

YOSEMITE

N A T U R E N O T E S

VOLUME XXXVII - NUMBER 7

JULY 1958



Vernal Fall



IN COOPERATION WITH THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE.

About the author —

Mr. and Mrs. Goethe have been called "The father and mother of the National Park Service's interpretive program."

As a result of their participation in nature programs conducted in Europe they began conducting similar programs in the Lake Tahoe area of California.

Stephen Mather, the first Director of the National Park Service, was so impressed by their program that he asked them to apply their ideas and programs in Yosemite. This article is reprinted through the kindness of Nature Magazine.

Editor

YOSEMITE

Nature Notes

in its 37th year of public service. The monthly publication of Yosemite's park naturalists and the Yosemite Natural History Association.

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THE WORLD'S LARGEST SUMMER CAMP

By C. M. Goethe

Here is a salute to Micky Kelly! Why? Grandad, who was a college professor, used to comment, "One does not know how much his students learn. He does know he himself daily gains wisdom from them."

Mickey was an example of not only Grandad's observation but of how Nature guiding in the National Parks came to be. Mickey's origin was a broken home in New England. From there he set out on a cross-country hitch-hike toward a California where, he had heard, he could pick oranges from the tree. On the Nevada desert en route, he had flagged a train to get a life-saving drink. The writer begged his custody from the sheriff after this evidence of Mickey's "juvenile delinquency." He was taken to our home for observation. There, he could pick oranges from our garden tree. The final decision was to route him to Sacramento Orphanage Farm, of which Grandmother, in Gold Rush days, was a founder.

Mickey was an Ishmaelite. He fought everybody from the matron to the smallest kid. They fought back. Even I could not find that minimum of good I had insisted was in every boy.

Once, with a circle of some twenty lads, I was squatted on the ground under the fig tree. The Nature yarn that day was Philippine bumblebees. Mickey always had refused to join the story-telling circle. Bumblebees, however, awoke something in Mickey. He stood at a distance, ears alert. I happened to mention that I never could find a California bumblebee's nest. That electrified Mickey. "I'll show you one right now!" How he did takes too long to tell here. Mickey, however, became an excellent assistant naturalist.

Then the day came when he said, "Mr. Goethe, I'm almost the age I'll have to leave the Orphanage Farm. As long as I can boss the kids, I'm O.K. When I'm out in the world again, I'm gone. Please get me into the Navy — and on one of those

newfangled submarines."

Mickey saw World War I. He had risen as high as possible without an Annapolis education. He volunteered to lead a raid which, they told him in advance, meant the supreme sacrifice. The last letter he wrote said, "Want you to know I do this because of Orphanage Farm bumblebees. I am a good citizen."

