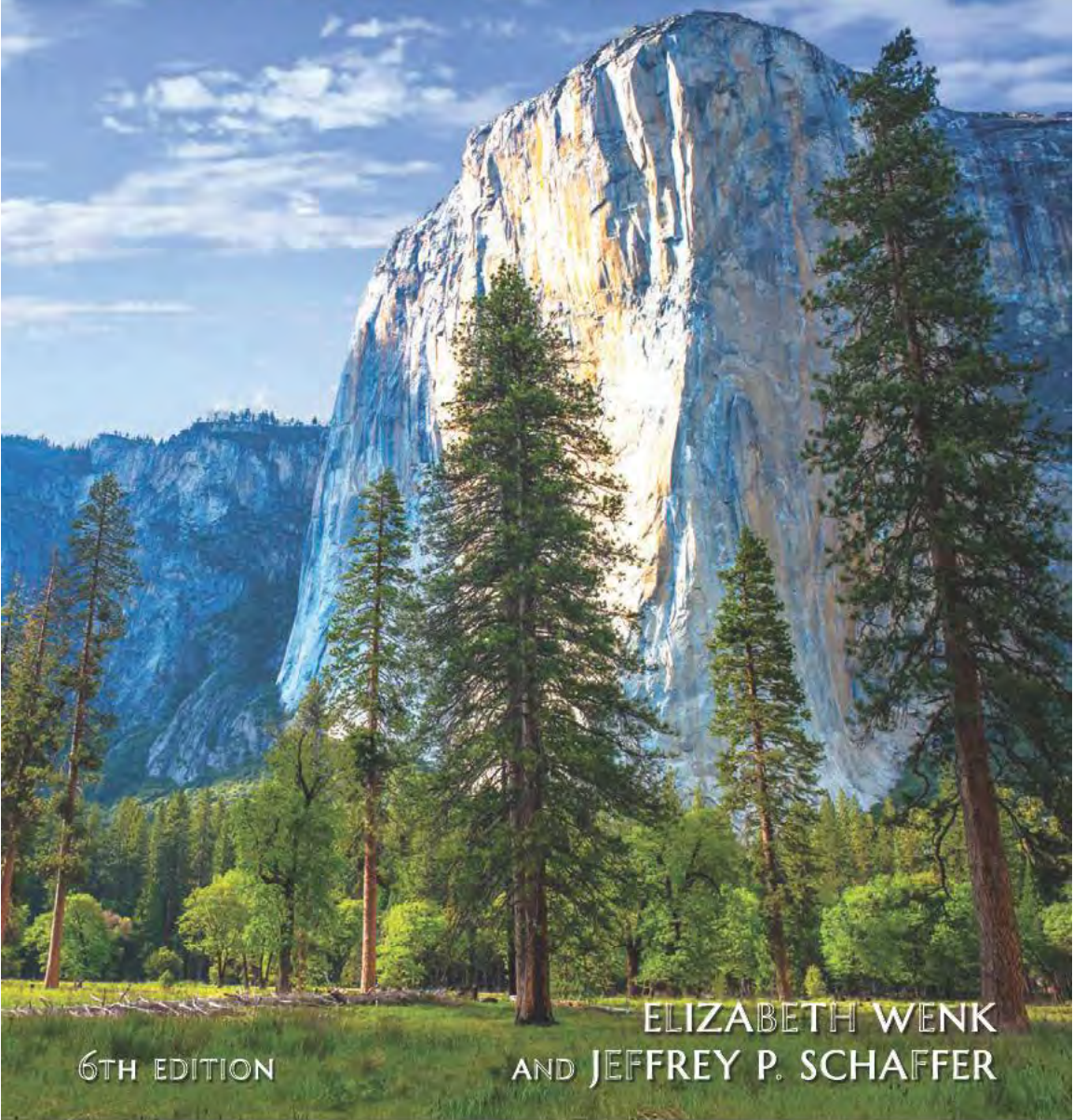


YOUR COMPLETE HIKING GUIDE

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK



6TH EDITION

— ELIZABETH WENK
AND JEFFREY P. SCHAFER

WILDERNESS PRESS



■ Contents ■

YOSEMITE OVERVIEW MAP	opposite page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	x
FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION	xii
INTRODUCTION 1	
Fees	3
Public Transportation and Yosemite National Park	4
Camping and Lodging	5
Supplies	7
Yosemite Activities Other Than Hiking	8
HUMAN HISTORY 11	
The Ahwahnechee and Other Yosemite Tribes	11
Early Contact with White Americans	12
First Tourists and New Access Trails	13
Yosemite Becomes a Park and Gains Its First Scenic Trails	14
Creating a National Park and the Beginnings of the Conservation Movement	16
Cavalry and Infantry Patrols	18
Yosemite Is Downsized and Hetch Hetchy Is Lost	19
The National Park Service Is Born	20
Changing Visitor-Use Patterns	22
Preserving Yosemite for the Future	24
FLORA 27	
Plant Communities	27
Topography and Water Availability	29
Geologic Influences	30
Fire	31
The Ahwahnechee and Yosemite's Flora	33
FAUNA 37	
Birds	37
Mammals	38
Reptiles	40
Amphibians	41
Fish	42
GEOLOGY 47	
Ancient Sediments	47
Plutonism and Volcanism	48
Sierra Nevada Uplift	50
Late-Cenozoic Volcanism	51
Pleistocene Glaciations	52
Holocene Landforms	54

CLIMATE—AND WHEN TO GO 56

 Summer 56

 Autumn 57

 Winter 58

 Spring 59

 When to Go 60

TRAVELING THE BACKCOUNTRY 61

 Wilderness Permits. 61

 Wilderness Ethics and Park Regulations. 63

ABOUT THIS GUIDE 67

 Selecting Your Trip 67

 How to Read the Trips. 67

MAP LEGEND 71

TRIP FEATURES TABLE 74–77

■ **CHAPTER 1** TRIPS OF YOSEMITE’S NORTH LANDS 79

INTRODUCTION TO THIS AREA 79

Trip 1 Tower Peak Country via West Walker River 80

Trip 2 Peeler Lake, Kerrick Meadow, and Buckeye Forks 95

Trip 3 Barney and Peeler Lakes 102

Trip 4 Seavey Pass–Benson Pass–Matterhorn Canyon Semiloop 108

Trip 5 Green Creek Canyon to Green, East, and West Lakes 123

Trip 6 Virginia Lakes Basin to Green Creek 127

Trip 7 Virginia Canyon Loop. 133

Trip 8 Virginia Lakes Basin to McCabe Lakes and Twenty Lakes Basin 140

Trip 9 Saddlebag Lake and Twenty Lakes Basin 148

■ **CHAPTER 2** TRIPS OF YOSEMITE’S WEST LANDS 153

INTRODUCTION TO THIS AREA 153

Trip 10 Kibbie Ridge and Boundary Lake 155

Trip 11 Kibbie Lake 161

Trip 12 Lake Eleanor and Miguel Meadow. 166

Trip 13 Preston Falls Trail 170

Trip 14 Poopenaut Valley 173

Trip 15 Laurel Lake and Lake Vernon 176

Trip 16 Jack Main Canyon–Wilma Lake–Tiltill Valley Loop 189

Trip 17 Hetch Hetchy to Rancheria Falls Camp 201

Trip 18 Rancheria Mountain–Bear Valley–Tiltill Valley Semiloop 205

Trip 19 Lookout Point 218

Trip 20 Smith Peak from the Mather Ranger Station 220

■ CHAPTER 3 TRIPS OF YOSEMITE'S WEST-CENTRAL LANDS NORTHWEST OF THE TIOGA ROAD 227

INTRODUCTION TO THIS AREA 227

Trip 21	Merced Grove of Big Trees	228
Trip 22	Tuolumne Grove of Big Trees	231
Trip 23	Harden Lake	234
Trip 24	Smith Peak from White Wolf.	238
Trip 25	Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne from White Wolf.	246
Trip 26	Pate Valley–Pleasant Valley–Bear Valley–Kerrick Canyon– Rodgers Canyon Semiloop	256
Trip 27	Lukens Lake from White Wolf	268
Trip 28	Lukens Lake from Tioga Road	271
Trip 29	Ten Lakes Basin	273
Trip 30	Yosemite Creek to Tenaya Lake Traverse via Ten Lakes Basin	279
Trip 31	May Lake and Mount Hoffmann.	285

■ CHAPTER 4 TRIPS OF YOSEMITE'S WEST-CENTRAL LANDS BETWEEN THE TIOGA ROAD AND YOSEMITE VALLEY 289

INTRODUCTION TO THIS AREA 289

Trip 32	Cascade Creek from Big Oak Flat Road	290
Trip 33	Devils Dance Floor.	293
Trip 34	El Capitan from Tamarack Flat Campground	296
Trip 35	Upper Tamarack Creek Trailhead to Tamarack Flat Campground	300
Trip 36	Yosemite Creek from Tioga Road to Yosemite Valley	302
Trip 37	North Dome	308
Trip 38	Snow Creek Trail from Tenaya Lake to Yosemite Valley.	312

■ CHAPTER 5 TRIPS OF THE TUOLUMNE MEADOWS AREA NORTH OF THE TIOGA ROAD 320

INTRODUCTION TO THIS AREA 320

Trip 39	Polly Dome Lakes via Murphy Creek	321
Trip 40	Pothole Dome	323
Trip 41	Tuolumne River and Little Devils Postpile	326
Trip 42	Glen Aulin and Waterwheel Falls	329
Trip 43	High Sierra Camps Loop	335
Trip 44	Tuolumne Meadows to Sonora Pass via the Pacific Crest Trail.	348
Trip 45	Young Lakes	367
Trip 46	Lembert Dome and Dog Lake	372
Trip 47	Lower Gaylor Lake.	375
Trip 48	Gaylor Lakes, Great Sierra Mine, and Granite Lakes	379

■ CHAPTER 6 TRIPS OF THE TUOLUMNE MEADOWS AREA SOUTH AND EAST OF THE TIOGA ROAD 383

INTRODUCTION TO THIS AREA 383

Trip 49	Upper Tenaya Canyon	384
Trip 50	Sunrise Lakes and Sunrise High Sierra Camp	387
Trip 51	Tenaya Lake to Clouds Rest, Half Dome, and Happy Isles	390
Trip 52	Lower Cathedral Lake	400
Trip 53	John Muir Trail from Tuolumne Meadows to Happy Isles	404
Trip 54	Budd Lake	411
Trip 55	Elizabeth Lake	414
Trip 56	Echo Creek and Nelson Lake	417
Trip 57	Vogelsang Pass–Merced Lake–Emeric Lake Semiloop.	422
Trip 58	Vogelsang High Sierra Camp and Lyell Canyon	431
Trip 59	Lyell Canyon to Silver Lake via John Muir Trail	437
Trip 60	Dana Meadows to Mono Pass	446
Trip 61	Dana Meadows to Silver Lake via Parker Pass	451
Trip 62	Mount Dana	459
Trip 63	Glacier Canyon and Dana Plateau	464

