



Yosemite: Everyone's Favorite

"That's not real," she said, seriously. "That was created by Disney!"

"That" was the stunning panorama of Yosemite Valley as seen from Tunnel View, high above the valley floor.

"She" was a high school student, genuinely shocked and overwhelmed by what she saw. Her father exclaimed, "Wow; will you look at that!" Her mother and two brothers were silent, with looks of wonder on their faces.

Something similar happens every few minutes when visitors get their first look at Yosemite Valley. You have to see it to believe it. Pictures can't do it justice.

Despite its being out of the way, crowded, and short on in-park lodging, approximately four million people visit Yosemite every year. A visit of three days is ideal. Weather-wise, June through September is the best time to go. To see water flowing over Yosemite Falls, visit before August. The wildflowers are best in Tuolumne Meadows during July.

This is the place to go if you want to be blown away by spectacular scenery. And the hiking, biking and picture-taking aren't bad either.

Pathfinder Newsletter

Summer 2011

Guided Tours of Cities, Towns, and National Parks in the American West
by the authors of *Seven Perfect Days in Northern California*,
Seven Perfect Days in Arizona and *Seven Perfect Days in Colorado*

Day One

Here's a heads-up: Yosemite National Park's entrance fee is \$20 per car for a seven-day period. If you are a U.S. citizen or permanent resident 62 years of age or older, you are eligible for the Interagency Senior Pass (formerly the Golden Age Passport, which still works). It costs only \$10 at the entrance gate and gives you lifetime access to all U.S. National Parks and National Monuments—including Yosemite. Up to three passengers who are with you will be admitted free of charge.

Most visitors to Yosemite enter the park via Highways 120 (from Manteca) or 140 (from Merced). Those roads come together shortly before Highway 41 on the west/near end of Yosemite Valley. At this junction, we're going to take a short detour that provides a most spectacular introduction to Yosemite Valley.

Turn right on Wawona Road/Hwy 41 and follow it uphill about two miles (3.2 km) until just before the Wawona Tunnel, where you'll find parking lots on both sides of the road...and a scene that will take your breath away. (See the center photo on page 1.)

As you look at this spectacular scene, we'll give you some sense of the scale, makeup, and geologic history of the Park. Yosemite Valley comprises only about five percent of the total park. The Park is approximately 37 miles (59 km) wide by 47 miles (76 km) long or about the size of Rhode Island. Visitors are primarily attracted to three distinct areas of Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Valley, the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, and the wilderness area..

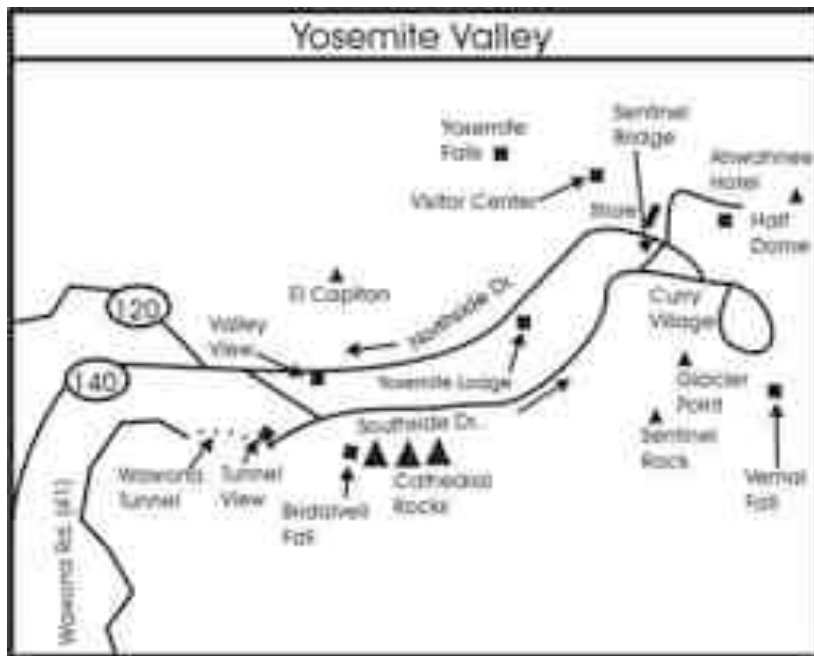
The world-famous Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias is 36 miles (58 km) south of Yosemite Valley on Wawona Road/Hwy 41 and features 500 giant sequoia trees within 250 acres (101 h) of forest. Nearby are the Pioneer Yosemite History Center and the historic Wawona Hotel. We'll visit these sites on Day Two.

Yosemite's wilderness area comprises about 95 percent of the Park, and is accessible primarily via Tioga Road/Hwy 120, which crests the Sierras at Tioga Pass and carries travelers toward Nevada and points east. Open only in the summer, the wilderness area is popular with hikers, backpackers, campers and rock climbers who seek high country environments. The highlight of Tioga Road is Tuolumne Meadows, which we'll visit on Day Three.

