

Spring 5-11-2019

Urban in Nature: Yosemite, Cars, and California's Cities, 1913–1970

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**URBAN IN NATURE:
YOSEMITE, CARS, AND CALIFORNIA'S CITIES, 1913–1970**

by

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B.A., Lewis & Clark College, 2008
M.A., University of New Mexico, 2014

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
History**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May 2019

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Yosemite, Cars, and California's Cities, 1913–1970**

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ABSTRACT

The impacts of national parks do not stop at their borders, and neither should their histories. Located less than a day's drive from California's biggest cities, Yosemite National Park remains a product of their combined influences. "Urban in Nature" is a relational history of the park and its nearby metropolitan areas like Merced (70 miles away), Berkeley (180), San Francisco (200), and Los Angeles (300).

Since the advent of the automobile Yosemite has been a mirror of the state's urban areas, rather than an escape from them. Passenger cars drove Yosemite's urbanization in two interconnected ways. Firstly, increasing amounts of tourist traffic in the early 1900s forced National Park Service personnel to construct increasingly sophisticated built environment; this process is especially evident in Yosemite Valley, a spectacular chasm containing waterfalls, sheer cliffs, and—most importantly—tens of thousands of humans at any given time. Secondly, automobiles served as cross-pollinators between the park and urban California, facilitating a statewide exchange of ideas, architecture, and political allegiances. In both its physical form and its connections to other cities, Yosemite Valley became "urban in nature."

This study expands the political, economic, and cultural significance of areas that are often considered escapes from urban industrial society. I argue that, on the contrary,

places like Yosemite are integral parts of the world outside their gates. It has become common to bemoan the level of development in America's national parks, but I argue that we must acknowledge their connections with urban spaces in order to reach a more nuanced understanding of the interdependency between nature and civilization.

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Introduction

National parks, especially those in the American West, are a relatively new nation's claim to an ancient past. They uniquely American landscapes that have helped define the United States as separate (and maybe better) than its antecedents in Western Europe. Their isolation only adds to their mystique. Certainly, then, these parks—Yellowstone, Glacier, Mesa Verde—cannot really have neighbors; they might as well exist on another plane of being. Yosemite may be a *national* park, but it also belongs to the cities and towns around it.

America's national parks have well-defined geographic boundaries, but their influence often strays beyond them. Parks are often considered museums of older (and simpler) times, but Brown's letter illuminates just how connected they can be. Ever since the first automobile entered its gates, Yosemite served as the crossroads of a massive transportation network linking California's coastal cities—and thus its highest concentrations of potential tourists—with smaller towns on the way to the park. These were not merely one-way relationships; Yosemite's built environment and its highway system changed in tandem with the needs of an increasingly mobile state.

Yosemite's increasingly smooth roads and its ever-growing parking lots hosted cars, and lots of them; however, these vehicles carried less tangible cargo—ideas, expectations, building types, political power, and even police intelligence—into the park. In the pages that follow, I will explore Yosemite's influence on the Golden State's university system, tourist patterns, extractive industry, highway building, city planning,

and law enforcement. Although created by federal action, Yosemite owes its modern form to years of interchange with cities across California.

Until recently, though, the chroniclers of national parks thought at considerably smaller scales. Historians have spent many years (and lots of ink) trying to unpack the contradictory language in the National Park Service's Organic Act (1916), which charged the nascent agency with both preserving land *and* developing for tourism. This tricky language has kept many historians busy for a long time. When Yosemite does appear in a textbook, it is likely regarding the controversial damming of Hetch Hetchy Valley to provide water and power for San Francisco—the fight that cemented John Muir's national reputation. The Park Service did not eliminate the need for impassioned wilderness defenders; in fact, the agency is constantly charged with overdeveloping the nation's most precious lands. Some of the most useful histories of the National Park Service investigate the agency's conflicted relationship to its lofty environmental goals. A newer cadre of historians have ventured farther afield, linked by a postmodernist desire to question the wilderness/civilization binary. Inspired by these broader histories of national parks, I expand Yosemite's story beyond the stock narrative of federal preservation in the American West.¹

1. A quick read of the National Park Service Organic Act (1916) reveals language fraught with loopholes, the most glaring being the pledge to “conserve the scenery” and simultaneously “provide for the enjoyment of the same.” To this day, historians of Yosemite—and other parks—focus on the contradictions of this mission statement. Muir and Pinchot's disagreement over the damming of Hetch Hetchy epitomizes a similar binary that has become indispensable (perhaps too much so) in the histories of our nation's parks. Many academics use the Mission 66 era (1956-1966), which brought features of the modern landscape (like highways and malls) into the parks, as another case study in the debate between conservation and preservation.

Some scholars address this tension by acknowledging the Park Service's ignorance of scientific and issues. The agency's origins, they argue, were much more cultural than environmental. See Stanford E. Demars, *The Tourist in Yosemite, 1855-1985* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991); Alfred Runte, *National Parks : The American Experience* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); and Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks : A History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997). Runte's book on Yosemite takes a similar tack, dooming the Park Service's

Internal combustion technology allows residents of the West to bridge the gaps between urban and rural faster and more frequently than ever. It has become almost cliché to note that a region known for its rugged landscapes now houses some of the nation's most powerful metropolitan areas—yet, it bears repeating. Growing up in rural coastal California, I grew up ignorant of the other states in the Union; I knew quite well, however, the driving distance to San Francisco or San Jose, the nearest cities of any magnitude. Working in Yosemite, visitors ask me to approximate driving distances daily. This exercise shifted my image of the West from a series of isolated places to a set of spatial relationships. There is no spatial or cultural relationship more important to the region's history than that of city and country; however one defines these, they remain essential ingredients that must be understood in relation to one another. My work redefines Yosemite as a crucial example of the blurred lines between urban and rural.²

management of the park's resources on the basis that "[s]elf-interest and the environment could never coexist." Runte, and historians like him, tend to reinforce the binary between the human and natural world. Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 150.

New histories of parks, probably inspired by the mandate William Cronon's "The Trouble With Wilderness" to break the wilderness/civilization binary, rely more on connecting national parks to the world around them. For Cronon's call to action, see William Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995), 69–90. See Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); Jen A. Huntley, *The Making of Yosemite: James Mason Hutchings and the Origin of America's Most Popular Park* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011); and Theodore Catton, *National Park, City Playground: Mount Rainier in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

2. The American West used to be a lot farther east; as a result, some of the best books on the region's cities occur in the Midwest. See Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996) and William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). Cronon, in particular, expertly unpacks the processes through which a city consumes the natural resources surrounding it. Along with *Nature's Metropolis*, one of my biggest inspirations has been John Findlay's John M. Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). While not exclusively an urban history, *Magic Lands* contains some really thrilling pieces of cultural landscape analysis; Findlay uses four quasi-urban spaces (like Disney Land and the Seattle Center) to speak larger truths about post-World War II West. To my knowledge, Earl Pomeroy's *The Pacific Slope: A History of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada* (New York: Knopf, 1965) was the first work of history to treat the Far West's cities as important in their own right. Squabbling over natural resources and dependency on federal money—two important characteristics of Western cities, even today—receive thorough treatment in Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken*

Technology plays a major role in this blurring. A well-developed historiography suggests that Americans have come to know nature more intimately through the internal combustion engine. If we broaden our definition of technology, however, to encompass other parts of the material world—buildings, roads, bridges—the story gets even more interesting. In a nation seemingly convinced of the purity of its national parks, histories of technology show that “wild” lands are more connected to our day-to-day lives than we let on. Automobiles demonstrate the ever-shrinking distance between wilderness and the workaday world in twentieth-century California. I expand on this theme by examining the highways connecting Yosemite with the stage’s biggest cities, rather than just the roads inside the park.³

Past of the American West (New York: Norton, 1987). See Char Miller, ed., *Cities and Nature in the American West* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2010)—in particular, the essays by Matthew Klinge, Phoebe Young, and Andrew G. Kirk—for a sampler platter of the region's urban/rural dichotomy.

3. The succinct account of the auto industry in Thomas K. McCraw, *American Business Since 1920: How It Worked* (Wheeling, Ill: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) provides a useful background. Mobility and gender are inextricably linked, especially in the wide-open spaces of the American West. See Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992) and Scharff, *Twenty Thousand Roads: Women, Movement, and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Histories of the automobile in nature remain some of my most treasured sources. See David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010); Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); and David G. Havlick, *No Place Distant: Roads and Motorized Recreation on America's Public Lands* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2002). Each owes a tremendous debt to Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, 35th Anniversary edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). If Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* is the essential American Studies title about the American West, then Marx's *Machine in the Garden* fills the same niche for the history of technology.

Whether trucks or telegraphs, technology creates networks. The foremost historian of information networks is Richard John; see his *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998) and *Network Nation: Inventing American Telecommunications* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2010). Just as often, however, technology—and its attendant debates—can tear people apart. The American West has a rich history of hosting these kinds of debates, especially ones involving federal power. See Andrew Needham et al., *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2016); Robert W. Righter, *The Battle over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); John M. Findlay and Bruce W. Hevly, *Atomic Frontier Days: Hanford and the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011); and Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Yosemite is more than just the park itself—it is an accretion of all the corridors leading to it. The park is connected to circuits of movement extending far beyond its boundaries. It is a place of migration, for humans and animals alike; it is part of a highway network, a mountain range, and a system of federally preserved land. Spatial helped me identify system worth tracking, serving as a sort of analytical bond across great distances. Given that California’s largest metro areas (Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and San Jose) contribute the lion’s share of the park’s visitors, I decided that—if I were to truly unpack Yosemite’s urbanization—these cities would have to play major roles; I would imagine the park as urban cousin to these bigger cities, rather than an escape from them. My work details the automotive networks that eventually broke Yosemite’s isolation and forged its new quasi-urban identity.⁴

4. Whether or not they name-check the obligatory big theorists, many classic histories of the American West utilize spatial framework. Spatial theory and urban history are an ideal combination to unite the region’s historically wide-open spaces with its more modern metropolises. Writing in 1960, the historian Earl Pomeroy called the American West a collection of “watersheds of urban allegiance and control.” Pomeroy, *The Pacific Slope*, 120. Gunther Peck’s study of *padrones* (labor bosses often employing recent European immigrants) may not necessarily revolve around cities, but links the West’s concentrations of capital with their hinterlands in another unique way. Peck’s *padrones*, who profited on providing reliable manpower across great distances, as something like a pinball player gunning for a high score: “The longer the distance between sites of labor supply and labor demand and the more frequently their compatriots had to cross the political, cultural, and economic portals they controlled, the greater their potential profits and power.” Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 57. The analytical tension between home and mobility (particularly, the automobile) is essential to understanding the American West. See Virginia Scharff et al., *Home Lands: How Women Made the West* (Los Angeles: Autry National Center of the American West, 2010) and Scharff, *Twenty Thousand Roads*. Even the oft-maligned frontier thesis—that westward movement continually created and refined our national character—employs a kind of spatial analysis. Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1894, 197–227.

For the importance of space in the social sciences, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford [England]: Blackwell, 1990); David J. Bodenhamer, “Creating a Landscape of Memory: The Potential of Humanities GIS,” *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing* 1.2 (2007): 387–427; and Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989). A personal favorite of mine remains J.B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map,” *Cartographica* 26, no. 2 (1989): 1–20. Harley provides an object lesson in spatial analysis, demystifying some of the highfalutin ideas surrounding it.

Gradually I realized that I could not study Yosemite's urbanization unless I studied cars. But rather than simply bemoaning the sheer amount of "blunt-nosed beetles" (John Muir's words) in the park, I had to find more meaning in them. The concept of automobility—a way of considering the broader effects of cars, like auto-centric architecture, carbon monoxide creation, and decreased spatial and temporal distances between places—proved essential in this regard. Since much of Yosemite's urbanity resides in the park's built environment, I paid particularly close attention to studies of automotive cultural landscapes in the twentieth century; particular building types, like motels and shopping malls, showed that even Yosemite Valley was not immune to the architecture of the commercial strip. Unlike many environmental histories of national parks, "Urban in Nature" focuses on the physical environments that demonstrate Yosemite's connections with its surrounding cities.⁵

The meta-categories at work here do not have clear-cut meanings. The connotation of the word 'city' has changed over time, and—as practitioners of the new suburban history suggest—cities and suburbs may be best analyzed as parts of the same system (rather than diametric opposites). The sociologist Mark Gottdiener notes the persistence of "the 'city' as *the* form of urban settlement," often accompanied by observations on "the 'differences' between the 'urban way of life' and its 'suburban' or 'rural' counterpart." Citing the "obsolete nature of these concepts," he argues that "the lists of terms and the alleged contrasts between them...provide little help in

5. The essential primer on automobility is John Urry, "The 'System' of Automobility," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 21, no. 4–5 (October 2004): 25–39. For a monograph-length application of the concept, see Scharff, *Taking the Wheel*. A keen eye for cultural landscapes helps highlight the significance of automobility. Classic studies include Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977); Chester Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); and John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984).

understanding current spatial transformations.”⁶ The instability of commonly-used terms can be frustrating, but the ensuing messiness can offer new insights. The hybridity of cities and nature is not a new theme; thus, just as ‘city’ is an elastic category, so too is ‘park’—especially in the context of the National Park Service, which has strayed from its original model of Western “wilderness parks” to provide interpretation and recreation in more developed (and less isolated) areas. There already exist excellent works on “urban parks” across the United States, some run by the National Park Service (Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the National Mall) and some by their respective cities (Central Park). Since Yosemite is perhaps *the* archetypal wilderness park, it is an ideal setting for examining the physical, philosophical, and etymological overlap between nature and civilization.⁷

Academic works aside, we often learn about cities or parks through maps. Maps appear as objective representations of reality, a messy world made simple; on the ground, however, things are not so simple. Space—the abstract playing field upon which all human actions take place—is subjective. Maps always reflect some kind of agenda, whether the machinations of an empire or simply a desire for the most efficient route to the grocery store. A map of Yosemite, for instance, might show the park as a tightly-bounded space far from any major urban areas; the map may even zoom in enough to

⁶ Mark Gottdiener, *The Social Production of Urban Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 5.

⁷ Some classic works of the new suburban history are Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Kevin Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). For more on urban parks, see Hal Rothman, *The New Urban Park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Civic Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004) and Setha M. Low, Dana Taplin, and Suzanne Scheld, *Rethinking Urban Parks: Public Space & Cultural Diversity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005). Cities even have environmental histories. See Martin V. Melosi, “The Place of the City in Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 17, no. 1 (April 1, 1993): 1–23 and Joel A. Tarr, “The Metabolism of the Industrial City: The Case of Pittsburgh,” *Journal of Urban History* 28, no. 5 (July 1, 2002): 511–45.

exclude any other cities or towns entirely. Because the park is rendered in green, we know it is a natural area of some kind. There may even be a mileage table telling us that San Francisco is over 200 miles away and Los Angeles over 300. These cartographic simplifications are not necessarily harmful, but they do not tell the whole truth. Although maps may portray Yosemite as a place apart, the park is inextricably connected to urban California.⁸

The park is roughly the size of Rhode Island, but most visitors come to see Yosemite Valley. Seven miles long, half a mile wide, and roughly 3,000 feet deep, it is home to spectacular rock formations and several tall waterfalls; it also boasts a relatively mild climate despite its elevation (4,000 feet above sea level), making it habitable year-round. Observers have called Yosemite Valley ‘urban’ for over a century, but this is not merely a commentary on the park’s center and its stores, campgrounds, and traffic. The years covered in this study coincide with massive urban (and suburban) growth in California—not to mention a drastic spike in auto ownership. When I talk about Yosemite’s urbanization, I am referring to two interconnected processes: development of the park’s built environment (especially in Yosemite Valley) and of linkages (both tangible and intangible) between Yosemite and its urban neighbors. Using a cast of different cities from around the state, I chronicle the connections between city and country in California that transformed Yosemite National Park (and especially Yosemite Valley) into something “urban in nature.”

⁸ For abstract treatises on space, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford [England] ; Blackwell, 1990); and Michel de Certeau and Steven Rendall, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). For more on how maps can mislead, see J.B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map,” *Cartographica* 26, no. 2 (1989): 1–20 and Mark S. Monmonier, *How to Lie with Maps* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

The preceding paragraphs may convey the impression that human habitation of Yosemite is a new phenomenon, but that is absolutely not the case. Yosemite's first residents were the Ahwahneechee, a Miwok people that lived in Yosemite Valley (which they called 'Ahwahne') for thousands of years. After gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in the late 1840s, Anglo American settlers spread further and further into the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada in search of gold and, to a lesser extent, trading opportunities. Following some violent conflicts in the area, the Ahwahneechee were violently evicted by the Mariposa Battalion—an anti-Indian militia formed to protect white settlers—as part of larger genocidal efforts across California.⁹

In 1864 President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant into law, setting aside Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias (south of the Valley in Wawona) to be preserved by the State of California. Around the same time, John Muir—one of the park's most famous defenders—set foot in Yosemite. Visitation gradually increased, and so did public alarm about the despoiling of the park's natural wonders. In 1890 the lands around Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove became Yosemite National Park, under jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. Since the job 'park ranger' did not exist yet, the United States Army stepped in to protect the area. California continued to administer the Valley and the Mariposa Grove until 1906, when they became part of Yosemite National Park. The Army remained until around 1914, at which

⁹ For more on the Native history of Yosemite, see Huntley, *The Making of Yosemite*; Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (Yale University Press, 2017); and Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For more on the Mariposa Battalion, see Lafayette Houghton Bunnell, *Discovery of the Yosemite, and the Indian War of 1851, Which Led to That Event* (New York: F.H. Revell Co., 1892).

time the park began its short period of civilian administration before the founding of the National Park Service in 1916.¹⁰

1913, the starting point for this work, is important for multiple reasons. Most famously, it marks the approval of the damming of Hetch Hetchy Valley—a crucible for the modern environmental movement.¹¹ More pertinently for this study, however, the first auto permit to Yosemite was sold that year. The National Park Service, though, was not founded until in 1916. What happened in those intervening three years? Berkeley, California—and the University of California, in particular—provided the social and educational ties that would staff the Department of the Interior (and, eventually, the Park Service) for years to come. The University would also train and employ the minds behind Yosemite’s earliest urban place: Yosemite Village.

Chapter One takes us to the eastern shores of San Francisco Bay. In Berkeley for the national parks conference of 1915, Mark Daniels described Yosemite Valley’s “municipal problems”: poor planning, bad drainage, unimproved roads. Daniels, a University of California grad who made his name as a developer, had recently been

¹⁰ For more on the early history of Yosemite, see Huntley, *The Making of Yosemite*; Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*; and Harvey Meyerson, *Nature’s Army: When Soldiers Fought for Yosemite* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

¹¹ For more on early conservation organizations and efforts, see Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Susan R. Schrepfer, *Nature’s Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and The Gospel Of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890–1920* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999). For more on the postwar growth on environmentalism, see Andrew G. Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007) and *Collecting Nature: The American Environmental Movement and the Conservation Library* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Finis Dunaway, *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Adam Ward, *Rome, The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Tom Turner, *David Brower: The Making of the Environmental Movement* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); and Hal Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?: Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998).

tapped to manage the nation's parks; he proposed to save the Valley from haphazard development with a new village north of the Merced River. Although his plan would not be realized until the late 1950s, Daniels remains the first to envision Yosemite Valley as an urban place. Another Berkeley graduate, Ansel Hall, took the first step towards Daniels's vision by establishing a dedicated museum complex on the Valley floor (designed by Herbert Maier, another Berkeley man). My first chapter examines how Maier and Hall used natural history to anchor a large complex of offices, shops, and parking that serves tourists to this day. The small social world of Berkeley alums created a satellite campus in the Sierra Nevada, an auto-accessible testament to the educational function of national parks.

Even if Yosemite's natural wonders were cause for celebration, some of them—like snow-packed roads—remained a nuisance. In Chapter Two we see how a city without winter paved (or plowed) the way for the park's ski industry, the subject of my second chapter. Between 1926 and 1931 the Auto Club of Southern California engineered *two* all-season roads to Yosemite Valley, essentially placing the park on Los Angeles's doorstep. The new roads also helped Yosemite's concessioner bolster winter attendance, a goal shared by the park's friends in Southern California. Together, promoters from Los Angeles and Yosemite redrew the state's tourist calendar as well as its geography. The road(s) to Los Angeles's recreational future ran through the Sierra Nevada, drawing Yosemite away from its Bay Area roots.

During the rationing of World War II, the park's visitation dropped precipitously. Seventy miles to the west lay another struggling small city, the subject of Chapter Three. Merced lay at the western end of the only railway and all-season highway into the park,

earning it the moniker “The Gateway to Yosemite.” Yet as other roads improved and car travel became the norm, Merced’s economic and geographic advantages *vis á vis* Yosemite evaporated; by World War II, the Yosemite Valley Railway was basically insolvent. Business leaders from Merced, desperate to keep their railroad functioning, tried to resume logging inside the park; though in line with the Park Service’s mission of preservation, the superintendent’s refusal sealed Yosemite’s fate as a car’s park. No longer *the* gateway, Merced became simply one of many.

The postwar tourist boom left the park’s brain trust scrambling for solutions and, like so many before them, they put their faith in the automobile—much to the chagrin of the Sierra Club. Chapter Four follows attempts to unclutter Yosemite Valley using foundational elements of suburbanization like annexation, tract housing, and highway building. El Portal, a newly purchased plot on the park’s western edge, offered space for employee housing and other functions deemed “nonessential” to the Valley. Cars presented new possibilities for redistributing tourists, as well; new facilities in Tuolumne Meadows and Wawona promised to draw excess summer visitors out of the Merced River canyon. Yet the Curry Company, the park’s concessioner, had a vested interest in keeping visitors *inside* Yosemite Valley. As planners attempted to spread human impact around the park, they created a city-suburb complex like that of San Jose, Orange County, or San Diego.

In Chapter Five, we return to the Bay Area. An influx of young visitors in the 1960s—first hoodlums, then delinquents, and finally hippies—spawned Yosemite Valley’s most urban feature to date: a police force. Long considered a mixture of hospitality worker, mountain man, and biologist, park rangers learned to dismantle

bombs, handle weapons, and quell riots. Yet no amount of training could disguise the popular perception that the Valley had become a kind of ghetto. Urban ills like traffic, crime, and smog made headlines. The superintendent solicited help from around the state, developing especially close ties to San Francisco's police force that specialized in dealing with "'hippies' and juvenile matters." A riot between rangers and young visitors on July 4, 1970 left Yosemite on lockdown; at entrance stations, armed rangers turned away any vehicles with long-haired passengers. The Bay Area, so instrumental in the park's early years, became its antagonist.

In less than sixty years, Yosemite Valley evolved from a simple village into a so-called ghetto embodying the darkest fears about the American metropolis. Fully unpacking this transformation requires embracing the unpleasant truths of Yosemite: overcrowding, traffic, crime, noise pollution, wildlife depletion, tricky commutes, and prejudice. These might not be what we think of when we imagine national parks, but they constitute some of the firmest evidence of Yosemite Valley's urbanization. Thus, to call the Valley 'urban' is not an insult; it is an invitation. Only by moving past the Park Service's mandate to leave parks "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations" can we appreciate the complex (and car-driven) relationship between Yosemite National Park and its fellow metropolitan areas. To understand Yosemite we must look to the cities around it. If we are to fully grasp the codependence between nature and civilization, we must see parks as they are—and not how we want them to be.

Chapter 1

A “City of Learning”: The University of California Comes to Yosemite, 1913–1926

In November of 1916, shortly after the founding of the National Park Service, Berkeley, California’s *Daily Gazette* announced: “Yosemite Park Road Introduced to World.”¹² This was not entirely correct, as the article detailed the discovery of a new species of *toad* in Yosemite National Park by a researched from the University of California’s (now referred to as the University of California-Berkeley) Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ), one of the preeminent scientific institutions on the West Coast. The typo unintentionally reveals the tension between infrastructural improvement and natural history that defined the first decade of the National Park Service’s administration of Yosemite.

Access to the park was, by 1916, predicated almost entirely on the automobile; travel by train and bus dwindled. Even visitors from the MVZ, bent on inventorying Yosemite’s flora and fauna, needed cars, roads, bridges, and gasoline—a decidedly unnaturalistic tool kit if ever there was one. University of California employees and alumni like George Bird Grinnell (Camp’s supervisor) and Ansel Hall, an information ranger-turned-museum curator, cemented the university’s legacy in Yosemite. Some of the school’s associates, however, tended more towards the promotional side. Early Park Service leaders Stephen Mather and Horace Albright, known for their slick promotional stunts and media savvy, also earned degrees from Berkeley. Landscape architect Mark Daniels, in charge of the nation’s parks from 1914–1915, was a Golden Bear; so was

¹² “Yosemite Park Road Introduced to the World,” *Berkeley (Calif.) Daily Gazette*, 22 November 1916.

architect Herbert Maier, designer of the Yosemite Museum and countless other structures in the nation's parks.

In short, the University of California provided the employees who dreamed, designed, and built the infrastructure necessary to convey the park's wonders to a curious public. Berkeley alums and associates—whether scientists or builders—replicated California's famous "City of Learning" on the floor of Yosemite Valley. The addition of a new museum building, in particular, cemented a new downtown district that remains entrenched to this day.

The San Francisco Bay Area has always been tied to Yosemite—and the National Park Service at large. The 1849 discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill triggered San Francisco's explosion as a global economic powerhouse; gold also led to the "discovery" of Yosemite Valley by the controversial Mariposa Battalion.¹³ Rev. Thomas Starr King, one of the first to call for Yosemite's preservation, began preaching at San Francisco's First Unitarian Church in 1860. John Muir, although no native of the Bay Area, used his contacts among the Bay Area's elite lawyers, teachers, and writers to form the Sierra Club in 1892.¹⁴ When the 1906 earthquake left San Francisco decimated, calls for improved water and power supplies put the damming of Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley—and, by proxy, the Sierra Club into the national spotlight.

¹³ For more on the connection between the Gold Rush and Yosemite (and the oft-violent encounters between ambitious Californians and Native populations), see Huntley, *The Making of Yosemite*, 43–90.

¹⁴ "Aware of these precedents [of other mountaineering clubs devoted to conservation], William Arnes, a professor of English at the University of California in Berkeley, proposed a Sierra Club. In September 1892, two hundred and fifty men gathered for a meeting of what its first president, John Muir, called 'Our Alpine Club.' Most were professors of history, art, English literature, German, and the natural sciences, testifying to the influence of western culture's aesthetic traditions and sciences on American conservation. The new club, like similar groups, quickly attracted a cross section of well-educated professionals: lawyers, physicians, teachers, and engineers." Schrepfer, *Nature's Altars*, 23.

Berkeley, a small outpost on the eastern shores of the San Francisco Bay, played a particularly large role in guiding Yosemite after its Army administration left in 1913.¹⁵ A product of the Morrill Land Grant Act (1862), the University of California was established in 1868; although nearby San Francisco offered more connectivity with the rest of the world, Berkeley—sited roughly five miles north of rapidly-growing Oakland—offered what geographer Gray Brechin calls “a more rural site conducive to studious virtue.” It quickly became California’s claim to national, international, and even historic educational excellence; Brechin notes that, “as Rome had once depended upon Greece for a ready supply of intellectuals, so would San Francisco’s capitalists increasingly rely upon the academy at Berkeley to provide managers and engineers for their Pacific imperium.”¹⁶ A great number of the city’s intellectuals flowed eastward, as well, many of them landing in Yosemite.

Phoebe Hearst, philanthropist and mother of William Randolph Hearst, soon became the university’s major benefactor.¹⁷ Like many Americans, she admired Daniel Burnham’s architectural achievements at Chicago’s World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893; Burnham had created an entire city out of thin air, and Hearst needed to do something similar on the *tabula rasa* of Berkeley. In 1898 Bernard Maybeck, who would go on to design the Sierra Club library in Yosemite’s high country, convinced Hearst to sponsor an international design competition—not just for one building on the Berkeley campus, but for its entire architectural plan. *Harper’s Weekly* noted that the victor would

¹⁵ For more on the Army’s role in Yosemite before the establishment of the National Park Service, see Meyerson, *Nature’s Army*.

¹⁶ Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 281.

¹⁷ For more on Phoebe Hearst, see Alexandra M. Nickliss, *Phoebe Apperson Hearst: A Life of Power and Politics* (Lincoln, Neb.: Bison Books, 2018).

“place at the western portal of a State imperial in its resources, and soon to match the greatest empires of the world in population, wealth, and culture.” The *Overland Monthly* detected echoes of “the early and superlative genius that wrought beside the Aegean Sea.” For her part, though, Hearst had a simpler ideal in mind: a “City of Learning.”¹⁸ The resulting city, nestled at the base of the sloping Berkeley hills, would walk a tightrope between competing with eastern schools for national prestige and simultaneously serving as a training ground (and charity magnet) for the Bay Area’s professional elite.¹⁹

Most importantly for this chapter, the nascent academic power would produce three of the first four directors of the National Park Service.²⁰ Besides bureaucrats, Berkeley’s scientific expertise also initiated nature guiding and museum building in Yosemite (which then spread to other parks). The university’s contributions to the national parks movement—and to Yosemite National Park, in particular—would help fulfill its twinned missions of local excellence and national recognition. Berkeley faculty and alumni would leave an indelible footprint on the floor of Yosemite Valley, using education to toe the fine line between preservation and visitation in a satellite campus of Hearst’s “City of Learning” through the construction of a new museum building.²¹

¹⁸ Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco*, 285–286.

¹⁹ Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–39,” *Social Studies of Science* 19, no. 3 (1989): 403.

²⁰ Robert Shankland, *Steve Mather of the National Parks* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 196.

²¹ College towns have long been acknowledged as a unique variety of cultural landscape. See Hildegard Hawthorne, *Rambles in Old College Towns* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1917); Charles Morrow Wilson, “Anatomy of a College Town,” *The North American Review* 237, no. 6 (1934): 506–513; John A. Jakle, “Twentieth Century Revival Architecture and the Gentry,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 4, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1983): 28–43; and Blake Gumprecht, *The American College Town* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).



Figure 1: Overhead view of the University of California campus, looking towards San Francisco Bay (c. 1900). Courtesy of USC Digital Library

1913, an especially heady year for Yosemite, is a good starting point for examining the University of California's influence on Yosemite. That year, the park transitioned from Army custody to civilian administration, marking the end of a great experiment that occurred in many western national parks. Yosemite's rangers also issued their first automobile permit that summer, formally acknowledging the role machines would play in popularizing the park's natural wonders. The year is perhaps most famous, though, for the passage of the Raker Act authorizing the damming of Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley to provide water and power for San Francisco; the news of this bill supposedly killed the Sierra Club's John Muir, who died almost exactly a year after the act's passage.²²

The national debate over Hetch Hetchy brought Berkeley to Washington, D.C. Franklin K. Lane, who attended the University of California in the 1880s but did not graduate, became Secretary of the Interior in 1913; his assistant Horace Albright—a Berkeley graduate who would go on to head the NPS—believed that the sole reason for Lane's appointment was to push the Raker Act through Congress.²³ Albright remembers the dam controversy vividly:

There was tremendous opposition from John Muir and the Sierra Club, newspapers, magazines, and just plain citizens who realized that the loss of Hetch Hetchy would be irreparable. Letters came into Lane's office by the thousands and had to be answered. I, along with several other secretaries, had to learn to counterfeit Lane's signature and sign letters in reply, trying to explain why the grant should be made or saying 'careful

²² For more on Hetch Hetchy, see John W. Simpson, *Dam!: Water, Power, Politics, and Preservation in Hetch Hetchy and Yosemite National Park* (New York: Pantheon, 2005) and Robert W. Righter, *The Battle over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). For more on John Muir's role in the Hetch Hetchy controversy, see Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 401–453.

²³ Horace M. Albright, Marian Albright Schenck, and Robert M. Utley, *Creating the National Park Service: The Missing Years* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 20.

attention' would be given to the protest. I hated this job, for I was in sympathy with the protests.²⁴

Despite their shared Bay Area ties, Lane and Albright stood on opposite sides of the debate. The damming of Hetch Hetchy is often cited as a critical juncture in America's environmental history, pitting the utilitarian conservationists (headed by Gifford Pinchot, the chief of the U.S. Forest Service) against the more spiritually motivated preservationists (exemplified by John Muir).²⁵ Berkeley graduates, many in positions of power within the Department of the Interior, drew from both of these philosophies in promoting science through development at Yosemite.

Other U. C. graduates entered public service through private practice. Talk of damming of Hetch Hetchy, murmured since the late 19th century, grew louder after an earthquake (and its subsequent fires) decimated San Francisco in 1906. One of the most popular scapegoats for the damage was the Spring Valley Water Company, a powerful and corrupt company that provided San Franciscans with exorbitantly-priced water during their time of need; indeed, when Muir spoke out against the damming of the Tuolumne River, many accused him of "fronting for the Spring Valley Water Company."²⁶ The company amassed properties around the peninsula, including some seafront land near San Francisco's Presidio that became a "high class residence tract" in

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The conservationist position is commonly stated as "the greatest good for the greatest number of people"; like many political philosophies of the Progressive Era, it stressed efficiency and university education in the management of natural resources. For more on the idea of conservation, see Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation And The Gospel Of Efficiency*. The environmental historian Roderick Nash is probably most responsible for the historiographical pairing of Pinchot and Muir. See Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind: Fifth Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 122–140.

²⁶ Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco*, 109.

1914.²⁷ The stylist of those subdivisions (and other tracts owned by Spring Valley) was none other than Mark Daniels, a Berkeley-trained landscape architect who would become the general superintendent of the nation's parks in 1914; he succeeded Adolph Miller, a former professor of economics at the University of California.²⁸

In Daniels' short tenure, he became the national park system's first urbanist, introducing a vision for a "village" in Yosemite Valley that lives to this day.²⁹ Known for planning "attractive residence sub-divisions of San Francisco and Berkeley," Daniels had a good deal of practice in high-dollar landscape design.³⁰ Albright remembers him as a "very smooth and personable young man, a fine speaker, a wealthy man-about-town type" who made an instant impression in his first meeting with Adolph Miller.³¹ His new position carried no salary, but—because he maintained his private practice the whole time—he did not need the extra cash. Daniels's discerning eye for landscape followed him to the Interior Department; soon after he began, he called Yosemite's current architecture "nondescript" and promised to provide buildings "in harmony with the

²⁷ "New Residence Tract," *The Architect and Engineer of California* 38–39 (August 1914–December 1914): 127.

²⁸ "Daniels to Get Place Under Secretary Lane," *Berkeley (Calif.) Daily Gazette*, 2 June 1914.

²⁹ To some, 'urbanist' implies a specialist in urban planning; others use it to describe people who think—and write—critically about urban space (regardless of their academic or professional pedigree). Jane Jacobs, one of America's most renowned urbanists, epitomizes the latter definition. She led a grassroots effort to defeat Robert Moses' proposed highway through New York City's West (Greenwich) Village. Rather than adhere to any particular academic doctrine, her writing employs vivid anecdotes and pithy prose; she coined the phrase "eyes on the street" to describe how mutual citizen surveillance creates safer streetscapes. See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961). Robert Moses is the archetypal urbanist antihero, known for using his considerable power to promote highways over public transit in and around New York City. See Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage, 1975). Works by other notable urbanists include Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961); Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984); James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1993); and Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class--Revisited: Revised and Expanded* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

³⁰ "Great Plan to Improve Yosemite," *Bakersfield (Calif.) Californian*, 1 May 1914.

³¹ Albright, *Creating the National Park Service*, 27.

wonderful region.”³² As a private developer, his vision for California rested on what he called the “subdivision plan” which would “eventually dot California from end to end with picturesque estates.” Yet this kind of rapid development was nothing without harmony, the same kind he promised to bring to Yosemite. “When Natures [*sic*] hand and man’s are linked in friendly clasp,” he advised, “artificiality ceases to be artificiality and a perfection is wrought wherein beauty and utility are mingled in right proportions.”³³

When Secretary Lane tapped Daniels as superintendent of the national parks, the landscape architect did not relocate to Washington, D.C. Thus Daniels’s appointment helped the Department of the Interior gain a toehold in a rising city of the American West, where practically all its national parks lay. Daniels’s new job carried broad responsibilities: tour and inspect the parks, plan their development, estimate the costs of improvements, and even purchase supplies for them.³⁴ Daniels would, in fact, eventually resign at the end of 1915 because of his excessive administrative duties. His signal contribution in his short time in the Department of the Interior became the idea of “park villages”; he planned them for Glacier, Mount Rainier, and Crater Lake and, of course, for Yosemite.³⁵

Important environmental writings of the latter 19th century advanced the idea that cities and the natural world were not so distant from one another.³⁶ After Hetch Hetchy,

³² “Engineer Called to Important Work,” *Woodland (Calif.) Daily Democrat*, 9 April 1914.

³³ Mark Daniels, “California as a Place of Homes,” *California’s Magazine* 1, no. 1 (January 1915): 207.

³⁴ Albright, *Creating the National Park Service*, 27.

³⁵ Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 74–75.

³⁶ George Perkins Marsh, writing in the 1860s, supported the conservation of New York’s forests so as to maintain a viable watershed for the state’s urban areas. John Wesley Powell later advocated shaping the boundaries of western states according to major watersheds, thus ensuring more localized control—and thus wiser usage—of the region’s precious water. See George P. Marsh and David Lowenthal, *Man and Nature* (Seattle : University of Washington Press, 2003) and John Wesley Powell, *Report on the Lands of*

though, Americans on both sides of the dam debate believed the metropolis and its hinterland occupied separate worlds; people like Muir advocated for parks as escapes from the ills of civilization, while those like Pinchot stressed the ability of forests to provide for neighboring communities. Daniels, however, had no qualms envisioning cities *in* parks themselves. As Horace Albright detailed, “he [Daniels] visualized that when visitors to a park became numerous, five thousand or so, the visitors’ area would resemble a small city and should be treated as such.”³⁷ City planning, for Daniels, was a necessary evil. He lamented that “[m]ost cities and towns that just grow without any thought of proper development, civic architecture, public health or social conditions,” so he set about to change that in Yosemite Valley—specifically, the “old” Yosemite Village which looked “hastily thrown up...to meet the demands of the growing number of tourists.”³⁸ At a meeting with other park personnel in 1915, Daniels dispelled any illusion of Yosemite Valley as a bucolic paradise:

In the Yosemite Valley there are times when there are five or six thousand people congregated at one time. That community ceases to be a camp; it becomes a village. It can no longer be administered or looked upon in the light of a camp. It has its municipal problems. There are many incorporated cities in this State and in the United States that do not have 5,000 in population.³⁹

With those words, Daniels thus became Yosemite Valley first urbanist. His advice—that it was best to accept Yosemite’s urban aspects and move to better plan them in the

the Arid Region of the United States, with a More Detailed Account of the Lands of Utah (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Common Press, 1983).

³⁷ Albright, *Creating the National Park Service*, 50.

³⁸ Mark Daniels, “Plans for Development of Yosemite National Park,” *San Antonio (Tex.) Light*, 26 September 1915.

³⁹ *Proceedings of the National Park Conference Held at Berkeley, California, March 11, 12, and 13* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915), 18.

future—moved past generations of idealized depictions of the Valley and into something much more concrete.

The “village” idea in the Valley entailed a move away from the cluttered Old Village to a new site on the opposite (north) side of the Valley. Besides its haphazard appearance, the southern site also lacked adequate drinking water, waste disposal, and traffic circulation. Because he was working in a national park (and not a major American city), Daniels could play with the river bottom landscape in almost infinite permutations; he could even advise the demolition of the old site and no one would bat an eye.⁴⁰ His plan for the new site revolved around a central lodging area surrounded by residential and service buildings; these structures would be sited along curving roads that met in wye intersections (a triangular junction shaped like a ‘Y,’ often used by railroads). Somewhat spectacularly, he even called for damming and excavating parts of the Merced River to create a system of lagoons and pools near the new village.⁴¹ Daniels attempt to allay the Valley’s “municipal problems” was not just utilitarian, but also based on a “careful study of the best arrangement of the buildings and for picturesqueness.”⁴² This idea of development in “harmony” with the landscape became a signature element of Park Service rustic style of architecture—the closest thing the fledgling agency had to a unified building code.⁴³

Daniels’s pro-development philosophies fit handsomely with increasing auto traffic to, from, and within Yosemite. . Shortly after his appointment in 1914, the

⁴⁰ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 108.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 107–108.

⁴² Quoted in Linda Flint McClelland, *Presenting Nature: The Historic Landscape Design of the National Park Service, 1916–1942* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1993), 73.

⁴³ In 1918, Secretary Lane wrote Stephen Mather (director of the Park Service) to detail the importance of “harmonizing” improvements (like roads, trails, and buildings) “with the landscape.” Lane to Mather, 13 May 1918, in Lary M. Dilsaver and Jonathan B. Jarvis, *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 35–39.

Oakland Tribune trumpeted his determination to “encourage auto tours to the valley as much as he can.”⁴⁴ In his life, as well as with his words, he stressed the role of Californians in publicizing Yosemite. He called it “shameful” that the park was “not better known to Californians,” suggesting that “we ought to make it as easy as possible” for cars to access it.⁴⁵ In this sense he predicted the future form of Yosemite. But Daniels, who left his post late in 1915, would leave his village plans unfinished. According to Horace Albright, Daniels not only had a tendency to alienate powerful men (like Louis Hill, the president of the Great Northern Railway) but he was also a bad administrator; Daniels—charged with purchasing and procuring supplies for park improvements—used an extremely complicated accounting system that put his co-workers off.⁴⁶

It is worth noting that a significant portion of Daniels’s stated plan above did materialize: the central area on the north side of the Valley flanked by residential and service districts. When it finally came to be, the central area was not lodging but a complex featuring a museum, administration building, and ranger housing all built by (and for) the University of California’s many disciples in the park. Daniels envisioned a central complex that could be managed as a city. The promotional and scientific acumen of his fellow Golden Bears would will that city into existence.

If Daniels dreamed the city, then Stephen Mather would eventually fill it with people. Mather arrived in Washington, D.C. during Daniels’s brief tenure. The story generally goes that Mather, dismayed at the haphazard state of the nation’s parks, wrote Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane—an old friend from their days at Berkeley—to

⁴⁴ Edmund Grinnion, “Yosemite Tour is Becoming Popular,” *Oakland (Calif.) Tribune*, 5 July 1914.

⁴⁵ “Great Plan to Improve Yosemite,” *Bakersfield (Calif.) Californian*, 1 May 1914.

⁴⁶ Albright, *Creating the National Park Service*, 28.

complain; Lane allegedly wrote back, “Dear Steve: If you don’t like the way the national parks are run, why don’t you come down to Washington and run them yourself?”⁴⁷ In reality, though, it was Adolph Miller (class of 1887, like Mather), the U. C. professor-turned-assistant to Lane, who connected the men (Mather and Lane did not know each other from college).⁴⁸ In that fateful year of 1913, Mather—upon learning that his old friend Miller was to become Lane’s assistant—scheduled a meeting with Miller to discuss the proposed extension of Sequoia National Park. Thus began a chain of events that culminated in Mather interviewing for his friend Miller’s former job under Secretary Lane.

Mather, a self-made millionaire in the Borax business, immediately impressed Lane with his gregarious and energetic presence. Lane, however, was also interested in Mather’s fortune; the Secretary’s instinct would prove keen, as Mather would use his private wealth to acquire the Tioga Road through Yosemite’s high country, construct the Ranger Club on the Valley floor, and jump-start a nature guide service in Yosemite. Because his role in promoting the Raker Act made him a “marked man,” Lane needed help lobbying Congress for a national parks bureau. Mather took his time considering the job offer, no doubt unimpressed by Lane’s disclosure that federally-owned parks were “orphans”—split amongst three departments, each with little interest in the project. The Secretary sweetened the deal by promising Mather yet another Berkeley graduate to help him out. After accepting the position in early 1915, Mather met with his new assistant—Horace Albright, who famously came to Washington, D.C. in a borrowed suit—to offer

⁴⁷ Shankland, *Steve Mather of the National Parks*, 7. Ken Burns’s “National Parks” documentary reproduces this story.

⁴⁸ Albright, *Creating the National Park Service*, 32



Figure 2: Stephen Mather, 1916. Despite his serious bearing here, his enthusiasm and energy earned him the moniker “The Eternal Freshman.” Taken by Marian Albright Schenk. Courtesy WikiCommons

him an additional one thousand dollars a year of Borax money.⁴⁹ These comically mismatched University of California men, the slick-talking millionaire and the son of a miner—would control the Park Service for its first seventeen years.

Mather soon decided to assemble park personnel from around the nation so he could assess them face-to-face. California was close to the nation's parks and their employees, plus it was slated to host two major fairs (San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition and San Diego's Panama-California Exposition) beginning in 1915. Mather, known as "The Eternal Freshman" for his boyish gusto, chose to host most of the events where it all began: the University of California. Albright and Mather arrived in the Bay Area on March 9, 1915, even though the conference was not scheduled to start until the 11th. Albright high-tailed it to Berkeley immediately, where his fiancée (another University grad) was waiting—but not before Mather ordered him to bring her to an important dinner that night. By the close of the meal, Mather convinced each of his dining party to contribute \$1,000 towards the purchase of Yosemite's Tioga Road; he even got one of the dinner guests to handle the legal work *pro bono*. Before the conference in Berkeley had even begun, Mather had secured a trans-Sierra highway.⁵⁰

Despite the supposedly national focus, the conference remained California-centric. Young up-and-comers like Mark Daniels, Horace Albright, and Stephen Mather stood testament to the importance of western talent in the national parks. Attendees all fawned over the Golden State, but some went further than others; California Congressman Denver S. Church even called out the East's moon, calling it a "little, old, freckled, measly, weather-beaten moon...not even a half sister, or a sister-in-law, or a

⁴⁹ Ibid., 35–38.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 47–49.

mother-in-law to the great big California moon that we have out here.”⁵¹ With the superiority of the state’s natural resources established—parks, beaches, and celestial objects—the focus moved to man-made accomplishments.

The conference’s host institution, the University of California, received its fair share of praise—as did the Berkeley connections that brought the gathering to fruition. U.C. Regent James K. Moffitt asserted that, since its inception, “this university has been concerned with the love of the mountains, the mountain lakes, and the mountain parks of this glorious State.” Noting with pride the “sons of the University of California” in attendance, Moffitt expressed the “great pleasure and privilege” of knowing them at school.⁵² Congressman J. Arthur Elston of Berkeley called attention to his town’s non-academic achievements, like hosting John Muir’s headquarters, the artist William Keith’s studio, and lawyer William Colby’s struggles on behalf of the Sierra Club.⁵³ Horace Albright, another Berkeley alum, crowed that “from this center much of the works on behalf of the national parks is to radiate.”⁵⁴

The conference schedule permitted Mather, a fraternity fellow from way back in the 1880s, a walk down memory lane. Not long after he had given his Sigma Chi fraternity money for a new house, Mather asked them to evacuate it for a week; the current brothers obliged, sleeping at friends’ houses or in hotel rooms (at Mather’s expense).⁵⁵ The fraternity house thus became the after-hours social center of the parks conference. On the first day, Mather took the opportunity to thank the Sigma Chi brothers

⁵¹ *Proceedings of the National Park Conference Held at Berkeley, California, March 11, 12, and 13* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915), 130.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵⁵ Albright, *Creating the National Park Service*, 49.

who “so willingly threw open their house as an abiding place for our superintendents, supervisors, and members of the official party from Washington.” He also revealed some of the logic behind his lodging plan, arguing that in bunking together in his old fraternity house he and his lieutenants would “develop that same fraternity life, and make a fraternity that will be of value to us personally and to the Nation as a whole.”⁵⁶

Mather did little more than introduce speakers during the conference; Daniels, the young and handsome general superintendent of the parks, did most of the work.⁵⁷ But at the conference’s end, it was Mather’s fraternal attitude that won the day. The publicist Robert Sterling Yard reminisced about the event like it was a wedding (or maybe, more accurately, a bachelor party):

...when we broke up last night over there in Berkeley that same silent, nervous group had become as closely bound together in bonds of sympathy and common effort and affection as any crowd of 24 men I have ever seen. It was a great idea of Secretary Mather’s getting us together in Berkeley in the atmosphere of that old college, his alma mater, which he loves so dearly.⁵⁸

The origin story of the National Park Service often revolves around dedicated, selfless individuals driven to protect scenery for future generations. Mather’s dormitory-style socializing, however, serves as a reminder that male bonding played a major role.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Robert Sterling Yard’s reminiscence of the “sympathy and common effort...of 24 men” omits some important female characters. One evening during the Berkeley conference, “the ladies of the Sierra Club” treated attendees to dinner at the Sigma Chi House. Horace Albright’s fiancée, Grace, played the piano; this is how Albright learned that his boss had “a fine baritone voice and loved to

⁵⁶ *Proceedings of the National Park Conference Held at Berkeley*, 9–10.

⁵⁷ Albright, *Creating the National Park Service*, 50.

⁵⁸ *Proceedings of the National Park Conference Held at Berkeley*, 152.

belt out the songs.” Perhaps because of these extracurricular activities, the conference began an hour later than usual the following morning. The following evening, however, Mather hosted a dinner for “park personnel only” at Sigma Chi. Albright decided to “slip away” for a quick dinner with Grace, returning to find “the gang”—a group of “experienced men” Mather’s age (or older)—in the midst “a real rouser.”⁵⁹ Like his first night in town, Albright was caught between his burgeoning romance and his burgeoning career. Women could feed and entertain the men responsible for the National Park Service, but they would be categorically excluded from the category of “park personnel” for many years to come. There could be no more apt setting for the Park Service’s prologue than a fraternity house.⁶⁰

Daniels would resign his position eight months after the conference, but Mather—who would become head of the newly-created National Park Service in 1917—kept his fellow Golden Bear’s village idea alive. The day that the Berkeley conference ended in March 1915, Mather was a man possessed by new and ambitious plans for Yosemite

⁵⁹ Albright, *Creating the National Park Service*, 50–52.

⁶⁰ For a series of essays on the interconnection between nature and gender, see Virginia Scharff, ed., *Seeing Nature through Gender* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003). Early outdoor organizations like the Sierra Club and Oregon’s Mazamas accepted female members and provided coed trips into the wilderness. As Susan Schrepfer notes, however, “[n]ature was assumed to be feminine, but control over it was masculine.” Schrepfer, *Nature’s Altars*, 33. Thus, the National Park Service—charged with managing large swaths of “wild” land—carries with it a masculine connotation to this day. Historian Polly Welts Kaufman attributes the agency’s gendered identity to its primary cultural antecedents: the military (which watched over early parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite) and “public communications” (which she defines as manners and strategies imported from the business world to make early park visitors feel welcomed and valued). Welts Kaufman argues that tension between these two “streams” created a climate that discouraged female employees. Compared to the national parks’ former military stewards, male ranger-naturalists were feminized as “pansy pickers” and “butterfly chasers.” This led male ranger-naturalists to see female ranger-naturalists (whom Albright began to hire after World War I) as threats to their jobs; as male naturalists fought for recognition in the 1920s, they “defined their positions as men’s jobs.” Thus, despite the increasing number of university-trained female naturalists seeking employment with the Park Service, their numbers remained quite small until after World War II. Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman’s Voice: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), xi–xii.

(which was, Horace Albright notes, his favorite park). He shared many of Daniels's aspirations for the Valley floor: sewage disposal, power production, lodging, hotels, and even restaurants. Albright, his constant companion on this trip, noticed that Mather had begun to use Daniels's pet word—"village"—quite frequently. Asking him what exactly he meant by the term, Albright did not receive a straight answer; he noticed, however, that roads, concessions, and increased tourism seemed much more important to Mather than the establishment of a national park bureau.⁶¹

Mather's tenure as director of the NPS, lasting from 1917 to 1929, remains notable for his enthusiasm for urban infrastructure development in the parks. During his time with the agency, he authorized over 1,000 miles of new roads, almost 4,000 miles of new trails, and 1,600 miles of telephone and telegraph lines in parks across the nation. He also oversaw the development of sophisticated physical plants in the nation's parks: museums, campgrounds, and even office buildings now dotted America's sacred scenic landscapes.⁶² As historian David Louter puts it, Mather was responsible for "opening parks to cars and turning them into urban villages."⁶³ All this focus on architecture and engineering left the nascent Park Service's scientific side feeling a little neglected. Other historians have credited (or blamed) Mather for "entrenched preconceptions that visitors were of first importance and resources a distant second" in the nation's parks.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Albright, *Creating the National Park Service*, 54–57.

⁶² Richard West Sellars, "Manipulating Nature's Paradise: National Park Management under Stephen T. Mather, 1916–1929," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 43, no. 2 (1993): 5.

⁶³ Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*, 42.

⁶⁴ Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 101. It was not necessarily that Mather spoke ill of his mission to protect resources, but a persistent focus on other resources showed his true priorities. As historian Richard Sellars argues, "...under Mather the National Park Service steadily built its own landscape architecture and engineering capability to develop the parks for tourism. Thus, its willingness to rely on biologists from other bureaus to manage national park flora and fauna suggests how much greater was the service's interest in recreational tourism than in fostering innovative strategies in nature preservation. With the park service committed to using the scientific expertise of other federal bureaus, natural resource management under

I argue that Mather's Berkeley connections mean a lot more than historians acknowledge. That ever-controversial statement of the Park Service's mission—to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein” while simultaneously “provid[ing] for the enjoyment of the same”—cannot be evaluated without considering the agency's connections to the University of California.⁶⁵ As head of a new federal agency, Mather played the underdog for perhaps the first time in his life—hence his focus on packing the parks full of tourists to show their political and economic viability. In doing so, however, he created the conditions necessary for Yosemite to become a sort of recreational university. However, during Mather's reign, other affiliates of the University of California stepped in to re-focus the Park Service's rampant development in Yosemite *around* the idea of natural history. In other words, Daniels and Mather provided a vision for an urban Yosemite Valley; their scientifically-trained counterparts from Berkeley adapted this urban vision to include ranger talks, guided walks, and—most notably—a museum.

Yosemite's drift towards natural history began in 1908, with the founding of the University of California's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ) by philanthropist Annie Montague Alexander.⁶⁶ Alexander tapped an energetic young naturalist, George

Mather was, to a large extent, imitative rather than innovative. Nearly always intended to assure public enjoyment of the parks, the service's manipulation of nature was mainly an adjunct to its tourism management.” Sellars, “Manipulating Nature's Paradise,” 7.

⁶⁵ “National Park Service Organic Act (1916),” in Dilsaver and Jarvis, *America's National Park System*, 34.

⁶⁶ As noted earlier, a rigid gender hierarchy permeated the National Park Service's early years. The University of California, however, relied greatly on the efforts of two female benefactors: Phoebe Hearst and Annie Alexander. Alexander was particularly influential for the nascent Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, even participating collecting trips; all told, she contributed more than 20,000 items to the museum. At the age of eighty she was still taking trips to Baja in a souped-up Dodge Power Wagon. James R. Griesemer and Elihu M. Gerson, “Collaboration in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 26, no. 2 (1993): 185. Both museum and field duties within the MVZ operated

Bird Grinnell, to head the nascent museum. At this time, the school walked a precarious tightrope between its national aspirations and its comfortable role as “a pet charity for many of the San Francisco Bay Area elite, and a training ground for local doctors, layers, industrialists and agriculturalists.”⁶⁷ The MVZ had many missions, but its central task under Grinnell was charting the distribution of flora and fauna across the American West.⁶⁸ Luckily, Grinnell and Alexander shared a dedication to local landscapes. While notable natural history museums like the Smithsonian cast a global net, the MVZ remained primarily focused on California’s birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.⁶⁹

In the museum’s early days, Alexander had a wide variety of constituents to consider: nature lovers, institutional sponsors, the University of California’s president and regents, and the Bay Area’s social elite. Alexander and Grinnell formulated a mission that would ostensibly please them all: the establishment of California, or even the whole American West, as a nature preserve. While the federal government had pursued this since the Yosemite Grant of 1864, Grinnell’s tenure at the MVZ added a scientific dimension to this process. University administrators delighted in his pledge to put regional research first. Amateur scientists and natural historians also approved, as Grinnell’s research would help their goals of preservation and conservation—those watchwords of the Progressive Era—in California. In other words, a more complete

according to a “flat” hierarchy, meaning that students and professors alike performed grunt work. When it came to publishing findings, Grinnell helped many women—like Margaret Wythe (the museum’s secretary) and Louise Kellogg (Alexander’s partner)—bolster their vitae. *Ibid.*, 200–201. For more on Annie Alexander, see Barbara R. Stein, *On Her Own Terms: Annie Montague Alexander and the Rise of Science in the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁶⁷ Star and Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects,” 403.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 394.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 399.

understanding of geographic range (the museum's overall goal) would help decide which landscapes to be protected and which to be managed for public use.⁷⁰

Yosemite emerged on Grinnell's radar shortly before Mather headed to Washington, D.C. Only one obstacle remained for the young naturalist: a collecting permit. In October 1914, Grinnell informed his fellow U.C. alumnus Secretary Lane of his plans to undertake "a Natural History Survey, under the auspices of the University of California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, along a line through Yosemite from Merced Falls to Mono Lake." After this first request was denied, he sent in a second request; this time, he enclosed a letter of support from the Sierra Club. Grinnell reached out to Mather (now Lane's assistant), asking if the Department of the Interior could "formally request a report from me bearing on the...treatment of wild animals in the Yosemite National Park"; he figured that this public gesture would "give standing" to his wildlife study. The ever-generous Mather declined to ask for a report, but he did quietly contribute \$100 to what he termed "completion of the park's natural history." Since every attempt since 1911 to establish a national park bureau had failed, Mather could not request a report suggesting any faults in the management of national parks.⁷¹

In the end, the MVZ study did nothing to jeopardize its hosts' political positioning. Grinnell's preliminary findings appeared in *Science* only three weeks of the establishment of the National Park Service in the fall of 1916. Titled "Animal Life as an Asset of National Parks," the article (co-written with study partner Tracy Storer) argued for nature study as an important part of recreation in national parks. Perhaps more interestingly, though, it also described national parks as the antithesis of "city parks":

⁷⁰ Ibid., 409.

⁷¹ Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 107 [quote re survey], 108 [quote re Mather].

while city parks were “artificial” and “planned,” national parks were “entirely natural” and “kept fairly immune from human interference.”⁷² In closing, Grinnell advocated for “a trained resident naturalist” in the largest parks to protect animal life and “mak[e] it known to the public.” This naturalist would educate visitors via “popularly styled illustrated leaflets and newspaper articles, on sign posts, and by lectures and demonstrations at central camps.”⁷³

The report established Grinnell as a committed public educator. His early work in the MVZ had taught him about the value of constituents—that no matter how rigorous or peer-reviewed they may be, the true test of scientific findings was their accessibility.⁷⁴ Back when Grinnell first requested a collecting permit from Lane, he vowed that his findings would be shared with the public and not just specialists with university training. This reflected his personal view that the conservation movement could only remain strong if its ideas were sown far and wide.⁷⁵ Connecting the University to its federally-managed backyard helped immensely. As environmental historian Alfred Runte notes, Grinnell’s biggest accomplishment may have been “the marriage between Berkeley and Yosemite.” Along with Albright, Lane, and Mather, Grinnell and the MVZ founded a “university in the wilderness.”⁷⁶

But what form would this university take? Grinnell’s efforts to make natural history accessible would hinge upon a different kind of accessibility. The Mather era in Yosemite would not hew to Grinnell’s “entirely natural” guidelines, but the two

⁷² Joseph Grinnell and Tracy I. Storer, “Animal Life as an Asset of National Parks,” *Science* 44, no. 1133 (1916): 377.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 379.