■ CHAPTER 7 TRIPS IN YOSEMITE VALLEY AND UP TO ITS RIMS 469

INTRODUCTION TO THIS AREA 469

Trip 64	Valley Loop Trail: Bridalveil Fall, El Capitan, and Pohono Bridge Loop.	470
Trip 65	Valley Loop Trail: Leidig Meadow and Swinging Bridge Loop	479
Trip 66	Valley Loop Trail: Lower Yosemite Fall Loop	483
Trip 67	Valley Loop Trail: Cooks Meadow and Ahwahnee Meadow Loop	488
Trip 68	Valley Loop Trail: Curry Village and Happy Isles Loop	494
Trip 69	Valley Loop Trail: Mirror Lake and Tenaya Creek Loop.	498
Trip 70	Upper Yosemite Fall and Eagle Peak.	503
Trip 71	North Valley Rim: Upper Yosemite Fall and North Dome	509
Trip 72	Stanford, Crocker, and Dewey Points from Wawona Tunnel.	517

■ CHAPTER 8: TRIPS FROM THE GLACIER POINT ROAD AND HAPPY ISLES 522

INTRODUCTION TO THIS AREA 522

Trip 73	McGurk Meadow and Dewey Point	523
Trip 74	Taft Point and the Fissures	527
Trip 75	Sentinel Dome	530
Trip 76	Pohono Trail from Glacier Point to Wawona Tunnel	533
Trip 77	Four Mile Trail from Glacier Point to Yosemite Valley	539

Trip 78 Panorama Trail from Glacier Point to Yosemite Valley543

Trip 79 Happy Isles to Vernal Fall Bridge, Vernal Fall, and Nevada Fall548

Trip 80 Little Yosemite Valley and Half Dome.554

Trip 81 Happy Isles to Merced Lake562

■ **CHAPTER 9: TRIPS SOUTH AND EAST OF THE GLACIER POINT ROAD** 570

INTRODUCTION TO THIS AREA 570

Trip 82 Bishop Creek via Alder Creek Trail571

Trip 83 Ostrander Lake573

Trip 84 Turner Meadow–Royal Arch Lake–Buena Vista Trail Loop.578

Trip 85 Clark Range Circuit from Glacier Point586

Trip 86 Alder Creek–Bridalveil Creek Campground–Chilnualna Falls Loop603

Trip 87 North Wawona to Chilnualna Falls612

Trip 88 Royal Arch Lake–Buena Vista Lake–Chilnualna Lakes Semiloop615

Trip 89 Mariposa Grove of Big Trees621

Trip 90 Wawona Meadow Loop629

■ **CHAPTER 10: TRIPS OF YOSEMITE’S SOUTHEASTERN LANDS** 632

INTRODUCTION TO THIS AREA 632

Trip 91 Royal Arch Lake via Chiquito Pass.633

Trip 92 Chain Lakes from Quartz Mountain Trailhead638

Trip 93 Vanderburgh–Lillian Lakes Loop645

Trip 94 Cora and Joe Crane Lakes651

Trip 95 Sadler Lake–Post Peak Pass Loop656

Trip 96 Isberg–Red Peak–Merced–Fernandez Passes Loop666

APPENDIX A: Campgrounds and RV Parks 683

APPENDIX B: Hotels, Lodges, Motels, and Resorts 686

APPENDIX C: Useful Books, Maps, and Websites 687

INDEX 694

ABOUT THE AUTHORS 708

■ Human History ■

THE HUMAN HISTORY of Yosemite can—and does—fill many tomes. Not only is it one of the United States' most famous destinations, but woven into the park's history are threads central to all western US history: the westward European expansion that both displaced the native people and inspired awe for western landscapes, ultimately leading to the push for public land, the conservation movement, and the subsequent evolution of the environmental movement.

It is impossible to include all the stories that make up Yosemite's history in this introduction. Instead, here, is a brief history of Yosemite mostly woven around the origins and use of its trails—this is, after all, a trail guide. If I've piqued your curiosity about some facet of Yosemite's human history, see Appendix C (page 687) to explore more.

The history of Yosemite's trails also sheds light on the changing purpose of trails. Initially trails were built to make it possible to travel between two destinations and only much later was the trail network expanded upon to provide scenic passageways throughout the park. Yosemite's history before the establishment of the National Park Service is more focused on the contributions of individual people, whereas for the past century, it is initiatives driven by Yosemite, the entire NPS, or society at large that more define Yosemite's story.

The Ahwahnechee and Other Yosemite Tribes

YOSEMITE'S FAR WESTERN LANDS have been home to Miwok people for at least 8,000 years, with Yosemite Valley inhabited for about 4,000 years. The native people who inhabited Yosemite Valley when the first Europeans arrived, the Ahwahnechee, were a culturally distinct tribe, thanks to the relative isolation the valley afforded. Evidence points to a strong connection between the Miwok and the Paiute people of the Mono Basin—tribal groups with a different language and cultural origins in the Great Basin. Indeed, Yosemite Valley's people at the time of Western contact may well have been predominantly Paiute, although Miwok tribes undoubtedly occupied Yosemite Valley at previous times, and the Ahwahnechee likely had ancestors from both groups. The western Sierra, including far southern and northern Yosemite, was inhabited by Miwok tribes when European settlers first arrived.

Western California's Miwok tribes and the Mono Basin's Paiute tribes were hunter-gatherers, collecting myriad plant materials for food, medicine, and tools and hunting for deer, fish, and insects. Throughout prehistory, Yosemite Valley's people, and indeed all of California's Miwok tribes, had a culture integrally connected to the black oak acorn, which provided an estimated 60% of their nutrition (see "Indigenous Uses of Yosemite Plants," page 35). They used fire to clear the valley floor of scrub and competing trees, effectively cultivating an oak woodland. Once dried, the harvested acorns were stored in *cha'ka*, or granaries built on stilts, to last through the winter. To avoid damage by moisture or insects, the granaries had to be both perfectly watertight and repel insects, the latter accomplished by lining the interior with mugwort (genus *Artemisia*). Before consumption, the acorns were pounded to a fine meal; the

■ Flora ■

THE FOLLOWING SECTION describes Yosemite's plant communities, topographic and geologic influences on its plant life, the role of fire in shaping the forest, and the connection between plants and Yosemite's Indigenous people.

Plant Communities

Plants are the most conspicuous living organisms in Yosemite, with conifer forests draping a green blanket across large swaths of the park. A handful of tree species may be visually dominant, but there are about 1,200 species of native plants. There isn't space in this book to delve into the individual species, save for a few common trees, but if you are interested in learning the names and stories of Yosemite's plants, consult the list of books in Appendix C. In particular, my book *Wildflowers of the High Sierra and John Muir Trail* covers the flora you will see above 8,000 feet.

Ecologists begin by dividing the landscape into vegetation zones, defined by the tree or shrub community that is most common. Two climatic elements, temperature and precipitation, are most influential in delineating vegetation zones. In a mountainous region such as Yosemite, elevation is generally a good proxy for temperature, with temperatures dropping by 3.5°F for each 1,000-foot increase in elevation, resulting in a more than 30°F drop in temperature from Yosemite Valley to the summit of 13,114-foot Mount Lyell. Meanwhile, winter precipitation is mostly deposited by frontal storms moving west–east from the Pacific Ocean inland. Precipitation increases up to midelevations as clouds cool and release more moisture, but then decreases slowly as the clouds dry on their approach to the crest, then rapidly to the east of the Sierra Crest. These broadscale elevation and temperature shifts lead to the transition between vegetation zones, which in and around Yosemite are as follows:

The **foothill woodland and scrubland zone** occurs mostly below 4,000 feet. It is an area that receives little to no snow in winter and is hot and dry in summer.

■ **TREES** Foothill pine (aka gray or Digger pine), knobcone pine, blue oak, interior live oak, tanbark oak, California buckeye, red willow, arroyo willow, black cottonwood

■ **WHERE SEEN** Sunny slopes about and below Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, Preston Falls, Arch Rock–El Portal area, lower Alder Creek Trail

The **lower montane** or **mixed-conifer forest zone** occurs between 2,000 and 7,400 feet, with the prevalence of white firs, a key indicator species, peaking around 6,500 feet. Several feet of snow commonly cover the ground during the winter months, but summers are hot and dry. Yosemite's three giant sequoia groves lie within this zone.



Foothill pine

(continued on next page)

■ Fauna ■

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK has a diverse collection of animal species whose presence throughout the park will most certainly enhance your visit. Fingers crossed, we are past the point where the commotion of bears in campgrounds is your most memorable Yosemite wild-life experience, and you will instead be treated to encounters with truly wild animals as you embark on your hikes.

Birds

Of the park's vertebrate animals (that is, ignoring insects, spiders, and so on), birds are the most common, with about 262 species recorded in the park, of which 165 are regular residents. Which species garner your attention is quite dependent on elevation and habitat, with the black-crested blue Steller's jay among the most common from Yosemite Valley to around 7,000 feet in elevation. These birds are hopeless beggars and thieves—keep your food closely guarded as you picnic at the top of Vernal Fall.

In the lodgepole pine forest encircling Tuolumne Meadows, it is the small gray, black, and white dark-eyed junco, a type of sparrow, that is near-ubiquitous. Mountain chickadees, with a black eye stripe and throat patches, are common in the subalpine lodgepole forests, clinging deftly to branches in search of insects; their “chick-a-dee-dee” call is usually what first identifies their location. American robins, hopping along the ground in search of worms, are also a common sight in any forested or meadow landscape. At the highest elevations, ravens, Clark's nutcrackers, and maybe even a golden eagle vie for your attention.

Steller's jay



As your ears try to filter through the background chirps, a few calls may pique your interest. Most startling to the uninitiated are the bellowing “whomps” of the male blue (or dusky) grouse in search of mates. Common in late spring and early summer throughout conifer forests, I have on many an occasion jumped as one erupted from a tree quite close to me. The pecking of woodpeckers and sapsuckers always causes me to turn my head, as does the shriek of the goshawk and the shrill call of the belted kingfisher. The former is the only forest-dwelling hawk in Yosemite, and I encounter one most years while tromping through dense forest: a distinct hawk call often followed by the sight of a large bird

Climate— ■ and When to Go ■

THE FOLLOWING SUMMARY of Yosemite's average seasonal conditions is just that: averages, a melding together of yearly weather conditions to create an idealized description. As you read this, remember that California's weather, and hence the Sierra's, is an average of extremes, with annual precipitation varying from 25% to 200% of normal. Even summer precipitation is highly variable, with barely a drop falling some years and others being remembered for their incessant afternoon storms.

