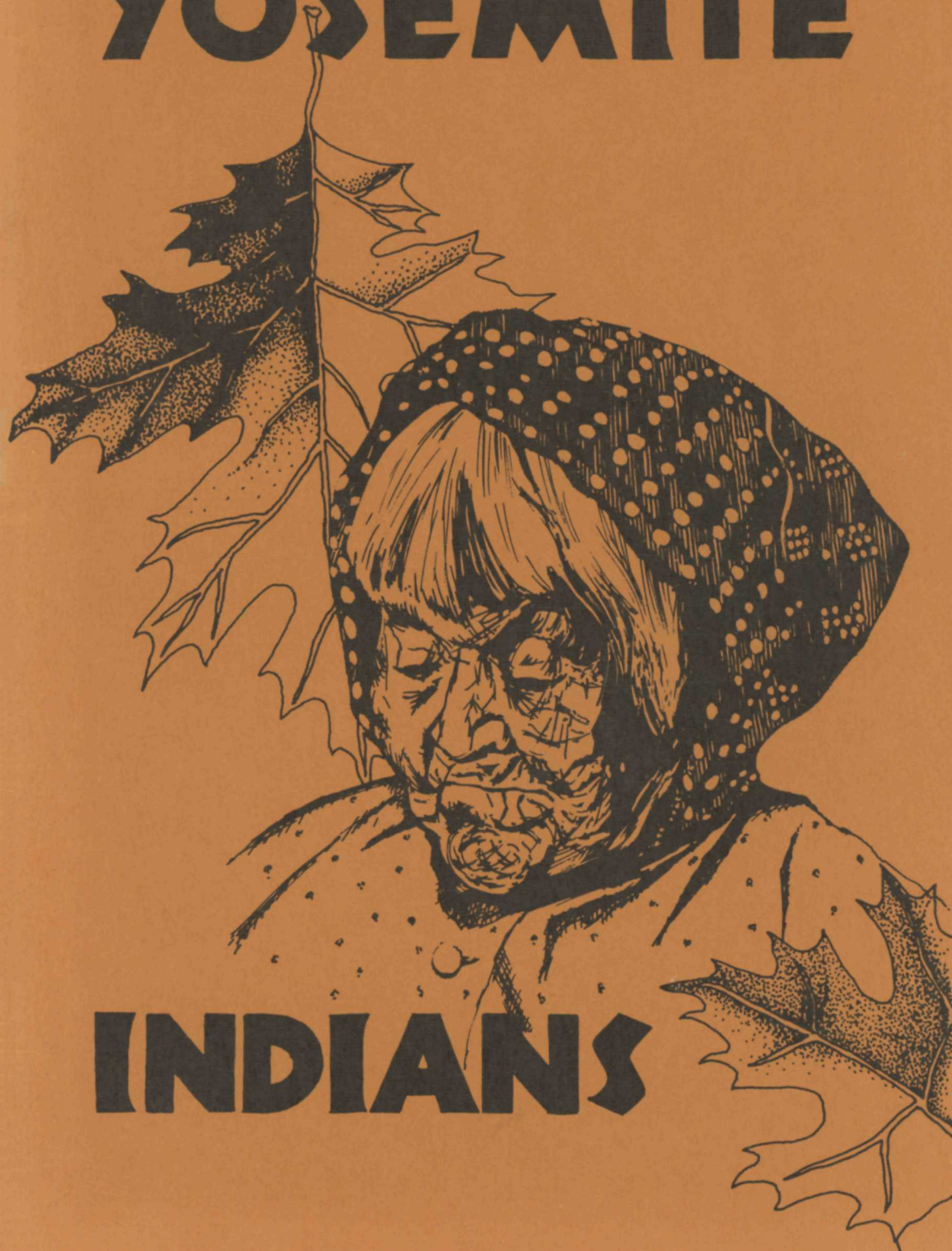


YOSEMITE



INDIANS

YOSEMITE INDIANS

by
Elizabeth Godfrey



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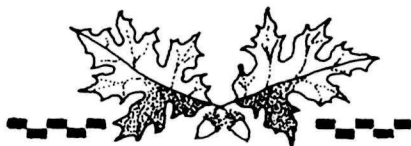
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THE AHWANEECHEES AND CHIEF TENAYA

The first Indians entered the Yosemite region sometime over two thousand years ago. The earliest groups moved across the crest of the Sierra from the east during very dry years in the Great Basin. Some centuries later, Miwok-speaking people from the west slowly penetrated the Yosemite region as their old homes in the great valley below were taken over by other peoples pressing down the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys from the north. Mixing with the small groups of people already there, the Miwok established themselves in permanent villages along the Merced River reaching into Yosemite Valley itself, which they called "Ah-wah-nee," meaning "deep, grassy valley." Here their lives revolved primarily around the gathering of seeds and the acorns of the black oak, the hunting of deer, and the catching of trout. The work of survival took them into the high country of Yosemite each spring and summer, following the herds of deer and trading with Paiute and Mono Indians from the east side of the Sierra, returning in the fall to live through the winter on the stores they had collected.

But early in the nineteenth century, disease forced the Ahwahneechees to leave their villages.

Tenaya recalled it as "a fatal black sickness," possibly the great cholera epidemic of 1833 which swept most of central California. The few disheartened survivors of the Ahwahneechee villages left to affiliate with neighboring tribes, and for some years Yosemite Valley was uninhabited.

Tenaya's father had been a chief of the Ahwahneechees and his mother a Mono. Among his mother's people, he had been raised. Growing up, Tenaya had heard legends and tales of the "deep, grassy valley," and, when he visited the place as an older man with a few of the old Ahwahneechees, he decided to return to it. Composed of the remnants of his father's people and scattered members of other tribes, a band of approximately two hundred Indians re-occupied Yosemite Valley with Tenaya as chief. These Indians represented a small part of the Interior California Miwoks, including in ancient times around 9,000 people closely related in language and culture in the western foothills and lower slopes of the Sierra Nevada. To the white newcomers the new band came to be known as "Yosemites," a corruption of "Uzumati," meaning "grizzly bear," the animal which represented the larger of the two social subdivi-

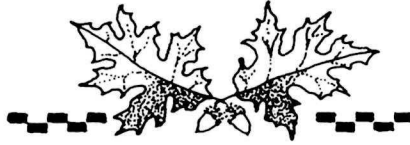
sions of the band. The valley itself remained "Ahwahnee" to the Indians, as it had been known to the earlier Ahwahneechee inhabitants.

Tenaya's band lived peacefully in "Ahwahnee" for a number of years. His sons grew up; as young men, they began to have families of their own. His band lived well. The "black sickness" which had overrun "Ahwahnee" years before, however, was only the first sign of the irreversible changes that were to overtake the small band in the high mountains.

The discovery of gold brought thousands of people into the Mariposa region in a very short time. Gold seekers scattered out over the hills in their search, changing streams and churning up the land. The cattle ranchers which followed them, finding a source of gold in food for trade, used acorns and seed grasses as fodder for their great herds. The balance of Indians' subsistence patterns was broken, so the foothill Indians moved quickly to new sources of food. Some worked as miners for people such as James Savage, a Mariposa trader. Others took advantage of the new foods brought in by gold hunters, especially the cattle and horses, which were much easier to catch and kill than the wary deer, and which seemed a natural source of provision to Indian hunters. As valley and foothill Indians moved higher into the mountains in their search for native foods, they clashed with the Yosemite, who also began to supplement

their sources of food with horses taken from the mines and ranches below.

