

# Welcome!

Most of Yosemite National Park is designated Wilderness—designated by Congress because the American people wanted areas where nature and its community of life remain unchanged by humans. You will experience nature on its own terms in Yosemite’s wilderness—natural fires, falling rocks, high water stream crossings, and sudden stormy weather can occur at any time. These are all part of the wilderness experience.

This brochure will help you plan for your stay in the wilderness while minimizing your impacts. With your help and care, we can keep the land wild for future generations. Call [209/372-0200](tel:2093720200) or visit online at [www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/backpacking.htm](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/backpacking.htm) for more information on trip planning, obtaining a wilderness permit, and trails.



## Planning Your Trip

Planning your trip is the most important step in preparing for an enjoyable wilderness experience. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Choose a reasonable route for your group’s abilities.** Keep in mind the physical condition of the group’s least experienced member. Think about what type of wilderness experience you would like to have and be aware of trip length and elevation changes. Let someone know your plans including when you will return. Do not go alone unless you are very experienced. Plan your route with the help of guidebooks, wilderness centers in the park and [www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit).

- **Have more than one trip in mind.** When selecting a route of travel you should plan your trip before you make a reservation and have at least one backup option in mind.

- **Consult a topographical map.** Yosemite ranges from 3,000 - 13,000 feet in elevation. In addition to considering total trip miles, factor elevation changes into your trip planning. Many trips are quite strenuous due to steep gradients, and high altitude can have a major effect on physical abilities. Temperatures also vary significantly at different elevations within Yosemite. Depending on the season and elevation, temperatures can be extremely hot or cold.

## Trailhead Quota System

Yosemite is a popular destination for backpackers, and it includes over 700 miles of trail and 54 trailheads. Yosemite National Park has a trailhead quota system limiting the number of overnight visitors entering a particular trailhead on a given day. This system is designed to reduce impacts and to avoid overcrowding, in keeping with the Wilderness Act’s mandate of providing “outstanding opportunities for solitude.” The quota system is based on where you begin your hike, and in some cases, on where you camp the first night of your trip. After the first night, you may hike to another section of the wilderness without restriction. For this reason, even if you have a permit lasting for several days, you may not begin your trip on any day except the first day your permit is valid.

## Overnight Wilderness Permits

A permit is required for all overnight wilderness use and must be in your possession while in the wilderness. Permits are not required for day hikes. Group size is limited to 15 people or less if travelling on trail, or eight people or less for any cross-country hiking more than 1/4 mile off trail. A maximum of 25 head of stock are allowed per group, and stock must stay on the trail. In addition, pets, bicycles, motorized vehicles, and hunting are not permitted in Yosemite Wilderness.

## Planning Your Trip Continued.

- **Check weather and be prepared for anything.** Rain is always possible. At higher elevations, significant amounts of snow can remain well into July. Water levels at creek crossings fluctuate; creeks that are dangerously cold and high in early season can become dry by August. Also be prepared for high temperatures, and bring plenty of water to stay hydrated.

- **Check road conditions.** The Tioga and Glacier Point Roads close to overnight parking on October 15 of every year. In the event of a winter storm, the roads close to all traffic and remain closed until the snow melts from the road. These roads usually open in late May or early June but may still be closed as late as July. Call [209/372-0200](tel:2093720200) to check current road conditions.

- **Arrive ready to go.** You can purchase food, cooking fuel, and some backpacking gear in Yosemite Valley, but selection is limited and some items may be unavailable. The nearest grocery store outside the park is approximately 50 miles from the Valley floor. Arrive prepared and save yourself time.

- **Be ready to store your food properly.** Bear canisters are required for all overnight trips. They are available at wilderness centers in the park with a \$5 rental fee and \$70 deposit.

## Acquiring A Wilderness Permit

**By reservation.** Advance reservations are available for trips occurring from May through October. Reservations are available up to 24 weeks (168 days), but no later than two days, before your start date.

To reserve a permit, download a reservation form from [www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm), completely fill out the form, and fax to [209/372-0739](tel:2093720739). You may also call [209/372-0740](tel:2093720740) or write to Wilderness Permits; PO Box 545; Yosemite, CA, 95389. A processing fee of \$5 per permit + \$5 for each person in the group is applied to each confirmed reservation.

To make a reservation please include the name the permit will be under, mailing address, daytime phone number, number of people, number of stock, start and end dates, beginning and ending trailheads, principal destination (to help clarify trailhead), and method of payment (credit card, check, or money order). All wilderness permits must be picked up in person by a member of the hiking group during open hours the day of or one day prior to your hike. Reserved permits are held until 10 am on the day of your trip.

**First-come, first-served.** From May to October, forty percent of available permits are held for walk-up visitors. These first-come, first-served permits become available one day before you plan to leave for your trip.