Approximately 40 miles (64 km) north of the spot where you're now standing is the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir and O'Shaughnessy Dam, which was completed in 1923 and is a source of San Francisco's drinking water and hydroelectric power.

The Incomparable Yosemite Valley

We think that Yosemite Valley must be one of the most beautiful and dramatic places on Earth. It's seven miles (11 km) long and a mile (1.6 km) wide (1,200 square miles/3,108 square kilometers), and is rimmed by spectacular granite and waterfall icons that are known throughout the world. From this high vantage point, you can see: El Capitan, the vertical giant on the left; Half Dome, in the middle at the far end of the Valley; triangular-shaped Sentinel Rock; and Cathedral Rocks and Bridalveil Fall on the right. Glacier Point, one of the premier viewing locations in the Park, is barely visible on the ridge behind Sentinel Rock. We'll visit Glacier Point on Day Two.



Hidden from view behind El Capitan are the famed Yosemite Falls. Hidden by Cathedral Rocks are falls by the names of Sentinel, Illilouette, Vernal and Nevada. We, and numerous other visitors, have enjoyed hiking up Mist Trail to view Vernal Fall from the top.

To give you some sense of scale, the Valley floor sits at 3,960 feet (1,207 m) above sea level, the summit of El Capitan is at 7,569 feet (2,307 m) and Half Dome tops out at 8,852 feet (2,698 m). That means El Capitan stretches 3,600 feet (1,097 meters) above the Valley floor and Half Dome is 4,900 feet high (1,493 meters)—over two times the tallest building in the world.

Extraordinary scene, isn't it?

Believe it or not, the Valley hasn't always looked like this. Geologists tell us two collisions of the earth's plates, about 150 and 25 million years ago, forced this part of the continent upward, thereby forming the Sierra Nevada mountain range. That was followed by roughly 22 million years of mountain erosion, as well as canyon carving by rivers and streams. And that was followed by some two to three million years of glaciations.

Yosemite Valley is a good example of a u-shaped glacial valley. It was originally carved into a v-shape by the Merced River, but was later changed to a u-shape by the downhill movement of a series of glaciers that slowly tore away and ground up the canyon's walls.

Why is the Valley floor flat instead of v-shaped? Because the glaciers deposited a long mound of rock, called a moraine, which blocked this end of the Valley. The last glacier melted about 10,000 years ago and became a lake, which was eventually filled in with 2,000 feet (610 m) of sediment that washed down from higher regions of the Park.

The glaciers filled most of the Valley, from bedrock 2,000 feet (610 m) below the current valley floor to the top of Sentinel Rock. That's 6,000 feet (1,830 m) or more than a mile (1.6 km) high! And this was just the lead edge of the glaciers; they actually extended about another 30 miles (48 km) up Tenaya Canyon to the Northeast.

All that tearing away of rocks caused another interesting phenomenon: leaping waterfalls. Streams that had been running down the sloped sides of the canyon, or through small valleys near the tops of rock formations, now drop vertically to the Valley floor. If you look at Bridalveil Fall, you'll see a great example of that. Another dramatic example is Yosemite Falls which, at 2,425 feet (739 m), is the fifth highest falls in the world (behind Angel Falls in Venezuela, Tugela Falls in South Africa, and Utigordsfossen and Mongefossen Falls in Norway). Sentinel Fall is the eighth highest of the world's falls.

Yosemite Valley has 13 waterfalls, most of which are best seen in April, May or June, because they're the result of spring snow melt. Unfortunately, the spectacular Yosemite Falls is one that dries up; visitors who come during late summer and fall are often disappointed when they miss seeing this icon of the Valley. However, Bridalveil Fall is fed by a watershed that holds more water, so it rarely dries up completely.

That, in a nutshell, is the geologic history of Yosemite Valley. What about the human history?

From Miwok Haven to National Park

Anthropologists tell us that Miwok-speaking Native Americans, who called themselves "a-wah-ni-chi," were the primary inhabitants of Yosemite Valley for about 4,000 years before white men arrived. The white men called them "Yosemites," taken from the Miwok word for grizzly bear, "u-zum-a-ti." The Miwok called the Valley "a-wah-ni," which apparently means, "Place like a gaping mouth."

Since you'll soon have the opportunity to learn about the Miwok way of life at the Indian village and cultural exhibit, adjacent to the Visitor Center, we won't comment further on them now, other than to say that Miwok is pronounced "mee-wock."

What we do think you'd like to know now is that a group of Caucasians called the Mariposa Battalion, while on a mission in 1851 to capture and relocate the Miwoks, was the first white group to enter Yosemite Valley. They entered approximately 1,000 feet (305 m) above where you're standing, and were awestruck by the beauty of this place

After white men occupied the area, John Muir and other preservationists became increasingly upset that the Valley was being developed as farmland with the introduction of livestock, crops and orchards. In 1864, they managed to get the U.S. Congress and President Lincoln to grant the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias to the State of California, preserving them for public use and recreation. In 1890, spurred on by naturalist John Muir and magazine editor Robert Underwood Johnson, the U.S. government established Yosemite National Park. Sixteen years after that, in 1906, the Yosemite Valley-Mariposa Grove grant to the State of California was rescinded and those lands became part of the national park.

