

Yosemite Nature Notes



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Photo by Ralph Anderson

The view south from the summit of Mt. Dana. Mt. Lyell and the Lyell Glacier to the right of Center.

Cover Photo: The High Sierra from Sentinel Dome, Yosemite Valley. By Ansel Adams from "Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada," text by John Muir, 64 photographs by Ansel Adams. Reproduction by kind permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.

Yosemite Nature Notes

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HIKING MOUNT DANA

By Shirley Sargent

Just as Yosemite is a rubberneck's paradise, so is it a challenge. Few visitors, however, take advantage of the many fine trails maintained by the National Park Service for their enjoyment, preferring instead to gather fleeting impressions from the windows of their speeding cars. Walking as well as exploring seems to be becoming a lost art. But for those lured from cars there is a special thrill that comes in discovering beauty alone. I first realized this truth in 1936 when I climbed Mount Dana.

While construction was underway on the new Tioga Road, on which my father—Robert C. Sargent—was an engineer, our family was living in Tuolumne Meadows. One Saturday a party consisting of my father, Frank Swan, two of his sons, and I drove to the Tioga Pass entrance, parked our car in full view of Tioga Lake, and set off toward reddish Mount Dana rearing high above the boggy Dana Meadows.

To a 9-year-old the goal looked impressive, but actually our hike was comparatively short, as the altitude at Tioga Pass was a breathtaking 9,941 feet and the top of Dana itself 13,050 feet—a difference of a little over 3,000 feet. The cold wind sweeping through the pass and

down from the snow-covered mountains was exhilarating as we stepped up our pace. Frequently we had to detour around small, jewel-like lakes that dotted the meadows like stones in a necklace. Some of these lakes deserved the name, but many were no larger than ponds. Their depth was surprising and the deep blue of the water glinted in the afternoon sun. When we reached the base of Mount Dana we struck a fair path, worn by other hikers, and almost immediately started upward. The change in surroundings was startlingly abrupt. One minute we had been striding through tall meadow grasses, commenting upon the variety of wildflowers; the next we were hiking over firm, bare earth, past the last straggly pines, and soon footing it over packed heaps of talus.

To anyone knowing the high country of Yosemite, our climb can immediately be transferred into remembered color and feel. For the sky was that sharp, vivid blue that made of the mountains etchings, and the meadows below were spring-green, specked with the contrasting blue of glacial lakes. When we paused to rest there was beauty below, with, and above us. Such beauty as to make hearts ache and to bring knowing to a child's wide-eyed gaze.

*Photo by Ralph Anderson*

Mammoth Mountain from Dana Meadows.

Although we had taken our jackets off, as we climbed higher the air thinned to a coldness that made exercise welcome. It seemed to me that the trail was taking us away from our destination — the peak which we could no longer see—but my father explained that this was the easiest ascent. When we came in view of the first snowbank, our hike was interrupted for a snowball fight. This snow was unsullied, pure white, and icy cold as it melted in my mouth and down my back. As we went on I began to hear sounds of running water and, failing to find any signs of a river, called my father's attention to it. He laughed, explaining that the noise was made by rivulets of melting snow running in an underground stream. To me that was mysterious and something of a miracle. On my hands and knees, I put an ear to the rocks, listening to the merry gurgling of the stream beneath me.

Voices echoed down, shouting for me to come on. The climb was steeper now, over moraine. Snowbanks were scarcer at this height; we were nearing the summit. Sharp rocks seemed to be cutting through the soles of my old sneakers. About 500 feet from the top I discovered that the soles of my shoes had actually worn through. My father carried me until we came to a fairly level area where we stood among piles of boulders and jagged rock debris. The incomparable view held us silent.

