

YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY

Spring Summer 2023

VOLUME 14 ISSUE 01



100

A Century of Conservation



YOSEMITE
CONSERVANCY

A Century of Conservation

A Century of Service



JOHN MUIR wrote enthusiastically about seeing Half Dome and the “radiant” Sierra crest from California’s flower-laden Central Valley for the first time in 1868. Today that clear vista is a rare sight, but I did see that view once on my birthday after a winter storm as we traveled to the Bay Area along Highway 99. Half Dome stood out like a beacon among the other peaks, and I knew this was a rare treat, never to be forgotten.

Yosemite has provided us all with special memories, and like a birthday, our centennial year at Yosemite Conservancy gives us an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come — and look to our journey ahead. We are thankful for the tremendous support from our donors that has enabled us to partner with the National Park Service in preserving Yosemite while also enhancing the park visitor experience. What began in 1923 as a campaign to raise \$75,000 to build the park museum has evolved into significant ongoing support of park programs, research, and restoration projects at Glacier Point, Yosemite and Bridalveil falls, and the Mariposa Grove.

In this expanded centennial issue, we share a bit of our history, including some iconic projects and popular programs. We’re proud to include personal essays from diverse perspectives, as well as tales of legendary Yosemite personalities, information about our often-misunderstood meadows, the challenges of vertical research, and bringing our bighorn sheep population back from the brink of extinction. And much more.

Celebrating this centennial milestone will entail more than a birthday cake. As the first nonprofit partner to a national park, Yosemite Conservancy’s model created a movement across the nation. There are now over 200 park partners in other national park areas that provided more than \$400 million in annual support in 2022. **As we look forward to our second century of service to Yosemite, you all can be proud of the legacy you have provided and the promise of supporting this amazing park in a new era. Thank you!**

Frank Dean

Frank Dean
PRESIDENT & CEO

COVER A moonbow glows beneath Yosemite Falls during a spring full moon.

PHOTOS: (COVER) © MIKE KLIMAS, (LEFT) © JOSHUA EARLE, (OPPOSITE PAGE) (100 YEARS) © COURTESY OF NPS, (MEADOW) © YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY/HEATHER VAN DER GRINTEN.

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100 YEARS *of the* Yosemite Conservancy

*Moments that
launched a movement*

BY PETER BARTELME

On a frigid fall day nearly a century ago, a group of people dressed in their Sunday finery stood under Yosemite Valley's towering black oaks to celebrate the construction of the Yosemite Museum.

Among them were Stephen Mather, the National Park Service's first director, and Ansel Hall, the first chief naturalist. As the crowd cheered, the two conservation pioneers stood beside a granite boulder that was about to be hoisted into place as the building's cornerstone — a moment that symbolized the launch of a movement.

This pivotal point was years in the making. Hall had toured museums and other far-flung places to gather ideas for the museum's design. Funding was secured from the Rockefeller family, specifically from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, which John D. Rockefeller had launched in 1918 in honor of his deceased wife. A year before the ceremony, in 1923, Hall had created a special bank account under the name "Yosemite Museum Association," effectively creating the National Park Service's first nonprofit partner.

During the next 100 years, the group's name would change as its mission and accomplishments grew: Yosemite Museum Association; Yosemite Natural History Association; Yosemite Association; Yosemite Fund, a fundraising offshoot; and finally, today's Yosemite Conservancy. Threaded through these decades has been a continuing dedication to the park and its protectors — with partnerships as the cornerstone of its success.

“That brisk morning changed the way people thought about how to more effectively steward public lands with private funds,” says Frank Dean, Yosemite Conservancy president. “The concept of partner organizations supporting our national parks took root in Yosemite.”

What began in Yosemite under those black oaks soon spread. Supporters created the Grand Canyon Association in 1932, the Yellowstone Association in 1933, and Southwest Monuments in 1938. These and more than 200 other nonprofit groups have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to national parks — donating more than \$400 million in 2022 alone to National Park Service projects and programs across the country.

Yosemite's nonprofit partner was the catalyst. Working with the National Park Service, the organization offered interpretive programs, trained naturalists, launched art and theater projects, and published books and the *Yosemite Nature Notes* periodical.

It also helped launch fundraising programs for notable projects, such as the reintroduction of bighorn sheep around Tioga Pass. And in 1988, the group's “Return to Light” fundraising campaign spawned the Yosemite Fund, a separate organization created to raise money for major park projects.

One early donor to the fund was Dave Dornsife, chairman of Herrick Corporation, a steel manufacturer. He and his wife, Dana, contributed funds and supplied the steel for bear-proof food lockers, a key part of the park's successful effort to wean bears from human food.

“After several encounters with bears stealing my food on backcountry hikes, I wanted to fix the problem. “We teamed up with the National Park Service and created a design that worked so well that we have donated hundreds of boxes,” Dornsife says. “Over 30 years, Dana and I are proud to have donated the steel to provide tangible





benefits to major projects like the bridges for trails at Tenaya Lake, Yosemite Falls, Mariposa Grove, and Bridalveil Fall.”

In 2010, the Yosemite Fund and Yosemite Association united to create today’s Yosemite Conservancy.

“The work supported by partner organizations had a snowball effect,” Dean says. “The prototype for bear-proof food lockers in Yosemite became the template for other parks. Wildlife managers from different parks share information to protect species, such as Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, monarch butterflies, and Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frogs. That was made possible with the advent of partner organizations and dedicated donors.”

During the past century in Yosemite, generous donors have contributed over \$152 million for more than 800 completed projects. This includes restoration of trails and habitat, wildlife protection, and education programs. Donors’ impacts can be seen at renovated overlooks, such as Tunnel View, Olmsted Point, and Glacier Point; the Lower Yosemite Fall Trail; Happy Isles Nature Center; the renovation of Parsons Memorial Lodge; the restored Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias; and more.

Park-loving donors range from philanthropists to children giving their birthday money. One teen hiked the John Muir Trail as a fundraiser. A sixth-grade teacher donates annually and brings her class to the park to energize the next generation of conservationists. The Pitzer Family Foundation gave \$1 million this year for improvements to the Mist Trail, which snakes up the Merced River to Vernal Fall and is one of the most popular trails in the entire National Park System.

And then there’s Mary Watt, the longest-running monthly donor, contributing every month for 37 years, who began volunteering for the organization in 1986. A self-proclaimed “nature girl” drawn to Yosemite’s natural history, Watt looks to the Conservancy’s efforts to save peregrine falcons for inspiration.

“When only two pairs of peregrine falcons existed in California, I thought I’d never see one in the wild,” she says. “They’re flourishing today in Yosemite and elsewhere. It’s proof that when there’s enough people that care, we can bring back something from the brink, make great change, and light a spark in humans to do remarkable things.”

Mary Watt’s spirit of giving. The power of partnerships. A better park. Moments such as these during the past 100 years capture all this potential, much like the cheering crowd under the tall oaks watching a crew move a granite cornerstone into place. ■

YOSEMITE MUSEUM circa 1930, approximately four years after it opened to the public. PHOTOS: © COURTESY OF NPS.



YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY

A Century of Conservation

YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY'S sustained dedication to supporting Yosemite National Park has played a vital role in protecting the natural and cultural resources of the park for the past 100 years. From operating museums and visitor centers to funding scientific research and restoration projects, Yosemite Conservancy has had a significant impact on the park and the millions of visitors who come to experience its beauty and wonder. As Yosemite Conservancy celebrates its centennial, it is worth reflecting on some key moments in our shared history.

TIMELINE RESEARCHED BY *Josh Byrd*

1916

The National Park Service (NPS) is established with Stephen Mather as the first director.



1923

The Yosemite Museum Association is formed.



1924

The Association expands its purpose and changes its name to the Yosemite Natural History Association.



1925

Yosemite Nature Notes is published monthly by the Association in booklet form.

The Yosemite Field School of Natural History is formed with the Association's support.



1925

The Glacier Point lookout and geology hut completed with part of the funds raised for the museum.