The U.S. Army managed the park from its establishment until the National Park Service was created in 1916.

Facts, Bears, Photos and a Challenge

Just a few more miscellaneous-but-interesting facts and we can move on down to the Valley floor: Yosemite National Park is open year-round, except for Tioga Road and most of Glacier Point Road, which are impassable during the winter because of heavy snows. The Park receives

approximately four million visitors a year. Elevations in the Park range from 2,000 feet (610 m) above sea level to more than 13,000 feet (3,962 m).

It's common to see mule deer in Yosemite Valley, but you're cautioned to not feed or touch them. Of particular importance, there are between 300 and 500 black bears in the Park. *Be forewarned: Bears can be very dangerous; keep well away if you see one. Take all food and other scented items to your room at night; do not leave them in your car. If you're staying in tent accommodations, use a coin-operated parking lot storage locker. Dispose of garbage properly.*

Now, take one more look (you did take photographs, didn't you?) and try to imagine the end of a storm over the Valley with sunshine breaking through the clouds. Ansel Adams saw that very thing, right here, when he was photographing Yosemite in the 1920's, '30's and '40's, and captured phenomenal images for all to see. You can enjoy them in the Ansel Adams Gallery near the Visitor Center (and usually find complete calendars of them every autumn).

We think you'll agree that the Tunnel View scene is one that will never be forgotten. Yet, the individual icons, such as El Capitan and Bridalveil Fall, can be similarly breathtaking when seen from the valley floor.

If you want the best lighting for your Tunnel View photograph of Yosemite Valley, come back in late afternoon or early evening. At that time, the western sun bathes the valley in direct, warm light.

Here's a challenge for you; we'll call it the "Icon Photo Challenge." While you're here, find tree-framed views of Bridalveil Fall, El Capitan, Half Dome, and Yosemite Falls (see the preceding map), and take long-to-be-enjoyed pictures...with either your camera or your mind's eye. (In past years, Mirror Lake would have been on this list, but the lake has been silting-in and is mostly a meadow now.)

Your first icon photo opportunity will come at the bottom of the hill.

Bridalveil Fall

So, return on Wawona Road/Highway 41 to the valley floor. Just before you enter the one-way road leading to the east end of the valley, you'll see a sign on your right pointing to Bridalveil Fall and its parking lot. Follow the short trail to the base of the 620-foot (189 m) high fall and capture your first Icon Challenge picture.

Bridalveil is especially beautiful in mid-summer when the water volume is somewhat less and the breeze causes it to fan out and fall softly to the small pool and boulders below.

Seeing the Valley Floor

Next, take Southside Drive, the one-way road heading east, to find your second icon to photograph, on the left. You can't miss it.

Wow!! Isn't that view of El Capitan spectacular?

You'll remember that we said El Capitan stretches 3,600 feet (2,000 m) above the valley floor. That's the equivalent of a 360-story building—if there were such a thing. This is the largest single block of exposed granite in the world.

Yet, as hard as it is to imagine, experienced rock climbers actually scale that sheer face and live to tell the story! They do it in about three to seven days, depending upon the route taken. Climbers can often be seen on the mountain face.

Next, you'll come to a spectacular view of Yosemite Falls. Here, we recommend that you park your car along the left side of the road and follow the path to the Merced River where you'll find your tree-framed photo of the upper fall. The photo on page one was taken from the street parking area on Southside Drive.

To view and photograph the remainder of these famous icons/sights, you have three choices of approach, and we recommend them in this order:

- 1) Take an open air Valley Tram Tour. The tour is two hours long, stops for gawking and picture taking, and is Park Ranger-narrated (except in inclement weather when buses are used and the drivers narrate). There is no fixed schedule, but there are numerous departure times each day, from Yosemite Lodge year-round. It's definitely worth the \$25 fare. (There is special pricing for seniors, children and families.) While it is sometimes possible to purchase tickets on the same day, advance reservations are recommended. To reserve, call 209-372-4386.
- 2) Take the free shuttle buses (approximately one hour to make the circuit if you don't get off—but you will want to). Advantages: it's free; you don't need a reservation; it stops so you can get off, and then back on a following bus about ten minutes later; and it has access to roads (for example, to Mirror Lake) where automobiles are not allowed. Disadvantages: you don't get narration by a knowledgeable person, nor up-close views of sites in the western end of the Valley, because Yosemite Falls is the farthest west the shuttle travels. Pick up a copy of *Yosemite Guide* newspaper at the Valley Visitor Center for a map of the shuttle service.
- 3) Rent bicycles at either Yosemite Lodge (209-372-1208) or Curry Village (209-372-8319). They're the old single-speed type, but helmets and a map of the 8.7-mile (2.6 km) Yosemite Valley bike loop path are included. The cost is \$10 per hour or \$28 for the day.