In preying upon the herds of horses and cattle, the Indians of the foothills and the Sierra ran into not only the resentment of the gold seekers but also their hostile, profoundly anti-Indian sentiments, which needed little provocation for expression. The Indians raided for food, and their raids were met with guns. Indians retaliated for the violence by killing more animals, forming a vicious circle of raiding and killing on all sides. Some violence was attributed to Tenaya, who was trying to protect his band's home and food supply and to defend his band against encroachments of other foothill bands dislocated by the sudden influx of population in the wake of the gold rush. It was this cycle of violence that brought three commissioners from Washington, D. C., to California in 1851 to make treaties with the various groups of Indians there, getting them to cede their lands to the United States and to locate themselves on reservations. The commissioners reached Mariposa in early spring, 1851, but by then the Mariposa Battalion had already been formed, and the expedition was underway which was to enter at last Tenaya's "deep, grassy valley," guarded, as foothill Miwoks had told the battalion's Dr. Bunnell, "by a frightful 'Rock Chief,' from whose head rocks would be hurled down upon us if we attempted to enter that resort of demons."



THE MARIPOSA BATTALION

Shortly after it was authorized by Governor McDougal in mid-January, 1851, following several skirmishes, the Mariposa Battalion was organized to subdue the Indians of the area and to bring them down to the reservations to be established by agreements with the treaty commissioners.

Trader James D. Savage was elected major of the battalion. Savage knew the Indians of the area well. Many Indians worked for him, mining gold in return for food and clothing. By learning several of the local dialects and marrying women from the most numerous bands, he made himself a powerful man in the Mariposa area, though many Indians, including Tenaya and his band, resented his power and his alliances by marriage. Savage's power came from his presence in the midst of the confusion brought to Indians with the great influx of population. But Savage also had a personal grudge to settle. The previous May, his Merced River store had been attacked by Indians, and then in December his Fresno River store was destroyed and the two men in charge there killed. Three more men were killed at his Mariposa Creek Station during a raid. Convinced that the Yosemite had organized the attacks, Savage swore,

"If I ever have a chance I will smoke out the Grizzly Bears (the Yosemite) from their holes."

After the Mariposa Battalion had surprised and captured an Indian rancheria on the South Fork of the Merced River at what is now Wawona, Savage sent an Indian messenger ahead to demand that Tenaya surrender, emphasizing that it would be to the advantage of the Yosemite to sign a treaty with the commissioners to quit-claim their lands and to leave for the reservation on the Fresno River without resistance. Tenaya came alone to Savage's camp and answered, summing up the fears of his band and the confusion that had come to them with the gold rush, "My people do not want to go to the plains. The tribes who go there will make war on my people. We cannot live on the plains with them. Here we can defend ourselves against them." But Savage gave him no alternative. If you "do not make a treaty," he warned, "your whole tribe will be destroyed, not one of them will be left alive."

Upon Tenaya's advice, the Yosemite agreed to make a treaty, and the old chief himself went on ahead to report to Savage that his people were coming in. Savage

waited three days for the fulfillment of Tenaya's promise, and then, suspecting him of deceit, took part of the battalion and set out for the valley with Tenaya acting as guide. Following an old Indian trail in the approximate location of the present Wawona Road, they came midway upon a scattered line of seventy-two Yosemitees leaving their valley. There were old women and young mothers with small children but no young men. All were weary from the long trek through the four foot drifts of snow. Although Tenaya assured Savage that this group represented his entire tribe, Savage remained suspicious. He sent Tenaya back to the South Fork camp with his band, while he and his soldiers went on in search of the rest of the Yosemitees.

Yosemite Valley Entered

Yosemite Valley had long been protected from intrusion by its impregnable walls, by the memory of the disease which had swept it years earlier, and by the legends about its features that had frightened foothill Indian bands away. Through Savage's grim determination to rout the Yosemitees from their mountain refuge, his company of soldiers entered the valley on March 27, 1851.* (See page 34.)

Emerging from the forest, the detachment suddenly came into a clearing at Old Inspiration Point, where they could see down into Tenaya's stronghold. The setting sun reflected against the massive wall of El Capitan, while a light



Major Savage

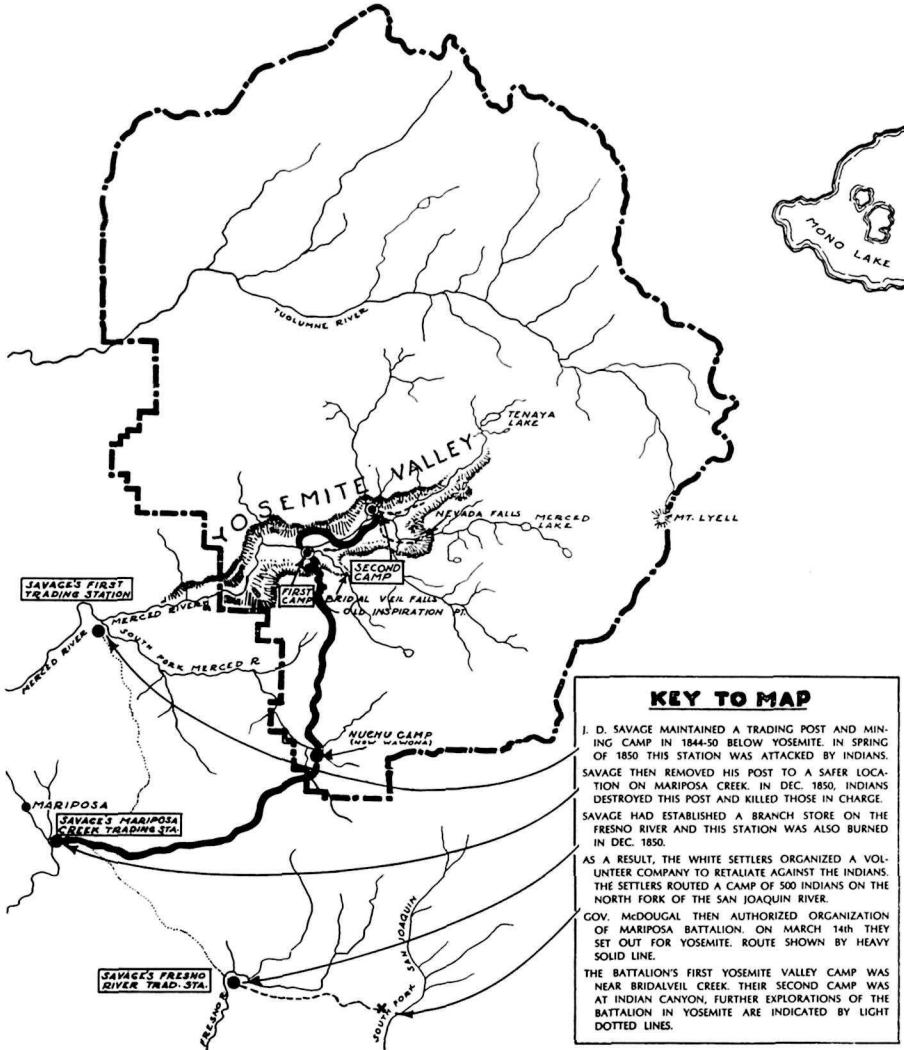
haze hung over the upper part of the valley and clouds obscured the high peaks on the horizon. Savage's party continued down the steep, rocky trail into the valley. Dr. Bunnell was the only one so awe-struck by what he saw that he pulled his horse out of line to survey "this wonderful valley". The Indians had misrepresented it, he thought, for "their prime object was to keep us from their safe retreat, until we had expected to see some terrible abyss. The reality so little resembled the picture of imagination, that my astonishment was the more overpowering." For the others, though, the main object continued to be the capture of the Yosemitees and their removal to the Fresno reservation.