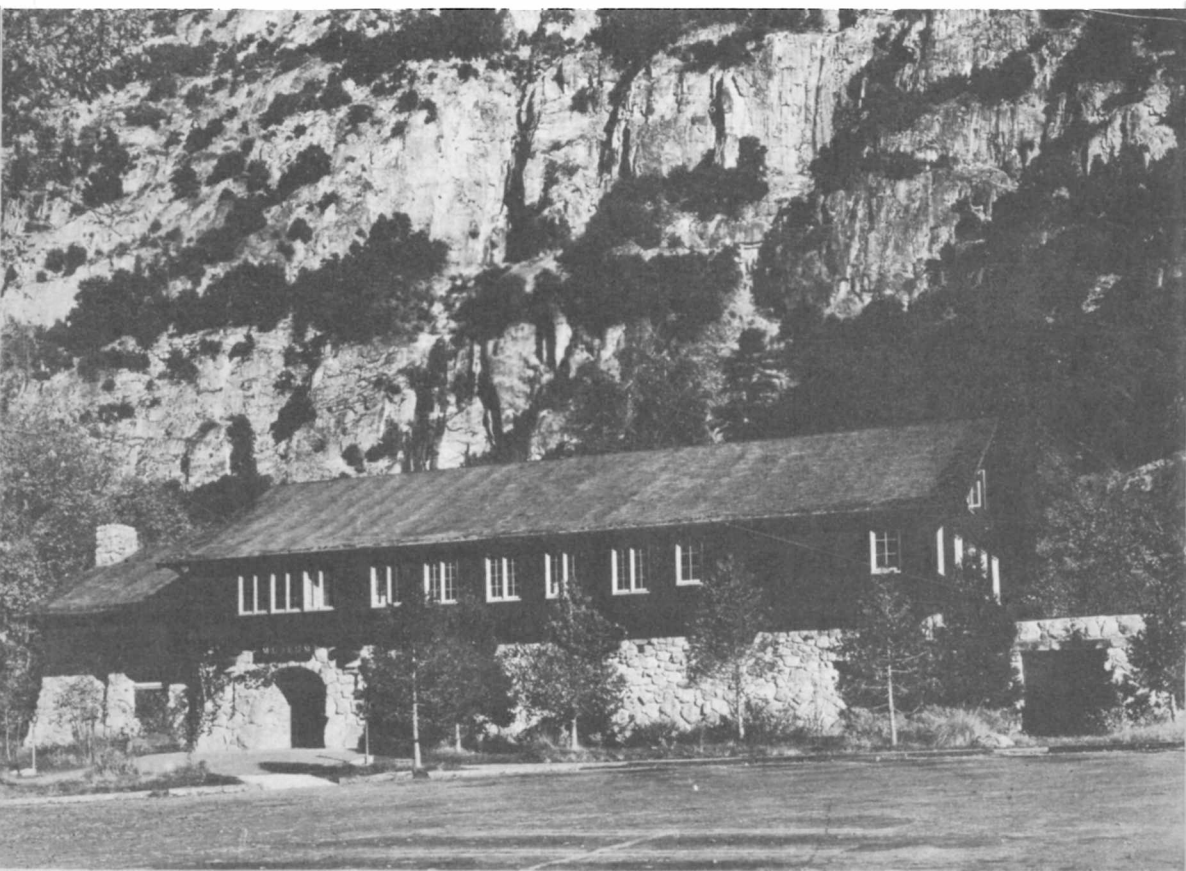
So, again, here is a salute to Mickey Kelly, junior naturalist, hero on a perilous mission and good citizen. A salute because he was, perhaps, foremost in a notebook of Orphanage cases that prepared me to know what I had accidentally discovered on Switzerland's Lake-of-the-Four Forest Cantons! It was on a steamer there I met a young teacher

with a score of enthusiastic youngsters. I climbed Rigi Kulm with them. After the descent, I vowed I would carry to the United States the idea of *Wandervoegling* — the Nature study field excursion.

That teacher introduced me to the leader of the Swiss movement, who advised a series of trips to Europe. This he proposed in order to understand clearly the varied national techniques of taking children, under biologist leadership, to study Nature. It was really the Agassiz theory of "not books, but living things."

Repeated visits to Europe, following the Swiss leaders' advice, yielded ever-accumulating facts. In Norway, where patronage by Nature-conscious Britons loomed consider-

The Yosemite Museum, gift of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial.



ably, summer resorts found it profitable to staff Nature guides. Geology lessons were everywhere in the fjord-slashed coast. In the central snow-fields was an alpine flora adjusted to an environment almost as severe as parts of Greenland. In Britain itself, field trip participation sometimes had a flavor of prizes for good school work. In fact, in parts of Scotland the outings were called "School Treats."

In Holland, the grower from whom we bought narcissi for our home garden commented that Dutch bulbs then led the world because producers had schoolboy backgrounds from these Nature study field trips. This was voiced, too, in the testimony of fruiterers from whom we purchased hothouse grapes and hothouse peaches. It was evident that intelligent thinking about Holland's commercial profits was based on earlier youthful studies of such things; for example, as insect control by birds. On one canal boat trip, (so slow one could often get off and walk), a teacher and her wooden-shoed pupils, out on a Nature study field excursion, welcomed this American.