⁷⁴ Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 112.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

Berkeley-ites' goals would mesh in another way. "Animal Life" argued persuasively that nature study would enhance recreational opportunities in national parks. Mather would eventually jump on the bandwagon, financing a Nature Guide Service himself. Though Mather and Daniels envisioned Yosemite as a city park, its "artificial" and "planned" qualities attracted massive crowds—all of them potential converts to conservationism.

Berkeley's educational efforts in Yosemite began way back in 1870, when geology professor Joseph LeConte led his students on a summer field trip through the park. Public education in the park lagged until a U.C. extension course on California's birds drew twenty-seven of San Francisco's best doctors, teachers, and businessmen; this proof of public interest inspired Grinnell to continue his quest to bring Yosemite's natural history to a wider audience.⁷⁷ In 1919 he excitedly wrote Enos Mills, a Colorado conservationist, to proclaim that—with the help of the University of California in general, and Horace Albright in particular—he would begin a summer "extension course" in Yosemite Valley. This "laboratory-out-of-doors" idea would be bolstered a museum "illustrating the local natural history" that the Park Service would establish. The museum would encourage visitors to "go out of doors and hunt up the animals, *alive*, in their natural surroundings." Grinnell was especially tickled to imagine a museum that "would *not* merely be a morgue!"⁷⁸

Grinnell's quest to bring science to the public was inspired in large part by the *fin de siècle* "New Museum" movement. To understand the New Museum movement, one need look no further than a study on Boston first graders published in 1891. Ninety

⁷⁷ Ibid., 112–114.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 117.

percent of respondents had no understanding of an elm tree, a field of wheat, or even the origin of leather, demonstrating a stark separation from the natural world. As historians of science Karen Rader and Victoria Cain point out, this “perceived national crisis” caused reformers to embrace science education in an attempt to bring Americans closer to the natural world; this would provide pleasure while stressing the rational use of resources—a key tenet of the Progressive Era.⁷⁹ The U.S. Forest Service—founded on a similar intermixture of enjoyment and wise use—was founded in 1905.

The New Museum movement also had something in common with the nascent National Park Service. Museum reformers, attempting to reach a variety of visitors through the effective use of displays, rooted through their respective basements in search of specimens that could “spark interest in scientists and schoolchildren” alike. Rather than merely preserving specimens and producing scientific knowledge, museums gradually become educational institutions.⁸⁰ Based on the contradictory language in the agency’s founding document, the National Park Service experienced similar tensions between the ideas of preservation and public engagement; the Mather-led NPS (1917–1929) dabbled in natural history but stressed visitation and auto access above all. It should be noted that even “museum men” (period terminology for museum reformers) were not above using commercialism to “sell” their subject matter; many consulted with department store display designers, theater directors, and even magazine illustrators to

⁷⁹ Karen Rader and Victoria Cain, *Life on Display: Revolutionizing U.S. Museums of Science and Natural History in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 21. Historian Daniel Rodgers identifies three key strands of Progressivism: anti-monopolism (to fight against a “rigged” economy), social bonds (to combat assumptions that poverty hinged on poor character), and social efficiency (to stress the importance of rationality and education in addressing societal problems). Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (1982): 113–32.

⁸⁰ Rader and Cain, *Life on Display*, 9–10.

utilize “a more explicitly commercial look for educational ends.”⁸¹ Grinnell’s efforts to establish education in Yosemite Valley led to the same kind of negotiation between consumption and conservation. A museum building could instill a sense of conservation in park visitors, but it also needed to “sell” the idea—just as Mather would “sell” the parks to the American public.

The first museum in Yosemite can be traced back to Maj. John Bigelow, of the Ninth U.S. Cavalry, the acting superintendent of Yosemite National Park before the advent of civilian administrators in 1906. Together with Grinnell, he developed a series of displays showing off Yosemite’s flora and fauna; when Albright became superintendent of Yellowstone in 1919, he took Bigelow’s museum idea with him and began curating a collection there.⁸² Isolated in Yellowstone, Albright did not have the luxury of borrowing from a world-class research university like his friends (and fellow Berkeley alumnae) in Yosemite. In a letter to Mather in 1918, Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane stressed that national parks did not need to employ their own scientific experts when they could simply “utilize [the] hearty cooperation” of biologists from other agencies.⁸³ Unnamed but implied here is the Berkeley connection, which would be crucial in establishing yet another tenet of Lane’s letter to Mather: encouraging “[t]he educational, as well as the recreational, use of the national parks.” To further this goal, the Secretary advised the establishment of “[m]useums containing specimens of wild flowers, shrubs, and trees and mounted animals, birds, and fish native to the parks, and

⁸¹ Ibid., 41.

⁸² Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 66.

⁸³ Quoted in Sellars, “Manipulating Nature’s Paradise,” 7.

other exhibits of this character.”⁸⁴ Although primarily known for the black bear (*Ursus americanus*), Yosemite’s museum owed a lot to the fictional Golden Bear.

Not long after Lane reminded Mather of his educational duties, the Californian conservationist (and eugenicist) Charles Goethe happened on a lecture by a U.C. biologist while in the Lake Tahoe area; impressed, he started his own lecture series the following summer at nearby Fallen Leaf Lake.⁸⁵ Stephen Mather dropped by one evening and, convinced of the project’s merit, decided to start a series of ranger talks in Yosemite—essentially beginning NPS interpretation as we know it. The University of California played an active role in this quantum educational leap. During the summer of 1919, Berkeley’s university extension division offered its first LeConte Memorial lectures (named for the field trip leader from 1870) in Yosemite Valley. Prominent faculty members like anthropologist Alfred Kroeber and botanist Willis Jepson spoke on the natural (and human) history of the Sierra Nevada “in the simplest of language,” heeding Grinnell’s idea of accessibility. The lectures drew over 250 people on average, indicating massive interest beyond the academy.⁸⁶

Mather seemed to believe that, by emphasizing Yosemite’s natural wonders, the Park Service could combat—or at least slow—the park’s commercialization.⁸⁷ Beginning

⁸⁴ Quoted in Ralph H. Lewis, *Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service, 1904-1982* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service Curatorial Division, 1993). 3.

⁸⁵ Garland E. Allen, “‘Culling the Herd’: Eugenics and the Conservation Movement in the United States, 1900–1940,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 46 (2013): 49. While conservation and eugenicism may seem to have little in common, both belief systems prize the salvation of something valuable (whether natural resources or desirable physical and mental characteristics) to benefit the greatest number of people possible. In the early twentieth century, supporters of either movement were likely to be white and male—not unlike the composition of the early National Park Service. See also Gray Brechin, “Conserving the Race: Natural Aristocracies, Eugenics, and the U.S. Conservation Movement,” *Antipode* 28, no. 3 (1996): 229–45.

⁸⁶ *Report of the Director of the National Park Service*, 1918 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 194.

⁸⁷ Linda W. Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and Its Resources* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1987), 596.

the summer of 1920, Yosemite added another Berkeley-centric natural history feature to augment the LeConte lectures: the Nature Guide Service, started with Mather's own funds (but at Grinnell's urging). Grinnell envisioned "a natural history leader or guide" to be "available for service at the several public camps of the Valley;" this person would have "the highest standing as a biologist," with a "pleasing personality" to boot. Their duties would include "twenty minute evening talks on local natural history—birds, mammals, reptiles, fishes, flowers—perhaps two or even three such talks...in one evening." There would be a nationwide search "to secure the approval of the best educated classes in the country." He summarily listed some ideal candidates, all of whom were men with Ph.D.'s and university jobs.⁸⁸

Two Nature Guides emerged from a crowded field: Drs. Loye Miller (of the State Normal School in Los Angeles, later UCLA) and Harold Bryant (of Berkeley's MVZ). The *Los Angeles Times* described Bryant, who earned his Ph.D. in zoology from Berkeley, as "one of the best-known scientists in the State."⁸⁹ Two other park naturalists would help Miller and Bryant initiate interpretation in Yosemite Valley: Ansel Hall (another Berkeley man), and Enid Michael (a schoolteacher from Pasadena). Michael was Yosemite's first female ranger-naturalist, and would eventually become the park's first female Nature Guide in 1923; she specialized in collecting flower specimens for display.⁹⁰ Bryant would be instrumental in operating the Yosemite Field School of Natural History, established in 1925 as a way to train applicants (regardless of gender) for naturalist positions within the Park Service. It soon became apparent that only male students would be considered for jobs; regardless of the label 'ranger-naturalist,' Park

⁸⁸ Quoted in Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 115–16.

⁸⁹ "Nature Guide Service a Hit," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 December 1922.

⁹⁰ Lisa Rhudy, "Enid Michael," *Yosemite Nature Notes* 46, no. 2 (1977).

Service personnel believed that women lacked the necessary skills—fighting fires, rescuing climbers, or enforcing the law—to be considered for employment.⁹¹ Historian Alfred Runte has also revealed that over half of the field school’s enrollees were associated with the University of California or George Grinnell.⁹² Thus the National Park Service’s new emphasis on natural history did little to change the agency’s preference for university-trained men—especially those from Berkeley.

Yet the proof of this new program’s success would only be measured in one way: human traffic. Indeed, by 1923 the Nature Guide Service—through its walks, talks, and museum work—was serving over 100,000 visitors per year, roughly three quarters of the park’s total visitors.⁹³ Despite Park Naturalist Hall’s contention that the Nature Guide program success “not be measured entirely by attendance but by the ...stimulated public sentiment favoring the conservation of natural resources,” these missions remained at odds.⁹⁴ Although Mather used the Guide Service to prevent commercialization, the innovative interpretation program still had the same goal as other parts of Mather’s agenda: growth. In order for Yosemite to function as an outgrowth of the University of California, it needed proper “enrollment” figures.

⁹¹ Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman’s Voice*, 70.

⁹² Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 151.

⁹³ “Educational Work in Yosemite Growing By Leaps and Bounds,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 1923. Visitation statistics from <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/Park/YOSE>.

⁹⁴ “Public Appreciates Nature Guide Service,” *Yosemite Nature Notes* 1, no. 7 (21 August 1922).



Figure 3: Nature Guides Dr. Loye Miller (left) and Dr. Harold C. Bryant (right) showing off snakes in front of the Old Village Superintendent's Office, 1920. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

Yosemite's innovative system of interpretation had funding, staff, and considerable publicity; the only thing it lacked was a home. Back when Major Bigelow was curating his collection, Yosemite Valley's downtown sat on the southern banks of the Merced River. Amongst the "nondescript" and "hastily thrown up" (Mark Daniels's words) development of photography studios and curio shops stood the Park Service's headquarters, where ranger Forrest Townsley had started a little museum in the late nineteen-teens. The pairing of administrative and scientific authority—a hallmark of the Progressive Era—spoke to Berkeley's twinned roles in the park.

Townsley found a kindred spirit in Ansel Hall, a Berkeley forestry grad who became an information ranger in 1919. Hall spent most of his first season in Yosemite registering campers and answering questions—noting, when he could, visitors' reactions to the flora and fauna on display in the same building. The next summer (1920) brought the inaugural season of the park's Nature Guide Service, and—with it—even more questions for Hall about the park's natural history.⁹⁵ Hall would go on to not only answer these questions, but lead the fight for a permanent (and fireproof) museum building befitting Yosemite's wondrous collections.

The drive for a permanent museum had lots of pit stops along the way. Mather's largesse once again proved crucial in 1920 when he paid for a handsome dormitory for Yosemite's rangers (the Rangers' Club, still standing today). This created a ripple effect, allowing bachelor rangers like Hall to leave behind their rooms at Jorgenson's studio, built in 1899 as a home office for successful California artist Chris Jorgenson; once relieved of dormitory duty, Jorgenson's studio became the next site to house the park museum. Hall began preparing the new site on a shoestring budget in September 1920,

⁹⁵ Lewis, *Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service*, 3–4.

turning extra doors into exhibit tables and begging lumber from a nearby logging outfit. The amateurish exhibition of objects (including some taxidermy donated by Townsley himself) communicated little concern for the museum's collection. Hall's guiding principle was simple: allow visitors to observe without interference.⁹⁶

Funding remained a constant thorn in Hall's side, making him an expert fundraiser. He also solicited gifts and loans of appropriate objects from collectors throughout California. This skill, which would define his curatorial career in Yosemite, resulted in a collection that—by the time the museum opened at Jorgenson's studio in June 1922—could have fetched more than \$30,000 (roughly \$425,000 in today's dollars).⁹⁷ Encouraged by the success of his collecting efforts, Hall also started the Yosemite Museum Association (later the Yosemite Natural History Association) in 1923 to aid his fundraising for a permanent and fireproof museum building; it was the first organization of its kind established in the Park Service.⁹⁸

There remained one problem. Even though Daniels and others might describe the Valley as a city, it was not the kind of city that could host a world-class museum. The streets remained unpaved, and during rainy periods the Old Village turned into a swamp. Luckily, Mather's Rangers' Club helped him accomplish one of his pet projects: abandoning the ramshackle and poorly-sited Old Village.⁹⁹ On the north side of the Merced River, newly constructed schoolhouse and cottages for government employees emerged shortly before Mather's new dormitory; the Holy Trinity of the Park Service's

⁹⁶ Ibid., 3–5.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁸ Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and its Resources*, 599.

⁹⁹ McClelland, *Presenting Nature*, 96.

rustic style—the Rangers’ Club, the administration building, and eventually the new park museum would follow in waves.

The Rangers’ Club proved to be the first puzzle piece in the Valley’s new urban village. The handsome new structure may have triggered the Valley’s urban migration from south to north, but the administration building provides a particularly potent symbol of this move. The headquarters in the Old Village had always symbolized federal authority; motorists entering the Valley headed there first to register and ask questions of friendly rangers stationed there (like Hall). As first contact point, however, it left a lot to be desired. Its makeshift appearance and general inefficiency caused park managers to worry about both visitors’ perceptions and employees’ morale. Luckily, Congress appropriated funds for a new park headquarters in 1923.¹⁰⁰ Approval for a new post office building—another symbol of federal authority—arrived in 1923, as well. By the end of that year, a long-range plan for “village” (or city) development in the Valley became clear. In contrast to the rambling plan of the old site, the New Village was to be arranged neatly around a plaza—with ample parking, of course. Park Service architect Daniel Hull dutifully noted that the new structures would “harmonize with their natural surroundings,” essentially an agency-wide mandate ever since Lane’s letter of 1918 and a fitting summary of the rustic style.¹⁰¹ While the aesthetic of the Ranger Club and the administration building—rough hewn beams, locally quarried rocks, and secluded

¹⁰⁰ Robert C. Pavlik, “In Harmony with the Landscape: Yosemite’s Built Environment, 1913-1940,” *California History* 69, no. 2 (July 1, 1990): 185.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in McClelland, *Presenting Nature*, 96.

siting—meshed with the landscape in its own way, Hall’s pet museum project would harmonize Yosemite’s built and natural environments in a way all its own.¹⁰²

Around the time of the Old Village’s demise, national parks underwent a reshuffling of their own. After World War I, with a patriotic tide rising throughout the home front, the nation’s parks became yet another symbol of the country’s superiority. Parks transcended their image as mere playgrounds; they became, as historian Marguerite Shaffer notes, a “recreational public school system.”¹⁰³ Stephen Mather, Berkeley man and director of the Park Service, used another academic metaphor when he claimed that “[t]he National Parks are national museums.”¹⁰⁴ The transformation of parks from pleasuring grounds to educational facilities shaped the social and political climate that would birth the new Yosemite museum building. Perhaps more importantly, though, it represented a new image for the NPS. Rather than an a tourist agency masquerading as a preservationist cause—as some historians have argued—the National Park Service’s emphasis on education suggested that the agency had finally figured out how to balance its contradictory missions of public enjoyment and preservation.

Mather’s required a dependable assistant that could become the agency’s public face whenever it was required. Horace Albright, Mather’s fellow University of California alum, left Washington, D.C. in 1919 to become superintendent of Yellowstone; into his place stepped Arno B. Cammerer, a capable career bureaucrat. Beginning in the early

¹⁰² The National Park Service’s trademark rustic style—employed from the agency’s inception until its shift to modernist architecture in the 1950s—sprung from a diverse variety of *fin de siècle* influences, like the famed designs of landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing and the summer camps of the Adirondacks. See McClelland, *Presenting Nature*, 50–58.

¹⁰³ Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001), 122.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Shaffer, *See America First*, 122.

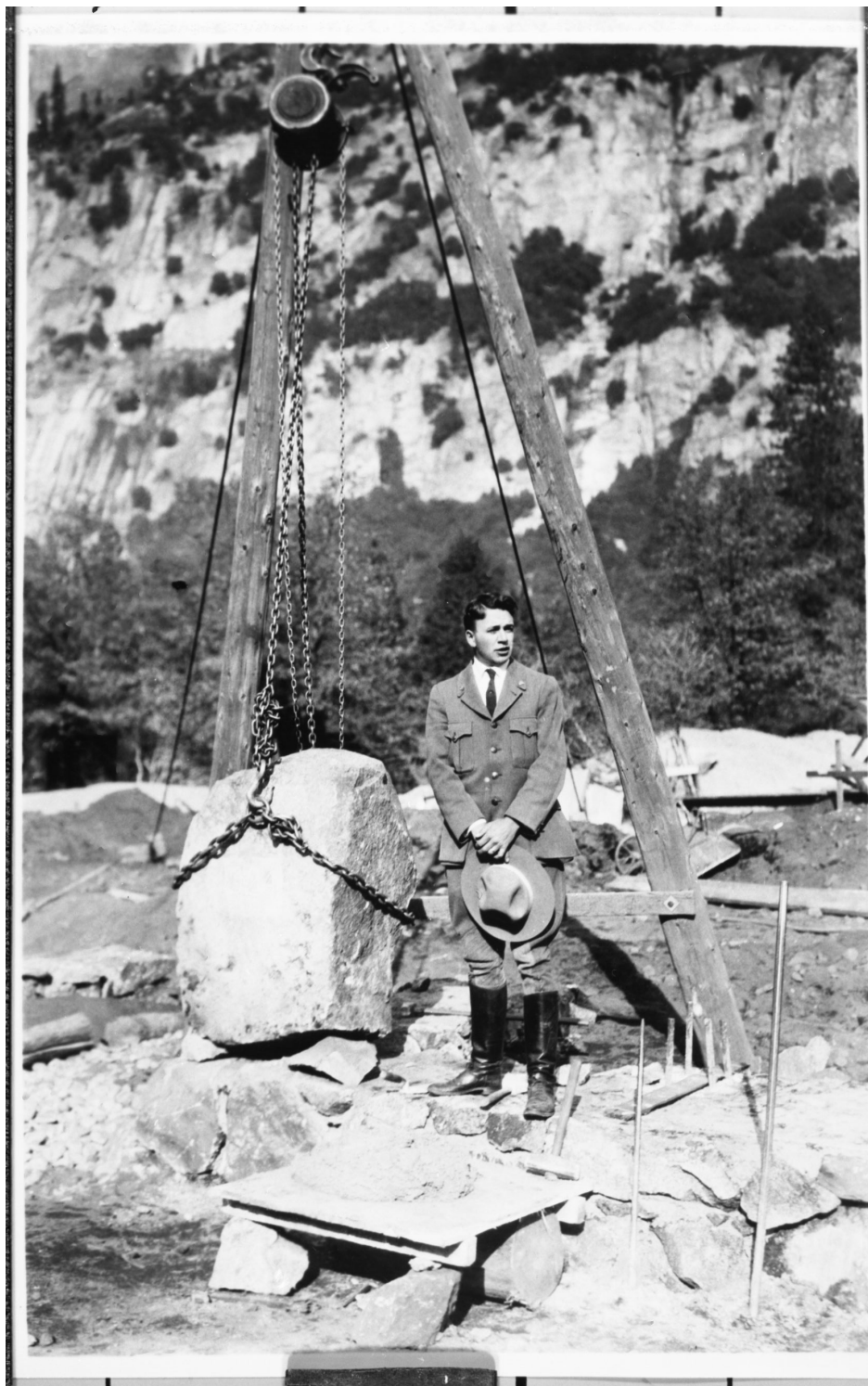


Figure 4: Ansel Hall standing by the cornerstone of the Yosemite Museum, 1924. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive



Figure 5: Traffic outside the Administration Building in the New Village, 1925. This is where motorists entering the park would check in. The Ranger Club (not pictured) is to the left (south), and the new Yosemite Museum would occupy a spot to the right (north) the following year. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive



Figure 6: The Rangers' Club, a fine example of the National Park Service's trademark rustic style. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons user almonroth

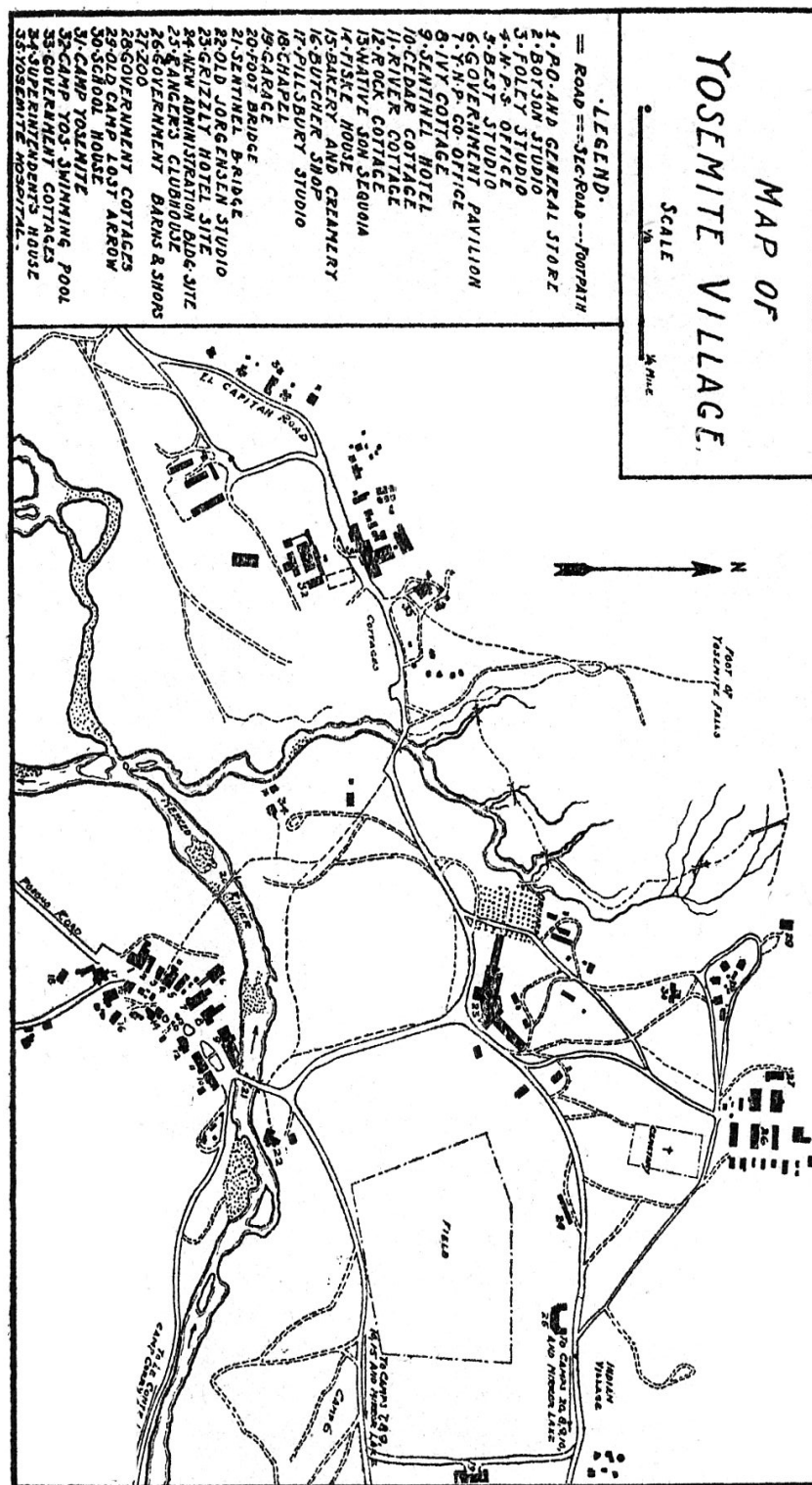


Figure 7: Yosemite Valley, c. 1920. The Old Village is the dense concentration of buildings at bottom center; the New Village site is located in the upper right corner just east of the cemetery (marked with a cross). Ansel Hall, *Guide to Yosemite* (San Francisco: Sunset Publishing House, 1920). Courtesy of Yosemite Library Online

nineteen-twenties, Cammerer presided over the years that turned national parks into “nature’s greatest laboratories of natural history.”¹⁰⁵ The following year, Cammerer sent letters to 134 (!) colleges and universities, urging them to form “National Parks Travel Committees” to organize some sort of summer travel to the parks.¹⁰⁶

Publicly, Cammerer displayed great pride in “the educational side of Park work” which, he argued, would transform parks into “Nature’s outdoor classrooms.”¹⁰⁷ While not exactly informed by the same urges as Grinnell or Hall, Cammerer was in a position to enact such a great change to the Park Service’s mission statement. In fact, his public advocacy for the Service’s educational mission changed one of the agency’s founding documents: the aforementioned letter from Lane to Mather, written in 1918. Lane advanced three central principles, one of which was that parks should be “set apart for the use, observation, health and pleasure of the people.” Cammerer lobbied, the Secretary of the Interior to change ‘observation’ to ‘education,’ thereby signifying a more active role for the parks in public education.¹⁰⁸ With Cammerer at the helm, the parks began their transformation into “a super-university of the natural sciences.”¹⁰⁹

For all the big talk of the agency’s changing priorities, Yosemite’s rangers still housed their expensive collections in a glorified shack. Shortly after establishing the Yosemite Museum Association in 1922, Hall enlisted Herbert Maier—the future assistant Regional Director, possessing a degree in architecture from the University of California—to prepare drawings of the proposed structure. One of the park’s concessioners donated almost \$2,000 to the cause; soon, the Museum Association had

¹⁰⁵ “Nation’s Park Plans Grow,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 November 1922.

¹⁰⁶ Shaffer, *See America First*, 119.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 121.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁰⁹ “Our National Parks Become Universities,” *New York Times*, 24 April 1927.

collected roughly \$9,000 towards the construction of a new fireproof home.¹¹⁰ Visitor counts at the museum, its sponsored campfire talks, and its naturalist-led hikes continued to rise through the early nineteen-twenties.¹¹¹ A victim of his success, Hall moved to Berkeley in 1923 after Mather appointed him Chief Naturalist of the NPS's new Field Educational Headquarters stationed at—where else?—the University of California.¹¹²

Despite the distance, Hall remained dedicated to Yosemite's museum program. Little did he know he had already secured its success years earlier. Flash back to 1921, when Ansel Hall—fresh from an ascent of Middle Palisade, in the southern Sierra—encountered a party of mountaineers including Chauncey J. Hamlin, future president of the American Association of Museums. As they got to talking, Hall detailed his current work involving museums in national parks. Remembering the conversation years later, Hamlin approached the president A press release celebrating the Rockefeller funds noted that Yosemite “will probably become one of the foremost places in all the world for natural history study,” making a vacation in the park a “period of mental improvement as well as of physical improvement.” It also mentioned the museum's place in the larger scheme of park improvements, including the Ranger Club and the improved administration building. The latter proved particularly important, for as “the registration place for all private campers motoring into the Valley” it guaranteed a steady flow of vehicles. Without traffic, Yosemite's educational mission could only advance so far.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Carl P. Russell, “Twenty-Five Years Ago (No. 3),” *Nature Notes* 28, no. 4 (April 1949).

¹¹¹ *Nature Notes*, passim (1922–1930).

¹¹² Carl P. Russell, “Twenty-Five Years Ago (No. 6),” *Nature Notes* 28, no. 11 (November 1949).

¹¹³ “Yosemite Receives \$75,000 from Rockefeller Memorial for Building New Museum,” press release (undated, but probably April 1924), 1–3. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

The New Village's museum remained tethered to the automobile. The same month of the announcement of the Rockefeller grant, Congress—in response to the entreaties of Yosemite superintendent W. B. Lewis—appropriated \$1.5 million to pave the roughly twenty-nine miles of roads in Yosemite Valley El Portal and improve the remaining one hundred and ten miles. This funding was probably inspired by the imminent arrival of the All-Year Highway, connecting Merced to El Portal—and thus announcing the true opening of Yosemite to the automobile, and to the world (see next chapter).¹¹⁴ In fact, the party traveling to the Valley in November 1924 for the laying of the museum cornerstone would travel this very same route.¹¹⁵ Progressive Era Americans noted the interdependence of cars and nature not with irony, but with hope. As Louter writes, parks became spaces “where it was possible for machines and nature to coexist without the same industrial transformation that was affecting other parts of the nation.”¹¹⁶

As construction in the New Village progressed, visitors accustomed to the “string of old buildings” in the Old Village could be forgiven for their confusion; the *Oakland Tribune* announced that “the village has moved across the Valley,” clarifying that—instead of simply moving the old buildings—the government “put up some handsome new ones.”¹¹⁷ Just as the downtown moved, so did the park's visitors; the administration building and the museum promised helped motorists check in their vehicles and check out the park's wildlife. Organized around a parking plaza, these modern-but-rustic structures demonstrated the influence of cars in connecting Berkeley to Yosemite and visitors to the natural world. The new buildings and the road leading to them lent a

¹¹⁴ Pavlik, “In Harmony with the Landscape,” 187.

¹¹⁵ “Ceremonies at Yosemite,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 November 1924.

¹¹⁶ Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*, 19.

¹¹⁷ “Many Surprises Wait Yosemite Park Veterans,” *Oakland (Calif.) Tribune*, 14 June 1925.



Figure 8: Herbert Maier's sketch of the new museum building, undated. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80

natural appearance to the newly constructed city.¹¹⁸

Cars had been essential on the curatorial side of Hall's museum, as well. A mad rush to open (and fill) the new museum commenced with the Rockefeller grant, leading Hall and his replacement—Park Naturalist Carl P. Russell—to use the Park Service's designated "museum truck" on a four-day collecting trip to Merced that netted them valuable paintings and photographs.¹¹⁹ Hall's new job in Berkeley begat another feather in his cap: Executive Agent for the Committee on Museums in National Parks, a title bestowed on him by the American Association of Museums. Moving between multiple jobs and multiple places, Hall became hard to pin down; he had to nag both of his employers to pay his mileage for one of his various duties which, for him as well and his employers, had started to blur together.¹²⁰ Hall's mobility helped and hurt him.

He never forgot the Park Service's failure to grant him an adequate vehicle. During his early years, he used his own automobile and "ran thousands of miles on Government business at my own expense." When he finally received a government car in the spring of 1923, it was a discarded Ford that "was too much of a wreck to be taken off the floor of Yosemite Valley"—yet when he left for a trip to Europe, the park's plumbing department repossessed it to use its engine as a pump. Sick of the run-around, Hall finally

¹¹⁸ Historian David Louter argues that early NPS architects and engineers excelled at camouflaging their developments so they appeared part of their surroundings: "...we could benefit from looking at parks through the lens of another preservation principle, one that considers preservation as a dynamic process, one that accepts the human and natural elements of the parks as part of the same mental and physical landscape. In this way, we can see attempts to accommodate autos by designing roads (and other park structures) so that they appeared natural as part of a much larger process of making—not destroying—national parks." Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*, 23.

¹¹⁹ Ansel Hall, "Progress Report of the Executive Agent for the Committee on Museums in National Parks, American Association of Museums," 20 December 1924. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

¹²⁰ Ansel Hall to W. B. Lewis, 16 July 1925. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80; Ansel Hall, "Voucher of Executive Agent (American Association of Museums) for March 1925, 10 April 1925." Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80

bought a Chevrolet truck for the museum using funds he had collection for construction and equipment; he also bought a car for himself with his own personal funds. Extracting mileage expenses from the Park Service remained difficult, and in early 1925 Hall told NPS Director Cammerer that he would just pay his most recent bill himself; the unpleasant alternative, he concluded threateningly, was to tell the American Association of Museums or the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial that “the Park Service is not cooperating in the way that it should.”¹²¹ His struggle with mileage reveals the overlapping layers of authority that came with the New Village’s museum. Stationed in Berkeley, loyal to Yosemite, and working for the American Association of Museums, Hall struggled to negotiate educational, federal, and institutional demands. For better or worse, his mobility enabled him to juggle these tasks.

Hall’s new gig in the East Bay was a reward for his revolutionary work, but he remained head of a rag-tag bureau with no official recognition. In early 1925, citing the permanent homes of the Park Service’s Landscape Architectural Division in Los Angeles and the Engineering Division in Portland, Hall lobbied to permanently house the Education Division in Berkeley. The city provided easy access to many of the nation’s parks, but it remained far enough away from them to avoid “the constant interruptions that are always occurring in the parks.” The University of California played a major role in Hall’s plea. In addition to providing “[s]cientific information of all kinds” and “technical experts,” it also proved a ready source for “[a]ll kinds of skilled labor.” Perhaps most personally for Hall, Berkeley had been his home since 1923 (and before that, during his education in the nineteen-teens); he bought property there shortly after his

¹²¹ Ansel Hall to Arno B. Cammerer, 16 January 1925. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

relocation, adding studios, laboratories, and shops at his own expense.¹²² Hall's wish would come true in 1925, when Mather established the Education Division there, furthering Berkeley's role as the urban backdrop to natural history in the nation's parks.

However, in late 1924 and early 1925, the imminent opening of Yosemite's new museum consumed most of Hall's time. He asked Yosemite's superintendent to loan him Park Naturalist Carl Russell for three months to help with "models and other exhibits preparatory to opening the new Yosemite Museum."¹²³ Obsessed with finishing the new building by spring of 1925, he even brought Herbert Maier—now employed by the American Association of Museums as the architect for the Yosemite project—to Berkeley to work on museum installation plans and models.¹²⁴ Travel between Berkeley and Yosemite became a foundation of the new museum. In his quest to bring the park's natural world to a larger audience, Hall became Yosemite's first commuting employee.

A product of the Valley and the Bay, the new museum building bore hallmarks of both places. Maier designed it to fit alongside the Ranger's Club and the new administration building, two symbols of the University of California's indelible influence on the park. Taken together, the three structures—and their indigenous logs, shingles, and stone—formed a crash course on the Park Service's emerging rustic style. The Berkeley-trained Maier, aware of "what has been said of preserving parks undefined by man's

¹²² Ansel Hall, "Some Suggestions for the Organization of the Educational Department," 19 January 1925, pg. 5–6. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

¹²³ Ansel Hall to W. B. Lewis, 8 December 1924. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

¹²⁴ Ansel Hall, "Progress Report of the Executive Agent for the Organization of Museums in National Parks, American Association of Museums," 20 December 1924, pg. 1. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80; Ansel Hall, "Some Suggestions for the Organization of the Educational Department," 19 January 1925, pg. 6. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

handiwork,” kept the building flat; a tall building, he said, would somewhat foolishly enter into “competition with the cliffs” while remaining visible rather from above (rather than disappearing under the oak and pine canopy).¹²⁵ Famed Bay Area architect Bernard Maybeck, known for his hillside houses in Berkeley, also proved a crucial influence on the rustic architectural style of the Park Service.¹²⁶ Berkeley thus provided architectural as well as scientific grounding for the project.

While the outside harmonized with the landscape, the inside resembled a university re-created in miniature. The foyer contained background information grounding the subsequent exhibits squarely in California: a naturalist sat next to relief models of Yosemite Valley, the park, and the entire state. Like buildings on a campus, the rest of the rooms were dedicated to specific subjects. The first room contained the geologic story of the park. The next room, dedicated to life zones, showed how flora and fauna changed with elevation along the Sierra Nevada. After that came the ethnology room, filled with the baskets that anchored earlier museum collections. Next came the history room, featuring bygone objects like stagecoaches; abutting that was a public library. Like many academic buildings, the bottom story contained “classrooms” while the upper story of the contained the more specialized—and non-public—functions. The offices of the naturalist and nature guides sat side by side, sharing an administrative assistant like faculty members might. A printing room, a darkroom, and a taxidermy

¹²⁵ McClelland, *Presenting Nature*, 99–100; Maier quoted in *ibid.*, 100.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

room rounded out the top floor, along with a special room for lectures and a “club room” complete with a fireplace—a kind of faculty lounge, if you will.¹²⁷

But the building was not meant to keep visitors indoors all day. To Hall’s boss, H. C. Bumpus of the American Association of Museums, the museum was not an “end in itself” but instead “a means for preparing the visitor to understand the stories that nature outside the building can tell so abundantly and so dramatically.”¹²⁸ The south side of the building, facing the Yosemite Village plaza—the main source of parking—contained two openings (both to the museum and the open-air auditorium); this helped connect the visitors’ automobiles with their educational enhancement.¹²⁹ The museum’s location also spoke to the automobile’s importance; the administration building, where motorists registered, and the museum—essentially serving as a visitor center—would serve as a collecting jumping-off point for most tourists.¹³⁰

The automobile actually occupied an important place inside the museum, as well. By beginning with a glacier and ending with a stagecoach, the layout put vehicles on par with some of Earth’s most impressive forces. Bumpus’ own travels to and from the park shaped his thoughts; he appreciated that specimens were arranged according to the “plant and animal zones that one passes through in motoring from the warm climate of the low

¹²⁷ Ansel Hall, “Progress Report of the Executive Agent for the Committee on Museums in National Parks, American Association of Museums,” 5 October 1924, pg. 2–3. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

¹²⁸ H. C. Bumpus, “A Report to the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Upon a Visit to the Yosemite National Park,” November 1927 [specific day not given], pg. 7. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

¹²⁹ Ansel Hall, “Progress Report of the Executive Agent for the Committee on Museums in National Parks, American Association of Museums,” 5 October 1924, pg. 2. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

¹³⁰ Lewis, *Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service*, 36.

lands (Upper Sonoran) into that of the Valley (Transition Zone).”¹³¹ More subtly than the building’s siting, the internal layout made transportation an important part of Yosemite’s natural world.

The museum’s opening in May 1926 corresponded with Yosemite’s automotive history in a big way. That July, the park celebrated the “discovery” of Yosemite Valley by white men seventy-five years prior in conjunction with its traditional Indian Field Days. Yet such an anniversary could not be celebrated in isolation, not with the completion of the much-anticipated All-Year Highway from Merced so imminent. In the past, the park’s Indian Field Days had been used to bolster visitor counts in the late summer (prime waterfall season in the spring used to be a bigger draw).¹³² In the context of cars, however, Native residence in the Valley was presented as merely another milestone on the way to modernity. On the second day of the celebration, August 1, both eras would be celebrated with pageant performed by over 200 players. Starting with a pyrotechnic display, the play covered all stages of the park’s history from Native habitation until the present day.¹³³ The implied end of the pageant was, of course, the opening of the new highway that the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* called the “dawn of a new transportation era.”¹³⁴ Like the museum exhibits, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Valley’s “discovery” would culminate with the automobile era—representing not only the current moment, but also infinite progress beyond.

¹³¹ H. C. Bumpus, “A Report to the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Upon a Visit to the Yosemite National Park,” November 1927 [specific day not given], pg. 7. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

¹³² Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 117.

¹³³ “Diamond Jubilee Pageant Planned for Yosemite,” *Oakland (Calif.) Tribune*, 18 July 1926.

¹³⁴ “Diamond Jubilee at Yosemite to Open on July 31,” *Berkeley (Calif.) Daily Gazette*, 23 July 1926.



Figure 9: The Yosemite Museum, 1938. Note the multiple entrances facing the plentiful parking lot.
Courtesy of the Mariposa County Public Library and the San Joaquin Valley Digitization Project

To pragmatists like Stephen Mather and his publicist, Robert Sterling Yard, automobiles remained essential to the Park Service's educational mission; indeed, at other parks like Crater Lake, naturalist-led motor caravans were already part of the syllabus.¹³⁵ But could internal combustion really help Americans understand the natural world? If tourists stayed on the road, would they spare less durable parts of the park? Could technology allow park visitors to be a part of the natural world without disturbing it?¹³⁶

The goal of teaching conservation in Yosemite had not died with Grinnell. Even in its early phases, the Valley's humble museum promised to lessen the impact on surrounding landscapes. Naturalists implored visitors to "do your botanizing at the flower exhibits" so as to not disturb wild specimens.¹³⁷ Writing to a prospective lecturer in 1924, Carl Russell (Hall's replacement) admitted that the park's visitors remained "largely pleasure seekers of the jazz-lover sort"; thus, any messages of conservation had to be tempered by "the popular science side."¹³⁸ By the time the New Village's museum opened, Russell was more adamant than ever: "If I were asked what I thought the greatest purpose and greatest opportunity of educational work in the national park is, I should say it is conservation teaching."¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*, 57.

¹³⁶ "The ideal of being a part of, but not disturbing, the natural world speaks to how Americans imagine their place in nature and reconcile their relationship with it. Leo Marx described this ideal as the 'middle landscape,' and more recently Jennifer Price has called it a mixture of 'nature and artifice.' It is an ideal that allows us to appreciate how twentieth-century realities have shaped national parks and that allows us to recognize our connections with nature in them." Ibid., 23.

¹³⁷ "Do Your Botanizing at the Flower Exhibits," *Yosemite Nature Notes* 1, no. 5 (7 August 1922).

¹³⁸ Carl Russell to Dr. Vinal, 2 May 1924. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

¹³⁹ Carl Russell to Herbert Maier, 8 November 1926, pg. 2. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 79.

Could crowds actually be *good* for Yosemite? The New Village's museum emerged as the All-Year Highway sparked a massive boom in auto tourism. It also, however, gave the conservationist gospel to large numbers of visitors. As with Mather's philosophy during the Park Service's early years, crowds would mean success: although they would tax park resources like never before, mass amounts of tourists and cars would demonstrate the agency's political and economic viability. Crowding became similarly important as a barometer of the new museum's popularity. In the months following its opening, H. C. Bumpus requested reports that showed an "increasing number of visitors," presumably to demonstrate the viability of such a project in other parks.¹⁴⁰ Herbert Maier, reporting "tremendous crowds deluging the Yosemite Museum" in the fall of 1927, actually recommended enlarging the museum—not for exhibit space, but for floor space; Maier's design, while handsome, "had not been expected originally to accommodate the crowds the new highway is bringing in."¹⁴¹ Like many successful galleries, the new Yosemite museum could anchor an urban environment.

T. S. Palmer, chief of the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Biological Survey, said as much upon visiting Yosemite in the summer of 1927. Like others before and since, he noted that on the most crowded weekends Yosemite Valley became "one of the 15 largest cities in the State." Palmer observed that, even though the new highway had "broken down the wall which formerly surrounded the Park," the nature guide service remained important "for preventing the 'jazzing' and impairment of Yosemite as a

¹⁴⁰ H. C. Bumpus to Carl Russell, 9 December 1927. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 81.

¹⁴¹ Herbert Maier to Carl Russell, 30 October 1927. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 81.

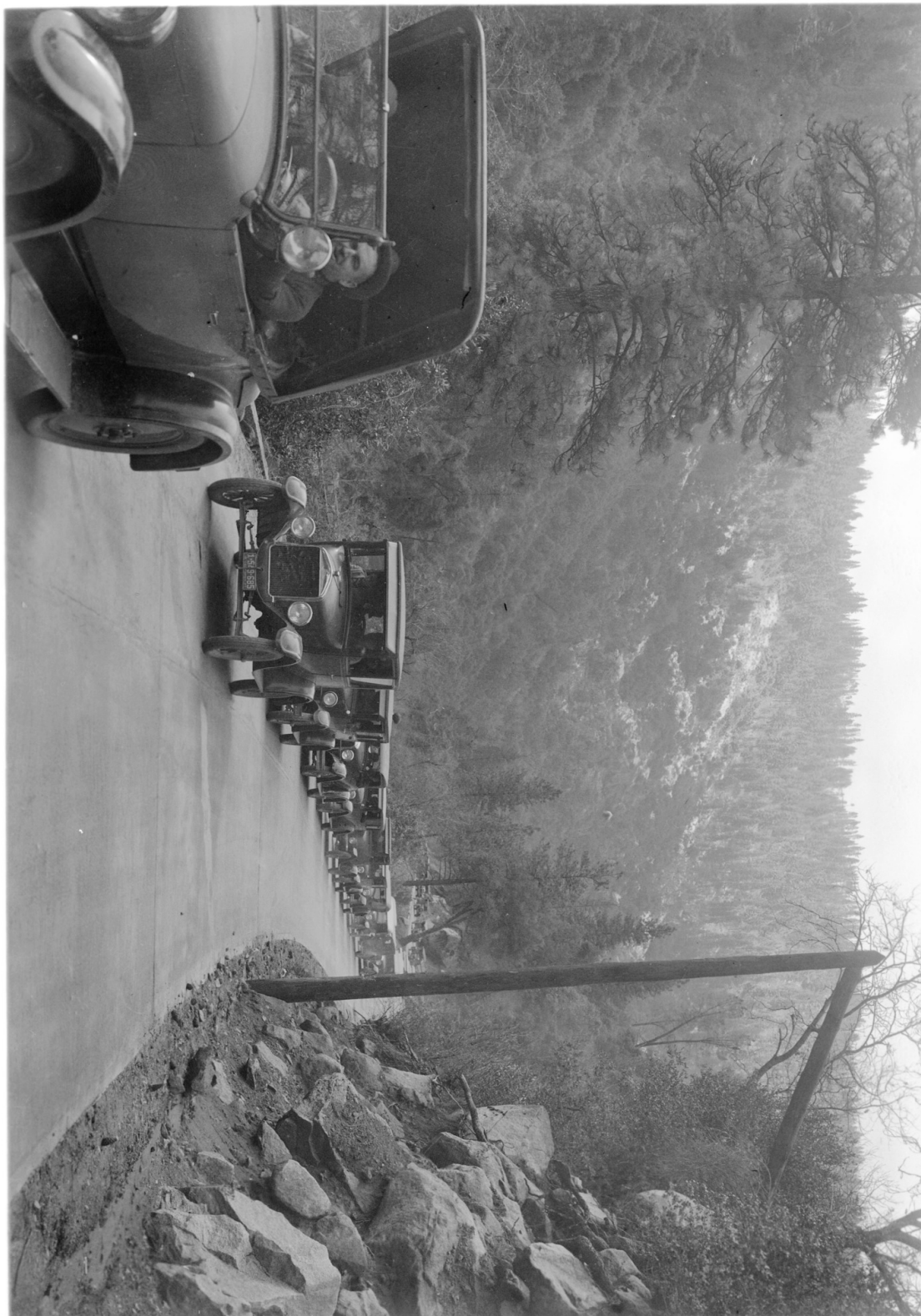


Figure 10: Traffic waiting to enter the park on the All-Year Highway, 1927. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

National Park.”¹⁴² Even visitors interested in the park’s natural history—what the museum was promoting—had to overcome an “aversion to crowds” if they wished to call on a park naturalist. During his trip, Palmer met a man who loved birds but hated crowds, and thus skipped all the guided walks emanating from the museum; upon learning that he might have seen a quarter of the Valley’s bird species on one particular walk, he was “disappointed.”¹⁴³ On certain weekends, the museum’s popularity inhibited its educational functions.

Bumpus may have taken pride in the growth of the museum’s clientele, but he also took pride in its growth as an organization. As he proudly reported to the Laura Spelman Rockefeller board, during 1927 the museum’s staff increased from six to fifteen and the attendance at museum-sponsored lectures in the Valley grew from 38,000 to 100,000. Attendance on naturalist-led field trips had almost quadrupled. Perhaps most importantly for the museum’s mission, over one half of Yosemite’s 500,000 visitors during 1927 visited the museum at some time during their trip. “There were times,” he reported with pride, that the “rooms were literally crowded.”¹⁴⁴

The University of California produced Yosemite’s first urbanists and its first natural historians, its developers and its defenders. The new museum—a crowd-creator and people-educator extraordinaire—served both camps. Taken by itself, it represented a triumph for conservation: educating visitors, housing the Nature Guide Service, and

¹⁴² T. S. Palmer, “Memorandum of Observations in Yosemite National Park, July, 1927.” pg. 2. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

¹⁴⁴ H. C. Bumpus, “A Report to the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Upon a Visit to the Yosemite National Park,” November 1927 [specific day not given], pg. 6. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 12, Subseries 1, Box 80.

allowing visitors to do their botanizing in a controlled environment. In the larger context of the Valley, however, the museum anchored a new metropolitan area on the Merced's northern banks, bringing order to the "ramshackle" situation that had accrued over the years; along with the administration building, it served as a makeshift visitor center.

As an institution, the museum altered the course of Yosemite's urban history. In the early twentieth century, Berkeley *was* its university; nearby San Francisco had a busier port and a bigger industrial base, but no municipality had a bigger effect on the early history of Yosemite—and the National Park Service in general. The university's (ultimately successful) quest for national notoriety began with some federal property a bit closer to home.

In the early years of the Park Service Yosemite emerged as a reflection of Berkeley, beginning a process of metropolitan mirroring that would continue for the next fifty years. "[T]he wall which formerly surrounded the Park" dissolved as the automobile became a fact of life, shaping Yosemite in the image of its neighboring cities and blurring the lines between city and country. Commenting on the New Village's newest asset, the *Los Angeles Times* noted that "the most striking individual feature of the entire institution" was not a Miwok basket or a piece of taxidermy, but in "thirty-four remarkable camera studies of the valley executed by Mode Wineman of Pasadena."¹⁴⁵ Curatorial squabbling aside, Los Angeles would take over where Berkeley left off. Yosemite's journey southward (or the Southland's journey northward) is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁴⁵ "Will Preserve Arts of Nature," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 February 1926.

Chapter 2

“Invade the North”: The Auto Club of Southern California and Yosemite’s New Season, 1913–1941

The Automobile Club of Southern California’s tranquil off-street parking almost makes one forget the busy intersection of Figueroa and Adams next door. In 1924 it was actually the nation’s *busiest* crossing, hosting almost 70,000 cars each day.¹⁴⁶ As traffic choked downtown, professionals moved their families increasingly farther out into the city’s suburban ring. But, for the Auto Club, Los Angeles stretched even farther to the north, out of the transverse ranges and into the southern tip of the San Joaquin Valley, past Fresno and increasingly rustic-sounding towns like Madera, Coarse Gold and Oakhurst—all the way to Yosemite.

Despite the Bay Area’s crucial role in creating and configuring the park, the 1920s and 1930s saw a new tourist geography emerge in California. Led by the Automobile Club of Southern California (ACSC), the Southland’s promotional maven, like the All-Year of Club of Southern California, *Los Angeles Times* publisher Harry Chandler, the city chamber of commerce, and a coalition of car dealers and outdoor retailers, embarked on a quest to make their city a true destination in all seasons. Better roads to Yosemite—especially those from the south—form a crucial part of this effort. Thanks in large part to the ACSC’s tireless lobbying, *three* new highways in the span of a decade gave Southern Californians easier access to the park; these modern all-year roads allowed travelers to subvert the typical tourist seasons, taking their cars where—and

¹⁴⁶ Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 80.

when—they wanted. The ACSC thus made Yosemite the northernmost extension of the Los Angeles area, incorporating the park into Southern California’s booming urban geography.

At the turn of the century, forty percent of Californians (all 1.5 million of them) lived in either the San Francisco Bay Area or greater Los Angeles area. These two urban areas continue to duel for prominence, each possessing some kind of edge in terms of weather (Los Angeles), innovation (San Francisco, at least since 2000), or traffic (tie). *Fin de siècle* Bay Area had all the eastern institutions—opera, museums, universities—but Los Angeles had sheer momentum, possessed by what one scholar terms “a civic ambition comparable to the high provincial security of San Francisco.”¹⁴⁷ What the Southland lacked in stature, it made up in audacity.

The Automobile Club of Southern California dates back to 1900, right as Los Angeles’s ambition hit new highs. The ACSC was one of many organizations founded around the turn of the century that sought to capitalize on the region’s potential for tourism. Along with its predecessors (the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and the Los Angeles Board of Trade) and its peers (the Merchants and Manufacturers Association and the Los Angeles Realty Board), the Auto Club’s executives joined an important class of citizens that one scholar terms “entrepreneurs of place.” While their methods differed, each of these groups sought one thing above all: the growth of the Los Angeles area.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 45.

¹⁴⁸ Todd Gish, “Growing and Selling Los Angeles: The All-Year Club of Southern California, 1921-1941,” *Southern California Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (2007): 397.

Their efforts succeeded: by 1920, the City of Angeles had surpassed San Francisco in population; by 1930, it was the fifth most populous city in the nation.¹⁴⁹

The ACSC's original goals belied its future clout. The club's bylaws humbly claimed it was "a social organization" for those "owning, manufacturing, or interested in the sale of self-propelled vehicles." Its officers pledged to seek "rational legislation" and "proper rules," and to protect the "lawful rights and privileges" of auto owners. Perhaps the only hint of the Auto Club's broader ambitions came in its promise "[t]o promote and encourage in all ways the construction and maintenance of good roads and the improvement of existing highways."¹⁵⁰ True to its pledge, the ACSC focused on local issues in its first decade: organizing auto parades, lobbying for higher speed limits, and even cracking down on reckless chauffeurs.¹⁵¹

The Auto Club's footprint soon expanded, both literally and figuratively. Its local political influence had grown considerably by 1915, including fights for highway bonds and against speed traps. Its Touring Bureau answered hundreds of queries each day, and its six branch offices issued hundreds of thousands of road maps each year. The club's spatial expansion spoke to its increasing ambition, some 8,500 signs over nearly 10,000 highway miles (including the coast-to-coast National Old Trails Highway) testifying to the Club's powerful presence.¹⁵² The club's efforts to open Yosemite National Park to automobile traffic marked another important phase in its development.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹⁵⁰ Auto Club of Southern California, "Auto Club of Southern California Historical Material Vol. I: Digest of Minutes of Board of Directors and Touring Topics," Part I [December 13, 1900 to January 14, 1907], 2. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., Fletcher Bowron papers, Box 43.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 25–30.

¹⁵² ACSC, "Auto Club of Southern California Historical Material Vol. III" [July 27, 1915 to December 1919], 4. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., Fletcher Bowron papers, Box 43.

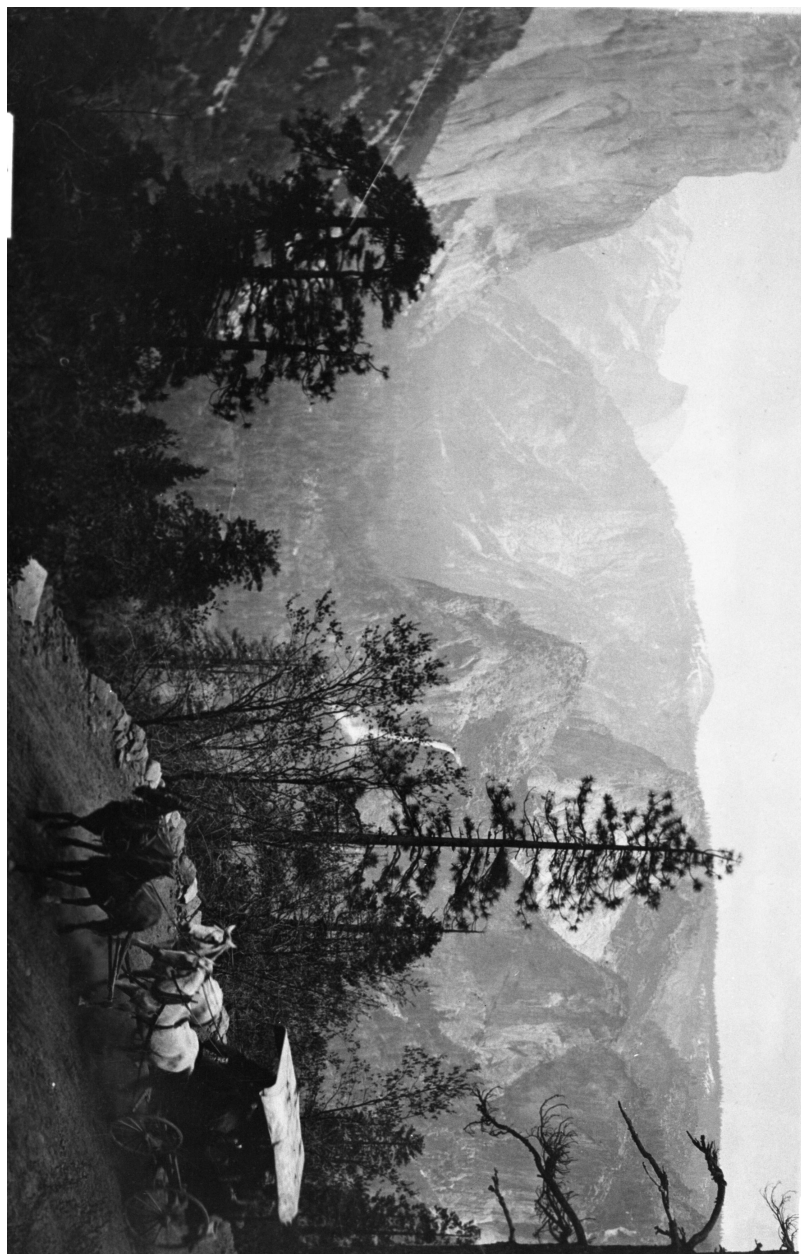


Figure 11: A stagecoach on the old Wawona Road, c. 1905. Notice the steep drop just beyond the road's edge. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

Although three toll roads reached Yosemite Valley by the 1870s, they remained for stagecoaches only; automobiles represented a potentially unsafe addition to the equation.¹⁵³ The Auto Club's interest in the nation's oldest park began in 1911 with the simple adoption of a motion in favor of "the opening of Yosemite to motorists." By early 1912, powerful allies like the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce joined the fight.¹⁵⁴ The Southern California coalition led by the Auto Club grew even broader—car dealers, Chamber of Commerce representatives, realtors, and even former U.S. Senator Frank Flint—in time for the National Park Conference held in Yosemite in October 1912. While the Los Angeles delegation made the trek to lobby for automotive access, they also managed to sneak in a plug for their preferred route: the Wawona Road, which offered Angelenos easier access to wonders like Glacier Point, the Big Trees, and—most importantly—Yosemite Valley.¹⁵⁵ Fifty years after its preservation as part of the original Yosemite Grant, Wawona held the key to Los Angeles's nascent tourist industry.

The Southern California delegation did not make the trip in vain. Disappointingly, though, the Department of the Interior's had a strange conception of "access." The first automobile permit into Yosemite, issued in August 1913, came with a host of strings attached: a \$5 permit for each car (over \$100 in today's dollars); a strict schedule dictating when motorists could leave and enter Yosemite Valley; and a sinister speeding policy (cars were actually *timed* to make sure they obeyed the rules). The *Los Angeles*

¹⁵³ Shankland, *Steve Mather of the National Parks*, 154.