The next day Savage and his men searched the valley floor in vain. They scouted up Tenaya Creek beyond Mirror Lake; they climbed up the Merced River canyon above Nevada Fall, but their searches went unrewarded. The only living

YOSEMITE INDIANS—YESTERDAY AND TODAY

ROUTE OF MARIPOSA BATTALION

First Expedition—March, 1851



soul was an aged Ahwahneechee woman, left alone because, as she said, "I am too old to climb the rocks!" She refused to tell Savage where the Yosemite had gone. Tenaya said of her to Savage, "When I was a boy, it was a favorite tradition of the old members of the band that when she was a child, the peaks of the Sierras were but little hills."

To force the Yosemite out of the mountains, Savage and his men burned the dwellings and large caches of acorns and other provisions the Yosemite had left behind. "The prospect that (this fire) offers to my mind of smoking out the Indians is more agreeable to me than all the scenery in creation," Savage remarked. After Savage left the valley, the stores of winter food still smoking behind him, the Yosemite returned to salvage what they could from the charred piles of supplies, which had included not only food but clothing. To-tu-ya (Maria Lebrado), the last survivor of Tenaya's band and only a ten-year-old girl at the time, remembered years later, "Got no shirt--got no pontloon. Pretty near nothing."

Although its members were the first outsiders to enter Yosemite Valley, the Mariposa Battalion did not accomplish its purpose of removing the Indians from the high mountains. The battalion was camped a few miles from the commissioner's headquarters near Mariposa when Tenaya and the Yosemite, who had followed him, escaped in the night past their sleeping guards.

The Second Expedition To Yosemite

The second expedition against the Yosemite was made in May, 1851, under command of Captain John Boling, whose company was a part of the Mariposa Battalion.



John Boling

At the outset, five Yosemite were captured, three of whom were Chief Tenaya's sons. Of these captives, Captain Boling released one of Tenaya's sons and his son-in-law with the promise that they would bring in the old chief to make a treaty. The other three were held as hostages.

The soldiers in Boling's camp practiced archery with their three prisoners, experimenting with the Yosemite's bow and arrows. When one of the captives shot his arrow far beyond the others, he was allowed to search for it and used the opportunity to dash for freedom. The other two prisoners were tied back to back to a tree, but not

well enough that they could not work their way loose. Their guard, a young man from Texas who felt it his duty to kill all the Indians he could, noticed this with a smile. When they finally did escape, Tenaya's youngest son was killed with a bullet in his back at fifty yards. The guard received a severe reprimand.

Shortly afterward, Tenaya was brought into camp. He saw the body of his most beloved son lying in a pool of blood. Dr. Bunnell watched the old man, and, "as he raised his head, the index to his feelings was exhibited in the glaring expression of deadly hate with which he gazed at Captain Boling," whose regrets could not allay Tenaya's grief. For Tenaya, the death of his son also signified the end of his liberty and happiness. Tenaya's band had seen the incident from above the valley, and they also knew what it meant.

A few days passed. When Tenaya's band failed to join him in surrender, he attempted to escape but was caught as he was about to plunge into the river. Tenaya lashed out at Boling, expressing all the frustration he and his band felt in the disruption of their lives:

"Kill me, sir captain! Yes Kill me, as you killed my son; as you would kill my people if they were to come to you! You would kill all my race if you had the power. You have made me sorrowful, my life dark; you killed the child of my heart, why

not kill the father? You may kill me, sir captain, but you shall not live in peace, I will follow in your footsteps, I will not leave my home, but be with the spirits among the rocks, the waterfalls, in the rivers and in the wind; wheresoever you go I will be with you. You will not see me, but you will fear the spirit of the old chief, and grow cold."



Three Brothers, named for sons of Chief Tenaya.

Captain Boling continued his pursuit of the remainder of the Yosemite into the snow-clad high country. His soldiers surprised them in their camp on the shores of Tenaya Lake. Hungry and tired from their efforts, the Yosemite gave up. "Are you ready now to go to the Fresno reservation?" Boling asked the young leader of this last band of Yosemite. "Not only willing, but anxious," he replied. "Where can we now go that the Americans will not follow us?" The young man stretched his arms out toward the east: "Where can we make our homes that you will not find us?" And then they began the long move out of the mountains.

Tenaya's Last Days

Tenaya and his people were assigned to the Fresno River reservation along with many other subdued bands. There Tenaya chafed under restraints placed upon him, preferred traditional foods to government rations, and resented the way Indians of other bands treated him. The agent granted his appeal to be permitted to return to Yosemite Valley after he promised he would provoke no more trouble. Tenaya was soon joined in "Ahwahnee" by other Indians of his band who managed to leave the reservation. The winter of 1851 and 1852 passed, and Tenaya kept his promise to the agent by causing no disturbances.

In the spring of 1852, a party of eight prospectors entered Yosemite Valley. While five of them were out prospecting, the Yosemitees attacked and two were killed. The others barely escaped alive. One of the prospectors had lured his comrades into the valley, there to kill them and take possession of a mine they held in partnership. He had incited the Yosemitees to kill the intruders, arranging for his own escape and letting the blame for the violence fall on the Yosemitees.

Fearing a general Indian outbreak, a detachment of regular army went to the valley from Fort Miller to forestall further trouble. Five Indians were captured immediately. When the soldiers

found clothing belonging to the dead prospectors among their belongings, the five captives were summarily executed. Tenaya and the rest of his band escaped across the Sierra and took refuge with the Monos near Mono Lake.

In the late summer of 1853, Tenaya and some of the men of his band were playing a hand bone game with some Mono Indians. The gambling game became tense; a quarrel broke out between Tenaya and the Monos. In the fight that followed, a Mono crushed Tenaya's skull with a rock and several of Tenaya's band were killed as well. According to custom, the bodies were cremated, and a great "cry" continued for two weeks as the remaining Yosemitees and their friends mourned Tenaya and their tribesmen.

After the death of their chief, the remnants of the Yosemite band dispersed as the Ahwahneechees had done years before, some staying on the east side of the Sierra with the Monos and the Paiutes, some living with the Miwok bands along the Tuolumne River. The end had come. The Yosemitees never regrouped. The last picture we have is the aged To-tu-ya, who had tried to pull unburned acorns out of the food stores Savage had set afire seventy-eight years earlier, standing at the grave of her cousin in Yosemite Valley in 1929, crying, "All gone, long, long time 'go. I 'lone; no more Yosemite; long time 'go."



FOOD

The food supply furnished by native plants, animals, birds and insects afforded the Yosemite a varied diet. For meat they killed deer, small animals, birds, and caught fish. The seasonal cycle for gathering plants began with mushrooms in winter, then clover in spring, seeds in summer, and acorns in the fall. They gathered various kinds of berries between the seed harvest and the acorn harvest. Bulbs were gathered in the spring. In winter the diet consisted largely of meat which had been dried and stored along with acorns and pine nuts for the months of snow. In addition, the Yosemite traded with other bands for salt, pine nuts, and insect foods.

The acorns of the black oak constituted the staff of life. Gathering the acorns, storing them in the **chuck-ah** granary, and preparing acorn mush and bread were the laborious tasks of Yosemite Indian women.