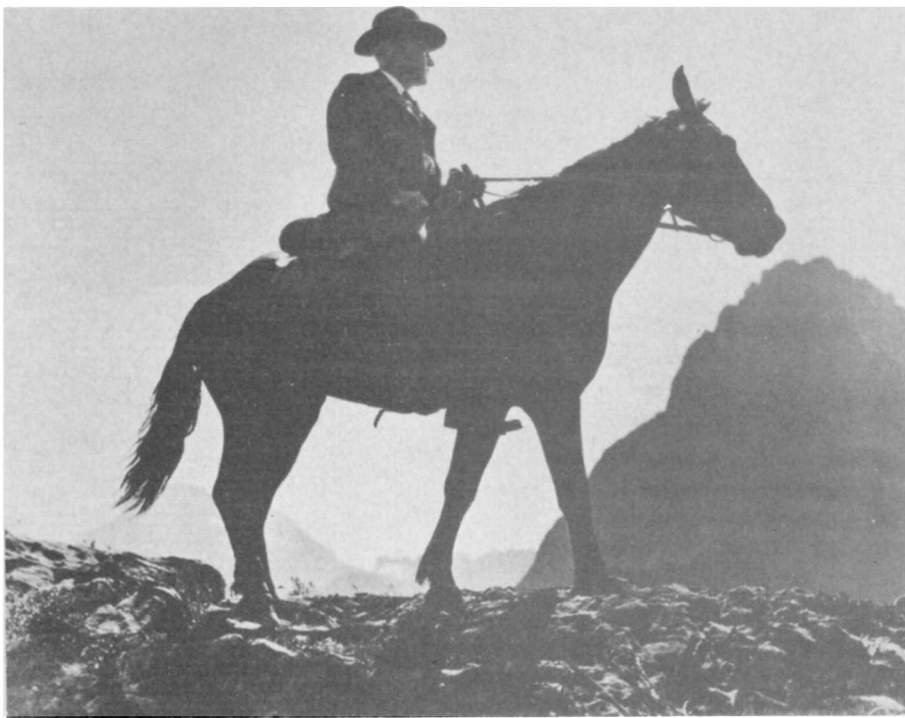
All these examples, however, were colored by education under monarchical governments.

Some adjustment was required to fit the concept into our American democracy. Then, too, our Native California was only recently emerging from the abnormality of gold rush days. Most folks still were dominated by a pioneering philosophy that, of necessity, had little time for "long-haired professors." That was why Mrs. Goethe and I selected Lake Tahoe for our "Laboratory." Six resorts ringed the lake. At one, Fallen Leaf, the owner was a longtime friend, the late W. W. Price, who had majored in biology at Stanford. It

was jokingly alleged he had a chipmunk, a rattlesnake, and a mosquito named for him. He immediately saw the possibilities of what Mrs. Goethe and I were attempting, inspired by our experiences overseas. He converted reluctant owners of the other five resorts to the idea of extending hospitality to the two naturalists who conducted the Tahoe Nature walks. So these naturalists covered the six resorts, one a day, each week.

Popular imagination was electrified. Confirmed anglers abandoned trout fishing for Nature study. One father came to my tent one morning at daybreak. "Here are a half-dozen twigs. I hardly know a cabbage from a pinecone. My sons think me all-wise. I don't want to wreck their dreams - at least, not now. Please help me identify what they brought in yesterday." I did, and I also joined in some of the daytime Nature walks, and the evening addressed at campfires, or indoors. This was principally to try to add a bit of geographical glamor, from our having joined the European *wandervoegling*. The question box after such talks strengthened the conviction derived from my after-banking-hours character-building work with problem boys. I came to appreciate the professor-sagacity of Grandad. I constantly learned more from my listeners, and I became increasingly convinced, among other things, that perhaps half of juvenile delinquency was due to inheritance. I felt, however, that perhaps the other half *was* environmental, as with Mickey Kelly, who had a bright mind.