¹⁵⁴ ACSC, "Auto Club of Southern California Historical Material Vol. I: Digest of Minutes of Board of Directors and Touring Topics," Part II [February 1909 to November 16, 1911], 65. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Fletcher Bowron papers, Box 43; "Automobile Club of Southern California's Part in the Opening of Yosemite to Automobiles and the Construction of the Merced Canyon Road into Yosemite" (excerpts from the minutes of the board of directors), 1. Auto Club of Southern California corporate archives [hereafter ACSCCA], E.E. East papers, Box 8, folder 000095.

¹⁵⁵ "Automobile Club of Southern California's Part in the Opening of Yosemite to Automobiles and the Construction of the Merced Canyon Road into Yosemite" (excerpts from the minutes of the board of directors), 1–2. ACSCCA, E.E. East papers, Box 8, folder 000095.

Times, a strong supporter of the Auto Club's mission, dubbed this hands-on approach a "Russian Spy System."¹⁵⁶ More importantly for the Auto Club of Southern California, though, motorists could only enter the Valley from the Coulterville and Big Oak Flat Road, inconveniently located at the park's northwestern boundary.

The Coulterville route presented another major problem for Los Angeles's growth entrepreneurs: its heights of roughly 6,000 feet made it impassible in winter. And so, even before the first automobile permit was issued, the ACSC started a campaign to raise funds for another road into the park—a highway from Mariposa to El Portal (on the park's western boundary) that the Club's engineer dubbed "by far the most feasible route" for auto access to Yosemite Valley.¹⁵⁷ Its relatively low elevation (roughly 2,000 feet, mostly along the banks of the Merced River) and its connection to an existing road to the Valley at El Portal (home of the railroad depot) made it a likely candidate for the first "all-year" road into Yosemite, an economic and recreational lifeline even when covered with ice.

First, though, the Auto Club would tackle the park's restrictive rules by heading straight for their source. After a meeting in late summer 1913 in which ACSC brass convinced Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane (a Californian himself) to loosen Yosemite's auto regulations, the *Los Angeles Times* celebrated the Club's determination to "invade the North." The Auto Club scored another serious coup at this tete-a-tete with Lane: the sole responsibility for opening the Wawona route to auto traffic.¹⁵⁸ The

¹⁵⁶ "Automobile Rules for Yosemite National Park," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 August 1913.

¹⁵⁷ "Automobile Club of Southern California's Part in the Opening of Yosemite to Automobiles and the Construction of the Merced Canyon Road into Yosemite" (excerpts from the minutes of the board of directors), 5. ACSCCA, E.E. East papers, Box 8, folder 000095.

¹⁵⁸ Bert C. Smith, "Bars Down at Yosemite, Red Tape is Unraveled," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 October 1913.

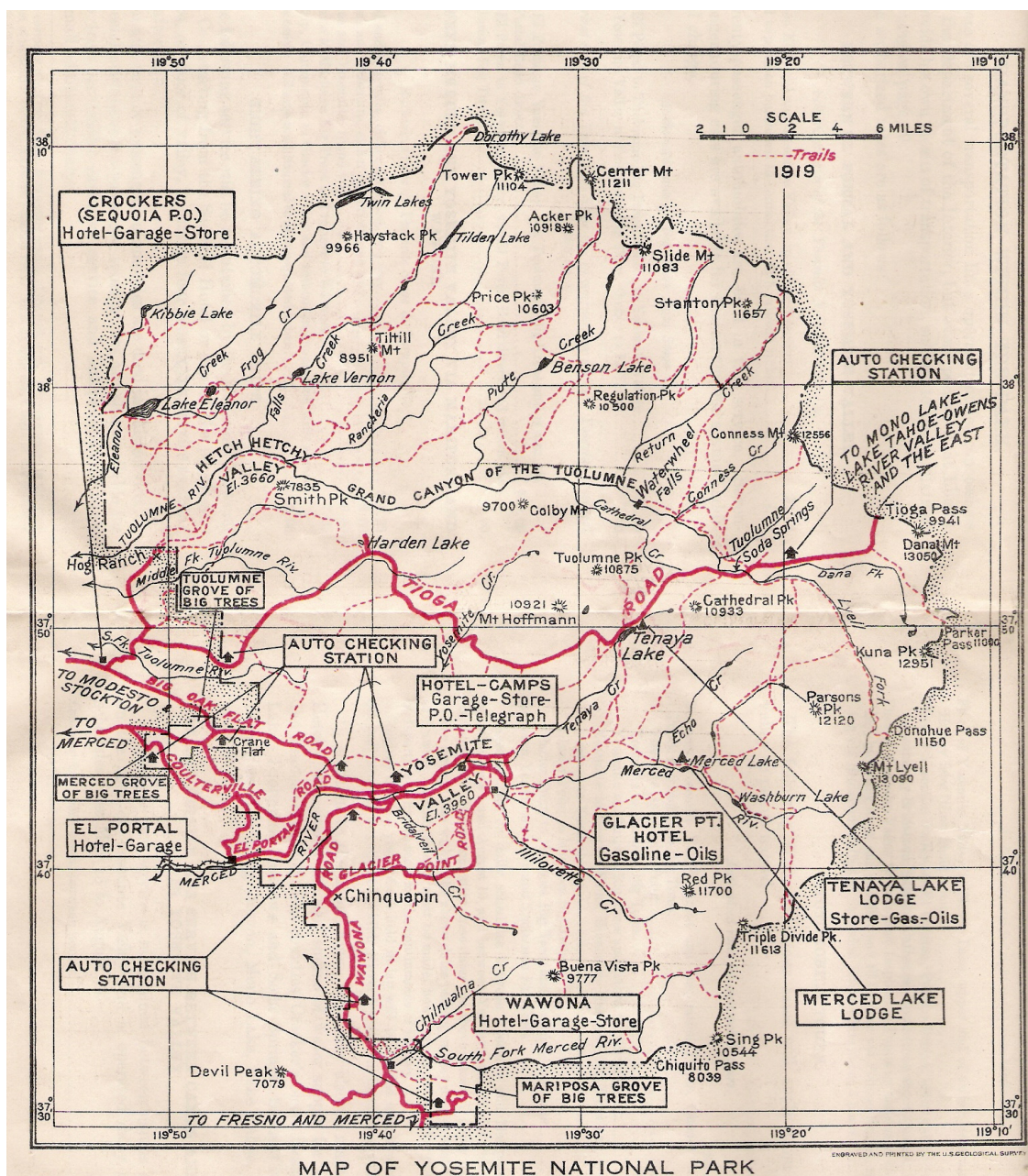


Figure 12: Yosemite's road system in 1919. Note the two northwestern routes, as well as the sharp curves of the Wawona Road to the south; the spur heading east from the Wawona Road offers access to Glacier Point.
 Courtesy Yosemite Online Library

Department of the Interior, wanting to evade its road-building responsibility, still recommended the Coulterville Road to access Yosemite Valley.

The hardy souls using the Wawona Road endured a number of inconveniences. Before the road allowed private autos, motorists parked cars at any number of resorts and took a stage down the twisty route. Pressure from the Auto Club and other southern communities, like Madera and Fresno, finally convinced the Department of the Interior to act. Once the Wawona Road opened to private auto traffic in the summer of 1914, motorists had to contend with the same stringent rules that had been waived for Coulterville Road traffic: they had to leave Wawona between 6:00 and 8:00 am, leaving the Valley not much later than 6:00 pm to return to Wawona by their 8:00 pm “curfew.” Motorists violating this schedule were still subject to fines.¹⁵⁹

The Auto Club remained unsatisfied, and its corporate board urged their in-house engineer to offer Lane his services on the Wawona Road project; they insisted, though, that the federal government pay for the road’s construction.¹⁶⁰ Despite the road’s constant openings and closings, the ACSC included the Wawona route in their “California Exposition Tour,” a counter-clockwise arc flowing from Southern California to San Francisco (the exposition site) via the inland route and returning via the coast.¹⁶¹ The federal government officially took responsibility for the Wawona Road in 1917 after

¹⁵⁹ “Wawona Route into Yosemite Park is Officially Opened,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 12 August 1914.

¹⁶⁰ “Automobile Club of Southern California’s Part in the Opening of Yosemite to Automobiles and the Construction of the Merced Canyon Road into Yosemite” (excerpts from the minutes of the board of directors), 8. ACSCCA, E.E. East papers, Box 8, folder 000095.

¹⁶¹ “California Exposition Tour,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 1915.



Figure 13: An auto run over the old Wawona Road to the Mariposa Grove, 1920. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive



Figure 14: The tour route recommended by the ACSC connecting both of California's world's fairs. Note the thicker line along the Wawona entrance to Yosemite. "California Exposition Tour," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 1915.

acquiring the road's southern portion from the Washburn family; however, its commitment to making it merely passable kept motorists wary.¹⁶²

Despite progress on the Wawona project, the ACSC remained focused on the Mariposa-El Portal project touted by the Los Angeles delegation of 1912. Unlike the mountainous Wawona and Big Oak Flat entrances, the proposed road through the Merced River canyon held the promise of a snow-free drive. Funding it, however, was another question entirely. The Auto Club's federal connections helped in this regard. When the U.S. Forest Service's Supervisor for Los Angeles County contacted the Club to ask which mountain road the USFS should support with their 1918 appropriations, the answer was obvious: the Mariposa-El Portal road.¹⁶³

But the ACSC could not do it alone, as they had with Wawona's opening. With \$700,000 in federal and state funds already appropriated, California's motorists needed to pony up \$1,000,000 (via 200,000 certificates valued at \$5 apiece) to completely fund the all-season road. The Park Service offered a bonus: any motorist willing to contribute \$5 towards the new road would receive a voucher good for entering Yosemite via any road they pleased. Under an agreement with the Secretary of the Interior, the funds raised would be held in trust until the State of California finished grading the new route.¹⁶⁴

Yet reports from Auto Club secretary Standish Mitchell that Southern California's motorists might just "take up all the certificates available when the campaign opens"

¹⁶² Richard H. Quin, "History of the New Wawona Road," in *Wawona Road HAER CA-148* (Washington, D.C.: Historic American Engineering Record, 1991), n.p.; Greene, *Yosemite: the Park and Its Resources*, 543.

¹⁶³ ACSC, "Auto Club of Southern California Historical Material Vol. III" [July 27, 1915 to December 1919], 98. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., Fletcher Bowron papers, Box 43.

¹⁶⁴ "Highway Fund Was Short in 1919, Too," *Yosemite Nature Notes* 34, no. 6 (August 1955): 100.

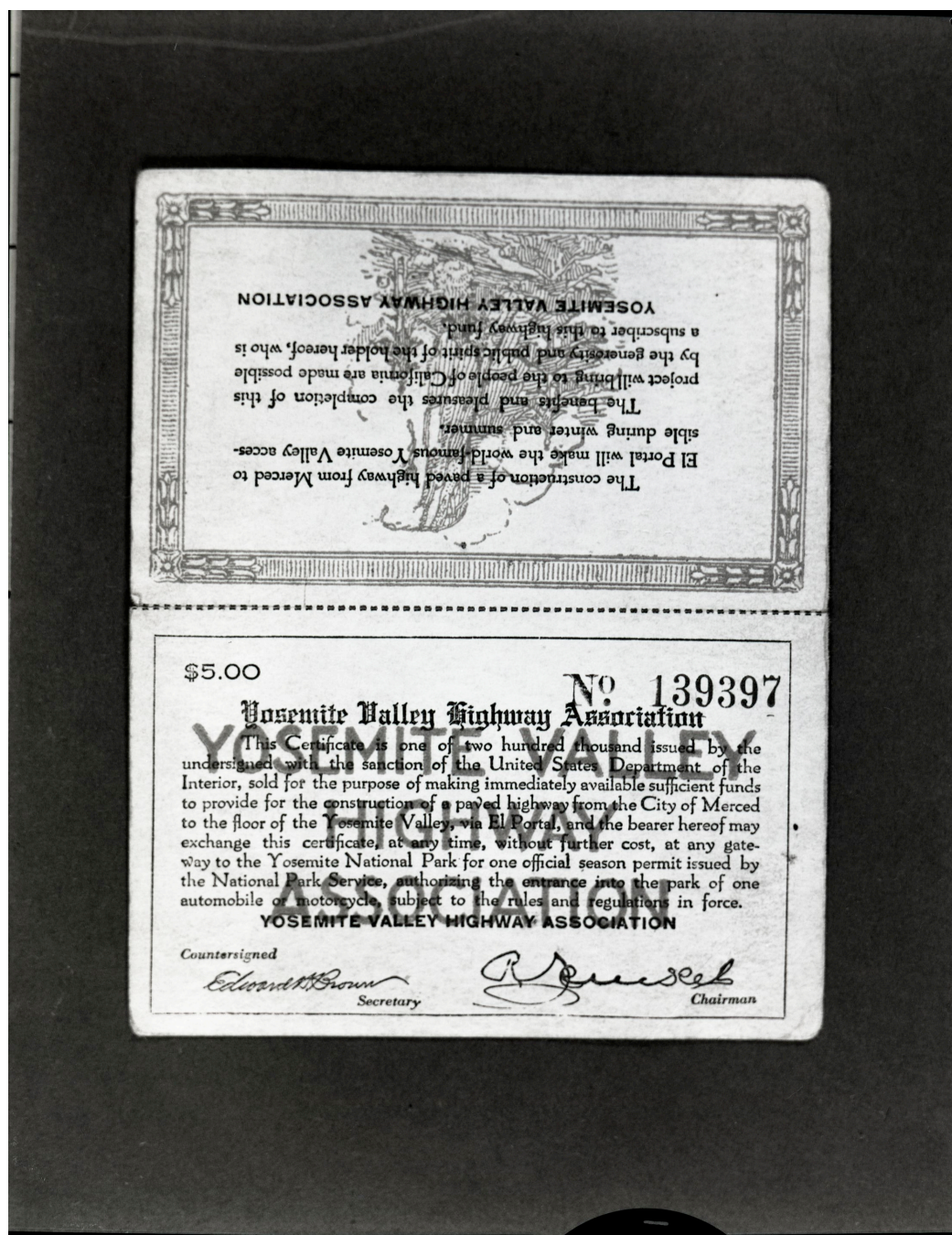


Figure 15: One of the many \$5 certificates sold by the Department of the Interior in an attempt to finance a new all-season highway. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

proved exaggerated.¹⁶⁵ Mitchell ate crow in a major way and, four months in, the Auto Club had raised only \$19,900. The club withdrew its participation in the drive to focus on an upcoming state bond measure for highway money.¹⁶⁶ Mitchell's bluster, though misguided, remains important. Motoring may have been the ACSC's primary motivation, but a rivalry with San Francisco was not far behind. A *Los Angeles Times* article detailed the Southland's rightful claim to Yosemite:

That old bugaboo, the 'claims of San Francisco,' the best little 'claimer' on the Coast, has entered the arena and alleges that it will put over the largest sale of Yosemite certificates in the State. Southern California, it is pointed out, is as much a patron of Yosemite Valley as any other part of the country, and therefore the Automobile Club is going to do all in its power to show its willingness to go more than fifty-fifty in building the road.¹⁶⁷

That same month, the president of the Auto Club noted San Francisco's annoying habit of "throwing down the gauntlet at every opportunity"; he noted that "[t]he only thing San Francisco hasn't claimed an excess of, is cafeterias, and that will probably come next."¹⁶⁸

Even though the fund drive failed, the ACSC managed to distance itself through another commodity: information. The ACSC chose to keep a "Club car" in Yosemite beginning in 1919, enabling the Club to produce current road reports; previously, they had relied on San Francisco's California State Automobile Association (derisively called the "northern club") for such information.¹⁶⁹ The Auto Club's twenty (!) different branch offices began sending their own cars over Yosemite's roads that same summer.¹⁷⁰ These new ways of gathering and disseminating information on the park helped club members,

¹⁶⁵ "Road Building Plans are Booming Throughout the Western States," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 April 1919.

¹⁶⁶ ACSC, "Auto Club of Southern California Historical Material Vol. III" [July 27, 1915 to December 1919], 150, 155. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., Fletcher Bowron papers, Box 43

¹⁶⁷ "Boost Yosemite Road," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 May 1919.

¹⁶⁸ "Open Campaign with Calmness," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 May 1919.

¹⁶⁹ ACSC, "Auto Club of Southern California Historical Material Vol. III" [July 27, 1915 to December 1919], 145. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., Fletcher Bowron papers, Box 43.

¹⁷⁰ "Southern Auto Club Studies Yosemite Roads, *Mariposa (Calif.) Gazette*, 28 June 1919.

but they also expressed symbolic ownership of a resource closer (both culturally and geographically) to the Bay Area. In the fight for an all-year highway to Yosemite, Los Angeles's urban ambition moved to a new, more naturalistic theater.

Motorists from the Southland staked their claim to Yosemite in another kind of public performance: economy runs. These races were more marathons than sprints, rewarding "efficient and economical operation on long, severe trips."¹⁷¹ The southern route to Yosemite, marked by poorly maintained country roads on the approach and steep hairpin curves inside the park, provided a perfect test for California's newest technological obsession. Beginning in 1917, the annual run from Los Angeles to Yosemite Valley became "the yearly classic of the Pacific coast" by the early 1920s.¹⁷² The Auto Club of Southern California made special maps for all entrants and trophies for the winners. Usually held in early May, the race also provided important information on the progress of the spring thaw along roads inside and out of the park—particularly the tangle of roads north of Fresno.¹⁷³

Was the drive from L.A. to Yosemite a "long, severe trip"? Well, yes and no. Economy runs marked the trip to the park as a serious undertaking, but they also created a wealth of information—the maps, the road conditions, the newspaper coverage—that could only encourage other aspiring motorists. More importantly, these races announced the automobile (preferably, one bought in LA) as the perfect mediator between city and country. Nationally covered in publications such as the *Washington Post*, the annual run "center[ed] national interest on Los Angeles and Southern California; on the automobile dealer activity here and the wonderful touring possibilities of the West." Los Angeles's

¹⁷¹ "Wonderful Records on the Economy Run," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 1919

¹⁷² "Oakland Smashes Fuel Marks on Run," *Washington Post*, 17 June 1923.

¹⁷³ "Roads to Yosemite Open," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 April 1920.

“genuine enthusiasm” for the run—as well as auto shows and more traditional speedway races—“earned for the California automobile man the name of being the most alive and the most aggressive of all the American automobile fraternity.”¹⁷⁴ While the race over the treacherous road celebrated the automobile as a technology that could tame nature and alter California’s geography, it also attested to the powerful business interests behind it. Thus every car from L.A. to speed through the Wawona entrance became proof of Los Angeles’s political and cultural control over Yosemite’s roads.

The Wawona Road used for the economy runs spoke primarily to Southern California’s interests. The proposed all-year road from Mariposa to El Portal, however, represented more of a bipartisan issue. Despite their petty gripes, both Southern and Northern Californians had an urgent interest in the road—at least, that was the story that L.A.’s growth entrepreneurs used to spur fundraising efforts. The *Los Angeles Times* declared the all-year road “not a Central State project, nor...a Northern State project, nor a Southern State project—but purely a whole State project.”¹⁷⁵ Tempering his comments on San Francisco’s annoying habit of “claiming,” the ACSC’s president noted that “the Yosemite Valley is a scenic asset just as valuable to one part of the State as another” (even though proprietary ACSC statistics showed that “local automobile owners are the heaviest patrons of the valley extant”).¹⁷⁶ As the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce opined, “the Yosemite highway building is not a thing of sectional interest”; in the same article, though, the *Times* insisted that Los Angeles would never stoop to San Francisco’s fundraising tactics of canvassing streets and businesses.¹⁷⁷ Messages of sectional

¹⁷⁴ “Economy Run Coming Up,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 April 1921.

¹⁷⁵ “Will You Help Yosemite,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 June 1919

¹⁷⁶ “Open Campaign With Calmness.”

¹⁷⁷ “Campaign to Build All-Year Road into Yosemite to End This Week,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 1919.

cooperation did not help the subscription drive, nor did they reflect the true feelings of the Auto Club, the *Times*, and their friends in the auto business. Perhaps fundraising efforts would have succeeded had the project been sold as a race between California's northern and southern half.

Despite their bombast, Southern Californian interests (and the ACSC in particular) did have a point: Yosemite and Los Angeles shared a common goal. A drop in winter visitation in the early 1920s irked the city's ruling class—in particular, the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce and Harry Chandler, the publisher of the *Times*. At their behest, Los Angeles hoteliers raised \$46,000 to promote true all-year tourism.¹⁷⁸ Another essential part of the region's growth machine, the All-Year Club (AYC), emerged in 1921 with a similar mission. Previously dedicated to improving the summer season, the AYC focused on improving winter visitation for the 1925-26 season. They delivered in a major way, placing massive amounts of promotional messages in magazines and newspapers nationwide at a time when the entire country was supposedly "Florida-minded." From January 1922 to January 1926, the number of tourists arriving in cars doubled.¹⁷⁹ Tourism emerged alongside oil, tires, and the Los Angeles port as a principal economic driver. The All-Year Club succeeded wildly, attracting 600,000 more visitors in 1930 than in 1920 (the year before its work began).¹⁸⁰ While the organization would swing from promoting summer to winter and back again, its officials retained pride in the fact that they "revolutionized the local business cycle."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Starr, *Material Dreams*, 95.

¹⁷⁹ "South Enjoying Largest Tourist Influx in Years," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 January 1926.

¹⁸⁰ Gish, "Growing and Selling Los Angeles," 411.

¹⁸¹ "All-Year Gain Foretold," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 June 1925.

All-year access to Yosemite presented an immense opportunity for growth entrepreneurs inside and outside of the park. Since their respective beginnings, the National Park Service and the park's concessioners had looked for ways to expand Yosemite's busy season. The Indian Field Days of the nineteen-teens, which featured including baby beauty pageants, craft demonstrations, and horse races, succeeded in lengthening the lucrative summer season.¹⁸² But what about winter? The concessioners, owners of all park lodging, took the lead. In 1920 Stephen Mather, promotional whiz and first director of the National Park Service, joined forces with the *Times*' Harry Chandler in a reorganization of the Yosemite National Park Company.¹⁸³ That year the Company closed the Sentinel Hotel, the plushiest lodgings at the time, and improved its baths, heating, and cooking features in a pointed effort to attract cold-weather visitors.¹⁸⁴ When the park's different concessioners consolidated as the Yosemite Park and Curry Company in 1925, their long-awaited Ahwahnee Hotel promised new levels of luxury for winter guests.¹⁸⁵ Speaking at the Ahwahnee's opening gala in 1927, Chandler made sure to mention Southern California's role in bringing development to Yosemite.¹⁸⁶ Entrepreneurs in both Los Angeles and Yosemite lusted after the elusive winter season, leading to a fruitful partnership.

Meanwhile, the quest for an all-year highway poked along, hampered by irregular state funding. In 1922 Congress nixed a budget proposal that would have allocated

¹⁸² Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 117.

¹⁸³ The Yosemite National Park Company would merge with the Curry Camping Company in 1925, forming the Yosemite Park and Curry Company—which would be granted a monopoly on park concessions by the federal government. Richard J. Orsi, Alfred Runte, and Marlene Smith-Baranzini, eds., *Yosemite and Sequoia: A Century of California National Parks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 81.

¹⁸⁴ Greene, *Yosemite: the Park and Its Resources*, 623.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 543, 547.

¹⁸⁶ "New Yosemite Hotel Opened," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 July 1927.

\$7,000,000 for park roads, leading the *Los Angeles Times* (who else?) to bring up “the old question of when the all-year State highway will be finished.”¹⁸⁷ The summer of 1923 saw private contractors finishing the penultimate link from the town of Mariposa to Briceburg, yet the *Times* still derided the highway as “talked about for years” and only just “start[ing] to become an actual fact.”¹⁸⁸ The failure of a three-cent gas tax further delayed road construction funds.¹⁸⁹ Convicts completed the last seventeen miles, a serpentine stretch of riverside roadway, just in time for Yosemite’s “Diamond Jubilee”—the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Valley’s “discovery” by white men.

What more fitting way to honor the road’s opening than a motorcade on a hot August day? California Gov. Friend Richardson, before taking his place at the head of parade, addressed the competing regional forces that cooperated on the road. “The citizens of every portion of the State have an interest in the completion of this highway,” he intoned. “The San Francisco Bay section, Southern California and the two great inland valleys each claim it as their own particular route to the Yosemite.” Now that the road was a reality, the *Los Angeles Times* had reason to evenly distribute praise; in the words of one *Times* scribe, that hot august motorcade represented the culmination of “the thirteen-year struggle of the Automobile Club of Southern California and other California interests.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Paul Lowry, “No Road Improvements: Parks to Receive No Aid from Government Next Year; Status of All-Year Yosemite Highway,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 November 1922.

¹⁸⁸ Paul Lowry, “Yosemite All-Year Road Takes Shape,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 June 1924.

¹⁸⁹ “Merced Canyon Yosemite Road to be Finished,” *Oakland (Calif.) Tribune*, 14 June 1925.

¹⁹⁰ C.A. Jones, “Yosemite’s Road Dedicated,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 August 1926. Despite this joint accomplishment, Northern and Southern California’s respective auto clubs remained opposed with regard to the completion of the rest of the state’s highways. One plan—referred to as “the Los Angeles measure”—specifically drew the ire of the California State Automobile Association; its representatives dubbed the proposition “a sectional measure which arbitrarily classifies 79 per cent of the highway mileage in the 13 Southern counties as primary highways and places 56 per cent of the highways in the northern and central counties in this classification.” Moreover, the measure would also ensure that any road mileage



Figure 16: A portion of the newly completed All-Year Highway roughly thirty miles west of Yosemite's gates, c. 1926. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archives

deemed “secondary” highways would received three and a half times as much money in the state’s southern end that anywhere else. Highway development throughout the state had become a zero-sum game. “Gas Tax Held Best Highway Builder,” *Berkeley (Calif.) Daily Gazette*, 4 September 1926.

As the ACSC's field secretary proudly announced, "Yosemite Valley is part of the playground of Southern California." An editor's note (maybe written by Chandler himself) at the end of the same article suggested that the realignment be shared far and wide, especially with "Eastern motorists" who might be "unaware of the nearness of Yosemite and Sequoia to Southern California." If every good Los Angeleno mailed the article to "an eastern motoring friend," that friend might have "a more enjoyable motor vacation this winter or next summer."¹⁹¹ Yosemite's proximity was crucial to L.A.'s all-year tourist philosophy. Winter or summer, mountains or beach—locals and "Eastern motorists" alike could have it all, and within a day's drive no less. The joint efforts of the Auto Club of Southern California and the *Los Angeles Times* created a physical archive of this geographic shift. L.A.'s growth machine was now aimed squarely at the heart of Yosemite, using expanded motoring possibilities to claim the central Sierra Nevada as an extension the Los Angeles Basin.

Using concrete, convict labor, and state funds, the route through the Merced River canyon promised a realignment of the state's tourist geography. Once a jolting seven-hour drive, the journey from the State highway at Merced to Yosemite Valley became a smoother three-hour jaunt.¹⁹² The new road, combined with the imminent opening of the Ahwahnee, effectively lengthened Yosemite's tourist season. At the highway's dedication, NPS director Stephen Mather promised "future development of the park" via \$1,000,000 in federal funds; no doubt Mather had his friend and business partner Harry

¹⁹¹ William C. Garner, "Yosemite Now But One Day from Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 1926.

¹⁹² "New Yosemite Road Open All the Year," *New York Times*, 20 March 1927.

Chandler in mind.¹⁹³ No tectonic plates had moved, and yet Yosemite and Los Angeles—partners in all-year recreation—were closer than ever before.

Even before the completion of the All-Year Highway from Merced, the Auto Club's officials were busy planning yet another incursion into Yosemite. While the new All-Year Highway from Merced cut off distance, it remained a primarily western route claimed jointly by Northern California, Southern California, the Central Valley, and the San Joaquin Valley alike. Still seeking a signature southern route, the ACSC found willing partners in Fresno and Madera—two largely agricultural cities that had pushed for improved southern access since the nineteen-teens. Yet citizens from this area were not natural promoters; the ACSC's field secretary C. E. McStay once bemoaned the loss of “about two hours of my valuable time” talking with an excited Maderan who had been advocating a new route to Yosemite “since the trees in the Wawona Grove were saplings.”¹⁹⁴

An improved southern approach meant little without a modernized road from Wawona to Yosemite Valley—steep and treacherous, yet possessing one of the most sublime views in the park. The ACSC began petitioning aggressively for this portion of road shortly after the completion of the All-Year Highway, but Park Service officials seemed dead-set on improving the Big Oak Flat Road first. Yet in the spring of 1928, the Auto Club received some good news: funds allocated for Big Oak Flat would be transferred to the Wawona Road. Even better, the project would be a wholesale alteration of the twisty and terrifying grade. Acting National Park Service director Horace Albright

¹⁹³ Jones, “Yosemite's Road Dedicated.”

¹⁹⁴ C.E. McStay to East, 13 September 1926. ACSCCA, E.E. East papers, Box 8, folder 000096.

informed the Auto Club directly, asking them to “publish the information I have given you as widely as possible.”¹⁹⁵

The new road promised to offer year-round visitation to Wawona’s Big Trees, enhance Yosemite’s winter sports prospects, and relieve some of the congestion in the Valley.¹⁹⁶ Citizens of Madera and Fresno rejoiced, as did Clarence Washburn, whose family had managed the Wawona Hotel (and a portion of the Wawona Road) since the late 1800s; he thanked the Club for its “various letters and telegrams” that apparently “reached Washington just at the right time.”¹⁹⁷ After the embarrassing failure of the statewide fund drive, Auto Club officials simply dealt with national policymakers instead.

But Washburn, like the ACSC, recognized that an improved road from the Valley was useless if the road from Fresno to the park boundary remained inconsistent. In the same letter thanking the Auto Club for their support, Washburn implored them to finish the job: “[N]ow is the time we should make our big effort to get a highway from the intersection of this proposed road to Fresno.”¹⁹⁸ Yosemite’s acting superintendent also showed remarkable sympathy to the Southern California cause, showing that—like the ACSC—he dreamed of linking the park with the beach, developing the smaller towns to Yosemite’s south in the process. As he wrote to Auto Club engineer E. E. East:

Perhaps you already know that more than half of the visitors to Yosemite National Park come from the southern part of the state, and with the Wawona Road between Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees now under construction on Bureau of Public Road [*sic*] standards, there is every opportunity for the adjacent counties to the south of us, and the southern part of the state generally, to get behind a movement to continue

¹⁹⁵ Horace Albright to E. E. East, 1 May 1928. ACSCCA, E.E. East papers, Box 8, folder 000096.

¹⁹⁶ Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and Its Resources*, 557.

¹⁹⁷ Clarence Washburn to E.E. East, 11 May 1928. ACSCCA, E.E. East papers, Box 8, folder 000096

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

this road from the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees to Fresno, and from Fresno to Morro Beach in San Luis Obispo County on the Coast highway. As it is planned to make the Wawona road an all-year road, this would make a wonderful southern entrance for our Southern California travel.¹⁹⁹

This letter speaks to one of the ACSC's signature accomplishments: enlisting the Park Service as a promoter of Southern California in its own right. The Auto Club's success in Wawona showed a newfound ability to enlist federal policymakers, rural towns, and big-city swagger for a common goal.

The *Los Angeles Times* broke an impressive number of stories about Yosemite, aided no doubt by the Auto Club's direct pipeline to Washington. Thus, when \$2,000,000 in federal funds emerged in 1930 to improve the Wawona Road, the *Times* had it first.²⁰⁰ Before long seemingly every motorist in the state knew of Yosemite's latest and greatest road plan—to the detriment of other transportation offerings within the park. In 1930 over ninety percent of all automobiles entering the park came from California; a twenty eight percent drop in rail travel and a thirty two percent drop in motor stage (bus) travel demonstrated the success of the Auto Club's efforts.²⁰¹ Compared to October 1930, October 1931 showed a forty eight percent drop in park entrances by any means other than private automobiles.²⁰² Thanks in large part to Los Angeles, the state's largest concentration of motorists, Yosemite became a car's park.

The All-Year Highway through the Merced River canyon proved the opening salvo of a concerted technological war against climate and geography. Perhaps even more

¹⁹⁹ E.P. Leavitt to Edward Lyman, 7 March 1929. ACSCCA, Standish Mitchell papers, Box 6, folder 002755.

²⁰⁰ "Wawona Road Improvements Will Provide Another Magnificent Highway to Yosemite," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 1930.

²⁰¹ James V. Lloyd, press release, undated (included in November 1930 monthly report). Superintendent's Monthly Reports for Director, Yosemite Digital Science Library [hereafter YDSL].

²⁰² Travel report for the month of October 1931. Superintendent's Monthly Reports for Director, YDSL.

impressive was the Wawona Road's new tunnel designed to eliminate some of the steepest and most treacherous parts of the old road. A Bureau of Public Roads engineer working in the park since the 1920s decided on a tunnel, rather than a more traditional "open cut" road, because it would leave less of a scar; he also feared that an open cut might drop so much rock into the Merced River below that it would flood Yosemite Valley.²⁰³ Construction on the almost mile-long stretch of solid rock progressed slowly, with groups of as many as 190 workers often boring as little as one hundred feet per week.²⁰⁴ Workers required two hundred tons of dynamite while working "night and day for 300 days" to remove almost 2,000,000 cubic feet of stone from the mountainside. When the dust settled, grades as steep as seventeen percent had been tamed to about five percent—enough to permit "high-gear" use between Wawona and Yosemite Valley. With the "sharp turns on the old mountain road" gone, one *Times* writer promised that even "the most inexperienced motorist will feel as much at home while traveling through this scenic portion of the Sierra as on his city boulevards."²⁰⁵

In a park of engineering marvels—the Tioga Road over the mountains, the All-Year Road that subverted seasons—this new accomplishment took the cake. Anticipating heavy traffic in the tunnel, engineers installed a state-of-the-art carbon monoxide detector designed to close the tunnel should auto exhaust build up to dangerous levels:

A perfect robot mechanism which does not require attendance by a watchman, automatically operates the ventilation system in the tunnel. This engineering innovation tests the air of the tunnel for carbon monoxide content. When a small amount of gas is discovered a great wheel is set whirling, sucking the air out through the main adit opening on the outside cliff wall. If heavy traffic causes the carbon monoxide to

²⁰³ "Information on the Construction of the Wawona Road, Based on Statements from Mr. Harry S. Tolen," 5 April 1948, Yosemite Research Library, Box y-20d, folder 4.

²⁰⁴ Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1931. Superintendent's Monthly Reports for Director, YDSL.

²⁰⁵ Frederick Black, "Mile-Long Tunnel Opens New Yosemite Route," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 July 1931.

increase, a second wind-wheel is started, finally a third, and then each of the three wheels is increased in speed. If all three wheels do not reduce the percentage of carbon monoxide content, a semaphore arm holding a red light signals 'Stop' at the entrance, thereby suspending traffic.²⁰⁶

This may well have been the first robot in a national park. Anticipation of thick crowds fostered other innovations, like a "tiny photo-electric cell device" midway through the tunnel that counted traffic passing in either direction.²⁰⁷ At the celebration of the road opening, the Park Service even rigged a public address system to broadcast "details of the pageant" to crowds further down the road at the tunnel's east end.²⁰⁸ Even the pageant itself (titled "History of Transportation in Yosemite") stressed the role of technology in this momentous new achievement, featuring "stage-coaches, old steam cars, and some of the most ancient models of motor vehicles extant" in the inevitable march towards modern cars and roads.²⁰⁹

But technology, like science, does not exist in a vacuum. The sheer technological achievements of the Wawona Road shone brighter for California's southern half. Movie stars Lois Moran and John Barrymore, slated to appear at the road's opening, symbolized the project's promise for the Los Angeles area.²¹⁰ A relatively small change in the park's geography, the new tunnel brought Wawona and its historic Big Trees to within forty-five and sixty minutes of the Valley floor, respectively; it promised to bring Glacier Point

²⁰⁶ "Celebration of Tunnel Opening on Wawona Entrance to Yosemite Set for Tenth of June," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 May 1933.

²⁰⁷ "Travel to Yosemite Increases," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 1933.

²⁰⁸ "Yosemite Fete Details Ready," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 1933.

²⁰⁹ "Celebration of Tunnel Opening on Wawona Entrance to Yosemite Set for Tenth of June."

²¹⁰ "Yosemite Fete Details Ready," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 1933.



Figure 17: The parking area east of the Wawona Tunnel at Inspiration Point, 1939. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

Let's go! Official dedication
NEW YOSEMITE-WAWONA TUNNEL

SATURDAY, JUNE 10, 1933 at 4:00 P. M.



**Join the party —
 See the Pageant —**

Drive through this great tunnel

Closer by hours to Southern California! And June 10 is Dedication Day for the new Yosemite-Wawona Tunnel — nearly a mile of electric-lighted, smooth driving that brings you out — *Wham!* — with all of Yosemite's gorgeous beauty right before you.

High gear all the way! No mountain roads! Take the Ridge Road to Fresno, and the Fresno-Yosemite road through the tunnel. You can drive it between breakfast and dinner. If you start early, you can arrive for the opening Pageant, featuring the history of Yosemite Transportation, at 4:00 p. m. sharp.

STANDARD Gasoline all the way — and in the Park — at your service.

STANDARD OIL COMPANY OF CALIFORNIA



FREE ROAD MAP

Routes to Yosemite, showing tunnel location. Ask for your copy.

**AT STANDARD STATIONS, INC.
 AND RED WHITE & BLUE DEALERS**

Figure 18: A Standard Oil ad for the tunnel's opening ceremony. Note the simplified linking Fresno directly to Yosemite. *Los Angeles Times*, 7 June 1933

closer, as well, a long-held goal that caused some to rally behind a tramway to the outcropping.²¹¹

The *Times*, dusting off the same rhetoric its writers had applied to the All-Year Highway, described the Wawona route as if it had changed the state's geography overnight. As one article proclaimed, "Yosemite Valley is now thirty-five miles nearer to Los Angeles," crediting the Wawona tunnel in particular for its "destruction of distance."²¹² (Curiously, another *Times* piece claimed a savings of forty-five miles.) Comparison with the highway from Merced to El Portal was inevitable. One *Times* writer argued that it failed most tourists; supposedly, sixty percent of cars entering Yosemite and sixty-six percent of all the park's visitors still came from south of Fresno.²¹³ In the early days of the tunnel's operation, travel via the park's southern artery increased over 400 percent.²¹⁴ Such a rapid uptick could be attributed to pent-up demand, but it is just as likely that the *Times* exaggerated some statistics—distance saved, visitors' origins—to tell a better story. Regardless of the exact numbers, this "destruction of distance" had major implications for both Los Angeles and its newly-claimed national park.

This closer connection to California's hotter, drier south spurred the development of winter recreation in Yosemite. This new spatial configuration influenced seasonal recreation patterns; in even simpler terms, it *created* a new season. Between the Los Angeles basin—with its ample sunshine, sun-baked coast, and acres of citrus—and

²¹¹ "The Wawona Tunnel" (press release), 10 June 1933. Superintendent's Monthly Reports for Director, YDSL.

²¹² Lynn J. Rogers, "Thirty-Five Miles Saved by Opening of Wawona Tunnel," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 April 1933.

²¹³ Fred Hogue, "Yosemite Brought Forty-Five Miles Closer to Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 1932.

²¹⁴ "Travel to Yosemite Increases," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 1933.

Yosemite's distinct mountain ecosystems, California truly had it all. As the *New York Times* put it,

It is a far cry from orange groves to ski slopes, and from magnolia trees to pungent evergreens weighted with snow. But here in California the contrast is taken for granted, for the State has at last become snow-conscious. It took Californians many years to realize that high in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, just a few hours from the Pacific Ocean, they had Winter sports conditions possibly equaling those at St. Moritz and Lake Placid.²¹⁵

With its merging of the montane and the coastal, California stood poised atop national and international tourist destinations. The added bonus—something that Lake Placid and St. Moritz could never top—was that, thanks to its all-season roads, only the *fun* parts of winter came to Yosemite.²¹⁶ Snow, ice, fog: they were no match for good roads and well-tuned cars. As the Curry Company touted, Yosemite was now “as near in winter as in summer.”²¹⁷ It drew especially close to Los Angeles, the fastest-growing collection of mobile and affluent citizens in the American West.

The All-Year Highway opened the Valley to winter tourism, and the Wawona Road eventually opened the park's higher ground to ski exploration. But the relentless quest for all-season access was one thing, and the creation of a winter sports scene entirely another. Winter visitors to the Valley found less than inspiring prospects; one of

²¹⁵ “Winter Games Growing in Popularity in California with Aid of Park Program,” *New York Times*, 4 February 1934.

²¹⁶ Scandinavian immigrants introduced ‘Nordic’ or ‘cross-country’ skiing in the mid-nineteenth century. It meshed labor and recreation, requiring skiers to huff up steep slopes in order to ski down them. As historian Annie Gilbert Coleman notes, mail carriers, ranchers, and miners imbued the sport with a “working-class masculinity” by using their skis to perform chores. The advent of ski lifts, however, removed some of the sport’s laborious connotations. Annie Gilbert Coleman, “From Snow Bunnies to Shred Betties: Gender, Consumption, and the Skiing Landscape,” in *Seeing Nature through Gender*, ed. Virginia Scharff (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 194–219.

²¹⁷ “Winter Sports in Yosemite National Park,” undated brochure (c. 1930). Superintendent’s Monthly Reports, YDSL.

the most popular activities was sliding down a snow slope on the lid of an ashcan. Skiing was only possible in Yosemite Valley's colder southern half, but these runs were short and unsatisfying. Even the luxurious Ahwahnee Hotel, completed in 1927, could not convince winter visitors to stay overnight (a crucial part of concessioner revenue). One board member even suggested that the Curry Company shut down their operations at the end of each summer.²¹⁸

Yet the park concessioner, possessing a monopoly on tourist services in the nation's busiest park, had social and political capital to burn. In the late twenties Company president Don Tressider founded the Yosemite Winter Club to "encourage and develop all forms of winter sports [and] to advertise and exploit the great advantages, beauties and healthy benefits of winter in the California Sierra to all lovers of outdoor life."²¹⁹ He stocked the club's rolls as a president would stock a cabinet—full of influential and important men from California's biggest urban centers. Stephen Mather and Horace Albright, the first and second directors of the Park Service, also accepted honorary positions.²²⁰

Despite Los Angeles's lack of a winter sporting scene—or, for that matter, winter in general—many of the area's leading citizens joined the Winter Club. Members included *Times* publisher Harry Chandler, stage and film actress Lois Moran, director Cecil B. DeMille, real estate magnate and promoter William May Garland (who brought the 1932 Olympic Games to Los Angeles), movie investor and early Auto Club member

²¹⁸ Gene Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters: A Century of Winter Sports* (Truckee, Calif.: Coldstream Press, 1999), 18.

²¹⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 20.

²²⁰ Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters*, 20; Don Tressider to Standish Mitchell, 22 December 1928. ACSCCA Standish Mitchell papers, Box 6, folder 002755.

Frank Garbutt, and sporting goods salesman B. H. Dyas.²²¹ Standish Mitchell, ACSC secretary (and later president), was also an early member. Tressider even offered him a spot on the Advisory Council, along with other “men and women who are prominent and deeply interested in California progress.”²²² If the club had formed twenty years earlier, it would have been packed with Berkeley and San Francisco addresses.

But the Basin’s boosters could not help Tressider acquire what he needed most: a winter resort worth visiting. In 1928 he and his wife, Mary, contracted ski fever while watching the Second Winter Olympic Games in Switzerland. With cowbells still ringing in their ears, they returned home thinking that Yosemite could become the “Switzerland of the West.” The Tressiders, never ones to procrastinate, simply hatched a scheme to host the next Winter Olympics. Don ordered construction of a new ice rink (60,000 square feet) to host figure skating and speed skating events. Unfortunately, though, he could not simply purchase world-class skiing terrain. The brash Tressider figured Yosemite would be competitive with only a cross-country course (easily arranged on the Valley floor) and a ski jump (which took a bit more doing). The park’s bid to host advanced farther than anyone thought possible, but Lake Placid—a proven ski city rich in history—won out; the International Olympic Committee found Tressider’s submission, a video of majestic snow-capped peaks, high on style but low on substance. This defeat became the less-than-immaculate conception of California’s ski industry. The state’s Chamber of Commerce embraced winter sports, hiring a San Francisco skier to edit the

²²¹ E. Des Baillets, “Yosemite After Olympics,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 January 1929.

²²² Don Tressider to Standish Mitchell, 22 December 1928.

Chamber's magazine and promote winter sports around the state. A cover from 1929 summed up the change: "California's Newest Industry—Winter Sports."²²³

Unfortunately, the Great Depression intervened, and many of the park's visitors arrived seeking employment instead of fun. Even Ansel Adams's iconic photographs of Yosemite blanketed in snow—sent to media members nationwide—could not make good on the promise of all-season tourism. The Curry Company lost money in 1931 and 1932, leading to more grumblings about shutting down operations from autumn until Easter. Winter sports remained confined to the Valley. Tobogganing, ice skating, and sleigh rides were quaint enough, but they failed to capitalize on the vast ski fields waiting on Yosemite Valley's southern rim. Glacier Point, looming some three thousand feet above the Merced River canyon, beckoned.²²⁴

Once again, the Auto Club of Southern California intervened in support of a new cause: a tram from the Valley floor to Glacier Point. Knowing the Wawona Road was a long way from completion, the ACSC argued that visitors were unfairly "denied the pleasure" of reaching that vista during the winter months. It would barely be noticed, Club officials argued, since "such tram will not be visible from the motor roads within the Valley."²²⁵ ACSC secretary Standish Mitchell sent a copy of the resolution to their sister organization, the California State Automobile Association (CSAA) of San Francisco. Mitchell urged his compatriots to support the project, chastising "the Sierra Club and other people who think that we should still be visiting Yosemite Valley on

²²³ Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters*, 20–25.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

²²⁵ Resolution, undated (c. 1931). ACSCCA Standish Mitchell papers, Box 6, folder 002755.

shanks' mares with a knapsack.”²²⁶ The CSAA's secretary replied that their board did not think motorists were actually interested in a tram; more to the point, Horace Albright, the director of the NPS, seemed “very much opposed” to the scheme.²²⁷ Unsurprisingly, the CSAA—located in San Francisco, home of the Park Service's regional offices and organizations like the Sierra Club—rebuffed the tram idea. Perhaps sensing an opportunity to discredit their Bay Area competitor, the Auto Club stood firm. Donald Tressider wrote to Mitchell soon after to personally express his thanks.²²⁸ Yosemite's advisory board (and the financial difficulties of the Great Depression) eventually killed the tram for good, but the ACSC had made a new friend in Yosemite.

The Winter Club eventually grew tired of skiing the same slope in Yosemite Valley, which, as one member recalls, was always “too low, too horizontal, or too vertical.”²²⁹ Enter the new and improved Wawona Road, an unlikely hero of California's ski history. Restless skiers used the road in the fall of 1932, before the new tunnel's official opening. A few miles up the road to Glacier Point lay an untapped ski paradise. At Badger Pass, skiers found a magical landscape of rolling hills and Douglas firs. It was even north-facing, practically assuring a long snowy season. Tressider grew enamored with the area's potential, and soon afterward the Curry Company's eighteen-passenger white buses became a regular sight at the slopes.²³⁰ The ACSC simply wanted easier access, but they ended up creating a recreational revolution.

²²⁶ Standish Mitchell to D.E. Watkins (Secretary, CSAA), 3 July 1931. ACSCCA Standish Mitchell papers, Box 6, folder 002755.

²²⁷ Excerpt from letter from D. E. Watkins, 23 July 1931. ACSCCA Standish Mitchell papers, Box 6, folder 002755.

²²⁸ Don Tressider to Standish Mitchell, 7 July 1931. ACSCCA Standish Mitchell papers, Box 6, folder 002755.

²²⁹ Yosemite Winter Club member, quoted in Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters*, 31.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.



Figure 19: A car carrying skis down the Wawona Road, 1933. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

Make mine a SNOW holiday!



Beach parties and mid-winter golf are O.K.!

But when Old Man Winter spreads a ten-foot snow blanket over the mountains my family starts talking Yosemite.

And I'm for it! A short trip and we're in a snug cabin in Yosemite Valley—not five minutes from evening skating carnival, tobogganing, "ash-can" sliding, crackling wood fires and a real old-fashioned sleigh ride.

This winter we're all going to try skiing—up on Badger Pass slopes, beside the new Alpine Ski House, where Hannes Schroll can get us started right. What is an "Upstart"? How do I telemark? How can Hannes Schroll stay with his skis when they're "doing 80" down the mountain side? We don't know all the answers (yet), but we all say: Make mine a SNOW holiday—every time!

Yosemite accommodations go as low as \$1.75 per person, European Plan, at Yosemite Lodge, the courts for weekly stays at both Yosemite Lodge and The Ahwahnee, and half rates for children. Housekeeping cabins also available. Any travel agent has winter holiday—er trip to the Yosemite area, Old Man Winter's last finger (Yosemite 270).

Yosemite AND BADGER PASS SKI-RUNS

ANIMATED WINTER CALENDAR—

Jan. 2, 3 and 4—Seventh Annual Pacific Coast Intercollegiate Winter Games for the President Hoover Cup, Ice Hockey and Speed Skating Division.

Jan. 5—Deviation of Badger Pass Ski House.

Jan. 11—Ferry Canyon Skiing Carnival.

Jan. 12—Ski Meet at Badger Pass.

Jan. 17—Ice Hockey—Golden State Milk Company vs. Yosemite Winter Club.

Jan. 19—Skiing Exhibition at Badger Pass.

Jan. 24, 25—Pacific Coast Outdoor Figure Skating Championships.

Jan. 31, Feb. 1, 2—Seventh Annual Pacific Coast Intercollegiate Games for the President Hoover Cup, Stadium—Downhill—Cross Country Skiing Division, Three-man team.

Feb. 4—Ferry Canyon Skiing Carnival in honor of John Temple Snow Carnival.

Feb. 18, 19—Yosemite Winter Club Invitational Ski Meet.

Feb. 22, 23—Special Washington's Birthday Holiday Sports Program.

Feb. 29—Calm Night on Yosemite Winter Club Skiing Trail.

Mar. 14, 15—Yosemite Winter Club Ski Meet, Downhill and Stadium events.

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Figure 20: An advertisement for the Curry Company's winter attractions. *Los Angeles Times*, 21 January 1936



Figure 21: A crowded day at the Badger Pass parking lot, 1941. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

The Curry Company's buses deserve a place of honor in California's winter hall of fame. Before the modernization of the Wawona and Glacier Point roads, skiers interested in sampling high country steeps had to snowshoe up the Four Mile Trail to Glacier Point—a grueling trek from the Valley floor.²³¹ Once the new road was in place, however, the Park Service used a Snogo plow (essentially a snow blower with an enclosed cab) on twenty-four-hour shifts to keep the Wawona and Glacier Point roads open.²³² During the winter of 1933–1934 the concessioner's buses began traveling from Chinquapin to the slopes near Badger Pass; ridership on the buses doubled within a year.²³³ The superintendent noted in 1934 that the high country's winter attractions were so popular that they actually improved Yosemite Valley's traffic.²³⁴

Cars and roads were only a part of the technological puzzle at Badger Pass. The new tunnel practically reshaped a mountainside to accommodate motorists. A powerful rotary snowplow arrived for the winter of 1934–1935, ensuring auto access to the slopes in all but the worst conditions.²³⁵ New electric lifts brought skiers to heights of 8,000 feet, ready to tackle trails radiating downhill. Instead of side-stepping their skis up seemingly endless slopes, thrill seekers could expend all their energy learning new skills on the downhill.²³⁶ This marked increase in the number of runs per day accelerated the average skier's learning curve. The Wawona Road remained crucial, but other new technologies

²³¹ Superintendent C. G. Thompson, press release, June 1932. Superintendent's Monthly Reports, YDSL.

²³² Superintendent's Monthly Report, February 1933. Superintendent's Monthly Reports, YDSL; Superintendent's Monthly Report, March 1933. Superintendent's Monthly Reports, YDSL.

²³³ Superintendent's Monthly Report, March 1934. Superintendent's Monthly Reports, YDSL.

²³⁴ Superintendent's Monthly Report, February 1934. Superintendent's Monthly Reports, YDSL.

²³⁵ Superintendent C. G. Thomson, press release, 16 October 1934. Superintendent's Monthly Reports, YDSL; "As Winter Sport Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1934.

²³⁶ Press release, 27 November 1935. Superintendent's Monthly Reports, YDSL; Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters*, 34.

like snowplows and ski lifts allowed visitors to spend less time on logistics and more time honing their skills. No longer did tourists have to earn their turns.

Buildings, too, shaped the ski experience. Meager snacks and subpar outhouses branded Badger Pass as anything but a luxury attraction. The arrival of a new “Tyrolean Ski House” (as the *Times* dubbed it), “modeled after a European ski center,” changed all that.²³⁷ Despite the Depression, Tressider doggedly sought funds for a new ski lodge with restrooms, ski rental, expert lessons, and a restaurant; he had a powerful ally in Yosemite superintendent Charles G. Thompson. Together, the two promoters secured funding so that the lodge would open in time for the 1935–1936 season. Some good actually came from the terrible economic conditions, as the Civilian Conservation Corps helped clear trees for new runs. The new Upski, a lift utilizing two counterbalanced sleds, carried roughly one hundred skis per hour; nicknamed the “Queen Mary” in honor of Mary Curry Tressider, it was the first such mechanical lift in the West. Ski lessons increased forty percent by the end of the new lodge’s first season. Ski days almost tripled, from 12,000 to 31,000. Badger Pass had arguably the best ski school in the country, relying on star Austrian athletes to promote the sport in style.²³⁸

Curry Company president Don Tressider parlayed his successful ski area into regional fame. He became the vice president of the California Ski Association, using his position to bring important races to his home turf. Badger Pass hosted California’s downhill and slalom championships in 1937, and the following year CCC workers added a ski jump, as well; now Tressider could credibly host every important ski event (jumping, cross-country, slalom, and downhill) in Yosemite. The 1938 Pacific Coast

²³⁷ “Ski House Dedicated,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 December 1935.

²³⁸ Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters*, 34–43.

Intercollegiate Championships—boasting ninety-six participants from sixteen colleges—marked the largest ski meet ever held in the park.²³⁹

Tressider soon collided with another budding ski empire, Mammoth Mountain, located a few hundred miles north of Los Angeles on the Sierra Nevada's eastern escarpment. Dave McCoy, ski entrepreneur and hydrologist for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), hosted the California State Championships there in 1939. An established ski center it was not; skiers plunged down the 2,000-foot slopes of Mammoth Mountain with only start and finish gates to guide them. After World War II, McCoy would civilize the mountain with a rope tow and develop the surrounding area as a ski resort.²⁴⁰

Mammoth Lakes today remains Los Angeles's domain. License plate holders, Dodgers hats, Lakers jerseys—all of it attests to an enduring connection spanning roughly two hundred miles of desert. It all started more than a hundred years ago, when another set of Southland boosters (mayor Fred Eaton and engineer William Mulholland) built an aqueduct from the Owens Valley to quench the Los Angeles Basin's growing thirst; the shady ways that city interests acquired water rights have become the stuff of legend—or, at least, Hollywood movies. Farmers, recognizing that the aqueduct was essentially bleeding their fields dry, attempted to destroy it in the 1920s to no avail. Dave McCoy's ski skills made him the perfect candidate for the LADWP, a physical extension of Los Angeles's water interests who could range deep into the Sierra Nevada. Thanks to him, the City of Angels eventually colonized yet another facet of the Owens Valley's water: its snowpack.

²³⁹ Ibid., 44.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 53.

Each winter, as the Sierra passes closed one by one, the Valley's major towns—Bishop, Lone Pine, Mammoth—essentially became part of Nevada. Businesses in the area waited impatiently for spring to come and, with it, renewed flows of tourist dollars from California's coast. Only the state's truly southern cities like Los Angeles could reach the Owens Valley during winter without driving hundreds of miles out of the way. Already known for hunting and fishing, the area became Los Angeles's designated ski center, as well. The new Wawona Road and the accompanying rise of Badger Pass whetted the Southland's appetite for winter recreation, but the National Park Service controlled an even greater asset to the eastern Sierra's economy. Every year around tax day, the same gossip spread up and down Highway 395: when would Yosemite's superintendent open Tioga Pass? From their gleaming urban offices, the staffs of the *Los Angeles Times* and the Auto Club of Southern California wondered the same thing.

As the crow flies, Badger Pass and Mammoth Mountain sit no more than thirty miles apart. The road between them, however, traverses no less than four distinct ecosystems via one ribbon of asphalt. From the mixed conifer forest around Badger Pass, one heads downhill to the oak-studded river bottom of Yosemite Valley, back up through mixed conifers to the subalpine splendor of Tuolumne Meadows, passing through Tioga Pass and descending to the arid bottomlands of the Owens Valley—all before climbing thousands of feet to Mammoth Mountain. Tioga Pass, California's highest mountain pass (just shy of 10,000 feet), mediates between vastly different environments. The road itself takes a shockingly bold line, threading between a rubble-strewn cliff band on one side and a sheer drop on the other. Before assuming his post as first director of the National

Park Service, Borax magnate Stephen Mather pooled funds from his wealthy friends to purchase the road; it opened to the public in July of 1915.

The road's strategic position—connecting California's coastal cities and recreational meccas like Mammoth, Lake Tahoe, and Death Valley—made its annual opening date a subject of much speculation. Tioga Pass sits on the border of Yosemite, meaning that snow removal efforts must be coordinated between the National Park Service and the State of California; naturally, concerned citizens petitioned both parties to open the road and thus open the eastern Sierra to summer tourist traffic. Despite the hullabaloo in the 1920s about all-year recreation, the Tioga Road remained a summer-only attraction. Its inaccessibility, however, only added to its attraction; one journalist deemed it the “[l]ast of all the California roads that summer unlocks to travel.”²⁴¹ When it finally opened, whether in May, June, or July, nearby towns held celebratory trout feeds to celebrate.²⁴² The shindig in June 1929, held at the bottom of the Tioga grade, featured over 200 pounds of trout caught in Mono County's streams; with leading citizens of the area (plus the obligatory representative from the ACSC), publicists from the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce spoke of the city's desire to “promote tourist traffic to the high Sierras this season.”²⁴³

Tioga Pass was a big deal for the City of Angels, marking the annual return of access to plentiful trout, abundant flowers, and crisp cool air of Yosemite's high country. Motorists from the Southland were usually the first each season to make the treacherous climb into the park, unofficially “opening” the road to travel. “Outdoor Franklin,” a scout for the Howard Automobile Company of Los Angeles, claimed first rites in 1921, 1922,

²⁴¹ “Wonders of Tioga Pass: ‘Back Gate’ to Sierras Now Open,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 August 1920.

²⁴² Alan S. Hart, *The Story of District IX* (Bishop, Calif: self-published, 1951), passim.

²⁴³ “Inyo County Entertains Visitors,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 June 1929.