The **chuck-ahs** in the Museum garden "Indian Village," constructed by Ta-bu-ce (Maggie Howard), are typical of the granaries employed for storing the acorns. The frame support is made of four slender poles of incense cedar about eight feet high around a center log or rock two feet high

for the bottom of the **chuck-ah**. The basket-like interior is of interwoven branches of deerbrush tied at the ends with willow stems and fastened together with grapevine. This receptacle is lined with



Chuck-ah used for acorn storage.
(Harwell photo)

dry pine needles and wormwood, the latter to discourage the invasion of insects and rodents. After the **chuck-ah** has been filled with acorns gathered in the fall, it is topped with pine needles, wormwood, and sections of incense cedar bark bound down firmly

with wild grapevine to withstand storms. The final touch is thatching the exterior with short boughs of white fir or incense cedar, with needles pointing downward to shed snow and rain, and fastening the boughs securely with bands of wild grapevine. Nearly every family had at least one of these caches which could hold almost a whole winter's supply of acorns or seeds to be taken out as needed by making a hole in the side of the **chuck-ah**.

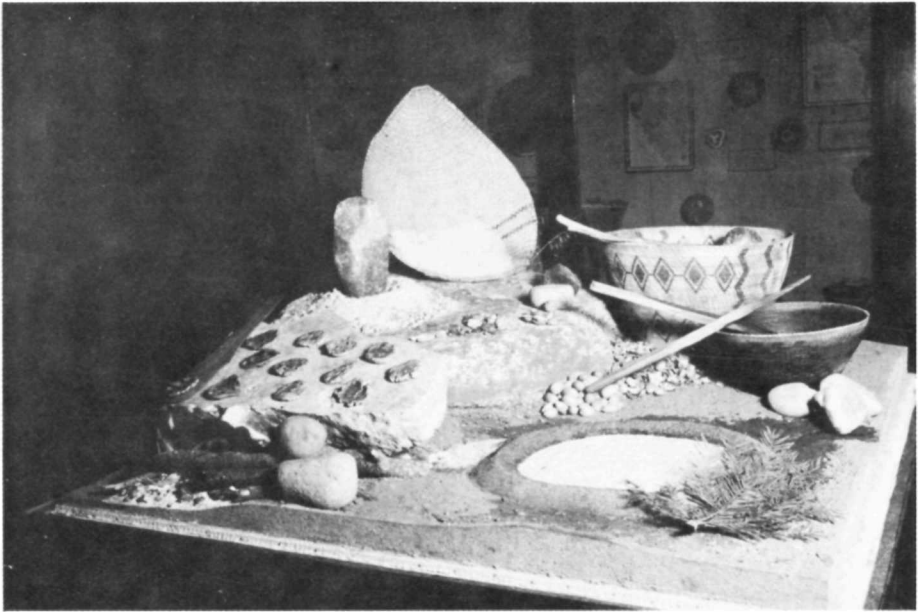
Acorns

After cracking, shelling and drying the acorns, Yosemite women removed the spoiled meats and pounded the good kernels into

a fine yellow meal, using the bed-rock mortars near each village site. Leaching removed the bitter tasting tannin from the meal. In this process, the acorn meal was first placed in a previously prepared, shallow, hard-packed sand basin. Water was poured over the mixture at short intervals and allowed to seep through the sand. About seven applications of water were necessary to remove the tannin--the last three being increasingly warm. Leaching produced three products graded by the fineness of the meal: the fine meal served for gruel or thin soup; the middle product for mush; and from the coarser material small patties were formed and baked on hot, flat rocks.



Ta-bu-ce (Maggie Howard) shelling acorns before preparing corn meal.



The stages of acorn food preparation required these tools and procedures. From top left to right: pestle, winnowing tray, cooking baskets, heating stones, leaching basin for the acorn meal, acorn meal patties.

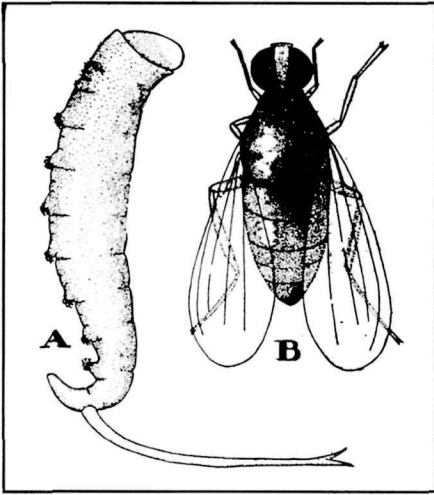
The mush was cooked in a large cooking basket, using the proportion of two quarts of newly leached acorn meal to six or seven quarts of boiling water. Lowering hot stones into the cooking basket with wooden tongs boiled the water and cooked the mush. When the mush was done, the stones were removed with the tongs and dropped into cold water so that the mush adhering to them would congeal and could be eaten. At meal time, the family gathered around the basket of acorn mush, and, using the two front fingers as a spoon, all dipped into the same basket.

Insects

One of the most important articles of trade between the Monos

and the Yosemite, besides obsidian and pine nuts, was the insect delicacy **ka-cha-vee**, which came from the saline waters of Mono Lake in the form of insect pupae. The waves cast upon the shores of the lake great windrows composed of millions of these undeveloped flies. The women scooped up the pupae in large baskets. When they were dry, the women rubbed them to remove their skins. After further drying, the pupae were packed for winter use. The final product had a flavor similar to shrimp but not as strong.

Another prized food product which the Monos traded to the Yosemite was the harvest of caterpillars of the pandora moth, known to the Indians as **pe-aggi** and collected in the Jeffrey pine forests just east of Yosemite Na-



Insect food

tional Park. The Monos knew the time of the year when the caterpillars left the trees to enter the ground to form pupal cases, and the Indians trapped them in shallow trenches dug in loose soil around the trees. The women visited the trenches periodically and gathered the caterpillars that had accumulated there. Then they dried the caterpillars and stored them away for use in winter stews. The Yosemiteis also used grasshoppers and the larvae of the yellow jackets as food, roasting them in an earthen oven.

Greens

The Yosemiteis used thirty-seven kinds of plants as greens, which were eaten raw, stone-boiled in a basket, or steamed in an earth oven. The leaves and stems of miner's lettuce were eaten raw. Sometimes the Indians let red ants run over the leaves to flavor them with formic acid, which gave an



Miner's lettuce

added sour taste like vinegar. Fern shoots of the brake fern, which commonly grows in moist, shaded regions in the valley floor and along side canyon walls, were cut when in the uncurling stage and eaten raw or cooked after the hairs were scraped off. Clover was eaten raw when the plants were young and tender prior to the flowering stage. The Yosemiteis chewed the California bay nut with clover to prevent indigestion. Lupines made good greens, especially when moistened with manzanita cider.

Bulbs

The best bulbs for eating were squawroot and the various brodiaeas, especially bulbs of the harvest brodiaea and camas. Bulbs were baked in an earthen oven in the ground. A layer of hot stones was placed in the bottom of a small pit and covered with leaves. A layer of bulbs came next, then alternate layers of leaves, hot

stones, leaves, and bulbs until the pit was filled. Over the top a layer of earth sealed the oven. The In-

dians built a fire over the whole, allowing the bulbs to bake all night or for about twelve hours.



Ta-bu-ce (Maggie Howard) gathering acorns during the autumn harvest, wearing burden basket and holding a winnowing basket.

Fish and Game

Fresh meat was usually cooked by broiling on hot coals or by roasting before the fire or in an earthen oven. For winter use, the Yosemitees dried meat in long, thin strips either by hanging it on trees or bushes to expose it to air and sunlight or by drying it on a rack about eighteen inches above a small fire. Squirrels, rabbits, and fish were roasted directly on coals or in hot ashes, either whole or drawn. In the latter case, the animal, bird, or large fish was stuffed with hot coals to make cooking more rapid.

Mushrooms

Mushrooms were in season during April and May. After shredding and drying, they were boiled and eaten with mineral salt or ground in a mortar and cooked as soup.