However, the half-dozen spaced trips to Europe were followed by the "Tahoe Laboratory," to create which Mrs. Goethe and I banked enough to cover expense of the summer "Tab-



Stephen T. Mather, first director of the National Park Service.

oratory test." We then told the University of California we would cover expenses of two scientists they would recommend. This brought Dr. Harold Bryant and Dr. Loye Miller into our experiment.

Then one day came a tired man - Stephen Mather. He had sold his Death Valley holdings to London. He had offered my friend, Woodrow Wilson, who had become President, his borax profits to "pump-prime" a National Park chain. This \$5,000,000, he hoped, would stimulate Congress to budget, over some years, the \$50,000,000 he envisioned as the most of a National Parks System. He afterward told me he felt he had been beaten in Congress; this, despite the fact he had defeated plottings to convert Yosemite into a vast gambling casino, like present-day Reno or Las Vegas. He said he knew their interests were powerful enough to gain

revenge by blocking his pet Congressional National Parks appropriation. He feared that his dream was ended. Feeling too exhausted to go to Sacramento for his Pullman, he returned over the Tioga to think things out. This meant overnight somewhere. Twilight brought him to Fallen Leaf. Going to register, he passed the crowded auditorium - and missed supper that night.

It happened that that evening's lecturing naturalist was Dr. Miller. He had rare ability to call wild birds to him. His talk on their music packed Fallen Leaf auditorium to the doors. Folks even stood at windows to hear. Seeing this popular outpouring induced Stephen Mather to ask transfer of our experiment to Yosemite National Park. This he envisioned as an effective backfire against those who sought to profiteer on this park.



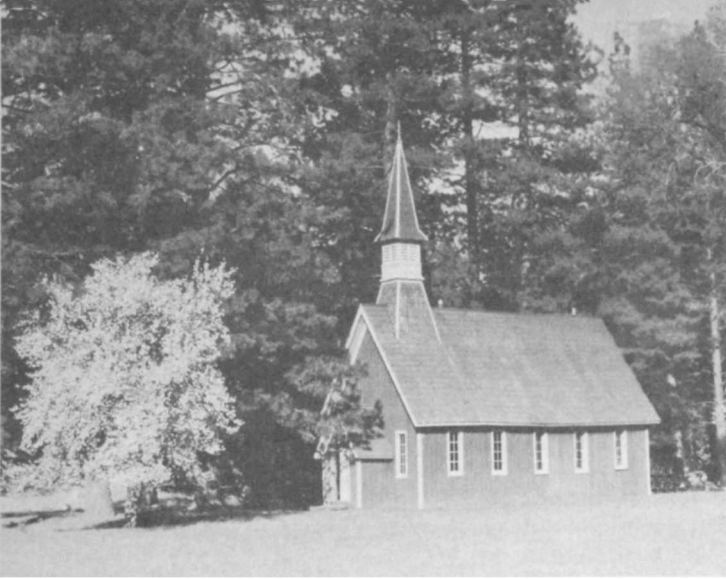
Mather plaques grace almost every National Park.

Then came Mather's invitation to join his Christmas 1919 university class reunion in Yosemite, although I was not a member of that class. He told his troubles, then said "Take Yosemite's telegraph key. Do not return until you can report your Tahoe Laboratory will be moved here next summer." Later Mather added "Mrs. Goethe and you already have invested much in this. Now, as political strategy, let's give it a geographical flavor. I'll finance some, you the rest. Congress thus will sense the movement is nationwide."