Summer

IF YOU ARE a typical hiker using this guidebook, you'll probably visit the park during the summer. Unlike most of America's mountain ranges, the Sierra Nevada is summer-dry, receiving only about 2 inches of precipitation during the summer months. The official summer period, June 22–September 21, matches well with the hiking season for most of Yosemite, though those exploring Yosemite Valley's trails will also find the second half of spring a spectacular time for a visit. The last significant high-elevation storm usually has ended by the start of June. In Yosemite

AVERAGE PRECIPITATION AND TEMPERATURES IN YOSEMITE VALLEY (4,000')

	Precipitation	High Temperature	Low Temperature		Precipitation	High Temperature	Low Temperature
JAN	6.5" / 165 mm	48°F / 9°C	29°F / -2°C	JUL	0.4" / 10 mm	89°F / 32°C	57°F / 14°C
FEB	6.7" / 170 mm	52°F / 11°C	30°F / -1°C	AUG	0.1" / 2.5 mm	89°F / 32°C	56°F / 13°C
MAR	5.2" / 132 mm	58°F / 14°C	34°F / -1°C	SEP	0.7" / 18 mm	82°F / 28°C	51°F / 11°C
APR	2.8" / 71 mm	64°F / 18°C	38°F / 3°C	OCT	2.1" / 53 mm	71°F / 22°C	42°F / 6°C
MAY	1.7" / 43 mm	72°F / 22°C	45°F / 7°C	NOV	4.6" / 117 mm	56°F / 13°C	33°F / 1°C
JUN	0.7" / 18 mm	81°F / 27°C	51°F / 11°C	DEC	5.5" / 140 mm	47°F / 8°C	28°F / -2°C

AVERAGE PRECIPITATION AND TEMPERATURES IN TUOLUMNE MEADOWS (8,600')

	Precipitation	High Temperature	Low Temperature		Precipitation	High Temperature	Low Temperature
JAN	4.5" / 114 mm	41°F / 5°C	10°F / -12°C	JUL	0.9" / 23 mm	72°F / 22°C	38°F / 3°C
FEB	4.4" / 112 mm	40°F / 4°C	10°F / -12°C	AUG	0.8" / 20 mm	71°F / 22°C	36°F / 2°C
MAR	3.8" / 96 mm	44°F / 7°C	13°F / -11°C	SEP	0.7" / 18 mm	65°F / 18°C	31°F / -1°C
APR	1.9" / 48 mm	47°F / 8°C	18°F / -8°C	OCT	1.5" / 38 mm	56°F / 13°C	25°F / -4°C
MAY	1.2" / 30 mm	55°F / 13°C	26°F / -3°C	NOV	2.3" / 58 mm	46°F / 8°C	17°F / -8°C
JUN	0.8" / 20 mm	65°F / 18°C	33°F / 1°C	DEC	4.7" / 119 mm	40°F / 4°C	10°F / -12°C

Source: [nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/weather.htm](https://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/weather.htm)

Traveling the ■ Backcountry ■

Wilderness Permits

IF YOU ARE going to spend one or more nights in the wilderness, be it in Yosemite National Park or in the wildernesses of adjoining U.S. Forest Service lands, you will need a wilderness permit. The notes for each hike indicate the exact permit details you should request, including the issuing agency and the trailhead. Wilderness permits in Yosemite and surrounding National Forests are allocated based on the starting trailhead and initial direction of travel.

YOSEMITE WILDERNESS PERMITS

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK'S backcountry has quotas May–October, and 60% of each day's trailhead quota is available by reservation; the rest of the permits are given on a first-come, first-served basis beginning the day before the hike's start date. The rest of the year, virtually all of the high country will be under snow, and very few people will be backpacking. Though the flexibility of first-come, first-served permits is wonderful, most of Yosemite's trailheads are so popular that I strongly recommend you reserve your permit in advance if you know your schedule. For popular trailheads, especially Happy Isles and those in the Tuolumne area, the reserved permit quota fills quickly—that is, the same day it becomes available—and long lines can form well before dawn for the first-come, first-served permits. Starting on a Friday or Saturday only increases the permit competition.

Permit rules are outlined at nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm. Check this website early in your planning process, because Yosemite has changed various permit regulations and procedures several times in the last five years and is likely to continue fine-tuning its system.

Currently, you can get a permit from 24 weeks to two days in advance of your trip date. The website above links to an online reservation page, new since 2019—no more fax submissions or phone calls. The cost of confirmed permits is \$5 per permit plus \$5 per person in the group.

HALF DOME PERMITS

PERMITS ARE ALSO required to hike Half Dome as either a day hike or part of a backpacking trip. These were instated in 2011 to reduce overcrowding on the route, and now approximately 300 people per day are permitted on the cables: 225 day hikers and 75 backpackers. Most day hike permits are allocated by lottery, with applications accepted March 1–March 31, though 50 permits become available for a last-minute day-hike lottery two days in advance.



■ Trips of Yosemite's ■ North Lands

Introduction to This Area

YOSEMITE'S NORTHERN BACKCOUNTRY is accessed either from the east, through Hoover Wilderness (in Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest), or from the north through Emigrant Wilderness (split between Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and Stanislaus National Forest). Most of Emigrant Wilderness is beyond the scope of this book, with just Trips 2 and 44 entering it, but many of its trails are described in two other Wilderness Press titles: *Sierra North* (10th edition) and Dr. Ben Schiffrin's out-of-print *Emigrant Wilderness and Northwestern Yosemite*. The trails along Yosemite's northeastern boundary are more comprehensively covered in this book. From US 395, roads climb west to trailheads north and east of Yosemite's Sierra Crest, and from these you can advance up canyons to the crest and then beyond into the lands of the northern third of the park. Several less-used trails that do not cross into Yosemite have been omitted, including the Horse Creek Trail and trails leading to Tamarack Lake, up Lundy Canyon, and up Lake Canyon.

The landscapes in this region are a mixture of granitic landscapes—John Muir's "Range of Light"—and metamorphic ones. In the northeastern corner, including Buckeye Canyon, there are even volcanic rocks. The granitic rocks, creating a landscape of varying light-gray shades, are farther west, while the metamorphic rocks, in various shades of brown, brownish red, rust, and ochre, outcrop along the Sierra Crest and east of it. Metamorphic rocks weather to produce soils with more nutrients, supporting an abundance of subalpine and alpine wildflowers.

Once across the Sierra Crest into Yosemite, the landscape is characterized by many parallel or near-parallel canyons, which generally get progressively deeper toward the east. Many of these are intersected by trails for just short stretches, increasing their remoteness. Some canyons with trails are included in Trips 4, 7, and 8 in this chapter and others in chapter 2. But as this book's original author wrote, "Many of the canyons lack trails, and the park's management is to be applauded for keeping them that way. . . . this Yosemite backcountry and the adjacent Emigrant Wilderness together contain the finest assemblage of cross-country routes to be found in the Sierra Nevada." Your current author concurs 100%: these parallel canyons—including Spiller, Slide, Thompson, and Stubblefield—offer not only remoteness, solitude, and striking beauty but also remarkably easy walking compared with off-trail adventures farther south in the Sierra.

OPPOSITE: Junipers grow on bluffs alongside Peeler Lake. (See Trip 3, page 102.)

WILDERNESS PERMITS AND REGULATIONS



Permits for Trips 1–8, which enter the backcountry through Hoover Wilderness or Emigrant Wilderness, are issued by Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest; the Hoover Wilderness trailheads all have quotas from the last Friday in June through September 15. Fifty percent of permits can be reserved through recreation.gov (search for “Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest wilderness permits”) six months before your start date, and 50% are available on a first-come, first-served basis beginning at 1 p.m. the day before your trip. Pick up both reserved and first-come, first-served permits at the **Bridgeport Ranger Station** (75694 US 395), at the south end of Bridgeport; to pick up a reserved permit in their drop box after-hours, call 760-932-7070. Visit tinyurl.com/hooverwildernesspermits for more information. Though Robinson Creek quotas do fill in summer, obtaining these permits is much less competitive than obtaining Yosemite permits. Permit reservations cost \$3 per person, plus a \$6-per-permit reservation fee. Trip 9, starting at the Saddlebag Lake Trailhead and accessing Twenty Lakes Basin, does not have a quota, and permits can be obtained at the **Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center** in northeastern Lee Vining or in Yosemite National Park at the **Tuolumne Meadows Wilderness Center** (but not other Yosemite permit-issuing centers). In Yosemite National Park, campfires are prohibited above 9,600 feet. In Hoover Wilderness, campfires are prohibited within 0.25 mile of Barney and Peeler Lakes (Trips 2–4), above 9,000 feet in the Green Creek and Virginia Creek drainages (Trips 5–8), and throughout the Twenty Lakes Basin (Trip 9). Bear canisters are required throughout Hoover Wilderness and Yosemite National Park.

CAMPGROUNDS

Numerous U.S. Forest Service campgrounds are in the vicinity, including **Sonora Bridge** and **Leavitt Meadows Campgrounds** along CA 108 (east of Sonora Pass), six campgrounds in the Twin Lakes and Buckeye Creek vicinity (**Honeymoon Flat**, **Robinson Creek**, **Paha**, **Crags**, **Lower Twin Lakes**, and **Buckeye**), **Green Creek** and **Green Creek Group Campgrounds** along Green Creek Road, **Trumbull Lake Campground** along Virginia Lakes Road, and nine campgrounds along CA 120 east of Tioga Pass (**Lower Lee Vining**, **Moraine**, **Aspen Grove**, **Big Bend**, **Ellery**, **Junction**, **Sawmill Walk-In**, **Tioga Lake**, and **Saddlebag Lake**). In addition, there are private campgrounds at Twin Lake’s **Mono Village** and at Lee Vining’s **Mono Vista RV Park**, both more suited to RVs than to tent camping; see Appendix A for more information*.

■ TRIP DESCRIPTIONS

■ TRIP 1 Tower Peak Country via West Walker River

DIFFICULTY  **TRIP TYPE**  **DURATION** Backpack with some off-trail hiking required **DISTANCE** 50.9-mile point-to-point **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 7,120'/10,870'; entire trip: +9,410'/-6,890' **SEASON** July–September **USE** Light **MAPS** *Pickel Meadow, Tower Peak, Piute Mountain, Tiltill Mountain* **PERMIT** Leavitt Meadows, issued by Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest; Sonora Pass if reversed

*At the time of this writing, only reservable campsites and Backpackers' Campgrounds were open, and no first-come, first-served sites were available; see nps.gov/yose/playourvisit/camping.htm for details.