Berries

Manzanita berries, smooth-skinned and having an agreeable acid flavor, were eaten raw or made into cider for drinking and mixing with other food preparations. To make cider, the Yosemitees crushed the berries into a coarse pulp with a rock in a basket. Then they added water which seeped through the mass and dripped into a watertight basket below, extracting some of the berry flavor in the process. Manzanita cider, which served as an appetizer, was enjoyed by dipping into the beverage a small stick with several short feathers fastened to one end and then sucking the drink off the feathers. A small watertight basket was also used for drinking cider or water.

Other common berries used for food were wild raspberries, thimbleberries, wild strawberries, currants, gooseberries, and wild cherries.



HUNTING AND FISHING

Hunting depended as much on knowing the habits of the game as it did upon the weapon one used. Special cleansing ceremonies preceded a hunt in order to remove human body odors that would give the hunter away. Hunters disguised in deerskins stalked deer and by mimicking the actions of the deer, a hunter could approach near enough to make a successful shot. Once in a while, when many deer were needed, deer were herded into a trap or net and killed by Indians lying in wait. The Yosemitees also sometimes built deer blinds near the springs where deer came to drink; this camouflage permitted them to take deliberate aim at close range.

The most common and abundant native fish in the Merced River and Yosemite Valley was rainbow trout. The Indians speared these fish with a wooden shaft fitted with a bone point. One end of a small cord was attached to the point and the other end held in the fisherman's hand. The struggles of the impaled fish freed the point from the shaft, and the fisherman landed it by pulling the cord.

Fish were also caught with weir traps made of long willow sprouts woven together and closed at the pointed lower end. The weirs were ingeniously placed in a specially



Fish spear

constructed dam and elevated above the surface of the water below the dam, so that the fish ran into this trap as they went downstream and found themselves at the lower end of it out of the water.

When the water was low in late summer, the Yosemitees stupefied fish with pulverized soaproot mixed with soil and water. This mixture, rubbed on rocks out in the stream, roiled the water and made it foamy. For the fish, it was a form of strangulation, causing them to rise to the surface where they could be easily captured by Indians with scoop baskets.



BASKETRY

Willow, redbud, sumae, strips of bark from redbud, bracken fern, brake fern, bunch grass, and other native plants served Yosemite women as material for the many baskets used for domestic tasks. The women knew the names of all the plants for basket-making, where to find them, and the best time to gather them. Once the materials were gathered, the basket-weaver also had to know how to prepare them for use. The plant materials had to be peeled, trimmed to correct width, fineness, and length, soaked in cold water,

boiled or buried in mud, according to their use. Colors for designs also came from plants. Roots of the brake fern were boiled or soaked to obtain black; redbud was employed for the red color.

In size, shape and weave each basket was designed to serve a special purpose. The women used a large conical shaped basket, known as a burden basket, for carrying heavy and bulky loads. These baskets were supported on the back by a strap passing over the wearer's forehead. Other com-



Ta-bu-ce (Maggie Howard) and baskets. (Boysen photo)

mon baskets were the large, deep family mushbowl basket around which the family gathered to dip into the acorn mush; a small, closely-woven basket used to serve food; a tightly woven disc-shaped basket for winnowing wild oats and other seed plants; a seed beater used for beating seeds into a carrying basket; a dipper basket, small and tightly woven for drinking water or manzanita cider: a cradle of open-work basketry, sometimes covered with deerskin, for carrying babies; special baskets used in wedding and dance ceremonies; and basket weirs for catching fish.

Yosemite Indian women used the twining and coiling methods of weaving baskets. In the twined basket, the heavy foundation, called the warp, is vertical from the center to the rim, and the horizontally twined woof is of lighter material. In the coiled basket, the heavy foundation warp is laid in horizontal coils around the basket

with the vertical woof running spirally in turns around or through the foundation coils, fastening them together. Practically the only twined baskets the Miwok made were the burden baskets, the triangular scoop-shaped basket for winnowing, the elliptical seed-beater, and the baby-carrier or "hickey." An application of soaproot, which hardened in a thin, brittle sheet, made burden baskets seed-tight. A scrubbing brush for cleaning the cooking baskets was also made of fibers from the dry, outer layers of the soaproot.

Indian women made their baskets according to tradition rather than by written guides. The designs, colors, and mathematical accuracy of their baskets represent works of art. Before beginning a basket, a weaver had to know exactly where to place the first stitch of each figure of the design, and as the bowl of the basket continued to flare, the size of each figure had to be correspondingly increased.



TOOLS

Bone and Antler Implements

The Yosemite Indians used bone and antlers to make a variety of tools and implements. From bones of the deer the awl was made for weaving coiled baskets. Limb bones of the jackrabbit and grouse became whistles for ceremonial dances. Antler points were used to shape flint and obsidian arrowheads and blades. An antler implement helped extract acorns stored by woodpeckers. Split leg bones from a deer afforded scrapers useful in working down a bow or in removing hair from deerhide.



Weapons

The principal weapons for hunting and warfare were bows and arrows. A good marksman with a bow was dangerous at a hundred yards and fatal at fifty.

The construction of bows and arrows was a skilled and demanding task as the weaving of baskets. Incense cedar and California nutmeg furnished the wood for the bow.

Incense cedar had to be treated for several days with deer marrow to prevent brittleness when dry.



Arrow points were fashioned from obsidian (volcanic rock) by first striking large piece with hammerstone (left) to obtain section of suitable size. This was then shaped with a tool made from a deer antler.

The finished bow was three or four feet long, sinew backed, and often had recurved ends. Glue used for applying the sinew to the back of the bow was made by boiling deer bones--or horse bones after the Yosemite got horses from the ranchers and gold seekers and combining the product with pitch. A plain bow without sinew backing sufficed for hunting small game at relatively close range. The best bowstrings were made of twisted sinew.

Arrows for large game often had two parts. The detachable fore-shaft remained in the wound, pre-



Arrow point was attached to shaft by use of sinew.

venting it from closing and hastening the animal's death from loss of blood. Arrow shafts were made of syringa or wild rosebush by removing the bark, stripping and trimming the pieces to an even thickness, and then straightening them with stone tools. Finally, the shafts were polished with scouring

rush. When the shaft was ready, obsidian point and feathers were attached, each feather split down the middle so that four half-feathers could be attached to the shaft with wrapping. Obsidian arrowheads fitted into a slot in the end of the shaft, held in place by sinew wrapping and pitch.

The great obsidian quarries near Mono Lake supplied material for arrowheads and other implements. Monos and Paiutes brought chunks of the stone up to the large trading sites near the crest of the Sierra where the Yosemite met them. The Yosemite bartered acorns and other goods for the obsidian they needed, hammering off pieces of suitable size for tools and arrowheads from the larger chunks, and then carrying these "blanks" back to their villages in deerskin sacks. The trade with the Monos and Paiutes for obsidian, salt, rabbit skins, and pine nuts was probably the most important trade connection for the Yosemite. It was certainly a large factor in the alliances and family ties the Yosemite had with their eastern neighbors.

Small pieces of obsidian were roughly shaped with an antler tool and finished with a smaller antler implement. The Yosemite grasped the obsidian in the palm of the hand, protected by a buckskin pad, and exerted pressure on it with the sharp end of an antler tool. The skilled maker of arrowheads could break off chips of varying sizes and depths by knowing just how much pressure to use at a given point, so that he could control shape and sharpness.



SHELTER

The typical Yosemite dwelling was the conical **u-ma-cha**. Poles ten or twelve feet long were set in the ground around an area twelve feet in diameter with the tops of the poles inclined together. Over this framework the Indians laid slabs of incense cedar bark. The **u-ma-cha** was easily built, fairly waterproof, and readily kept warm. The entrance on the south could be easily closed with a portable door.