Dana is but one of the mountains towering in a range curving north and south; others are Gibbs, Lewis, Mammoth, and Parker. Below, to the west, stretched Tuolumne Meadows gashed by the Tuolumne River, knobby glacial domes, and forested belts, not to mention the lakes. Those lakes we had seen while hiking across the meadow were nothing in comparison to the numerous ones

we could see now, gleaming blue in the sun. Within a few minutes I counted 42. When we turned to the eastern view we were handicapped by not being on the summit, from which, the Swans reported, Mono Lake, the Nevada desert, and barren mountains could be seen. Because of the condition of my sneakers it was impossible for me to climb the last 200 or 300 feet. However, my father and I could see the large glacial lake at the base of Mount Dana. Walking cautiously, I marveled at the mass of tumbled rocks of odd shapes and sizes. It

was simple to slip into eerie, rock-scooped caves until my father stopped me.

My heart thrilled to the panorama spread before us. The road—so far away—was nothing more than a track for beetles. The sense of pioneering was strong within me, although John Muir had first climbed Mount Dana on September 1, 1869, and many others had followed in his footsteps over the years; but still we had achieved a goal and knew a beauty that could never have been ours from a car window.

GLACIER POINT IN WINTER — THE SKUNKS IN THE KITCHEN

By Dorothy R. Mayer¹

One day after an unusually severe cold spell at Glacier Point, we opened the door of the closet for the water heater and were somewhat disconcerted to see two gleaming eyes gazing mildly at us. They belonged to a spotted skunk who was sitting complacently on the hot water tank warming his feet. He must have followed the pack rat's trail to this cozy, warm haven during the cold weather, a circuitous route over the balcony roof, down through the walls, between the floors, and a resounding scramble down the pipes.

Reluctant to startle him in this position, we thought it would be more diplomatic to make friends and thereupon offered him some food. At first a little shy, he was soon tempted right out into the kitchen, where he hungrily ate some bits of bacon and other scraps. He was very demure but quite unafraid.

Next day, having spread the good news of his find, he returned with his mate, who was more reticent but enjoyed the snack when placed in the closet. Thereafter we were coerced into feeding them both every day. We could hear their rather heavy footsteps as they trotted expectantly above the ceiling and scrambled down the pipes every night and often during the day. They behaved with perfect decorum until one night they descended into their dark chamber as usual and found it already occupied.

There was a series of low growls and then a mad scrambling up the pipes, sounding as though several animals were trying to escape in unison. Considerable scuffling overhead ensued, between the rafters and in the walls, with assorted growls and squeaks punctuated by heavy thumps. Then the inevitable

1. Mr. and Mrs. Mayer were in charge of the Mountain House at Glacier Point during the winter and were isolated most of the time.—Ed.

happened: a pungent and all pervasive aroma began to encompass us, rendering the act of breathing most difficult if not well nigh impossible. We were comfortably ensconced in bed and certainly did not relish the thought of shifting to other cold and airy quarters in the middle of the night, but there was no alternative. Gradually the fumes of battle wore away and the atmosphere returned to normal. In a few days it was again possible to occupy our own quarters.

We found the newcomer was a marten who, by some mysterious grapevine, evidently had secret information about the skunks' cozy, warm room and free handout. We now had a problem on our hands. There seemed to be no way of stopping these ill-assorted animals from coming in and we did not care for a repeat performance between the walls. However, they seemed to settle their differences between themselves, for the nocturnal visits continued and they somehow managed to evade each other. At least there was no obvious evidence of any encounters, though the traffic overhead was fairly heavy all night.

When the weather improved, the skunks would not turn up for several days at a time, but always returned with the next snowfall. Then one night after a short absence, we heard a new commotion overhead

and a new voice—a high, thin trilling which sounded like a nest full of baby birds. At first we thought the pack rats had produced a new family and began to worry about the marten and his nocturnal prowlings. But in the morning, hearing the twittering repeated in the water heater closet, we opened the door, and there was a young skunk sitting before a plate of food we had placed there, and squealing at the top of his voice. In the background shadows was the mother accompanying him in a slightly lower key. He was evidently being introduced to his new surroundings and the occasion was a very exciting one, calling for much comment. He next received instructions on ascending the slippery pipes. With a great deal of slipping and sliding, he managed to scramble to the floor above while his mother looked on approvingly.