We strongly recommend that you not try to drive to all of the popular sites in Yosemite Valley, because parking spaces are extremely difficult to find. The best approach is to park in the day-use lots near Yosemite Village (where the Village Store and Valley Visitor Center are located) or Camp Curry and use one of the above options.

So, we're going to make the assumption that you'll take either a Valley Tram Tour or the free shuttle. If you've made a reservation for the tour, you already know the departure time and location. If not, you can either try to purchase a ticket at the booth outside the Village Store, or board the free shuttle. Either way, we recommend that you head for Yosemite Village, which you can reach by continuing east on Southside Drive, to the stop sign (just past the circa-1879 Chapel), crossing Sentinel Bridge, turning right at the next stop sign, entering the day-use parking lot and walking north. Or, if this day-use parking lot is filled, re-cross Sentinel Bridge and drive to the day-use parking lot at Curry Village, where you can catch the shuttle bus back to Yosemite Village.

By the way, if you drive slowly across Sentinel Bridge, you'll see one of the classic photo opportunities of Half Dome. (The photograph of Half Dome on page one was taken from this bridge.)

If you're hungry about this time, we recommend the Village Grill, adjacent to the Village Store, and Degan's Delicatessen and Degan's Cafe, between the store and the Valley Visitor Center.

The Valley Visitor Center and Environs

The Valley Visitor Center is hidden at the back of Yosemite Village, and you have to search for it, but you'll be amply rewarded when you do find it.

To get there, walk around the Village Store—or through the store and out the rear door. Then, turn right, walk about the length of a football field, pass the Main Post Office (there are others at Yosemite Lodge and Curry Village), pass the Wilderness Store and Ansel Adams Gallery, and you'll see the Valley Visitor Center on your right.

We have five recommendations for you here: First, see the 20-minute film, *Spirit of Yosemite*, in the theater. Second, look at the displays in the interpretive center and learn more about the geology, animals and people of Yosemite. Third, visit the reconstructed Indian village behind the Visitor Center to learn about the Miwok Indians and their culture. Fourth, browse around the bookstore where you'll find the best collection anywhere of Yosemite-related literature. (We recommend *The Complete Guidebook to Yosemite National Park*, by Steven P. Medley, if you want additional helpful information during your visit.) And fifth, especially if you plan to use the shuttle bus, ask a park ranger at the information desk for copies of *Yosemite Today* and the *Yosemite Guide*.

While in the Valley Visitor Center, we recommend that you purchase a booklet, titled Yosemite Road Guide. As the title suggests, you'll get driving directions, descriptions of sights along the way, and historical highlights. It will be very helpful as you drive tomorrow to Glacier Point and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, and on Day Three up Tioga Road to Tuolumne Meadows, if you choose to do so.

The Valley Visitor Center is open daily 9 am-7 pm; 209-372-0298; www.nps.gov/yose or www.yosemite.org. The first (National Park Service) website contains a wealth of information about the Park.

Another interesting stop in the area is the Ansel Adams Gallery, featuring the famous photographer's works and offering photography supplies and gift items. The gallery also offers two-hour and four-hour photography classes three times a week; visit www.anseladams.com/category_s/19.htm for more information. Reservations for the classes may be made by calling 209-372-4413.

A short walk to the east, past the Village Store and the Medical Clinic, would bring you to the Ahwahnee Hotel, which was built in 1927 and is now a National Historic Landmark. To get on with the Icon Photo Challenge, we suggest that you bypass this for now, and if your budget and wardrobe permit, consider the Ahwahnee for dinner.

Ah, the magic word, "dinner."

Restaurants and Accommodations in and Beyond Yosemite Valley

See our recommendations at the end of this issue. You'll find a lot of detail there, about restaurants and accommodations, because in-park accommodations are hard to come by, and because having in-park restaurant information handy will save you a significant amount of anxiety and effort—and time that is better spent relaxing, touring and enjoying the Park.

Day Two

We recommend an early start, so you can beat the crowds to Glacier Point. After that, head south to the Wawona area of Yosemite National Park, where you'll enjoy the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias and Pioneer Yosemite History Center.

Glacier Point

This view down into Yosemite Valley from its rim, and of the wilderness beyond, should not be missed.

From late Spring to early Fall, you can get to Glacier Point by taking a bus from Yosemite Lodge, departing at 8:30 am, 10 am or 1:30 pm and returning four hours later. The cost is \$41 for adults, less for seniors and children. If you choose to ride to Glacier Point and walk down to Yosemite Valley via Four-mile Trail or Panorama Trail, the cost is \$25. Make reservations at 209-372-4386. You'll find more information at

www.yosemitepark.com/Activities_GuidedBusTours_GlacierPointTour.aspx.

Instead of taking the bus, we recommend that you drive to Glacier Point, so you can continue on to the sequoias and history center.