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Leavitt Meadows Trailhead	[S] START OFF-TRAIL SIDE TRIP: 1.1 miles to Otter Lakes	
0.4	Leavitt Meadows Trailhead–Secret Lake junction	25.9	base of Kendrick Peak
2.6	Secret Lake junction	29.7	Bond Pass–PCT junction
3.1	Roosevelt Lake	30.2	Dorothy Lake stock spur
3.6	south end Lane Lake	31.2	Dorothy Lake Pass
6.2	Hidden Lake junction	32.1	Bonnie Lake–PCT junction
6.8	stock West Walker–Fremont Lake junction	32.5	Lake Harriet
7.4	hiker West Walker–Fremont Lake junction	33.6	Cascade Creek–PCT junction
[S] START SIDE TRIP: 1.2 miles to Fremont Lake		34.4	Cinko Lake–PCT junction
7.8	Beartrap Lake (Long Canyon) junction	36.3	West Fork West Walker–PCT junction
10.3	Upper Piute Meadows–Lower Piute Meadows junction	36.5	Upper Long Lake–PCT junction
11.3	Tower Lake–Kirkwood Creek junction	38.4	east end Kennedy Canyon
14.9	Tower Lake	41.1	Emigrant Pass–PCT junction
15.6	Tower Lake–Mary Lake saddle	42.9	Leavitt Lake–PCT junction
16.9	Mary Lake outlet	45.2	Leavitt Peak southeast spur
18.2	reach better use trail	[S] START OFF-TRAIL SIDE TRIP: 0.65 mile to Leavitt Peak	
19.5	Tilden Lake inlet	47.3	crest crossing north of Leavitt Peak
21.7	Tilden Lake outlet	48.5	Emigrant Wilderness boundary
[S] START SIDE TRIP: 0.7 mile along Tilden Lake's south shore		50.9	Sonora Pass Trailhead
23.15	Tilden Lake–PCT junction		

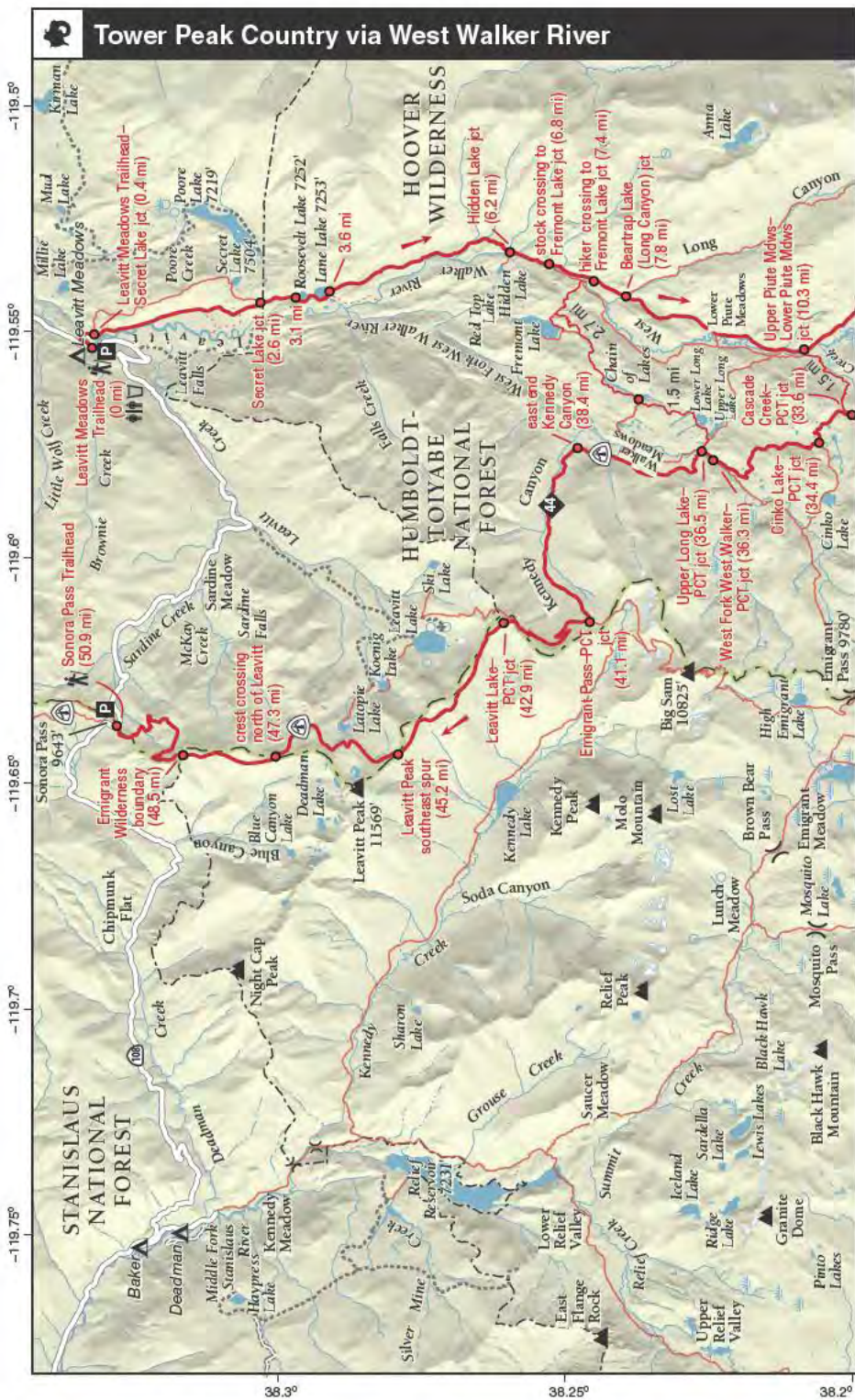
ALTERNATE ROUTES Return to Leavitt Meadows Trailhead via Cascade Creek (5.5 miles shorter); route past Cinko Lake (1.2 miles longer); return to Leavitt Meadows Trailhead via Long Lakes and Fremont Lake (2.5 miles shorter)

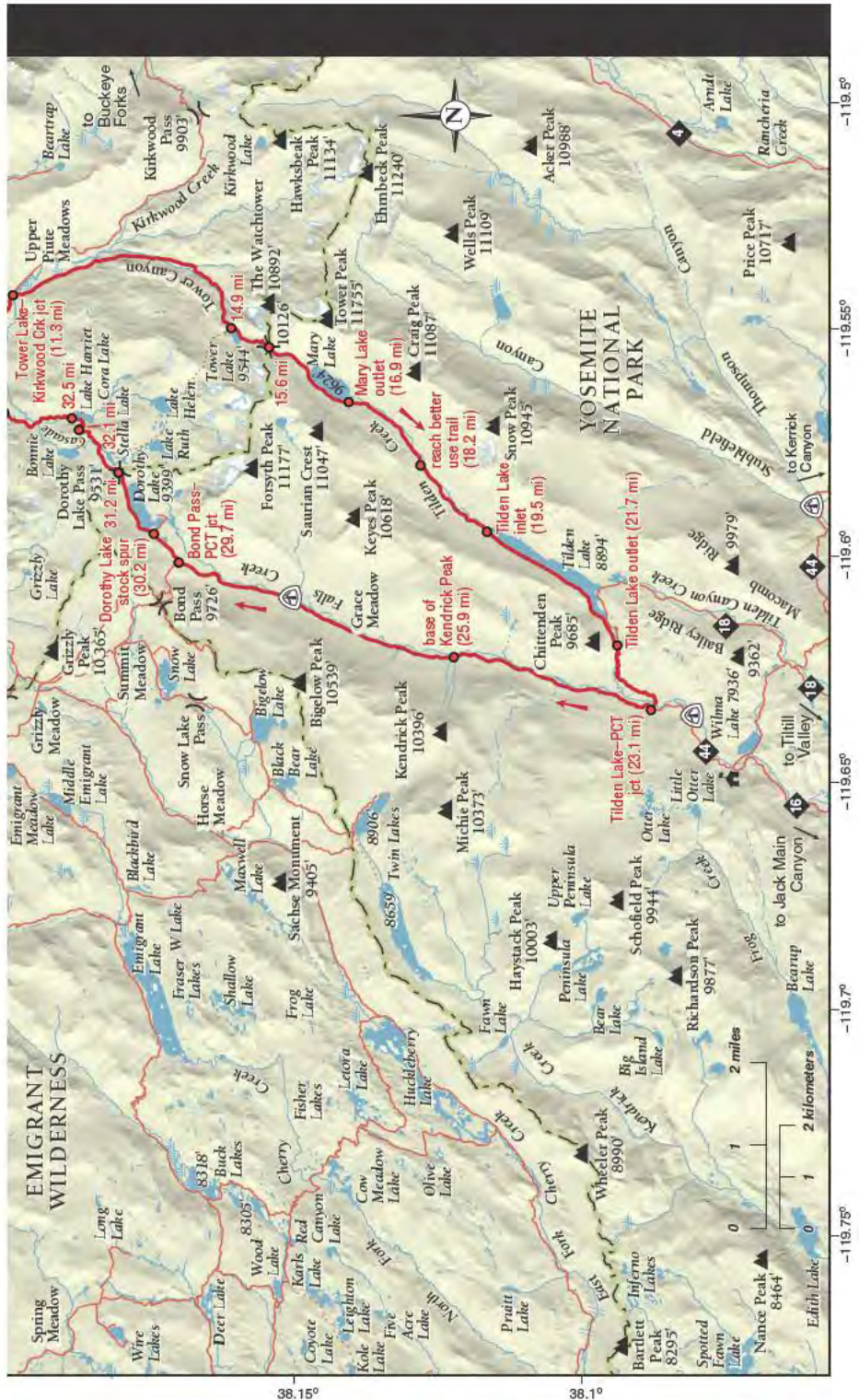
■ INTRODUCTION

This route, recommended as a six-day hike, begins along the West Walker River Trail and then climbs into the heart of the Yosemite north country. Upon reaching gorgeous Tower Lake, it cuts cross-country to reach Tilden Lake, possibly the epitome of the verdant, pastoral north country. Your exit, via the famous Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), provides a rugged, spectacular alpine finale. This route just touches upon the extensive network of trails in the northern part of Hoover Wilderness and Emigrant Wilderness. These trails are more extensively described in *Sierra North* and *Emigrant Wilderness*, both published by Wilderness Press.

Note that lingering snowfields through mid-July in average snowfall years and well into August in high snowfall years can make the cross-country route from Tower Lake south across the Yosemite boundary to Lake Mary and Tilden Lake inaccessible. Under these conditions, consider an out-and-back to Tower Lake or a semiloop that leads cross-country from Tower

(continued on page 84)





(continued from page 81)

Lake northwest across a straightforward pass to Lake Helen and Lake Ruth. You reunite with the described route at Stella Lake.

If you have only a single car, it can be inconvenient to return from the ending trailhead, Sonora Pass, to your car at the Leavitt Meadows Trailhead. (That is, it can take a long time to get a ride if you're hitchhiking along CA 108.) Two alternate routes that let you complete this trip as a semiloop are described in the text, but they miss the glorious high traverse to Sonora Pass along the described trip's final day.

DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEADS This trailhead is located along CA 108, 7.0 miles west of the CA 108–US 395 junction and 7.7 miles east of Sonora Pass. The dirt lot is on the east side of the road, just 400 feet south of the campground. There are toilets in the parking area and water faucets in the campground.

SHUTTLE DIRECTIONS The ending trailhead is located exactly atop Sonora Pass along CA 108, 7.0 miles west of the starting trailhead. A small parking area is directly across from the trailhead, and additional parking spaces and toilets are along a spur road 0.2 mile to the west. Neither public-transportation options nor local shuttle services connect these two trailheads, so a second car is recommended if you want to attempt this trip.

DESCRIPTION From the hiker parking lot, a trail leads north to the adjacent campground, then trends right (northeast) through the campground to a recently replaced bridge over the West Walker River. The trail turns east and soon south, follows the edge of an outcrop, continues along the west side of a minor draw, and reaches a junction where left (east) leads to Secret Lake, while you stay straight ahead (south), signposted for Roosevelt Lake and Lane Lake (0.4 mile). Here you leave the route depicted on the old 7.5' topo maps and follow the modern trail that skirts the eastern edge of Leavitt Meadows.

■ TRAIL CHANGES ■

Contemporary online USGS maps, available on the National Map Viewer (see page 687), as well as trail maps such as Tom Harrison's, show the correct trail locations, but the trail network depicted on printed USGS maps bears little resemblance to the modern routings along the Walker River corridor.