An opening at the top allowed smoke to escape from a fire kindled in the middle of the dwelling. An **u-ma-cha** could house a family of six with all its worldly possessions, including the dog. During the summer, the Yosemitees lived outside under brush arbors, using the **u-ma-cha** as storehouses.

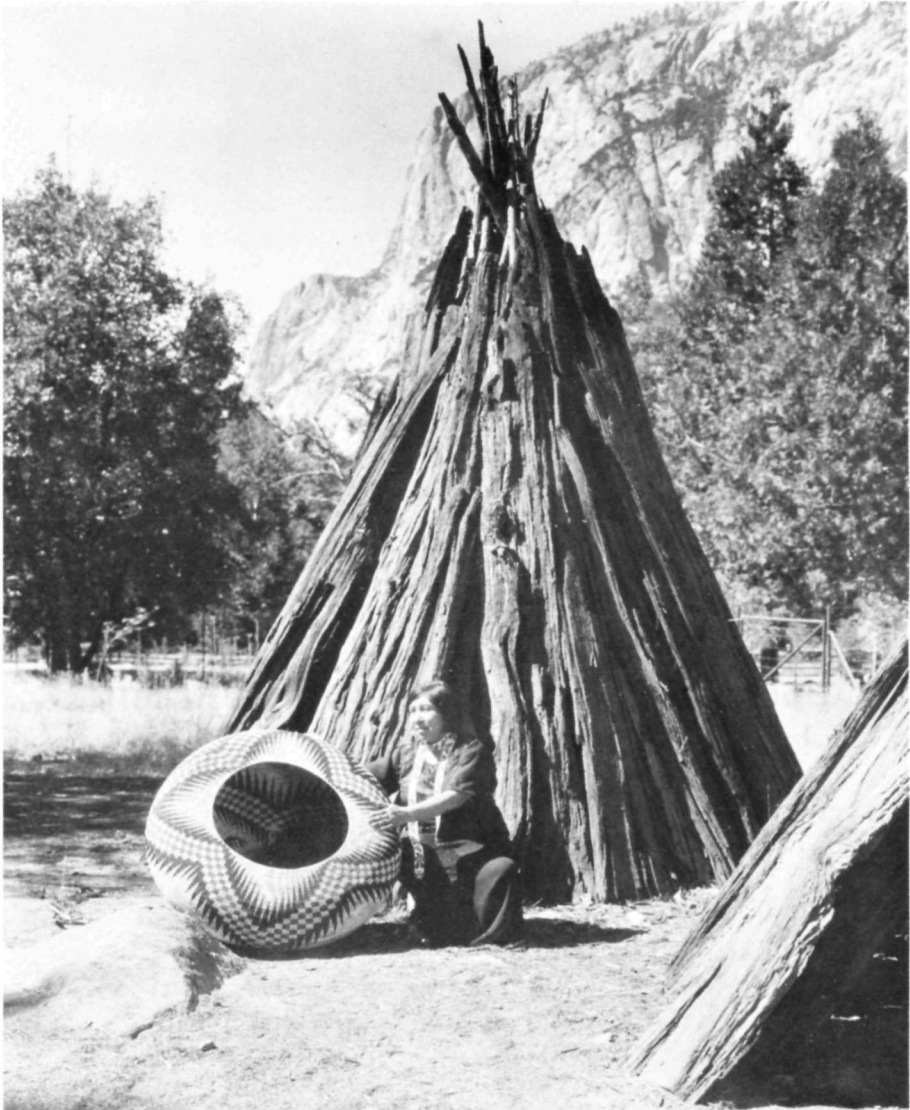
Besides **u-ma-chas** and **chuck-ahs**, the Yosemitees also built earth lodges, about forty feet in dia-



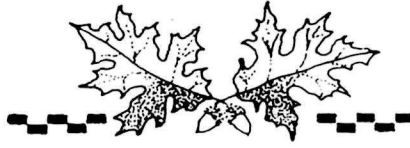
Indian Village

meter and constructed of poles and a thatch of brush over a shallow pit, for ceremonial usage. The sweathouse was a low, earth-covered structure heated by fire and used for cleanliness and curative purposes. The sweathouse was regularly used for deer-hunting pre-

parations, because sweating followed by a dip in the cold river would bring luck and make the hunter's legs strong enough to walk far without aching, as well as removing human smells from the hunter. Men with rheumatism and headache also made use of it.



Lucy Telles with a large storage basket in front of an u-ma-cha.



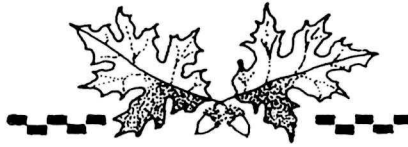
CLOTHING & HAIR DRESS

Skins from wild animals furnished clothing before the Gold Rush. In summer men wore a loin cloth of buckskin, while women wore buckskin skirts reaching from waist to knees. Children under ten years old went unclothed in warm weather. For winter, the Yosemitees wrapped themselves in blankets made from dressed skins of deer, bear, mountain lion, and coyote. The same blankets worn for warmth were used as bedclothes. The most popular blanket was made by weaving narrow strips of rabbit skins into a loose but very warm covering, using plain cord as the woof. Rabbit skins were another trade item the Yosemitees often received from the Monos and Paiutes.

Mocassins were the only style of footwear, and they were worn only in cold weather or on long, rough trips. Mocassins were fashioned out of a single piece of buckskin lined with shredded cedar bark. They were seamed up the heel and the front with milkweed fiber thread. Overlapping pieces were bound around the ankles.

At the mourning or dance ceremonials, Yosemite men wore a headband made of feathers from the red-shafted flicker and occasionally a headdress made of magpie feathers bound with sinews. Straps of eagle down draped obliquely over one shoulder and the chest and tied around the waist, along with a skin kilt of fox, coyote or wildcat completed the costume. A cape of eagle, hawk or other feathers was nearly always a part of the ceremonial costume. Other items of costuming were worn, these depending on the affluence of the wearer.

Adults wore their hair long, often to the waist, either flowing loosely or caught at the back of the neck with a feather rope or boa. They cut their hair only as a symbol of mourning by using an obsidian knife. Shampoo came from soaproot and was supposed to promote luxuriant growth. The fibers of this same plant sufficed for a hair brush. Men either permitted their beards to grow or plucked them. Flowers and feathers adorned the hair as ornaments.



CEREMONIES & CUSTOMS

Social Life

More than thirty village sites had been established in Yosemite Valley over its centuries of human occupation. Never were they occupied all at once. Some were very old, some recent; many were only summer sites, and a few were permanent, year-round locations. The villages, as the people of the band itself, divided themselves into two halves or moieties, which corresponded to the division in nature between land and water. Villages on the north side of the Merced River belonged to the land side, and that moiety took as its totemic symbol the grizzly bear, from which the name "Yosemite" originated. South of the river, the people of the water side moiety used the symbol of the coyote. Nearly all the phenomena of nature were divided into these two categories, land and water. Marriage ordinarily occurred outside one's moiety, so that relatives and possible mates were easily defined. Parents gave children names relating to the totems of their particular side. The moieties competed with each other in games and divided the responsibilities of funeral ceremonies, puberty rites, and other rituals. This division of

the band worked throughout the lives of the Yosemitees, providing a way of organizing their economic and social activities, their lines of descent and authority, and the world of the mountains in which they lived.