The desired Congressional support eventually was consolidated by various methods. One device, (now no longer possible), was a ranger-naturalist suggestion to enthusiastic participants in the field trips, "If you feel so, why not write your two Senators

and your Congressman?" Among National Parks visitors were some folks of influence. Soon came Yosemite Training School. Eventual gifts of millions provided museums. Support spread from park to park. Additional national parks were demanded by an enlightened citizenry. It was several years, however, before Congress was convinced they were worth tax payer's dollars. Former Regional Chief of Interpretation later commented, "This has developed into the world's largest summer school with a 25,000,000 acre campus and an enrollment of 18,901,244." Now the "enrollment" is four times greater — as is the need!

So here once more is a salute to Mickey Kelly, submarine gob, war hero, and "Good Citizen," via beetles, bugs, and bumblebees!"



—Anderson



THE OLD VILLAGE CHURCH IN YOSEMITE

By M. C. Fitzgerald

Once in awhile on warm spring mornings thoughts go back a good many years; back to the Old Village Church in Yosemite. It is the same today as it was forty years ago, and I suppose it is still being used, as it was then, by all denominations under some kind of Sunday Armistice. Each pastor sort of dusted the place out after the preceding group with a few carefully chosen prayers.

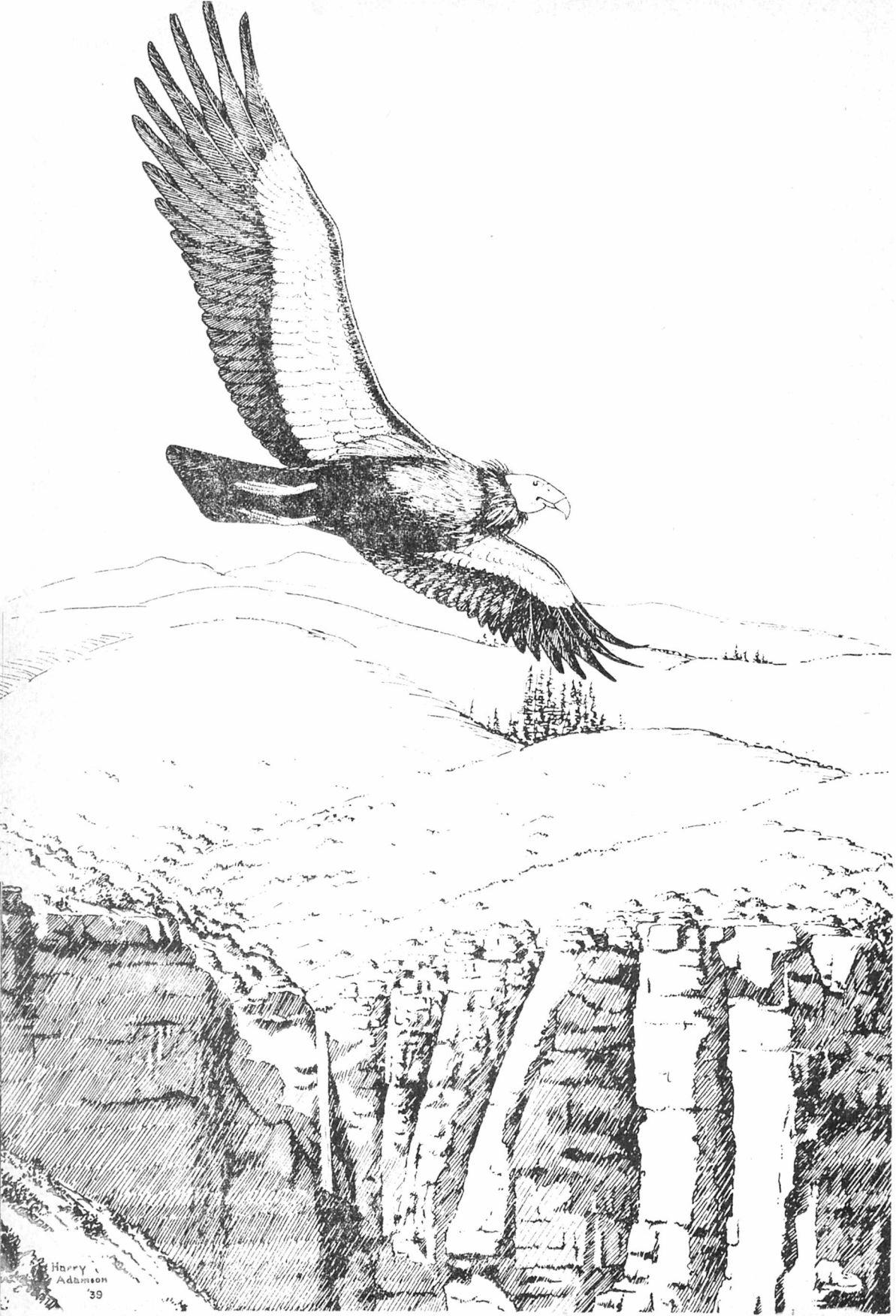
To little boys, trapped for an hour between father and mother on a good behavior or else (!) basis, a service in the Old Village Church was - as churches go - quite tolerable and the memory of it now has become one of those cherished memories of happy boyhood vacations. The sun streamed through the open windows and brought with it the warmth of the grassy meadow across the road and the chirping sounds of busy birds outside. One tree, which nudged the windows, became a resort for nearby bees and an occasional exploring bee would come in and buzz the place, going round and round before alighting on a flowered hat. This mystery he would explore afoot and at some length before buzzing out the window again, no doubt confused.