To get to Glacier Point from the west end of Yosemite Valley, drive uphill on Highway 41, pass Tunnel View, continue south about 8 miles (13 km) to Chinquapin junction, turn left and drive 16 miles (26 km) up Glacier Point Road to the overlook. [What's a Chinquapin? It's an evergreen shrub with leaves that are green on one side and yellow on the other, and grows to about four feet in height.] Along the way, you'll see turnoffs to the Badger Pass Ski Area and Sentinel Dome overlook, with its 360-degree view of the Park, as well as California red fir, lodgepole pine and sugar pine trees.

Glacier point is surprisingly well developed. You'll find two ample parking lots (ample, that is, until the crushes at mid-day and on weekends), restrooms, a small food service facility and a ranger/naturalist on hand to explain things. Before going to the edge of the overlook, we suggest that you stop at the rock hut for a geology lesson.

The view from the edge of Glacier Point is a grand one, indeed. Looking down 3,214 feet (980 m) into Yosemite Valley, you'll quickly make out Yosemite Falls, the Merced River, Camp Curry (directly below), Half Dome, Vernal Fall and Nevada Fall. Yosemite Village is hidden in the trees. In the distance, you'll see the Sierra wilderness, dominated by large domes of granite with deep canyons between them. The major canyon that you'll see as you look past Half Dome is Tenaya Canyon. If you choose to do so, you'll see that high country, up close and personal, tomorrow as you drive up Tioga Road.

As we said while at Tunnel View, this incredible landscape was carved over millions of years by a series of glaciers. What we didn't say is that one of those glaciers topped out at about 700 feet (213 m) *above* Glacier Point! That's a massive amount of ice, isn't it?

When you finally tear yourself away from this spectacular view, we suggest that you head back down to Highway 41, turn left and drive about 13 miles to Pioneer Yosemite History Center.

Either before or after the history center we suggest that you have lunch at the restaurant in the adjacent Wawona Hotel.

The Pioneer Yosemite History Center

Here, you can see a collection of historic buildings brought together from elsewhere in the park, each of which is described by markers, but you can also take a stagecoach ride, cross the North Fork of the Merced River on a circa-1870 covered bridge, and observe a blacksmith at work. Pick up a copy of the self-guided tour brochure at the north end of the covered bridge, or you can see/download it at www.nps.gov/yose/historyculture/upload/pioneer-history-center.pdf.

In addition to the classic covered bridge, you'll see the Grey Barn, the Cavalry Office, Degnan's Bakery, the Wells Fargo Office, the Blacksmith Shop, the Jail, a shelter with old horse-drawn vehicles, and the Artist, Anderson, Homestead and Ranger Patrol Cabins.

Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias

You'll find this very popular Yosemite attraction four miles (6.5 km) farther south, just off Highway 41. This is the largest of three groves of giant sequoias in Yosemite.

What's a Sequoia? It's the largest living thing on earth and one of the oldest. Its sister tree, the Redwood, is taller but slimmer and less bulky. These Sequoias are nearly 3,000 years old, but the Bristlecone Pine is older. So, here's your opportunity to take a one-hour guided (audio headsets) open-air tram tour of a 250-acre (101 h) forest of 500 giant evergreens and be awed by the immensity and beauty of these trees. Or, if you'd rather walk, there are free trail brochures available in the tram boarding area printed in English, French, Japanese and Spanish.

Trams depart on a first-come first-served basis from mid-May through late October, approximately every 20 minutes from 9am to 4pm and cover a five-mile (8 km) loop in about an hour. There are several stops along the way, including the Mariposa Grove Museum and Grizzly Giant, which is 96 feet (29 m) around at the base, 209 feet (64 m) tall and about 2,700 years old. For more information about the tram tour, visit www.yosemitepark.com/Activities_GuidedBusTours_BigTreesTramTour.aspx.

As you drive back to Yosemite Valley, you'll have an opportunity to get that late afternoon-early evening perfect photograph of the Valley from Tunnel View.

Day Three

Today, we give you a choice. You can either drive Tioga Road to see the heart of Yosemite's wilderness, including Tuolumne Meadows, or you can see more of the attractions in and around Yosemite Valley.

Option One: Tioga Road and Tuolumne Meadows

For many years, we've wanted to see Yosemite's high country and to hike around Tuolumne Meadows (pronounced too-ah-lu-mee; the "n" is silent). Alas, we weren't able to do it again this time, while researching this issue of *Pathfinder Newsletter*. Winter 2011 snows were so heavy that the Park Service was unable to finish plowing Tioga Road until after we'd left. (On the positive side, Yosemite Falls was the most spectacular it has been in many years.)

So, what we offer here is what we've learned from the *Yosemite Road Guide*, the National Park Service's website and its *Seasonal Highlights* newspaper, from an eyewitness who drove and recorded what he saw, and from other websites and travel books.

Tioga Road is typically open only from early June to the first heavy snowfall between mid-October and early December.

If you drive the road during July and August, be prepared for afternoon thunderstorms. Always carry something to keep you warm; temperatures are significantly cooler at higher elevations.