1930

The Junior Nature School, today known as Junior Rangers, is created and funded by the Association.



1950s

The Association reprints and publishes new books about Yosemite's natural and cultural history.

1971

The Yosemite Field Seminar program, now known as Yosemite Outdoor Adventures, is created at the request of NPS.



1974

Ostrander Ski Hut operations are taken over by the Association.

PHOTOS: (1916) © NATIONAL PARK SERVICE HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION/PHOTOGRAPHER STONE. (1923 & 1925) © COURTESY OF NPS. (1930) © YOSEMITE RESEARCH LIBRARY. (1930) © LOREM IPSUM. (1974) © HUGH SAKOLS.

1976 The Association holds its first annual members' meeting.

1981 The Association and partners renovate the Pohono Indian Studio into the Art Activity Center.

1985 Visitor information volunteers begin assisting NPS in the park. The Association changes its name to Yosemite Association.

1988 At the request of NPS, The Yosemite Fund becomes a separate entity and relocates to San Francisco.

1992 Parsons Memorial Lodge Summer Series begins with assistance from Association volunteers.



1993 Yosemite license plates are introduced.

1995 The Association begins operating the Wilderness Center in Yosemite Valley.



1999 The Association creates Keep Bears Wild merchandise to raise money for the Yosemite Wild Bear Project. It also rents required bear-proof canisters to the public for use in the backcountry.

2005 Leave No Trace outdoor ethics are promoted in the Wilderness Center and taught to field leaders by the Association's seminar program; restoration of Yosemite Falls completed.



2010 Yosemite Association and Yosemite Fund form a reunified organization.

2018 Opening of the restored Mariposa Grove.




2020 30 years funding songbird research.

2020 35 years of the Yosemite Conservancy Volunteer Program.



2022 40th anniversary of art programs.


2023 Restored Bridalveil Fall viewing areas and new Welcome Center open.

An aerial photograph of a lush green meadow in a valley, surrounded by dense evergreen forests. A winding stream flows through the meadow, creating a series of small pools and rapids. The scene is captured from a high angle, showing the intricate patterns of the forest and the meadow's layout.

WHAT IS A *Meadow?*

Our lead naturalist shares insights on the rich biodiversity of meadows in Yosemite

BY CORY GOEHRING



Yosemite has almost 3,000 meadows, clustered in a few large and connected habitat hot spots, that range in elevation from 3,300 feet to more than 12,000 feet.

LYELL FORK gently meanders through an alpine meadow in Yosemite's high country.

PHOTO: © JACKSON ABHAU.

What is a meadow? This question frequently arises during my discussions in Yosemite National Park. I set aside a portion of every program to emphasize the importance of meadows, because in my view, meadows are the most crucial component of Yosemite. While most visitors first come and visit Yosemite for the waterfalls and towering cliffs, meadows often go unnoticed, as people may not understand their beauty or know how significant they are to the park's ecosystems.

Scientists have come to a consensus that meadows are ecosystems composed of one or more herbaceous plant communities that support plants using surface water and/or shallow groundwater, with woody vegetation being present but not dominant. Perhaps not the most exciting definition, but the story of meadows comes alive in what they offer to Yosemite.

Yosemite has almost 3,000 meadows, clustered in a few large and connected habitat hot spots, that range in elevation from 3,300 feet to more than 12,000 feet. Meadows are an important ecosystem in Yosemite National Park, despite only making up 3% of the park's total area. They contain 50% of Yosemite's biodiversity, and half of all the plant and animal species in Yosemite depend on meadows for their survival. Meadows function like sponges, absorbing water and filtering pollutants, benefiting both wildlife and humans.

To many visitors, meadows also serve as gathering spots in Yosemite. Many of the park's beloved scenic vistas of Half Dome and Yosemite Falls are found by meandering through meadows. Boardwalks have been erected to protect the fragile meadow ecosystem, allowing people to move freely into the open and observe Yosemite's majestic landscapes. People often ask, "Where is the best view of Half Dome, Yosemite Falls, or El Capitan?" and I will often mention a meadow that will provide them with a path and a wide-open vista of some of the most iconic sites in all the national parks.

Meadows have served Yosemite in many ways. Historically, the meadows of Yosemite had various uses, including supporting human populations. The seven traditionally associated Tribes of Yosemite rely heavily on meadows, using plants from these ecosystems as a vital source of sustenance and using grasses to weave baskets. Tribes help preserve these meadows by employing regular burning practices, which help maintain the ecosystem's health and productivity. After forcibly removing the Native population, Euro-American settlers grew hay and grazed cattle in the meadows to support the growing population of visitors traveling long distances to Yosemite year after year.

Unfortunately, over time, these practices began to have a significant impact on the meadows' fragile ecosystem. Heavy grazing caused the degradation of native plant communities, and the construction of roads through the meadows dramatically changed the hydrology. Fortunately, we now understand these impacts, and with donor support and the help of Yosemite Conservancy, the National Park Service is restoring meadows today.

By 1923, most meadows were cleared of livestock, and Yosemite Conservancy was born as the Yosemite Museum Association. Since its inception as a national park, Yosemite has undergone a remarkable transformation. Gone are the days of bear-feeding shows, traveling zoos, and nightly firefall events in which glowing embers cascaded off the cliff's edge. Today, campgrounds are localized and campsites are reserved, in contrast to the old ways of pitching tents wherever one wished. We strive



SIERRA GENTIAN blooms in the dense grasses of an alpine meadow. Meadows are essential sponges, holding onto water and protecting against surface runoff.

PHOTO: © YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY/
HEATHER VAN DER GRINTEN.



to support the restoration of Yosemite and make amends for past wrongs to safeguard Yosemite for future generations.

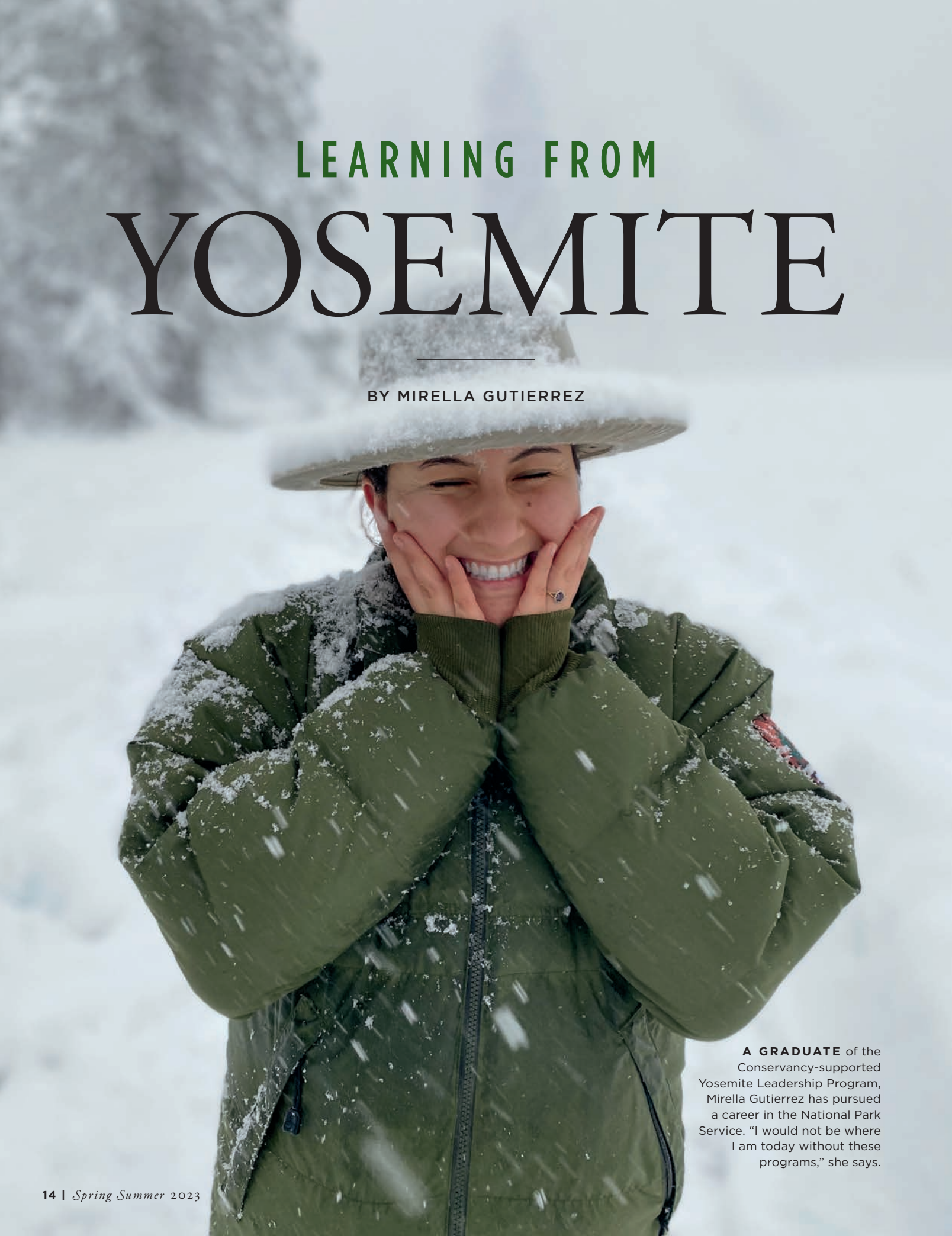
Today, through the work of the National Park Service and funding from Yosemite Conservancy donors, we have a clear path forward — a path that leads us to support the park in diverse ways. The landmark addition of Ackerson Meadow was donated to the park through a cooperative effort among The Trust for Public Land, Yosemite Conservancy, and the National Park Service.