The baby's face was no larger than a quarter and broken into patches of black and white, merging into four white stripes running down the back and ending in a feathery, white-tipped plume.

As our family increased when spring arrived, the Mountain House awakened to new life. Every day the rafters resounded with strange and mysterious activities — gnawing, thumping, squealing, and running feet. It sounded like a veritable zoo awakening after a winter's sleep.



**A NEW BIRD RECORD—
RAVEN OBSERVED NEAR MARIPOSA GROVE**

By O. L. Wallis, Park Ranger

While searching for the carcass of a deer at the edge of the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoias this summer, I chanced upon a unique observation — the discovery of an American raven (*Corvus corax sinuatus*), which previously had been unrecorded from Yosemite National Park.

On August 19, 1950, a visitor reported that an ailing doe too weak to stand was lying near the Clothespin Tree. When I investigated shortly afterwards, I found that the deer had already died of natural causes. The body was removed to a spot just off the fireroad near the southern boundary of the park where for several days it remained undisturbed by the many carrion feeders. On August 24 the deer had disappeared. By following bits of hair on logs and rocks and the ground disturbances, I was able to trace for about 150 yards the path over which the animal remains had been dragged. As I was nearing the end of the search, a raven flew up from the carcass.

Already the deer had been torn apart and much of it eaten. Scats of coyote and bear at the immediate site indicated that these animals, also, had eaten of the remains. Evidently a bear had hauled the body that distance. (Incidentally, on September 13, 9½-inch bear tracks were observed on the fireroad near this spot.)

The occurrence of the raven within Yosemite National Park was not recorded in the studies and checklists of the bird life of the park in any of the references listed below. Grinnell and Storer (1924) stated that the "Conditions in the Yosemite region do not seem to be attractive to the Western Raven, . . . Elsewhere in the Sierra Nevada the species is common locally, . . . The general lack of cattle, with which the raven is so often associated, may be partial explanation of the absence of the species from the Yosemite region."

The area in which I saw the raven on August 24 is at the edge of open, cut-over land outside the park, which is used for summer pasturage for cattle. I considered it more typical of the ordinary habitat of the raven than most of the land within the park.

It is of considerable interest to add the raven, rare as it probably is within the area, to the park checklist of birds. The raven is the largest local member of the family Corvidae which includes the jays, magpies, and crows. Other members of this family found in Yosemite National Park are the following: Blue-fronted jay, long-tailed or California jay, American or black-billed magpie, yellow-billed magpie, western crow, pinon jay, and Clark nutcracker or Clark crow.

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NOTES ON BRYOPHYTES SEEN ALONG YOSEMITE TRAILS

By Sol A. Karlin, Field School, 1950

Perhaps the reader is not familiar with the term "bryophyte." This term applies to the primitive group of green land plants which are best characterized by their lack of specialized water-conducting tissue (xylem, or woody cells) and which often assist in making possible the life of the larger land plants. In general, the bryophytes are divided into two main groups. One group, the liverworts (Hepaticae), are distinguished by their flat or scale-like body (thallus) growing on the ground or on rocks or trees. The other group, the mosses (Musci), may be described as mostly small plants having simple stems and leaves, the leaves being variously attached to the stem. All members of the bryophyte clan are propagated and dispersed by means of spores—microscopic one-celled particles of living matter (protoplasm) capable of reproducing the plant. Also, all bryophytes at some stage of their life history have a similar means of sexual reproduction. Male and female germ cells will fuse to form a single cell called a zygote which will develop into the spore-bearing structure called a sporophyte (fruiting body).

The summer of 1950 in Yosemite was a good one for collecting bryophytes because many of the forms were found in excellent fruiting condition. Perhaps this was due to the unusual wet weather experienced this season. The author must confess that his attention was not focused upon the mosses until a thunder-

storm drenched his campsite. Somehow the mosses were transformed from drab grays into brilliant hues of green found everywhere on the ground, on granite boulders, and even on the tree trunks.