1924, and 1928. In May of 1924—supposedly a low snow year—Franklin battled “snow drifts, deep slush-filled ruts and fallen trees” during an eighteen-day (!) trip from Los Angeles to Yosemite Valley via Tioga Pass.²⁴⁴ In late June of 1922, after a heavy winter, Franklin and his traveling companion encountered snowdrifts of forty-five feet; using planks to stabilize the surface, they lost their car and spent three days shoveling snow to liberate it.²⁴⁵

The data gained from these excursions was valuable, but the symbolic importance much more so. The Auto Club of Southern California’s scout cars, so active along the All-Year Highway and the Wawona Road, fed road conditions to the *Los Angeles Times*. By naming and assessing the sporting conditions in the Owens Valley, as well, the Southland’s promoters laid claim to an even larger tourist territory. In 1921 an ACSC scout car reported on the conditions at Tioga Pass, but also the sporting scene throughout the eastern Sierra in general:

In addition to navigating the pass, the club crews have just completed a survey of all fishing lakes and streams in the Sierras between Mojave and the great Feather River region above Tahoe. Fishing, roads, streams and lakes are in better condition this year than every before in history, reports the touring bureau. Never have roads to the streams where the big fellows hang out been better and never has fishing been better in California.²⁴⁶

The Auto Club’s advocacy did not stop at roads. If a big fish jumped in a roadless wilderness, did it make a sound? To truly access the “big fellows,” Los Angelenos would need a consistent and direct route northward into the mountains.

²⁴⁴ “First Over Tioga Pass,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 June 1924; “Tioga Pass Driven in Fast Time,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 June 1928.

²⁴⁵ “Buick Pioneers Over Tioga,” *Motor West*, vol. 37 (August 1, 1922): 21.

²⁴⁶ “Tioga Highway Opened,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 July 1921.

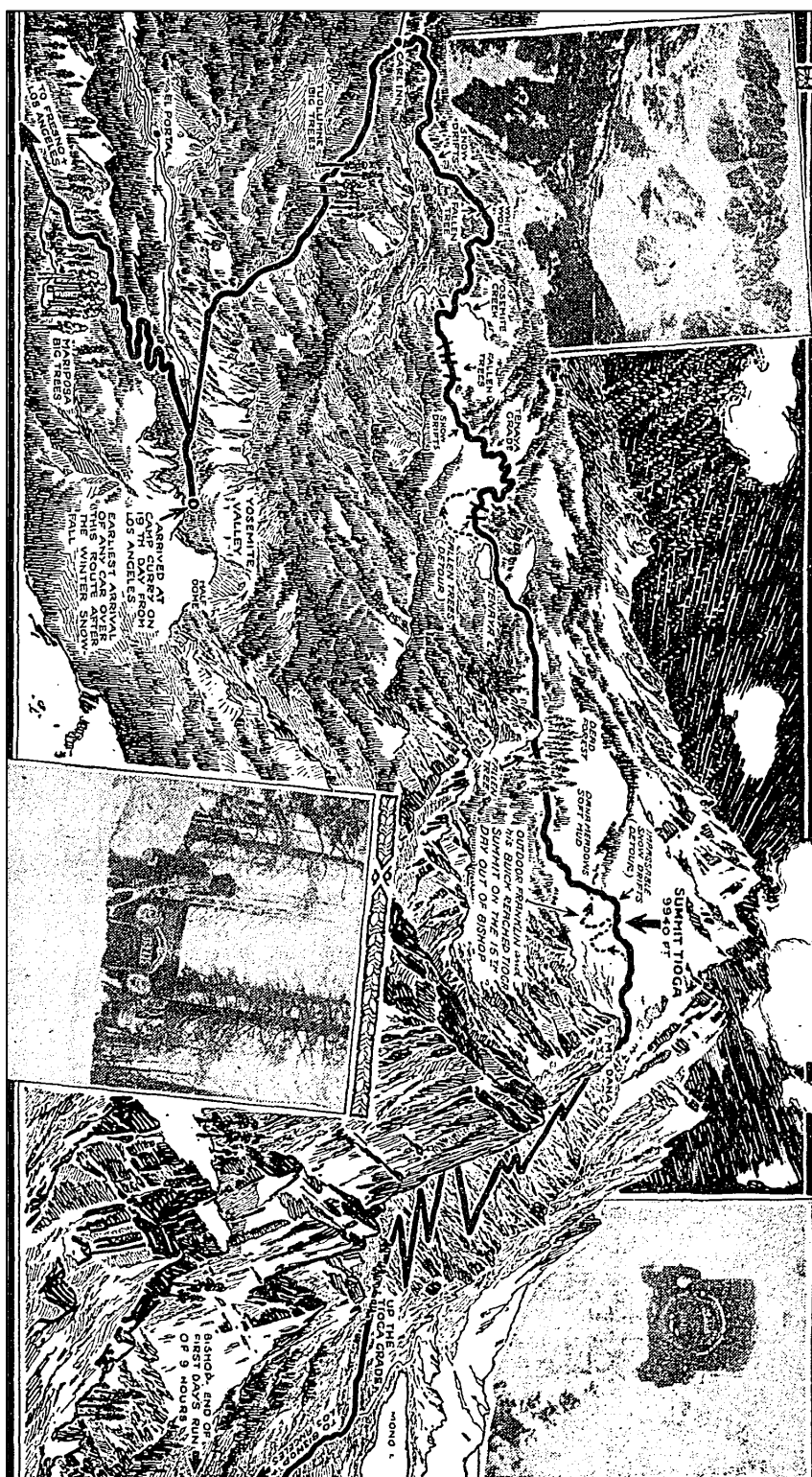


Figure 22: An artist's rendering of the eastern approach to Tioga Pass and Yosemite Valley. "Early Opening is Forecast for Tioga Pass, World's Most Spectacular Mountain Road." *Los Angeles Times*, 1 June 1924



Figure 23: Auto Club of Southern California members celebrating their passage over Tioga Pass, c. 1920. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

Now beloved by mountaineers and Burning Man attendees alike, U.S. Route 395 began humbly in 1910 as the brainchild of the Inyo Good Road Club (named for Inyo County, abutting the southern third of the Sierra Nevada).²⁴⁷ During a visit that same year, governor James Gillette—the first California governor to set foot in Inyo County—proposed a highway stretching from Mojave (located in the eponymous desert to the south) to Bridgeport (a famous fishing destination north of Tioga Pass).²⁴⁸ Citizens thanked him with a massive key (more than a foot long) engraved to look like the pinnacles of Mount Whitney—the highest summit in the continental United States and one of Inyo County’s biggest claims to fame.²⁴⁹ In 1913 the ACSC volunteered to sign the entire length of road from Los Angeles to Lake Tahoe, using over 800 signs over 400-plus miles.²⁵⁰ Unfortunately, any Angeleno driving to Lake Tahoe would likely find the pavement’s end at Mojave—too far south to bring tourist traffic into Inyo County.²⁵¹ Road-wise the 1920s saw little change, except for the expansion of Los Angeles’s urban watershed via Mulholland’s aqueduct.

In 1931 crews completed an otherwise unremarkable stretch of state highway between Cinco and a point seven miles north of Ricardo, east of Bakersfield at the southern tip of the Owens Valley. On paper, it looked like the opposite of a big deal. But in a spatial sense, this stretch of rural highway finally connected Inyo County—and the wealth of natural treasures to its north—with the Los Angeles metropolitan area via “a solid ribbon of hard surfaced highway.”²⁵² The *Inyo Register*, the eastern Sierra’s paper

²⁴⁷ Inyo County lies just south of Mono County, which connects to Tioga Pass.

²⁴⁸ Robin Morning, *Tracks of Passion: Eastern Sierra Skiing*, Dave McCoy & Mammoth Mountain (Mammoth Lakes, Calif.: Mammoth Ski Museum, 2008), 19.

²⁴⁹ Hart, *The Story of District IX*, 9.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 15.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 51.

²⁵² Ibid., 97.

of record, called the highway completion “as great a success as the most sanguine could anticipate.”²⁵³ The *Los Angeles Times* touted “an entirely paved, glass-like, high-speed road surface...from Los Angeles to a point beyond Bishop, more than 290 miles north.” Formerly a fourteen-hour odyssey, the journey from L.A. to Bishop shrunk to six. And, in the fashion of the times, the road earned the coveted “all-year” distinction.²⁵⁴ High winds and flying sand gave way to clear blue skies for the celebratory picnic in Kern County’s Red Rock Canyon. C. E. McStay of the Auto Club of Southern California gave a speech; even Horace Albright, director the National Park Service, greeted visitors briefly.²⁵⁵ More state-funded road improvements in Inyo and Mono counties followed in 1935.²⁵⁶ No one really knew where Los Angeles stopped and the mountains began.

The roads to the Sierra ran two ways, and the Auto Club of Southern California devised a clever way to bring the mountains to the city. In the mid-1930s the ACSC began hosting an annual Outing Show, a smorgasbord of gear vendors and promotional stunts to whet Los Angelenos’s outdoor appetites. Inside the Club’s off-street parking, just yards from one of the nation’s busiest intersections, attendees thrilled to wood-chopping contests, frog-jumping trials, and homing pigeon races.²⁵⁷ Father Crowley, one of the Owens Valley’s foremost promoters, watched mule packers “transform a bare asphalt-paved plaza into a tree-shaded Sierra rendezvous in the most approved Hollywood manner”:

A plaster model of Mt. Whitney was lifted atop the grub box, and its base concealed in a screen of pinyons and sugar pine and cedar, with juniper and manzanita in the faked canyon below. Three or four of the imitation

²⁵³ *Inyo (Calif.) Register*, 22 February 1931; quoted in Hart, *The Story of District IX*, 98.

²⁵⁴ “Red Rock Highway Open,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 February 1931.

²⁵⁵ Hart, *The Story of District IX*, 99.

²⁵⁶ Morning, *Tracks of Passion*, 79.

²⁵⁷ “Outing Show Lures 50,000,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 April 1935.

rocks left by a movie company at Lone Pine had been brought down in the truck, too, and about their base sagebrush instantly sprang up. Tents rose in a semicircle around the campfire, a log cabin faced the audience and acted as a display rack for photographs of the sportsman's paradise reached by the pack train....Between the tents tall birches grew miraculously out of the bitumen, owing to the digging of Bruce Morgan and Jack Hopkins, who had chopped them from the banks of Lone Pine Creek.²⁵⁸

The new highway to the eastern Sierra carried more than tourists; it also transmitted images, exposing Los Angelenos to the peaks, watersheds, and ecosystems claimed by their city's promotional class. The Auto Club of Southern California played host, solidifying their claim to the mountains that seemed to be inching closer to Adams and Figueroa.

Amidst the hubbub at the 1935 Outing Show, a ranger from Yosemite imitated birdcalls.²⁵⁹ The Wawona Road and U.S. Route 395 gave Los Angelenos direct routes to the park's "front" and "back" doors, respectively; however, a bureaucratic quirk of geography brought the Southland even closer to Yosemite. A government realignment in 1933 left the park superintendent responsible for Devils Postpile, a wondrous tableau of columnar basalt surrounded by beautiful backcountry just west of the nascent ski destination of Mammoth Lakes.²⁶⁰ The Park Service's control of not one but two vitally important sites for eastern Sierra tourists—Tioga Pass and Devils Postpile—meant that,

²⁵⁸ Joan Brooks, *Desert Padre: The Life and Writings of Father John J. Crowley, 1891-1940* (Desert Hot Springs, Calif.: Mesquite Press, 1997), 321.

²⁵⁹ "Outing Show Lures 50,000."

²⁶⁰ In 1933 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 6166, which transferred all national monuments, battlefield parks, and historic cemeteries to the National Park Service. Questions about Devils Postpile's switch to NPS jurisdiction arose in Mammoth Lakes, primarily because residents believed the area would become part of Yosemite National Park. See Christopher E. Johnson, *Nature and History on the Sierra Crest: Devil's Postpile and the Mammoth Lakes Sierra* (Seattle: National Park Service, Pacific West Regional Office, 2013), 88–89.

more than ever, the superintendent's decisions would affect the tourist trade outside Yosemite. Boosters along Highway 395 took notice. Previously, promoters in the Owens Valley lobbied for better roads, but the Inyo-Mono Club (IMC) took a new tack.

The IMC was the most professional and aggressive promotional organization in the Owens Valley to date. Formed in 1937, the Inyo-Mono set aside infrastructure in favor of a more aesthetic strategy. With support from Father Crowley, the organization had raised enough money by 1938 to hire Robert "Bob" Brown, a former newspaper reporter with considerable public relations experience. The Inyo-Mono Club succeeded in publicizing attractions like Mono Lake, Yosemite, and Death Valley, using the *Los Angeles Times* as well as the ACSC's monthly magazine *Westways* to bombard Los Angelenos with beautiful images. In just a few months, fifty-one newspapers nationwide published over three thousand articles on Inyo and Mono counties.²⁶¹ Brown's methods were nothing if not eye-catching; he built elaborate displays for storefronts, like a sixty-inch by forty-inch photographic display featured by at least twelve retail outlets in the L.A. area.²⁶²

Brown found a willing partner in Yosemite's superintendent, Lawrence Merriam, who became a crucial source of promotional images of Devils Postpile National Monument. While demand for Yosemite's scenic beauty remained inelastic (some would say problematic), Devils Postpile remained somewhat undiscovered. In 1939 Merriam told his boss that it would not even be worth the effort to collect an admission fee as only two thousand cars came each summer; if prompted to pay, visitors would just camp down

²⁶¹ Brooks, *Desert Padre*, 362.

²⁶² *Bridgeport (Calif.) Chronicle*, 8 December 1938; quoted in Morning, *Tracks of Passion*, 116.

the road at the nicely-developed free campgrounds offered by the Forest Service.²⁶³ Thus Bob Brown's constant requests for photographs of the Postpile paid dividends for each side: Yosemite's underdeveloped satellite got more attention, and the Inyo-Mono Club got more ammunition for their ad campaigns.

Unsurprisingly, Brown's advertising strategy also depended heavily on the Auto Club of Southern California. He shunted one batch of Merriam's Devils Postpile photographs to LIFE magazine, making sure to route them through the ACSC's publicity department to "give some added weight in trying for the cover spot." Brown had a publicist's knack for driving hard bargain, using his best photographs to bargain for more space inside LIFE; since he could always make the cover of western magazines like the Auto Club's *Westways*, Brown was free to swing for the fences when dealing with national publications.²⁶⁴ Ever ambitious, Brown crowed triumphantly when the Postpile material received big exposure through *Travel*—or, failing that, *Ripley's Believe It or Not* (the basalt formations do look strange).²⁶⁵ The newfound highway connections between Los Angeles and Yosemite gave the Inyo-Mono Club a fair amount of leverage. With local contacts like *Westways* already spreading his message, Brown could aim even higher.

Brown milked his Yosemite connection for other perks. Merriam sometimes dropped hints regarding Tioga Pass, though he offered a disclaimer that "[w]e have no

²⁶³ Lawrence Merriam, Memorandum for the Director, 26 August 1939. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 1/2, Subseries 4/1, Box 2.

²⁶⁴ Bob Brown to Lawrence Merriam, 29 January 1940. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 1/2, Subseries 4/1, Box 2.

²⁶⁵ Bob Brown to Lawrence Merriam, 10 May 1940 and 28 May 1940; Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 1/2, Subseries 4/1, Box 2.

way of predicting when it will be open.”²⁶⁶ Referring to 1941’s early opening as “manna from heaven,” Brown let Merriam know that the superintendent’s efforts to clear the road were “highly respected by all [his] ‘east-side’ friends.”²⁶⁷ Countless business letters back and forth gradually turned into a more convivial relationship. Tioga Pass, the switch that turned winter to summer, remained the Park Service’s purview. However, the Inyo-Mono’s Bob Brown—and all his “‘east-side’ friends”—often applied some friendly pressure in order to get a jump on the seasonal travel swing.

The more Bob Brown knew about the changing of the seasons, the more he could tailor his media offerings to popular demand. Like the Auto Club of Southern California, the Inyo-Mono Club used informational bulletins to promote kinds of tourism. By the end of the 1930s, Brown was sending weekly snow reports (complete with the locations of rope tows) to “all major department stores, all major sporting good stores, all oil companies, all recognized travel agencies, all major newspapers and all automobile clubs.”²⁶⁸ Ski media was rapidly becoming big business in the Southland; both the Los Angeles *Times* and *News* had dedicated ski columnists, as well. The ski fever that began with Badger Pass’s failed Olympic bid had spread to parts of the state without any consistent snow. New highways bridged the gaps between winter and summer, slopes and suburbs, parks and cities. Together, growth entrepreneurs in Los Angeles and Yosemite brought the Sierras to the metropolis—or was it the other way around?

²⁶⁶ Merriam to Bob Brown, 15 May 1940. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 1/2, Subseries 4/1, Box 2.

²⁶⁷ Brown to Merriam, 4 June 1941. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 1/2, Subseries 4/1, Box 2.

²⁶⁸ *Bridgeport (Calif.) Chronicle*, 16 January 1941; quoted in Morning, *Tracks of Passion*, 116.

It took almost thirty years, but the Auto Club of Southern California succeeded in opening Yosemite to the automobile. Along the way, however, the project acquired a life of its own, becoming a battlefield in the Southland's struggle to step out of San Francisco's shadow. The ACSC's efforts to "open" Yosemite, duly reported by the *Times*, gave Los Angeles legitimacy on a regional and national scale; after all, the Club had the ear of the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service. But the real victor in the battle was not a city, a region, or a person. By the end of the 1930s, Yosemite did not belong to either northern or southern California—it belonged to the automobile. More importantly, it belonged to automobiles *all year*.

Highway 395, the Wawona Road, and the All-Year Highway through the Merced River canyon all underwent colossal improvements during the 1920s and '30s. The Auto Club of Southern California manifested all these projects, leaving a lasting asphalt legacy in and around Yosemite. This led to the Club's most important accomplishment: blurring the lines between park and city. People like Mark Daniels had already dubbed Yosemite Valley a self-contained city; the ACSC, however, enlisted the entire park as part of the greater Los Angeles area. The Valley remained an important draw, but the Auto Club and its constituents used more of the park—especially high-elevation areas like Badger Pass and Tioga Pass, which offered Southern Californians a rare glimpse of winter. Over a span of roughly two decades, Yosemite became the northernmost link in Los Angeles's system of city parks.

Although Yosemite Valley has always resembled a sort of city, it is not the only barometer of the park's urbanization. Yosemite's significance extends beyond its Rhode Island-sized footprint. Its sheer fame motivated boosters from around California to claim

the park as their own, tethering it to their cities in hopes of capitalizing even further on its sheer economic and cultural gravity. Just as Berkeley associates sought to re-create the University of California in the Valley, ACSC officials enlisted the entire park in a new geographic imagining of Los Angeles's recreational assets. The distance Yosemite and the intersection of Figueroa and Adams shrunk of seemingly overnight. The next chapter, too, details how the park's impact transcended its physical boundaries.

Chapter 3

“The Ultimate Motor Car By-Passing of Merced”: The Case of the Gateway Community,

1913–1945

The metropolitan areas discussed thus far lie hundreds of miles from Yosemite. Many smaller cities orbit the park, providing food, lodging, and gas to Yosemite-bound tourists. These “gateway communities” are thus inextricably tied to the park, regardless of how their leading citizens may feel about federal control of their backyard. Gateway communities have existed for well over a century, but recently they organized into a more official entity. Since 2003 the communities bordering the park have met as the Yosemite Gateway Partners to discuss shared issues like traffic, housing, and—more recently—government shutdowns.²⁶⁹

The relatively recent notion of cooperating gateway communities obscures the formerly stiff competition for the title of “*the* Gateway to Yosemite.” Merced, one of the earliest adopters of this moniker, sits roughly seventy miles west of Yosemite’s gates. Although it now possesses the newest branch of the University of California system, Merced still remains deeply tied to its roots in agriculture and ranching. The city offers an ideal case study of the highs and lows of life as a gateway. Gateway communities tend to urbanize in tandem with the park they orbit, and Merced is no different. Connections to the Yosemite indelibly shaped the city’s economy, architecture, and its self-image in the first half of the twentieth century. Merced facilitated Yosemite’s growth by funneling

²⁶⁹ For more on gateway communities, see Kurt Culbertson, “National Park or Bust: Gateway Communities Cope with the Crowds,” *Planning* 63, no. 11 (Nov. 1997): 4–10. For a specific case study on the economic dependence of gateway communities on federal land, see Todd Gabe, “Effects of the October 2013 U.S. Federal Government Shutdown on National Park Gateway Communities: The Case of Acadia National Park and Bar Harbor, Maine,” *Applied Economics Letters* 23, no. 5 (March 15, 2016): 313–17.

large numbers of tourists directly to the park; Yosemite, in turn, provided Merced with an identity. Merced also enjoyed virtual monopolies over train and auto travel into the park—at least, until the reconstruction of the Wawona Road in the early 1930s. Yosemite essentially fueled the urban development of its downstream neighbor.

In the 1920s and '30s, improved auto access to Yosemite from all directions began to threaten Merced's gateway status. Yosemite superintendent Frank Kittredge confronted some threats of his own after the horrific events of December 7, 1941. Pressured to prove that Park Service preservation efforts would not impede full military mobilization, Kittredge also faced requests from gateway communities—particularly Merced—to resume logging on Yosemite's western boundary. Naturally, he refused to compromise his agency's priorities; however, his decision essentially sealed the demise of Merced's Yosemite Valley Railroad (which used timber to compensate for dropping tourist revenues). Kittredge thus unwittingly changed the course of the park's urbanization, removing the last obstacle to the automotive takeover of Yosemite. Thus the rapid decline in Merced's influence paved the way—quite literally—for a new vision of Yosemite, one glimpsed exclusively through a windshield.

The relationship between Yosemite and Merced starts with a river. Originally dubbed *El Rio de Nuestra Señora de la Merced* (the River of our Lady of Mercy), the Merced River was named by Spanish explorer Gabriel Moraga in 1806; his party was parched from a forty-mile trek through arid country, and thus relieved by the “mercy” of the river's cold, clear water.²⁷⁰ The Merced River flows from Yosemite's highest peaks,

²⁷⁰ Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez, *Spanish and Indian Place Names of California, Their Meaning and Their Romance* (San Francisco: A.M. Robertson, 1914), 276.

making its way westward until it becomes one of the most recognizable features of Yosemite Valley. West of the Valley the South Fork joins, followed by the North Fork. A zig northward and a zag southward brings us to Merced Falls, considerably less majestic than Vernal and Nevada Falls farther upstream but crucial to the river's industrial history.

The river then reaches the broad floodplain of the San Joaquin Valley, one of California's three great inland valleys and home to the San Joaquin River. Merced County was founded in 1855, almost fifty years after the naming of the river itself. Early settlers practiced agriculture and ranching, made difficult by alternating flood and drought conditions that plagued the entire San Joaquin Valley during the 1860s and 1870s.²⁷¹ While many of the county's residents struggled mightily, federal actions affecting the Sierra Nevada promised a more consistent crop: tourist dollars. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant in 1864, preserving Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias; shrewd lobbying by John Muir and others resulted in the creation of a much larger Yosemite National Park in 1890. The park remained unreachable by railroad, but Merced, Stockton, and Madera—three of the San Joaquin Valley's biggest towns, all connected by the Southern Pacific Railroad—offered the most convenient changeover points to the three separate wagon stage lines into Yosemite Valley.²⁷² No one would have called any of these routes 'easy,' but they offered potential visitors an array of options.

From the beginning, Merced's built environment indicated a particular obsession with Yosemite. Lake Yosemite, a reservoir for irrigation built just east of the city in the late 1880s, was said to contain "crystal snow waters, fresh from the Yosemite Falls." On

²⁷¹ David Igler, *Industrial Cowboys: Miller & Lux and the Transformation of the Far West, 1850-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 21–26.

²⁷² See map on page 124.

the lake's edge lay the Yosemite Colony, a 5,000-acre subdivision containing a large irrigation ditch to feed "Young Orange Groves, Almonds, Prunes and Apricots, Figs, Pomegranates, Peaches, etc."²⁷³ Many of the town's leading citizens joined the local Masonic Lodge, which was dubbed the Yosemite Lodge.²⁷⁴ After a change of ownership in the early 1900s, the Merced Livery Stables became the Yosemite Stables.²⁷⁵ While Merced had many benefits—lots of land, advanced irrigation, great soil—proximity to Yosemite became another of the area's prime geographic advantages.

The town's symbolic dependence on Yosemite deepened with the advent of the first—and only—railroad into Yosemite. The Yosemite Valley Railroad (YV), first organized in 1902 by businessmen from San Francisco and Oakland, represented a colossal opportunity for whichever small town was chosen to host the depot; despite competition from Fresno and Modesto, Merced won the chance to carry tourists and freight to Yosemite. The eastern terminus was located at the small town of El Portal, where stages would carry disembarking passengers the final ten miles to Yosemite Valley. Surveying began in 1905, and was completed in 1907.²⁷⁶ Merced became quite a bustling place during this period, reportedly housing twenty-three different saloons.²⁷⁷

During their fight for automotive access to Yosemite, the Auto Club of Southern California (covered in the previous chapter) unwittingly gave Merced a major competitive advantage. After automobiles were officially admitted to Yosemite in 1913,

²⁷³ Gustavus A. Eisen, *The Raisin Industry: A Practical Treatise on the Raisin Grapes, Their History, Culture and Curing* (San Francisco: H. S. Crocker printers, 1890), n.p. ("Yosemite Colony").

²⁷⁴ John Outcalt, *A History of Merced County, California, With a Biographical Review of the Leading Men and Women of the County Who Have Been Identified with Its Growth and Development from the Early Days to the Present* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Historic Record Company, 1925), passim.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 620

²⁷⁶ Delores J. Cabezut-Ortiz and Merced County Chamber of Commerce. *Merced County: The Golden Harvest: An Illustrated History* (Northridge, Calif.: Windsor Publications, 1987), 55–57.

²⁷⁷ "Meany Recalls Y.V. Prosperity," *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 1 March 1933.

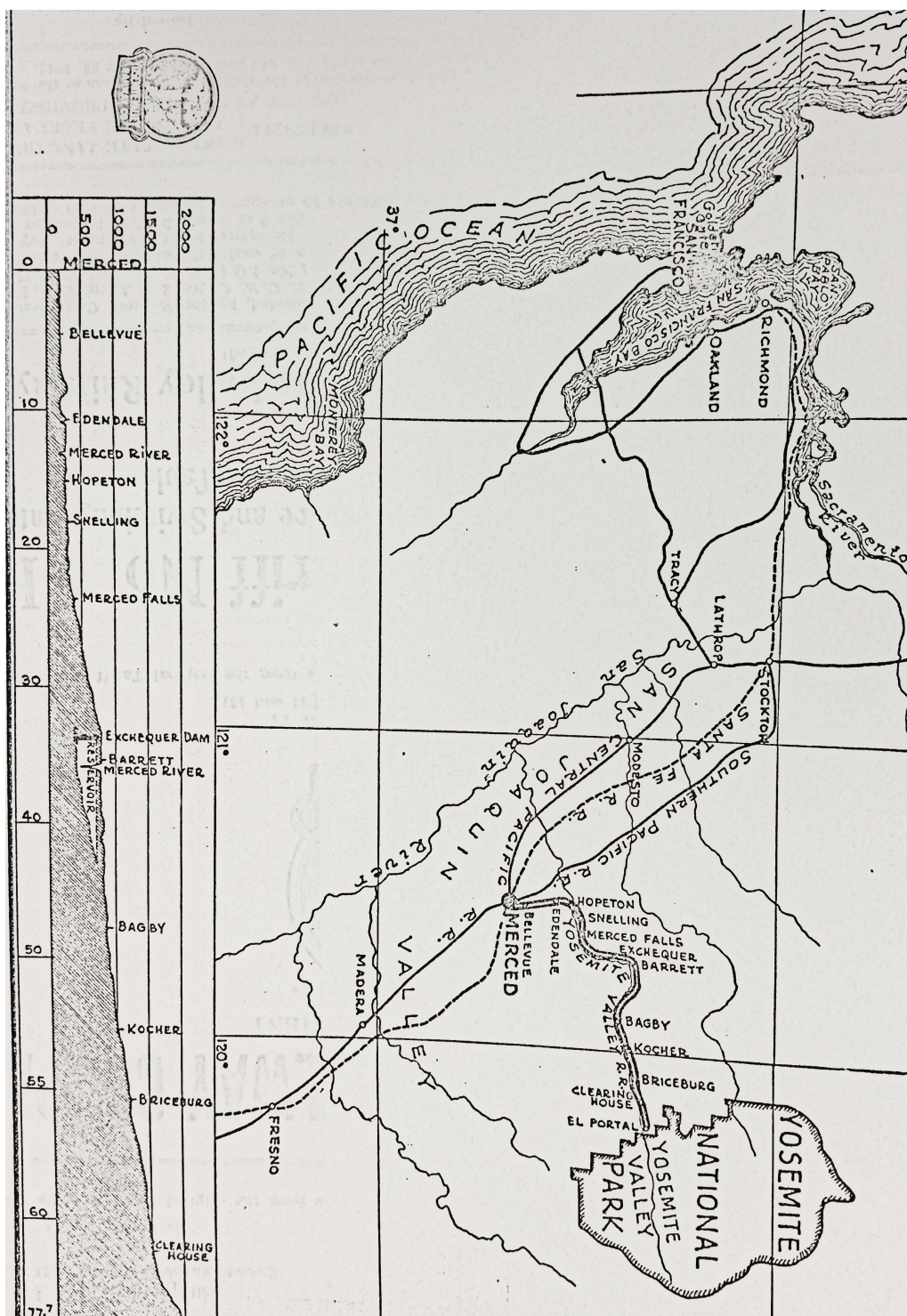


Figure 24: The Yosemite Valley Railroad from Merced to Yosemite, including connections to the Santa Fe, Central Pacific, and Southern Pacific. Note the convergence of all these lines in Merced. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 9, Subseries 4-6, Box 60



Figure 25: An overhead view of the Yosemite Valley Railroad depot in El Portal (c. 1908) looking east up the Merced River towards Yosemite Valley. Courtesy Pillsbury Picture Co. and Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Merced became important for park-bound motorists, as well; one promotional pamphlet touted Merced as possessing “[t]he only railroad in the state, as well as the best automobile or carriage route, to the grand and inspiring Yosemite Valley.”²⁷⁸ No other towns could claim this two-pronged superiority. Although the masthead of the *Madera Mercury* (another city hosting a stagecoach line) advertised Madera as “the Gateway to Yosemite” as late as 1915, Merced gradually looked to be pulling ahead in the race.²⁷⁹ In 1916 the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Company, one of the largest providers of auto access to Yosemite, saw four-fifths of its traffic emanate from its Merced depot and only one fifth from its Fresno depot. Additionally, a direct highway from Merced to Mariposa promised to reduce travel time to Yosemite Valley (via Wawona) by almost two hours.²⁸⁰

By 1917 even the *Madera Mercury* had to concede “Merced’s superior location with respect to Yosemite.” Anticipation of a state highway from Mariposa to El Portal, the YV’s eastern terminus, further highlighted Merced’s ideal placement; in 1917 the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Company ceased trips from Fresno altogether to focus on its Merced depot.²⁸¹ The combination of a rail monopoly and a booming motor stage connection solidified the town’s reputation as the most geographically favored of the San Joaquin Valley—at least, with regards to Yosemite.²⁸²

²⁷⁸ *Merced County, Where Location and Soil Make for Prosperity and Contentment* (Merced, Calif.: n.p., 1915), n.p. (“A Few Other Facts”).

²⁷⁹ Masthead, *Madera (Calif.) Mercury*, 28 May 1915.

²⁸⁰ “Stages Close Successful Yosemite Season,” *Mariposa (Calif.) Gazette*, 28 October 1916.

²⁸¹ “Claims All Yosemite Traffic,” *Madera (Calif.) Mercury*, 2 March 1917.

²⁸² As “the Gateway to Yosemite,” Merced’s business community capitalized on Yosemite via rail tourism and extractive industry. This bygone model of the national park experienced is explained in Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Earl S. Pomeroy, *In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America* (New York: Knopf, 1957); and Alfred Runte, *Trains of Discovery: Railroads and the Legacy of Our National Parks* (Lanham, Md: Roberts Rinehart, 2011).



Figure 26: A motor stage departing El Portal en route to Yosemite Valley, 1927. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

Although tied to Yosemite Valley's natural beauty, much of Merced's economy relied on bringing natural resources to market. The Yosemite Valley Railroad carried tourists, but timber—much of it from Yosemite's western boundary—provided much of the railroad's revenue. Like much of the San Joaquin Valley, Merced County itself had little timber; cattle and wheat reigned supreme. Whereas forests had provided food (chiefly acorns) for indigenous Yokuts communities, trees quickly became fodder for waves of settlers seeking arable river-bottom land. Beginning in the 1850s, county residents began thinning forests to heat their homes or build fences; steamships along the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers also consumed lumber for fuel.²⁸³ A brochure for the YV written in 1905 explains as much, noting that the immense supply of timber around El Portal would provide an important source of revenue.²⁸⁴

Hot on the heels of the YV, the Yosemite Lumber Company (YLC) incorporated in 1910. As the *Merced Sun-Star* remarked, it was “the most important enterprise affecting the city of Merced...since the welcome news was circulated here about six years ago that a railroad would be built from Merced to Yosemite Valley.” As their first order of business, the YLC's agents purchased the so-called “Minor Tract”: 10,000 acres of prime sugar pine land high above El Portal—which, as the railroad's eastern terminus, would be the primary shipping point for lumber traveling westward. The company also announced plans to build a mill on the Minor Tract, meaning that finished boards would be lowered thousands of feet down the canyon walls via incline rail; trains waiting at El Portal would get the lumber to market. Although the railroad's tourist appeal was

²⁸³ Igler, *Industrial Cowboys*, 28.

²⁸⁴ Sarah Lim, “Merced Falls: Water, Power, and Mills,” *Merced (Calif.) Sun Star*, 3 March 2018.

obvious, its managers foresaw that—“if the timber possibilities could be developed”—they could derive “considerable tonnage” from the Merced’s watershed.²⁸⁵

The new lumber concern meant portended big things for the largely agricultural town of Merced. Indeed, the new lumber company promised employment for hundreds of men; moreover, it ensured that “people employed there will make Merced their trading point, and ‘coming to town’ will mean coming to this city [Merced].”²⁸⁶ Taken together, the railroad and the lumber company represented a massive change of fortune for a small town in central California. For at least a few hundred rural workers, Merced would represent civilization—a place to spend their cash earned high in the hills.

After being absorbed by a larger conglomerate in 1913, the new Yosemite Lumber Company became—in the words of a breathless editorial in the *Merced Sun*—“one of the biggest and most important enterprises on the Pacific coast.”²⁸⁷ A large mill and mill town at Merced Falls, some twenty miles northeast of Merced, followed soon after; construction costs totaled roughly \$1 million (in today’s dollars). Here, where the majestic Merced River eased into the San Joaquin Valley, logs awaited their fate in a pond. Lumber traffic paid most of the railroad’s operating expenses all the way through the Great Depression, stimulating Merced’s economy in the process; one historian estimates that, during peak milling season, the camps and dining room used over 1,200 pounds of beef, 750 pounds of butter, and 1,200 eggs each week. The mill’s annual operating budget was roughly \$1,500,000, a significant contribution to the largely

²⁸⁵ \$100,000.00 Lumber Deal,” *Merced County (Calif.) Sun*, 2 September 1910.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ “Yosemite Lumber Company Acquires 20,000 Acres of Choice Timber Land,” *Merced Evening Sun*, 2 May 1913.

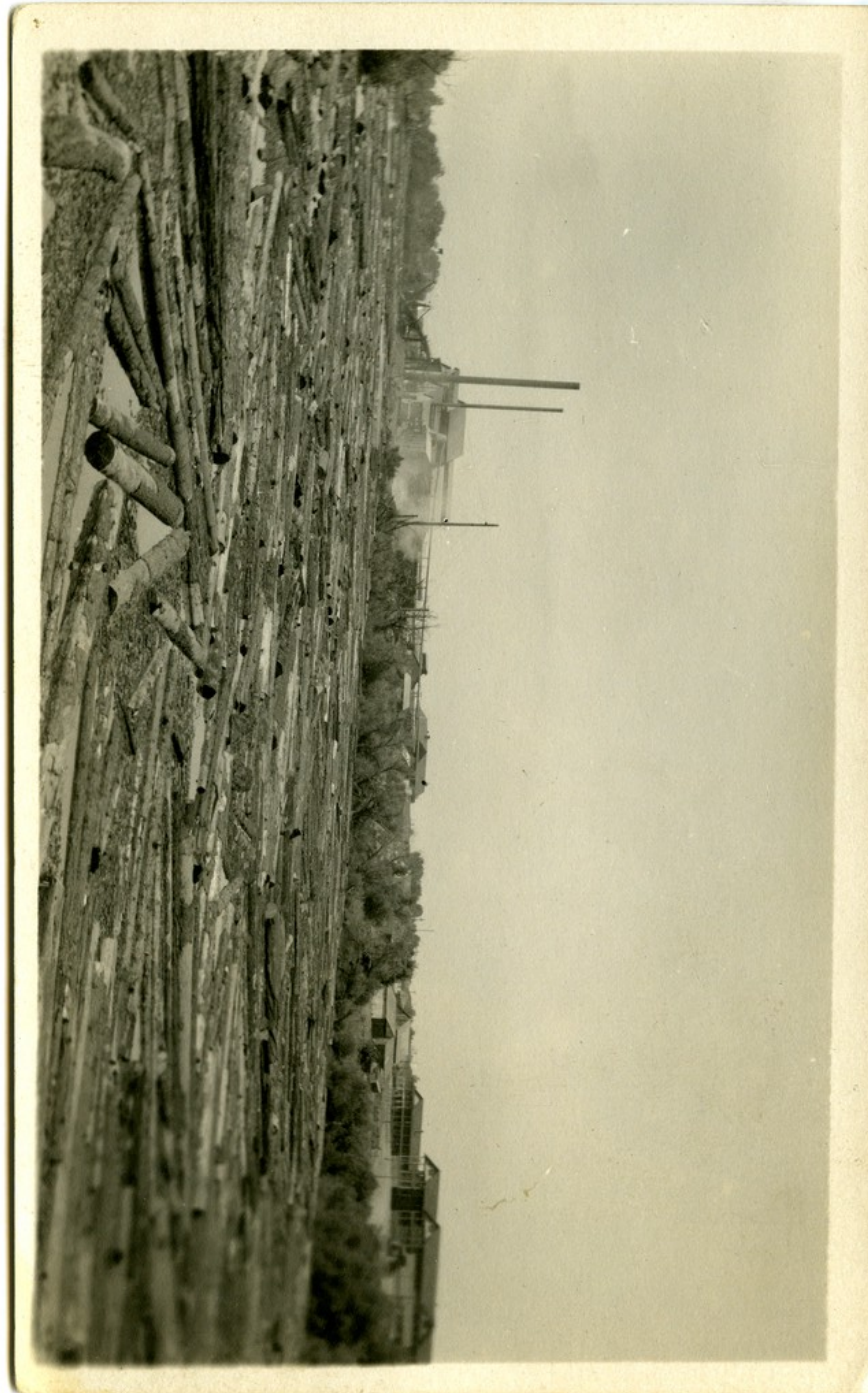


Figure 27: Logs in the Yosemite Lumber Company's pond with its mill at Merced Falls smoking in the background, 1921. Courtesy Merced County Historical Society and Courthouse Museum/Calisphere



Figure 28: Looking down the Yosemite Lumber Company's incline rail into the Merced River Canyon (the site of the All-Year Highway), 1926. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

agricultural county.²⁸⁸ Lumber from Yosemite's western boundary fed a massive economic system based not on tourism but on extraction. The YV and the YLC benefited tremendously from the geography of energy bridging the Sierra Nevada and the San Joaquin Valley.²⁸⁹

World War I provided one of the first tests of the symbiotic relationship between Yosemite and Merced. Cattle thrived in the dry grasslands of the San Joaquin Valley; however, the intense demand for meat to feed soldiers—coupled with a serious drought—led the region's ranchers to question Park Service anti-grazing policy. Resolutions drafted by the Live Stock Commission of the Federal Food Administration for Merced and Mariposa counties declared “a grave situation” challenging stockmen “to determine how best to prevent their stock from starving and thus diminishing, to that extent, the supply of food for America and her allies, in the present world crisis.” Acknowledging the Park Service's mandate to “preserve unimpaired,” the resolution concluded that “the consideration of tourists, sightseeing, wild animals, or flowers” should be “secondary...in the present emergency.”²⁹⁰ In June of 1918, Park Service director Stephen Mather met with California's Food Administrator and members of the California Cattlemen's Association to officially declare Yosemite open to grazing until the war's end.²⁹¹

Although Merced's stockmen proved crucial in the lobbying efforts, they found their

²⁸⁸ Cabezut, 57–60. This estimate is undated, so it is hard to adjust year-by-year for inflation; however, Merced County grossed \$20.3 million in gross cash farm income in 1940, the year after the fateful transfer of Carl Inn. Thus, the mill formed roughly 13% of the county's prewar income from farming—its most productive industry. This is only an estimate but it provides insight into the importance of the railway and lumber company for Merced County. Farm statistics from *California Airports: A Study of the Aeronautical Status of California with Projections for the Future and Recommendations for Adequate Development*. (Sacramento, Calif.: State Reconstruction and Employment Commission, 1947), 342.

²⁸⁹ Richard White coined this phrase to discuss the geography of the Columbia River watershed in relation to work, labor, and commerce. Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 9.

²⁹⁰ “Stockmen Urging Opening of Yosemite National Park,” *Mariposa (Calif.) Gazette*, 23 February 1918.

²⁹¹ “Cattle to Graze in Yosemite,” *Madera (Calif.) Mercury*, 7 June 1918.

lands still full of feed and therefore did not move their cattle to the park.²⁹² The National Park Service under Mather was not known for its strict adherence to preservationist doctrine. Nonetheless, the compromise showed that conservationism—the greatest good for the greatest number—held immense potential for reconciling national parks with their more extraction-oriented neighbors.²⁹³

Under Mather, the National Park Service continued to cooperate with Merced's rail and timber interests. The Yosemite Lumber Company's immense impact became obvious by the early 1920s, especially given its continued acquisition of land and development of logging roads in Yosemite's southwestern quadrant. Many parks, even early ones like Yosemite, faced dilemmas with private land claims that predated federal protection efforts—especially logging claims; to combat this, the Park Service offered landowners a trade of “less valuable” park land to preserve scenic vistas in high-traffic areas.²⁹⁴ This was the case in 1921, when Mather proposed a land exchange with the Yosemite Lumber Company to maintain “an effective timber screen along the Wawona Road.”²⁹⁵ The YLC and the YV retained rights to the park's massive stands of sugar pine—provided they cut only in areas deemed scenically uninspiring.

²⁹² “Rate Fixed for Grazing in Park,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 27 June 1918.

²⁹³ See chapter 1 for discussions of Mather's reign and the tension between preservation and conservation.

²⁹⁴ “On 9 April 1912, Congress passed Public Act No. 117, S. 5718: An Act to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to secure for the United States title to patented lands in the Yosemite National Park, and for other purposes. This act had been designed to facilitate the acquisition of patented forest lands by offering in exchange equal values in decayed or matured timber that could be removed from the park without affecting its scenic beauty. It also authorized acquisition of private forests near public roads by giving in exchange timber of equal value on park lands in less conspicuous parts of the park so that logging activities would not be visible to park visitors.” Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and Its Resources*, 298.

²⁹⁵ *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1921* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 195.

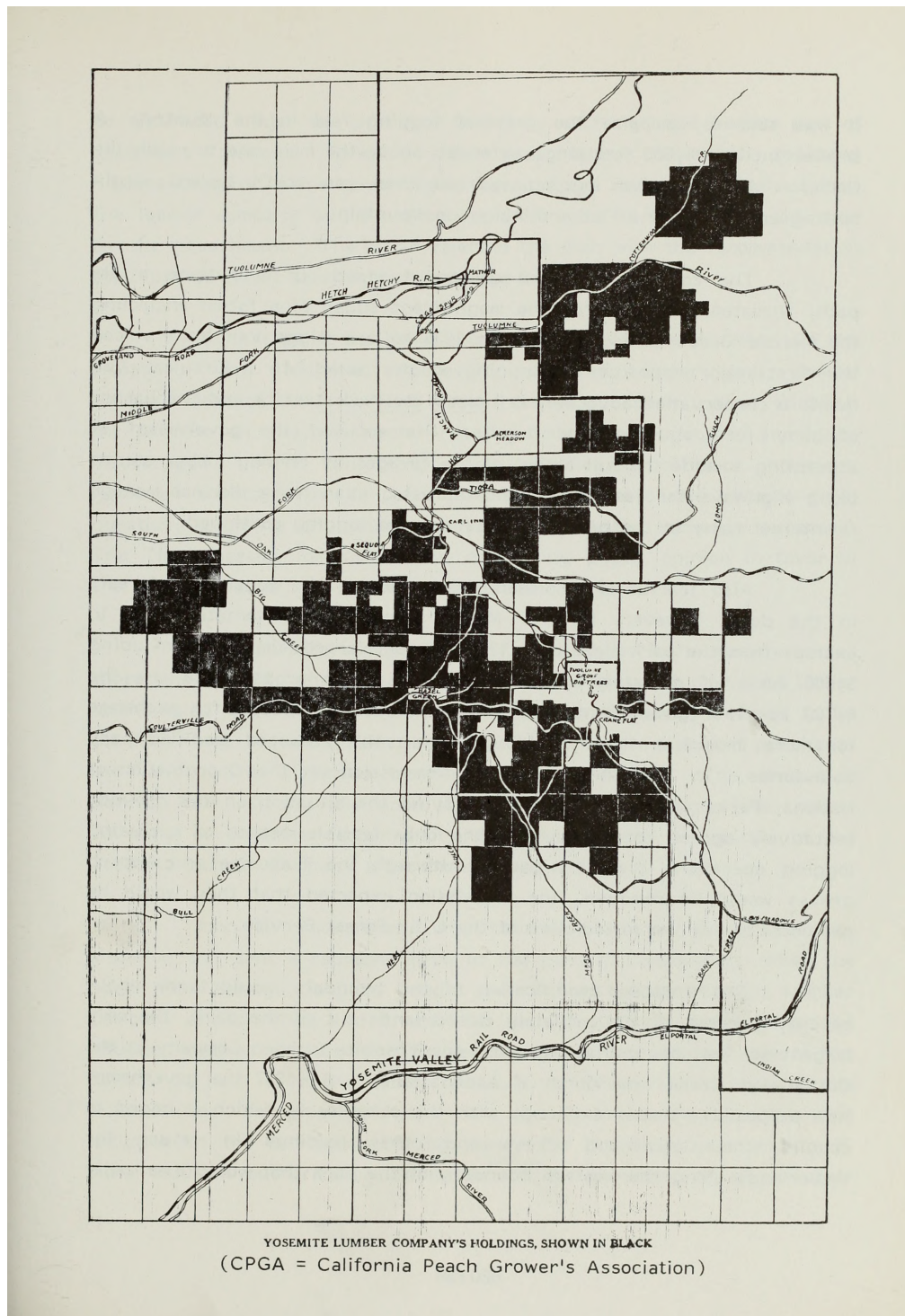


Figure 29: The Yosemite Lumber Company's holdings in Yosemite, 1923. Notice that the Carl Inn tract lies outside the park boundaries (the thick black line) at this point. Courtesy Linda W. Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and Its Resources*, 2-679

Lumber would become even more important for the Yosemite Valley Railroad as auto traffic to the park boomed in the 1920s. The Auto Club of Southern California's forceful support had produced an all-season road into Yosemite Valley—a historic event, to be sure. It threatened traditional patterns of visitation, calling into question whether Merced was still the unquestioned “Gateway to Yosemite.” Nonetheless, citizens welcomed the opening of the All-Year Highway in 1926. Once again, Merced really did boast the only railroad connection to Yosemite *and* the best automobile route; not only was the All-Year Highway passable in winter, but it also shaved precious time off the drive—even San Franciscans could reach Yosemite Valley in one day's time.²⁹⁶ The new highway also coincided with a major building boom in Merced. In 1927 the city issued a *four times* its average number of building permits. One of these new structures, the Hotel Tioga, was built specifically to house Yosemite-bound tourists. Nearby lay Sixteenth Street, which connected directly to the All-Year Highway; thus, two “Gateway to Yosemite” signs emerged along the busy thoroughfare—one at either end of the city.²⁹⁷ The park remained enmeshed in the city's built environment.

The All-Year Highway threatened the Yosemite Valley Railroad—and, by proxy, the Yosemite Lumber Company. Between 1925 and 1926 the number of visitors entering Yosemite in automobiles jumped from 155,745 to 234,461; in that same period, the number of travelers on the YV fell from 25,614 to 19,281.²⁹⁸ Yet the *Merced Sun-Star*

²⁹⁶ “Yosemite All Year Highway Getting Finishing Touches,” *Healdsburg (Calif.) Tribune*, 10 July 1926.

²⁹⁷ Sarah Lim, “A Look Back at Merced's Building Boom of 1927,” *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 11 December 2015.

²⁹⁸ *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1926* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926), 97.

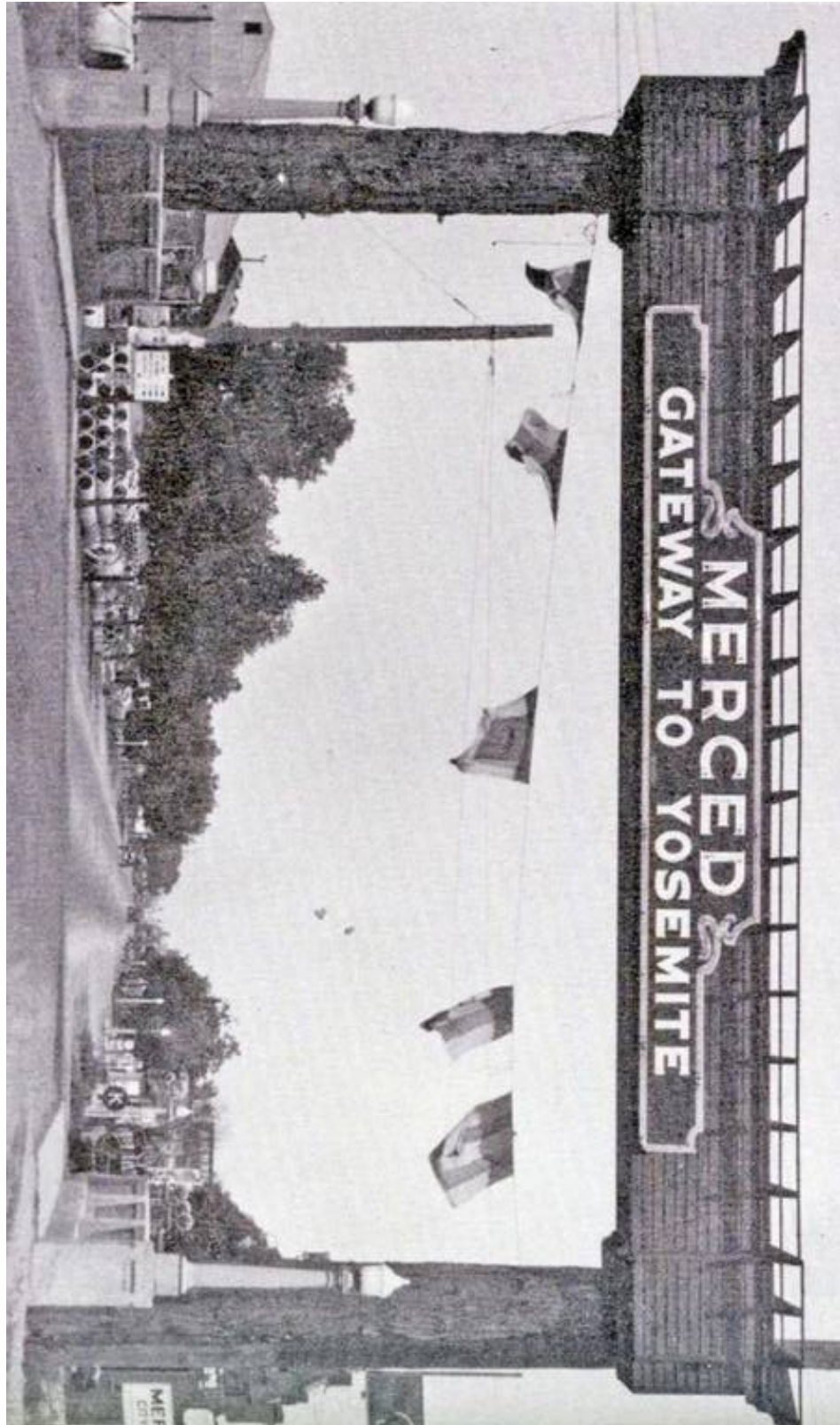


Figure 30: One of two "Gateway to Yosemite" signs along Merced's Sixteenth Street corridor. Sarah Lim, "A Look Back at Merced's Building Boom of 1927," *Merced Sun-Star*, 11 December 2015. Courtesy Merced County Historical Society and Courthouse Museum Collection, Merced, CA

continued to be optimistic about its hometown enterprise, trumpeting the line-up of “special trains”—group trips to Yosemite for the likes of the Camp Fire Girls of America, Fraternal Order of Eagles, and the Motion Picture Owners Association—the railroad had scheduled for the summer travel season.²⁹⁹ In the years following the highway’s opening, the YV gained fame not from the sheer amount of passengers it carried but from famous ones (Winston Churchill) or extravagant ones (a “land cruise” from Los Angeles in 1927 had cars reserved for “gymnastics, dancing, motion pictures and lectures”).³⁰⁰ Rail travel to the park was rapidly becoming a novelty. These pre-planned trips for large groups, though good for business, demonstrated the true appeal of an auto trip to Yosemite: there was no advance booking and no schedule.³⁰¹

Looking to recoup some of its losses, the YV successfully petitioned California’s railroad commission for rights to operate auto stages between Merced and El Portal.³⁰² Further cracks appeared as the Great Depression deepened. H.L. White, the YV’s manager, blamed federal legislation for the railroad’s struggles. The Transportation Act of 1920, which returned railroads to private operation after World War I, contained a “recapture clause” dictating that one half of any railway profits over six percent would be returned to the federal government; White argued that this unfairly handicapped short-line railroads like the YV.³⁰³ In October 1932, the railroad applied to run “mixed service,” mixing passenger cars and freight cars on the same train (ostensibly due to a

²⁹⁹ “Summer Bookings Over Y.V. Shows Heaviest Travel,” *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 4 June 1926.

³⁰⁰ “Winston Churchill to Yosemite Today,” *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 27 September 1929; “‘Land Cruise’ to Yosemite National Park,” *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 11 February 1927.

³⁰¹ While rail travel and hotel stays went hand in hand, so did auto touring and camping. In his brilliant history of auto tourism, Warren Belasco argues that camping helped travelers circumvent the “monopolistic rail-hotel complex.” Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1979), 3. See also Mary Pettit, “Guide to Family Camping,” *Travel* 102 (July 1954): 22.

³⁰² “Y.V. Railway and Park & Curry Co. Get Stage Right,” *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 10 November 1926.

³⁰³ “White Reports War Reaction,” *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 11 February 1932.

lack of the former).³⁰⁴ In early 1933 the YV sued the Yosemite Park & Curry Company for lowering its motor stage rates between Merced and El Portal, thus undercutting the YV's nascent motor stage business.³⁰⁵ Acting with the American Short Line Railroad Association in 1934, White urged Congress to consider federal regulation of motor carriers; unlike larger railroads, he argued, short lines simply could not recover revenue lost due to increasing highway traffic.³⁰⁶ Later that year the YV board asked the Interstate Commerce Commission for refinancing, citing increasing auto travel along the All-Year Highway and the closure of the Yosemite Lumber Company's Merced Falls plant as reasons for its dire straits.³⁰⁷ The railroad went up for auction in 1935 and was bought by its bondholders, who renamed it the Yosemite Valley Railway Company. The *Sun-Star* speculated it would be used mostly for shipping lumber and cement.³⁰⁸ By 1938 only 2,328 visitors entered the park via train, as opposed to 422,860 by private cars.³⁰⁹

The mill at Merced Falls reopened in 1935 under the newly organized Yosemite Sugar Pine Lumber Company, resuming the consistent flow of sugar pine from Yosemite's western boundary down the Merced.³¹⁰ However, the new owners of both the railroad and the mill soon encountered a major stumbling block. In 1939 the NPS acquired a chunk of fine sugar pine land on Yosemite's western slopes; after its exclusion from park boundaries in 1902, the Carl Inn tract represented a second to chance to save the prized conifer. Conservationists—including the bill's biggest champion, the Emergency Conservation Committee of New York—hailed the purchase as a major

³⁰⁴ "Y.V. Passenger Train Continued," *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 12 December 1932.

³⁰⁵ "Y.V. Sues Curry Company on Cut in Stage Rates," *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 11 February 1933.

³⁰⁶ "Regulation of Motors Urged," *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 6 January 1934.

³⁰⁷ "Yosemite Valley Railroad Asks for Refinancing," *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 23 November 1934.

³⁰⁸ "Yosemite Rail Line Auctioned," *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 24 December 1935.

³⁰⁹ *Superintendent's Annual Report, 1939* (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1939), 3. NPGallery Digital Archive.

³¹⁰ "Big Lumber Mill at Merced Falls to Start in July," *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 17 April 1935.



Figure 31: Congressman Charles Kramer and Los Angeles County Supervisor Gordon McDonough underneath a sugar pine. 1937. Notice the immensity of the tree in relation to the photo's human subjects. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

victory. The Yosemite Sugar Pine Lumber Company, sensing a threat to its existence, engaged in some last-minute cutting as a middle finger to the NPS.³¹¹ It was only fitting that the California Garden Club, appealing to garden clubs across the nation for support, published a description of sugar pines written by none other than John Muir.³¹² After years of amicable coexistence between the park and the railroad's contributing industries, trouble appeared to be brewing.

The acquisition revealed a state divided in its economic allegiances.³¹³ Rep. John S. McGroarty (of the Los Angeles area) and Sen. William G. McAdoo introduced bills to save the trees; the California State Chamber of Commerce, however, opposed the transfer.³¹⁴ California representative H. L. Englebright, speaking for his rural constituents, argued that the loss of sugar pine lands would prove "detrimental to industries in Merced, Mariposa, Tuolumne counties, lose the \$100,000 annual payroll of the Yosemite Sugar Pine Lumber company and cripple operations of the Yosemite valley railway [*sic*]." ³¹⁵

Even then, California's population was concentrated on the coast. It is not surprising, then, that McGroarty and McAdoo favored the expansion of a preserve that many of their constituents could now reach in a day. The Carl Inn debate revealed a deep divide between Yosemite's geographic neighbors (like Merced) and its symbolic

³¹¹ See "U.S. to Buy Sugar Pines for Yosemite Park Annex," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 June 1937; "Giant Sugar Pines Tract Will Be Added to Yosemite," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 May 1939; "Lumber Cut Halted," *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 19 July 1937; "Urge Purchase of Pine Forest," *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 20 April 1937; "Territory Added to Yosemite Park," *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 16 March 1939; and "Yosemite Land Bill is Signed," *Merced (Calif.) Sun-Star*, 17 July 1939.