Plan on a drive of between 1-1/2 hours to Tuolumne Meadows. The first part of your drive will be dominated by dense forests of California red fir and lodgepole pine trees, and the last part by massive granite domes and peaks that have been polished by glaciers. During the latter part of the drive, you'll be passing through the terrain that you saw yesterday from Glacier Point.

From Yosemite Valley, drive west on Highway 120, past the junction with Highway 140, through the three tunnels, and to Crane Flat Campground, where you'll turn right onto Tioga Road.

Tuolumne Meadows is 50 miles (80 km) ahead, but before you arrive there, you'll pass Tuolumne Grove Big Trees and climb from 6,200 feet (1,890 m) elevation to 8,700 feet (2675 m). The Big Trees grove has 25 Sequoia trees; you may want to visit it if you didn't make it to Mariposa Grove yesterday.

We suggest that you check your car's gasoline level before you leave Crane Flat. Gasoline can be purchased here and at Tuolumne Meadows. Gas is otherwise unavailable in Yosemite National Park.

Be sure to stop at Olmsted Point, about 30 miles (48 km) from the Crane Flat Campground. After a very short walk from the parking lot, you'll see a sweeping view of Half Dome and Cloud's Rest to the west and Tenaya Lake to the east. Tenaya Canyon, between Olmsted Point and Half Dome, is the primary channel through which glaciers traveled to carve out Yosemite Valley. Tuolumne Meadows is just eight miles (13 km) beyond Olmsted Point.

At an elevation of 8,775 feet (2,675 m), Tuolumne Meadows is the largest sub-alpine (8,000-9,500 feet, 2,438-2,896 meters) meadow in the Sierra Nevada mountains. It's a flat basin about 2-1/2 miles (.8 km) long that's surrounded by the largest concentration of granite domes in the world. In July, the meadows are carpeted with wildflowers. The Tuolumne River runs through the meadows.

The first thing to do here is stop by the Visitor Information Center, to get the lay of the land, as well as trail maps and information about scheduled ranger walks. The information center is open only during the summer, from 9 am to 6 pm; the telephone number is 209-372-0263. Yes, the Visitor Information Center has restrooms.

If you're fit and ready for a challenge, a favorite activity here is to climb Lembert Dome (4 miles, 3-4 hours) for an excellent view of the basin below. *We recommend against this if you have heart or respiratory problems.* If you'd prefer, you can take an easier loop walk around the meadow on parts of the John Muir, National Scenic and Pacific Crest Trails.

Lunch can be gotten at the Tuolumne Meadows Grill and Store. (The lodge serves only breakfast and dinner; 209-372-8413.)

Option Two: More Yosemite Valley Attractions

Today, you can choose to hike within the Yosemite Valley, ride the shuttle to additional sites, or do both.

Valley Hikes - There are 11 hikes to choose from within the Valley. We suggest that you look at their descriptions on the National Park Service website at www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/valleyhikes.htm. They range from 1/2-mile one way and easy (.08 km to Bridalveil Fall) to 14 miles one way and difficult (22 km to Half Dome). The most popular hikes are Bridalveil Fall, Lower Yosemite Fall, and Vernal Fall. The Valley Floor Loop (full loop 13 miles/21 km; half loop 6.5 miles/10.5 km) provides the best overall look at the Valley's highlights. The Mirror Lake hike can be disappointing; the lake has been filling with sediment, so it has water reflections only in spring and early summer.

Happy Isles and Vernal Fall – You'll find both at shuttle stop 16. Happy Isles is a nature center geared primarily toward children. Here, you'll find interesting nature exhibits and a bookstore. Open 9:30 am to 4 pm. This is also the trailhead for the Vernal Fall Bridge hike (.08 mi/1.3 km one way) and the hike to the top of Vernal Fall (1.5 mi/2.4 km one way). The last part of the hike is 200 very steep and sometimes slippery steps; they're very hard on the legs and knees. It's called the Mist Trail for a reason.

Yosemite Valley Chapel – From shuttle stop 11, walk out onto Sentinel Bridge and take your Icon Photo Challenge winner of Half Dome and the Merced River. Then, finish crossing the bridge, turn right onto Southside Drive and walk across the street to the Chapel.

The most significant fact about the Chapel—to us—is that Celia's mother played the organ here during the late 1930's and early 40's. (Celia was born in Yosemite when her father worked for the National Park Service.)

Of lesser importance—to us—are the facts that the Chapel was built in 1869, seats 250, is the regular meeting place of the interdenominational Yosemite Community Church, is the site of 300 marriages a year, and was moved to its current location, from a mile away, in 1901.

Check out www.yosemitevalleychapel.org/history.htm for more history on this picturesque chapel.

Old Yosemite Village

Across the street from the Chapel, in the meadow, you'll find something that you can't see. It's the site of the original Yosemite Village. The signboard depicts the layout of the village.