Many specimens were collected on the various field trips made by the Field School. Good material—that is, a moss in fruiting condition—is difficult to find. Keen observation is required! The capsule, or spore-containing sac, of a moss plant is the key to its identification, just as is the flower of a seed-bearing plant. The specimens were dried and placed aside after each trip. Somehow time couldn't be found for research until the very end of the season. It was not until then that some fundamental discoveries were made. First, the herbarium contained no available samples of mosses. Second, the library didn't have a copy of a recent standard work on mosses.

The specimens were taken to the herbarium of the University of California at Los Angeles where identification was undertaken. Dr. Mildred Mathias of the herbarium suggested that an expert on California mosses should be contacted because of the pioneering nature of this work. After several letters of inquiry, we obtained the help of Dr. L. F. Koch, author of the most recent annotated list of species of California mosses.¹

As determined by Dr. Koch, the following list of mosses was collected in Yosemite National Park between June 26 and August 12, 1950:

1. Koch, L. F. (1950) *Leaflets of Western Botany* (6) 1. San Francisco.

Aulacomnium androgynum (Hedw.) Schw.
Aulacomnium palustre (Hedw.) Schw.
Brachythecium lamprochryseum C. Muel. &
 Kindb. var. *giganteum* Grout
Bryum spp. (2)
Bryum caespiticiu Hedw.
Dicranoweissia cirrata (Hedw.) Lindb.
Drepanocladus uncinatus (Hedw.) Warnst.
Eurhynchium stokesii (Smith) Schp.
Fontinalis neomexicana Sull. & Lesq.
Funaria hygrometrica Hedw.
Grimmia montana Bruch.
Homalothecium nevadense Lesq., Ren. &
 Card.
Leptobryum pyriforme (Hedw.) Schp.
Orthotrichum lyellii Hook. & Taylor
Philonotis americana Dism.
Philonotis fontana (Hedw.) Brid.
Pohlia cruda (Hedw.) Lindb.
Pohlia drummondii (C. Muel.) Andrews
Pohlia nutans (Hedw.) Lindb.
Polytrichum juniperinum Hedw.
Polytrichum piliferum Hedw.

This is but a sample of what may be found; Yosemite National Park undoubtedly has a rich moss flora yet to be discovered. Only two liverworts were identified in the field, as listed below:

Marchantia polymorpha L. Only fe-

male colonies, or clones, were discovered, and these were in excellent fruiting condition. Locations: the stream below the ski lodge at Badger Pass, July 6; Bridalveil Creek at the Pohono Trail, southwest bank, July 7. The female clones reproduce vegetatively in two ways: (1) by the division of the dichotomous branches as the older parts decay, thus forming large fan-shaped colonies, and (2) by vegetative buds called gemmae. Apparently at these sites sexual reproduction does not occur. Upon careful observation with a 9x hand lens no sporophytes were found.

Riccia fluitans L. This is a small, thin, ribbon-like liverwort; it is bisexual, with spore cases being enclosed within the thallus. Location: common in the Gaylor Lakes region, it was especially abundant in the bed of a drying vernal pool just below Granite Lakes, July 28.

PRIVATELY OWNED LANDS WITHIN NATIONAL PARKS AND MONUMENTS

By Arthur Nelson, Field School, 1950

Probably not one person in a thousand who visit our national parks or monuments realizes that some state and privately owned lands exist within the boundaries of these areas. In 1947 such non-federal land amounted to some 600,000 acres and was evaluated at approximately 20 million dollars. In the past there has been very little money available to the National Park Service for the purchase of these holdings. The situation was improved somewhat during the fiscal years of 1948 and 1949 when \$200,000 was appropriated by Congress each year for land acquisition. This money made it possible to purchase a few key properties, but

at this annual rate it would take at least 100 years to buy them all up.

The question might be asked as to how and why this non-federally owned land exists within the national parks and monuments. The primary reason, at least for the western areas, lies in the land policies of the Federal Government during the expansion of the United States after the Revolutionary War.