³¹² "Preservation of Sugar Pines in West Cheers Tree Lovers," *Washington Post*, 19 September 1937.

³¹³ To this day, public land management divides California's rural counties from its urban centers: the state's more liberal city dwellers perceive rural industries—ranching, logging, and farming—as threats to valuable recreational lands. See "California's Far North Deplores 'Tyranny' of the Urban Majority," *New York Times*, 2 July 2017.

³¹⁴ Elsie Gray Cambridge, "Fight for Sugar Pines," *Washington Post*, 9 May 1937.

³¹⁵ "Defeat Rescue of Park Trees," *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 19 August 1937.

neighbors (like Los Angeles). For over thirty years, Merced's railroad interests had profited from Yosemite's natural resources both *in situ* and at market; now neither was a sure bet. The loss of Carl Inn pointed to a tough reality: without lumber and tourists, what exactly *would* the Yosemite Valley Railway carry?

Anger at the Carl Inn purchase did not hinder Superintendent Frank Kittredge's diplomatic duties—at least, not immediately. Like many superintendents, Kittredge made sure to court allies in Yosemite's neighboring towns, unlike others, however, he came to power on the eve of a world war. From his first day of work in August 1941 Kittredge made public relations a priority. He attended both of the San Joaquin Valley Council of the California Chamber of Commerce and the Merced County Fair (where he received compliments on “park participation”) in his first month on the job.³¹⁸ The following month, he returned to the San Joaquin Valley Council to trumpet “the benefit to surrounding areas arising from business conducted within the park”; soon after, he was named “guest of honor” at a banquet in Mariposa attended by a state senator, a local assemblyman, a columnist for the *Merced Sun-Star*, and a local district attorney.³¹⁹

The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, drawing the United States into a multi-front conflict. Despite his public relations efforts, Kittredge worried of an “invasion of park ideals or objectives” that could bring “public crusades in the name of national defense, misguided as they may be.” He was especially nervous about the recent Carl Inn addition but, mindful of World War I, he also fretted about local efforts to

³¹⁸ His sidekick, irrepressible park naturalist Harry C. Parker, gave a talk to the Mariposa Lions Club the next month. Memo to the Regional Director, September 1941 and October 1941. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

³¹⁹ Memo to the Regional Director, November 1941. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

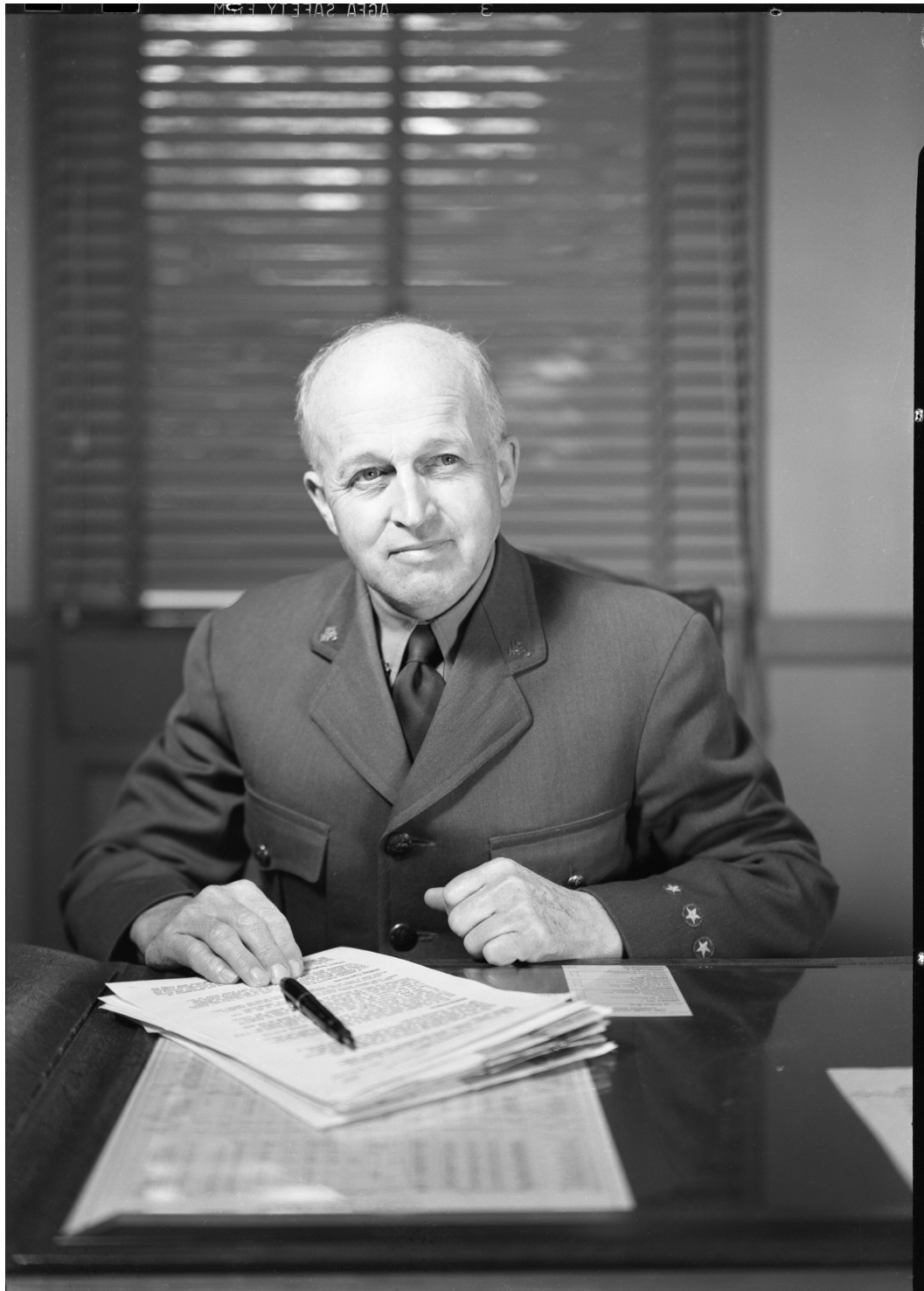


Figure 32: Frank Kittredge in his office. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

“break down the national park program of non-grazing.” Kittredge counted on his schmoozing to pay dividends. Kittredge expressed confidence that newspaper editors in Visalia, Fresno, and Merced were “personally very friendly,” just the type of “key men” to “squelch any plan of invasion of park ideals.”³²⁰

Despite its international scale, World War II embroiled Kittredge in local issues.³²¹ Almost immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor the superintendent was already steeling himself against neighboring communities that might use “the plea of patriotism” to enhance their own economies.³²² In March 1942 Merced’s chamber of commerce confirmed Kittredge’s suspicions by making the “first attempted raid on Yosemite...in the name of defense.” At a meeting of the San Joaquin Valley Chamber of Commerce, a representative from Merced County proposed “selected logging” of the Carl Inn tract.³²³ Here was the “plea of patriotism” Kittredge had foreseen: sugar pine fetched high prices, and Merced’s merchants—eager to strengthen their economy—used the war

³²⁰ Superintendent Kittredge to William E. Colby, 8 January 1942. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3, Subseries 2, Box 7.

³²¹ For more information on World War II’s effects on Californian cities, see Kevin Starr, *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Roger W. Lotchin, *Fortress California, 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Roger W. Lotchin, ed., *The Way We Really Were: The Golden State in the Second Great War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

Despite this historiographical emphasis on cities, California’s more isolated assets had their fair share of military significance. Places like Yosemite had long represented more than just diversions—they were immersions into a carefully curated national past. Park and rail promoters from the *fin de siècle* to the 1940s typically “encouraged white, native-born middle- and upper-class Americans to reaffirm their American-ness by following the footsteps of American history and seeing the nation firsthand. In teaching tourists what to see and how to see it, promoters invented and mapped an idealized American history and tradition across the American landscape, defining an organic nationalism that linked national identity to a shared territory and history. And tourist interests insisted that by seeing the sights and scenes that embodied the essence of America, by consuming the nation through touring, tourists would become better Americans.” Shaffer, *See America First*, 4.

³²² Superintendent Kittredge to William E. Colby, January 8, 1942. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3, Subseries 2, Box 7.

³²³ Memo for the Regional Director, April 1942. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

as pretense.³²⁴ Kittredge rejected the proposal on the grounds that Merced's business leaders could produce "no evidence" proving "an actual shortage of lumber for military purposes."³²⁵ This refusal, combined with the prewar Carl Inn purchase, effectively sealed the fate of the Yosemite Valley Railway.³²⁶

Kittredge continued to keep his close neighbors in mind. Even fuel and rubber rationing, which threatened the two commodities most central to the automobile, did little to shake his neighborly determination. Throughout the war, Kittredge visited Merced and Fresno almost twice as frequently as San Francisco—home of the Park Service's regional offices.³²⁹ Scarce fuel and rubber, he wrote, would not prevent him from being "closely in touch" so that "the park and the local communities" could have a "closer working relationship."³³⁰ Shortly after rejecting Merced's "plea of patriotism," the city invited park rangers to participate in its Army Day Parade. Yosemite personnel prepared an extravagant float, complete with pine boughs and a banner reading 'Work for Victory—Revitalize in the High Sierra.' Perhaps this was a gesture of reconciliation, a recognition that the park and its nearest urban neighbor had a shared purpose: helping tired war

³²⁴ By the early 1940s, sugar pine stands in the northern, southern, and Great Lakes-area forests had been exhausted; thus, the coveted wood became "heavily high-graded" during World War II. Laurence C. Walker, *The North American Forests: Geography, Ecology, and Silviculture* (Boca Raton, Fla: CRC Press, 1998), 243.

³²⁵ Memo for the Regional Director, May 1942. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

³²⁶ Merced's business leaders likely banked on the Park Service's willingness to do anything for the war effort—even compromise its own mission statement. For more on sacrifice, see Mark H. Leff, "The Politics of Sacrifice on the American Home Front in World War II," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 4 (1991): 1296–1318. Leff argues that sacrifice on the home front did not actually require terrible suffering, but rather a temporary suspension of self-interest for the greater patriotic good. Other scholars have corroborated the mostly economic nature of these wartime sacrifices. See James T. Sparrow, "'Buying Our Boys Back': The Mass Foundations of Fiscal Citizenship in World War II," *Journal of Policy History* 20, no. 2 (2008): 263–86.

³²⁹ See memos to the Regional Director, August 1941–December 1945 (passim). NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

³³⁰ Frank Kittredge to L.C. Jirsa, March 1, 1945. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 9, Subseries 10, Box 63.

workers achieve some rest and relaxation in Yosemite. Or maybe the pine boughs were cut from sugar pines, thus reminding the citizens of Merced what they—and their railroad—could not have. Either way, it was a rousing success; Kittredge reported to his superiors that “the float brought more congratulation and pleasure than did any others excepting the soldiers and the military equipment and riders.”³³¹

Whatever the float’s symbolism, rationing bestowed renewed importance on Merced’s transportation facilities. Despite the failure to regain logging rights, Merced enjoyed the collateral wartime benefits of being Yosemite’s neighbor. The Yosemite Transportation Service, eager to take full advantage of rationing, began offering twice daily stage service from Merced’s Southern Pacific Depot to Yosemite Valley in the summer of 1942.³³² Once nationwide fuel rationing began in December 1942, the California Department of Highways stopped plowing the roads leading from Fresno to Yosemite’s southern entrance—shunting all winter tourist traffic through Merced.³³³ The following summer, the Yosemite Park & Curry Company shuttered the Glacier Point Hotel, Wawona Hotel, and Big Trees Lodge—the most important lodging establishments in the park’s southern sector—due to “war restrictions and conditions.” The YPCC also announced that motor stages from Fresno to Yosemite Valley would cease, granting Merced a (temporary) monopoly over rail and bus traffic during the busy summer season.³³⁴ Although rail travel continued to drop through the war, stages—many of them

³³¹ Memo to the Regional Director, April 1942. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 6, Subseries 3-4, Box 18.

³³² “Additional Bus Schedules,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 26 June 1942.

³³³ Memo to the Regional Director, December 1942. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

³³⁴ Memo to the Regional Director, June 1943. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.



Figure 33: The float for Merced's Army Day Parade, 1942. Memo to the Regional Director, April 9, 1942. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 6, Subseries 3-4, Box 18

leaving from Merced—became increasingly popular; in fact, they carried over a quarter of all Yosemite’s visitors in 1944.³³⁵ World War II, and rationing in particular, temporarily revived Merced’s reputation as “the Gateway to Yosemite.”

Superintendent Kittredge was not the only Park Service employee concerned with his agency’s wartime image. Military mobilization presented public relations problems at a much larger scale. Because the war effort demanded every ounce of the country’s resources, Director Newton B. Drury—an ardent supporter of conservation—knew that his agency would face requests to use parks for defense work.³⁴⁰ Even before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes complained to President Franklin D. Roosevelt that his branch’s control over public lands was “rapidly being restricted to a futile ex post facto protest as far as the Army is concerned.” He continued with a trenchant military metaphor, noting the military’s tendency to “march in and take possession just as Hitler marched in and took possession of the small democracies of Europe.”³⁴¹

The basis of this military takeover lay in a presumption that Park Service policies were “not entirely in sympathy with the all-out war effort.”³⁴² After all, what good were preserved natural resources if they could not be used when American needed them most? NPS officials faced immense pressure to prove that tourism—or, “travel for essential rest

³³⁵ Bus travel rose throughout the war: 9,630 (1942), 14,608 (1943), 25,487 (1944). See memos to the Regional Director, August 1941–December 1945 (passim). NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

³⁴⁰ Janet A. McDonnell, “‘Far-Reaching Effects:’ The United States Military and the National Parks during World War II,” *The George Wright Forum* 32, no. 1 (2015): 90

³⁴¹ Quoted in McDonnell, “‘Far-Reaching Effects,’” 90.

³⁴² Carl P. Russell, “Practical Aspects of Park Museum Management in Times of War,” *Yosemite Nature Notes* 21, no. 10 (Oct. 1942): 82.

and recreation”—was vital for the nation and its citizens.³⁴³ Drury acted quickly, waiving soldiers’ entrance fees to all parks before America even entered the war. By preemptively promoting military tourism, the Park Service would “enhance the pride in this national heritage which it may be necessary for members of the armed forces and trainees sometime to defend.”³⁴⁴

Defense workers also formed a crucial part of the Park Service’s strategy. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Secretary Ickes argued that the country “should profit by experience of her allies,” many of whom “learned early in war that too long hours at high pressure work resulted in decreased production.”³⁴⁵ Partners in park tourism reinforced the message, as well. Echoing Ickes, the director of the All-Year Club of Southern California reminded attendees at a travel conference that “[t]ravel is an automatic stimulant to morale”; in order to reach the “highest production levels,” workers needed the “rest and change” brought by travel.³⁴⁶ Indeed, defense manufacturers around California organized tours to the state’s national parks. Lockheed and Consolidated Aircraft, for example, sent employees on two-week trips to Yosemite.³⁴⁷

The National Park Service still courted civilian visitors, but fuel and rubber rationing made it difficult for many to travel.³⁴⁸ This was especially true in California, as

³⁴³ Ibid., 83.

³⁴⁴ News release re Yosemite and the War Effort, November 14, 1941. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3/4/5/6, Subseries 6/1/1-2/1-2, Box 15.

³⁴⁵ Harold Ickes to Lee Lyles (Secretary of Public Relations, Santa Fe Railroad), January 15, 1942. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 9, Subseries 1-2, Box 55.

³⁴⁶ “Scotch That Rumor,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 23 January 1942.

³⁴⁷ McDonnell, ““Far-Reaching Effects,”” 94.

³⁴⁸ A study conducted at the park’s entrance stations between February and August 1943 found that over eighty percent of civilians entering the park held ‘A’ ration cards. ‘Travel Summary for Gasoline Rationing Period—Dec. 1, 1943 to Aug. 1, 1943.’ Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Series 3, Subseries 3-4, Box 12. ‘A’ cards were by far the most common, assigned to almost everyone; however, they allotted as little as three gallons a week, meaning that visitors from San Diego, Los Angeles, and even San Francisco would have to save for weeks (and even months) to accumulate enough gas for a Yosemite trip. Information on the ‘A’ ration from Paul D. Casdorff, *Let the Good Times Roll: Life at Home in America*

the state's biggest cities all lay hundreds of miles from Yosemite. By October 1941, two months before America even entered the war, military travel made up roughly ten percent of the park's visitation.³⁴⁹ Yosemite received half as many visitors in December 1942 (the beginning of fuel rationing) as it did in December 1941, despite a threefold increase in military visitation.³⁵⁰ Out of state visitation ground to a halt.³⁵¹ Twenty-one percent of all visitors for the 1943 travel year were from the military, rising to thirty-one percent in 1944.³⁵² This sharp decrease in overall travel—and the corresponding increase in military travel—epitomized Yosemite's wartime experience, and other national parks' too; by 1943, roughly one in four visitors nationwide were from the military.³⁵³

Over Memorial Day 1943, investigators from the Office of Price Administration (the government agency overseeing rationing protocol) staged a "raid" in Yosemite. Agents found more than 200 motorists from Central California and the Bay Area in possession of illegally obtained gasoline.³⁵⁴ Later that summer Park Service brass began explicitly discouraging civilian travel. An early supporter of wartime tourism, Secretary

during *World War II* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 46. Government officials assumed a fuel efficiency of fifteen miles per gallon, meaning that 'A' ration holders could travel forty-five miles a week on average—or 5,250 miles annually (per vehicle). John Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life*, (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2009), 147.

³⁴⁹ "Did You Know," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 21 November 1941: 6.

³⁵⁰ Memo to the Regional Director, January 1943. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

³⁵¹ See memos to the Regional Director, December 1941-December 1945, for statistics on the decline in visitation (especially from out of state). NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

³⁵² 1943 travel year (October 1, 1942-October 1, 1943): 27,000 military visitors; 127,000 total visitors. 1944 travel year (October 1, 1943-October 1, 1944): 37,000 military visitors; 119,500 total visitors. "Facts and Figures," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 14 October 1944.

³⁵³ Isabelle Story, "Army Invades the National Parks," *New York Times*, 2 May 1943.

³⁵⁴ "Pleasure Trip Check Lists 200 Motorists," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 June 1943. Once the rations ran out, Americans' options were slim. They could find a gas-producing well, or they could make a cheap fuel substitute at home. Most, however, tried to game the ration system: "The rationing scheme was no sooner announced than OPA offices were overrun by a frantic public asking for higher-bracketed rationing cards. And OPA threatened swift retaliation for anyone making false petitions for more than the minimal three gallons per week. After penalties of ten years in jail and fines ranging to \$10,000 were announced, an avalanche took places as people rushed to turn in revised cards." Casdorph, *Let the Good Times Roll*, 47–48.

Ickes changed his tune and asked Americans to vacation closer to home in order to reduce strain on gas, rubber, and trains.³⁵⁵ In fact, that Fourth of July, he implored Americans to stay away from parks “unless they are lucky enough to live within close proximity to one of them.”³⁵⁶ Civilian travel became simply too wasteful; military travel to the parks, however, remained of national importance. Merced offered Yosemite some much-needed help in this regard.

Wartime added a new dimension to this neighborly partnership. It was generally expected that parks collaborate with the military bases nearest them. The Office of Defense Transportation permitted both the Army and the Navy to use “automotive equipment” to give servicemen organized tours—in essence granting a reprieve from fuel and rubber rationing. At a meeting in early December 1942, military personnel agreed that regional directors and park superintendents should contact local Army and Navy units to schedule regular visits.³⁵⁷

Contrary to Secretary Ickes’ Hitler analogy, Yosemite’s top brass seemed to enjoy having servicemen in the park. Beginning even before the war, soldiers from nearby cities like Stockton, Fresno, and Merced arrived in Yosemite in groups of a thousand (or more).³⁵⁸ Many came for drilling. One summer day, soldiers tested an amphibious vehicle which one visitor deemed it “a cross between a Ford and a landing barge.”³⁵⁹ Soldiers also practiced digging foxholes in Tecoya Meadows, close to the busy Yosemite Village

³⁵⁵ “Vacationers Face Problem,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 1943. This philosophy remained strong throughout the war. See also “Play at Home Over Fourth Plea of ODT,” *Madera Tribune*, 29 June 1945.

³⁵⁶ Harold Ickes, “Ickes Sees Curtailed Park Use,” *New York Times*, 4 July 1943.

³⁵⁷ McDonnell, “Far-Reaching Effects,” 91–92

³⁵⁸ See memos to the Regional Director, December 1941–December 1945. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

³⁵⁹ “Amphibians Invade Yosemite with a Big Splash,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 2 July 1943.

complex.³⁶⁰ These special groups often received customized sightseeing trips. A group of approximately 500 men from Fresno's Hammer Field descended upon Camp 4 in late December 1942, immediately receiving an orientation at the east end of the Wawona Tunnel—one of the park's signature vistas. The next morning, they received special museum tours (in groups of one hundred or more) and hiked to Vernal Fall afterward.³⁶¹ As Kittredge remarked, it “would instill pride in the heart of any American” to see these “fine young men” in the park, “reveling in the beauties of Nature at her best.”³⁶²

Attempting to link preservation to patriotism, Superintendent Kittredge courted military tourists from bases around California. Some military tourists meant more than others—especially those from Merced, who offered Kittredge an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. Allowing soldiers to rest and recuperate within Yosemite showed the National Park Service's willingness to assist in the war effort; hosting Merced's soldiers, in particular, could constitute an olive branch to a city with plenty of reasons to resent their federal neighbors.

In November of 1942, the director of Merced's United Service Organizations (USO) Club approached Superintendent Kittredge with an unusual request. “Remembering the wonderful times they had in the Park during the summer,” she wrote, “some of the boys...are asking to spend Christmas in your Valley.” Since it would be too cold to camp, she asked instead if park residents could offer “home hospitality” for

³⁶⁰ “From Here and There,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 15 April 1944.

³⁶¹ Memo to the Regional Director, 1 January 1943. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145. Park naturalist Frank Brockman, who led these hikes, often slowed his pace to allow soldiers to adjust to the altitude; sometimes, though, troops engaged in “physical education” at their duty stations reversed this dynamic. “N.P.S. Ramblings,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 4 March 1943.

³⁶² Frank Kittredge to Region IV Director, October 27, 1943. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3/4/5/6, Subseries 6/1/1-2/1-2, Box 15.

soldiers missing their own families.³⁶³ Employees jumped at the chance. Dr. Donald Tressider, president of the Yosemite Park & Curry Company, announced their arrival:

Service men, many of them far from home and likewise dreaming of a 'White Christmas' will find here the peace, beauty, and spiritual revival that we associated with the Christmas season. All of us will strive to make this Christmas a memorable one for our guests, that they may go back to Army camps, battlefronts and war factories with renewed spirits. We see in this an important assignment and we guarantee our best.³⁶⁴

After the holidays, the commanding officer at the Merced Army Flying School wrote to express his soldiers' "gratitude for their Christmas gift of the hours spent at your home."³⁶⁵ The park—and, in particular, its employees' firesides—provided a kind of temporary home for servicemen stationed in Merced.

Not long after war broke out, the Navy decided that men who had experienced combat needed places to recuperate on land. In April 1942 Congress passed Public Law 528, dictating that the Navy's "Welfare and Recreation" funds could be used to rent buildings, facilities, and services to help Naval officers recuperate from their overseas tours. The Navy thus began looking for isolated areas that would discourage families from visiting.³⁶⁶ Yosemite fit the bill, and in the summer of 1943 the Curry Company transformed the luxurious Ahwahnee Hotel into a convalescent hospital for the Navy. Although technically the concessioners' call, NPS officials tried to take some credit for it. Park Service Director Arthur Demaray gave simple instructions to his regional director:

³⁶³ "How Many Service Boys Will You Entertain This Xmas," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 25 November 1942.

³⁶⁴ Letter from Don Tressider, *Yosemite Sentinel*, 24 December 1942.

³⁶⁵ Letter to Frank Kittredge from Col. Harvey F. Dyer, *Yosemite Sentinel*, 7 January 1943.

³⁶⁶ McDonnell, "'Far-Reaching Effects,'" 91.



Figure 34: Sailors at Tunnel View, 1944. Due to fuel and rubber rationing bicycles became an increasingly popular way to see Yosemite. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

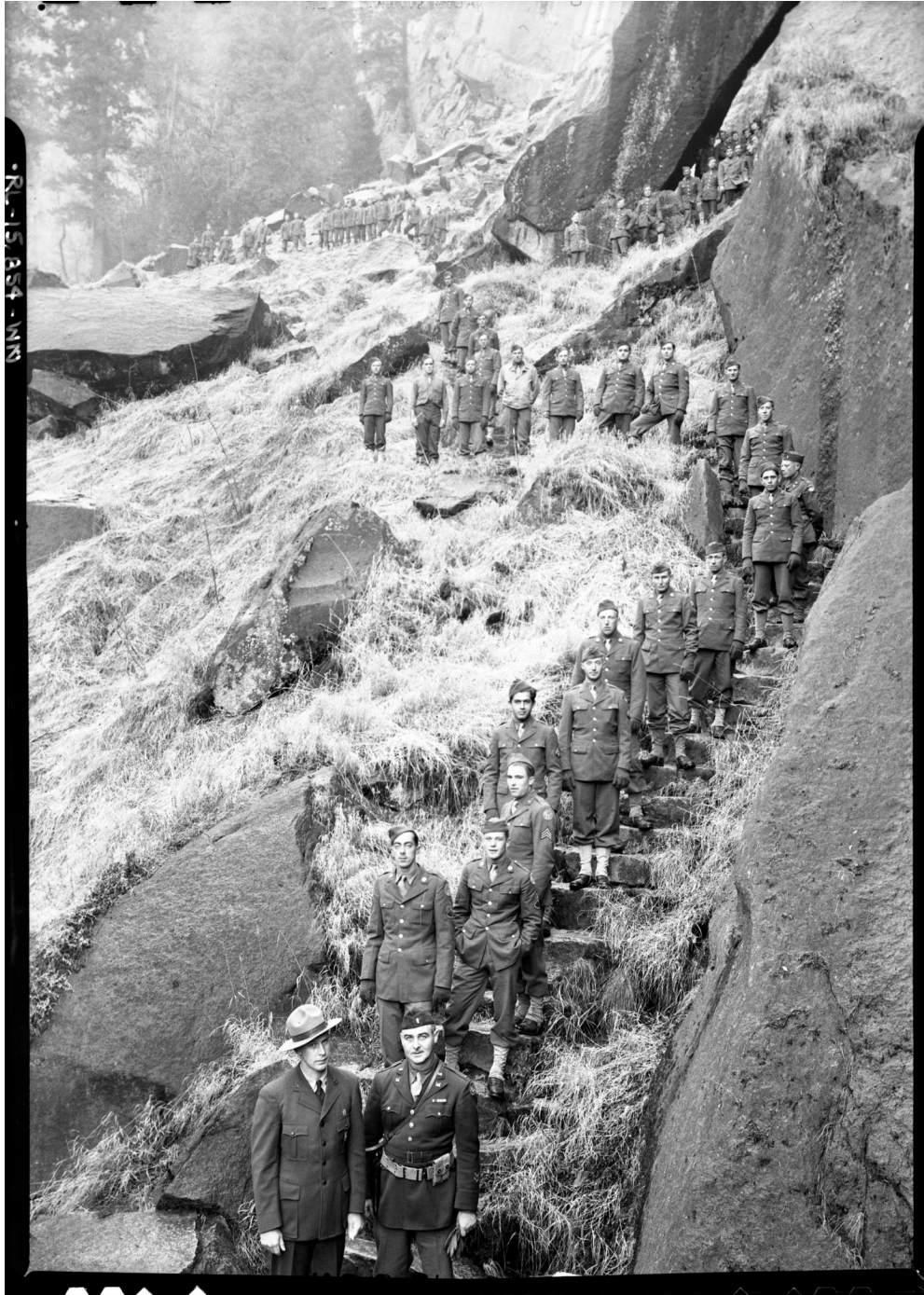


Figure 35: Soldiers on the Mist Trail to Vernal and Nevada Falls (at the eastern end of Yosemite Valley), c. 1944. Notice the ranger assigned to lead the hike in the foreground. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive.

when talking about the convalescent hospital, he should “[s]tress contribution to the war effort.”³⁶⁷

Once again Merced would prove essential to securing great press for the National Park Service. “Navy men assigned to Yosemite's de luxe [sic] hotel Ahwahnee for rest and recuperation need have never a dull moment,” a press release announced. Patients could fish with rangers “who know many of the trout by their first names”; they could also hike with rangers skilled in botany, zoology, and geology, and—if they wished—they could even climb mountains.³⁶⁸ But not all patients enjoyed the outdoors. Fortunately, neighbors in the San Joaquin Valley rushed to help. In its early days, the hospital was “literally saved” by nearby political and civic entities—Army bases at Merced and Fresno, the San Joaquin Valley Elks Club, the Navy Club and War Dads of Fresno, and different chapters of Navy Mothers’ Clubs and Veterans of Foreign Wars—which donated ping pong tables, games, radios, phonographs, and magazines.³⁶⁹ The Army airfield at Merced partnered with the War Dads of Fresno to host dances every other Saturday night at the hospital.³⁷⁰ The commander of the Merced airfield also provided weekend visits by an Army orchestra and a local detachment of the Women’s Army Corps.³⁷¹ Around Christmas time, nearby communities sent candy and cookies.³⁷²

The Ahwahnee’s location may have been scenic, but it was not particularly convenient. With San Francisco over 200 miles away and “the nearest town of any size”

³⁶⁷ Arthur Demaray to Major Tomlinson, April 10, 1943. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3/4/5/6, Subseries 6/1/1-2/1-2, Box 15.

³⁶⁸ Press release, June 7, 1943. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3/4/5/6, Subseries 6/1/1-2/1-2, Box 15.

³⁶⁹ Yosemite Park & Curry Company, *History of the United States Naval Special Hospital* (Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Park & Curry Company, 1946), 14.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁷² See “Navy Hospital Will Welcome Holiday Gifts,” *Madera Tribune*, 29 November 1944.

(Merced) over eighty miles away, the hospital needed to be “self-sustaining in every way possible.” While initially conceived as a home for psychiatric patients, the Ahwahnee proved “unsuitable” for them; the high surrounding walls fostered claustrophobia, and the lack of diversions led to boredom. Non-psychiatric patients, as well, chafed at the dearth of entertainment options. Despite their service, they were “isolated in the High Sierras” instead of sent home. To make matters worse, there were often hefty delays in obtaining medical discharges; during the hospital’s first year, hundreds of patients arrived in Yosemite from San Francisco—which was experiencing a dire shortage of medical beds—in order to wait for their discharges. Only emergency leave was authorized for the hospital, though, meaning many patients were trapped in paradise.³⁷³

World War II showcased a new side to the Merced-Yosemite partnership, one predicated less on business and more on shared sacrifice. Although the city’s “plea of patriotism” irked Kittredge, he remained committed to maintaining good neighborly relations—especially when it helped prove the National Park Service’s contributions to the war effort. Unlike most Californian cities, Merced was uniquely positioned to profit from the scarcity of fuel and rubber. Rationing short-circuited the park’s new all-season highway system, thus allowing Merced to resume its role as the “Gateway to Yosemite”—a role it had already relinquished, and would again once the war ended.

The Yosemite Valley Railway struggled as the war ground on. Instead of sugar pine, its owners had to make do by shipping materials for barite and cement; dwindling

³⁷³ Yosemite Park & Curry Company, *History of the United States Naval Special Hospital*, 12–31.

tourist traffic did not help, either.³⁸² By 1944 the railroad could not even pay interest on the two million dollars in bonds that it owed. The National Lead Company (which shipped barite via the railroad) and the Yosemite Portland Cement Company (crushed stone) leapt to defend the troubled line, as did Mariposa County representatives who rallied behind their county's only railroad—and, for that matter, their only public transportation.³⁸³ Theodore Stewart, president of the Yosemite Portland Cement Company and member of the 'Save YV' committee, pointed out the railroad's importance to every community it served.³⁸⁴ The Merced County Chamber of Commerce, with its financial future seemingly on the line, suggested that another company take over the railroad.³⁸⁵ But these protests accomplished little and, late in the summer of 1945, the YV's owners petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission for abandonment.³⁸⁶ The YV became the first railroad with a national park connection to be "scuttled"—a dubious honor.³⁸⁷

One rail advocate made a particularly interesting case, speculating that "[a] national park without a railroad leading into it is a second rate park in the eyes of...the wealthier class of tourist."³⁸⁸ The equation of rail and "the wealthier class" leaned on an outdated stereotype of park tourism, and thus this protest *against* the YV's abandonment actually made a convincing case *for* it. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the golden age of rail tourism, Western national parks proved so expensive to

³⁸² Rail visitation declined throughout the war: 613 (1942), 577 (1943), 193 (1944). See memos to the Regional Director, August 1941–December 1945 (passim). NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

³⁸³ "Merced and Mariposa County Men Discuss Future Status of Yosemite Valley Railroad Line," *Merced Sun-Star*, 4 April 1944; "ICC Hearing on Railroad Closing Dec. 1," *Merced Sun-Star*, 29 November 1944.

³⁸⁴ "Effort Launched to Stop Abandonment of Y-V Railway," *Merced Sun-Star*, 13 August 1945.

³⁸⁵ "Chamber Will Protest YV Abandonment," *Merced Sun-Star*, 9 November 1944.

³⁸⁶ "Y.V. Petitions for Abandonment," *Merced Sun-Star*, 31 August 1944.

³⁸⁷ "YV's No. 23 Makes Final Run; Line Goes on Block," *Merced Sun-Star*, 25 August 1945.

³⁸⁸ "Hearing Opens on Railroad Abandonment," *Merced Sun-Star*, 1 December 1944.

access that tourists were basically assured “the company of wealthy and cultured Englishmen and Easterners in Colorado.”³⁸⁹ National park tourists in the postwar United States, however, would be defined by a different kind of wealth—one characterized by unlimited mobility and a bold new variety of consumer choices. Californians, in particular, had tasted the fruits of all-season access to Yosemite throughout the 1930s; World War II would prove only a brief hiccup in their love affair with their cars and their favorite national park.

National Park Service and concessioner personnel stood up for the YV, but they had less at stake. Superintendent Kittredge and Donald Tressider, head of the Yosemite Park & Curry Company, both guaranteed they would support “any feasible plan” to ensure the railroad’s survival; although little-used by tourists, the YV still carried commercial freight into and out of the park.³⁹⁰ Regional Director Owen Tomlinson also supported the railroad, but only because—without it—congestion on the All Year Highway would increase dramatically.³⁹¹ Both the NPS and the YPCC saw the railroad’s future through an automotive prism. When rationing ended and tourism resumed, the Yosemite Valley Railway’s only purpose would be to keep traffic running smoothly by keeping semi-trucks off the road.

The railroad’s abandonment had major implications for Merced. Former YV employees warned that a proposed highway from Modesto to Yosemite Valley—together with the all-year road from Fresno—threatened to “practically eliminate Merced from

³⁸⁹ Earl S Pomeroy, *In Search of the Golden West*, 9.

³⁹⁰ “Merced and Mariposa County Men Discuss Future Status of Yosemite Valley Railroad Line,” *Merced Sun-Star*, 4 April 1944.

³⁹¹ “Hearing Opens on Railroad Abandonment,” *Merced Sun-Star*, 1 December 1944.

tourist business.”³⁹² The Modesto highway, which would create a thirty-three mile shortcut for northern travelers, would lead to “the ultimate motor car by-passing of Merced”; it was, in no uncertain terms, the “death of a historical era.” In an era of unprecedented automotive mobility, the town once “proudly lauded as the Gateway to Yosemite” would no longer enjoy an exclusive geographic advantage.³⁹³

The Ahwahnee Hotel reopened in December 1945, relieved of its duties as a hospital.³⁹⁴ Not surprisingly, travel for the 1945 travel year (October 1–September 30, inclusive) increased one hundred and fifty-five percent over the previous travel year, and eight percent over the previous record travel year (1941); travel from outside the state of California surged, as well.³⁹⁵ But 1946, the first year completely free of rationing, belonged to Californians. Ninety percent of park visitors that year came from within the state.³⁹⁶

That summer, Kittredge proudly reflected on some of his wartime accomplishments. “The park’s natural values were safeguarded from the threat of grazing,” he boasted. “The forests of the park were not invaded for timber,” he continued, “and the careful use of camping areas by military convoys had no visible effect on the vegetation of the park.” In other words, World War II had left Yosemite’s natural resources intact. The park’s traffic situation, however, was another matter. “No sooner

³⁹² “Opinions by YV Employee Committee,” *Merced Sun-Star*, 1 September 1945.

³⁹³ “YV’s No. 23 Makes Final Run; Line Goes on Block.”

³⁹⁴ “Ahwahnee Open House Friday Evening,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 19 December 1946.

³⁹⁵ “Park Travel Report,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 11 October 1946.

³⁹⁶ *California Airports*, 48.

had the atomic bomb smoke cleared over Hiroshima,” Kittredge exclaimed, than “[a]utomobiles started rolling into the park from all directions.”³⁹⁷

Changes in California’s highway system in the 1920s and 1930s democratized access to the park, meaning that more cities had legitimate claims as gateways to Yosemite. Merced’s leading citizens paved the way for this moment, even if it meant they could no longer claim the park as their own. Yet these hotel and railroad magnates had played a pivotal role in promoting Yosemite, funneling people from California (and beyond) into the formerly remote park. Ironically, though, the abandoned Yosemite Valley Railroad proved to be Merced’s biggest contribution to the park’s urbanization. With the YV dismantled and cars coming “from all directions,” Yosemite National Park became yet another Californian attraction dedicated entirely to the automobile.

No place epitomized this transformation better than El Portal. Once the YV’s eastern terminus, the small town in the lower Merced River canyon would become a planned community boasting single family homes, two-car garages, and a new class of commuting employees. From the ashes of the railroad era emerged a more complex version of Yosemite, an auto-oriented commercial landscape in lockstep with the rapidly suburbanizing state around it.

³⁹⁷ *Superintendent’s Annual Report, 1946* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949), 1. NPGallery Digital Archive.

Chapter 4

“Less Perishable Areas”: Mission 66 and the Fight to Decentralize Yosemite Valley,

1945–1966³⁹⁸

By early September 1945—shortly after the end of World War II—travel to Yosemite resumed in force. Despite some notable exceptions (like the ski area at Badger Pass) Yosemite Valley remained the main draw. As its visitor facilities grew more and more overloaded nationwide, the National Park Service’s budget stagnated. Thus the contrast between the nation’s postwar wealth and its impoverished parks became evident to bureaucrats, journalists, and visitors alike.³⁹⁹

Thrust into serving postwar crowds on prewar budgets, Park Service brass had to make some urgent decisions regarding the shape of Yosemite. The lack of a train, combined with California’s rising auto registrations, made it abundantly clear that cars would dominate the park’s future—but in what way? Would they carry tourists straight to Yosemite Valley, thus reinforcing the centralized nature of the park’s development? Or

³⁹⁸ An earlier version of this chapter appeared as “Sierra Sprawl: Yosemite’s Age of Decentralization, 1956–1966,” *California History* 92, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 37–54.

³⁹⁹ The defining statement of this idea (private wealth and public poverty) was John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958). More recent scholarship has expounded on the tension between the postwar era’s consumer boom and its growing environmental consciousness. It has become common to critique suburban development as detrimental to both central cities *and* the environment at large (not to mention its effect on race relations); however, it is important to recognize the connection between affluence and environmental activism. The defining treatment of this subject is Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961). Rothman explores questions of class and consumption, positing that environmental advocacy promised to provide space for middle-class lifestyles; however, the consumption implicit in these middle-class lifestyles (like multiple cars, single-family homes) threatened to counteract many of the movement’s victories. See also Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Rome argues that America’s postwar housing shortage led Congress to empower tract-home developers, which in turn exposed many potential homebuyers to the environmental hazards of green field development; he thus expands the discussion of environmentalism beyond its patron saints of John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson. For more on the connection between prosperity and preservation, see George A. Gonzalez, ““The Wilderness Act of 1964 and the Wilderness Preservation Policy Network,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 20, no. 4 (December 2009): 31–52.

would they distribute visitors over a wider ranger of park attractions to give the Valley a break? Mission 66, a funding boost approved in 1956, offered the Park Service a chance at decentralizing Yosemite Valley by removing both visitor and employee services to outlying areas within the park (or outside the park altogether).⁴⁰⁰

The Yosemite Park and Curry Company (hereafter ‘the Curry Company,’ ‘the Company,’ or simply ‘the concessioner’) had other ideas. Party to the park’s development since the 1920s, the Company held a monopoly on visitor services in Yosemite Valley: lodging, meals, groceries, and even haircuts. Thus the concessioner doubled down on their strategy, adding a motel and a retail complex that transformed the Valley into an auto-oriented commercial landscape befitting the rapidly suburbanizing nation.⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰⁰ The classic work on Mission 66 and its architecture is Ethan Carr’s *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma*. Carr argues that “[n]ational park development constituted a part—as did tracts of residential development, shopping centers, and highway construction—of an overall modern landscape that was beginning to reach its ultimate extent across the entire continent during the postwar decades.” (47). For more on modernism in the national parks during this period, see Sarah Allaback, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type* (Washington, D.C: National Park Service, 2000).

Broader treatments of the automobile are Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road*; Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel*; Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life*, Updated edition (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013); Mark H. Rose and Raymond A. Mohl, *Interstate: Highway Politics and Policy Since 1939* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012); and John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Motoring: The Highway Experience in America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

⁴⁰¹ Mission 66 in Yosemite was a product of its time. It would be overly simplistic to claim ‘suburbanization’ and ‘decentralization’ as synonymous, but they share interesting similarities. The historiography of America’s suburbanization remains vast. After many years, the definitive treatment of the Federal Housing Authority and other federal mechanisms of decentralization remains Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), esp. 195–219. Jackson’s explanations of the connection between FHA loans and HOLC (Home Owners’ Loan Corporation) neighborhood evaluations remains one of the clearest articulations of the discriminatory practices baked into both suburban growth and urban decline. One of the most successful materialist accounts of suburbia is Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003). Using the broad concept of growth to guide her analysis, Hayden focuses on the vast array of parties that stand to profit from suburban living: lawyers, transportation companies, utility companies, newspapers, supermarkets, big-box stores, and more. An excellent companion to Hayden is James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993). Kunstler writes in a biting, polemical style about the ways in which suburbia has fostered a sprawling, placeless, and wasteful design ethic. For a look at federally-subsidized decentralization of postwar business interests, see Margaret O’Mara, “Uncovering the City in the Suburb: Cold War Politics, Scientific Elites, and High-Tech Spaces,” in *The New Suburban History*, eds. Kevin Kruse and Thomas Sugrue (Chicago: University of Chicago

The Sierra Club also weighed in on the Park Service's plans to spread visitors more evenly throughout Yosemite. Club leaders vehemently opposed the modernization of the Tioga Road, a trans-Sierra highway offering access to the park's scenic high country; while these new recreational opportunities would help decentralize the Valley, they would also bring more traffic to one of the Sierra Club's most beloved places. Three of the dominant forces in postwar American life—the federal government, conservation organizations, and private industry—collided during the Mission 66 era, conflicted over Yosemite's future form but unanimous on the importance of cars.⁴⁰²

Postwar auto tourism boomed. As the Curry Company newsletter noted, “[m]any local residents had different cars parked in front of their houses over the weekend, and many new faces were seen in the residential area as our friends and relatives came in for a visit.”⁴⁰³ Travel for June 1946 showed a gain of two hundred and fifty percent over the previous June, as well as a fifty percent drop in bus traffic; it eclipsed the previous record (June 1941) by eleven percent.⁴⁰⁴ Visitors from the San Francisco Bay Area and Southern California returned in particularly large numbers.⁴⁰⁵

Press, 2006): 57–79. Like many practitioners of the “new” suburban history, O’Mara explores the cities and suburbs in tandem.

⁴⁰² Any scholar interested in Park Service roads must familiarize themselves with David Louter's *Windshield Wilderness*. Louter argues that parks allowed America's increasingly-mobile citizenry to “engage wilderness in a new way, in which automobiles and highways seemed to be mutually beneficial” (5). Thus, park design promoted an ethos of preservation through development, “which considered roads not as intrusions but as enhancements” (13). Another essential book on roads and wilderness is Paul Sutter's *Driven Wild*. Separating wilderness and the national park idea, Sutter argues that wilderness advocacy (especially that of the Wilderness Society, which originated in the 1930s) arose from a critique of consumerism and, specifically, the role of automobiles and road-building in outdoor recreation. See also David G. Havlick, *No Place Distant: Roads and Motorized Recreation on America's Public Lands* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2002).

⁴⁰³ Quote and statistics from “From Here and There,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 8 September 1945.

⁴⁰⁴ June 1946 narrative report, n.d. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

⁴⁰⁵ Over the 1953 calendar year, Californians comprised 74.2% of Yosemite's total visitors; 28.2% of total visitors came from Southern California (including San Diego and Los Angeles), and 32.2% came from

Few parks were prepared for the postwar travel explosion, but Yosemite's unique situation—close to major metropolitan centers, accessible by four highways, and with visitation concentrated in one seven mile by half mile chasm—prompted some serious conversations. Park Service officials looked to Yosemite's Board of Experts for advice on how to proceed. Since 1928 the Board—essentially a think tank composed of planners, architects, natural scientists, and other public intellectuals—had served as a sort of advisory council to park superintendents. Shortly after V-J Day, Park Service director Newton B. Drury challenged the Board to consider an especially provocative suggestion from Thomas C. Vint, the agency's chief planner. Looking to manage the returning tourist hordes, Vint had recommended removing as much development as possible from Yosemite Valley—Park Service and Curry Company facilities alike. To compensate, Drury suggested “build[ing] up the facilities at Wawona, or at Big Meadow”—rural areas to the south and west of Yosemite Valley, respectively. He reassured them that the plan “was not as radical as it might appear,” and that it did not “preclude overnight accommodations or campgrounds.” Vint's plan would, however, “shift the emphasis so far as resort activities and Government operations...to less perishable areas”—an idea that Drury deemed “a trend in the right direction.”⁴⁰⁶

The Board proved unsympathetic to the Vint plan. In 1946 their reply came: although they were “wholly in sympathy” with Director Drury's wishes, removing the

Northern California (including San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose). Jan W. van Wagendonk, “Visitor Use Patterns in Yosemite National Park,” *Journal of Travel Research* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1980): 15, table 5.

⁴⁰⁶ “I should like the Board to consider particularly the possibility of moving as much as possible of the Government facilities out of the Valley.... I should also like the board to give serious consideration to the proposal of eliminating Yosemite Lodge, broadening the range of service at the Ahwahnee, and eliminating the resort-type entertainment featured at Camp Curry, thereby reducing the tourist impact of the Valley Floor.” Drury to Duncan McDuffie (chairman of Advisory Board), 7 August 1945; quoted in Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 189.

“heart of the park” was “too great a sacrifice to make.”⁴⁰⁷ As a compromise, they proposed limiting the overnight population of the Valley. Pushing past the ideal overnight carrying capacity, they argued, would result in a reduction of each visitors’ “individual pleasure” to “a quarter or a third of that under favorable conditions.”⁴⁰⁸ They reasoned mostly in mathematical terms; after all, many of the Board’s members were academics. Board member John P. Buwalda, a geology profesor at the California Institute of Technology, decried Vint’s plan as too expensive and inconvenient. Its biggest flaw, though, was “not being able to see the Valley in its different moods from early morning to late at night.”⁴⁰⁹ In one version of Vint’s plan, Yosemite’s administrative facilities—as well as that of Sequoia and Kings Canyon—would be removed to nearby Fresno. The Board especially disliked this idea, pointing out that removing park headquarters to an outlying area would be as inefficient as “the removal of the mayor of New York City to a suburb.”⁴¹⁰

Superintendent Frank Kittredge took a more moderate approach to Vint’s plan. Writing to the chairman of the Board, he expressed the central dilemma of the postwar park experience:

We have recognized the advisability of gathering together of necessary public services in order to protect other areas from people, and yet this very gathering together has served to get away from the camp mood and to get into the town or city mood with the...necessity for the city services and entertainments.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ Carr, *Mission* 66, 246.

⁴⁰⁸ Board of Advisors, “Limitation of Overnight Population in Yosemite Valley During Summer Months” (n.d., c. 1946). Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3, Subseries 2. Box 7.

⁴⁰⁹ Kittredge to Buwalda, 13 July 1947. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3, Subseries 2. Box 7.

⁴¹⁰ Board of Advisors, “The Proposed Vint Plan” (n.d., c. 1946). Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3, Subseries 2. Box 7.

⁴¹¹ Kittredge to McDuffie, 6 August 1945. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3, Subseries 2. Box 7.

In other words, centralization was not working. “City services and entertainments” dominated the Valley floor because the National Park Service had let them “in order to protect other areas from people.” The resulting crowds irreparably changed the Valley’s “mood”—one Kittredge’s favorite barometers of the park experience. He believed it was in the Park Service’s best interest to “substitute a simple camp atmosphere for the present urban conditions”; those in search of “jazz or city type” activities would eventually “label the park as ‘dead’” and seek entertainment elsewhere.⁴¹²

Unsurprisingly, higher-ups at the concessioner thought little of Kittredge’s desire to remove “city type” activities that bolstered the Company’s bottom line. The Yosemite Park & Curry Company was baked into Yosemite’s history. It operated the Ahwahnee Hotel, Wawona Hotel, Camp Curry, and the ski facilities at Badger Pass; aside from lodgings and food, it also offered dancing, golfing, tennis, swimming, and other diversions.⁴¹³ The Company essentially invented winter recreation in Yosemite.⁴¹⁴ More to the point, it oversaw a massive economic system predicated upon overnight accommodations in Yosemite Valley. Related concessioner businesses like restaurants and gift shops flourished across the national park system; gift sales, in particular, helped businesses like the Curry Company ensure a profit for their overall operation. Any visitor that could afford a stay at the Ahwahnee, for example, likely had enough disposable income to spring for some kind of souvenir. Thus, the Company had a vested interest in maintaining a concentration of services and, more importantly, *people* in Yosemite Valley.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² Quoted in Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 190.

⁴¹³ Martin Litton, “Yosemite’s Charm Attracts Million,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1952.

⁴¹⁴ See chapter 2.

⁴¹⁵ Fitzsimmons, *Central Place*, 303.



Figure 36: Crowds assembled outside the cafeteria in Camp Curry, 1946. Camp Curry is one of the concessioner's biggest concentrations of lodging and services. This photo displays the reason that the Curry Company could never abide by decentralization: there was simply too much money to make. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive



Figure 37: Japanese Olympians in the Camp Curry pool, 1932. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

Agents of the Curry Company interpreted the Vint plan as an attack on their very existence. The general manager, Hilmer Oehlmann, bristled at the notion that he and his fellow concessioners “would subscribe to any form of desecration of these areas for the sake of additional profit.” It was absurd to blame the Curry Company for crowds, he continued, when “for every swimmer in the pools there are a hundred in the river.” Knowing the Park Service’s postwar budget woes, he drily remarked that “it is not to be expected that the Park Service itself will aspire to confront the Appropriations Committees with statistics of declining travel.”⁴¹⁶ Oehlmann’s words foreshadow the role that massive concessioner investments would play in determining the shape of Yosemite.

Oehlmann sounded confident, but he had other reasons to worry. The political climate had grown hostile to national park concessioners. In 1946 Rep. John J. Rooney (D-NY) criticized the contract—signed in 1932—that required the Yosemite Park and Curry Company to pay the government only \$5,000 of its nearly \$3 million in gross income. Yosemite was “run for the benefit of a concessionaire,” he argued.⁴¹⁷ In the years following World War II, some members of Congress began a movement for government ownership of national park concessions; unsurprisingly, other senators and representatives bucked at this perceived move towards socialization of private assets.⁴¹⁸ A *Los Angeles Times* reporter opined that, without the Curry Company’s numerous (and lucrative) distractions, Yosemite Valley “might become once again the most beautiful

⁴¹⁶ Quoted in Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 191–192.

⁴¹⁷ “Yosemite Park Concession Hit,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 May 1946.

⁴¹⁸ “U.S. Ownership of Park Concessions Sought,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* 11 June 1948; “Funds Asked to Meet National Park Boom,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 April 1950.

place in the world.”⁴¹⁹ Legislators, Park Service personnel, and even the media had begun to question the Curry Company’s influence over federal preservation policy.

By the early 1950s, other problems supplanted Park Service concessions policy. Conditions were so bad system-wide that pundits like Bernard DeVoto actually advocated closing the nation's parks until they could be adequately funded.⁴²⁰ After seeing National Park Service facilities decay—first due to nonuse during World War II, and then due to extreme use afterwards—Director Wirth pressed for a new emphasis on comprehensive and well-funded master plans. These were not simply vague vision statements; in Wirth’s words, they were meant to “insure [sic] a sound, economical, and orderly development of each area.”⁴²¹ Yosemite’s master planning process revived the Vint plan. Contributors to the park’s 1952 Master Plan insisted on “gradual decentral[ization]” of the Valley, which was “rapidly approaching the saturation point.” By 1952, 700 cars and 2,300 people entered the Valley each day; from May to September, those numbers more than doubled. Some campgrounds were given “rest period[s]” to allow partial recovery.⁴²² Yet Yosemite’s operating budget actually

⁴¹⁹ Martin Litton, “Yosemite’s Charm Attracts Million,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1952.

⁴²⁰ See Bernard DeVoto, “Let’s Close the National Parks,” *Harper’s* (October 1953): 49–52.

⁴²¹ Park master plans reflected the ultimate integration of all park functions: interpretation, roads, parking, archeology, fee collection, biology, and law enforcement all chimed in. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 59. For more on extreme postwar visitation, see Carr, *Mission 66*, 3–5.

⁴²² Master Plan Development Outline, 1952, 22–23. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 3, Subseries 1, Box 1. Master plans contained every possible angle of park development: archeology, forestry, hydrology, engineering, fire protection, and maintenance, to name a few. They also contained every mode of conveying information, like maps, charts, photographs, building plans, and budgets. Former NPS Director Conrad Wirth describes the master plan as “a living thing, constantly being altered and revised to meet changing conditions.” Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 59.

decreased four percent between 1953 and 1954, leaving little funding for such an ambitious idea.⁴²³

Predictably, Curry Company representatives defended their role in the Valley's crowding. As one official put it, "[w]e try to spread them out by encouraging the use of facilities outside the Valley itself, such as those at Wawona, Glacier Point, and Tuolumne Meadows"; ultimately, though, "most of the people who apply for reservations insist on going 'where all the people are.'" The official also noted that the Company's advertising focused on the off-seasons (spring and fall) so as to not to contribute to summer crowding.⁴²⁴ This excuse did not necessarily hold water, as increasing off-season visitation had long been a successful joint venture of the Park Service and the Curry Company.⁴²⁵

The new superintendent, Carl P. Russell—a former Yosemite park naturalist that succeeded Kittredge in 1947—moved to thaw the once-chilly relationship between the Park Service and concessioner. He invited anyone unhappy with the "the roads crossing the meadows, [or] the meadows that are blacktopped to provide extra parking space" to blame the National Park Service; Russell also criticized "changing administrative views...that have kept the service from knowing just where it is heading."⁴²⁶ Was the Park Service to blame for allowing Yosemite Valley to become so developed? Or was the Curry Company to blame for taking advantage of federal policy? Either way, Russell's words—published in the *Los Angeles Times*—showed the American public that his agency's insecure finances and changing priorities had taken their toll.

⁴²³ Lawrence E. Davies, "Shabby Yosemite Needs Personnel," *New York Times*, 8 April 1954.

⁴²⁴ "Yosemite's Charm Attracts Million," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1952.

⁴²⁵ See chapter 2.

⁴²⁶ "Yosemite's Charm Attracts Million," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1952.

The 1950s continued auspiciously for businesses like the Curry Company. At a superintendents' meeting in Yosemite in 1953, the Park Service's leadership addressed the future of concessioners. In his memoirs, Director Conrad Wirth (appointed in 1951) recalls a collective attempt at "mending the bad feeling that had developed" between private enterprises and their federal hosts. Criticisms of parks run "for the benefit of concessionaire" explained much of the bad blood; so did a suggestion in the 1940s that concessioners sell their facilities to the federal government. In response, the House Committee on Public Lands introduced the idea of 'possessory interest,' pledging that any concessioner improvements would be treated the same as those made on private land. If corporations were assured that their facilities would remain theirs, they might be more willing to help the Park Service finance its sorely-needed "reconstruction program." The meeting, Wirth remembers, "brought out the importance of the concessionaires as part of the team."⁴²⁷

Even with concessioners back in the fold, the Park Service would need more money to deal with problems emerging in Yosemite and across the national park system. A solution emerged when Congress authorized funding for Mission 66 (1956–1966), a new program designed to facilitate public access through modernization of the national park system. Relationships with concessioners like the Curry Company proved crucial to the plan. As Wirth convinced President Dwight D. Eisenhower, "the best encouragement the National Park Service can give is to go forward with its own part of park development." If a concessioner was willing to build new lodging, for example, the Park Service needed to make sure that its portion of the work—utilities, road, parking areas—

⁴²⁷ Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 292.

was completed promptly. “We have to do our part before the concessioners can go ahead,” Worth concluded.⁴²⁸

As Wirth’s pitch indicates, the National Park Service had to provide the basic infrastructure for concessioner investments (mainly lodging) to flourish. Thus, much of Mission 66 funding went to new roads, parking lots, and campgrounds—all of which would provided a steady clientele for concessioner facilities. Yet one part of Wirth’s plan remained patently unrealistic. Despite the importance of concessioner development *within* parks, Wirth also pledged to “encourage private business to build more accommodations in the gateway communities near the parks.”⁴²⁹ Even more boldly, he trumpeted the removal of overnight facilities from “major park features.”⁴³⁰ Once again, the Vint plan had resurfaced; this time, however, it was not confined to Yosemite.

Park Service officials eventually softened their stance on lodging, requiring only four of the nation’s thirty “large parks” to phase out overnight accommodations within their boundaries. New concessioner lodging facilities thus became a signature part of the Mission 66 program.⁴³¹ A meeting of the Western Conference of National Park Concessioners and Park Service officials in 1957 produced the conclusion that “concessioners operating in the large national parks of the western states and Hawaii” would “cooperate as fully as possible in providing the thousands of new lodgings and related facilities now needed.” The Curry Company and other concessioners balked, however, at the potential cost of construction and labor; to raise the Park Service’s

⁴²⁸ “Mission 66 Proposal to the Eisenhower Cabinet,” in Dilsaver and Jarvis (eds.), *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, 193–194.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴³⁰ Not only did they reap profits from lodging, but hotels and motels ensured longer stays, which increased the profits of other concessioner services. Carr, *Mission 66*, 233. For more on the plan for removal of overnight facilities, see Carr, *Mission 66*, 234.