## Acquiring A Wilderness Permit Continued

From May through October, you can get permits at the following locations:

- Yosemite Valley Wilderness Center in Yosemite Village next to the Post Office
- Tuolumne Meadows Wilderness Center, one mile east of the Tuolumne Store, off Tioga Road
- Big Oak Flat Information Station, immediately after the 120 West park entrance
- The Wawona Visitor Center at Hill’s Studio
- Hetch Hetchy Entrance Station

## Overnight Winter Permits

Wilderness permits for overnight camping are required in winter (Nov.- April), and are available on a self-registration basis at the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center, Wawona Visitor Center at Hill’s Studio, Badger Pass Ranger Station, Hetch Hetchy Entrance Station, or the Big Oak Flat Information Station. No reservations are necessary.

## Backpackers’ Campgrounds

Wilderness permit holders may spend one night prior to, and one night after a backpacking trip in one of the first-come, first-served, walk-in backpackers’ campgrounds. This may be helpful if you receive your first-come, first-served permit the day before beginning your hike. The cost is \$5 per person and they are located behind North Pines campground in Yosemite Valley, Hetch Hetchy, White Wolf, and Tuolumne Meadows.

## Popular Trailheads

Because of Yosemite’s popularity, certain trailheads fill up regularly. Reservations for these trailheads are likely to fill up in the first few weeks they are offered for advance reservations, and the first-come, first-served quota is likely to be entirely allocated within the first hour it becomes available.

## The most popular trailheads are:

- Happy Isles to Little Yosemite Valley
- Glacier Point to Little Yosemite Valley
- Happy Isles Pass Thru to Merced Lake, Sunrise (John Muir Trail entry point)
- Sunrise Lakes (entry at Tenaya Lake heading south)
- Cathedral Lakes

## The following trailheads are also likely to fill in high season

(July and August, weekends, and holidays):

- Rafferty Creek to Vogelsang
- Glen Aulin
- Glen Aulin Pass-Thru to Cold Canyon and Waterwheel Falls
- Lyell Canyon

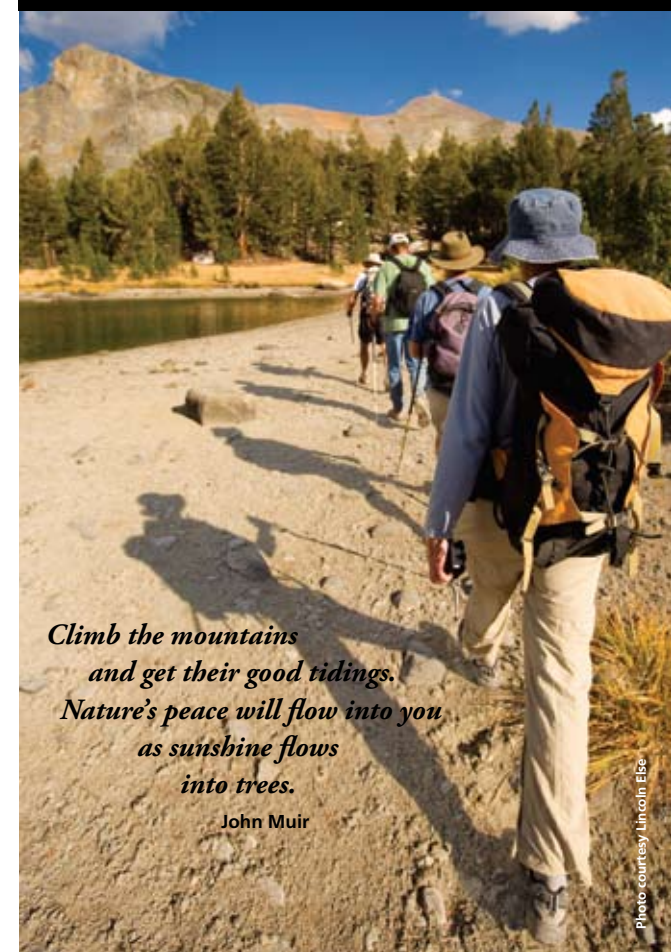
Whatever your intention, before you acquire your permit, research trips to ensure a backup option.

*The greater the obstacle,  
the more glory  
in overcoming it.*

Jean Baptiste Molière



## Yosemite National Park Wilderness Use



*Climb the mountains  
and get their good tidings.  
Nature’s peace will flow into you  
as sunshine flows  
into trees.*

John Muir

*A lake is the landscape’s  
most beautiful  
and expressive feature.  
It is earth’s eye,  
looking into which  
the beholder measures  
the depth of  
his own nature.*

Henry David Thoreau

Photo courtesy Lincoln Elise

Photo courtesy Lincoln Elise

# Do Your Part to Protect Yosemite Wilderness

Leave no trace of your visit. While you are in the wilderness, you may encounter hazards due to human influences, such as contaminated water and animals that want to eat your food. With your help and care, we can reduce these human-caused changes to keep these wild lands unimpaired for future generations. Keeping wilderness wild depends on you.



## PREVENT NEW TRAIL RUTS:

Stay on the trail even if it is muddy or the route is longer to avoid creating unintended trails



## WASTE DISPOSAL:

Bury human waste and pack out toilet paper and hygiene products to avoid unsanitary and unsightly items in the wilderness.