Medicine

The Yosemitees assumed that most ailments were caused by supernatural forces and could therefore be cured only with the aid of the supernatural. Theoretically, disease occurred with the intrusion into the body of a foreign object or spirit. The sufferer or his family called the shaman, or medicine man, believed to have acquired his powers from spirits, to remove the cause. After dancing, singing, and manipulating the patient, the shaman declared what he believed the cause to be and began sucking the affected part of the patient's body to remove the poison. Eventually, the shaman removed a dead grasshopper, lizard, pieces of straw, or some other object from his mouth, showing the patient and his relatives that the trouble had been removed. With restored confidence and the aid of herbal remedies, recovery

ordinarily followed. If the shaman was unfortunate enough to lose several patients, the relatives of the deceased might try to kill him unless he could escape to another locality.

Death and Mourning

Like other Miwok bands, the Yosemite Indians cremated their dead to liberate the spirit of the deceased. Most of the dead person's belongings, except for some reserved for the annual mourning ceremony, were placed with the body on the funeral pyre. The mourners danced around the fire chanting and wailing until the body and offerings were consumed. Most of the remains then received burial. The nearest female relatives ground up a few pieces of bone and mixed the powder with pitch, which they then wore on their faces until it came off, sometimes six months or a year later. Widows also cut or burned their hair short as a sign of mourning.

In the late summer or autumn of each year, the Yosemite Indians remembered their dead with mourning ceremony, wailing and singing for several days. At dawn on the last day of the ceremony, the mourners added to the fire food and property belonging to the dead. Dead persons of special rank or particularly beloved by their survivors were represented by effigies burned in the mourning fire. Finally, the mourners of the land moiety ceremonially washed the people of

the water side and vice versa, signifying their cleansing from the period of grief and from the restrictions of mourning.

Ceremony of Thanksgiving

The band broke up its economic activities with a cycle of ceremonies and dances. Some of these were events for fun, such as **Lole**, the women's dance. Ceremonies marked the seasons, celebrated the



Francisco, an early day Yosemite in dance costume. (Boysen photo)

coming of age of boys and girls, reenacted tales of the band's history and mythology, appealed to

the spirits of the natural world for abundant game and harvests, or entreated with totemic spirits for

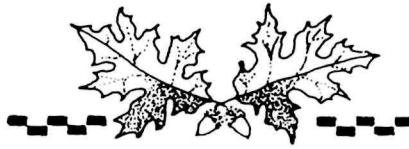
protection and good fortune. The regular performance of the cycle of the stability of the world.



Lee-mee (Chris Brown) wearing ceremonial dance costume. (Boysen photo)

One annual event, the acorn ceremony, occurred in the fall of each year after the acorn harvest. For three days and nights the participants danced and fasted; many dressed in costumes representing the animals and spirits which had helped them. On the fourth day, selected women prepared acorn mush and other food for the feast. When the food was ready, everyone joining the feast began to dance, moving slowly around the fire in a large circle, chanting and shaking their rattles vigorously over the flames. One of the women terminated this dance just before the

feast by spreading acorn gruel four times around the edge of the fire, so that it might burn and be carried into the air in four directions to be eaten by the spirits of the dead. No one dared eat of the new acorn crop until the spirits had thus been satisfied. After the feast, dancing continued far into the night: a fire dance as a tribute to the fire that heated the cooking stones; a stone dance in appreciation of the hot stones that cooked the acorn mush; and a basket dance to the basket which held the mush.



YOSEMITE INDIAN LEGENDS

The stories about "Ahwahnee" told by the Yosemiteites were their means of explaining and ordering their world. They told stories for enjoyment during the cold winter months, but the tales also embodied the history of the band and lent a continuity to its past as they passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. Value systems, behavioral guides, explanations of creation and custom, life philosophies--all of these were elements of legends which not only outlined a view of the uni-

verse but defined the relationship of the band and its members to that universe. The three legends which follow tell of the origin of several of the most prominent features of Yosemite Valley--El Capitan, the massive cliff at the lower end of the valley; the Lost Arrow, a spectacular shaft of rock jutting out from the cliff just to the east of Yosemite Falls; and Half Dome, Royal Arches, Washington Column, and Basket Dome at the upper end of the valley.

Legend of El Capitan

Long, long ago there lived in the valley of Ahwahnee two cub bears. One hot day they slipped away from their mother and went down to the river for a swim. When they came out of the water, they were so tired that they lay down to rest on an immense, flat boulder and fell fast asleep. While they slumbered, the huge rock began to rise slowly until at length it towered into the blue sky far above the tree tops, and woolly, white clouds fell over the sleeping cubs like fleecy coverlets.

The distracted mother bear searched in vain for her two cubs,

and, although she questioned every animal in the valley, not one could give her a clue about what had happened to them. At last To-tah-kan, the sharp-eyed crane, discovered them still asleep on top of the great rock. Then the mother bear became more anxious than ever lest her cubs should awaken and feel so frightened upon finding themselves up near the blue sky that they would jump off and be killed.

All the other animals in the valley felt very sorry for the mother bear and promised to help rescue the cubs. Gathering together, each attempted to climb the great rock,



El Capitan

but it was slippery as glass, and their feet would not hold. Little field mouse climbed two feet and became frightened; the rat fell backward and lost hold after three feet; the fox went a bit higher, but it was no use. The larger animals could not do much better, although they tried so hard that to this day one can see the dark scratches of their feet at the base of the rock.

When all had given up, along came the tiny measuring worm. "I believe I can climb up to the top and bring the cubs down," it courageously announced.

The other animals all sneered and made sport of this boast from one of the most insignificant of their number, but the measuring worm paid no attention to their

insults and immediately began the perilous ascent. "Too-tack, too-tack, To-tokan-oo-lah," it chanted, and its feet clung even to that polished surface. Higher and higher it went until the animals below began to realize that the measuring worm was not so stupid after all.

Midway the great rock flared, and the measuring worm clung at a dizzy height only by its front feet. Continuing to chant its song, the frightened measuring worm managed to twist its body and to take a zig-zag course, which made the climb a great deal longer but much safer. Weak and exhausted, it reached the top of the great rock at last, awakened the cubs, and miraculously guided them safely down to their anxious mother. All the animals were overjoyed with the return of the cubs and loudly sung the praises of the measuring worm. As a token of honor the animals decided to name the great rock "To-to-kan-oo-lah" for the measuring worm.

Legend of Lost Arrow

Tee-hee-neh, a beautiful maiden, was betrothed to Kos-soo-kah, who was fearless and bold with his spear and bow. At dawn on the day before their marriage, Kos-soo-kah made ready with other men to go into the mountains to hunt deer, bear, rabbit, and grouse for the wedding feast. Before leaving, he slipped away from the other hunters to meet Tee-hee-neh, his bride, who was waiting nearby.

As they parted, Kos-soo-kah said, "We go to hunt now, but at the end of the day, I will shoot an arrow from the cliff between Cho-look, the high fall, and Le-hamite, the canyon of the arrow-wood, and by the number of feathers you will know what kill has been made."

Tee-hee-neh happily assisted the women preparing acorn bread and other food for the marriage celebration until the appointed time when she was to wait at the foot of the high fall for the arrow message from Kos-soo-kah. Hour after hour she waited until gradually the joy she had known was replaced with fear and concern for her lover's safety. At last, unable to bear her anguish any longer, she decided to climb the rugged and difficult trail that led to the top of the cliff.

"Kos-soo-kah," she called again and again, but the only answer was the faint echoing of her own voice. Breathless, frightened, and her heart heavy with dreaded fear that Kos-soo-kah had met with harm, she reached the summit. Seeing footprints in the direction of the cliff, she moved toward the edge, alarmed not for her own safety but for what she might behold. As she leaned over and looked down, she gave a piercing cry of despair, for in the starlight she beheld the still form of her loved one lying on a ledge below with the spent bow in his hand. She remembered that at the hour of sunset, while she had stood waiting for Kos-soo-kah's arrow to fall,



Lost Arrow

she had heard the distant, thunder-like rumble of a rockslide. Her despair was almost overwhelming as she realized that, while her faithful Kos-soo-kah had stood on the edge of the cliff to draw his bow, he had been caught in the unexpected slide of earth that had hurled him to his doom.