After a brief walk across a sagebrush flat, the trail descends toward the West Walker River, traversing a slope decorated by the bright blooms of prickly poppy, wavy-leaf paintbrush, and scarlet gilia just above its meandering flow. Far upcanyon, Tower Peak stands majestically on the Yosemite border. A succession of trails departs right (west) toward the riverbank and accompanying meadow, a collation of fisherman's trails, unsigned trails to the pack station, and discontinued dead-end routes; in each case, remain straight ahead (south), even where a mis-rotated sign directs HIKERS downward. The trail soon climbs a rocky slope, follows a corridor past a small tarn, and reaches the southern junction with the Secret Lake Trail (left, east; 2.6 miles). You stay straight ahead (right; south) and in a few steps reach the Hoover Wilderness

boundary, where a placard relays the trials of early emigrant voyages. Along the next length of trail, you may observe tall specimens of curl-leaf mountain-mahogany, an almost-tree-size shrub. Despite the leaves' dry, tough appearance, the local mule deer love to eat them. The plant is particularly striking from midsummer through early fall, when the styles (the part of the flower extending above the fruit) elongate. They are covered in very long, white hairs, and the hundreds of these plumes on each bush catch the sun, making the entire shrub glow. Next you reach Roosevelt Lake (3.1 miles), ringed by a sparse fringe of Jeffrey and lodgepole pines.

▲ While Roosevelt Lake offers only small campsites, including one on a saddle west of the lake, at Lane Lake to the south, there are excellent choices on both its northern and southern shores. Both of these small, shallow lakes—separated by a broad isthmus of sand (of possible glacial origin)—harbor trout and crayfish, as well as a teeming variety of insect and attendant birdlife. Perhaps lake-bottom springs, whose water once flowed through nutrient-rich volcanic rocks just above to the east and southeast, allow these two lakes to feature such an unusual abundance of life. Brook trout and Lahontan cutthroat trout can both be caught in these lakes, although bag limits are lower than the standard regulations; check specific California Department of Fish and Wildlife restrictions.

From Roosevelt Lake, the trail leads over a granite shoulder to Lane Lake's inlet and over a second ridge to its often-dry outlet. Just beyond, spurs lead to lakeside campsites (3.6 miles).

▲ Next, at the eastern corner of a large tarn, a well-used spur leads right (west) toward the West Walker River; this is the long-ago trail routing and leads to riverside campsites and, after 0.8 mile, to a 40-foot-tall roaring waterfall.

Continuing southeast on the main route, the rocky-dusty trail ascends briefly through volcanic deposits, then levels off as it passes several lovely aspen groves, some with lush grass floors even into late season. Following this corridor perched high above the West Walker River, you walk 1.25 miles before dropping back to the river's edge in a cool flat shaded by aspen, cottonwoods, water birch, and white fir. Beyond, the trail again trends away from the river, climbing a draw beside another tributary to a saddle with fine views north toward Leavitt Meadows and south up the West Walker Valley to Forsyth Peak on the Sierra Crest. Descending among picturesque Jeffrey pines and junipers, the trail again leads to the West Walker River's banks and soon to a signed turnoff right (west across the river) to Hidden and Red Top Lakes; there is a large campsite at the junction (6.2 miles). ▲ Continuing south, you ascend along the east bank of a narrow section of the West Walker River, where the river tumbles in a series of small falls and cascades through the narrows. The gorge was easily eroded in the fractured white granite that typifies the middle of the West Walker River Valley. To either side, walls are composed of younger volcanic rock that spans the color spectrum from black to reds and yellows.

Soon after the gorge opens and the river calms and widens, the trail splits. At a wide spot, signs direct stock users bound for Fremont Lake to go right (west, then south) and ford the river here; you continue straight ahead (left; south) along the eastern bank (6.8 miles). Onward, you walk pleasantly through nearly flat valley-bottom lodgepole pine forest, the broad, deep West Walker River meandering to your right and bluffs rising to the left. Quickly, you reach a junction, where right (west) leads to the hiker ford toward Fremont Lake, while

you again continue left (south), staying along the West Walker River corridor (7.4 miles). From this junction, heading due west toward the river leads to some lovely campsites, with good nearby fishing and swimming holes if water levels are safe. ▲

☐ SIDE TRIP TO FREMONT LAKE From the junction along the West Walker River, it is a 1.2-mile hike, steep in places, to Fremont Lake, at 8,220 feet in elevation. You'll find an abundance of well-used campsites at the lake's south end and along its southwestern shores. ▲ Fremont Lake lies directly on the route of the pioneers' Sonora Trail route west to the gold fields. In fact, emigrants once had to lower the outlet level of this good-size lake so that their wagons could pass around its lodgepole-and-juniper-lined western shore! **END OF SIDE TRIP**

Leaving the broad valley-bottom lodgepole pine forest, you ascend a narrow corridor to a minor saddle, then drop to another forested flat where you pass a junction that leads left (southeast) up Long Canyon to Beartrap Lake (7.8 miles). Staying right (southwest), you soon ford Long Canyon's creek (logs usually present) and continue along a corridor that is separated from the West Walker River by a granite rib; camping options are limited to small sites near two tarns you pass. Looping around a final granite dome, you reconverge with the main river at the northern end of Lower Piute Meadows. Walking through lodgepole pine forest, your trail continues just east of Lower Piute Meadows. Although there are few established campsites along the trail corridor (the large stock camps are mostly across the creek along the western edge of the meadow), you'll find ample places to pitch a tent. After about 0.6 mile the meadow pinches closed, and continued flat walking leads through lush lodgepole pine forest (think mosquitoes!) to a junction where right (southwest) is a trail that ascends Cascade Creek toward the PCT, while you stay left (southeast) to ascend Kirkwood Creek, signposted for Upper Piute Meadows (10.3 miles).

You amble upstream, staying east of another broad, boggy meadow strip, again coming close to the river as it tumbles down a narrower channel, and then reaching the northern tip of Upper Piute Meadows. Here are sandy campsites under lodgepole pine cover, along with a junction where left (southeast) is the continuing route up Kirkwood Creek to Kirkwood Pass and on to Buckeye Forks, while you turn right (south) to ford the river and proceed around Upper Piute Meadows' western perimeter, bound for Tower Lake (11.3 miles). You have two crossing options: a log balance just downstream of the junction marker where the river narrows, or a broad, deep, sandy wade in the meadow. Once across the river, you reach the Piute Cabin complex, once a U.S. Forest Service trail-maintenance station, now little-used. The trail is indistinct across the creek and past the cabins but reappears as you continue south. Skirt the huge meadow on its west side, a delightful (at least once the mosquitoes have moderated in late summer), flower-filled stroll backdropped by graceful, sweeping Hawksbeak Peak. Its north end is marshier, with a mosaic of arc-shaped oxbow lakes, formed as the river's meanders have been relocated during floods.

After about a mile you enter small Rainbow Meadow and begin to climb above the valley floor, a pleasant duff trail that leads through a tangle of downed trees—the aftermath of a 2011 windstorm. The Tower Lake Trail continues up, soon traversing a rocky slope high above a narrow, blocky gorge down which the river plummets. (*Note:* On older USGS maps, Tower Lake's



West Walker River near the Fremont Lake junction

outlet is considered the headwaters of the West Walker River, but more-current survey maps now confer this honor on a longer, slightly higher creek that emanates from a cirque beneath Ehrnbeck and Hawksbeak Peaks, and the tributary you are following is unnamed.) You are on metavolcanic rock into which the deeply incised stream channel was easily eroded. You stare across at the erosion-resistant white granite walls that bracket the river to the east and down to the stream: a plummeting ribbon of water.

Where the gorge ends, you ford the creek in a tangle of vegetation; there is currently a handy log to balance across. A moderate ascent leads through a dense forest of lodgepole pine and hemlock and across an unnamed tributary. Back along the river, you pass small campsites beneath hemlock boughs and then continue southwest, climbing more steeply up a creekside rib, still cloaked by a splendid hemlock forest. ▲ You emerge from tree cover in an often-marshy flat where repeated avalanches obliterate tree cover—the enduring trees are small and often missing limbs or have sheared-off tops. You ford the river again where it meets the tiny stream draining the glacier to the south; avalanche-downed trees usually conveniently span the flow. Ahead, the grade steepens and the trail narrows; you ascend a rocky slope just above Tower Lake's churning outlet stream. The Watchtower, Tower Peak's northern satellite, dominates the upward view; the Tower Lake outlet, cascading down a deep chasm, is equally captivating. The trail crosses to the creek's southern shore, winds upward through increasingly thick willow cover and quickly reaches a small knob at Tower Lake's northern end (14.9 miles). Small but picturesque campsites cluster in whitebark pine on the east side of the outlet. Note that Tower Lake has reverted to its natural fishless state—don't come here for remote fishing opportunities.

You continue around Tower Lake's southeastern shores, mostly an easy walk across meadows and sandy flats, with a few excursions onto talus, mostly following a use trail. About two-thirds of the way around the lake, you turn south to follow a sandy rib, or moraine, upward. A line of whitebark pine clings to the western side of the slope, while your faint trail continues up at the eastern base of the rib. Where this rib comes to an end, your use trail becomes fainter, turning more to the left (east) to follow a shelf, with bluffs below and above, to reach the main drainage gully. Proceeding upward again, you'll pick up pieces of a pad but are also walking increasingly on talus and snow. Continuing up the center of the drainage, you need to aim for the bare ground between two permanent snowfields. *Note:* Snow often spans the entire slope well into July—and sometimes all year. If there is still continuous snow, make sure that it isn't icy and you have the protective equipment and skill required to continue.

After a short headwall, the angle rapidly lessens, and you reach the top of the Tower Lake–Mary Lake saddle (15.6 miles). From the 10,110-foot saddle between Saurian Crest and Tower Peak, you can gaze southwest down Tilden Creek canyon over barren, windswept Mary Lake to long, forest-girded Tilden Lake and its southern guardian dome, Chittenden Peak. You've now completed the only challenging portion of the cross-country trek—ahead, you can see that the route to and around Mary Lake is straightforward.

Your continued route remains just northeast of the center swale, winding down rocky-sandy slopes that avoid upslope talus bands and downslope willow thickets. You descend approximately 500 feet to reach the broad meadow at Mary Lake's head, staying along its periphery. Clustered whitebark pines above the inlet of Mary Lake afford the best campsites here. ▲ Follow Mary Lake's northwest shore to reach the outlet (16.9 miles), and then descend moderately through frost-shattered hummocks and a velvety alpine fell field of reed grass, rice grass, and red heather, always remaining on the northwest side of Mary Lake's outlet stream, nascent Tilden Creek. It is a wonderfully rewarding walk down the headwaters of one of northern Yosemite's infamously broad, linear, glacier-carved valleys. You walk on grass, sand, and slab, with smooth, steep walls rising to their side.