The chores around the building were performed by the elderly and methodical Mr. Degnan from the bakery next door. He took care of everything. His handle bar mous-

tache and the little patches of hair above each ear fascinated us, and we thought he truly earned his niche in Heaven, for he rang the bell, passed the plate, and even swept out the place for the Protestants.

Late arrivals were interesting too, for every board in the floor squeaked and shrieked to the softest and most careful footsteps, causing heads to turn like Jerseys when a Hereford comes into the field. And for the same reasons nobody dared to leave early.

There was a little reed organ in the church too, which wheezed and quavered through the hymns, and well it might, for it had been through everything from "There Are No Spots On Jesus" to "Te Laudamus" during the purple crepe of Lent. Truly it was a sweetly sacred place, and the various pastors found it easy to preach there for God seemed very close in Yosemite, and the church was quite small. Then too, it had shared with generations of happy people a few of the most delightful and carefree moments of their lives. Each pilgrim to the Old Village Church took with him from there a memory of a comforting warmth and serenity of spirit and a good feeling of going forth from its doors and across the meadow contented and happy in contemplation of the beauty of a world new again in Springtime.



FROM THE PAST

By Roy Christian, Ranger-Naturalist

Do you ever dream?

It was hot, down in that granite gorge, just west of Arch Rock, as I scrambled through the brush bordering the river. The river was slowed to an August gurgle; the foam and spray of spring was reduced to quiet green pools between great white boulders. There was a shimmer of heat radiating from the oak-covered slopes.

Rounding a turn, there not more than 100 yards before me on the slope above the river, was the carcass of a deer lying on the ground. But it was not the sight of the dead animal that brought me to a breathless stop, frozen in the very process of taking a step. For there alongside the dead animal I saw three great brown-black birds, and around their necks a ruff of feathers setting off the raw-orange colored heads. There could be no doubt. Here was the California Condor, eating carrion along the Merced River on a hot California afternoon.

Two of the birds faced me, expressionless but noble. The third tore at the entrails for a moment, but then it too, sensing a stranger on the scene, slowly straightened up and turned to watch me. Slowly the three birds began to walk away from the carcass. They started to run. Their wings partly unfolded, they bounded down the rocky slope and launched themselves into the air, almost simultaneously, stretching their dark wings out, dropping downward towards the river. Then these great birds all stroked downward and their

wing tips flared out, and they gained height above the river, flying downstream away from me.