**CAMPFIRES:** Only use pre-existing fire rings. Don't leave permanent blackened scars by creating campfires at the base of rocks.



## PROPER CAMPSITE SELECTION:

Camp on a durable surface such as sand, gravel, or rock 100 feet away from water sources and the trail.



## PACK IT IN, PACK IT OUT:

Carry all garbage out with you and do not burn or bury trash.

- **PLAN AHEAD AND PREPARE.** For both day and overnight trips, always tell someone where you are going, and carry the "10 Essentials." This includes map & compass, sun protection, extra water, rain gear & clothing that insulates from cold, headlamp/flashlight, first aid kit, matches in a waterproof container, pocket knife, extra food, and an emergency shelter such a tent or extra-large garbage bag. Be prepared for bad weather and emergencies.
- **BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHER VISITORS.** Give the right of way to stock (horses and mules), and stand quietly on the trail while they pass. Be aware that sound carries in Yosemite, and respect the quiet atmosphere so that other visitors can also enjoy the sounds of nature. Camp at least 100 feet away from trails and water sources so that views are clear of tents.
- **TRAILS.** Help maintain the existing trails by staying on the trail. Don't shortcut switchbacks—it causes soil erosion, trail destruction, and hazardous conditions such as new, undesignated trails which may confuse other hikers. Pets and bicycles are prohibited in wilderness. Keep your group size to 15 people or less, and hike in single-file lines on trails. Walking next to one another widens trails and increases erosion. If hiking off-trail, hike in dispersed groups to prevent creating new trails.

- **RESTROOMS.** Bathroom facilities do not exist in the majority of the park. Bury all human waste in a hole 6-8 inches deep, and at least 100 feet (30 meters; 50 steps) from water, camp areas, and trails to preserve water quality and trail aesthetics. Do not bury toilet paper—animals frequently dig it up—and do not burn it due to wildfire risk. Pack out all toilet paper and hygiene products so that unsanitary items are not left for others to come across.
- **WATER.** Human waste that has entered the water can spread *giardia* and other pathogens. Purify all drinking water from open sources (rivers, lakes, springs) by boiling, treating chemically, or filtering. Do all washing at least 100 feet (30 meters; 50 steps) from water—even biodegradable soap pollutes the water and can injure fish and other aquatic life. Biodegradable soap is only biodegradable in soil. Additionally, scatter strained wastewater at least 100 feet from any water sources.
- **GARBAGE.** Pack out everything you pack in, and do not burn or bury trash. Don't leave trash or toilet paper for someone else to see, clean up, or for animals to eat.

- **CAMPFIRES.** Campfires are prohibited above 9,600 feet to protect fragile high-elevation ecosystems. Campfires are allowed below 9,600 feet in elevation in existing fire rings only. Constructing new fire rings or enlarging existing fire rings is prohibited. Wildfires are a real risk in Yosemite so keep your fire small. Use only dead wood that is on the ground and smaller than your wrist, and never leave fires unattended. Do not burn or leave garbage in your campfire ring. Make sure fires are fully out before you leave. Gas stoves are encouraged for cooking.
- **LEAVE WHAT YOU FIND.** Leave rocks, plants, and natural objects as you found them. This helps prevent the spread of non-native species and also leaves the natural world for others to enjoy. Additionally, help to preserve Yosemite's past by leaving archeological objects as you found them. Archeologists learn from artifacts and sites when they are left in place. It is illegal to damage or remove archeological objects from federal lands.

- **CAMPSITE SELECTION.** Plan your trip to allow plenty of time for campsite selection. Your campsite must be four trail miles from Tuolumne Meadows, Yosemite Valley, Glacier Point, Hetch Hetchy, or Wawona, and one air mile from any road. Choose a previously impacted campsite at least 100 feet (30 meters; 50 steps) away from water and trail. Campsite should not be visible from the trail. Avoid places where vegetation is just beginning to be lost or bare earth is just beginning to show. Using an existing campsite or camping on durable ground (rock, gravel, or snow) protects wilderness quality because additional plants aren't impacted and soil isn't eroded.
- **FOOD STORAGE.** Keep wildlife wild. View animals from a distance, and never feed or provoke them. When animals eat human food, it alters their natural behavior, and they may become more aggressive in order to get human food in the future. Bear canisters (available at wilderness centers in the park) are required by law for overnight trips. Bear canisters must be used to store all food, toiletries, trash and other scented items. In developed areas, place food in bear-proof food lockers, throw garbage into dumpsters, and clip locks shut. Do not leave scented items in your vehicle as animals can smell them and may damage your car to obtain food.

## HOW TO PACK A BEAR CANISTER.

- Choose foods that are compact, compressible and high in calories. Plan out and measure out every meal. Repackage your food and toiletries into baggies or small containers.
- Before you leave, make sure that ALL food, trash, toiletries, and scented items will fit inside the canister the first night.
- Put the canister and your camp kitchen 50 feet from your sleeping area. Leave the canister on the ground. Do not hang canister from a tree.

**FOOD STORAGE:** Use a bear canister to store all scented items and food.