At about 9,160 feet in elevation, as you enter more-continuous lodgepole pine forest, a trail becomes better defined (18.2 miles). Your gorgeous walk continues alternating between granite slab and forested strips, with flower patches and the bubbling creek providing up-close splendor, while Keyes Peak, Craig Peak, and Snow Peak's walls frame the valley. As you approach the immense, boggy meadow that segues to Tilden Lake, you pass some decent campsites in lodgepole pine forest (your last camping opportunity until you reach the base of Chittenden Peak, toward Tilden Lake's outlet). ▲ The aforementioned meadow would once have been an extension of Tilden Lake, but it has been filled with sediment and now hosts an immense wildflower garden in early summer. Your use trail skirts the meadow's northwestern edge to reach the start of Tilden Lake (19.5 miles). While your author attempts not to pick favorites among Yosemite's lakes—since nearly all have a long list of virtues—Tilden Lake certainly ranks as particularly special. For 2.2 miles, you are now walking just steps from the lake's shore, staring across its deep-blue waters to the bare slab on its southeast side. At its midpoint the lake is nearly pinched in half—a mere 300 feet between two sandy lobes. Perhaps you'd

like to drop your pack and brave the frigid waters to swim across? As you approach black-streaked Chittenden Peak the lake turns to the west, and here, just southwest of a small dome, are some of Tilden Lake's best tent sites, sitting in lodgepole pine forest a little back from the shore. ▲ Chittenden Peak, named for an early Yosemite boundary commissioner, is easily climbed and provides the best overlook of Jack Main Canyon. Rounding south of Chittenden Peak you reach Tilden Lake's outlet and step across the creek on rocks (21.7 miles).

[S] SIDE TRIP ALONG TILDEN LAKE The trail along Tilden Lake's southern shore offers storybook views upcanyon to cockscombed Saurian Crest, particularly memorable in the early morning, when the summits are mirrored in the lake's still waters. Excellent campsites are also found here, on knobs overlooking the lake. ▲ Continue about 0.7 mile for the best views. Also see the alternate route described in Trip 18. **END OF SIDE TRIP**

Tilden Creek spills steeply from Tilden Lake's outlet, dashing toward Jack Main Canyon through a delightful hemlock forest. Your trail switchbacks beside it, with views across the canyon; up Chittenden Peak's steep, black-streaked walls; and to the tumbling creek beside you. After a nearly 600-foot drop, the gradient eases and you descend more gradually through lodgepole forest, passing a small tarn en route to a ford of Falls Creek (usually wet). Beyond, you pass some small campsites and shortly arrive at a junction with the PCT. ▲ Here you turn right (north), following the PCT toward Dorothy Lake and into Emigrant Wilderness, while left (south) leads to Jack Main Canyon (Trip 16; 23.1 miles).

Tower Peak



S OFF-TRAIL SIDE TRIP TO OTTER LAKES Should you first want isolated camping, head 0.1 mile south to a creek and ascend its south bank 1 mile west to Otter Lake, located on a subalpine bench with Little Otter Lake and more than a dozen ponds and lakelets. **END OF SIDE TRIP**

The 6.6 miles to the next trail junction are fast, beautiful walking—you gain only 1,200 feet while traipsing alongside the long subalpine meadows that distinguish this broad canyon. Steep walls rise to either side, set back enough that they never feel confining. Chittenden Peak and its north satellite serve as impressive reference points as you progress northward. You pass two substantial meadows with small campsites at their perimeters before arriving at the south end of much-larger Grace Meadow, Falls Creek meandering lazily along its western side (26.8 miles). Here, the upper canyon opens into plain view. The guiding landmarks are, from east to west, Forsyth Peak, Dorothy Lake Pass, and Bond Pass. Under lodgepole cover along the meadow's edge, you can set up camp, although flat, unvegetated sites are quite limited. ▲ Throughout these miles, endless trickles descend from the west, making for wet, muddy feet in early season; take care not to trample the surrounding vegetation in an attempt to keep your feet dry, for this not only kills the plants but also compacts the soil, making it hard for meadow species to regenerate.

Leaving Grace Meadow, you soon pass through yet another small meadow before the gradually increasing gradient becomes noticeable. After a 600-foot climb, you meet, in quick succession, two trails that unite to climb to nearby Bond Pass, the park's boundary (29.7 and 29.8 miles). This trail is an alternate route into Emigrant Wilderness and on to Sonora Pass, with the trail network shown on the trip map. Just beyond these junctions, volcanic sediments and exposures are evident in ever-increasing amounts—a taste of what's to come. Alternating between drier and wetter forest patches, you soon reach a once-upon-a-time meadow that is now crowded with snow-twisted lodgepole pines that effectively block the view. Only as you reach the tarn south of Dorothy Lake does steep-fronted Forsyth Peak come into view, and soon Dorothy Lake itself.

Before you reach the lake's shores, you pass a sign pointing stock parties southeast around the lake to legal campsites (30.2 miles). Hikers should follow this use trail as well; Dorothy Lake may be 0.7 mile long, but it offers few campsites along its northern shore, for either the terrain is sloping or the ground is marshy and vegetation covered. Hikers needn't continue the full 0.4 mile to the big stock campsite, for in just a few hundred feet you reach some excellent campsites beside clusters of lodgepole pine. ▲ As you continue around Dorothy Lake, water seeps from the base of upslope slabs until late in the summer, and these endless rills irrigate the slopes, nurturing splashes of color (shooting star, elephant heads, goldenrod, paintbrush, whorled penstemon, pussypaws, and false Solomon's seal) and expanses of corn lilies and willows. The trail can also be quite muddy, so walk on the wet tread or balance on rocks instead of damaging the surrounding subalpine turf. A short climb above the lake's east end takes you up to Dorothy Lake Pass (9,531'), which affords a final good view of the lasting snowfields that grace the north slopes of Forsyth Peak (31.2 miles).


Leaving Yosemite National Park (and Hoover Wilderness), you enter Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and follow the trail as it wiggles around rocky Stella Lake, drops to a small tarn (beside which is an unmarked spur to Bonnie Lake), and proceeds down six tight switchbacks through broken slab to Lake Harriet's western shore. You pass small campsites, but there are better, larger choices along Lake Harriet's eastern side. ▲ The PCT brushes quickly past Lake Harriet's outlet (32.5 miles) and continues down, but if you are taking this trip under moderate-to-high-water conditions, note that the PCT crosses the Lake Harriet outlet, Cascade Creek, just 0.1 mile downstream, and this is often a wade. Meanwhile, you can easily rock- and log-hop across Lake Harriet's inlet and then pick up a good east-bank use trail that quickly leads back to the PCT. This option also treats you to a better view of Tower Peak.


The two forks reunited, the continuing trail winds down the creek's eastern bank, alternating between bare, broken slabs and clusters of lodgepole pine. The creek to your side is forever spilling down little falls, for the rock erodes in a blocky fashion. Then, 0.6 mile below Lake Harriet, the trail fords Cascade Creek in a pocket of lodgepole pine (no camping), requiring either a delicate log-and-rock hop or a broad wade; an old footbridge is long gone. Continuing briefly across dark slabs, the PCT looks down upon an often-flooded meadow, passes a pair of heath-bound tarns, and soon reaches a junction (33.6 miles), where you continue left (north) on the PCT, while right (northeast) leads 1.6 miles down the Cascade Creek corridor back to the West Walker River Trail at Lower Piute Meadows.

A **ALTERNATE ROUTE TO TRAILHEAD VIA CASCADE CREEK** This 1.6-mile trail segment leads you back to Lower Piute Meadows, from where you can retrace your steps 10.3 miles to the trailhead. After a brief traverse, your route drops down a draw shaded by fine hemlock stands and then transitions onto dry metamorphic outcrops—note how the rock upslope of the trail is layered and tipped on end. A few splendid junipers, together with big western white pines, grace the slopes above, but mostly the slope is scrubby: wax currant, tobacco brush, and pinemat manzanita. A long series of rocky switchbacks leads back to the stream corridor and welcome red fir shade. Here, Cascade Creek flows down a gorge incised in the metamorphic rock, tumbling down rough bedrock and dropping down small steps, the biggest drop named Cascade Falls. On the valley floor, the trail wanders through white firs and lodgepole pines beside a boggy meadow. About where the meadow pinches closed, the trail inobviously fords the West Walker River, a reasonably deep, sandy wade. At high flows, it is best to walk slightly upstream, where you're likely to find a selection of logs to cross on. Across the creek, on a big cobble bar, you pick up the trail and follow it a quick 300 feet to the junction where you previously trended right (south) toward Upper Piute Meadows, while now you head left (north) to return to Leavitt Meadows.


END OF ALTERNATE ROUTE

Crossing onto metavolcanic rock, a 0.8-mile segment takes you across a broad saddle cradling a series of tarns (and possible campsites) and then down into a draw, across a small creek (on rocks or logs) and to a junction with a trail to Cinko Lake (34.4 miles).

A ALTERNATE ROUTE PAST CINKO LAKE The left-hand (southwest-trending) trail that leads to Cinko Lake was once the route of the PCT. It climbs 0.9 mile to Cinko Lake (decent campsites) and then descends 0.6 mile to the West Fork West Walker River.  Turning right (northeast), the trail descends alongside the river, fording it midway, and reuniting with the current PCT's route after an additional 1.6 miles at the junction labeled "West Fork West Walker–PCT jct" on the map. This is a good detour to take if you are hunting for a private campsite. **END OF ALTERNATE ROUTE**

The rock is a mosaic of older metavolcanic and metasedimentary rocks, including a wall sparkling with garnets and bands of marble. Beyond, the trail turns west, again winding along forested corridors between granite slabs and past early-drying tarns. After 0.5 mile the trail turns north, paralleling the West Fork West Walker River on a sandy ramp high above the drainage. Over the coming 0.5 mile your passageway, colored by bursts of Leichtlin's mariposa lily, mountain pride penstemon, and Brewer's aster, slowly descends to meet the West Fork West Walker Trail near some excellent campsites (36.3 miles). Descending the West Fork West Walker River Trail, in just 0.2 mile you reach a second junction (and more campsites) where the PCT turns left (northwest) to cross the West Fork West Walker River on a stout bridge, while right (southeast) leads to the Long Lakes and Fremont Lake (36.5 miles). 

A SECOND ALTERNATE ROUTE TO LEAVITT MEADOWS TRAILHEAD The second and longer optional route back to your trailhead takes you past a number of lakes; the pair of Long Lakes, the Chain of Lakes, and Fremont Lake all offer camping, swimming, and fishing opportunities. From the junction where the PCT crosses the West Fork West Walker River on a footbridge, turn right (east, then southeast) toward the Long Lakes. Ignore a minor north-trending trail you pass after 35 feet that leads to Walker Meadows, continuing southeast to a junction where you turn left (north) toward the Chain of Lakes, while right (southeast) leads back to the West Walker River at Lower Piute Meadows (0.2 mile).

You loop around Upper Long Lake, ford its intermittent stream, loop around a sandy knob, and reach Lower Long Lake where you'll find splendid campsites with views north to the Tower Peak area.  Rounding another elongate, unnamed lake, the trail trends north, climbing over another knob, the trail veneered with slippery sand. As you begin winding above the southernmost lake in the chain, a signed lateral departs left (west) for Walker Meadows. Staying right, your trail continues approximately south, following the Chain of Lakes, but regularly climbing up and over small granite outcrops and in between passing a selection of campsites in lodgepole pine–shaded flats.