In the early 1900s, this meadow contained a Masonic Hall, a Wells Fargo station, a jail, a bathhouse, a couple of stables, a photographic studio, a grocery store, two saloons, Degnan's Restaurant, the Sentinel Hotel which included cottages and cabins, and many wooden-floored tents.

Because of frequent flooding in this area, all of the structures in the village were either moved to Pioneer Yosemite History Center or were demolished during the 1950's and 1960's. The current Yosemite Village, Yosemite Lodge, the Ahwahnee Hotel and Camp Curry fill most

needs of today's visitors and residents. The Chapel is the only remaining structure of Old Yosemite Village.

Valley View – If you're a professional, aspiring or amateur photographer and the sun is shining, you'll want to be here late in the afternoon or early evening before you leave Yosemite Valley. Also called Gates of the Valley (the "gates" are El Capitan on the left and Cathedral Rocks on the right), the view you get from here is the ground-level equivalent of higher-up Tunnel view. It's pretty much the same scene, but with the waters of the Merced River within view and earshot. It's a winner. This could be an even better photograph than the one you took at Tunnel View.

To get there, drive west on Northside Drive almost to the end and watch for the pullout on the left with a dozen or so spaces. If you're driving east on Southside Drive, cross to Northside Drive on one of the bridges that spans the Merced River.

Professional and aspiring photographers will take their shots. But, if you're an amateur photographer, forget the Icon Photo Challenge for this special place. Let the scene burn into your memory and carry it with you for the rest of your life.

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Accommodations and Restaurants in and Near Yosemite

Accommodations

We go into more detail about accommodations than in most *Pathfinder Newsletter* issues, because of the difficulty that so many Park visitors have when seeking lodging inside Yosemite Valley.

Lodgings in Yosemite Valley

We can't overemphasize the need to make reservations well in advance of your arrival if you want accommodations in Yosemite Valley. If possible, make your reservations one year in advance—you can call 366 days ahead of your visit. If you can't make it on the days you planned, you may cancel your reservation, for a full refund, if you do so at least seven days before your scheduled arrival.

There is a single reservation system for all in-park lodging. Accommodations and availability can be checked, and reservations can be made, at www.yosemitepark.com and 801-559-5000.

- **The Ahwahnee Hotel** - Luxury in the grand style, also offers several cottages; near Yosemite Village; open year-round; \$\$\$.
- **Yosemite Lodge** - Moderately priced lodge and standard rooms; near Yosemite Falls; open year-round; \$\$.
- **Curry Village** - This is the least-expensive option in Yosemite Valley; motel rooms with bath, cabins with bath, cabins without bath, and canvas tent cabins without bath; open from spring to fall and on holidays and weekends in winter; \$.

Other Accommodations in the Park

- **Tuolumne Meadows Lodge** – Canvas tent cabins on Tioga Road/Highway 120, 60 miles from Yosemite Valley, caters mainly to hikers from mid-July to mid-September; \$-\$\$.
- **Wawona Hotel** – Historic hotel on Highway 41, 35 miles south of Yosemite Valley; year-round; \$\$-\$\$\$.

When Yosemite Accommodations are Unavailable

The following lists of bed & breakfasts, hotels, and motels on Highways 120, 140 and 41 may be of help if you need to make outside-the-park reservations. Some Web sites provide availability information by date, and will accept reservations online. Don't forget to ask about AAA, AARP or other discounts you may qualify for!

***Very Important:** If you want to have dinner and spend your evening hours in Yosemite Valley, you should arrange for late arrival where you'll be staying overnight. Many establishments will release rooms to others if guests do not arrive by 6:00 pm.*

Accommodations on Highway 120, west of Yosemite Valley, might be the most convenient if you plan to visit the Gold Country following Yosemite. (See the coming, fall 2011, issue of *Pathfinder Newsletter*.)

Be forewarned: After you reach the Yosemite Park entrances on Highways 120 and 140, you still have approximately 20 miles (32 km) to drive before you get to Yosemite Valley. It's 35 miles (56 km) to the Valley after you reach the entrance on Highway 41.

Groveland Area Accommodations along Highway 120

- **Blackberry Inn**, 12 miles (19 km) from Yosemite entrance; 7567 Hamilton Station Loop at Buck Meadows, PO Box 1064, Groveland 95321, 888-867-5001, 209-962-4663, www.blackberry-inn.com, \$\$-\$\$\$. We loved staying at this place.
- **Evergreen Lodge at Yosemite**, 8 miles (13 km) from Yosemite entrance; 33160 Evergreen Rd., Groveland 95321, 800-93-LODGE, 209-379-2606, www.evergreenlodge.com, \$\$-\$\$\$. Excellent ratings on TripAdvisor.com.
- **Yosemite Rose B&B**, 18 miles (29 km) from Yosemite entrance; 22830 Ferretti Road, Groveland 95321, 866-962-6548 www.yosemiterose.com, \$\$-\$\$\$. We also loved staying at this place.