“Now, as the meadow restoration proceeds, it will end up being a showcase restoration project,” says Pete Van Kuran, a donor who facilitated the acquisition of Ackerson Meadow. From the restoration of Ackerson Meadow to boardwalks through sensitive areas, from restoring habitats to reintroducing threatened or locally extinct species, from supporting Tribal tending of black oaks to offering young people opportunities to experience Yosemite for the first

time, the generosity of Yosemite Conservancy donors plays a vital role in helping fund the very paths we gather on today.

When I reflect on Yosemite Conservancy and its 100-year history, it feels like a meadow. It is a place where we can gather to safeguard and nurture something that is dear to us, a place where we can put our collective energy to ensure the next generation has a place to gather and be in awe of the natural world.

As we celebrate Yosemite Conservancy’s centennial, I see parallels with a meadow’s regeneration after being damaged. Conserving Yosemite requires tireless effort and collective action over many years, much as a meadow gradually heals itself. Let us cherish Yosemite’s meadows and support their restoration, especially as we commemorate the Conservancy’s century-long commitment to preserving this national treasure. ■

A woman wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a green quilted winter jacket is smiling joyfully in a snowy environment. She has her hands up to her cheeks. Snow is falling around her, creating a soft, white atmosphere. The background is a blurred, snowy landscape.

LEARNING FROM YOSEMITE

BY MIRELLA GUTIERREZ

A GRADUATE of the Conservancy-supported Yosemite Leadership Program, Mirella Gutierrez has pursued a career in the National Park Service. "I would not be where I am today without these programs," she says.

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK: a name synonymous with wonder, inspiration, and power. A name that conjures up images of marvelous natural wonders. A name that has been a source of inspiration for all who visit and has the power to draw many to see its beauty.

Yosemite has inspired a community of stewards that reaches far and wide. I am a product of the Yosemite Leadership Program (YLP) 2014 cohort, a donor-funded program that planted a seed of empowerment and commitment to protecting a place — not for myself, but for generations I will never have the opportunity to meet.

YLP showed me I belonged in these outdoor spaces and could make a difference. My National Park Service career began when I became a student ranger for Yosemite while still at University of California, Merced, through YLP.

Many of us working in Yosemite have a "spark moment" that ignites our passion for the work we do. Mine happened while I was leading a fourth-grade field trip in Yosemite Valley as part of my work as a student ranger. I will never forget the look of wonder and excitement the students had while we led them on an educational walk around Yosemite Valley. I got to relive the moment I fell in love with Yosemite as their eyes lit up, just as mine had. As the other rangers and I were saying our goodbyes, the kids began loading onto the buses. Among all the shouts of, "Thank you, ranger," "Bye, ranger," and "We'll miss you," was a young voice that said, "Bye, hero."

Thanks to that spark, I went on to work with middle-school students with the Udall Foundation's Parks in Focus Program (another wonderful program supported by Yosemite Conservancy donors) as the Yosemite trip leader from 2017–2018.

My dream is to connect future stewards to these incredible ecosystems. Yosemite is not just a place of waterfalls and sequoias; it is a culmination of human stories and hands that have all touched it and want to be part of its future. I have spent the past few years in the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center focusing efforts to better connect the

Spanish-speaking community to Yosemite. Now almost 10 years since the start of my journey — and after working with students, visitors, and bears — I find myself back in the Yosemite Education Office working directly with students and the program that gave me everything I love so dearly.

YOSEMITE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM: a name synonymous with wonder, inspiration, and power. A name that conjures up the image of students exploring and learning about the wonders of Yosemite, as they become the next source of inspiration for future stewardship projects and efforts — who have the power to create lasting change. ■



YOSEMITE RANGER Mirella Gutierrez with a group of fourth graders from Merced County on a field trip with the Every Kid Outdoors program. PHOTOS: © COURTESY OF MIRELLA GUTIERREZ.

Florence Hutchings

AT HOME IN YOSEMITE

BY LAUREN HAUPTMAN

Florence Hutchings, also known as Flo, Floy, and Flora, was known for exuberantly welcoming visitors to Yosemite National Park wearing “knee-high boots, trousers, a flowing cape, and a wide-brimmed hat,” according to *Pioneers in Petticoats*.

The first non-Indian child born in Yosemite Valley in 1864, Flo was the daughter of well-known entrepreneur James Mason Hutchings and his wife, artist Elvira Sproat. Flo often lamented the fact that she had not been born a boy, as she loved playing with lizards, hiking, camping, riding horses, and endlessly exploring the Valley and mountains that were her home.

The Hutchings family lived in a log cabin near Yosemite Falls. Flo and her siblings regularly visited the nearby cabin of John Muir, who worked for her father. As a teenager, Flo was deeply interested in religion, and she volunteered as a caretaker of the then-new Yosemite Valley Chapel. She cleaned and decorated and rang the bell to announce services.

Her contributions there were later recognized by a generous donor, who gave an organ to the chapel in Florence’s memory.

James Hutchings, a publisher, used his *Hutchings’ California Magazine* to draw tourists to the Yosemite area, and he purchased a hotel in the Valley shortly before the Yosemite Grant Act established Yosemite Valley as a state park. The family moved to San Francisco a decade later, but Flo was able to spend summers hiking and riding her horse in her beloved Yosemite, before returning full time when she was 16 and James was appointed guardian of the park.

Tragically, Flo died at age 17 in a mysterious 1881 rockfall. She is buried beside her father in the Yosemite Cemetery, and her spirit lives on in the Cathedral Range’s Mt. Florence, a remote and isolated peak in the Yosemite backcountry. The 10th highest peak in the park, it is one of very few named for women. ■

WANT TO LEARN
MORE ABOUT
YOSEMITE’S
DIVERSE HISTORY?

Learn more about the bold daughter of a famous father in *Call Me Floy*, a novel for ages 8 to 12. Available at shop.yosemite.org



Purchase Here

PHOTO: © COURTESY OF NPS.