Everything seemed slow, almost as if the heat had slowed down the processes of life. The birds worked laboriously, slowly. Then all together the condors stopped flapping and veered, wings outstretched, and went soaring up into the blue California sky. The white patches underwing contrasted with the black wing tips, each feather distinct and pointing finger-like. They circled up and up, following the invisible currents.

I watched, oblivious of the heat, oblivious of my poor footing, watched them circling forever upward and then they bore to the south and in an instant disappeared behind the oak-covered wall far above.

The red talus of Mt. Dana was in sharp contrast to the bright snow as I ascended the north ridge. To my left I could look down into the cirque cut by powerful glaciers, now occupied by a weak remnant of ice. To the right the panorama of the Sierra Nevada stretched out; Mt. Lyell, the Cathedral Range, Banner Peak on the horizon — names that are familiar and memory-provoking to the lover of Yosemite.

Then a movement down below on the sloping shoulder of Dana caught my eye. Prospective is lost above timberline. Was it a marmot? Or would a deer be up here at 12,000? I ripped into my pack, brought out my binoculars, found the moving object again, and brought the glasses to my eyes.



A mummified sheep was found in Lyell glacier in 1933.

The animal moved rapidly and purposefully across the slope. Tawny brown in color, its white rump showed distinctly, but even more distinct and exciting was its head lifted high, carrying heavy curled horns. A mountain sheep! Within a moment the animal crested a rise and stopped for an instant, looking over his shoulder at me, silhouetted against a Sierra sky, the massive horns curling around and outward and ending in blunt points on either side.

But the pause was only momentary. Those telescopic eyes sized up the situation, instantly and the ram was gone.

Only as I lowered the glasses was I aware of a dull ache around my eyes from the pressure of the glasses pressed too firmly against my head.

The early morning sun slanted into the unnamed meadow just north of Lukens Lake. The trees filtered the light and allowed only occasional shafts to reach the moist meadow



Ruthless hunting exterminated the grizzly in California.

grass. It was cool and I lolled in my sleeping bag at the forest's edge, looking out over the meadow. The knoll I was on gave me a good vantage point.

As I watched, out of the shadowy forest on the other side of the meadow, a bear nosed into view. Head down, the animal seemed to sniff his way into the grass. I was immediately struck by the bear's size. Although I viewed the scene as a whole, the head of the animal seemed to dominate. It was massive. He swung it from side to side, burrowing his snout into the ground. His shaggy coat was a grayish brown, tangled and matted, and rising over his shoulders was a hump, the hair on it falling away on all sides almost as if it were combed. His huge head, tawny color and heavy set shoulders added up to only one thing in my racing mind — a grizzly. A grizzly bear hunting for roots at the meadow's edge in the early morning!

At the very moment that I realized it was a grizzly a breeze began to blow, gently, rustling the fir and pines, cool and peaceful in character.

The round heavy head came up from the grass and he started directly at me across the meadow. There was a grunt, and then the grizzly loomed up, hoisting himself onto his hind legs and standing a full eight feet above the meadow floor, his front paws draped on his barrel

chest. Even from this distance I could see the powerful curled nails. His eyes seemed ridiculously small and close together, set deep in the round face. He stood there for I know not how long — time has no value at a rare moment such as this. Then he dropped to his forefeet, there was another brief growl, and I saw the gray-brown body disappear into the surrounding trees.