The Fremont Lake granodiorite has extensive landscape-scale joints creating endless near-parallel corridors that trend south-southwest, paired with cross-cutting corridors angled to the northwest-southeast. The Chain of Lakes and Long Lakes sit in one of the most prominent of these fractures (and the West Walker River flows down a parallel valley), although the Long Lakes' "length" spills along the cross-fractured direction. The trails here often briefly climb steeply, then turn 90 degrees and are suddenly flatter as

they follow a line of tarns or some densely forested flat between granite ribs or domes; these easier stretches are along a joint. Where the corridor ends, the trail then jogs and climbs or drops steeply to cross the more rugged landscape between the fractured-defined passageways. A glimpse of the area on Google Earth before your trip gives immediate insight to the trail wanderings.


At the northern end of the Chain of Lakes the trail bends east, curving close to the lake; yellow pond lilies and often a duck family float on its surface. Continuing northeast on a dry, joint-defined slope, the trail now skirts around the final of three large domes that separate your shelf from the West Walker River corridor.

You pass an unsigned use trail that leads steeply to Fremont Lake's shore, but continue the high traverse across a sandy slope, enjoying a succession of weather-beaten juniper and, yet again, memorable views toward Tower Peak. The rather wiggly route eventually leads to a signed junction in a forested alcove, where left (northwest) leads to Fremont Lake and right (southeast) back to the West Walker River (3.5 miles). Turning left—for having taken this route, you should see Fremont Lake—continue a final 0.4 mile to large campsites along the southern shore of Fremont Lake (3.8 miles). This popular lake makes a great last night's stay in the wilderness. Other campsites abound along the western side. ▲

Returning to the junction (4.2 miles), you head down to the West Walker River and another junction. Left (northeast) leads to the stock crossing of the West Walker River, while right (south) is the hiker route (4.9 miles). Turning right you quickly ford the river—always a wade and sometimes one that requires extreme care—and reach a junction you'll recognize from the start of your trip (5.0 miles). Turn left (north) and retrace your steps 7.4 miles to the trailhead. **END OF ALTERNATE ROUTE**

Across the bridge and past more campsites, the trail winds its way along the fringe of Walker Meadows, then transitions to granite slab at the base of soaring volcanic ridges. The PCT passes through a lodgepole corridor to a crossing of a wide but ephemeral creek, whose water flows mostly underground through the porous volcanic sediments. Continuing just at the forest–talus slope boundary, you shortly pass a small waterfall splashing into a volcanic alcove (worth a look). Your traverse north continues for another 0.5 mile, along which you can leave the trail at any point to descend to the flat-floored forest just below and make camp.

By the time the trail turns northwest up Kennedy Canyon (38.4 miles), granitic bedrock has reappeared, but 0.5 mile upcanyon, not far beyond ▲ a potential campsite, it disappears for good. The trail alternately passes through pleasant lodgepole pine forest and across small grassy benches above the gurgling creek. Continuing up this brown-walled, volcanic canyon, soon after you cross the canyon's creek, the trail's tread steepens, crosses a tributary, and enters a prominent avalanche zone: the logs littering the ground all face the same direction and many surviving trees are missing lower branches. Ahead, the subalpine lodgepole pines are replaced by clumps of timberline whitebark pine, scattered across extensive spring-fed meadows. A steady climb leads past several campsites ▲ to a junction with an old mining road at 9,710 feet, where you

turn right (north) toward Sonora Pass, while left (south) leads back toward Emigrant Pass (41.5 miles); there are good campsites  and a spring about 0.25 mile to the south.

Continuing, you have now left behind all reasonable campsites until Sonora Pass and also all reliable water supplies until the final descent to Sonora Pass—fill up here. The coming 1.6-mile climb offers few botanical or geologic distractions—it is simply a long climb up the old road tread, your reward being the expanding views down Kennedy Canyon and the adjacent volcanic landscape. The terrain finally levels as you reach the ridgetop, the Sierra Crest, and the trail crosses to the west side of the crest, continuing a short distance north to a junction (42.9 miles). Here the old mining road turns right (southeast), switchbacking back across the ridge and down to Leavitt Lake, while you stay left (northwest), traversing just below the crestline. It is lovely, easy walking, with astounding views west to the Kennedy Creek canyon and triangular Kennedy Lake and across to Molo, Kennedy, and Relief Peaks, the trio of volcanic summits to the southwest. Tower Peak, which you passed beneath just days ago, surges into view far to the southeast. This stretch of trail is decorated with colorful blooms from early to midsummer. Sky pilot (the northern variety, *Polemonium pulcherrimum*), narrow-leaved fleabane, and Eaton's daisy (the latter two both rare species in most of the Sierra) are all quite common. Later, you pass clusters of wind-shaped low-statured whitebark pines, behind which hardy hikers occasionally bivvy (but there is no water source), and eventually you cross back to the east side of the crest as you cross Leavitt Peak's southeastern spur (45.2 miles).

A broad arc leads across a slope above Koenig Lake—take care, for it often harbors late snow—and then you loop around an east-trending spur from which you can easily ascend Leavitt Peak.

[S] OFF-TRAIL SIDE TRIP TO LEAVITT PEAK From the base of the aforementioned snowbank, it is just 0.65 mile up a ridge to the summit of Leavitt Peak. If you have spare time, it is a straightforward, albeit rock-and-talus, ridge walk with 750 feet of elevation gain to the summit. Once you're about halfway up the ridge, there are vestiges of a use trail. **END OF SIDE TRIP**

You drop steeply down another often-snowy slope, now directly above Latopie Lake. Continuing to traverse with little elevation gain or loss, the trail cuts across the front of rugged, multicolored volcanic bluffs to reach a notch where you bid farewell to the excellent views of the Yosemite hinterlands. The route drops a quarter mile north, then angles northwest around an often-snowbound seasonal tarn, passes two very youthful glacial moraines, and climbs to another crest crossing (47.3 miles).

■ VOLCANIC ROCK ■

The volcanic rubble you're walking across is part of the Relief Peak Formation. It includes lava flows of various chemical compositions, lahars (mudflows triggered by volcanic eruptions), and what is termed autobreccia. Autobreccia forms when the erupting magma causes either previously deposited volcanic rock or the underlying bedrock (in this case granite) to fracture and this fractured rock is engulfed in the magma. All the places where you see chunks of one rock enveloped in a volcanic matrix are autobreccia of volcanic origin.

Looking far down to CA 108, the trail traipses across a west-facing slope high above Blue Canyon; the whitebark pine and currants have been wind-pruned into smooth, flat mounds. Ahead, you cross to the east side of the crest a final time among a delightful garden of low-growing alpine plants (48.5 miles). Now north of the Emigrant Wilderness boundary, you parallel the crest north before a tight switchback leads back south and then east across a broad cirque framed by rugged volcanic crags that, in early summer, is snowbound and requires great caution. Continuing north then back to the west, the trail ultimately descends to cross Sardine Creek and then a second, unnamed, ephemeral drainage. The late-lasting snowfields and the nutrient-rich volcanic rocks nurture dense expanses of flowers: the mule ears, western blue flax, scarlet gilia, California valerian, and mountain monardella are among the most colorful, although several dozen species grow here. Finally the trail winds briefly through multistemmed whitebark pine clusters to reach CA 108 at Sonora Pass. Now just a car shuttle remains to complete your trip (50.9 miles).

■ **TRIP 2 Peeler Lake, Kerrick Meadow, and Buckeye Forks**

DIFFICULTY **TRIP TYPE** **DURATION** Backpack **DISTANCE** 22.9-mile point-to-point **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 7,110'/9,590'; entire trip: +3,480'/-3,360' **SEASON** July-early October **USE** Moderate to Barney Lake, then light **MAPS** Buckeye Ridge, Matterhorn Peak, Twin Lakes **PERMIT** Robinson Creek, issued by Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest; Buckeye Creek if reversed

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Robinson Creek Trailhead (Mono Village)	10.9	South Fork Buckeye Creek crossing
0.5	turn from road onto trail	13.6	Buckeye Pass-Kirkwood Creek junction (Buckeye Forks)
4.1	Barney Lake	15.4	small falls on side creek
5.2	lowest Robinson Creek ford	16.5	Hoover Wilderness boundary
6.75	Peeler Lake-Robinson Lakes junction	19.5	Buckeye Creek crossing
7.5	spur to east shore Peeler Lake	22.6	Eagle Creek junction
8.8	Seavey Pass-Buckeye Pass junction (in Kerrick Meadow)	22.7	Buckeye Creek Trailhead
9.5	Buckeye Pass	22.9	Buckeye Creek parking

■ **INTRODUCTION**

This trip around Buckeye Ridge visits a surprising range of Sierran environments, from the sagebrush scrub of the east side to spectacular granite-ringed Peeler Lake and subalpine Kerrick Meadow, and past water-loving clumps of quaking aspen. Walking the length of the two biggest east-oriented valleys in the area, you can't help but imagine a landscape once dominated by great rivers of ice. While the miles to Peeler Lake can be busy, the rest of the walk traverses sparsely traveled terrain. Be sure to give yourself time to enjoy the upper portion of Buckeye Creek, termed the Roughs, with its cascades and small falls.

DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEAD From US 395 near the northwest side of Bridgeport, take paved Twin Lakes Road southwest 13.6 miles to the entrance of Mono Village, at the west end of upper Twin Lake. *(continued on page 98)*

■ Trips of Yosemite's ■ West Lands

Introduction to This Area

WHILE THE PREVIOUS chapter covers trails entering Yosemite's north country from the north and east, this chapter covers lower-elevation trailheads that access this region from the southwest, either from the Cherry Lake environs or along the Hetch Hetchy Road. Trips 10–13, departing from the Cherry Lake Road and vicinity all offer solitude by virtue of being along a long, windy, little-known road. In contrast, the Hetch Hetchy Road receives abundant traffic, but only Trips 15 and 17 will be busy; the other trips described depart from little-used trailheads or head deep into the backcountry and therefore will be more sparsely used once you are 5 miles from the trailhead.

One common thread throughout this region is fire—every hike included traverses lands burned, in part, by either the 1996 Ackerson Fire or the 2013 Rim Fire. For many of the hikes, the majority of the hike is through charred terrain, with only the two longest loops, Trips 16 and 18, escaping to higher-elevation, more-northeasterly lands that were mostly untouched. The fires mean shade is lacking, but the spring-wildflower display is usually outstanding; you should not be discouraged from visiting the burned lands, but be simply aware that their feel has changed remarkably in the past decades.

Northwestern Yosemite is virtually 100% granite: domes, cliffs, and endless granite slabs. Long stretches are—or were—forested, but elsewhere bare rock dominates. In contrast to the long, linear canyons along Yosemite's northern and eastern boundaries, at lower elevations those river drainages are incredibly rugged and difficult to ascend without trails; the creeks are fast flowing, their gorges are often enclosed by steep bluffs, and everywhere are landscape-scale joints and fractures that eroded into a landscape of steep granite ribs, ridges, and cliffs. Depressions in the landscape hold water bodies—sometimes spectacular big, deep lakes, and elsewhere tiny ponds or seasonal wetlands that breed abundant mosquitoes. Rancheria Mountain, visited on Trip 18, offers a different experience, with a gentler landscape and volcanic rock outcrops.