VERTICAL RESEARCH

SCALING THE EL CAPITAN ECOSYSTEM

BY MEGAN ORPWOOD-RUSSELL

EL CAPITAN is one of the most iconic cliffs in the world, synonymous with human feats of daring and strength. Yosemite's cliffs might not seem particularly hospitable, but the vertical ecosystem supports plenty of life: lichens, tree frogs, peregrine falcons, bats, and even mice. In the spring, as snowmelt trickles down the rockface of El Capitan, it provides water to a diversity of plant life that find their homes on ledges and in nooks and crevices. In turn, they are pollinated by bees and other insects.

YOSEMITE BIOLOGISTS Sean Smith and Shannon Joslin scale sheer rock faces to locate a bat roost identified by a recreational climber. PHOTO: © MIYA TSUDOME.



Conditions on El Capitan can be harsh: Bitterly cold winters give way to sweltering summers — the granite cliff is too hot to climb safely in late summer — which creates a challenging environment for life to exist. Despite the adversity, though, many species do thrive, which creates an exciting problem for researchers: How can they safely study this unique ecosystem?

BIG WALL RESEARCH

At a minimum, El Capitan field technicians must be skilled rock climbers. Some studies are multiday and require overnight camping on the wall to collect data.

“Safety is one of my biggest concerns,” says Shannon Joslin, Yosemite’s big wall bat program manager. “It’s something I’m constantly thinking about, so I require all the technicians I hire to complete rope safety courses. We need to make sure all our time spent on the wall is well thought out and as streamlined as possible.”

Sean Smith, a biological science field technician who works for Joslin, also works on peregrine falcon monitoring and management. This ensures a natural crossover among data collection that minimizes team time on El Capitan.

“What is challenging about big wall research?” Smith asks. “We are not going anywhere fast, and we’re limited to where ropes are fixed and where crack systems are. If we see bat signs we want to follow up on, sometimes we can’t physically get to them and must arrange a second excursion to reach that data.”

BATS UNDER THREAT

There are 17 species of bat in Yosemite, with 15 of those roosting on rock crevices — including on El Capitan. Conservancy donor-supported research led by Joslin aims to improve knowledge of bat distribution. It also will help us understand the spread and severity of white-nose syndrome (WNS), a disease decimating bat populations throughout North America. Given the devastating impacts of WNS on bats, Joslin says: “It’s not a matter of *if* it comes to Yosemite; it’s a matter of *when*. We are trying to understand fundamental aspects of basic ecology on cliffs before we see the effects of white-nose syndrome.”

The sheer scale of Yosemite, combined with the relatively furtive roosts of bats, is a challenge for a small team to survey. Smith regularly attends “Climbers’

“A few years ago, I lived in a tropical area and saw bats every day! I had a unique opportunity to safely observe them up close in the wild; they are very methodical animals. Bats need to be protected, and that’s why I support the Conservancy and this essential research.”

Cornelia Haag-Molkenteller
YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY DONOR

Coffee” to engage the climbing community in essential conversations about citizen science. He speaks with climbers about the importance of reporting bat roosts and works to demystify negative stigmas surrounding bats by educating people about their importance in our ecosystems. This season, Smith spoke with climbers about the importance of protecting peregrines and climbing closures associated with their nesting sites. Outreach to the public is critical for peregrine protection and stewardship. And it isn’t just fauna that is discussed; climbers are uniquely positioned to inform researchers about flora they have identified along their routes.

MAGNIFICENT MONKEYFLOWERS

Big walls are frontiers of scientific discovery, and El Capitan provides an unparalleled opportunity to document plant diversity, adaptation, and reproduction in this extreme environment for the first time. While National Park Service (NPS) climbing rangers have supported both bat and bird research projects, it is only in recent years that their fieldwork has pivoted to include botany.

Thanks to a partnership among NPS, Tulane University, and University of California, Merced — with support from Yosemite Conservancy donors — the first survey of plant biodiversity on El Capitan was undertaken



SHANNON JOSLIN (top) prepares equipment to identify where bats are roosting in vertical ecosystems. (bottom left) A big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*) nests in a rock crevice. (bottom right) A flash of sunshine-yellow monkeyflower brightens up the granite.

PHOTOS: (TOP) © MIYA TSUDOME. (BOTTOM LEFT) © SEAN SMITH. (BOTTOM RIGHT) © FRED TURNER.

in 2022, with a particular focus on monkeyflowers. The researchers collected seeds from six populations in Yosemite to study seed dispersal and reproduction patterns across cliff and non-cliff populations to understand not only which species are present, but also whether the elevation of their extreme topography affects their adaptation.

Initially identified on El Capitan by park restoration ecologist Erin Dickman, monkeyflower in the Sierra is abundant and remarkably robust, given where it is found.

“Monkeyflowers offer endless answers to whatever ecological and evolutionary questions we want to throw at them,” lead researcher Jason Sexton says. “They occur in myriad environments in myriad forms and, thus, teach us so much about how life adapts.”

Researcher Diana Tataru, a keen climber herself, has found some fascinating adaptations of the species in Yosemite.

“I found three different species of monkeyflower on El Capitan,” she says. “It looks like some of them might be hybridizing, meaning some of the plants we’re seeing have traits from two different species.”



IN THE EARLY 1990S, Conservancy donors helped fund efforts to restore the park’s falcon population. In 2009, biologist Jeff Maurer launched a program to protect peregrines through targeted closures of climbing areas.

PHOTO: © COURTESY OF NPS.

This hybridization indicates a possible mechanism for gene flow down the vertical ecosystem, which helps form a more detailed picture of how flora has adapted to survive in this unlikely environment.

“Whenever you observe organisms and populations persisting in such an intense and harsh environment, it’s not an accident,” Tataru says. “They have adapted to be there.”

THE RETURN OF PEREGRINES

Before the mid-20th century, there were more than 3,800 adult peregrine pairs in the United States. That number started to plummet in the 1950s; by 1974, only 324 pairs remained, with zero nesting pairs in Yosemite. The culprit? The pesticide dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT). Insects ingested DDT; small birds ingested insects; and falcons ingested small birds, swallowing a concentrated toxin that made eggshells so dangerously fragile that adult peregrines would accidentally crush their eggs.

Thanks to a nationwide ban on DDT and concerted rehabilitation efforts, peregrines have made a comeback. A 2006 survey estimated that populations in the U.S. had rebounded to at least 3,000 pairs. In Yosemite, most peregrine work is now done long-distance using optics and vantage points. For decades, climbers and wildlife managers have worked together to help peregrines thrive on Yosemite’s walls.

Thanks to these ongoing efforts — and over 30 years of donor support — visitors have the chance to see a success story in action: a falcon saved from extinction, gliding and diving above the Valley.

“I am privileged to support the comeback of the majestic peregrine falcon in Yosemite National Park,” Conservancy donor Barbara Coulter says. “It is especially heartening that the temporary closing of climbing routes near their nests has been a special cooperative effort for their benefit that could be an example for other conservation issues.”

None of this work could be undertaken without a strong community of both climbers and researchers. Teams naturally collect data for multiple projects and studies while they are scaling El Capitan.

“Throughout the whole summer, patrols are sending pictures to me,” Tataru says. “It’s very much a community effort. People are always so floored to know there’s life up there. It’s cool to share that with them.” ■

STORIES FROM THE

Volunteer Campground

BY RODGER LOPEZ

My love affair with Yosemite began with my first visit in spring 1994. My family and I were driving through and stopped for lunch in the Curry Village parking lot in the shadow of Half Dome. I knew at that moment that I had to come back for a longer visit. Since then, I have only missed one year of visiting the park.

In summer 2013, I met a volunteer at Parsons Lodge. We spoke for nearly an hour. He would not let me leave until I promised to apply for the volunteer program the next year. I did.

September was the only month that fit my schedule, and I was accepted as a visitor information assistant (VIA). During my phone interview, I was asked about my volunteer experience. When I said most of my volunteering was cooking for large groups, I was asked if I would be interested in an assistant cook/host position, cooking for a group of people who took a week of their hard-earned vacation to work in beautiful Yosemite.

