessary to prevent the ants from crawling up her legs while standing on the boulder.

Soon the flicker made a trip to the knothole nest which gave our jay a turn to perform. His first attempt

1. *Poa pratensis*

2. *Agrostis palustris*

3. *Natbolcus lanatus*

4. *Elymus virescens*

at the tree was fruitless for these crawling insects seemed to choose his legs as a path of retreat. During the next few attempts he learned key to obtaining this new kind of the dance which seemed to be the food.

Now, as we all know the jay, his new dance routine will probably

spread like wildfire and soon will be seen in all the camp grounds. Despite the mimics this fellow boasts, he does have a character all his own. From now on, when we witness his proud antics and should he slip in a fancy step or two, we'll all know the origin of at least one of his acts, as a pupil of the flicker.

YOSEMITE FIELDS AFAR

By Charles J. Migliazzo, Field School, 1949

We attribute to a seed the potentialities of sprouting, of growing, of reaching maturity and then climaxing life with death. These are the steps of all living things. Great ideas, however, differ in that they are born in the minds of God-like creatures and continue to grow like the redness of a noon sun. They only die when man himself dies.

The birth of the Yosemite ideal of preservation for posterity, of protection for the present, and of enjoyment for all the people continues in this respect to reach far and wide into world horizons. This fluorescence of worldly splendor is worthily presented by Rene Salques in his "Protection de la Reserves floro-faunistique."¹

It is fortunate that M. Salques should make us proud by placing American conservational thinking at the very top. His interesting expressions are given brilliance by an

account of the World's National Parks and National Reserves which so appropriately fit into the Yosemite ideal.

His wide scope of discussion brings to focus many world national parks. Among those listed are the landscape spectacles of the Canadian Rockies, the sculptured caverns of Czechoslovakia, the grandeur of the Javanese crater lake, the magnificent arborescent ferns of Argentina, the expanse of volcanic uplifts in New Zealand and the wide and varied abundance of life in equatorial Africa. He indicates by this expanse of natural beauty that ideas do grow and that they do glow in their magnitude when the thought is great. What greater satisfaction, what greater pleasure, what greater thrill could fill the hearts and minds of the founding fathers of Yosemite than the growth and development of an idea?

EDITOR'S NOTE

This number of Yosemite Nature Notes has been prepared and edited by the 1949 class of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History.



1. *Revue generale des Sciences pures et appliquees*, Vol. XLVII, Nos. 9, 10, 12, 13, Paris. May 15, 31; June 30; July 15, 1936.



Shy Guys.

—N.P.S. Photo—Anderson



DIGEST OF THE PURPOSES OF THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Yosemite National Park, California

INCORPORATED for the purpose of cooperating with the National Park Service by assisting the Naturalist Department of Yosemite National Park in the development of a broad public understanding of the geology, plant and animal life, history, Indians and related interests in Yosemite National Park and nearby regions. It aids in the development of the Yosemite Museum and library, fosters scientific investigations along lines of greatest popular interest, offers books on natural history applicable to this area for sale to the public, and cooperates in the publication of

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