⁴³¹ Using a simplified visitor demand formula, NPS officials would eventually argue for an *increase* in lodging. The result: a spike in total pillow count in twenty-six parks from 23,797 to 58,797. *Ibid.*, 242.

lodging capacity from 24,000 to 52,000 (the projected goal), it would cost \$50 million—with concessioners providing three quarters of that amount.⁴³² For Mission 66 to move forward, concessioners would have to double down on their already-impressive investments in “central places” across the national park system. Wirth’s plan to decentralize concessioner facilities eventually had the opposite effect. Private enterprise had become inextricably bound to the nation’s parks.

Even if the system-wide goals of Mission 66 had abandoned decentralization, Yosemite’s superintendent John Preston ultimately controlled the allocation of new funding in his park. Knowing that the Curry Company would not budge from the Valley, Preston tried more subtle tactics to disperse visitation. Acquiring the remaining private lands within the park constituted the least controversial part of his Mission 66 to-do list.⁴³³ Throughout the twentieth century, many American cities grew by annexing land, ensuring a larger tax base and more room to grow. Since the early 1900s, a similar process for acquiring private lands within Yosemite allowed Park Service officials to mitigate the negative effects of the park’s patchwork property lines; after World War II, however, private land purchases became an integral part of the plan to save the Valley.⁴³⁴

⁴³² “Mission ‘66’ Stresses Role of Private Enterprise,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 22 February 1957.

⁴³³ The traditional rejection of private lands within Yosemite began early. James Mason Hutchings, one of the earliest entrepreneurs in Yosemite Valley, lost his property there in the 1870s after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that “the act of the state legislature granting Hutchings 160 acres of land violated two of the conditions of the trust—that the lands be held for public use, resort, and recreation, and that they be inalienable for all time.” Greene, *Yosemite: the Park and Its Resources*, 100; see also Huntley, *The Making of Yosemite*, 120–138.

⁴³⁴ For a case study of postwar annexation in the West, see John D. Wenum, *Annexation as a Technique for Metropolitan Growth: The Case of Phoenix, Arizona* (Tempe: Institute of Public Administration, Arizona State University, 1970). More information on Park Service land acquisitions, including the landmark case of Cape Cod National Seashore, can be found in Joseph L. Sax, “Buying Scenery: Land Acquisitions for the National Park Service,” *Duke Law Journal* 1980, no. 4 (September 1980) and Joseph L. Sax, “Helpless Giants: The National Parks and the Regulation of Private Lands,” *Michigan Law Review* 75 (1976–1977): 239–74.

Mere months before leaving Yosemite in 1947, Frank Kittredge had expressed a desire to “more fully utilise [*sic*] Wawona.”⁴³⁵ Kittredge, so attuned to the needs and functions of gateway communities, saw similar opportunities to spread out visitors within park boundaries. Like neighboring towns serving the park’s tourist overflow, areas like Wawona would take pressure off Yosemite Valley.

Yet Wawona was also dotted with private lands, many owned by longtime Californians with a deep attachment to their vacation homes in Yosemite. The Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias was included in the Yosemite Grant back in 1864, but the Park Service did not acquire Wawona’s primary residential development near the grove until 1932. The basin’s private inholdings had been subdivided in the intervening seven decades, chiseled into smaller and smaller parcels. A circuitous network of dirt roads crisscrossed the basin.⁴³⁶

Thus Preston, like others before him, found Wawona difficult to manage. Shortly after Mission 66’s introduction to the public in 1956, Superintendent Preston stressed the urgency of land acquisition to Director Drury. “Costly improvements are being made daily on these active subdivision areas of Foresta and Wawona,” he wrote, referring to residential developments to the west and south of Yosemite Valley, respectively. “Each day adds to the physical improvement and consequent valuation of the properties in Wawona and Foresta making acquisition increasingly difficult.”⁴³⁷ By 1958

⁴³⁵ Kittredge to McDuffie, 4 September 1947. Yosemite National Park archives, Old Central Files, Series 3, Subseries 2. Box 7.

⁴³⁶ Greene, *Yosemite: the Park and Its Resources*, 55; 508–509.

⁴³⁷ John Preston to Conrad Wirth, 21 March 1956, 8. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Office of the Superintendent, Box 7.

Superintendent Preston reiterated that the acquisition program was “making rather slow progress.”⁴³⁸

There was reason to persevere. With some added visitor services, Wawona could offer an alternative to the Valley. Its short distance from Yosemite Valley, along with established attractions like the Mariposa Grove and a historic hotel, made it a logical candidate for decentralization. If Yosemite Valley was indeed a city, then Wawona was its country cousin. The Wawona Hotel, acquired by the Curry Company in 1923, offered large doses of rural charm:

One of the best nine-hole mountain golf courses in the United States is included in the property.... Facilities also include tennis courts, a riding stables, volleyball courts, and a new swimming pool, added this year. Close by are a store, gas station, groves of Big Trees, and numerous other Yosemite National Park attractions.... A total of 27 miles from the floor of Yosemite Valley, life at Wawona is unhurried and uncrowded. ‘We came here for the quiet, peaceful life of Wawona,’ one couple, yearly visitors since 1932, said. ‘The people are genial.’⁴³⁹

In contrast to the Valley’s auto-oriented layout, Wawona became a tableau of olden days.

Other historic structures arrive, cultivating the powerful pull of nostalgia and uncluttering the Valley floor in the process. In addition to its existing historic sites—a covered bridge, wagon shop, and the Wawona Hotel—Wawona received eight more

⁴³⁸ To combat this rapid growth of vacation homes, NPS officials considered amending the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to prohibit construction on private lands within the park that did not conform to established fire districts within California. While it was true that “haphazard” construction of “cabins, shacks, and summer homes” increased Wawona’s fire danger, park officials had ulterior motives for limiting private development in the area. This appears a forward-thinking attempt to limit low-quality sprawl; however, it directly served Preston’s (and Vint’s, and Kittredge’s) interests. Preston to Regional Director, 12 September 1958. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 11, Box 39.

⁴³⁹ Mike Konon, “Complete Serenity Greets Travelers at Historic Wawona Hotel in Park,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 22 September 1959.



Figure 38: The Wawona Barn near the Pioneer History Center, undated. Notice the rural character of the scene. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

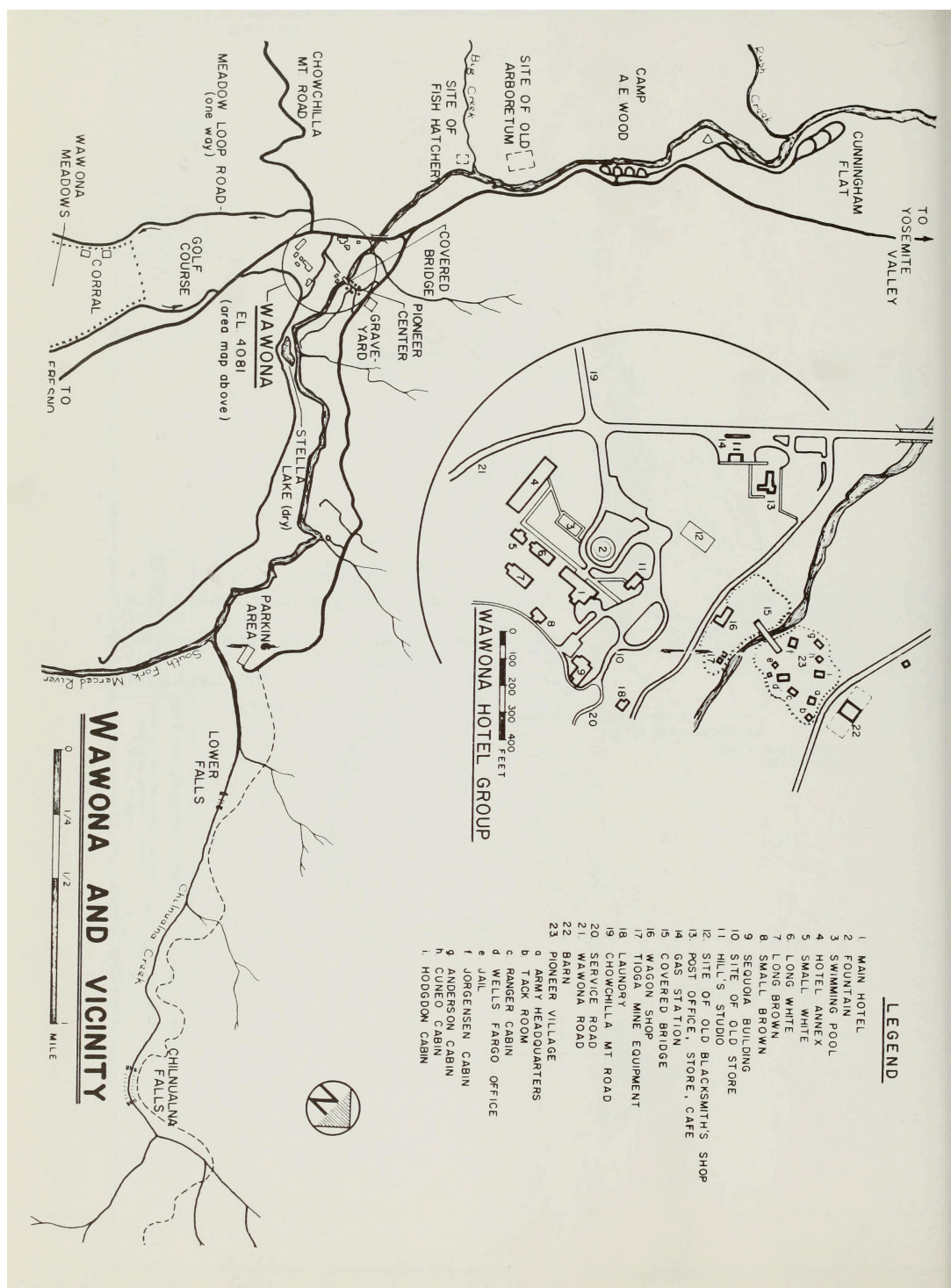


Figure 39: The Wawona area, c. 1965. Notice the juxtaposition of features conveying the area's historical significance (the Pioneer History Center, a graveyard) with more modern conveniences (like a golf course). Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and its Resources*, 889

historic buildings in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Two of them (the Wells Fargo building and the powder house) came from the Old Village; they would have otherwise been razed to make space on the Valley floor.⁴⁴⁰ Walking down “Main Street” became a sort of time travel; visitors could see log cabins, stagecoaches, and even a covered bridge.⁴⁴¹ Each represented a different stage of Yosemite's development: pioneering, homesteading, rail transport, early hotels, the Army administration, and the nascent national park years. Crews spent six years moving and refurnishing these structures, which would officially open as the Pioneer History Center in 1961.⁴⁴² A dedication of the center, featuring some 300 “pioneers, or sons and daughters of pioneers,” occurred as part of the Yosemite Grant centennial in 1964—yet another attempt to link Wawona to the park's origins, rather than its modernization.⁴⁴³

Even though development at Wawona technically furthered the Vint plan, it was anything but controversial. The Curry Company surely did not mind, as the Pioneer History Center funneled more visitors towards its historic Wawona Hotel. But when it came to the greatest question of Mission 66, the Wawona area fell short. Preston, ever cost-conscious, noted pessimistically in 1956 that “a new central headquarters” at Wawona would “complicate” its acquisition “by placing increased valuation on the land.” To make matters worse, the best lands for a potential campground lay in private hands, as well. Even a relocation of entertainment options (like the dance pavilion) to Wawona from the Valley seemed problematic; Preston lamented the potential danger to “the carefree seasonal employee of the concessioners” on their return trip to the Valley “late at

⁴⁴⁰ Fitzsimmons, “Effect,” 72–73.

⁴⁴¹ “Wawona Pioneer Village,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 4 April 1958.

⁴⁴² Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and Its Resources*, 882.

⁴⁴³ “300 Pioneers Dedicate Yosemite,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 14 September 1964.

night over this winding road.”⁴⁴⁴ Wawona could never become “a new central headquarters,” but it was a nice walk down memory lane nonetheless.

Preston’s concern about the road to Wawona underscored a crucial facet of his Mission 66 strategy: assuming that visitors would experience the park from behind a windshield. The average tourist was more mobile than ever. By the start of the 1950s roughly ninety-nine percent of visitors to the national park system arrived in cars, either their own private autos or rented ones.⁴⁴⁵ In 1952 Carl P. Russell—a former park naturalist and Kittredge’s replacement as superintendent—estimated that ninety percent of the park’s visitors were from California, most of them “repeaters.”⁴⁴⁶ This phenomenon would only intensify as the state’s auto registrations doubled between 1950 and 1966.⁴⁴⁷

Any time a Californian got in their car, there was a good chance they were going to Yosemite. In-state tourists became so numerous that some proposed limiting Californian visitation to give visitors from elsewhere “a better chance at getting past park gates.” One scheme even proposed a staggered school schedule within the state redistribute heavy summer crowds.⁴⁴⁸ The context of California is doubly important given the state was changing in similar ways to Yosemite. The harbingers of decentralization—especially highways, planned communities, and guaranteed Federal Housing Authority

⁴⁴⁴ John Preston to Conrad Wirth, 21 March 1956, 4–8.

⁴⁴⁵ Carr, *Mission 66*, 5.

⁴⁴⁶ Martin Litton, “Yosemite’s Charm Attracts Million,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1952.

⁴⁴⁷ By 1950, California had four million registered automobiles; by 1966, the state contained over nine million. Allan K. Fitzsimmons, “The Effect of the Automobile on the Cultural Landscape Elements of Yosemite Valley” (M.A. thesis, San Fernando Valley State College, 1969), 2.

⁴⁴⁸ Harlan Trott, “Spread-Out Traffic Urged at Yosemite,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 August 1955.

loans—reshaped the state, transforming rural land into urban land at an alarming rate.⁴⁴⁹

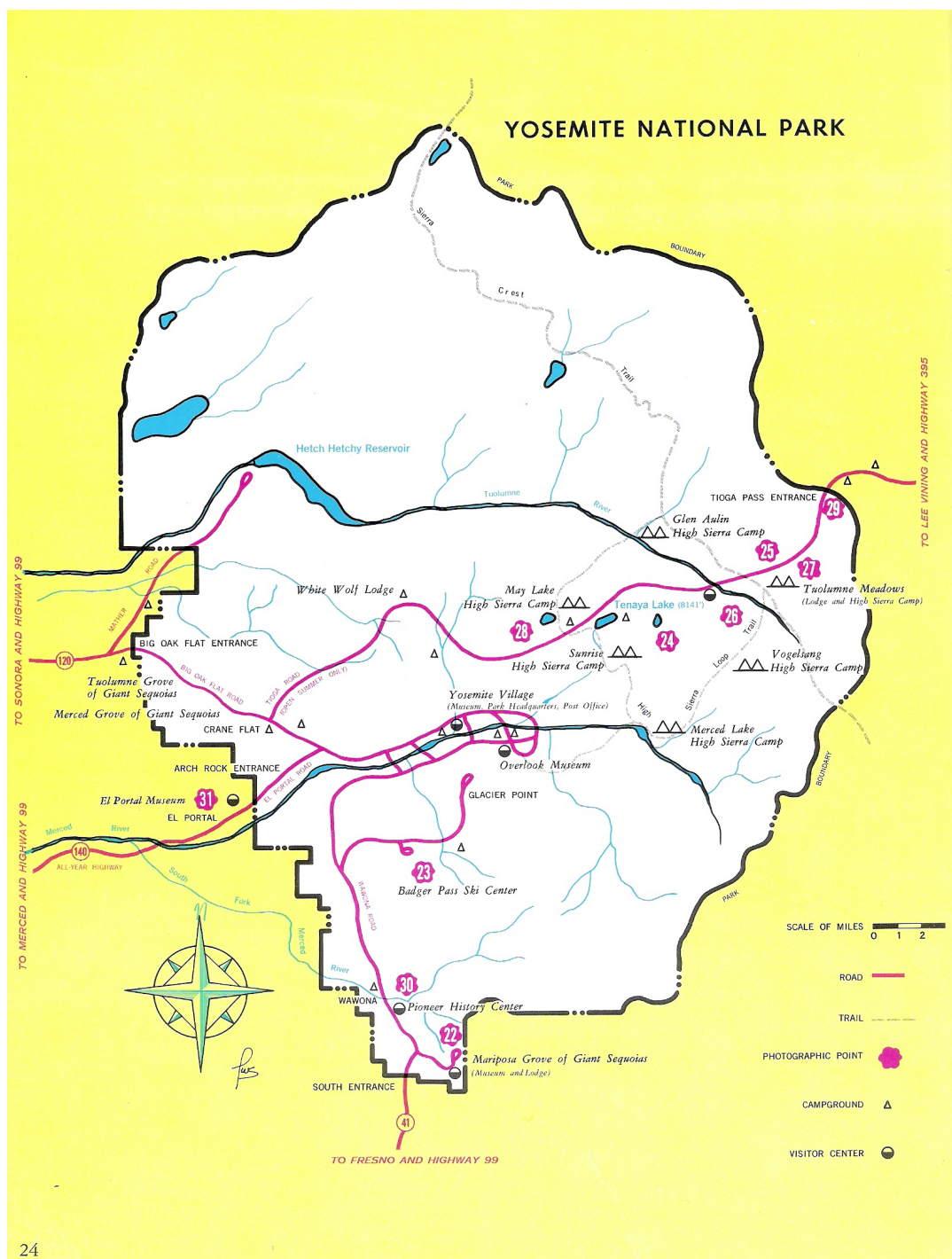
Yosemite’s Mission 66 agenda created a similar dynamic in the park, shunting development to areas previously considered peripheral to the visitor—and employee—experience.

Preston’s refusal to locate a new headquarters at Wawona showed his sensitivity to his employees’ commuting patterns. In the early Mission 66 period, Preston eyed El Portal and Big Meadow—two communities west of the Valley—as potential places to relocate “housekeeping” functions (things like a garbage dump and an incinerator that were not essential for visitor enjoyment) from the Valley. A daily drive from El Portal to the Valley seemed dangerous, though; Highway 140 ran right next to the Merced River for multiple miles, causing frequent flooding; the amount of traffic through the Arch Rock entrance also seemed problematic. Preston initially favored Big Meadow for its higher elevation and thus milder summer climate.⁴⁵⁰ Eventually, though, Big Meadow’s patchwork of private land claims proved impractical, and El Portal became Preston’s next target.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ For example, from 1953–1959 San Bernardino County shifted 9,625 acres of land per year from rural to urban. Findlay, *Magic Lands*, 29. The most politically and economically insightful treatment of the Golden State’s suburban growth (in the context of race, liberalism, and the welfare state) is Robert O. Self, *American Babylon*. The classic neighborhood study of a blue-collar, racially diverse suburb remains Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven : Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). For a primer on the architecture of automotive mobility as perfected in California, look no further than Richard W. Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998).

⁴⁵⁰ Greene, *Yosemite: the Park and Its Resources*, 515.

⁴⁵¹ Knowing that property owners there valued “unimproved” grazing lands, Preston assumed the Park Service would therefore have to push for a full acquisition of all property therein; the present owner, who had been “amicable neighbors” with the Park Service for years, eventually planned to deed his land to the park, anyways. Preston also feared that pressing for full acquisition would “have adverse effects upon the orderly acquisition of the inholdings at Foresta and Wawona.” John Preston to Conrad Wirth, 21 March 1956, 7–8.



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Figure 40: Yosemite in the 1960s. Note El Portal on the southwestern side, next to the big '31.' From Douglas Hubbard, *This is Yosemite* (San Francisco: 5 Associates, 1962).

As the former terminus of the Yosemite Valley Railroad, El Portal had always been functionally (if not legally) part of Yosemite.⁴⁵² After the Yosemite Valley Railroad was abandoned in 1945, the El Portal Mining Company—a branch of the National Lead Company—acquired title to El Portal. The Park Service purchased the town in 1958.⁴⁵³ The park’s Mission 66 plans to remove “supporting facilities” (another word for “housekeeping” functions) would hinge upon this acquisition.⁴⁵⁴

The site’s geography had a lot to recommend it, especially in comparison to Wawona. El Portal sat directly on the All-Year Highway, which remained open more consistently than the roads leading to Wawona and Big Meadow. Removing the incinerator—or other heavy materials like cement, lumber, gravel, and steel—from the Valley to El Portal (one of Preston’s Mission 66 goals) would require a “downhill haul” along a relatively straight roadway; placing utilities at Wawona, on the other hand, would “increase greatly the congestion on this slow, tortuous two-lane road.” Even better, most of the land at El Portal was under a single ownership. By controlling the site—adjacent to a heavily-used park entrance—Preston argued that the Park Service could prevent “‘shoestring’ development of motels, bars, etc.,” that “characterize[d] the ‘front door’ to many of our national parks.”⁴⁵⁵ Perhaps the only downside of the site was its elevation (roughly 2,000 feet lower than Yosemite Valley), which meant scorching summer heat.

⁴⁵² El Portal thus contained scores of railroad employee housing constructed between 1905 and 1915. Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and Its Resources*, 314. See chapter 3 for more details on El Portal’s history as a transportation hub.

⁴⁵³ Ibid, 994. While much of the land was purchased outright, some tracts were acquired by agreement from the Forest Service or purchased from remaining private landholders. See Yosemite National Park Resource Management and Science, *El Portal Administrative Site Historic Resource Survey with Assignments and Recommendations* (Yosemite, Calif.: National Park Service, 2011): 30–34.

⁴⁵⁴ Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and Its Resources*, 754.

⁴⁵⁵ Preston cited Rocky Mountain (and its gateway community, Estes Park, CO) as prime examples of “shoestring” development. Preston to Conrad Wirth, 21 March 1956, 3–4.

The community would thus require “refrigerated housing necessary for comfortable summer living.”⁴⁵⁶

As the mention of air conditioning implies, Preston was also weighing El Portal as a residential area. Like many places across America, Yosemite lacked housing in the years following World War II. This is one of many reasons why the Park Service’s system-wide Mission 66 plans prized the mobile nuclear family. At a Superintendents’ Conference in 1952, wives of Park Service employees formed the National Park Service Women’s Organization (NPSWO). When newly-installed director Conrad Wirth asked what Mission 66 could do for them, they responded unanimously: better employee housing. A study revealed that half of the Park Service’s employee housing lacked running water, electricity, or indoor toilets. Many NPS families lived in “former forts, CCC barracks, bunkhouses, barns, stables, or summer homes.” In addition to increased living standards, members of the NPSWO also cried out for privacy—specifically, housing areas separated from major tourist attractions. The Organization also agitated for standard housing plans across the Service; that way, furniture and fixtures would continue to fit even as families moved from park to park.⁴⁵⁷

New single-family homes at El Portal would address all of these needs. In the late 1950s many employees housed in Yosemite Valley lived in “old substandard residences” around Yosemite Valley, housing stock that had fallen into disrepair. Others occupied “trailer camps,” usually sited between the Merced River and the main loop road. Others occupied. Somewhat ironically, trailers represented a solution to this ramshackle situation. Contractors completed sixty-two trailer units in El Portal by December 1960,

⁴⁵⁶ Reed, “El Portal to Ease Crowded Yosemite.” For more on air conditioning, see Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 65–72.

⁴⁵⁷ Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman’s Voice*, 113–115.

with seventy-eight more planned just down the river. While not exactly the stereotypical single-family home, these sites offered “window boxes full of blooming flowers,” plus “an attractive utility building containing two automatic washers and two dryers” and a play area for children. Up a draw to the west, workers laid twenty foundations for permanent government homes—for Park Service and Curry Company employees alike—by December 1960.⁴⁵⁸ Paraphrasing Assistant Superintendent Keith Neilson, a writer for the *Madera Tribune* noted that the homes constituted an important step in establishing El Portal as an “operating base” that would also become “a model community with appropriate zoning.”⁴⁵⁹

It is safe to assume that “appropriate zoning” simply meant that the town’s industrial functions would remain separate from its residential neighborhoods. Building a “modern incinerator and land fill” represented an especially “high priority,” since the presence of these facilities at outlying areas would “make it possible to eliminate the present smoky incinerator and public dump from the Valley floor”—which had “long been conspicuous eyesores.”⁴⁶⁰ Workers finished a new sewage disposal facility and water plant in 1962, further diversifying El Portal’s “housekeeping” functions.

To the east of these essentials, though, a self-sufficient bedroom community emerged. Shortly after acquiring the land, the Park Service awarded a new contract for the management of the El Portal Market, a general store with roots in the community’s mining days.⁴⁶¹ Plans for a five-classroom school, as well as a “village center” with a post office, motel, and church, ensured that residents could remain separate from the

⁴⁵⁸ “El Portal: A Town With a Future.”

⁴⁵⁹ “Employee Homes at El Portal Are Now Being Built,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 14 December 1960.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ “Yosemite National Park Concession Contract Awarded,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 5 November 1959.

Valley—unless, of course, they worked there.⁴⁶² Preston also publicized another advantage of the town site: a nearby school in Yosemite Valley (and the promise of a new one in El Portal itself), plus a high school in nearby Mariposa; at Wawona, however, students would probably have to attend boarding schools.⁴⁶³ This potential for family life led The *Oakland Tribune* to prematurely dub El Portal “the biggest little city in California.”⁴⁶⁴ The concessioner’s newspaper hyped the town—with its anticipated population of “1500 to 1800 souls”—as potentially the biggest in Mariposa County.⁴⁶⁵

Despite its industrial functions, the El Portal area offered few jobs. Thus many employees (both NPS and concessioner) commuted to work in Yosemite Valley, a distance of roughly fifteen miles one way. The wet winter of 1955–56 provided a vivid reminder of Highway 140’s commuting hazards; Carroll Clark, who commuted from El Portal to the Ahwahee, sent his co-workers a “dawn-early SOS” in order to be “portaged...up, around, and in to work around another slippery slide.”⁴⁶⁶ In late 1960, just after the first batch of housing became available in El Portal, one employee painted a bleak picture of the commute to work:

Some El Portal to the Valley drivers are grieved by the manner in which others crowd them from behind. You’ve no doubt had some 3,000 lb. steel monsters breathing down your back at one time or another too, and on a crooked road it is a frightful feeling. All employees should adhere to the general rule which states that drivers are to stay at least one car length from the car in front for every ten (10) MPH. Avoid accidents!⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶² Reed, “El Portal to Ease Crowded Yosemite.”

⁴⁶³ John Preston to Conrad Wirth, 21 March 1956, 4.

⁴⁶⁴ Don Reed, “El Portal to Ease Crowded Yosemite,” *Oakland Tribune*, 11 January 1961.

⁴⁶⁵ “El Portal: A Town With a Future,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 2 December 1960.

⁴⁶⁶ “Ahwahnee News,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 7 February 1956.

⁴⁶⁷ “Accordion Style Compacts,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 30 December 1960. The stretch of Highway 140 from El Portal to Yosemite Valley retained its dangerous reputation in tandem with that of the Wawona road. In 1965 Highways 140 and 41 saw 167 auto accidents combined; of these, 18 victims were Valley employees “involved in accidents sufficiently serious to require their hospitalization.” “TV Safe-Drivers Test,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 18 May 1966.

The new planned community cleared space in Yosemite Valley, but not without creating some new headaches.⁴⁶⁸ By spending some extra time in their cars, both Park Service and Curry Company workers were unwittingly contributing to another revival of the Vint plan in Yosemite.

New housing opportunities for its employees did not stop the Curry Company from doubling down on its monopoly in Yosemite Valley. Park Service personnel responsible for Yosemite's Mission 66 plans believed that, if visitors could experience the park in an "efficient" manner, they might "limit [their] stay voluntarily."⁴⁶⁹ Like other versions of the Vint plan, this particular flavor looked to automobiles as agents of decentralization. The concessioner's brain trust, however, looked at cars differently. One journalist estimated that Yosemite Valley hosted 25,000 people some nights, all of them potential customers.⁴⁷⁰ Lodging and associated businesses—restaurants, grocery stores, curio shops—funneled tourist expenditures directly towards the Curry Company. If visitors could access all these services from one parking spot, then so much the better.

In the first days of auto tourism, the "old" Yosemite Village held the park's largest concentration of services: offices, lodging, a butcher shop, and even a dance pavilion.⁴⁷¹ In the mid-1920s, though, NPS director Steven Mather oversaw the construction of a new administrative building, new museum, and post office complex on the north side of the Valley. This essentially guaranteed the obsolescence of the Old

⁴⁶⁸ Geographers might term El Portal an important part of Yosemite Valley's "labor-shed." See James E. Vance, "Labor-Shed, Employment Field, and Dynamic Analysis in Urban Geography," *Economic Geography* 36, no. 3 (1960): 189–220.

⁴⁶⁹ J. S. Adams, D. S. Hubbard, C.H. Hackett, *Master Plan for the Preservation and Use of Yosemite National Park* (1963).

⁴⁷⁰ Lawrence E. Davies, "Yosemite Dresses Up Its Scenery," *New York Times*, 24 May 1959.

⁴⁷¹ Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and Its Resources*, 280. See chapter 1 for more on the Old Village versus the New Village.

Village site; the Park Service and concessioner even signed an agreement in 1925 that ensured the removal of the Old Village store and a construction of a new one in Yosemite Village within one year. This new location on the north side promised more warmth and, more importantly, space to expand.⁴⁷²

Critics of Mission 66 lamented the loss of the Park Service's trademark rustic architectural style. Architectural historian Ethan Carr describes Mission 66 as an outgrowth of “contemporary planning ideas,” with familiar forms borrowed from shopping centers, movie theaters, and motor lodges.⁴⁷³ The concessioner’s first major success of the Mission 66 era was the Yosemite Lodge. Like others to follow, it demonstrated the Curry Company’s determination to apply modern auto-centric planning to a historic landscape.⁴⁷⁴ Hilmer Oehlmann, the Company’s general manager, secured \$1 million in funding for the new Yosemite Lodge—*before* Yosemite’s managers could even prepare their first Mission 66 prospectus.⁴⁷⁵ Completed in 1956, the Lodge—featuring exposed steel framing, large glass panes, and low-slung pitched roofs—represented a drastic departure from the NPS's famed rustic style. Rather than mirror the

⁴⁷² Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and Its Resources*, 347, 351; Fitzsimmons, “Effect,” 73. See chapter 1 for more on the move.

⁴⁷³ “The interstate highways systems also influenced Mission 66 road design and sometimes determined the locations of developed areas in the parks. For preservationists who decried these changes in the American landscape in general, seeing their expression in the frontcountry of national parks was deeply disturbing.” Carr, *Mission 66*, 12–13.

⁴⁷⁴ Motels like the Yosemite Lodge enjoyed unprecedented popularity after World War II, due to the return of auto tourism and some favorable economic conditions. They were also easy to build, finance, and resell. The number of motels in America climbed steadily after World War II. In 1954, there were almost 30,000; by 1961, there were over 60,000. John Jakle, Keith Sculle, and Jefferson Rogers, *The Motel in America* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 20. Compared to most other types of real estate investment, motels produced a higher cash flow; thus, any debt incurred in building them could be easily amortized. New motels also appreciated rapidly and could be sold for large profits. As a result, lending institutions usually required only small cash down payments. *Ibid.*, 45. Furthermore, the 1954 tax code included lenient provisions for accelerated depreciation, which meant that two-thirds of a motel's construction cost could be written off in five years. Like other forms of auto-oriented commercial development, motels were particularly attractive as safeguards against inflation. *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁷⁵ Carr, *Mission 66*, 247. The project ended up costing \$1,250,000, with roughly \$600,000 financed on a five-year plan; the final payment came due in 1961. “Now It’s Ours!” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 6 October 1961.

natural environment, such materials facilitated an openness that maximized the Lodge's view-shed—especially its prime spot in front of Yosemite Falls. The complex featured a central reservation area containing a coffee shop, cafeteria, restaurant, souvenir shop, lounge, and outdoor amphitheater, marking the Lodge as an entertainment area as well as an overnight destination. Western luminaries like Bill Lane, Jr.—publisher of *Sunset Magazine*—hosted cocktail parties in the swank lounge.⁴⁷⁶ Clusters of one- and two-story motel units orbited this nucleus. A major arterial road ran straight through the grounds, separating central services from outlying accommodations; a smaller network of curving service roads parceled the property into residential neighborhoods. Parking lots scattered along the singular entrance allowed visitors to leave their cars promptly.⁴⁷⁷

Like midcentury motor lodges, shopping centers also allowed customers to abandon their cars easily. The New Village, long the center of the park, became an outdoor mall thanks to an outpouring of Curry Company capital. A two-story structure housing a coffee shop, a restaurant, and a grocery store arrived in 1958.⁴⁷⁸ A monstrous new structure arrived in 1959, roughly half of it dedicated to the Village Store—a full-service grocery and souvenir outlet.⁴⁷⁹ The rest of the building contained a barbershop,

⁴⁷⁶ Oehlmann to Superintendent John Davis, 24 April 1967. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 2, Subseries 1, Box 1.

⁴⁷⁷ The Lodge's parking lots were expanded in 1957, 1958, and 1960. By 1966, the complex featured 3.6 acres of visitor parking. Fitzsimmons, "Effect," 61–64. These descriptions of the complex's siting and styling taken from National Park Service, *A Sense of Place: Design Guidelines for Yosemite Valley* (Yosemite, Calif.: National Park Service, 2012), 146–48; Fitzsimmons, "Effect," 99.

⁴⁷⁸ In the spring of 1956, the Secretary of the Interior signed a contract with Degnan Donohoe, Inc., subcontractors of the Curry Company and operators of an Old Village staple; they agreed not only to open a new branch in the New Village within two years, but also to demolish their facilities in the Old Village shortly after the completion of their new facility. "National Park Service," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 25 April 1956.

⁴⁷⁹ The cost of these buildings together totaled \$1.5 million, the largest single expenditure in the concessioner's history. "New Store at Yosemite Now Open," *Bakersfield Californian*, 5 May 1959.



Figure 41: The Yosemite Lodge, c. 1960. Notice the swooping roofline of the entryway. There is more parking just left of the frame, allowing guests a short walk from their cars to their rooms. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive



Figure 42: The new store and restaurant in Yosemite Village, c. 1959. Notice the dominance of glass in the frontal façade, despite the fact that the pitched roof evokes a more rustic kind of cabin structure. Courtesy NPgallery Digital Archive



Figure 43: The entrance to the New Village, 1958. Notice how the commercial functions get top billing, with information tucked all the way at the bottom of the sign. Before its reinvention as an outdoor shopping mall, Yosemite Village was a place to register one's car and learn about the park's natural wonders.

beauty shop, and laundry facilities, as well as another coffee shop and restaurant.⁴⁸⁰

When the dust settled, the concessioner had spent \$1.5 million in 1959 alone, the largest amount in the corporation's thirty-two year history—and almost two percent of the Park Service's total budget that year.⁴⁸¹

This spending spree cemented the concessioner's ascendance from homespun business to major corporation. It began offering longstanding employees health insurance—as well as considerable retail discounts and longer vacations—in 1954.⁴⁸² The Curry Company also had considerable clout, as evidenced by the food and beverage giants invited to the store and restaurant dedication in May of 1959: Kraft, Lucky Lager, and the major dairy concerns Swift & Company and Borden.⁴⁸³

The New Village improvements also showcased more sophisticated methods of financing projects. Until 1956 the Company had used “current cash flow” for construction projects; to build the merchandise center and warehouse in the New Village, however, it had to acquire two five-year loans (\$1,450,000 total) and sell 113,400 shares of unissued stock to the Company's shareholders. This new shift toward long-term financing for improvements in the built environment would be useful for company representatives in the early 1960s, when they would argue for an extension of their contract from twenty to thirty years (ending in 1982 instead of 1972).⁴⁸⁴ As all parties

⁴⁸⁰ Fitzsimmons, “Effect,” 74, 79.

⁴⁸¹ Park Service budget from Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 261. That brought the Company's total construction expenditures since 1952 (the start of its new contract) to approximately \$5,588,000. Lawrence E. Davies, “Yosemite Offers New Guest Lures,” *New York Times*, 10 May 1959.

⁴⁸² “Yosemite Park Firm Offers New Benefits,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 March 1954; “Yosemite Park and Curry Co. Employee Benefit Plan,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 6 March 1954.

⁴⁸³ “Conrad L. Wirth to Speak at Store, Restaurant Dedication,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 7 May 1959.

⁴⁸⁴ “Proposed 30-Year Contract,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 4 May 1962.

knew, the Curry Company's contract with the Park Service enhanced its ability to obtain financing from external sources.⁴⁸⁵

The concessioner's spending spree put the Park Service's funding struggles in stark relief. Most Mission 66 funds went to infrastructure instead of personnel; thus, despite visitor totals doubling between 1941 and 1959, the park employed more permanent rangers in 1941 (twenty-three) than it did in 1959 (twenty-two). As if an afterthought, a *New York Times* article about the concessioner's building program added, "[t]he Park Service itself has not been idle....[I]t has added several camp grounds in a continuing process."⁴⁸⁶ Juxtaposed with the Curry Company's impressive new complex—which took two percent of its NPS's total budget to complete—landscaped patches of dirt seemed trivial by comparison.

Yet the Curry Company's almost manic activity did aid the Park Service's interpretive program. Mission 66 scholars often focus on visitor centers, and justifiably so; they are prime examples of the agency's attempts to mesh midcentury architecture with conservation education.⁴⁸⁷ Despite criticisms of Mission 66's excessive modernity, many—including Ronald F. Lee, the Park Service's chief of interpretation—touted visitor centers as part of a larger effort to reconnect Americans to their natural history. In 1956 Lee addressed the nation's slippage into a "void, symbolized by concrete and asphalt." The solution, he explained, lay in "magazines like American Heritage and Life...films

⁴⁸⁵ *Superintendent's Annual Report, 1962* (Washington, D.C.: Government Print Office, 1962): n.p. ("Concessions Operations").

⁴⁸⁶ Davies, "Yosemite Offers New Guest Lures."

⁴⁸⁷ The Yosemite Museum represents an older version of the visitor center idea. Mission 66-era visitor centers, however, were multipurpose facilities that incorporated visitor assistance, research libraries, staff offices, parking, restrooms, and even movie theaters. Architectural historian Ethan Carr describes Mission 66 as an outgrowth of "contemporary planning ideas"; visitor centers, for example, bore a striking resemblance to shopping centers—particularly their eager concession to people arriving in cars. Carr, *Mission 66*, 12–13.

like Walt Disney's Beaver Valley and Bear Country...paper-back books like the Golden Nature Series; but... most of all from the interpretive program of the National Park Service."⁴⁸⁸ Visitor centers made park resources efficient, entertaining, and easily digestible.

In Beaver Valley (1950) and *Bear Country* (1953), parts of Disney's "True Life Adventures" film series, presented tame visions of nature meant to educate younger audiences. This vision for Mission 66 visitor interfaces found its ideal expression in Yosemite Valley, which one writer dubbed "nature's Disneyland" ("the only tract of virgin wilderness with a built-in delicatessen and a bakery").⁴⁸⁹ All along the New Village's promenade, opportunities to eat, shop, and learn abounded. Its buildings, arranged in a horseshoe shape, rarely exceeded two stories. Parking and roads provided easy ingress and egress. A new approach road for the Village Store arrived by 1964; crews completed a new parking lot behind the post office the same year.⁴⁹⁰ A semicircular road arched through the Village, with three major parking lots providing immediate access to the Village Store, Degnan's, and the Visitor Center/Museum complex—thus allowing visitors to stroll from errand to errand in a self-contained pedestrian environment.⁴⁹¹

The museum building had formerly done double duty as the park's visitor center. A revamped visitor center—designed by Eldridge Spencer, architect of the Yosemite

⁴⁸⁸ "Visitor Services for Protection and Understanding," in *Mission 66 for the National Park System* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1956): 38–39.

⁴⁸⁹ Horace Sutton, "All Nature—Plus All Amenities," *Washington Post*, 21 August 1960.

⁴⁹⁰ Land and Community Associates, *Yosemite Valley Cultural Landscape Report* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, Denver Service Center, 1995), 2–114. Between 1913 and 1966, the Valley's primary road system actually decreased in mileage; the auxiliary network, however, almost tripled in the same span, indicating new development away from central park attractions. Fitzsimmons, "Effect," 68.

⁴⁹¹ The large parking plaza—consisting of three contiguous lots—was removed in 1972 in order to create a pedestrian plaza. *Cultural Landscape Report*, 2–114. Like many malls, the Village's goal was "to divorce customers from their automobiles as quickly as possible." Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, 308.

Lodge—arrived in 1967, complete with two auditoriums.⁴⁹² This new complex served as a “focal point of visitor contact,” providing “attractive new exhibits,” “free and for-sale literature,” and a “self-guiding Wildflower Garden.”⁴⁹³ Like Disney’s nature films, Yosemite Village blurred the line between retail and education, presenting natural history as yet another feature of a multipurpose mall environment.⁴⁹⁴ It acquainted tourists “with elements of nature that could otherwise be strange and frightening.”⁴⁹⁵

By the end of the 1950s, Curry Company construction had transformed the New Village into a new kind of downtown. As Conrad Wirth had indicated, though, Mission 66 was to be a joint effort between a federal agency and its private partners. The case of Yosemite illustrates how the oft-conflicting goals of the National Park Service and the concessioner could coexist within a single park. Just as the Park Service scored the first major victory for the Vint plan with its El Portal project, the Curry Company revolutionized the park’s urban center. The move from the Old to the New Village in 1920s was prompted by the museum, a monument to the Park Service’s educational mission; fast forward three decades, and little had changed. Curry Company improvements paved the way for better interpretive facilities, proving why the National

⁴⁹² Fitzsimmons, “Effect,” 79; *Cultural Landscape Report*, 2–115. It is telling that, while the NPS struggled to fund its visitor center, the concessioner’s main Mission 66 structures (Degnan’s and the Village Store) were completed by 1960.

⁴⁹³ Adams et al., *Master Plan for the Preservation and Use of Yosemite National Park*.

⁴⁹⁴ The definitive essay on nature and the mall remains Jennifer Price, “Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company,” in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996): 186–203. On the architecture of Disneyland, see Findlay, *Magic Lands*, 52–116; on the architecture of Disneyworld, see Paul Goldberger, “Mickey Mouse Teaches the Architects: Mickey Mouse Disney World,” *New York Times*, 22 October 1972.

⁴⁹⁵ Adams et.al, *Master Plan for the Preservation and Use of Yosemite National Park*.

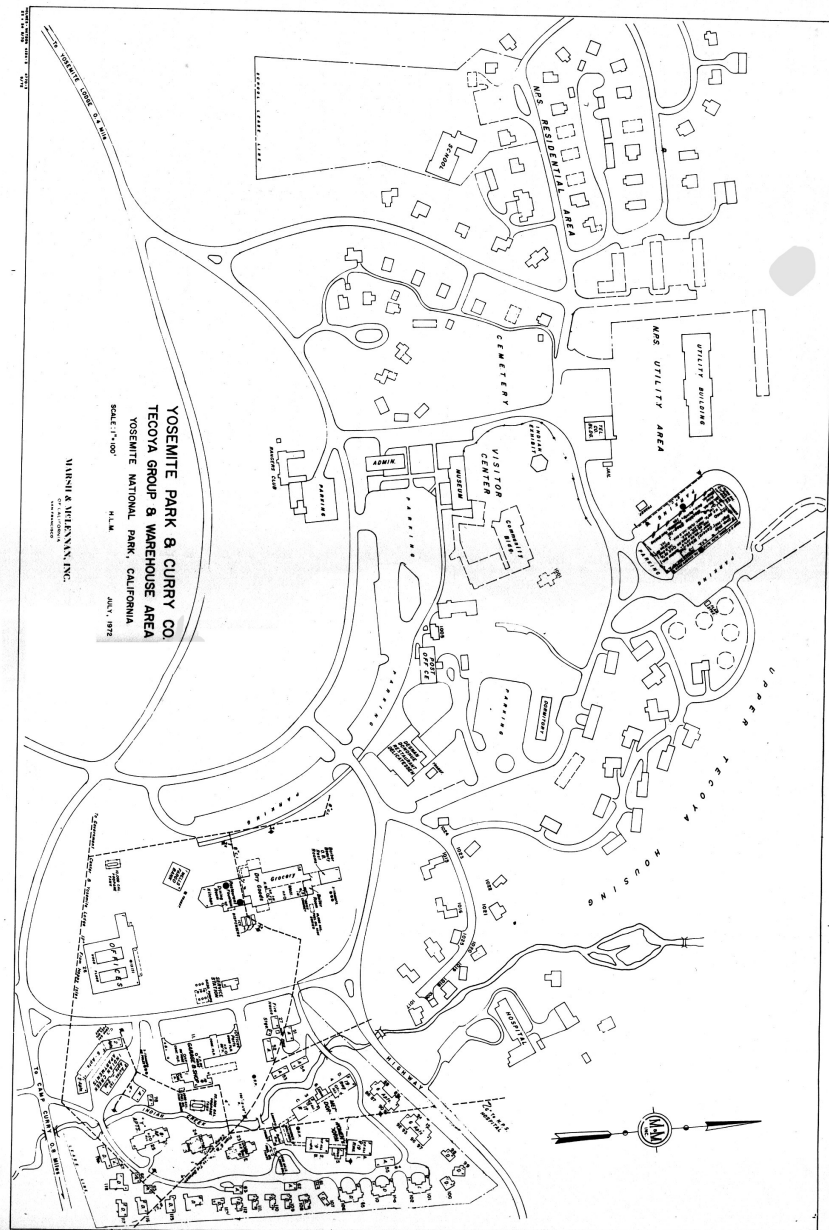


Figure 44: Yosemite Village, c. 1972. Note the curvilinear entrance road providing ringside parking to the shops (further east) and the visitor center/museum complex (further west).
Courtesy Yosemite Online Library

Park Service could never really abandon the Valley: the agency's message of conservation needed the largest crowds possible.

Push and pull between the NPS and the Company produced a recognizable postwar landscape: a dense downtown with offices and retail outlets, and a model residential community positioned a short commute away. These competing landscapes reflected a deep-seeded conflict over the role of automobiles in Yosemite, particularly for employees. While many workers lived in trailer camps in the Valley, many Company and Park Service employees lived in residential neighborhoods around Yosemite Village. In many suburbs, residential development preceded commercial development; in Yosemite Village, however, the two had grown side by side. There were close to one thousand year-round employees orbiting the New Village by 1966; this number swelled to two thousand during the busy summer months.⁴⁹⁶ Many residents lived within walking distance of a school, hospital, barbershop, post office, grocery store, and coffee shop—and, even more importantly, their job.⁴⁹⁷ The construction of a school (1955), a fire department (1957), and garden plots for employees on the western edge of the village further encouraged this distinct neighborhood identity.⁴⁹⁸ To borrow a term a term from architectural historian Richard Longstreth, it was a “total environment.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Fitzsimmons, “Effect,” 112.

⁴⁹⁷ Fitzsimmons, “Effect,” 84.

⁴⁹⁸ *Cultural Landscape Report*, 2–114, 2–115.

⁴⁹⁹ Midcentury malls and their surrounding residential communities often formed what one architectural historian calls a “total environment,” featuring churches, schools, and—of course—retail. Richard Longstreth describes Lakewood, a shopping mall incorporated with the single-family neighborhoods around it: “Lakewood's most striking physical departure stemmed from its comprehensive land use program.... Lakewood's boulevards were generously landscaped, with access roads as buffers between them and the dwellings. Trees and shrubs were planted in great number. Churches, schools, and other institutions were closely related to the housing fabric around them. Commercial activities not only were limited to a single precinct but were separated from other land uses. The guaranteed neighborhood became a product of

Yet there was not nearly enough room for everyone that worked in Yosemite Yosemite Valley. Like many places in the postwar United States, the park faced a housing shortage. El Portal offered an obvious solution, but Hilmer Oehlmann perceived the new planned community as a threat to his labor supply. In 1959 Superintendent Preston dubbed trailer housing in the Valley, especially concessioner housing just south of Yosemite Village, “a temporary expedient.” Once again he demanded “the removal of all non-essential ‘housekeeping’ facilities from Yosemite Valley to a new operating base at El Portal,” citing the soon-to-be-built trailer village as evidence of his concern about “the pressing housing problem.”⁵⁰⁰

Curry Company general manager Hilmer Oehlmann objected vehemently, arguing that the concessioner could not “render satisfactory service to the public in the absence of trailer housing on the Valley floor.” Unsurprisingly, Oehlmann favored married employees, whom he considered “more stable than single ones”; the Company often staggered couples’ duties, so that one worked a “straight shift” and the other worked a “split shift.” If any couple on a split schedule moved to El Portal, he contended, they would be forced to purchase a second automobile—“which they hardly would do.” Oehlmann insisted on keeping his employees near their jobs, suggesting some kind of “tall planting” to would screen their trailers from visitors.⁵⁰¹ The whole argument ended up a moot point, though: even by 1962, the trailer village remained incomplete “due to

mass consumption.” Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, 337. Famed architect and planner Victor Gruen posited that successful malls included “the widest possible palette of human experiences and urban expressions.” The inclusion of “as many nonretail urban functions...as feasible” created an “atmosphere which in itself becomes an attraction for the inhabitants of a region.” Howard Gillette, Jr., “The Evolution of the Planned Shopping Center in Suburb and City,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 51, no. 4 (2007): 452.

⁵⁰⁰ John Preston, Office Order No. 46, 13 February 1959. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 2.

⁵⁰¹ Oehlmann to Preston, 15 June 1960. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 10.

lack of funds.” Preston retreated to a new position: once housing in El Portal became available, Company employees would have to vacate the Valley floor.⁵⁰² Concerns about the roles of cars in Yosemite spilled over into debates over employee life, displaying the degree of control that both employers could exercise over their workers’ movements.⁵⁰³

Oehlmann’s comment about married employees revealed some larger truths about El Portal. Park Service personnel also viewed married employees as more stable; new housing assignments continued this conflation of family and reliability. In 1959 Preston laid out the criteria for determining access to new housing in the El Portal area:

One full point for each \$1,000 of salary, with decimals to 3 places.
 One full point to families where there are both a boy and a girl – one or both of whom are over 8 years of age.
 One full point for each full year of service which is creditable toward retirement...
 Two points for each member of the family. (This includes all those dependents on the wage earner whether living at home or away at school).
 Employees with no dependents considered in competition up to the level of one bedroom houses (3 rooms total), but not beyond.
 Employees with one dependent considered in competition up to the level of two bedroom houses, but not beyond.⁵⁰⁴

Clearly, longer-tenured employees with larger salaries remained a high priority. Preston’s point system also, however, rewarded larger families—particularly those with children of both sexes; in a rural area with scattered settlement, perhaps he saw an opportunity to create a balanced gender profile for the much-anticipated El Portal school. Children

⁵⁰² Preston to Oehlmann, 12 July 1960; Preston to Oehlmann, 5 October 1962. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 10.

⁵⁰³ For more on the question of design in employee communities, see Stanley Buder, *Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning, 1880-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). There is a rich literature on company towns, especially those in the American South. See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and Douglas Flamming, *Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884-1984* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

⁵⁰⁴ Preston, Office Order No. 3 (revised), 23 April 1959. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 2.

likely made an employee more likely to stay. As Acting Superintendent Keith Neilson (Preston's assistant) stated in 1960, El Portal represented the park's first attempt at "adequate family housing or space to provide it"; this allowed the NPS to hire married personnel instead of itinerant single employees.⁵⁰⁵ Perhaps many Park Service families, after moving from substandard housing to substandard housing, would fall in love with El Portal and its promise of a stable living situation, a relatively short commute, new housing stock, and services that belied the town's rural setting.⁵⁰⁶

All told, Mission 66 created thousands of new housing units across the national park system, many of which were situated in towns like El Portal. In 1967 three Park Service wives published a guide for living in these residential communities. The booklet begins by addressing the (presumably female) reader as "new neighbor" and insuring them "a new community of friends" and "an especially beautiful or historic or interesting place in which to live," which constituted "one of the bonuses of NPS life!" The authors admonish wives not to "intrude into official duties," and they suggest an alternate way to help their husbands' careers: "see that his clothes are ready when needed, clean and neatly pressed." Mindful of the dynamics of small communities, the authors caution against letting "coffee chats degenerate into gossip sessions or comparisons of

⁵⁰⁵ Neilson to Regional Director, 30 September 1960. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 2.

⁵⁰⁶ Like corporations, the federal government has also encouraged a family presence—especially in the American West. Virginia Scharff describes American conquest, especially the Homestead Act of 1862, as a "shotgun aimed at the trans-Mississippi West" loaded with "sedentary, male-headed, monogamous, [and] agrarian" families. Virginia Scharff et al., *Home Lands: How Women Made the West* (Los Angeles: Autry National Center of the American West, 2010), 63. See Jon Hunner, *Inventing Los Alamos: The Growth of an Atomic Community* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004) for more on federal employee life for employees of the Manhattan Project.

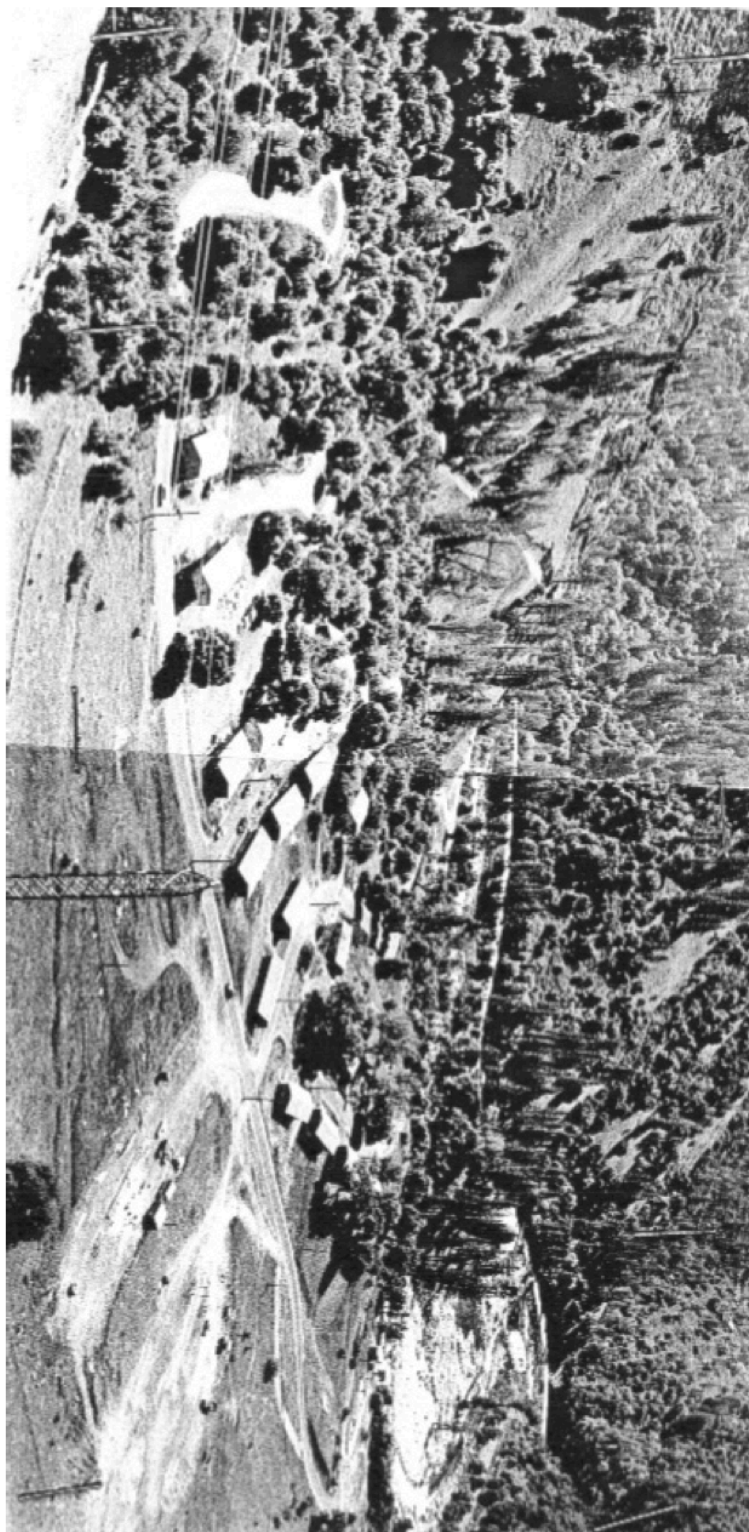


Figure 45: New homes El Portal in the early 1960s. Yosemite Resource Management, *El Portal Historic Resource Study* (Yosemite, Calif.: National Park Service, 2011)

advancements and careers” because “[t]he NPS needs all phases of operation in order to function properly.”⁵⁰⁷ It was assumed that National Park wives, like many women in postwar America, were completely fulfilled by their husbands’ careers.⁵⁰⁸

Before long, El Portal boasted its own social networks. The El Portal Garden Club began meeting around January 1961, only shortly after the completion of the first plot of trailer sites. Topics of discussion varied widely: state parks, Christmas gift ideas, houseplants, and driftwood sculpture headlined some of their agendas. One meeting in February 1963 featured a Speed-o-knit machine “demonstrated by a representative of the Taft Sewing Center of Fresno”; attendees were invited to “show or model home made or hand knitted clothing.”⁵⁰⁹ Social organizations like the Garden Club highlight the many varieties of unpaid female labor—sewing, decorating, holiday planning. It made perfect sense, then, that these women occupied a town designed to move “housekeeping” functions out of Yosemite Valley. Life on the fringes of a city also ensured plenty of time in the car, another form of work for women in El Portal.⁵¹⁰

Despite the commute, emphasis on nuclear families, and daytime social clubs, a major aspect of postwar suburbia evaded El Portalians—federal and concessioner

⁵⁰⁷ Lyn Broadbent, Pat Binnewies, and Susan Wilson, *National Park Service Wives’ Handbook* (National Park Service, 1967), <http://npshistory.com/publications/nps-wives-handbook.pdf>.

⁵⁰⁸ For more on the stereotypical role of women in the postwar United States, see Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 50th Anniversary edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013). The defining treatment of Cold War–era gender roles is Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008). May argues that the period’s focus on containment (in the international political context) mirrored a domestic focus on containment of female sexuality.

⁵⁰⁹ Quote from “El Portal Better Gardens Club,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 8 February 1963. For more on the club, see “El Portal,” *ibid.* 27 January 1961; “El Portal Doings,” *ibid.* 5 May 1961; “El Portal Better Gardens Club,” *ibid.* 16 November 1962; “Better Gardens Club,” *ibid.* 25 January 1963; and “Better Gardens Club,” *ibid.* 5 April 1963.