When September rolled around, I found myself moving into camp as a VIA surrounded by strangers. I wondered if I would fit in to this close-knit group. They were all so warm and welcoming, I felt at home there. Home. When visitors asked where I was from, I told them Site 65, Lower Pines Campground. My time that week was



RODGER proudly displays his catch, a Brook Trout caught in Ireland Lake on a recent backpacking trip.

PHOTOS: (TOP TO BOTTOM) © ERIC BALL. © RANDY MOLLER.

so rewarding, I knew I wanted to come back as a cook/host in the future.

Working seven of the past nine years in that program has allowed me to camp in some of the most special spots in the park and meet the most amazing people from around the globe.

We volunteer to “give back to the park” by helping visitors enjoy Yosemite by sharing our love and knowledge of our summer home. That’s what brought us to the program. The friendship brings us back year after year. ■



ICONIC PROJECTS:

Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep

BY YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY STAFF

A PEACEFUL moment of an ewe and lamb resting together, which belong to the source population for the Cathedral reintroduction.

PHOTO: © STEVE BUMGARDNER.

“For more than 30 years, Yosemite Conservancy donors have played a significant role in restoring Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep to the park.”

Sarah Stock
YOSEMITE WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

Bighorn sheep roam the rocky crest of the Sierra Nevada. These high-altitude herds graze green patches of vegetation in steep, secluded environments where many of us will never tread. The return of this wilderness icon to Yosemite National Park has been made possible through decades of collaboration.

“The biggest lessons from the bighorn sheep project is that endangered species projects take time, and growing a small population requires taking risks,” says Yosemite wildlife biologist Sarah Stock, who will lead a Bighorn Sheep Backpack with Yosemite Conservancy’s Outdoor Adventures in August. “For more than 30 years, Yosemite Conservancy donors have played a significant role in restoring Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep to the park.”

Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep are a distinct subspecies of bighorns, who have lived in the Sierra Nevada for approximately 600,000 years. In the second half of the 19th century, the introduction of domestic sheep spread pneumonia. Herds of bighorns disappeared from Yosemite and much of the Sierra by the 1880s, with only three surviving in the 1970s — almost a century later — when recovery efforts began to bring them back.

In the 1980s, plans came together for these iconic animals to return to the northern reaches of their historic range. Thanks to

donor support, The Yosemite Fund purchased a domestic sheep allotment — land designated and managed for livestock grazing. This enabled the reintroduction of 27 bighorns to Lee Vining Canyon in 1986. The Fund also financed biologists Les Chow and Peggy Moore to monitor the bighorn sheep. The 27 split into what are now referred to as the Mt. Warren and Mt. Gibbs herds, which have become established along the eastern crest.

“Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep are tough animals, but they are vulnerable to malnutrition, disease, avalanche accidents, predation, and genetic inbreeding,” Stock says. “A large population can ride out these threats, but a small population needs careful tracking of survivorship and reproduction, and the willingness to intervene by augmenting with individuals from source herds.”

The translocations of sheep over the years were made possible through collaborations among Yosemite National Park, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Yosemite Conservancy.

In 1999, Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep were listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. The National Park Service and its partners have closely monitored and augmented bighorn sheep populations in Yosemite, as needed, in accordance with the Recovery Plan. The plan outlines goals based on population and distribution over four recovery units, with herds in Yosemite as part of the northern unit.

In 2015, 13 bighorn sheep were released into the Cathedral Range, forming a new herd in Yosemite’s

Wilderness. Balancing years where there are abundant lambs and population rebounds are years with high losses from mountain lion predation or large snowfalls that result in population declines.

“When I wrote that petition for federal endangered status, we had barely over 100 sheep left in the Sierra,” notes John Wehausen, founder of the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation. “Now, under our worst conditions, the total population is about 500. Compared to where we’ve been, it’s glorious.”

Wehausen, an integral part of the recovery efforts, has spent nearly 50 years researching bighorns and mapping everything from their population distribution to genome. Even after all this time, he still relishes every opportunity to spot another sheep.

“I’ve looked at thousands of them over the years,” he says. “It’s always a delight to find them and see them. Just viewing bighorn sheep is a really special thing.”

Yosemite Conservancy donors have provided nearly \$1 million to Sierra Nevada bighorn research and recovery efforts. This funding enabled important actions to be taken and research to be accomplished. While the overall population has stabilized, larger herds are found in the central and southern recovery units. With the record-breaking snow of the 2022–2023 winter season, Yosemite’s herds may be set back once again.

“Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep are lucky, because they have caring and hardworking people who are willing to intervene on their behalf and who will never give up,” Stock says. ■



Experience Yosemite on an Outdoor or Custom Adventure

Join us to backpack, bird-watch, hike, stargaze, and more.

- Half, full, and multiday options
- Always led by experienced naturalist guides
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Learn more at yosemite.org/adventures



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George Meléndez Wright

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT REFORMER

BY LAUREN HAUPTMAN

A nature and wildlife enthusiast from an early age, San Francisco native George Meléndez Wright often explored Yosemite's backcountry while in college at University of California, Berkeley.

Wright became an assistant park naturalist in Yosemite National Park in 1927. It was the beginning of a career that would profoundly affect wildlife and natural resource management throughout the United States. He wrote articles for *Yosemite Nature Notes*, was a teacher of field classes in the park, and helped develop the Yosemite Museum.

During his first years working in the park, Wright grew concerned about the negative impact of humans on wildlife. With no staff devoted to the issue, he volunteered to conduct a survey of wildlife and plant conditions in the national parks using money he had inherited from his father. Spending more than half of his inheritance, Wright funded the entire project himself for three years, until the National Park Service (NPS) finally designated a wildlife budget.

While conducting his surveys, Wright witnessed terrible treatment and killing of wildlife in parks across the country. He documented everything he saw, soon calling for a change in natural resource management policies, as well as a formal wildlife division at NPS.

When NPS Director Horace Albright established the Wildlife Division of NPS in 1933, he named Wright as its first chief. Wright led the division to prominence, and in 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed him to head the National Resources Board. Wright spent the next two years traveling to and researching areas where new national parks could be established.

Sadly, Wright was killed in a 1936 car accident at age 31. But his contributions to institutional reform in NPS and to wildlife conservation and resource management nationwide still live every day in the parks he loved so much. There are mountains named for him in Denali National Park & Preserve and Big Bend National Park. ■

ALLAN BROWN

A Legacy of Giving

ALLAN AND MARILYN BROWN
attend the groundbreaking of the
restoration of Mariposa Grove.

PHOTO: © NANCY ROBBINS.

Allan Brown was 10 years old when he first saw Yosemite. He recalls driving in from Groveland with his family, waiting patiently for traffic coming out of the park; the road then was one-way. Eventually, he and his family reached the park, and he was awestruck.

“Of course, I was very impressed by the waterfalls,” he says. “But the walls of granite were so imposing and monolithic that it felt as though they were speaking to me in a new and different language.”

His father told him the landscape had been formed by glaciation, and he was astonished to think of the scale and weight of the water that had shaped Yosemite’s iconic granite. “It’s a landscape that shrinks you down to size!” he laughs.

In 2004, after supporting the Conservancy for many years, Allan and his wife, Marilyn, joined the Yosemite Conservancy Council and shared fond memories of touring the park during semi-annual meetings. They even celebrated their honeymoon at The Ahwahnee.

“We were together for 48 years,” Allan says. “On that trip, we walked around the park going wherever we wished. We could follow our hearts and enjoy the trails and flora, stopping to talk about what we had seen along the way.”

Allan and Marilyn were co-chairs for the Campaign for Mariposa Grove 2012–2017, and they were instrumental in the protection and preservation of the grove. With significant fundraising experience from their time as board members at other environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club Foundation and the Peninsula Open Space Trust, they rallied support for the restoration and generously donated over \$500,000 themselves. “We wanted people to see a different Yosemite,” Allan says.

“This is the very grove that encouraged John Muir to write to President Lincoln asking him to preserve the park.”