Closest Accommodations along Highway 140

- **Cedar Lodge**; 8 miles (13 km) from Yosemite entrance; 9966 Highway 140, PO Box C, El Portal 95318; 210 rooms, 2 restaurants, pools; 888-742-4371, 209-379-2612, fax 209-379-2712; www.yosemite-motels.com/cedarlodge/index.htm; \$\$.
- **Yosemite View Lodge**; just outside the park boundary; 11136 Highway 140, PO Box D, El Portal 95318; 278 rooms, 2 restaurants, pools; 888-742-4371, 209-379-2681, fax 209-379-2704; www.yosemitemotels.com/yosemiteviewlodge/index.htm; \$\$-\$\$\$.

For accommodations along Highway 41

- Visit www.yosemite.com/tripplan/SearchResults.asp?fw=3
- And www.gocalifornia.about.com/od/cayosemite/a/hotels_41hwy.htm

RV Parks and Campgrounds

There are three drive-in and one walk-in campgrounds in Yosemite Valley, and nine other campgrounds elsewhere within the park (including Wawona, if you're headed there). Reservations are required year-round and are made on a first-come first-served basis. Contact the National Park Reservation Service, as early as possible, at 800-436-7245, or online at www.reservations.nps.gov, or at P.O. Box 1600, Cumberland, MD 21502. International callers use 301-722-1257. For more information call the park campgrounds office at 209-372-8502 or access www.nps.gov/yose/trip/camping.htm.

The U.S. Forest Service Operates nearby campgrounds on a seasonal basis. Contact district offices: for the Highway 140 area, 209-966-3638; for the Highway 41 area, 559-683-4636; for the Highway 120 area, 209-962-7825.

Woodall's-recommended campgrounds

- **Moccasin Point**, Groveland; drive 2 mi. (3.2 km) N on Hwy 49 from jct with Hwy 120 to Jacksonville Rd.; 209-852-2396; www.donpe-drolake.com.
- **Mariposa Fair Grounds**, Mariposa; from jct Hwys 49&40, drive 2 mi. (3.2 km) S on Hwy 49; 209-966-2432; www.mariposafair.com.
- **High Sierra RV Resort**, Oakhurst; drive 1/2-mi. (.8 km) NE on Hwy 41 from jct. with Hwy 49; 877-314-7662, www.highsierrarv.com.

Restaurants

The Ahwahnee

- **Ahwahnee Dining Room**; traditional, five-star fine dining in a grand old-world ambience; coats and ties are preferred at dinner and advance reservations are suggested at 209-372-1489 or online at www.yosemitepark.com/dining_ahwahneediningroom.aspx; open year-round; breakfast 7-10:30 am, Lunch 11:30 am-3 pm; Sunday brunch 7 am-3 pm, Dinner 5:30 pm-9 pm; \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$.
- **The Ahwahnee Bar**; cozy, with appetizers and light bar fare; open year-round, 11:30 am-11 pm; \$.

Yosemite Village

- **Degnan's Delicatessen**; next to the Main Post Office; sandwiches, salads and snacks; open year-round, 7 am-6 pm; \$-\$\$.
- **Degnan's Cafe**; hamburgers, chicken, ice cream; open spring through fall, 7 am-5 pm; \$.
- **The Loft at Degnan's**; pizza, salads and appetizers; open spring through fall, Monday-Thursday, 5-9 pm and Friday-Sunday, 12 noon to 9 pm; \$.
- **Village Grill**; hamburgers, sandwiches, chicken strips, fries, milk shakes; open spring through fall, 11am-5 pm, \$.

Yosemite Lodge

- **Food Court**; many food choices; open year round; breakfast 6:30-11am, lunch 11:30 am-2 pm, dinner 5-9:30 pm, light fare served all day; \$. Pre-wrapped picnic items.
- **Mountain Room Lounge**; sandwiches, salads, appetizer plates; open year-round, Monday-Friday 4:30-10:30 pm; \$-\$\$.
- **Mountain Room Restaurant**; fine dining, advance reservations recommended at 209-372-1281; steak, fish and pasta dishes with views of Yosemite Falls; outside seating available; open year-round for dinner only, 5:30-9:30 pm; \$\$-\$\$\$.

Curry Village

- **Ice Cream and Coffee Corner**; boxed lunches and baked goods; open year-round, 6 am-10 pm; \$.
- **Pavilion**; hot entrees, taco bar, stir fry, pasta, salads, soups; open March through October; breakfast buffet 7-10 am, dinner buffet 5:30-8:30 pm; \$-\$\$.
- **Pizza Deck**; pizza and salads; open spring through fall, noon to 10 pm; \$-\$\$.
- **Taqueria**; Mexican food; open spring through early fall, 11 am-5 pm; \$-\$\$.

Groceries can be purchased at: the Village Store (8 am-10 pm); Degnan's Delicatessen (8 am-6 pm) in Yosemite Village; the Yosemite Lodge Gift/Grocery (8 am-9 pm); and, in Curry Village, the Gift/Grocery (8 am-9 pm) and Housekeeping Camp (8 am-8 pm).

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Next Issue: "California's Gold Country"