⁵¹⁰ Isolated communities across the American West required both men and women to spend increasing amounts of time in the car. Men received more recognition for their automotive labor, for they were participating in the ritual of “going to work”; women drove just as much, even if they were not technically employed outside the home. Thus, the shift to suburbia in midcentury America “offered [women] both the lure of the open road and the burdens of the chauffeur’s job.” Scharff et al., *Home Lands*, 79.

employees alike. Essential to Yosemite but technically not a part of it, their town lay in a kind of liminal state. The site's byzantine land laws meant that, no matter how entrenched they were, employees could not own their land—only the structures on it.⁵¹¹ As more permanent units became available, a question remained: if employees could not truly own their property, then how could they finance it? As early as January 1962, Hilmer Oehlmann posed a plan to skirt this issue. He would offer employees “assistance in disposing of their equity in the houses when their employment was terminated,” but would also allow employees to negotiate a sale by themselves; failing that, Oehlmann figured that the Company could “purchase the equity and assume payments until a successor owner could be found.”⁵¹²

The inability to own property hurt home values in El Portal. Indeed, in 1963, the nine units available in El Portal averaged roughly a quarter of the median home price in California.⁵¹³ By March of 1964, Harold Ouimet—head of housing for the concessioner—noted his optimism regarding “negotiations between N.P.S., Curry Company and F.H.A. toward the creation of a family housing development in El Portal.” He envisioned a plan that would allow employees to build in El Portal through financing with the Federal Housing Authority; although neither the employee nor the FHA would own title to the land, the Curry Company would guarantee the loan to the FHA (plus

⁵¹¹ The newly-acquired “administrative site” would not become part of Yosemite National Park; it was still managed by the Secretary of the Interior, though, who could “grant nonexclusive privileges, leases, and permits for the use of land in the area and enter into contracts relating to the same....” PL 85-922, 85th Congress, H.R. 12281, 2 September 1958.

⁵¹² “Housing Plan Discussed,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, 12 January 1962.

⁵¹³ *Yosemite Sentinel*, 25 January 1963. El Portal housing, 9 units for sale w/ avg price \$3,466 per (adjusted for 2000 inflation, just under \$20,000; per census data, CA's 1960 media home value = \$74,400). Sources: <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/values.html>; <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>

guarantee to purchase any outgoing employee's equity).⁵¹⁴ While this particular arrangement did not materialize, the Senate passed a bill in 1968 that extended leases of home sites from thirty to fifty-five years; its sponsor, Rep. Harold T. 'Bizz' Johnson (D-CA), aimed to help employees acquire loans for home construction (since they could not borrow against the equity of their property).⁵¹⁵ El Portal was not an especially easy place to put down roots. Despite the cooperation of agencies like the FHA, the suburban dream of home ownership remained elusive.

Relocated from the dense confines of the Valley, these NPS and concessioner employees confronted social and physical isolation, bad commutes, and difficult financing while also inventing social rituals befitting a typical suburban community.⁵¹⁶ They also took their place—whether intentionally or not—in a larger pattern of postwar residential development around the nation.⁵¹⁷ However, simply slapping the 'suburban' label on the town undersells its impact. El Portal was the most tangible success of the Vint plan yet. Like many Cold War enclaves, it was a product of federal legislation and financing; however, it was designed to *save* the metaphorical city—not supplant it. While many of the nation's newest converts to environmentalism lived in suburbs, El Portal was one of the few such communities that actually eased overdevelopment in a nearby

⁵¹⁴ "Report from YPC Co. Housing," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 20 March 1964.

⁵¹⁵ "Long Yosemite Leases Okayed," *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 10 July 1968. See also "Yosemite Bill Passed," *Madera Tribune* 12 September 1967.

⁵¹⁶ For more on the social life of a suburban community, see Scharff et al., *Home Lands*, 69–85. See also Virginia Scharff, "The Ghosts of Suburbia," *New York Times* 24 May 1991.

⁵¹⁷ Kenneth Jackson calls suburbia "the quintessential physical achievement of the United States," identifying its archetypal traits like "conspicuous consumption, a reliance upon the private automobile, upward mobility, the separation of the family into nuclear units, the widening division between work and leisure, and a tendency toward racial and economic exclusiveness." El Portal certainly displayed many of these. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 4.

national park.⁵¹⁸ It was a suburb, but also a company town; it created space in the Valley, yet it also made cars more important than ever before to the park's basic functions. Like most parts of Mission 66 in Yosemite, El Portal simultaneously lessened dependence on the Valley *and* reinforced the importance of a downtown district. After all, where else would El Portalians work?

El Portal provided even more proof of the uneasy relationship between cars and conservation in Yosemite. Cars embodied the possibility of decentralization, both for employees and visitors. Internal combustion could thus help Yosemite Valley by distributing human impact far and wide. By midcentury it was evident that the National Park Service was not an environmentalist organization; its mission was too complex, its political support too tenuous. Groups like the Sierra Club, however, had no problem reminding affluent Americans of their responsibility to other life forms and future generations. The controversial modernization of the Tioga Road—and attendant development in Yosemite's high country—showcased the complicated role of environmental activists in the debate over the Valley's decentralization.⁵¹⁹

John Muir famously founded the Club in 1892. To boost membership, Sierra Club officials began to organize outings in the early twentieth century. The first official Club outing took place in 1901 around Tuolumne Meadows, a splendid (and little-visited) subalpine ecosystem perched just to the west of the Sierra Crest. From a base camp along

⁵¹⁸ For more on the role of suburbia in the environmental movement, see Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*.

⁵¹⁹ For a comprehensive history of the Sierra Club, see Michael P. Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club 1892-1970* (San Francisco: Random House, Inc., 1988). For an examination of its postwar leader that shepherded the Club's rise to national prominence, see Tom Turner, *David Brower: The Making of the Environmental Movement* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

the Tuolumne River, club members took day trips into the surrounding mountains; in the evenings, they listened to lectures around the campfire. The Sierra Club established a campground and later a library on the site of Soda Springs (a naturally-carbonated upwelling in a scenic meadow), and from that spot originated hundreds of skiing, hiking, mountaineering, and botanizing trips.⁵²⁰

As jealous defenders of Yosemite, Club officers tried to improve the park in any way possible—even the burdensome and poorly-funded task of private land acquisition.⁵²¹ After World War II the Sierra Club assisted the Park Service in acquiring large tracts of land near Tuolumne Meadows.⁵²² The Tioga Road would be modernized roughly a decade later, threatening the Club’s control over their favorite part of Yosemite.

Owned by the Park Service since 1915, the Tioga Road was mostly paved by midcentury—notwithstanding a twenty-one mile portion extending westward from Tuolumne Meadows. Preston believed an improved trans-Sierra route would siphon crowds from the Valley; accordingly, the park’s Mission 66 plans called for *tripling* the number of campsites elsewhere in the park—with Tuolumne Meadows shouldering much

⁵²⁰ Greene, *Yosemite: the Park and Its Resources*, 355–56.

⁵²¹ While a priority for Director Drury, postwar private land acquisition was not well received by many Western members of Congress (who feared the loss of tax revenue from lands absorbed into national parks); by 1948, though, roughly \$800,000 was approved for the program. Newton B. Drury, *Annual Report of the Director National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946): 320; Newton B. Drury, *Annual Report of the Director National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948): 331. As a result of increased funding and help from groups like the Sierra Club, the acreage in the system jumped from 20,473,000 to almost 24,000,000 between 1945 and 1950—an increase of almost seventeen percent. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 261.

⁵²² July 1949 narrative report, n.d. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145. See also “Yosemite Park Acquires Tract,” *Madera Tribune*, 2 November 1949. The Yosemite Natural History Association (formerly the Yosemite Museum Association) also stepped up in a big way during the 1950s, helping the Park Service acquire fifty-eight of the roughly eighty lots in Foresta between 1954 and 1957. Greene, *Yosemite: the Park and Its Resources*, 512–513; “Foresta Lot Purchase,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, August 29 1957. For more on the Yosemite Natural History Association (and its predecessor, the Yosemite Museum Association), see chapter 1; see also Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 105–118, 151.

of the burden.⁵²³ Each year, the plowing of the Tioga Road marked the start of summer in California.⁵²⁴ Yosemite's superintendents received an "annually recurring plea" from surrounding towns hungry for tourist dollars.⁵²⁵ Yet for the road to open, the California Department of Highways had to plow the road that climbed 3,000 feet from Highway 395 to the Pass. Responding to overwhelming support from communities near and far, the state agreed to upgrade this route in the late 1950s; it would be "the largest cost highway job ever performed in the district."⁵²⁶

Construction on the unfinished stretch began in 1957, spurring concessioner development at White Wolf that exists to this day.⁵²⁷ The Park Service's Mission 66 funds provided improvements for the Tuolumne Meadows campground, new walk-in camping sites near the outlet of Tenaya Lake, and a trail connecting Tenaya Lake to the Tuolumne Meadows area.⁵²⁸ These new facilities drew their fair share of users, and in 1961 Tioga Pass showed the greatest increase in usage of any park entrances: almost thirty-five percent.⁵²⁹

⁵²³ In 1958, the Tioga Road was blocked by snows, camping in the Valley was heavier than in 1959 (when the road was open earlier). "Travel," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 3 June 1960. For more on camping and Mission 66, see Carr, *Mission 66*, 248–249.

⁵²⁴ For more on the Tioga Road and its effects on seasonal tourist patterns, see chapter 2.

⁵²⁵ May 1949 narrative report, 13 June 1949. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 145.

⁵²⁶ "Yosemite Area Road Grade Near Completion," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 June 1959; Richard H. Quin, "Tioga Road: Written Historical and Descriptive Data" (Washington, D.C.: Historic American Engineering Record, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991), n.p. Not surprisingly, papers from the Southland trumpeted this new connection with obvious satisfaction; in fact, even before its modernization, the Tioga Road proved slightly shorter (mileage-wise) to the Valley than the journey through Fresno and Wawona. From Pomona to Camp Curry via Highway 395 and Tioga Pass: 418 miles; from Pomona to Camp Curry via Madera and Bakersfield: 435 miles. "32 Cars Will Compete in Youth Safety Run," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 1958. See also "Tioga Pass Routing Approved," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 1961.

⁵²⁷ The National Park Service purchased the land in the early 1950s; shortly thereafter, the concessioner acquired the rights to use the lodge structure on site). "National Park Service News," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 18 July 1957; "National Park Service News," *ibid.* 7 August 1957.

⁵²⁸ "Campground Experiment in Yosemite," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 2 June 1961; "Yosemite Lists Projects Linked to New US Budget," *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 26 Jan 1960.

⁵²⁹ Visitation via Tioga Pass jumped from 141,330 (1960) to 190,330 (1961). "New Record Set in 1961 for Park Visitation," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 12 January 1962.

The same year that construction started on the Tioga Road, Director Wirth preempted his critics by publishing a large color brochure entitled *The National Park Wilderness*. After the victory against the Echo Park dam, the environmental movement—and particularly wilderness advocates—gained considerable strength. Unsurprisingly, Wirth’s assertion that Mission 66 was actually a win for the wilderness movement fell on deaf ears; early in 1958 David Brower, the head of the Sierra Club, penned a scathing rebuttal in *National Parks Magazine*. The Club was particularly incensed at the proposed widening of the Tioga Road near Tenaya Lake, a process that would involve the destruction of glacially-polished granite around one of the High Sierra’s most scenic lakes. The famed photographer Ansel Adams, another Sierra Club member, published yet another anti-Park Service screed in *National Parks Magazine* late in 1958 in which he urged the agency to re-dedicate itself to its original mission.⁵³⁰ Other members argued that, like the Valley’s urban attractions, the new highway would attract undesirable visitors like “the restless driver...and trailer tourist.”⁵³¹

The idea that a road could actually help Yosemite Valley was incompatible with the Sierra Club’s aggressive postwar stance.⁵³² Yosemite’s superintendents, however, had always cultivated allies outside the park.⁵³³ In 1959 Superintendent Preston marshaled

⁵³⁰ Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 180–190.

⁵³¹ They observed that, while the Park Service could not stop visitation, they could at least limit highway building and city-like attractions. Quoted in Carr, *Mission 66*, 263.

⁵³² See Jason Henry Schultz, “To Render Inaccessible: The Sierra Club’s Changing Attitude toward Roadbuilding” (M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2008). The Sierra Club also weighed in against another proposed trans-Sierra highway just to the south of the Tioga Road—one that, strangely enough, Curry Company controller Sterling Cramer advocated with the help of local Congressional representative Harold T. ‘Bizz’ Johnson. Cramer also moved to transfer National Forest land around the Minarets (south of Yosemite) to within Yosemite’s boundaries, citing the Park Service’s roadbuilding skill. See “Club’s Opposition to Road Discounted,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 17 May 1956; “Forestry to Parks: County Opposing Land Transfer Plan,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 13 January 1960; “Cramer Expected to See Board,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 18 January 1960; and “Land Transfer Debate Set,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 27 January 1960.

⁵³³ Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 194–197

these connections in defense of the road's modernization. He reiterated that support for the project "came from the California State Chamber of Commerce, local city and county chambers of commerce, such as Merced, Fresno, and others, County Supervisors, State Senators and Assemblymen, as well as other groups and organizations," demonstrating that "groups other than the Sierra Club are extremely interested in what goes on in National Parks."⁵³⁴

The Tioga Road was finished in 1961. The Assistant Secretary of the Interior cut the ribbon, remarking that—if the Service had to build roads—"they might as well be good ones." The Curry Company newspaper touted the road's "gentle curves" and "scenic turnouts" with "diagrammatic plaques for identification of points of interest."⁵³⁵ Like other Mission 66 projects within the park, the Tioga Road made nature accessible through a civilized veneer. The signage, "[l]ocated where there are outstanding views or interesting geological or historical sites" and "easily seen or read from ample parking spaces," epitomized the auto-centric philosophy of the program. Signs "resembled the granite mountains," and—thus—"do not intrude on the scene."⁵³⁶

⁵³⁴Quoted in Runte, *Embattled Wilderness*, 197.

⁵³⁵"Completed," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 30 June 1961.

⁵³⁶"Sign Language," *Yosemite Sentinel*, 28 July 1961. This symbol of interpretation and promotion mingling in the built environment gestated in Yosemite, but spread elsewhere; the park's sign shop (slated for removal to El Portal) utilized a new combination of sand-blasting, tinting, and coating; at the time, it served all other western parks, ensuring the dispersal of this new signing vocabulary. David Louter's *Windshield Wilderness* and Paul Sutter's *Driven Wild* both investigate the relationship between roadbuilding and nature in midcentury America. Louter's account is more of a technical primer on three different road-planning paradigms within the Park Service; Sutter argues that wilderness advocacy in the 1930s and beyond coalesced around an opposition to roads in wild areas (rather than an ethereal and aesthetic defense of nature).



Figure 46: The Tioga Road at Olmsted Point, one of the most popular overlooks in the park. Note how the highway seamlessly melds into a large pullout. Brian Grogan, 2001. Courtesy Library of Congress, HABS/HAER collection



Figure 47: Aerial photograph of Tuolumne Meadows looking southwest, 1967. Notice how the Tioga Road (lower right corner) cuts through the subalpine scenery. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

Along with its opposition to the Echo Park dam, the fight over the Tioga Road would cement the Sierra Club's transformation from a hiking club to a national political force; it would also prove useful in refining the language of the bill that would eventually become the Wilderness Act, passed in 1964.⁵³⁷ The Act, which prohibited roads, motorized vehicles, permanent structures, and timber harvesting (while greatly restricting mining activity), essentially excluded technology from certain federal lands.⁵³⁸ When postwar bureaucrats like Vint, Drury, Kittredge, and Preston talked about decentralizing Yosemite Valley, they implicitly put their faith in the automobile as the best chance of changing visitor (and employee) patterns. Unwittingly, then, the Sierra Club's arguments against the Tioga Road aligned them with the Curry Company. Both groups accepted the Valley's urbanization as a permanent fact, the Company for reasons of profit and the Club for reasons of pragmatism.

The decentralization of Yosemite Valley remained a pipe dream, especially given the popularity of the Curry Company's overnight accommodations; concessioner lodging reached its peak pillow counts in 1962, staying relatively static until the mid-seventies. However, some evidence suggests that the National Park Service's quest for an "efficient" visitor experience (featuring better roads and a new visitor center) did convince postwar visitors to shorten their stays. In the 1950s, sixty percent of visitors

⁵³⁷ Carr, *Mission 66*, 265. For more on wilderness in general, see Mark W. T. Harvey, *Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011); and the classic work of Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 5th edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

⁵³⁸ George A. Gonzalez, "The Wilderness Act of 1964 and the Wilderness Preservation Policy Network," 31.

stayed overnight; by 1975, however, only forty percent stayed longer than one day.⁵³⁹

The elimination of Valley overflow camping in the late 1960s helped to limit the overnight population, as well.⁵⁴⁰ By 1970 campsites outside the Valley became more popular, perhaps owing to the backpacking boom amongst members of the counterculture.⁵⁴¹ And yet, as we will see in the next chapter, descriptions of the Valley's city-like atmosphere persisted.

Yosemite's Mission 66 projects further blurred the lines between the park and the sprawling metropolitan areas outside its gates. Yet Curry Company and Park Service officials disagreed vehemently over how to modernize Yosemite Valley. The concessioner favored a more compact downtown, cultivating a pedestrian retail environment that encouraged visitors to spend money; the NPS, however, sought to disperse tourists, services, and employees throughout the park and—ultimately—lessen visitor impact. The Sierra Club weighed in, as well, opposing the improved Tioga Road that promised to siphon visitors away from the overcrowded Valley.

Despite their disagreements, though, all parties tacitly acknowledged the primacy of the automobile in Yosemite. As auto registrations rose nationwide (and especially in California), cars reshaped patterns of work and play; John C. Preston and other advocates of the Vint plan hoped that the same would hold true within Yosemite. Yet whether or not he could deconstruct the city center that had accumulated on the Valley floor, Preston—and his combatants in the Curry Company and the Sierra Club—saw the writing on the

⁵³⁹ Fitzsimmons, *Central*, 108.

⁵⁴⁰ In the late 1960s, the NPS instituted "unitization" of Valley campgrounds—creating discrete numbers campsites, rather than vaguely defined boundaries that could accommodate twice the intended amount of visitors. Rangers were dispatched to control registration procedures, as well. Once capacity in the Valley was reached, they would direct visitors to outlying campgrounds like Tuolumne Meadows and Wawona. "Yosemite Park Announces Improvements In Park Use," *Redlands (Calif.) Daily Facts*, 22 May 1968.

⁵⁴¹ Fitzsimmons, *Central*, 109. An influx of disruptive "hippies" to the Valley may have contributed to this trend, as well.

wall: postwar visitors would use their cars to utilize the *entire* park, for better or for worse.

Chapter 5

“Ghetto Yosemite”: San Francisco and the Development of the Park’s Police Force,

1960–1970

The addition of El Portal, the historical village at Wawona, and the modernized Tioga Road did nothing to quell criticisms of Yosemite Valley’s urbanity. As the 1960s progressed, critics focused less on the park’s built environment and more on certain types of visitors. Administrative responses to new classes of tourists created an even more urban environment, transforming park rangers into a makeshift metropolitan police force. The superintendents’ office changed the image of the park and its rangers forever through alliances with metropolitan police forces around California. A host of urban areas—Oakland, Berkeley, Fresno, Merced, Los Angeles—shared expertise, manpower, and extensive knowledge of California’s criminal networks. Yet none loomed larger than San Francisco, the breeding ground of the Park Service’s newest enemy: the hippie.⁵⁴²

Urban rioting throughout the nation, and some soul-searching by President Lyndon Johnson, provide another layer of context for this chapter. America’s racial tensions grabbed headlines as major American cities—Los Angeles, Detroit, and even Washington, D.C.—turned into occupied zones. The workings of white flight, in place since the inception of the Federal Housing Authority in the 1930s, continued to separate America into two societies: one white and suburban, the other black and urban.

⁵⁴² For more on urban police forces in the 1960s, see Frank J. Donner, *Protectors of Privilege Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Disneyland offers an interesting case study of social control in a recreational context. Walt Disney and his design team “hoped to address ‘the young adult problem’ by designing urban spaces where teenagers could be ‘properly controlled’ and occupied while being permitted to express themselves.” Findlay, *Magic Lands*, 106.

Complaints about Yosemite City, then, reflected much broader doubts about the future of America's metropolitan areas.⁵⁴³

Yosemite Valley's urbanization in the 1960s occurred at three different scales. Most immediately, Yosemite's crowds—featuring new levels of misbehavior—created a city-like atmosphere that caused employees and visitors alike to fear for their safety. At the state level, park rangers joined a regional intelligence network including city police departments, county sheriffs, and the California Highway Patrol; these external agencies viewed Yosemite as merely another site of potential hippie misdeeds. At the same time, the entire country witnessed riots that would forever link cities with civil unrest. On July 4, 1970, hippies and park rangers clashed in Stoneman Meadow, a popular youth hangout at Yosemite Valley's eastern end. Deemed “the Stoneman riot,” the confrontation instantly garnered national attention. Not since the damming of Hetch Hetchy had Yosemite's reputation as a sanctuary been so publicly challenged.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴³ Widespread civil disorder greatly complicated Americans' feelings about cities: “Beginning with the 1965 Watts riot in Los Angeles through July 1968, over one hundred cities experienced riots. According to survey statistics compiled by the Senate Subcommittee on Government Operations, 189 people were killed, 7,614 were injured, 59,257 were arrested, and nearly \$160 million in property was damaged.” David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of Modern America* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 1995), 187. For more on the Federal Housing Authority and the institutional roots of suburbanization, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*. For more on white flight, see Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight* and Robert O. Self, *American Babylon*. Self argues that the term ‘white flight’ overlooks the myriad reasons white Americans were drawn to suburban living. Based on this observation, he argues for a more holistic historical narrative that interweaves urban and suburban narratives. President Johnson's Great Society initiatives sought to bridge the gap between these increasingly racialized landscapes, producing a treasure trove of government reports documenting the subtle environmental determinism of the 1960s. For a detailed breakdown of the Moynihan Report (1965), which highlighted the deep roots of African American poverty, see Daniel Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). For a history of the United States's conflicted relationship with cities, see Steven Conn, *Americans against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁴⁴ For recent work on the riot, see Michael Childers, “The Stoneman Meadow Riots and Law Enforcement in Yosemite National Park,” *Forest History* (Spring 2017): 28–34. The youth/authority binary has proven useful to historians, especially those interested in events like Chicago's Democratic National Convention or the battle at Berkeley's People's Park. In the case of Yosemite, however, this narrative needs more unpacking. For detailed coverage of the riot, see Laura Avedisian, “The Yosemite Riot: Changes in Policy and Management in the National Park Service” (MA thesis, San Jose State University, 1998). For excellent

As the sixties began, crime in Yosemite hit close to home. Without any consistent connection regional and national arrest records, hiring officials had no way of knowing whether potential employees were seasoned criminals. This uncertainty created one of the park's biggest criminal populations; in fact, employees committed forty-three percent of Yosemite's crime in 1958, and thirty-three percent in 1959.⁵⁴⁵ This trend had changed little by 1961, when rangers discovered that "a surprising number of concessioner employees" had either active warrants for their arrest or prior felony convictions. That year, four employees of the concessioner committed a grand theft and a burglary, victimizing their own employer—the Curry Company—in each case.⁵⁴⁶

Befitting tradition, Ranger Ben Twight described Yosemite Valley in the summer of 1961 as "a city of 25,000 persons" with amounts of thefts, burglaries, and stolen property that "compared quite similarly" with nearby Merced. He noted one important caveat, though: excepting "transient types employed in the kitchens and on other concessioner cleanup crews," the Valley's population had no "lower strata" of its population. Generalizing, Twight asserted that cooks employed by the concessioner "were the most common type of employee in serious trouble," noting that rangers had discovered three such individuals with hidden felony records; the FBI arrested one for embezzlement after he fled, and another escaped with over \$300 from the Village Store.

treatments of the youth versus authority dynamic vis a vis the 1968 Democratic National Convention and the fight over People's Park, respectively, see David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) and W.J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). For national coverage on the habits of younger visitors, see Ed Meagher, "Hippies Mar the Scenery in Yosemite National Park," *Milwaukee (Wisc.) Journal*, 17 July 1968.

⁵⁴⁵ Assistant Regional Director Herbert Maier to Park Service Director Conrad Wirth, 3 March 1960. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

⁵⁴⁶ Ben Twight, "Law Enforcement and Crime Report—1961," 1. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

A night watchman for the Curry Company even stole a car in the park! Twight also lashed out at other concessioner employees, citing a night watchman who somehow missed a rather conspicuous stolen car—with “expired license plates and both wind wings kicked out”—on his nightly rounds for *two weeks* until a ranger from another district eventually noticed it. Perhaps owing to a Park Service bias, employees of the Yosemite Park & Curry Company came to embody misbehavior of all kinds. If Yosemite Valley was a city, then they constituted its “lower strata.”⁵⁴⁷

With these homegrown evildoers and their enablers right under their noses, Yosemite’s rangers felt understandably underprepared. The job ‘park ranger’ remained impossibly broad, and—while some specialized in law enforcement—their training remained minimal.⁵⁴⁸ Only one permanent ranger was assigned to criminal investigation for the entirety of the 1961.⁵⁴⁹ That same year, Valley District Ranger Robert Branges called for more “crime prevention and analysis.”⁵⁵⁰ Twight put it even more succinctly: “most Service personnel presently assigned to this park are not too familiar with modern police investigative methods and policy.”⁵⁵¹ As an alternative, he suggested that

only rangers who show interest and talent in the detection and prevention of offenses, who take an interest in learning who and what belongs where, and who take an interest in getting to know and know about the local people (particularly those who might be involved in some offense or have been involved before coming here)...be assigned to patrol duty.

⁵⁴⁷ Twight, “Law Enforcement and Crime Report,” 2–9.

⁵⁴⁸ Fred Koegler, fifty-year veteran of Yosemite’s ranger corps, recalls his training in the mid-1960s (when *every* ranger could enforce the Code of Federal Regulations): “District ranger said ‘Okay, in the glove compartment is your .38 [and] handcuffs, lock it at all times. If you need it you can unlock it and put it on and do what you have to do.’ That was the introduction to law enforcement.” Fred Koegler (park ranger) in discussion with the author, August 2016. At this time, park rangers served mostly interchangeable functions. Supervisors “pulled” a ranger from campground duty if they wanted more manpower to pursue “cloak and dagger” objectives. Branges, “Summary,” 4.

⁵⁴⁹ Twight, “Law Enforcement and Crime Report,” 7.

⁵⁵⁰ Robert Branges to Chief Park Ranger Elmer Fladmark, “Summary of Law Enforcement Action—Year 1960,” 4. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

⁵⁵¹ Twight, 7.

In his view, rangers with “one or two days of FBI training” who were subsequently sent off to a campground or entrance station experienced “very little contact with actual police work.” Instead, he recommended that incoming seasonal rangers train in “non-patrol” jobs, receiving the FBI training only when they graduated to a patrol vacancy in subsequent years.⁵⁵² This tension between public contact and law enforcement would lead to a seismic shift in the time-honored image of the National Park Service ranger.

Aside from restructuring the workforce, both Twight and Branges maintained that new technology—whether in the form of training, equipment, or expertise—could help Yosemite’s law enforcement woes. Twight suggested that officials vary the annual training program to include “defensive tactics, use of firearms, interrogation, and investigation.”⁵⁵³ With a mixture of pride and dismay, Branges noted the purchase of “a deluxe ‘black-light kit,’” which rangers used twice—albeit unsuccessfully—to lay a trap for burglars.⁵⁵⁴ But perhaps the most important new form of technology was not any singular innovation, but rather an increasing camaraderie with law enforcement agencies in California and beyond.

A major milestone came in the fall of 1961, when a representative of the Department of Justice (writing from Sacramento) requested that Yosemite’s rangers submit crime reports, thus adding “to the overall modus operandi picture in the State.” He suggested that, due to the “large number of transients” frequenting the park, Yosemite’s

⁵⁵² Twight, 5. Branges agreed, noting that a permanent ranger should be assigned to law enforcement duties until “the protection organization” (the body of rangers working on criminal cases) could obtain a permanent supervisor. Robert Branges, “Annual Law Enforcement Activities Report” (cover letter). NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

⁵⁵³ Twight, 5.

⁵⁵⁴ Branges, “Summary,” 4.

crime reports could be “correlated with other offenses in California.”⁵⁵⁵ This simple suggestion spoke volumes about changing perceptions of Yosemite. Owing to the state highway system, the park had become increasingly accessible to visitors from all corners of the state (and beyond). The newfound crime problem in the Valley, however, linked Yosemite and its guardians to surrounding metropolitan areas in an entirely new way.

Even if park rangers failed to submit their reports, they relied on other districts to provide important information. Investigations often created a tangle of connections across the state. In the summer of 1961, rangers arrested two juveniles and—after checking with San Diego police—discovered prior offenses. In the suspects’ cars, they found a license plate from Visalia, which had been stolen in Long Beach. A Deputy U.S. Marshal arrived to take the pair to Sacramento.⁵⁵⁶ In just one arrest, rangers traced perpetrators’ tracks through four of California’s biggest metropolitan areas. This delicate dance involved dated technology by today’s standards, but it succeeded in creating new intelligence nonetheless. Airmail helped to cross-reference records with the FBI, but telephone and teletype often sufficed to communicate with urban police departments or the California Bureau of Criminal Identification.⁵⁵⁷ In several instances, this knowledge sharing made the difference between jail time and a simple slap on the wrist; locating records in other jurisdictions allowed prosecutors to escape a generic disorderly conduct charge (under the Code of Federal Regulations) and prosecute violators to the fullest

⁵⁵⁵ Harold Gillett to Elmer Fladmark, Chief Ranger, 3 October 1961. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

⁵⁵⁶ Elmer Fladmark to Fred Woolflin, Assistant U.S. Attorney, Department of Justice (San Francisco), 31 August 1961. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

⁵⁵⁷ Twight, 7.

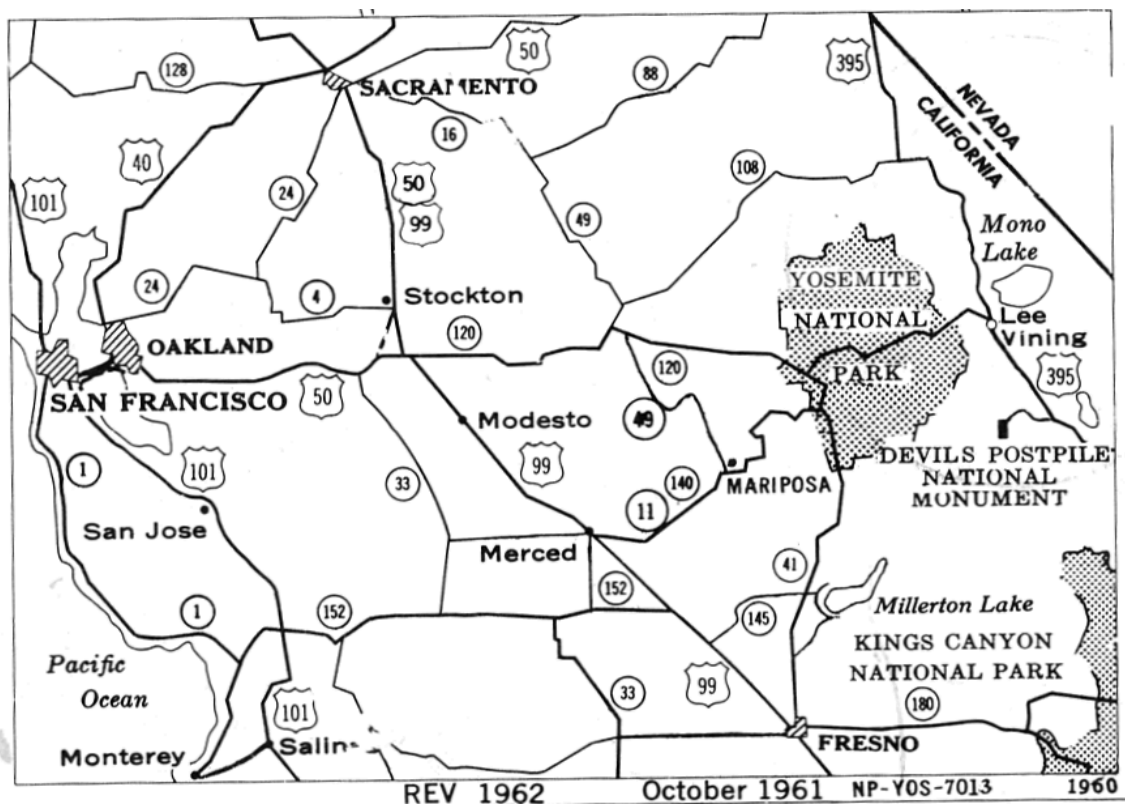


Figure 48: The greater Yosemite region, from a Park Service brochure, 1961. Notice the relatively straight line eastward from San Francisco to Yosemite, as well as numerous outlying towns much closer. Courtesy of the Yosemite Online Library

extent of the law (using the California Penal Code).⁵⁵⁸ After one particularly tricky case, Twilight expressed his gratitude for the opportunity “to get acquainted with various local police agencies outside the Park.” It was “a good education for this ranger,” he added.⁵⁵⁹

Connections with other enforcing bodies created a sense of mutual dependence and shared responsibility. Puzzled by an uptick in car burglaries in Yosemite, Chief Ranger Elmer Fladmark asked the sheriffs of Madera, Merced, Fresno, Tuolumne, Mono, Tulare, and Kern counties if they had experienced a similar trend; he had a feeling that an experienced thief was working a single location for one or two days and then simply moving to “another resort.”⁵⁶⁰ Even if these intra-agency connections failed to produce any important information, they proved successful in other ways. In late 1961, Fladmark took pains to thank Mariposa-based officers of the Highway Patrol for driving to El Portal—the farthest eastern point in their jurisdiction—to stake out “one of our local drinking drivers who just doesn’t learn.” No arrests were made, but the presence of a CHP vehicle outside the suspect’s whereabouts reinforced the sense of surveillance network larger than the Park Service itself could provide.⁵⁶¹

When Ranger Twilight mentioned that Yosemite and Merced shared similar crime rates, he neglected to mention the longstanding partnership between each city’s law enforcement professionals. One ranger thanked Chief of Police Ralph Bond for the “thoughtful assistance” their department provided to Ranger Twilight (who was charged with creating a summary of park-wide law enforcement trends in 1961). The Merced

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁶⁰ Elmer Fladmark to Sheriff, Madera County (with copies), 11 July 1961. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

⁵⁶¹ Elmer Fladmark to Lt. N.C. Barkalow, California Highway Patrol (Mariposa), 14 November 1961. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Files, Box 14.

Police Department also helped Twight with “record and report creation, fingerprint creation, [and] investigation advice”; they also invited him to meetings of the Central San Joaquin Investigators Association, welcoming him into a larger brotherhood of regional law enforcement officials.⁵⁶² Consisting primarily of social meetings over at places like Lucca’s Restaurant (Madera, a smaller city near Fresno), the group gathered to “discuss and exchange ideas on cases presently being investigated.” The informal group was known to break difficult cases—often over heaping plates of prime rib.⁵⁶³ The downside of Yosemite’s rising criminal activity was obvious enough. On the plus side, however, law enforcement agencies near and far began to recognize rangers’ potential contributions to statewide intelligence efforts. If Yosemite Valley had become a city, at least it was in good company.

Yosemite’s crime problem radiated even farther outward, touching federal authority as well. Late in the summer of 1961, Fladmark contacted chief rangers at Grand Canyon, Sequoia, Lassen, Crater Lake, Death Valley, and Lake Mead to warn them of a prolific car burglar; he included the subject’s modus operandi; his vehicle’s make, model, and license number; and his physical description.⁵⁶⁴ Graduates of the FBI National Academy seemed to gravitate to Yosemite, with one—Granville Liles—serving briefly as assistant superintendent.⁵⁶⁵ As part of his attempts to improve park policing, Twight suggested that another academy graduate, Bruce Hiller, be made “technical advisor for

⁵⁶² Wayne Howe to Ralph Bond, Chief of Police (Merced), 27 November 1961. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

⁵⁶³ “Valley Investigators Will Meet in Madera,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 8 December 1965.

⁵⁶⁴ Elmer Fladmark to Chief Park Ranger, Grand Canyon (with copies), 14 September 1961. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

⁵⁶⁵ Frank Price, Special Agent in Charge, FBI (San Francisco) to Granville B. Liles, 6 September 1962. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

the ranger assigned to investigation work.”⁵⁶⁶ Despite the annual FBI training for seasonal rangers, this new influx of interurban intelligence, technical training, and enforcement expertise suggested a sea change in the position of park ranger. Yosemite National Park, no longer isolated, became a part of larger networks designed to identify, track, and apprehend criminals. A crime problem, a police force, and a (summertime) population comparable to nearby cities announced Yosemite Valley as something more than just a getaway.

Even those convinced of Yosemite Valley’s urbanity noted that it failed to compare in one crucial aspect: violent crime. Ranger Twight, pondering this exact question in 1962, argued that the low rate of violence stemmed from “a generally low percentage of the skid row and unskilled laboring class of people in the visitor population.”⁵⁶⁷ Twight, and many of his co-workers, assumed that most of Yosemite’s visitors knew how to behave themselves; it was the rangers’ job to ensure that these innocents could enjoy their visit safely and securely. The thought of violence within the park remained blissfully far from administrators’ and rangers’ thoughts.⁵⁶⁸

Even without violence, the sixties provided plenty to police. Those with potential to upend the park’s preferred moral code suffered discrimination—or expulsion—at the

⁵⁶⁶ Twight, 7.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁶⁸ Richard Maxwell Brown remains the preeminent historical voice on American violence. See *No Duty to Retreat: Violence and Values in American History and Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994) and *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). In a more theoretical vein, Richard Slotkin’s work on violence and culture is the standard. See *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973) and *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998). The most renowned study of violence in recent years deals with networks of raiding, trading, and revenge in the American Southwest; instead of glorifying or ignoring violence, Ned Blackhawk examines how it creates political, social, and economic networks. See Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

hands of the ranger force. Homosexuals, “an evil we have each year without fail,” elicited quick and decisive action.⁵⁶⁹ Indeed, a group of one hundred motorcyclists held “a homosexual party” in the park in 1960; when they returned in 1961, the District Ranger told them to leave.⁵⁷⁰ People without traditional family structures clashed with traditional Park Service morals. Flagmark pledged to throw the book at two un-chaperoned juveniles, less for their offenses (possession of drugs and stolen property) than for their non-compliance with norms of “family type patronage” encouraged by park brass. Rangers, he argued, needed to make an example of these two juvenile offenders—if word of ranger leniency got around, it would “only encourage such people to come to Yosemite.”⁵⁷¹

The phrase “such people” indicates a rather elastic cast of *persona non grata*, subject to revision according to changing administrative priorities. “Such people” proved a narrower title as the sixties wore on. Juveniles, particularly those without their parents, proved a continuing thorn in the rangers’ sides. In early 1962, Twight noticed an uptick in a “rowdy, hoodlum type of youth” recognizable by “their ‘hot rod’ type cars, and ‘duck-tailer’ or flat-top haircuts.” As to why these miscreants might visit the park instead of other their “former haunts” (like Santa Cruz), Twight summarized Yosemite’s magnetism: “it was cheap, one could stay, swim, drink and pursue the girls for a very low cost.” Indeed, the summer of 1960 saw... In addition, former areas popular for these ne’er-do-wells were experiencing curfews and “police crackdowns”—things that would not trouble them in Yosemite Valley. Twight warned his superiors that, unless rangers

⁵⁶⁹ Branges, “Summary,” 5.

⁵⁷⁰ Twight, 9.

⁵⁷¹ Flagmark to Woolflin, 31 August 1961.

made similar crackdowns, increasing numbers of “young delinquent types” would descend on the park.⁵⁷²

When pressed for more specific descriptions, rangers often turned to popular stereotypes in order to create a visual picture of undesirable characters. Beatniks, synonymous with San Francisco’s North Beach neighborhood, came to symbolize everything wrong with young people—in the park and across the nation.⁵⁷³ In the summer of 1960, a ranger working road patrol encountered “five boys of the beatnik type and appearance riding motorcycles, with extremely high handlebars” on the road to Wawona; without specifying any violations, he simply noted their “outward appearance of being beatniks or trouble makers.”⁵⁷⁴ By early 1961, rangers began to act on this classification. Branges, the Valley District Ranger, shared a solution that “always seemed to work”: escort the suspected beatniks to the park boundary, take their permits, and tell them not to

⁵⁷² Twilight, 3. The historiography of tourism paints young people as appendages of their parents’ itineraries. Marguerite Shaffer and Susan Sessions Rugh, writing about the pre-and post-World War II era, respectively, argue that family vacations were meant to instill patriotic values in children. See Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First* and Susan Sessions Rugh, *Are We There Yet?: The Golden Age of American Family Vacations* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008). Worries over the “generation gap,” present since the early 1950s, intensified as America entered the 1960s. Affluent children, in addition to impoverished ones, ran away from home at incredibly high rates. See James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2009); and Christine Chapman, *America’s Runaways* (New York: William Morrow & Co, 1976).

⁵⁷³ “The national media’s discussions of the beats often brushed over their professional artistic work. Instead, national magazines, Hollywood films, television series, and local newspapers fixated on the beats’ social relationships inside beat bars, coffeehouses, and apartment ‘pads.’ These mass-market depictions of bohemia created beatnik caricatures: black-clad, bereted, goateed men and similarly dressed, waifish women. The dark clothes allegedly evinced dark moods, and the ubiquitous references to the beats’ ‘vacant stares’ suggested a nihilistic rejection of work, political engagement, color-blind ideology, and family-oriented traditional gender roles. These violations of traditional citizenship standards, some national observers believed, made beats ‘fugitives of the great American middle class’ and a threat to law and order.” Christopher Lowen Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco: Policing and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Liberal Politics, 1950-1972* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2016), 32. For more on beatnik culture, see Allen Ginsberg, *Beat Culture and the New America 1950-1965* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996); John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991); and Steven Watson, *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960* (New York: Pantheon, 1995).

⁵⁷⁴ Merlin Miller to Assistant Chief Ranger, 8 July 1960. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

come back.⁵⁷⁵ It gradually became common knowledge that Yosemite National Park reserved the right to refuse service to anyone.

Even young visitors without motorcycles, cars, or flat-tops caught rangers' eyes. In early 1961, Branges expressed concern over a new camping trend: parents who arrived with their children on the weekend, then left them unsupervised in Yosemite Valley during the work week (presumably returning the following weekend to collect them). Unattended males often banded together in "roving packs," chasing young women and causing what Branges described as "questionable" behavior.⁵⁷⁶ Rangers broke up at least ten fights in 1960. One melee at a dance—which Fladmark blamed on "increased patronage by drinking, unsupervised juveniles"—involved roughly twenty-five people.⁵⁷⁷ Even organized sporting clubs turned ugly when alcohol was available. A ski club from Merced, all under the age of twenty-one and many under eighteen, acquired "a large quantity of beer" while visiting the Yosemite Lodge. Not surprisingly, park rangers corresponded with Merced's police force regarding the proper dispositions of these troublemakers.⁵⁷⁸

Struggles with young visitors continued to intensify. Between June 1963 and June 1964, rangers responded to over 400 incidents of juvenile disorder; local Park Service officials noted that this statistic placed Yosemite on par with many cities, although any other community with this kind of problem would have a staff as large as Yosemite's entire ranger force dedicated *specifically* to juvenile crime. Rangers continued to receive

⁵⁷⁵ Branges, "Summary," 3.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Fladmark to Harold Swenk, 31 October 1961. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

⁵⁷⁸ Ralph Miller (Acting Chief Ranger) to Ralph Bond, Chief of Police (Merced), 17 April 1962. NARA-San Bruno, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Box 14.

training regarding “how to handle young people who come to Yosemite, throw their weight around and get into trouble.”⁵⁷⁹ In late 1965, following Twilight’s invitation in 1961, *seven* of Yosemite’s rangers attended a meeting of the Central San Joaquin Investigators Association; prompted by a Hells’ Angels rendezvous in the resort town of Bass Lake the previous summer, representatives of the Madera County Sheriff’s Office presented their plans for “preventing any untoward acts of violence and vandalism” in the future.⁵⁸⁰ Yosemite’s rangers still struggled to control younger visitors, which had become their most fundamental task.

In another instance of low-tech technological improvement, Yosemite’s brain trust introduced a horse patrol in 1966. As any visitor knows, the sight of a ranger on horseback is a quintessential national park experience; rangers, however, had more than just public relations in mind. Horse patrol, then, marked the tipping point between rangers’ dual duties as garrulous interpreters of natural wonders and protectors of the peace. The first mounted patrol of Yosemite’s campgrounds took place on June 23, 1966. From his perch, the ranger issued over one thousand greetings to “every type of camper and all ages,” receiving a “great and genuine” response expressing “[r]espect and admiration for the man in uniform and his beautiful horse.”

Rules were enforced and done so effectively. Several underage, possession of alcohol camps were discovered and removed from the park. Speeding through the camp and vehicles with loud mufflers were controlled without difficulty. Campground boundaries and dog rules were easily handled. *Respect of the Ranger on a horse is noticeably different from that of one in a patrol car.*⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹ Report of Staff Meeting, 12 June 1964. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 11, Box 40.

⁵⁸⁰ Report of Staff Meeting, 16 December 1965. Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 11, Box 40.

⁵⁸¹ Campground Ranger O’Bryant to Valley District Ranger, 23 June 1966. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 11, Subseries 7, Box 4. Emphasis added.

And so the horse patrol proved its value. After initial skepticism of mounted patrol's anticipated expenses (both money- and manpower-wise), Park Service officials begrudgingly noted that—aside from their visual appeal—horses also allowed rangers to “observe a greater area due to being able to see over the tops of vehicles.”⁵⁸² In terms of respect, the results were equally unanimous; a mounted ranger noted receiving “much less static” from young people while enforcing anti-loitering statutes.⁵⁸³ Horses allowed rangers to see and be seen, each action enforcing desired standards of behavior in the country's busiest national park.⁵⁸⁴

No one could deny that the horse patrol made law enforcement more efficient. At the beginning of the summer of 1967—the first full summer of horse patrol in Yosemite—one ranger noted that horses could actually help the park overcome its manpower problems. In addition to providing visibility, horses were themselves quite visible, providing “the desired deterrent in a preventive law enforcement program.” The conspicuous image of a horse helped stop potential lawbreakers, but increased publicity of the mounted patrol extended influence beyond park boundaries, as well. Park officials sent four mounted rangers to Mariposa's County Fair Parade during the summer of 1967, announcing the park's modernized enforcement techniques to all in attendance.

⁵⁸² Report of Staff Meeting, 7 July 1966. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 11, Box 40.

⁵⁸³ “Yosemite Valley Horse Patrol Operations, 1967.” Yosemite National Park Archives, Resource Management Records, Series 11, Subseries 7, Box 4.

⁵⁸⁴ Many images of civil unrest throughout the sixties feature mounted police, attesting to these widely-acknowledged tactical advantages.



Figure 49: A mounted ranger patrolling a beach area, 1970. Charles Howe, "The New Campers," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 September 1970; Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection

Participants reported “many favorable comments about our mounted patrol unit being there, our equipment, and our personal appearance.”⁵⁸⁵ Yosemite’s mounted rangers meshed public relations with preemptive social control in a fashion that an ordinary ranger—on foot or in a car—simply could not.

Drastic changes in rangers’ duties signaled a larger change in the idea of Yosemite itself. In 1961 Twilight posited that, since the crime rate was rising across the country, it stood to reason that it would rise in Yosemite, as well.⁵⁸⁶ This is a completely logical hypothesis, but it reveals a new kind of thinking about the park: rather than a refuge from nationwide trends, it was an embodiment of them. A few years later, the authors of Yosemite’s master plan put an even finer point on the topic, observing that the Valley had become “almost urban in character.”⁵⁸⁷ By 1966, Yosemite’s chief naturalist argued that the Valley “must be considered a city park.”⁵⁸⁸ This was not a new idea, but the sixties produced a new iteration of it. In the place of “the incomparable valley” was a crowded, crime-ridden strip of land, roughly seven miles long and a half-mile wide, complete with its own police force and a population density on par with many other major cities.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. “Yosemite Valley Horse Patrol Operations, 1967.”

⁵⁸⁶ Twilight, 3.

⁵⁸⁷ Adams et al., *Master Plan for the Preservation and Use of Yosemite National Park*.

⁵⁸⁸ Report of Staff Meeting, 7 July 1966.

⁵⁸⁹ On holiday weekends, the valley held more than 20,000 people (employees included) in roughly 2,400 acres, making a density of 8.3 people/acre. San Francisco’s 1960 population was 740,000 in roughly 148,400 acres, making a density of 5 people/acre. Yosemite Valley population estimates from Fitzsimmons, “Effect,” 121; acreage estimates from Fitzsimmons, “Effect,” 113. San Francisco data from US Census records (via Google Data, <https://www.google.com/publicdata>). Accessed 1 October 2015. The National Park Service’s idea of an ‘urban park’ (the National Mall and Memorial Parks in Washington, D.C., for example) is quite different than the metaphor assigned to Yosemite. Golden Gate National Recreational Area, a piecemeal park in the San Francisco urban area, represents a more recent effort by the National Park Service to serve the nation’s cities. See Hal Rothman, *The New Urban Park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Civic Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004). The

In June 1966, the *Wall Street Journal* brought the urban metaphor to national audiences with an article entitled “Severe Overcrowding Brings Ills of the City to Scenic Yosemite.”⁵⁹⁰ Park brass took issue with the authors, who described the Valley as a “skid row,” claimed the park saw roughly one murder per year, and quoted a ranger as saying he “didn’t join the Service to be a lousy cop.” Journalists from nearby newspapers like the Modesto Bee and Fresno Bee took notice; national outlets, like NBC, CBS, and Forbes magazine, clamored for comment, as well. The superintendent stressed that park personnel “should be prudent and cautious” in their remarks to the press. In particular, he instructed them to emphasize that Yosemite Valley only constituted some seven of the park’s 1,189 square miles, and that—even in the Valley—visitors could still find solitude.⁵⁹¹ Even as Park Service officials and rangers compared their park to a city, they could not let media outlets think they had accepted this condition.

The metaphor spread far and fast. One writer suggested that the Valley closely resembled “an urban amusement park,” with hot rods, marijuana, and rock music assaulting the senses on a daily basis.⁵⁹² Other visitors complained about the air quality, noting that the Valley’s smog rivaled that of Los Angeles.⁵⁹³ Tents, normally seen as symbols of pastoral contentment, took on different connotations. A Texan bemoaned

preeminent work on cities and nature—and perhaps environmental history, in general—is William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis*. Its central thesis—that rural hinterlands play major roles in providing the raw materials for urban economic growth—influenced Cronon’s later essay, “The Trouble With Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.” Cities in the American West have proven especially fascinating for historians, given the historic characterization of the region as open and rugged. In one of the first monographic treatments of the twentieth-century West, Earl Pomeroy described the region’s “watersheds of urban allegiance and control.” This implies that major centers of capital—Denver, San Francisco, and (later) Los Angeles—exert political and economic power far outside their geographic vicinity. Earl S. Pomeroy, *The Pacific Slope*, 120.

⁵⁹⁰ Glynn Mapes, “Severe Overcrowding Brings Ills of the City to Scenic Yosemite,” *Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 1966, 1.

⁵⁹¹ Report of Staff Meeting, 7 July 1966.

⁵⁹² DeMars, 1.

⁵⁹³ Complaint letter to Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 9, Box 14.

numerous campgrounds crowding visitors “as in a city in dwellings that would be condemned in any American City.”⁵⁹⁴ Accusations like “tent slum” and “instant city” were leveled at the Valley floor.⁵⁹⁵ One incensed observer compared the scene to “one-story tenements, not unlike Arab refugee camps.”⁵⁹⁶ A visitor described “Yosemite City,” replete with “parking problems, traffic snarls, rush hours, gang warfare, slums, and urban sprawl.”⁵⁹⁷ Perhaps more than anything the valley *felt* like a city. Surrounded by high cliffs and total strangers, many tourists responded with anti-urban rhetoric gleaned from the decade’s widespread urban unrest. Campgrounds shifted from small groups of like-minded families to sprawling skid rows; nylon tents became concrete tenements, the thin Valley roads major freeways.

Surrounding cities, San Francisco in particular, provide context for the park’s supposed urbanity. In 1967, poet and novelist Richard Brautigan gave the park-city connection a visual form. As part of a project for KQED (San Francisco’s public television station), Brautigan wrote and narrated a four-part short film entitled “Ghetto Yosemite.” Stark footage of trash, sidewalks, and windblown neighborhoods accompanied Brautigan’s free-associative words: “This is Ghetto Yosemite located in the Western Addition of San Francisco. A lot of poor people live here. This is their Vernal Fall, their Castle Cliffs, their Inspiration Point[...].”⁵⁹⁸ With just some suggestive images

⁵⁹⁴ Complaint letter to Senator Ralph Yarbrough. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 9, Box 14.

⁵⁹⁵ Umberto Tosi, “Everybody Loves Yosemite,” *WEST* (Los Angeles Times supplement), 20 September 1970. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁵⁹⁶ Richard G. Lillard, “The Siege and Conquest of a National Park,” *The American West* 5 (January 1968): 71.

⁵⁹⁷ Quoted in Demars, *The Tourist in Yosemite*, 130.

⁵⁹⁸ William Hjortsberg, *Jubilee Hitchhiker: The Life and Times of Richard Brautigan* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012), 324.

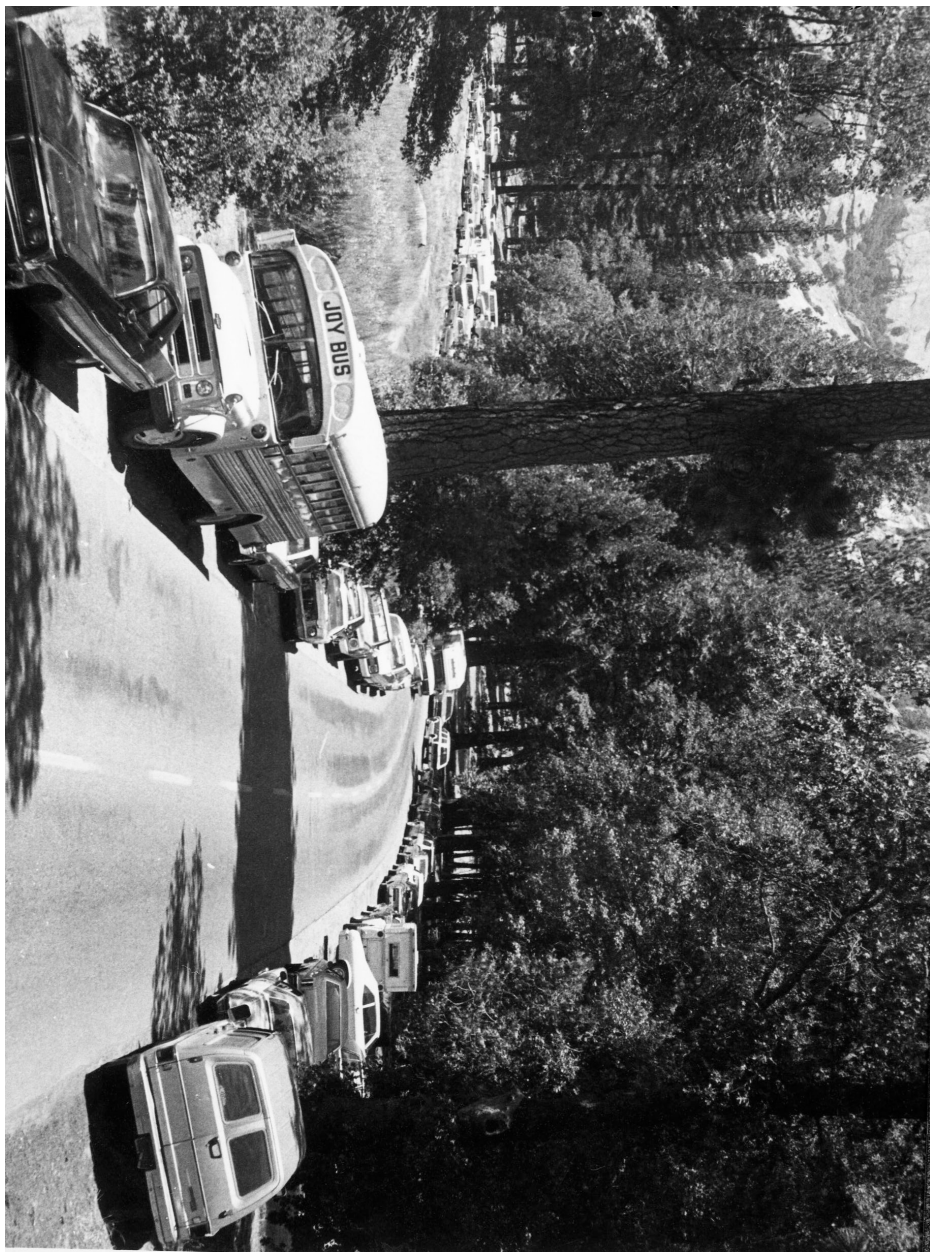


Figure 50: Packed roadside parking over Memorial Day weekend, 1975. Courtesy NPGallery Digital Archive

and a creative script, Brautigan expressed the fluidity of the terms ‘park’ and ‘city.’ More importantly, he counteracted a time-honored tradition of associating Yosemite with scenic vistas. “Ghetto Yosemite” expressed a connection between the nation’s cities and its wild places in one pithy metaphor.⁵⁹⁹

The San Francisco Bay Area had always been symbolically important to Yosemite; the Sierra Club, the University of California-Berkeley, and the O’Shaughnessy Dam (to name but a few) represented a continuing dialogue between the *fin de siècle* metropolis and its closest example of the sublime. By the late 1960s, however, this conversation had a decidedly different tone. A new cultural icon, the hippie, stepped in as intermediary between city and country.⁶⁰⁰

Before hippies, though, there were beatniks—the same ones Yosemite’s rangers had noticed in and around the park. Beat culture first made national headlines in 1958 when Jack Kerouac published *On the Road* and San Francisco’s district attorney prosecuted Lawrence Ferlinghetti—owner of City Lights Bookstore—for selling obscene

⁵⁹⁹ Scholars of the global sixties have stressed the spatial reorganization of the era, mostly on a global scale. German Third Worldists internalized struggles in Iran, Vietnam, and the Congo, essentially creating alternate geographies that stressed political affinity over spatial proximity. Leaders of the South African Black Consciousness Movement adapted ideas from the Black Panthers to fit their own circumstances. The Mexico City Olympics of 1968, and the accompanying media bonanza, further demonstrated the connective potential of print and television journalism. Events of the sixties, and especially 1968, cannot be confined to one space; the spirit of protest spread despite political boundaries, brutal repression, and sheer physical distance. See Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties Germany* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012); Daniel Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010); Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); and Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

⁶⁰⁰ Historian Jen Huntley notes that “Yosemite...gave San Francisco elites the vision of a greater purpose, a divine sanction, a symbol of urban greatness with the moral authority to dominate the hinterland regions and Pacific resources. Yosemite, as an icon, provided potent symbolic power to San Francisco elites, and San Francisco provided the technological, material, and cultural resources to develop that icon and make it ‘known to all men.’” Huntley, *The Making of Yosemite*, 83–84.

material. San Franciscans fretted over new forms of youth socialization that flew in the face of traditional family values.⁶⁰¹ Like hippies later in the decade, the beats would challenge popular assumptions about work, leisure, and family.⁶⁰² Not coincidentally San Francisco's police department underwent a concurrent change in image and function, shifting to a professionalized model of urban policing that relied on displays of force. The tactical squad, or 'tac' squad, proved the most noticeable addition to the city's landscape.