Allan is now in his 90s, and his gifts have made a positive impact all over Yosemite. You’ll see evidence of support in restored habitat, at Bridalveil Fall, and of course, in a deep-rooted legacy at Mariposa Grove. After a lifetime exploring Yosemite with her husband, Marilyn died in 2022. While Allan doesn’t get to the park as often as he used to, he is passionate about his support: “Yosemite Conservancy is a wonderful organization. I feel strongly about sustaining the park for generations yet to come.” ■



BOARDWALK beside Fallen Monarch, looking into the lower part of Mariposa Grove. PHOTO: © YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY/JOSH HELLING.

Celebrate our Centennial

SHOW YOUR Yosemite Conservancy pride with our centennial-branded merchandise. A century of conservation deserves some fanfare.

All purchases support the park and help share the joy of this important milestone.

Shop now at
shop.yosemite.org



THE LEGACY OF CHIURA OBATA

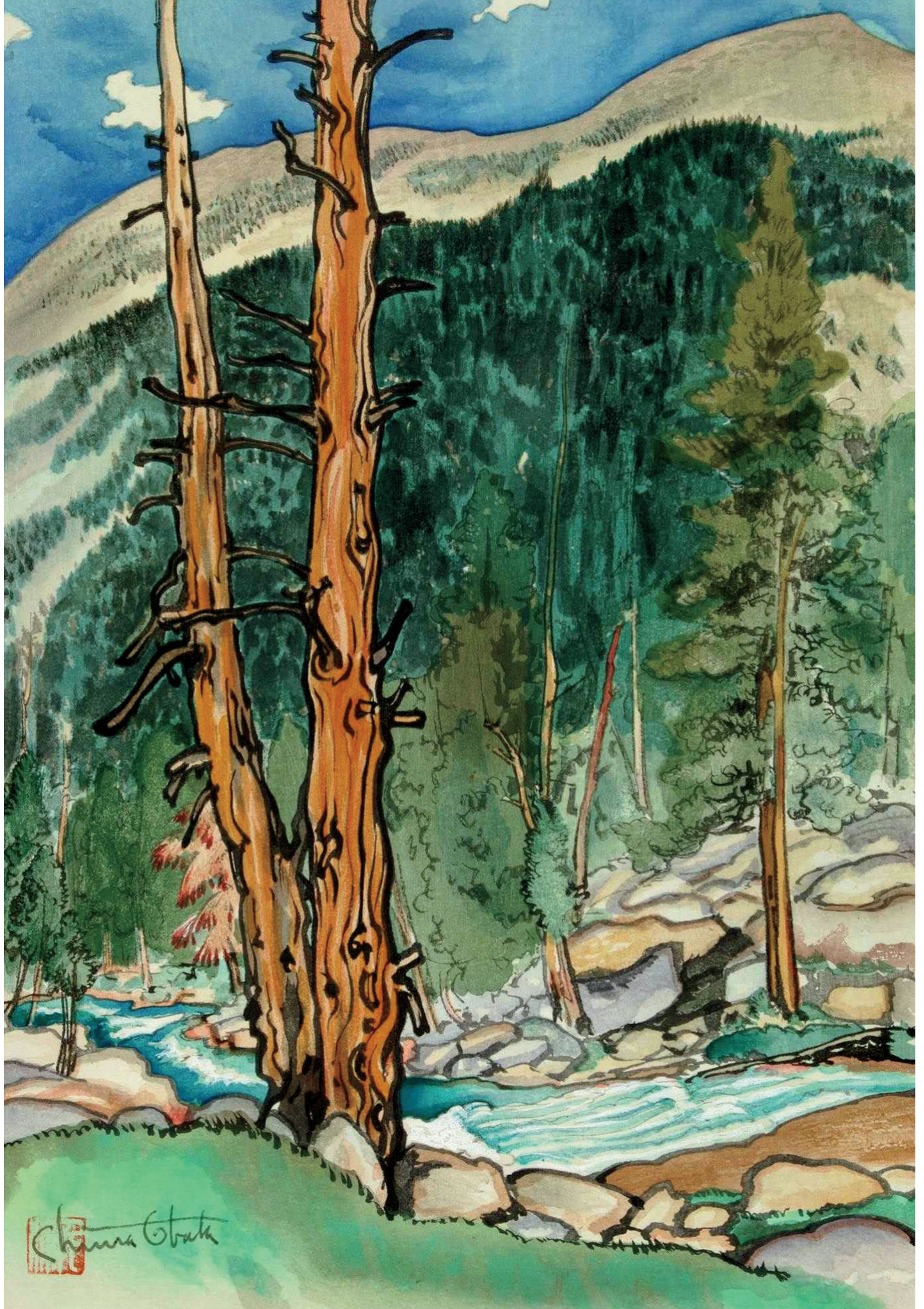
BY KIMIKO MARTINEZ

It was 1927 in Yosemite.

Ansel Adams was in the limelight for a stunning, almost-surreal photograph of Half Dome. Nearly half a million visitors were rushing into the park, thanks to the recent completion of Highway 140. And a middle-aged Japanese artist was quietly navigating the Yosemite wilderness, appreciating, documenting, and drawing the epic beauty around him.

Chiura Obata spent six weeks during his first trip to the park away from the crowds in Yosemite Valley, mostly in the High Sierra. He described the experience as “the greatest harvest for my whole life and future in painting.” He completed 100 drawings in pencil, watercolor, and sumi ink, more than 30 of which he later translated into color woodcuts. His works now reside in the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.; the





“Obata’s legacy reminds us that time spent in ‘Dai-Shizen’ or ‘Great Nature’ has the power to help heal and sustain us physically and emotionally and grow in love and appreciation for ourselves, our neighbors, and this planet.

April Megumi Kunieda
INTERPRETIVE RANGER,
YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK



WOODBLOCK PRINTS, ink on paper of “Clouds, Upper Lyell Trail, Along Lyell Fork”(previous page), “Upper Lyell Fork Near Lyell Glacier” (left), and “El Capitan” (above) by Chiura Obata.

ALL PAINTINGS: © COURTESY OF YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK.
(PREVIOUS PAGE) © YOSE 109531. (LEFT) © YOSE 109533.
(ABOVE) © YOSE 109528.




Scan to
see more
of Chiura
Obata's art

Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; and the de Young Museum in San Francisco, among others.

“Obata’s legacy reminds us that time spent in ‘Dai-Shizen’ or ‘Great Nature’ has the power to help heal and sustain us physically and emotionally and grow in love and appreciation for ourselves, our neighbors, and this planet,” says April Megumi Kunieda, an interpretive ranger with the National Park Service and organizer of Yosemite’s donor-funded Obata Art Weekend. “I think he rivals John Muir in his writing; in the way he talks about Great Nature — how essential it is to our health and well-being, how central it is in making good art ... and when you look closer and build a deeper, more substantial relationship with Great Nature, it not only benefits you, but also the places you’re in. It’s a reciprocal relationship.”

Obata’s traditionally Japanese artistic style sets him apart from other artists who’ve captured the beauty of Yosemite. And while he did make prints of El Capitan and Half Dome, the bulk of his work captures different aspects of the park and atypical moments of beauty and the power of nature.

“He painted landslides and the dead of winter with white all over,” says ShiPu Wang, the Coats Endowed Chair in the Arts and professor of art history at the University of California, Merced. “He understood what nature was all about.”

Obata’s reverence for nature shaped his art, and it also



OBATA ART WEEKEND

Aug. 25-27 in Yosemite Valley • **FREE EVENT**

Celebrate Chiura Obata's art, impact, and connection to Yosemite. In line with Obata's philosophy, this event strives to highlight how both art and nature can help sustain us physically and emotionally — and grow in understanding and appreciation for ourselves, our neighbors, and natural spaces. The event includes guest speakers, artist workshops, demos, and other programs.



Scan to
Learn More

PHOTO: © COURTESY OF NPS.

“Someone like Obata can exemplify how a public space, a shared environment, can be so beneficial.”