The Federal Government acquired vast areas of land through the Louisiana Purchase, the Mexican Purchase, and other acquisitions. Large segments of these areas were later given or sold to individuals,

companies, or states under the provisions of various public land laws. There were several reasons for disposing of these lands. One reason was that the Government needed money. Another was that it wished to encourage the settlement of the West by farmers and stockmen. The Government also gave away this land to promote the establishment of schools and colleges, and transcontinental railroads were subsidized through the disposal of considerable areas of this public domain.

As a result, lands which were later to be within the boundaries of national parks and monuments passed out of the possession of the Federal Government. It was in this manner that privately owned holdings became established within what is now Yosemite National Park.

Two examples will illustrate what has happened to some of these private lands in this park.

In 1859 the first homestead in Yosemite Valley was taken up by James C. Lamon. This area of 160 acres was located near the present Camp Curry. Lamon planted the two apple orchards which are still to be found in that vicinity. In 1864 the Federal Government by act of Congress ceded the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove region to the State of California for the establishment of the Yosemite Grant for public use and enjoyment. The terms of this grant did not recognize the claims of settlers to privately owned lands in the grant; so Lamon and the other homesteaders were forced to give up their properties. Later, in 1874, the State of California compensated the settlers for their loss. The net result was that the Yosemite Grant was free of private claims after 1866. Thus, when the State receded the grant back to the

Federal Government in 1905, no land ownership problems complicated the administration of this area.

Unfortunately the situation was not so simple in the case of the lands outside of the original Yosemite Grant but which were destined to be included within the much larger Yosemite National Park. Many parcels of land were taken up by miners and homesteaders until 1890 when Yosemite National Park was established by Congress. One such homesteader was John Baptiste Lember. In 1885 Lember took up a homestead of 160 acres in the Soda Springs area of Tuolumne Meadows. He raised goats on this land until the winter of 1889-90 when he lost his herd in a severe storm. Then he turned to the collecting of plant and insect specimens for a livelihood.

In 1890 Yosemite National Park was created surrounding the already existing state park. However, the claims of private settlers were not voided as had been the case with the Yosemite Grant; so privately owned lands remained established within the national park. Lember did not have final title to his land in 1890, but in 1895 he was issued a patent to it. He died during the winter of 1896-97, and the property passed to his brother, Jacob. The land was then sold to the McCauley brothers in 1898, and finally it was purchased by the Sierra Club in 1912. The Sierra Club still retains ownership of this property.

During the past two years Yosemite National Park has been fortunate in that a large share of the money appropriated by Congress for land acquisition has been spent in this park. This has made possible the purchase of several important private holdings. One of these is the former Murphy Estate of 160 acres

along Tenaya Lake. This was a desirable purchase because part of the public campground at Tenaya Lake is situated on this land. The Gentry tract of 148 acres is in the process of being acquired. This property is located on the north rim of Yosemite Valley immediately to the west of El Capitan. The Scroggs property of approximately 51 acres has been purchased recently. This land is located in back of the Wawona Hotel in an area known as Section 35. Several other tracts of land have been acquired.

But more privately owned lands still remain within the park, some of which should be purchased as soon as possible. For example, logging operations are being carried out on privately owned tracts at Aspen Valley and East Meadow. A sportsmen's club has been negotiating for the privately owned land along

Johnson Lake. It hardly need be said that neither of these cases fits into the national park concept.

Although the Scroggs property in Section 35 has been purchased, there still remain considerable private holdings in that section constituting a serious problem of park administration.

Not all the privately owned lands within Yosemite National Park have been mentioned, but the ones which have been cited are good examples of why such tracts within this and other national parks and monuments should be acquired by the Federal Government as soon as possible. Persons interested in the welfare of these natural wilderness reserves should give their support to the various conservation organizations which are attempting to have an effective program of land acquisition—passed by the United States Congress.



Tenaya Lake

Photo by Ralph Anderson

DIGEST OF THE PURPOSES OF THE
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Yosemite National Park, California

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