Arranged in four separate groups of eight, the tac squad dressed its officers in masked helmets and all-black coveralls and schooled the men in judo, wrestling, karate, baton use, antisniper control, and house-to-house combat. Neither City Hall nor the Hall of Justice made any attempt to downplay the tac squad's physical capabilities. Department leaders described its members as 'outstanding physical specimens,' and one squad sergeant summarized, 'We don't want little guys.'⁶⁰³

Despite this menacing countenance, many citizens and reporters threw their support behind the tactical squad, believing—like Yosemite's top brass—that more stringent enforcement could endorse “proper” behavior. Interestingly, enforcement professionals in both city and park entered the national spotlight due to riots; San Francisco's tactical squad made news in 1968 when the Federal Bureau of Investigation utilized squad leaders as coauthors of its report on riot control.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰¹ "Together, these two events unleashed a torrent of national media attention on San Francisco's North Beach scene. *Look*, *The Nation*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Time*, and *Playboy* all ran features covering beats in the neighborhood. Entranced by the notion of an alternative to traditional family values, most of these early national reports painted a pathetic picture of the North Beach denizens. Nevertheless, the attention generated new waves of visitors and migrants." Agee, *Streets of San Francisco*, 46.

⁶⁰² "By 1960 more than half of San Francisco men in their twenties were unmarried, and between 1950 and 1960 the percentage of women in their twenties who were single jumped 9 points to 29 percent. This expanding corps of young downtown employees enjoyed an off-work life largely free of many forms of traditional adult control. Within the context of these demographic and social changes, cultural conservatives worried over the beats' public rejection of the traditional markers of adulthood." *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Yosemite's ranger corps learned a lot about hippies from their colleagues in the Bay Area.⁶⁰⁵ It is difficult to tell when park rangers' concerns narrowed from youths to hippies in particular but, early in the summer of 1967, Yosemite's personnel asked the Regional Solicitor for guidelines in handling this new type of visitor.⁶⁰⁶ A month later staff meetings began to include an approximate count of hippies in the park over busy weekends.⁶⁰⁷ To learn more about their supposed enemies, the superintendent's office again sought help from neighboring law enforcement agencies. In 1967, two rangers—Steele and Cahill—shadowed police departments in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland in order to study “'hippies' and juvenile matters” with police departments well-versed on the subject.⁶⁰⁸ In San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, ground zero for hippie culture, rangers noted that hippies lived not with families but as tribes, where “intercourse is freely indulged in by all parties of either sex”; this stood in stark contrast to beatniks, who preferred to remain somewhat exclusive. As part of their “evangelistic activities,” hippies welcomed naïve “crashers” into these hedonistic social structures. Thus, otherwise promising youths flocked to San Francisco as if they were “following a

⁶⁰⁵ There is some debate as to the origins and meaning(s) of the term ‘hippie.’ As James Agee writes, “The press labeled participants in the subculture ‘hippies’ in early 1966.” Agee, *Streets of San Francisco*, 219–220. Charles Perry, however, argues that the term arose from beatniks’ derision of a younger subculture as “hippies (junior grade hipsters).” Charles Perry, *The Haight Ashbury* (New York: Wenner Books, 2005), 5. Legendary Yosemite climber Steve Roper considered his subculture quite similar to that of the hippies: “[W]e didn't have nine-to-five jobs; our hair was long and scraggly; our language poured forth without inhibition; and our morals, as Henry Miller once said about the bohemians of Paris, were of ‘the reptilian order.’ We fit right in with the hippies, though we prided ourselves on at least having a sense of direction: climbing.” Steve Roper, *Camp 4: Recollections of a Yosemite Rockclimber* (Seattle, Wash.: Mountaineers Books, 1998), 217. There is undoubtedly a significant overlap between ‘hippies’ and ‘counterculture’ but—in order to remain faithful to my Park Service sources—I will use ‘hippie’ as frequently as possible.

⁶⁰⁶ Report of Staff Meeting, 8 June 1967. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 11, Box 40.

⁶⁰⁷ Report of Staff Meeting, 6 July 1967. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 11, Box 40.

⁶⁰⁸ Report of Staff Meeting, 6 July 1967. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 11, Box 40.

pied-piper.”⁶⁰⁹ Hippies represented a contagion, threatening to influence otherwise well-behaved children at a moment’s notice.⁶¹⁰ Popular perceptions of the burgeoning subculture readily exacerbated any and all fears—sex, drugs, disconnection—of a changing nation.⁶¹¹

Steele and Cahill also visited Golden Gate Park, which—owing to its proximity to the Haight-Ashbury—experienced more than its fair share of hippie visitors.⁶¹² Police officers estimated that “hundreds and sometimes thousands of hippies and teenagers” slept in the park at night, exacerbating San Francisco’s problems with runaway youths.⁶¹³ City parks, like Golden Gate Park and Berkeley’s People’s Park, represented havens from authority; rangers and Park Service officials feared that Yosemite Valley would be next.⁶¹⁴ In many ways, the rangers’ observations resemble anthropological fieldwork,

⁶⁰⁹ Report from rangers Steele and Cahill on Bay Area detail-undated, but occurred late June or early July 1967. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 11, Subseries 7, Box 4. For a history of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, see Perry, *The Haight Ashbury*.

⁶¹⁰ This influence often came in the form of drugs, the sales of which supported hippies economically and attracted new members to the subculture: “The consumption and distribution of illegal and experimental drugs, more than any other single factor, was responsible for the creation and development of America’s many countercultural enclaves. Drug sales and use contributed heavily to the enclaves’ economic base, social order, and cultural disposition. A heavy percentage of the very first hippies to live, for example, in the Haight-Ashbury—a kind of no-man’s-land between the poor, all-black Fillmore neighborhood and the well-to-do Pacific Heights area—sold marijuana. The dissemination of drugs outside of these enclaves was also the single most important factor linking the small counterculture with the vast majority of going-to-school, living-at-home young people. The spread, lure, promotion and open use of illegal and experimental drugs was also the main reason a majority of adult Americans feared and even hated the counterculture.” Farber, *Age of Great Dreams*, 173.

⁶¹¹ “The shock troops in this ‘culture war,’ at least as most Americans saw it, were the long-haired ‘freaks’ and ‘hippies’ of what was then called the ‘counterculture.’ It was the counterculture, more than the antiwar movement or Black Power groups, that seemed to many older Americans to be most threatening to their families and loved ones.” David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 168.

⁶¹² Responding to criticisms that Golden Gate Park had become a “jungle,” liberal mayor Frank Alioto staged a picnic there to illustrate “his confidence in the midst of the counterculture.” Agee, *Streets of San Francisco*, 223.

⁶¹³ Report from rangers Steele and Cahill on Bay Area detail-undated, but occurred late June or early July 1967. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 11, Subseries 7, Box 4.

⁶¹⁴ While it is common to cite parkland as an unquestionable good, Jane Jacobs noted parks’ propensities to turn into criminal havens; however, Jacobs’ argument is based on under-used parks, not over-used ones. See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. In May 1969, violence erupted at Berkeley’s People’s Park after officers from the California Highway Patrol and Berkeley Police

attempts to unravel different value systems and ways of life. More importantly, they read as a tacit denouncement of cities as incubators for physical and moral decay.⁶¹⁵

Even members of San Francisco's municipal government reinforced this connection between hippies and filth (in multiple senses of the word). In 1967 the city's Department of Public Health sent inspectors to 691 buildings in the Haight-Ashbury; disappointingly for them, they found only 39 houses in need of "sanitary repair."⁶¹⁶ The following year the Department's chief of community mental services, J.M. Stubbledine, penned a report entitled "Health Hazards of the Hippies." According to him, hippies were preoccupied by *anything* filthy: language, appearance, grooming habits, and living quarters. Stubbledine comes prepared with statistics and anecdotes, noting that, in 1967, the Haight Ashbury (comprising 0.9% of San Francisco's total population) accounted for 7.6% of the cases of infectious hepatitis citywide; additionally, he blames hippies for slaughtering one (possibly two) of the buffalo in Golden Gate Park for use in their "communal cooking pots." Despite shenanigans like this, Stubbledine seems to possess sympathy for the subculture he describes as largely white and affluent "expatriots (*sic*)

Department fenced it off; Gov. Ronald Reagan dispatched National Guardsmen to keep order. See Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War*, 156–162; and Miller, *On Our Own*, 292.

⁶¹⁵ Geographer David Sibley has explored the historic characterization of the poor as polluting, both morally and ethically. See David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁶¹⁶ "The San Francisco Department of Public Health used these crackdowns [in supposedly hippie-dominated neighborhoods] as an opportunity to exploit the mainstream media's caricature of barefoot, panhandling, 'dirty' hippies. *Look* magazine, for example, conjured this image when it described the typical hippie flat as a filthy litter-strewn, swarming dope fortress that was a great deal less savory and sanitary than a sewer.' In March 1967 the health department deployed teams of health inspectors to visit 691 buildings in the Haight-Ashbury flatlands. Unfortunately for city officials, the investigators found only 39 residences in need of sanitary repair, and of those, a paltry six were occupied by hippies." Agee, *Streets of San Francisco*, 220.

from suburbia” who, after moving to San Francisco for school, fell in with the wrong crowd.⁶¹⁷

Hippies were stereotypically estranged from their parents, especially their fathers—who, as “white, breadwinning, heterosexual husband[s]”—epitomized the “model rights-bearing citizen” of the postwar era.⁶¹⁸ Younger people visiting Yosemite without their parents therefore represented a threat to the “family type patronage” that Park Service personnel had been encouraging for so long. The collaboration between the park’s police force and their Bay Area compatriots reinforced what sociologist Kristin Ross calls “the police conception of history”:

The police do their counting statistically: they deal in groups defined by differences in birth, functions, places, and interests.... These groups, when counted, make up the social whole—nothing is missing; nothing is in excess; nothing or no one is left uncounted.”⁶¹⁹

Ross’ “police conception” was incredibly useful for law enforcement officials during the 1960s, as it distilled complicated social matters into a system of simple categories. It is imperative, then, that any attempt to understand the 1960s not fall into the same traps. The anti-hippie ideology that park rangers inherited from their counterparts is vital—not just for the spatial connections it illustrates, but also as evidence of how ideologies harden over time.

Steele and Cahill’s trip to San Francisco, then, shows how the incredible social and political polarization of late-sixties America pervaded park boundaries. Their experiences made it clear to them (and, thus, their superiors) that hippies were an urban

⁶¹⁷ J. M. Stubblebine, “Health Hazards of the Hippies” (San Francisco: Department of Public Health, May 16, 1968). Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 11, Subseries 7, Box 4.

⁶¹⁸ Agee, *Streets of San Francisco*, 6.

⁶¹⁹ Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 23.

issue, a frightening discovery, given Yosemite Valley's reputation as a city in its own right. Thus San Francisco's police force and city health officials and—by proxy, Yosemite's superintendent and his ranger force—joined an intensifying debate over the future of America's cities.

Just as the interchange between Yosemite and San Francisco blurred the line between wilderness and city, nationwide civil unrest led Americans to conflate many different kinds of crime. In the beginning of the 1960s, murder and robbery rates rose conspicuously; the number of African Americans held accountable for these crimes jumped disproportionately, as well.⁶²⁰ This criminalization of blackness—on top of years of political, economic, and physical mistreatment—led to rioting in many of the nation's biggest metropolitan areas, which had hosted large black populations since the second Great Migration. In addition to street crime and urban rioting, a third specter haunted the nation: political protest, beginning with Berkeley's well-known Free Speech Movement and culminating in opposition to the Vietnam War. Ascendant conservatives like Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon parlayed these three fears into a catch-all cry for "law and order," which discredited liberal politicians as soft on criminals and dissidents.⁶²¹

⁶²⁰ "According to the federal Uniform Crime Reports surveys from 1960 and 1971, the number of recorded murders in metropolitan areas increased from 5,211 to 13,675, and recorded robberies jumped from 76,184 to 370,643. In the latter year, moreover, African Americans, who constituted less than 10 percent of the total United States population, accounted for more than two-thirds of all robbery arrests and almost two-thirds of all homicide arrests." Agee, *Streets of San Francisco*, 7-8.

⁶²¹ "The amorphous quality of the [law and order] issue enabled conservatives to combine fear over the Watts Riot, disgust over the demonstrations at Berkeley, and alarm at rising crime into a powerful denunciation of the inequities and inefficiencies of the liberal state." Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order : Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2005), 68.

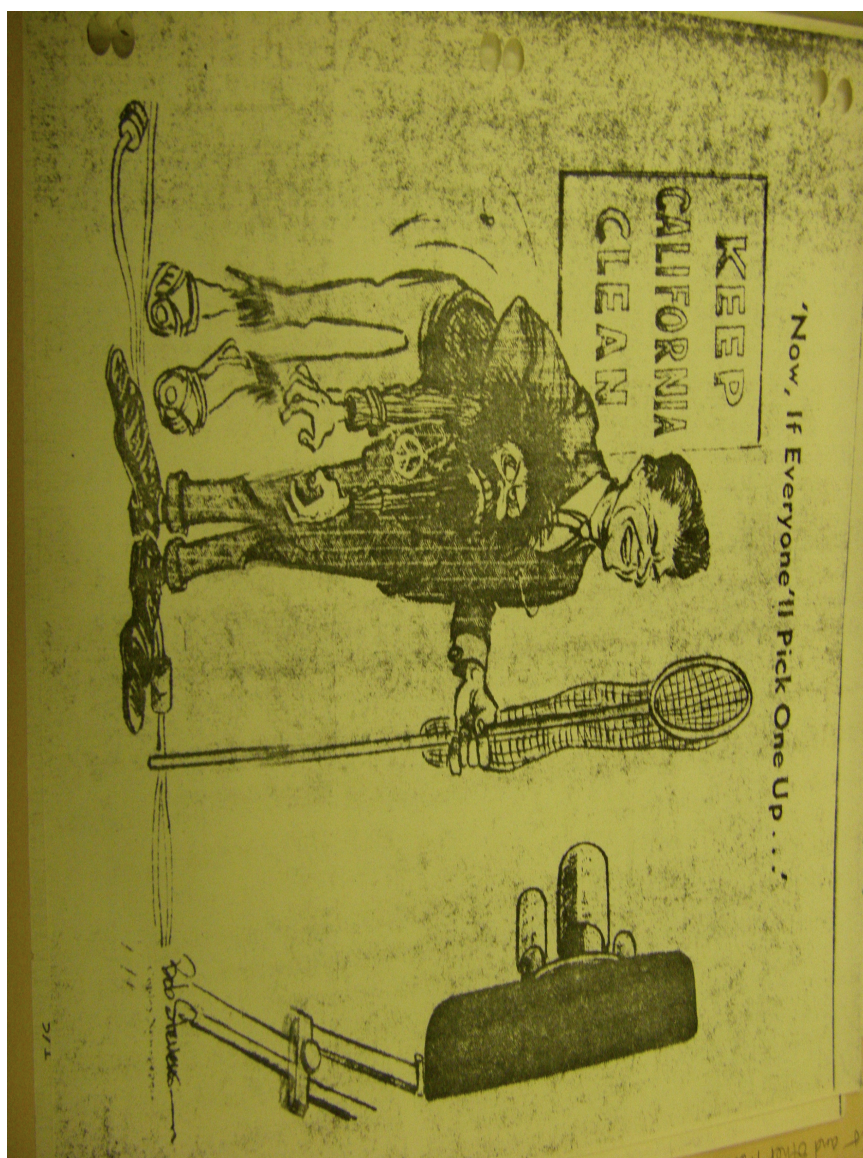


Figure 51: Ronald Reagan's stance as California's governor in a nutshell. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection

American cities—or, at least, their reputation—bore the brunt of this anxiety. This vague but widespread fear of crime, coupled with quantum leaps in economic and technological growth, led to worries about the future of the American metropolis. New patterns of living, enabled by suburbanization, air travel, and a booming service sector, suggested that center cities might become obsolete.⁶²² If the idea of the metropolis had indeed passed its prime, what then did America's historic cities represent? The National Advisory Commission on Civic Disorders, convened by President Johnson in the wake of the long, hot summer of 1967, described the inner city as “an environmental jungle.”⁶²³ This metaphor proved easily interchangeable with the humid environs of South Vietnam, where the U.S. military daily trudged through an uncertain war.⁶²⁴ One retired colonel envisioned American cities as war zones, with “[r]ooftops, windows, rooms high up, streets low down, and back alleys nearby...a virtual jungle for patrolling police or military forces at night when hidden snipers could abound.”⁶²⁵ Around this time, the phrase ‘concrete jungle’ gained widespread currency in popular culture, as well.⁶²⁶ The divisions and insecurities plaguing the American public provided immense fluidity for traditional referents like ‘city’ and ‘jungle,’ subtly intermixing the two until they were almost inseparable. If Yosemite Valley could be a city, then a city could be a jungle, as well.

This city-bashing led to another major area of debate: urban versus suburban. For many decades, white Americans had taken advantage of guaranteed loans, improved

⁶²² Melvin M. Webber, “The Post-City Age,” *Daedalus* 97, no. 4 (October 1, 1968): 1092.

⁶²³ David Ginsburg et al., “Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders” (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice, 1968), 130.

⁶²⁴ Flamm, 105.

⁶²⁵ Flamm, 116. Quoted from *Army Magazine*.

⁶²⁶ While Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906; reprint, 1960) introduced this term, the film *The Concrete Jungle* (1960) and eponymous songs by The Tams and Joe South (1964 and 1965, respectively) gave renewed vigor to the term.

transportation, and unprecedented housing development in their “flight” from the nation’s inner cities. 1968’s Kerner Report, a dispatch from the crumbling—and largely black—American metropolis, brought white Americans face to face with “the consequences of their suburban dreams.”⁶²⁷ While the city-suburb dichotomy paralleled this narrative of racial prejudice, it also (supposedly) explained the hippie problem: middle-class youths, bored by their parents’ lifestyles, left the suburbs *en masse* and headed for cities like San Francisco.⁶²⁸ Major works from this era, like Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and William Whyte’s *The Organization Man*, presupposed that built environments—be they urban or suburban—obviously influenced their residents’ behavior.⁶²⁹

By 1968, then, a slew of urban riots triggered an existential search for the future of the American city. Many agreed that, despite their industrial connotations, these metropolitan scenes resembled jungles: confusing, frightening, and densely packed. The ongoing quagmire in Vietnam only made jungles more menacing. The broken windows, shattered glass, and angry faces beamed through the television created a vivid scene,

⁶²⁷ Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 25.

⁶²⁸ One historian has suggested that, in addition to playing a supporting role, the conflict between center and periphery actually represented a major front of the sixties’ culture wars. The mid-1950s through the mid-1960s produced a large share of interesting analyses in this vein, most notably Jane Jacobs’ *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, William Whyte’s *The Organization Man*, and Lewis Mumford’s *The City in History*. These works are still relevant today, and for good reason. However, as Becky Nicolaides writes, “the relationship between built environment and social life was more obscured than revealed.” Becky M Nicolaides, “‘How Hell Moved from the City to the Suburbs: Urban Scholars and Changing Perceptions of Authentic Community,’” in *The New Suburban History*, ed. Thomas Sugrue and Kevin Kruse (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 94.

⁶²⁹ Sociologist Herbert Gans argued that, despite Jacobs’ vehement opposition to city planners, she actually shared many of their ideas regarding the connection between urban design and human behavior. Gans dubs this assumption “the physical fallacy.” Herbert J. Gans, *People, Plans, and Policies: Essays on Poverty, Racism, and Other National Urban Problems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 36. Whyte’s work invented many of the popular criticisms of suburbs as corporate, unimaginative, and stale places inhabited by career ladder-climbers. William Hollingsworth Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956).

but—more importantly—they reinforced the idea that urban environments created a certain kind of social disorder. When visitors commented on Yosemite Valley’s “tenements” and “slums,” they vilified more than just the park’s maintenance practices. In the spirit of the age, which conflated (and exploited) different environments and the behaviors they provoked, criticisms of the Valley’s built environment acknowledged a breakdown in traditional terminology. Despite this uncertainty, criticisms of Yosemite City and concrete jungles suggested a consensus that environments, especially urban ones, shaped their residents’ actions, often for the worse. In this way, Yosemite Valley—whether urban, suburban, or wild—fit right in with the dominant narratives of the sixties.

Visitation swelled to over 2 million in 1968, almost all of whom headed directly to Yosemite Valley.⁶³⁰ The superintendent’s office moved to curb hippie behavior and disprove the slogan that “Smokey The Bear is wide open.”⁶³¹ One newspaper columnist noted that “rangers were making more raids on hippies than the bears were on food-laden campgrounds.”⁶³² This campaign reached its apex the night of June 26, as rangers descended on a group of more than one hundred hippies relaxing in Stoneman Meadow. Since none were found in possession of drugs, rangers detained younger suspects until their parents arrived and escorted older ones from the park.⁶³³ Almost a month later, Assistant Superintendent Ted Thompson crowded, “There’s no doubt of the impact this

⁶³⁰ Tosi, “Everybody Loves Yosemite.”

⁶³¹ “Yosemite Losing Hippie Haven Lustre,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 23 July 1968. Although Smokey the Bear is the brainchild of the U.S. Forest Service, he is often mistakenly attributed to the Park Service.

⁶³² “Yosemite Losing Hippie Haven Lustre.”

⁶³³ “Hippie Invasion—The Yosemite Flower Children,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 July 1968. It is interesting to note that, despite the ranger force’s continuous professionalization, simply removing suspected miscreants from the park proved the most time-honored method of quashing any kind of rebellious activity.

drive has had on them [hippies]. Since then, they have been fewer in number and are enjoying the park as others do.”⁶³⁴

“Enjoying the park as others do” meant visiting with one’s family. The raids of 1968 were blatant attempts to endorse a certain kind of tourism and a certain kind of tourist. The early 1960s saw an unprecedented recreational boom, with outdoor recreation—and camping, in particular—leading the way. In 1958, Americans spent \$1 billion on camping; by 1972, that number had risen to \$105 billion.⁶³⁵ In fact, publishers launched five new family camping magazines were launched in the year 1960 alone.⁶³⁶ Even lifestyle magazines like *Redbook* capitalized on this outdoor renaissance. Some suggested camping as a way to reinforce a family hobby, like fishing or hiking.⁶³⁷ In an article entitled “Fun and National Strength,” Colonel Adolph H. Humphreys stated that parents were engaged in “an ideological war” for youthful minds. Outdoor activities like camping helped combat “televisionitis,” thus teaching youths about the value of fitness in a relaxed atmosphere.⁶³⁸

The quaint picture of a family camping trip proved difficult to achieve in Yosemite Valley. In a master plan from the early 1960s, park planners endorsed “numerous small, family-type campfire circles where groups can get together and share the experience of the day.”⁶³⁹ By 1968 this family-centric camping philosophy had yet to produce discernible results:

⁶³⁴ “Yosemite Losing Hippie Haven Lustre.”

⁶³⁵ Peter Boag, “Outward Bound: Family, Gender, Environmentalism, and the Postwar Camping Craze, 1945-1970,” *Idaho Yesterdays* 50 (Spring/Summer 2009): 6.

⁶³⁶ Reynold E. Carlson, “Changing Patterns in Camping,” *Recreation* 54 (1961): 115.

⁶³⁷ Ginny Ade, “A Redbook Guide to Family Camping Vacations,” *Redbook* 134 (November 1969): 36.

⁶³⁸ Adolph H. Humphreys, “Fun and National Strength,” *Recreation* 54 (1961): 101.

⁶³⁹ Adams et al., *Master Plan for the Preservation and Use of Yosemite National Park*. Emphasis original.

We must view campground management as a priority operation for this summer—it must have priority in our thinking—for everyone on our staff. There is nothing more important or more pressing than to get campgrounds under positive control and management. There is implicit in this all of the thing that bear on the publicity the parks has had with respect to hippies, drunkenness [*sic*], violence to persons and property, smoke and smog, noise and confusion. I believe campground management, properly applied, will tend to eliminate a lot of things that have worked against us in the past.⁶⁴⁰

There was a reason that campgrounds surfaced again and again in visitors' complaints about Yosemite City. Theoretically, campgrounds promised an idyllic evening beneath the stars with only the company of one's nuclear family; instead, they often provided a close look at a subculture that many might have preferred to ignore. "The real values of a park experience" proved elusive, and no changes in the Valley's built environment could guarantee their presence.

Yet there is considerable evidence that younger visitors—hippies or not—were "enjoying the park as others do."⁶⁴¹ Historian Roderick Nash argues that members of the counterculture actually had more in common with the National Park Service than meets the eye. Eager to escape society's "fixation on progress, growth, and competition," members of the counterculture viewed wilderness "as a way of resisting the so-called establishment."⁶⁴² As one self-identified 'hippie' told a journalist, "I guess we're like

⁶⁴⁰ Report of Staff Meeting, 15 March 1968. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 11, Box 40.

⁶⁴¹ They supposedly enjoyed nature for different reasons, though. According to Charles Reich's *The Greening of a Nation*, a bestselling treatise published in 1970, the tension between older and younger Americans represented a conflict between different stages of consciousness ("Consciousness II" and "Consciousness III"). Views on nature distinguished the two; while older Americans (Consciousness II) went outside "as a holiday from what is real," younger ones (Consciousness III) "go to nature as a source." Charles Reich, *Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 263.

⁶⁴² "Indeed many Americans of the 1960s began to think of wilderness and, parenthetically, of Indians, as victims of the same fixation on progress, growth, and competition which threatened countercultural values such as peace, freedom, and community. It followed that defending wilderness was a way of resisting the so-called establishment." Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 251–252.

everybody else. We're lovers of nature, too."⁶⁴³ In search of a more authentic way to live and think, the counterculture adopted anti-modernist beliefs—in existence since the Progressive Era—that would form the backbone of the environmental movement.⁶⁴⁴ In a sense, then, Yosemite's campgrounds formed an important bridge to the back-to-the-land movement in which young people (many of them reared in suburbia) found community in remote outposts; Table Mountain, a famous commune in Mendocino County, was actually founded as a safety valve for the inherently unstable Haight-Ashbury scene.⁶⁴⁵

Nor was there any evidence that younger campers' activities in Yosemite were materially different from their older counterparts. Despite the obvious exceptions—all night parties, acid trips, naked swimming—many younger visitors simply enjoyed the change of pace that a park campground provided. Visitors on both sides of the generation gap brought “artifacts and expectations” of everyday life into Yosemite; after all, were music and drugs that much different from televisions and martini fixings? As one journalist commented, “[t]he longhair's loud and showy motorcycle...may be no more than a modest takeoff on the ostentatious 350-horsepower sedan driven by the established family man.”⁶⁴⁶

Despite these material similarities, no one could deny that the atmosphere in Yosemite Valley had changed beyond recognition. In 1968 Yosemite aficionados nationwide lamented the demise of the firefall, a time-honored park tradition; at night, a

⁶⁴³ Ed Meagher, “Hippies Mar the Scenery in Yosemite National Park,” *Milwaukee (Wisc.) Journal*, 17 July 1968.

⁶⁴⁴ Jeff Sanders, “Environmentalism,” in *The Columbia Guide to the America in the 1960s*, eds. David Farber and Beth Bailey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 279.

⁶⁴⁵ Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 71–74. For more on “appropriate technology” and the era's focus on self-sustaining community, see Andrew G. Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

⁶⁴⁶ Jack Hope, “Hassles in the Park,” *Natural History* 80 (May 1971): 84

Curry Company employee at Glacier Point would push a ball of flaming embers off a cliff as visitors watched it float to the Valley floor. Many complained that this left nothing for young visitors to do at night, “making Yosemite an old folks home.”⁶⁴⁷ A more sarcastic visitor suggested that the Park Service replace the firefall with “a hippie hanging by the hair from the top of Glacier Point-with a bottle of LSD in one hand and a switch-blade knife and a tire chain in the other.”⁶⁴⁸ While Park Service personnel considered it an artificial spectacle, the firefall represented Yosemite’s salad days—an antidote to the widespread changes in the visitor experience. More than that, it provided a wholesome nighttime activity for younger visitors, something in short supply.

1968 saw more changes in the Valley. In an effort to reduce traffic, the eastern third of Yosemite Valley became a one-way road system; the superintendent’s office believed this would “reduce the inevitable conflicts between autoists, walkers and hikers, bicyclists, and saddle horse parties.”⁶⁴⁹ Superintendent John M. Davis also trumpeted the unitization of Camp 11, one of the biggest campgrounds in the Valley (with other campgrounds to follow). Unitized campgrounds held specific numbers of sites, thus lowering their capacity; before this practice, visitors simply pitched their tents in any patch of dirt that would fit them. Davis allayed any worries, noting that this project guaranteed visitors a picnic table, a fire pit, and ranger supervision to prevent “additional campers crowding in to usurp sites occupied by others.” While site-stealers presented a major nuisance, Davis minced no words in blaming “juveniles and young adults whose

⁶⁴⁷ Complaint letter to Superintendent Hadley, 8 February, 1968. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records Series 1, Subseries 9, Box 14.

⁶⁴⁸ Complaint letter to Superintendent Hadley, 5 February, 1968. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records Series 1, Subseries 9, Box 14.

⁶⁴⁹ Lawrence Hadley, “Official Report on Park Action,” 3. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection.

only interest in coming to the Park has seemed to be purely selfish.” He promised that campground improvements, despite limiting the Valley’s capacity, would ultimately aid those interested in “the real values of a park experience.”⁶⁵⁰

The announcement of the firefall’s demise, one-way roads, and campground improvements caused a panic in nearby communities. Rumors flew that the Park Service planned on excluding visitors from the Valley and barring cars from the park.⁶⁵¹ However exaggerated these rumors were, park concessioners’ business suffered that summer.⁶⁵² Visitor use also declined, although only one gate—Arch Rock, the entrance most convenient to the Bay Area—experienced a major drop in numbers. Members of the business community in Mariposa, the community closest to this entrance, blamed “reports of hippie invasions,” signs falsely stating that all campgrounds were full, and the increasingly public nature of Yosemite Valley’s overcrowding.⁶⁵³ These changes to campsites, roadways, and evening activities were meant to provide a more “authentic” park experience, especially in campgrounds; however, they terrified economic entities that relied on tourism to fill their coffers. Would the superintendent’s ploy to control the Valley pay off, economically or otherwise?⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵⁰ “Yosemite Campground Improvement Started,” *Madera (Calif.) Tribune*, 17 October 1967.

⁶⁵¹ Report of Staff Meeting, 1 February 1968. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 11, Box 40.

⁶⁵² “The implication is that some of the things we have done this year such as elimination of the firefall, the one-way road, management of campgrounds, etc., has affected their business. There seems little doubt that business is down.” Report of Staff Meeting, 18 July 1968. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 11, Box 40.

⁶⁵³ “Traffic Drop Cuts Into Park Business,” *Fresno (Calif.) Bee*, 28 July 1968.

⁶⁵⁴ Yosemite had three different superintendents in the sixties: John C. Preston (1952–1965); John M. Davis (1966–1968); and Lawrence C. Hadley (1968–1970). This kind of turnover leads to some difficulties in assigning ownership to any number of park actions; for example, while Davis publicly announced the campground renovations, they were implemented under Hadley’s watch. “Historic Listing of National Park Service Officials,” *National Park Service*, accessed 18 March 2017, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/tolson/histlist.htm.



Figure 52: Younger visitors likely to be dubbed “hippies” by park administrators disobey posted rules, 1968. “Hippies Outnumber Bears at Yosemite Park This Summer,” *Anniston (Ala.) Star*, 21 July 1968

The summer of 1969 saw more of the same problems with drugs and liquor, but in increasing numbers.⁶⁵⁵ By that summer, patrol rangers had developed a thorough list of violations commonly perpetrated by hippies in campgrounds, including possession of marijuana, “dangerous drugs,” or stolen property; harboring runaway juveniles or individuals wanted by other law enforcement agencies; indecent exposure; underage possession of alcoholic beverages; and (occasionally) possession of a firearm or another deadly weapon. Rangers, in return, developed a common set of violations related to park statutes that hippies happened to break most frequently: dirty campsites; too many individuals per campsite; violation of the seven-day camping limit; unauthorized pets; and camping out-of-bounds.⁶⁵⁶ These lesser charges, trivial though they were, helped rangers enforce proper park aesthetics and social norms.

Rangers’ most valuable new weapon, though, allowed even more room for interpretation. Taking their cue from the San Francisco Police Department’s battles with hippies and beatniks, park rangers discovered the wondrous and multifaceted disorderly conduct charge.⁶⁵⁷ This broad charge served as a kind of umbrella offense, allowing persecution of a wide range of unruly behavior; it proved useful as a way of “controlling...the troublesome hippie types,” especially when the offender’s behavior fell

⁶⁵⁵ Comparing summer of 1968 with summer of 1969, narcotics arrests/citations rose from forty-five to ninety-seven and liquor arrests/citations rose from seven to ninety-four. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 11, Subseries 3–7, Box 2.

⁶⁵⁶ Horse Patrol Supervisor to Chief Ranger, 16 January 1969. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 11, Subseries 3–7, Box 2.

⁶⁵⁷ “The SFPD’s initial response to this hippie scene followed the pattern the department had set with the North Beach beats. SFPD leaders relied on uniformed Park Station patrol officers to maintain order, and the officers did so with broad ‘public nuisance’ charges. Hippies, in return, charged that the ‘subjectivity’ wielded by ‘policemen on the beat’...led to harassment and brutality.” Agee, *Streets of San Francisco*, 220. While the SFPD and Yosemite’s rangers leaned heavily on the disorderly conduct charge, other jurisdictions had their own shortcuts. A new history of postwar America investigates the broad usage of vagrancy charges to arrest or otherwise detain beats, hippies, racial minorities, prostitutes, and other non-conforming citizens. See Risa Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation: Police Power, Constitutional Change, and the Making of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

short of an assault charge. Rangers grew quite fond of it—between the summer of 1968 and the summer of 1969, arrests and citations based on the disorderly conduct charge increased almost fivefold.⁶⁵⁸

Short of the time-honored practice of simply escorting undesirable visitors to the nearest entrance station, the disorderly conduct charge represented the rangers' greatest weapon against a large but loosely organized subculture that threatened Yosemite's officially sanctioned value system. After a summer of nationwide unrest, park officials endorsed particular park uses through changes in the Valley's built environment; rangers, on the other hand, used broad discretionary charges—like urban police forces—to control the hippie population. By the fall of 1970, though, these new levels of social control would appear tame.

The "police conception of history" is alive and well in National Park Service accounts of the riot in Stoneman Meadow. On Friday, July 3, 1970 visitors packed Yosemite Valley as usual. A crowd of roughly three hundred youths, many conforming to hippie stereotypes, socialized in Stoneman Meadow—home of the anti-hippie blitz of 1968. Park rangers announced the superintendent's orders that the meadow was to be cleared by 7:00 p.m. When it came time to enforce the curfew, no one left the meadow. Park rangers and other employees swept through the meadow, on foot and on horse, making sure everyone headed their separate ways. Campgrounds that night were quiet.⁶⁵⁹

The following night saw the same setup. Again, the superintendent decided to

⁶⁵⁸ From 1968 to 1969, arrests/citations based on the disorderly conduct charge rose from 26 to 122. 1969 Law Enforcement Summary. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records Series 11, Subseries 3-7. Box 2.

⁶⁵⁹ Avedisian, "The Yosemite Riot: Changes in Policy and Management in the National Park Service," 30-32.



Figure 53: A scene from the riot. "A Blade of Grass in Every Hand,"
Berkeley Tribe, 17–27 July 1970; Yosemite National Park archives,
Protection Division Riot Collection

enforce a curfew, deeming the meadow's infestation an ecological issue; not surprisingly, the assembled youths refused to heed the curfew. Rangers on horseback rushed the crowd, followed by twenty-one NPS employees on foot, armed with mace and ropes. The crowd threw bottles and rocks in retaliation; a few individuals threw knives, and one threatened a ranger with an axe. The above photo of the riot, presumably taken after the Park Service's initial charge, shows a crowd of young males—some holding sticks, bats, or other weapons—with their arms raised as if in triumph; it is difficult to identify any female participants, many of whom had probably left by this point. By 7:40 p.m., all Park Service personnel fell back, setting up roadblocks as they retreated to stop all traffic to and from Stoneman Meadow. In turn, some rioters erected a roadblock of their own: a large bonfire. Local police forces (from places like Madera, Merced, and Fresno counties), U.S. Marshals, and the California Highway Patrol sent help; all told, 146 individuals from other jurisdictions came to help. Between midnight and 8:00 a.m. on July 5, rangers searched campgrounds to find anyone involved in the riot; in total, rangers and other law enforcement officers arrested 138 people. Despite the severity of the situation, no one suffered anything worse than a laceration.⁶⁶⁰

At least, that is one version of the story. News of the riot spread rapidly, the debate influenced by the fresh memories of Los Angeles, Detroit, and Kent State. As journalist Robert Jones noted, Superintendent Hadley's report on the riot displayed considerable "rhetorical sophistication"—like the sentence "21 footmen and 16 horse patrolmen entered the meadow." "There are many ways to 'enter' a meadow," he noted, implying that Hadley was downplaying the violence of his rangers. Jones, a 26-year old freelancer from the West Coast, was well suited to document the stories of younger

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid, 36–43.

visitors. Another account provided by a college student from the Bay Area suggests a different story:

About 7:20 P.M. people began screaming and scattering off in all directions. I stood up and saw rangers running with clubs. They had surrounded | the meadow and were charging without warning.... I got up and ran along with everybody else. As I ran I had to duck to avoid the lassos, and the horses were so close I could have touched them as they swept by. A friend of mine was not as lucky as I and was trampled by one of the horses. Many others were struck down and beaten.⁶⁶¹

Other witnesses confirmed this account. John Fischer's widely circulated eyewitness testimony decried Superintendent Lawrence Hadley's decision to "order his troops into such action," recalling the National Guard's role in urban riots throughout the sixties. Fischer, a former state legislator (and a Republican, at that) offered a reminder of the past decade's troubles in more personal terms: "[I]f this came about in the peace of one of our National Parks, how soon shall we dread the middle of the night knock on the door at home."⁶⁶²

Once again, more than a trace of fear kicked in as a visitor described Yosemite as part of the world outside its boundaries. Pro-ranger accounts touched on similar themes. One visitor railed against "so-called hippies, drug addicts, ordinary thieves, and social anarchists," noting that handling a situation like Stoneman Meadow would have been impossible without "a police beat situation, as in a crowded city." He also claimed that Yosemite Valley's problems with drug use, theft, noise, and traffic violations—all stereotypically urban issues—correlated directly with the presence of hippies.⁶⁶³ With the

⁶⁶¹ Jones, "Range War at Generation Gap."

⁶⁶² Dr. John J. Fisher to Pres. Richard Nixon, 3 August 1970. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁶⁶³ Dr. Robert Craycroft to Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel, 1 September 1970. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection.

specter of the long hot summer looming, the comparison between the Valley and the nation's urban centers seemed more fitting than ever.

The riot also fanned regional flames. The *Berkeley Tribe*, a rather militant counterculture newspaper from the Bay Area, reacted rather predictably to the events of July 4. It advertised “a membership drive” to form “a 10,000-freak army by Labor Day,” asking that enrollees bring “dope, maps, music, marijuana seeds, bodies, equipment (technical and otherwise), food, imagination.”⁶⁶⁴ Though it came six months into a new decade, the Stoneman riot announced Yosemite Valley as yet another site of urban dissent and militaristic backlash. San Francisco and Berkeley—key components of Yosemite's early years—now constituted a threat to the park's safety. More importantly, the uprising represented a collision between an ascendant idea (the troubled American metropolis) and one on the decline (the national park as a sanctuary).

Late in August of 1970, an Emergency Planning Council consisting of U.S. Marshals, F.B.I. agents, U.S. Attorneys, superintendents and rangers from other parks, and the Governor Reagan's personnel met in Sacramento. Regarding the “10,000-freak army” planned for Labor Day, Assistant Superintendent Russ Olson stated that rangers “were not expecting much in the way of a problem.” An assistant to the governor noted that was no “street talk” about Yosemite, and that no pamphlets were circulating regarding any kind of planned protest; supposedly, the hippies' attention had shifted to the Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles, as well as an American Legion convention in

⁶⁶⁴ “A Blade of Grass in Every Hand,” *Berkeley Tribe*, July 17-24, 1970. Protection Division Riot Collection.

Portland.⁶⁶⁵ Here the “police conception of history” surfaces again as the assembled assume some kind of unified purpose behind hippie actions; although the Stoneman riot had damaged Yosemite’s public image, there is no evidence that it was planned or coordinated. The same council met a week later, agreeing that hippies turned away at Yosemite’s gates would most likely head for the resort town of Bass Lake, near the park’s southern entrance; ‘Burn Mariposa’ stickers seen in Los Angeles constituted the only other park-related news. Attendees also discussed camp-in for gay liberation on the Kern River and stolen dynamite in the Modoc National Forest (in the state’s northeastern corner).⁶⁶⁶ Like so many times before, Yosemite’s troubles revealed the park as an active participant in statewide enforcement.

All this planning could not prevent a sense of anxiety inside the park. A week before Labor Day, one of the concessioner’s security guards found a large stockpile of rocks near Stoneman Meadow.⁶⁶⁷ Rangers moved the park’s central dynamite cache from a central location in Yosemite Valley to its “outlying district caches” around the same time.⁶⁶⁸ An unknown party stole a large supply of explosives from the California Division of Highways’ powder magazine in Coulterville, roughly an hour and a half away

⁶⁶⁵ Emergency Planning Council Meeting (With State and Federal Agency Representatives). August 21, 1970. RMR, Series 11, Subseries 7, Box 3. On 29 August 1970, an antiwar rally in East Los Angeles turned violent as Mexican Americans protested American involvement in Vietnam; three were killed, including a local newsman. “Salazar Inquest Will Be Long,” *Desert News (Palm Springs, CA)*, 10 September 1970. Police and Secret Service agents feared that President Nixon’s appearance at the American Legion convention (28 August–2 September) would draw tens of thousands of “youthful protesters.” *Chicago Tribune*, 24 August 1970.

⁶⁶⁶ Intelligence Meeting-Emergency Planning Council, August 28, 1970. RMR, Series 11, Subseries 7, Box 3.

⁶⁶⁷ Memo to rangers from Law Enforcement Specialist, August 27, 1970. Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁶⁶⁸ Operational Plan, Labor Day Holiday Period, 1970. Protection Division Riot Collection.

from Yosemite Valley.⁶⁶⁹ As Labor Day approached, violence lurked in and around the park.

The Stoneman riot—and ranger professionalization throughout the sixties in general—underscored the need for outside help. In anticipation of Labor Day, sixty-five park rangers from outlying parks—“all fresh from cram courses on law enforcement techniques and crowd control”—arrived to beef up security.⁶⁷⁰ U.S. Park Police, deployed after the Stoneman riot, stayed in the park to train park rangers in crowd dispersal.⁶⁷¹ Trained in crowded urban parks, they knew how to handle to protest, dissent, and overall chaos. Clearly, the traditional ranger—“protector of park resources and host to park visitors”—hailed from a more innocent era.⁶⁷²

Western park rangers, in particular, had long enjoyed a reputation as friends of the forest—biologists, botanists, storytellers, and hosts. This friendly façade faded in the face of new regulations, as helmets, sidearms, and handcuffs entered the picture. Once friendly, they became “hired assassin [*sic*] rangers trying to rob [people] of their last sanctuaries.”⁶⁷³ In a memo to superintendents, the director of the Western Region stressed the importance of “soften[ing] the visual effect” so that park rangers did not appear “a

⁶⁶⁹ Memo to rangers from Law Enforcement Investigator, 27 August 1970. Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁶⁷⁰ “Rangers Ready for Trouble at Yosemite,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 3 September 1970. Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁶⁷¹ Hope, “Hassles in the Park,” 20–23, 82–91. The NPS also created a special forty-man supervisory team, drawn from the Park Police and divided among the Park Service’s six regions. “Riot Echo: Smokey Dons His Police Helmet, Grabs Weapon,” *Fresno (Calif.) Bee* 16 May 1971. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection. For more on the Park Police, see Barry Mackintosh, *The United States Park Police: A History* (Washington, D.C.: History Division, National Park Service, Dept. of the Interior, 1989).

⁶⁷² Secretary of Interior Hickel, letter to Mr. Sidney B. Gorchov, October 1, 1970. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 1, Subseries 9, Box 15.

⁶⁷³ “A Blade of Grass in Every Hand.”

threat, either physical or psychological.”⁶⁷⁴ To a newer generation of visitors, Yosemite’s park rangers came to represent government intrusion in a formerly sacred place.⁶⁷⁵ A new police force became another integral component of the Valley’s urbanization.

Steps to increase Park Service authority did not stop with the ranger force. The major changes implemented in the summer of 1968 foreshadowed park architecture’s role in encouraging orderly behavior. The ranger corps had long understood the relationship between crime and the built environment. In 1961, Chief Ranger Elmer Fladmark wrote that, as roads improved, so did the odds of fugitives visiting the park.⁶⁷⁶ The same year, Ranger Ben Twilight surmised that the park’s entrance stations accounted for its low rate of violent crime.⁶⁷⁷ Roads and entrance stations theoretically worked in tandem to provide visitors with access to the park; in reality, though, rangers often used them as defense mechanisms to protect the “park experience.” Indeed, as Ranger Robert Branges wrote in 1961, rangers often took undesirable visitors to the park boundaries and told them not to come back.⁶⁷⁸

As Labor Day loomed, anxiety bred innovation. Orders came down that all entrance stations would stay open twenty-four hours a day; in addition to fee collectors, three to four rangers with shotguns visible would staff each entrance in order to present a

⁶⁷⁴ Memo from Acting Director, Western Region, to Western Region Superintendents, November 23, 1970. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 11, Subseries 7, Box 3.

⁶⁷⁵ For more on the park ranger, see Charles R. “Butch” Farabee Jr., *National Park Ranger: An American Icon* (Lanham, Md.: Roberts Rinehart, 2003). For more on the changes after the riot, see “Park Rangers Face New Task as Policemen,” *Fresno (Calif.) Bee*, 19 July 1970; “Riot Echo: Smokey Dons His Police Helmet, Grabs Weapon,” *Fresno (Calif.) Bee* 16 May 1971; and Hope, “Hassles in the Park.”

⁶⁷⁶ Fladmark to Harold E. Swenk, 31 October 1961.

⁶⁷⁷ Twilight, 2.

⁶⁷⁸ Branges, “Summary,” 3.

“strong show of force.”⁶⁷⁹ The ranger reinvented these rustic waystations—no more than two people wide, at best—as a new kind of surveillance technology. Even more craftily, Assistant Superintendent Russ Olsen instructed entrance station personnel to utilize the California Vehicle Code (since, technically, vehicles in line to enter the park were still in California) to turn back any suspicious vehicles; publicly, though, he denied the existence of “the anti-long hair policy.”⁶⁸⁰ This clever usage of the federal-state boundary gave rangers unprecedented personal power. At the sight of any kind of defect—dim headlights, bald tires, broken horn—they simply expelled the offending car from the park.⁶⁸¹ One ranger estimated he denied entrance to forty percent of the vehicles he checked. Another complained that young visitors were parking down the road and entering with other groups; this prompted him to check “approximately 100%” of cars at his duty station. Not surprisingly, those deemed “straights” or “family types” gained entry with ease.⁶⁸²

Young visitors that did gain access faced increasing levels of scrutiny. In their Labor Day plans, protection supervisors ordered rangers to place “potential law violators” in Camp 11, the Valley’s biggest.⁶⁸³ They issued a more politic version of this mandate, advising rangers to avoid “the assignment of many adjacent sites to similarly interested

⁶⁷⁹ Major Criticisms of July 4 Operation: Recommendations for Future Operations. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection. Rangers would work twelve hours a day, six days a week during the Labor Day period. Koegler, conversation with the author, August 2016.

⁶⁸⁰ Emergency Planning Council Meeting (With State and Federal Agency Representatives). August 21, 1970; “Rangers Ready for Trouble at Yosemite,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 3 September 1970.

⁶⁸¹ Major Criticisms of July 4 Operation: Recommendations for Future Operations. Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁶⁸² Activity Log, C.O. Post (Labor Day Weekend, 1970). Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection

⁶⁸³ Operational Plan, Labor Day Weekend 1970--2nd Draft. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection. This was excluded from the final draft, but it was echoed in an unofficial memo from the same period.

groups,” closer to Labor Day.⁶⁸⁴ In another feat of surveillance, campgrounds rangers were to notify the park command center when they encountered large groups from Berkeley, Hayward, or Fremont, nearby urban areas thought to have played major roles in the Stoneman fiasco.⁶⁸⁵ Without explicitly saying so, the powers that be attempted to keep young, long-haired visitors from the Bay Area from entering Yosemite.

In the weeks following, concerned citizens attacked this discriminatory policy. Older visitors wrote their Congressional representatives to protest the targeting of “young people, especially if they were in old cars or Volkswagens [*sic*] or were dressed suitably for hiking, camping, or climbing.”⁶⁸⁶ Younger visitors complained that the mere presence of mountaineering gear aroused the suspicion of rangers.⁶⁸⁷ Rangers planned to invoke another aspect of state law, California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 601. Enacted in 1937, probably in reaction to wandering and unemployed children during the Depression, it targeted youths deemed “in danger of leading an idle, dissolute, lewd, or immoral life.”⁶⁸⁸ Even the executive director of the ACLU wrote the Park Service’s regional director, who denied any attempts “to repress and/or harass youthful visitors wishing to enter.”⁶⁸⁹ The *Berkeley Tribe* noted that Yosemite “may have started a trend by becoming the first National Park to effectively close its gates to freaks, longhairs,

⁶⁸⁴ Operational Plan, Labor Day Weekend 1970. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁶⁸⁵ Undated pre-Labor Day meeting notes. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁶⁸⁶ Letter to Congressman B.F. Sisk, July 20, 1970. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁶⁸⁷ Letter to Secretary of Interior Walter Hickel, July 19, 1970. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁶⁸⁸ Operational Plan—Labor Day Holiday Period, 1970. Emphasis original. A 1971 decision that invoked Section 601 to authorize court jurisdiction over a juvenile was remanded in 1974, when federal judges deemed its standards “too vague to serve as a constitutionally permissible standard on which to base an arrest.” National Criminal Justice Reference Service. “Jurisdiction: Status Offenses.” Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1977.

⁶⁸⁹ Ernest Besig, letter to Joseph Rumberg, Jr., July 24, 1970; response August 4, 1970. Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection.

misfits.”⁶⁹⁰ After years of unparalleled automotive access, Yosemite’s visitors—especially young ones—encountered a militarized border.

Increased media scrutiny only added to the tension. Still reeling from July 4th, the park was desperate for a quiet and uneventful weekend. The official plan for Labor Day was full of minute details, but its broad message was clear: “The eyes and ears of the country will be focused on Yosemite during this period.”⁶⁹¹ The park kept an ongoing log throughout the weekend, a stream of consciousness memo filled with every phone call, observation, and suspicion regarding counterculture activity. The sheer number of media requests stressed Yosemite's public relations machinery. News stations from Los Angeles and Sacramento taped interviews with management assistant Larry Quist. The *Los Angeles Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle* called continuously, hoping for new scoops.⁶⁹²

Sadly for news outlets, park life reverted to its default Labor Day conditions: crowded, warm, and non-violent. On the evening of Sunday, September 6, a reporter called asking if the park had “won the battle”; the commanding officer replied, “[T]here wasn't one.”⁶⁹³ After the dust settled, Yosemite's rangers and administrators had time to congratulate themselves. A law enforcement briefing commended the rangers for a “good clean crisp weekend,” stressing the advantage of being “‘combat ready’ at all times.”⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁹¹ Operational Plan, Labor Day Weekend 1970.

⁶⁹² Activity Log, C.O. Post (Labor Day Weekend, 1970). Yosemite National Park archives, Protection Division Riot Collection.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Briefing sheet, September 13, 1970. Yosemite National Park archives, Resource Management Records, Series 11, Subseries 7, Box 3.

In the month following the riot, the *Berkeley Tribe* announced those “going to the mountains to get away” that “You CAN’T get away!”⁶⁹⁵ Shortly thereafter, urban theorist Peter Marcuse noted the same interconnection between “the most blighted inner cities” and “the natural areas of the United States;” he also criticized the national park movement for creating a “socially acceptable way of fencing off...unpleasant urban problems.”⁶⁹⁶ Since their inception, national park boundaries cordoned off certain landscape features, sometimes seemingly at random. The measures taken by the Park Service to strengthen Yosemite’s boundaries, however, said as much—if not more—about surrounding areas than they did about the park itself. Police patrols of one-story tenements. “Random” searches targeting specific populations. Discriminatory residential policy. All these measures to protect Yosemite from “urban problems” actually heightened its similarities to the archetypal city of the sixties.

The events of the sixties (and very early seventies) cemented Yosemite Valley’s reputation as a city at three different scales. Locally, the sensory experience of the place—marijuana smoke, engine noise, lines of traffic—disappointed many of the park’s older visitors and its custodians. The influx of hippies added a new chapter to the story of Yosemite and the Bay Area. Although park officials blamed many of their problems on San Francisco, the city’s police department helped acclimate park rangers to modern law enforcement techniques; they also reinforced popular stereotypes of hippies, leaving Yosemite’s rangers paranoid of some major countercultural conspiracy. At the broadest level, the Stoneman riot resonated with national skepticism about America’s inner cities. The idea of Yosemite City had grown in both scale and severity, making Mark Daniels’

⁶⁹⁵ “YLF,” *Berkeley Tribe*, 14–21 August 1970.

⁶⁹⁶ Peter Marcuse, “Is the National Parks Movement Anti-Urban?” *Parks and Recreation* VI, no. 7 (July 1971) 17, 20.

fifty- five-year-old assertion of “municipal problems” seem quaint by comparison.

Census designations aside, Yosemite National Park—and Yosemite Valley, in particular—had become urban in nature.

Conclusion

Despite its violent aspects, the summer of 1970 also brought some positive urban change to the Valley floor in the form of a public transportation system. On July 10, less than a week after the infamous riot, the *New York Times* announced “the turning point in the people vs. cars battle”: Park Service officials banned all traffic from the eastern third of Yosemite Valley, instituting a 24-hour-a-day shuttle service in its place. George Hartzog, the Service’s director at the time, hailed the potential to “materially diminish congestion and pollutant effects of noise and exhaust emissions.”⁶⁹⁷ After a decade of the nastiest aspects of city life—drugs, crime, police brutality—the Valley’s residents and visitors experienced some of the benefits of metropolitan living.

From 1913 to 1970 automobiles drove both sources of Yosemite Valley’s urbanity: its increasingly modern built environment, and its flourishing connections to metropolitan California. It is easy for a modern observer to condemn these phenomena, but—if history is any indication—the Valley’s urbanization was not always a travesty. Even before the Park Service, Berkeley-ites like Mark Daniels and Stephen Mather saw the “village” plan as a potentially positive form of social organization; the massive crowds represented an opportunity to teach conservation. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Auto Club of Southern California fostered a different kind of urbanization by shrinking the metaphorical and physical distance between Los Angeles and the park. The new all-season roads into the Valley allowed Southern Californians to claim their share of California’s great natural treasure, redefining Yosemite as an extension of both the Bay

⁶⁹⁷ “Park Service Bans Cars From Section of Yosemite Valley,” *New York Times*, 10 July 1970.

Area *and* the greater Los Angeles area. The park buoyed its immediate neighbors, as well. For a quarter century, Merced funneled a steady stream of rail and auto traffic into the park, the result of a virtual monopoly on tourist transportation; two of the town's biggest business ventures, the Yosemite Lumber Company and the Yosemite Valley Railroad, also made a tidy profit logging the park's western boundary. Yosemite developed in tandem with many of California's biggest cities, both near and far.

By World War II, though, both aspects of the park's urbanity underwent seismic shifts due to fuel and rubber rationing. Yosemite Valley, normally buzzing with activity, fell relatively quiet—save for the shouts of Army men or the hushed conversations from the Naval Convalescent Hospital. The park's connections with other cities faltered, as well, since most Californians could not spare the fuel to reach Yosemite's gates.

Merced's business community, desperate for a lifeline, soon discovered that the Park Service's commitment to preservation had major ripple effects outside park boundaries. The demise of the Yosemite Valley Railroad signaled that automobiles would be the sole intermediaries between the park and its urban neighbors.

The park's urbanization soon became a source of anxiety for both Park Service personnel and the public at large. Cars and people flooded Yosemite after World War II, leading to worries about the future of the overcrowded Valley. Perhaps inspired by the nation's rapid suburbanization, the superintendent's office sought other parts of the park as pressure-release valves; however, Yosemite Valley could never truly be decentralized, as the Curry Company's future depended on a densely packed downtown. Even if this downtown could never be disbanded, an influx of hippies in the late 1960s proved that it could be destabilized. The National Park Service scrambled to impose order, using new

regulations, partnerships with other police departments, and its own newly transformed ranger corps to quell these young and supposedly unruly visitors. Worries about the future of the American city, prompted by the long, hot summers of the late sixties, spilled over into peoples' vacations. The idea of Yosemite City had broken the park's boundaries wide open, letting in the problems of the American metropolis and—more importantly—displaying the intimate ties between the nation's public lands and its less-than-savory historical narratives.

To define national parks as “America's best idea” misses a major part of their significance. It can be disappointing to acknowledge the traits of urban America—traffic, pollution, discrimination—in parks across the country; perhaps this is because we expect these meticulously managed landscapes to provide escape valves from an urban industrial society that seems to be careening off the rails. In reality, the unpleasant aspects of Yosemite's story (and others like it) attest to the natural world's role in broader historical narratives—and not just the inspiring ones. The enlightened and ever-improving quest to preserve wild nature is only one of many narratives at play in our nation's parks.

In addition to seeking new stories, we must also question the categories in play. The tension between nature and civilization has been drummed into us, and—even though we may not be able to define either term—we know them when we see them. To best understand “the long dialogue between the place we call city and the place we call country,” we must focus on the relational history of the terms.⁶⁹⁸ In the case of my work, this means following connections—some (quite literally) concrete, some less tangible—that have linked Yosemite to cities across California. The park's history thus holds the

⁶⁹⁸ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 54.

power to illuminate unlikely interchanges; far from being isolated, Yosemite is an integral part of the world outside its gates.

It is time to expand the ways in which we appreciate national parks. As Yosemite and other places like it burn summer after summer, it becomes clearer that park boundaries cannot protect against climate change. Dwindling appropriations and federal shutdowns serve as reminders that parks are inherently politicized; they are subject to the whims of a government headquartered 3,000 miles away. And yet they continue receive millions of visitors each year, single-handedly propping up rural economies and shaping travel corridors well beyond their boundaries.

The idea of parks as escapes from “real life” is incredibly appealing, and its power should not be underestimated. But in the coming years, it will only become harder to ignore the impacts of the outside world on national parks. This is precisely why the urban history of Yosemite is important: it serves as a reminder that certain habits of thought (i.e. the urban/nature binary) can blind us to important linkages. This relational history of Yosemite National Park and California’s cities provides a new way of seeing public lands in relation to their surroundings, and—on a broader scale—a new way of questioning the long-held cultural binary between wilderness and civilization (however one construes them).

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