ShiPu Wang

PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY, UC MERCED

shaped his experience as an immigrant. Years before he was sent to an incarceration camp for Japanese Americans during World War II, navigating “Great Nature” in the United States helped to shape his identity as a naturalized American.

“It’s important to highlight Obata’s love for Great Nature, but also his love for American landmarks,” Wang says. “It’s a way for an immigrant to appreciate the grandeur of a host country they eventually call home. It’s also a way for artists to stake a claim — a statement that ‘I live here as well. I’m appreciating the beauty of this place and sharing it through my art.’”

That feeling of belonging — and appreciation — is one Kunieda wants to foster with the Obata Art Weekend. Now in its third year, the event has grown to include guest speakers, artist workshops, demonstrations, and other programs. Beyond educating visitors and attendees, Kunieda hopes the event provides opportunities for inclusion.

“Obata is the only artist of color that is ‘famously’ associated with Yosemite,” she says, noting he is one of the few non-white Yosemite-affiliated artists that comes close to being as widely known as Ansel Adams or Gunnar Widforss or Thomas Hill. “Being a full-time artist is inherently marked by privilege. And it says a lot about access to nature, but also access and representation in the art world.”

It’s why Kunieda is so excited about the park’s partnership with University of California, Merced, which brings a cohort of art students to the event.

Many are first-generation college students and from historically underserved groups. The goal is to emulate Obata’s time communing with — and being inspired by — Great Nature, while also providing opportunities for access to spaces and people that are sometimes out of reach for young artists of color.

“Someone like Obata can exemplify how a public space, a shared environment, can be so beneficial,” Wang says. “How many stories and experiences can come from it.”

With the imminent 100th anniversary of Obata’s first trip to the park, Kunieda hopes the event will become a permanent fixture in Yosemite’s summer attractions. The Obata Art Weekend, she says, provides an opportunity for visitors to connect with nature in a more meaningful way.

“It’s mindfulness. It’s training yourself to stop and look closer,” she says. “I know so many hikers or climbers who are objective-based, goal-oriented. They’re thinking, ‘I’m going to hike this far, get to this thing as fast as I can,’ and not thinking about how amazing it was that they walked through a field of fireweed or that they’re there at just the right time for waterfall ranunculus.

“An artist has to stop and consider all of it. If you’re going to represent it well — in a way that means something to you — you walk away having made a relationship with it. Even if you’ve done nothing with that piece of art, you created a relationship with that tree, that waterfall, that vista. And that’s special.”

Kimi Kodani Hill, Obata’s granddaughter and editor of *Topaz Moon: Chiura Obata’s Art of the Internment*, says her grandfather wanted everybody to find their own personal relationship to art and nature.

“He felt that he could embrace this beauty and the beauty also embraced him — no matter what was going on in the rest of the country,” she says. “Nature was always there for him.” ■

The Obata Art Weekend is funded, in part, by the Pitzer Family Foundation and Yosemite Conservancy donors.

THE GROUNDBREAKING RESTORATION OF HISTORIC GLACIER POINT

BY ELIZABETH SHERER

For most modern Yosemite visitors, Glacier Point is a must-see. The stunning overlook offers an unparalleled view of Half Dome, Yosemite Valley, and Vernal and Nevada falls, with Clouds Rest and the Sierra Nevada visibly stretching in the distance behind them.

In the high season, approximately April to November, this popular destination is also relatively easy to reach. Glacier Point is accessible by car for those who are not prepared to make the strenuous climb up the Four Mile or Panorama trails; it takes about an hour to drive the 30 miles there from Yosemite Valley or Wawona. Upon arrival, visitors find a paved, wheelchair-accessible trail from the parking area to the magnificent vista, more than 3,200 feet above Curry Village.

As iconic as the view has become, it would be easy to take for granted that this location wasn't always so accessible. According to historical records, no road or trail led to the south rim of the Valley until at least 1860, and getting to Glacier Point required considerable mountaineering skills. That was 15 years after James Hutchings visited Yosemite and wrote about his experience in the *Mariposa Gazette* in August 1855. Segments of





THE GLACIER POINT HOTEL was open from 1918 through 1969, when an electrical fire destroyed the building and the adjacent Mountain House. The view from the hotel included Half Dome and Yosemite Valley.

PHOTO. © COURTESY OF NPS.



VISITORS ENJOYING the scenic views from the restored Glacier Point overlook and amphitheater thanks to the historic collaboration between the National Park Service, Yosemite Concession Services, and Yosemite Conservancy, with a generous contribution from donor Bill Lane. PHOTO: © JEFFREY EISEN.

Hutchings' article were quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, a defining moment for what later became Yosemite National Park.

"The splendor of the view from Glacier Point induced entrepreneurs to provide means of access and concessions for visitors," historian Richard Quin wrote.

By 1873, The Mountain House was built nearby, offering overnight accommodations to visitors. Glacier Point Hotel followed in 1917. Travelers came and went, the Firefall tradition was born, years passed, and thousands of visitors took in the view at this majestic park overlook.

In the winter of 1968–1969, record-setting snowfall caused extensive damage to the Glacier Point Hotel, forcing its closure. The hotel was closed and mostly unoccupied when an

electrical fire destroyed the building and much of the surrounding landscape in July 1969.

The site was cleared, cleaned, and reopened the following summer, with the foundation of the abandoned hotel still visible. The original footpaths and infrastructure remained, and not much changed at Glacier Point — including its popularity among visitors — until a historic restoration effort began in the 1990s.

In the past, the National Park Service had taken the sole lead on major construction projects in Yosemite. But with a sizable contribution from Conservancy donor Bill Lane, then-publisher and owner of *Sunset* magazine, The Yosemite Fund contributed \$600,000 to the project. Yosemite Concession Services (a subsidiary of Delaware North)





“One of the most rewarding experiences in my National Park Service career was working with The Yosemite Fund (now Yosemite Conservancy) on the restoration of Glacier Point. It was the first big capital project that the Conservancy took on and required park and Conservancy staff to work together closely for the first time. It was a great partnership and set the precedent for how we've worked together ever since.”

Frank Dean

YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY PRESIDENT & CEO



A GROUP of snowshoers pose in front of the Glacier Point Hotel.

PHOTO: © COURTESY OF NPS.

provided \$2.6 million, via the percentage of its contract revenue required to be dedicated to capital improvement projects in the park, thus also playing an important role in shaping the future of Glacier Point. This collaborative effort had permanent implications for rehabilitation projects in Yosemite.

“It turned out wonderfully, and it was a great partnership,” says Frank Dean, president of Yosemite Conservancy. “That was the beginning of many good things to come, such as the Yosemite Falls restoration with the Conservancy, Olmsted Point, Mariposa Grove, and now Bridalveil Fall.”

At the time of its completion and the vista’s reopening in September 1997, the Glacier Point project set an important precedent as the largest collaborative restoration among the National Park Service, the park concessionaire, and what is now Yosemite Conservancy in the 107-year history of Yosemite National Park.

The upgraded facilities include a 150-seat stone amphitheater designed especially for stargazing, plus a restroom and concession building that doubles as a bunk house for intrepid cross-country skiers who make the 10.5-mile winter trek from Badger Pass Ski Area to the Glacier Point Ski Hut. (Please note: Glacier Point Ski Hut is only open in the winter, and reservations are required.)

As we reflect on 100 years of impact on the park — and a century of invaluable support from generous donors who love Yosemite — we are particularly grateful for the precedent-setting, successful restoration effort at Glacier Point. ■



Tie Sing

THE MOUNTAIN CHEF WHO COOKED UP THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

BY LAUREN HAUPTMAN

A chef may seem an unlikely namesake for a Yosemite mountain. But without Chef Tie Sing's culinary prowess, we might not have the National Park Service, let alone Yosemite National Park.