A faint hope stirred in Tee-hee-neh's heart. Perhaps Kos-soo-kah was still alive. To summon assistance as quickly as possible, she frantically collected cones and dead limbs to light a signal fire for urgent help. Although numbed with grief, she kept the fire bright and high for several hours before men from the valley and others returning from the hunt in the high country were able to reach her. Quickly they made a pole

from lengths of tamarack fastened securely with thongs of hide from the deer that had been killed for the marriage feast. Although exhausted, Tee-hee-neh was the first to descend to the ledge where Kos-soo-kah lay. As she knelt beside him and listened for breath, her own heartbeat almost stopped, for the brave Kos-soo-kah was cold and still. Without a murmur, she motioned for the men above to lift her.

Tee-hee-neh's wedding day had dawned by the time the men had raised the body of Kos-soo-kah to the top of the cliff where the others waited. As his lifeless form was placed gently on the ground, Tee-hee-neh knelt beside him, and, with tears streaming down her cheeks, she repeated his name over and over, as though by doing so she could call him back to her. Suddenly she fell forward on Kos-soo-kah's breast as her spirit too departed to join his.

With great wailing and mourning, the two lovers and all their belongings were placed for cremation on the funeral pyre in accordance with the burial custom. In Kos-soo-kah's hand was the fatal bow, but the arrow had been lost forever. In its stead the spirits lodged a pointed column of rock in the cliff between Cho-look, the high fall, and Le-hamite, the canyon of arrow-wood, in memory of the faithful Kos-soo-kah, who met his death in keeping a promise to Tee-hee-neh. Ever since this rock has been known as Hum-mo, the Lost Arrow.

Legend of Half Dome

Many, many generations ago, long before the gods had completed the fashioning of the magnificent cliffs of the valley of Ahwahnee, there dwelt far off in the arid plains a woman named Tis-sa-ack and her husband Nangas. Learning from other Indians of the beautiful and fertile valley of Ahwahnee, they decided to go there and make it their dwelling place. Their journey led them over rugged terrain, steep canyons, and through dense forests. Tis-sa-ack carried on her back a heavy burden basket filled with acorns and other articles, as well as a baby carrier. Nangas followed at a short distance carrying his bow, arrows, and a rude staff.

After days and days of weary travelling, they entered the valley of Ahwahnee. Nangas, being tired, hungry, and very thirsty, lost his temper and struck Tis-sa-ack a sharp blow across the shoulders with his staff. Such mistreatment was contrary to custom, and Tis-sa-ack became terrified and ran eastward from her husband.

As she went, the gods caused the path she took to become the course of a stream, and the acorns that dropped from her burden basket sprang up into stalwart oaks. When Tis-sa-ack reached Mirror Lake, her thirst was so great that she drank every drop of the cool, quiet water. Nangas caught up with Tis-sa-ack and saw that there was no water left to quench his thirst. His anger then knew no bounds, and again he struck her

with his staff. Tis-sa-ack ran from him, but he pursued her and continued to beat her.

Looking down on them, the gods were sorely displeased. "Tis-sa-ack and Nangas have broken the spell of peace," they said. "Let us transform them into cliffs of granite that face each other so that they will be forever parted."

As she fled, Tis-sa-ack tossed aside the heavy burden basket,

which, landing upside down, immediately became Basket Dome. Next she threw the baby carrier to the north wall of the canyon, and it became Royal Arches. Nangas was then changed into Washington Column and Tis-sa-ack into Half Dome. The dark streaks that mar the face of this great cliff were the tears that Tis-sa-ack shed as she ran from her angry husband.



Half Dome from Glacier Point

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*Discovery of Yosemite Valley by whites had occurred earlier. In the fall of 1833, a party of approximately forty men under Joseph Reddeford Walker passed through the area just north of Yosemite Valley. Unfamiliarity with the region, its rugged terrain, lack of supplies, and the lateness of the season combined to make their journey over the Sierra a long and extremely arduous one. While scouting for a suitable westward route through the mountains, members of Walker's party first saw the valley from the north rim. "On making several attempts (to enter the valley) we found it utterly impossible for a man to descend, to say nothing of our horses," wrote one of the party, and they followed the ridge above the rim toward the San Joaquin Valley. Tenaya and the old Ahwahneechees remembered Walker's crossing, but thought he had not seen Yosemite Valley.

In the fall of 1849, an itinerant millwright, William Abrams, and a friend followed the tracks of a grizzly until they got lost in the mountains. "We found our way to camp over an Indian trail that led past a valley enclosed by stupendous cliffs rising perhaps 3000 feet from their base and which gave us cause for wonder." They noted Bridalveil Falls and Half Dome but did not enter the Valley in their haste to return to camp.

SOURCES OF QUOTATIONS

1. "deep, grassy valley" - page 3 line 21 — L. H. Bunnell, **Discovery of the Yosemite** (Los Angeles: G. W. Gerlicher, 1911), p. 73; Richard J. Hartesveldt, "Yosemite Valley Place Names," **Yosemite Nature Notes**, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1 (Jan., 1955), p. 2.
2. "a fatal black sickness" - page 3 line 1 — Bunnell, p. 72.
3. "grizzly bear" - page 3 line 35 — Alfred L. Kroeber, "Indians of Yosemite," in Ansel F. Hall, ed., **Handbook of Yosemite National Park** (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921), pp. 59-61.
4. "by a frightful 'Rock Chief,' . . ." - page 4 line 41 — Bunnell, p. 40.
5. "If I ever have a chance . . ." - page 5 line 1 — Bunnell, p. 45.
6. "My people do not want to go . . ." - page 5 line 21 — Bunnell, p. 55.
"do not make a treaty," - page 5 line 28 — Bunnell, p. 55.
7. Footnote quote "On making several attempts, . . ." - page 6 line 34
Zenas Leonard, **Adventures of Zenas Leonard, Fur Trader**, edited by John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), p. 79.
8. "this wonderful valley." - page 6 line 9 — Bunnell, p. 64.
"their prime object was to . . ." - page 6 line 11 — Bunnell, p. 64
9. Footnote quote "we found our way to camp over an Indian trail . . ." - page 34 line 12 — Weldon F. Heald, *The Abrams Diary*, **Sierra Club Bulletin**, Vol. 32, No. 5 (May, 1947), p. 126.
10. "I am too old to climb the rocks": "When I was a boy, . . ." - page 7 line 3 — Bunnell, p. 83.
11. "The prospect that (this fire) offers to my mind . . ." - page 8 line 17 — Bunnell, p. 92.
12. "Got no shirt—got no pontoon . . ." - page 8 line 32 — C. P. Russell, "A Last Link with the Past," **Yosemite Nature Notes**, Vol. VII, No. 6 (June, 1928), p. 42.
13. "as he raised his head, . . ." - page 9 line 16 — Bunnell, p. 173.
14. Tenaya's speech, "Kill me sir captain! . . ." - page 9 line 36 — Bunnell, p. 177.
15. "Are you ready now to go to . . ." - page 9 line 20 — Bunnell, p. 234.
16. "All gone, long, long time 'go . . ." - page 10 line 40 — Mrs. H. I. Taylor, **The Last Survivor** (San Francisco: Johnck & Seeger, 1932), p. 3.