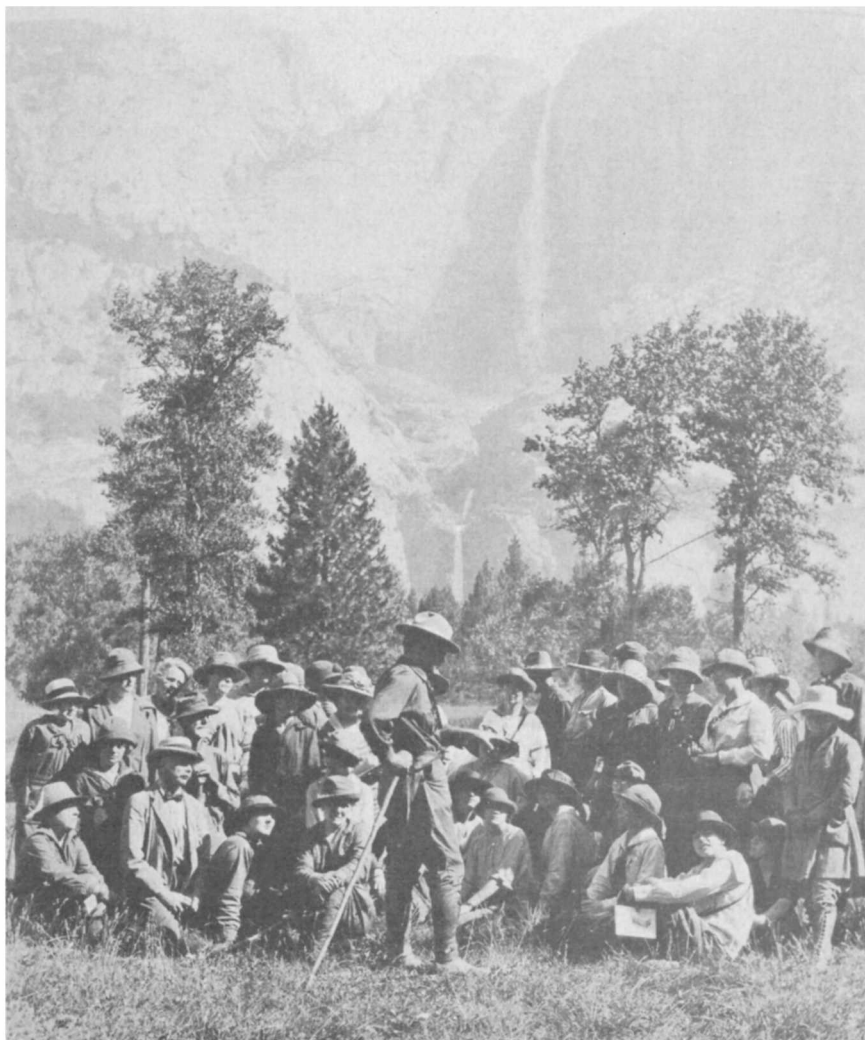
It was mid-morning before I left that small unnamed meadow, just north of Lukens Lake.

Dreams, true enough. No grizzly will grace a Yosemite meadow again; the rams of Yosemite may be gone forever; the giant condors, verging extinction, are pushed into limited mountain area of California. These animals, like the Indians, are victims of civilization.

But grizzlies are still found in the mountains of Yellowstone National Park, mountain sheep still scramble up the talus slopes of Kings Canyon National Park, and only last year two condors were seen in the Diablo hills, far from their home (now a guarded sanctuary). Vigilance is needed to maintain the remnants of our once spectacular wildlife heritage, now shrunken by the works of man. The National Parks are essential links between the world of nature and the world of men. They are a barrier to the ever-spreading biological desert of pavement and roofs.



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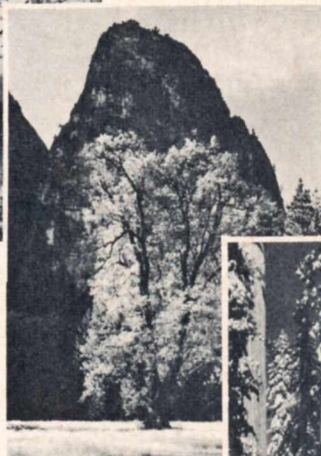
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