A Nevada native of Chinese descent, Sing spent much of his 30-year career cooking “elaborate backcountry meals” for the mapmakers and geologists of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The appreciative eaters named Sing Peak, along the southeast boundary of Yosemite National Park, for their beloved chef in 1889. This was particularly notable, as it occurred on the heels of the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States. Fluent in both English and Chinese, Sing was one of many Chinese Americans who persevered in the face of terrible discrimination to make lasting contributions to public lands.

So renowned was Sing's cooking that U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Interior Stephen Mather recruited him to cook for his 1915–1916 adventures to Yosemite and nearby parks. These expeditions, later

referred to as the Mather Mountain Parties, aimed to convince the participating political and business leaders to help conserve significant U.S. lands and encourage the formation of a government agency to oversee them.

Several members of the Mather Mountain Party would write about the incredible meals Sing created and served in the backcountry, as well as the positive effect they had on their experience in Yosemite. Well-fed and happy, the influential men developed an appreciation for the landscape and became advocates for conserving public lands. Their efforts succeeded, and Congress established the National Park Service in 1916, installing Mather as its first director.

Annual pilgrimages to Sing Peak to pay homage to the legendary mountain chef are organized every July by the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California and the National Park Service. Visitors can learn more about Tie Sing and Chinese Americans in Yosemite at the Chinese Laundry Building in the Wawona History Center, recently restored thanks to Conservancy donors Sandra and Franklin Yee, and Roger and Florence Fong. ■

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOSEMITE'S DIVERSE HISTORY?

Join us Sept. 29–Oct. 1 for **Forgotten Tales of Yosemite's History**, a three-day guided adventure with storytelling and hiking. Our expert naturalist will explore the lesser-known stories of people whose actions defined Yosemite throughout history.



Register Here

PHOTO: © COURTESY OF USGS.



MEET THE TEAM:

LORA SPIELMAN

CONNECT with Lora and our amazing volunteer art teachers in the park. Book an art class at yosemite.org/art.

PHOTOS: © COURTESY OF LORA SPIELMAN.



OUR DIRECTOR OF ART PROGRAMS made a few brief trips to Yosemite during her younger years. But a summer internship as a youth art instructor in the park may have changed the trajectory of her career — and her life.

“I never imagined an art program existing in any national park, let alone Yosemite,” she says. “When I started teaching nature journaling, specifically, I started to feel more empowered to be curious and look at the park through an artistic lens. I realized that everyone has a unique way of seeing the world, and art was my means.”

Six years later, Spielman runs Yosemite Conservancy’s art programs. And in her time here, she’s met many incredible artists, made many lifelong friends, and happened to meet her future husband.

My favorite part about my job is ...

Providing a safe and encouraging environment for people to connect with the park and create. Many of our class participants self-identify as “non-artists,” so it is exciting to see them evolve during a short class and walk away feeling confident and inspired to continue creating.

Something people are surprised to learn about me is ...

I enjoy bouldering, floral arranging, DIY home-improvement projects, trying new recipes, and sharing yummy meals with the people around me. People are often also surprised to learn that I majored in cognitive science (loosely defined as the interdisciplinary study of the mind).

My connection to Yosemite began ...

While completing my undergraduate degree at University of California, Merced, I realized I wanted to pursue art as a career but wasn't sure how that would manifest. After graduating, I started a summer internship with the Conservancy-funded Yosemite Leadership Program as a youth art instructor. During those three months, I fell in love with teaching art to visitors and dreamed of the possibility of continuing this as a profession. Shortly after, an opportunity opened within the art program, and I was hired as an assistant. I was eventually promoted to the coordinator — and now the director role!

Aside from simply calling Yosemite home, I find peace in wandering through the high country and getting lost in the ever-changing beauty of this place. I feel equally inspired by community and my surroundings.

Where I spend my days ...

I enjoy finding new parts of the Sierra Nevada that are less traveled and love to capture them in my sketchbook. I am constantly amazed by this dynamic mountain range. During the summer, I can almost always be found somewhere along the Eastern Sierra or up in Tuolumne Meadows.



“I never imagined an art program existing in any national park, let alone Yosemite.”

What inspires me ...

I feel inspired by all the artists I work with. Each artist has a unique perspective when it comes to their artistic philosophy and approach. And though each of the artists are equally inspiring, there is a quote from Molly Hashimoto's book, *Colors of the West*, that has always resonated with me:

“Hiking, skiing, biking, paddling, and climbing are all engaging activities that bring us close to nature, but they make the world go by very fast — a 30-second break to take a photo is as close as we come to stopping. And in the age of social media, you have to ask: Is there a photo that has not been taken? A sketch, on the other hand, is pretty hard to replicate. Technology blurs individual distinctions, whereas hand-created work emphasizes them. No person's sketch can be totally like another's.”

I love to share this excerpt with class participants whenever I can to help emphasize the unique importance of creating in wild places like Yosemite. ■



Big Ideas Being Explored on Yosemite Big Walls

As **Junior Rangers**, you could someday be part of the new frontiers of scientific discovery in national parks. Many of the Conservancy-funded projects on El Capitan and other bigwalls started with a question or curiosity. Then scientists teamed up with rock climbers to collect data along the 1,000 foot vertical cliffs. What would you want to study on El Capitan?

Rock Climbers

It takes climbers on average 3-5 days to climb El Capitan. Imagine climbing and collecting data along the way!



Peregrine Falcons

Scientists study how peregrines raise their young on cliff ledges. Talk about life on the edge!



Stay Curious!

Junior Rangers, have you ever thought about exploring the wonders above you in your own backyard? Your sky at home is a magnificent laboratory for scientific discoveries! Spring and summer are perfect seasons to observe migrating birds as they pass through your area. Utilize apps such as eBird and iNaturalist to identify and document your findings. Don't forget to gaze at the clouds and learn about their various shapes and formations. Notice which ones bring rain and which ones simply drift by. Stay curious, Junior Rangers, and unlock the secrets of the skies right above you!

Big Wall Bats

Yosemite has 15 bat species that roost on its rock faces. Have you ever seen a bat flying at dusk?



Monkeyflowers

Scientists study them to learn about how the flowers grow, adapt, and survive. They can grow in cracks thousands of feet off the ground.



El Capitan Mad Lib!

Once upon a time, a(n) _____ scientist
(1. adjective)
named _____ embarked on an
(2. person's name)
adventure to climb El Capitan in Yosemite. Equipped
with a _____ and a _____,
(3. noun) (4. noun)
they discovered a rare _____ with
(5. noun)
_____ features and documented it
(6. adjective)
in their _____.
(7. noun)

Continuing the ascent, they encountered a(n)
_____ rock formation and collected a(n)
(8. adjective)
_____ sample. Near the summit, they
(9. adjective)
observed a peculiar _____ weather
(10. adjective)
pattern. With their remarkable observations,
_____ forever changed the
(2. person's name)
understanding of El Capitan.

KEY

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 adjective (e.g., ambitious) | 6 adjective (e.g., colorful) |
| 2 person's name (e.g., Dr. Jane) | 7 noun (e.g., field journal) |
| 3 noun (e.g., notebook) | 8 adjective (e.g., striated) |
| 4 noun (e.g., GPS device) | 9 adjective (e.g., smooth) |
| 5 noun (e.g., lichen) | 10 adjective (e.g., gusty) |

Feed Your Curiosity

Find the official
Yosemite Junior
Ranger products at
shop.yosemite.org



YOSEMITE THROUGH YOUR LENS

Park fans share their photos of Yosemite.



A Elusive Yosemite Falls
Winter Rainbow

© BRITAIN ANDREW.

B Looking Back from
the John Muir Trail

© KATHRYN DUDDY.

C Winter Raven

© DEBORAH FORT.

D Early Morning in
Tuolumne Meadows

© ILO GASSOWAY.

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FOR THE PAST 100 YEARS, generous supporters have provided for Yosemite in countless ways. Since the founding of the organization in 1923 that would become Yosemite Conservancy, thousands of people have made a difference by including us in their estate plans, signaling to their families and loved ones that Yosemite is a place they cherish. We are deeply honored by each of these gifts.

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