The exact landscapes encountered on each trail are, of course, quite varied. Trip 10 offers spectacular broad expanses of slab and several lakes. Trip 11 is similar, but shorter, leading to a single lake, Kibbie Lake. Trip 12 offers a walk around giant Lake Eleanor with side trips to surrounding uplands. Trips 13 and 14 lead you on brief excursions to the Tuolumne River

Canyon. Trips 15–18 depart from Hetch Hetchy Reservoir. This trailhead provides some of the best access to remote northwestern Yosemite, as well as to the most popular trip described in this chapter, Trip 17, the traverse east above Hetch Hetchy Reservoir to Rancheria Falls Camp, passing Tueeulala and Wapama Falls along the way. Most day hikers do only the relatively level 2.4-mile stretch to Wapama Falls, a wonderful spring and early-summer destination. Finally, there are two trails from the Mather Ranger Station: Trip 19, a short hike to rewarding, aptly named Lookout Point, and Trip 20, a longer day hike or backpack to an even more impressive lookout, the summit of Smith Peak. Both are good early- or late-season excursions, when snow covers the park's higher elevations.

WILDERNESS PERMITS AND REGULATIONS

The trailheads for Trips 9–11 lie in Stanislaus National Forest. Though there is a quota for these trailheads, no reservations are possible. Instead, permits may be obtained only up to 24 hours in advance by contacting the **Groveland Ranger District** at 209-962-7825. It is located on the west side of Buck Meadow on CA 120—the street address is 24545 CA 120, Groveland, CA 95321. Yosemite permit centers can also issue permits for these trailheads, but it is also not possible to make reservations for them. Trip 12 does not require a wilderness permit. Permits for Trips 13–18 and Trip 20 are issued by Yosemite National Park; see page 61 for details on obtaining wilderness permits in Yosemite. For the Yosemite trailheads in this chapter, all permits, both reserved and first come, first served, can be picked up at the **Hetch Hetchy Entrance Station** (aka the **Mather Ranger Station**) along the Hetch Hetchy Road. Visit nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm for details. Trip 19 is day use only. In Yosemite National Park, campfires are prohibited above 9,600 feet and at Kibbie Lake (Trip 11). In Emigrant Wilderness, campfires are prohibited above 9,000 feet (Trip 10). Bear canisters are required throughout Yosemite National Park.



CAMPGROUNDS



There are many U.S. Forest Service campgrounds along the access roads to these trailheads. For Trips 10–12, **Cherry Valley Campground** at Cherry Lake is the most convenient; for Trips 14–20, **Diamond O Campground** along Evergreen Road is the most convenient. In addition, there are three campgrounds along CA 120, west of Yosemite National Park: **The Pines**, **Lost Claim**, and **Sweetwater**. Dispersed camping—that is, camping wherever you wish—is also permitted in the Cherry Lake vicinity. **Hodgdon Meadow Campground**, just inside Yosemite National Park, is also relatively conveniently located, requiring just a short backtrack to reach the trailheads for Trips 14–20. Finally, if you have a wilderness permit, you can stay at **Hetch Hetchy Backpackers' Campground**, on the loop road at the end of Hetch Hetchy Road. *Note:* This road is restricted beyond the Hetch Hetchy Entrance Station. In midsummer the road is open 7 a.m.–8 p.m., but open hours decrease with dwindling daylight. The current hours are posted where you turn onto Evergreen Road or on the Yosemite National Park website.*

*At the time of this writing, only reservable campsites and Backpackers' Campgrounds were open, and no first-come, first-served sites were available; see nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/camping.htm for details.

TRIP DESCRIPTIONS

TRIP 10 Kibbie Ridge and Boundary Lake

DIFFICULTY  **TRIP TYPE**  **DURATION** Backpack **DISTANCE** 21.2-mile out-and-back **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 5,900'/7,920'; one-way: +2,550'/-900'; round-trip: ±3,450' **SEASON** Mid-May–October **USE** Light **MAPS** Cherry Lake North, Kibbie Lake **PERMIT** Kibbie Ridge, issued by Stanislaus National Forest

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Kibbie Ridge Trailhead		 START OFF-TRAIL SIDE TRIP: 0.5 mile to Many Island Lake
1.2	Kibbie Lake–Kibbie Ridge junction	9.2	Styx Pass
4.1	Lookout Point	10.0	Boundary Lake spur
4.9	Swede's Camp	10.6	Boundary Lake
5.3	shallow pond		 START OFF-TRAIL SIDE TRIP: 1.25 miles to Little Bear Lake
7.0	Sachse Spring	21.2	Kibbie Ridge Trailhead
9.0	Styx Pass tarn		

ALTERNATE ROUTE Off-trail alternate routes from Boundary Lake to Kibbie Lake (mileage varies); alternate loop via West Fork Cherry Creek and Jack Main Canyon (40.2 miles longer)

INTRODUCTION

Near Styx Pass and the headwaters of Kibbie and Bartlett Creeks, the landscape is one of nearly unbroken granite slabs interrupted by more than two dozen lakes, with even more incredible slab country just to the north in the upper Cherry Creek drainage. Boundary Lake is the only of these lakes reached by an official trail, but a use trail continues past it to nearby Little Bear Lake. All of the other lakes are reached by cross-country travel, necessitating orienteering skills and a decent map; the terrain is unexpectedly convoluted in places.

Whichever location you choose as your destination, this is a stunning area in late spring, when Yosemite's higher-elevation lands are still snow covered; in summer, to avoid crowds along the park's more popular trails; or even in fall, when temperatures are getting chilly up higher.


DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEAD From Groveland drive east 13.6 miles on Tioga Road (CA 120) to paved Cherry Lake Road (FS 1N07). This junction is just east of the highway bridge over the South Fork Tuolumne River. (A spur road right, immediately before the bridge, leads briefly down to the popular Rainbow Pool day-use area—a refreshing spot to visit after your hike.) Take FS 1N07, passing a right-hand junction with FS 1S02 (toward Hetch Hetchy and Mather) after 5.3 miles; stay left still on FS 1N07. Go an additional very slow, windy 17.6 miles, crossing the Tuolumne River en route, to reach a T-junction with Cottonwood Road (FS 1N04). If you're in search of a campground, turn left at the T-junction and you'll find the Cherry Valley Campground along a road that traverses over to Cherry Lake's southwest shore. To reach the trailhead, turn right and you will reach the signed Cherry Dam parking area in just 0.3 mile; this is the parking area from December 15–April 15, when vehicular traffic is



prohibited across the Cherry Dam. Note that in the past, the road across the dam was also closed during the fall hunting season, but this restriction is currently lifted.

Starting April 15 (usually), you can drive an additional 5.7 miles in distance, making a 1,200-foot ascent to a newer trailhead—making this walk worthwhile. To reach it, drive across Cherry Dam, then continue 0.9 mile (measured from the west end of the dam) to a T-junction with FS 1N45Y, where right leads to Lake Eleanor. Trend left (north), staying on the main road, and continue past the Lake Eleanor Trailhead (2.5 miles from the dam), shortly followed by the old Kibbie Ridge Trailhead. Onward, the road climbs up Kibbie Ridge, just a short distance below the old trail. Three switchbacks eventually lead up to the dead-end trailhead at 5,880 feet. You'll notice a dirt road descending behind the trailhead; just about a minute's walk down this old road is Shingle Spring, with beautiful dogwoods and, most important, water and some large, flat areas perfect for camping the night before you begin your hike. There are not, however, any toilets at this trailhead. There is also no potable water, so fill your water bottles at the ranger station when you pick up your permit.

DESCRIPTION From the parking area, the trail heads briefly east, soon turning north to traverse diagonally up a fire-decimated slope. You are on the Kibbie Ridge Trail, but well above its true start 1.9 miles downhill; you happily drove past this lower starting point in the car. The slope you are crossing was first burned in the 2003 Kibbie Complex Fire and then rescorched in the 2013 Rim Fire, removing the previously used descriptors *cooler* and *forested* from adjectives that can be accurately applied to the landscape. Instead, it is a mostly open slope of rapidly growing, generally thorny brush, with the occasional lollipop tree—my description of those tall trees where all lower branches have been burned, an important seed source for forest regeneration but hopeless at providing shade. Switchbacks still sporting a handful of mature conifers lead to a broad saddle with dense clusters of young trees—fortunately not touched by the 2013 flames—and a trail junction (1.2 miles). Right (east, then northeast) leads 2.9 miles to Kibbie Lake (Trip 11), while you trend left (north) up Kibbie Ridge into Emigrant Wilderness.

Starting up Kibbie Ridge, you follow the trail's duff tread through landscape burned in 2003; except for bare sandy patches, the landscape is covered in fern thickets, dense brush, and young regenerating conifers. After dropping past colloquially named Sand Canyon, you pass a marshy flat with even denser vegetation and then climb onto sparsely forested granitic slabs covered with *grus* (weathered granite gravel). Note how the massive roots of the Jeffrey pines loosen and fracture the peeling rock, hastening the development of soil. Trending more northeasterly, the trail climbs steadily to Lookout Point (4.1 miles), with impressive vistas west into the deep cleft of Cherry Creek canyon; there is no marker, and the best view is obtained by dropping 100 feet to the west. Next, you pass Swede's Camp, a once-popular campsite near a spring, although much of the burned landscape along the watercourse is now a willow thicket and you'll have to settle for exposed sandy sites on the adjacent ridges to camp. In less than 0.5 mile, you make a minor ascent to a large, shallow pond (5.3 miles) with the first decent camping opportunities since leaving the trailhead, for here bits of the forest are still intact.  After skirting its sandy north shore, you climb under sparse mixed trees, often at a steep incline, to



Jeffrey pines on slab ridges above Boundary Lake

an open-ridgetop sand flat, where you find the Yosemite National Park boundary. A steep path straight up the sandy ridge, blessed with fine panoramas east-southeast to Mount Conness, leads to the seasonally muddy, marsh marigold-dotted vicinity of Sachse Spring, where there is a good camp (7.0 miles). ▲

Rested, you continue northeast from Sachse Spring, on a trail that undulates on morainal material supporting western white pines and red firs in unburned patches; elsewhere the Kibbie Complex Fire reset the successional clock here as well. Crossing a shallow rib, your route begins to descend onto open granitic slabs, a harbinger of what's to come. Mercur Peak, at 8,096 feet in elevation, is a domelike summit in the northeast. Like many granitic features in the park, it has formed through exfoliation.

After a mile you pass a cluster of murky tarns filling slight depressions between shallow granite ribs; sandy patches and lodgepole pine stands at their edges offer decent camping. Alternating between slab and sand, you follow blazes and ducks, on a bearing straight for Mercur Peak. Its summit can be reached by climbing slabs up its south or southwest sides and provides a fine vantage point for examining the Cherry Creek drainage. In a lodgepole grove south of the peak, your trail reaches a large tarn, with various sandy patches offering good campsites. ▲

[S] OFF-TRAIL SIDE TRIP TO MANY ISLAND LAKE This tarn marks the start of a cross-country route to aptly named Many Island Lake. Proceed due south through lodgepoles and around early-season ponds to low-angle slabs bounding the north part of the basin that holds this lake. By keeping your feet flat on the sloping rock and pointed downhill, you should have no difficulty descending a total of 0.5 mile to campsites flanking the

■ MULE DEER ■

Biologists studying the mule deer herd in this area named it the “Jawbone Herd,” after its winter range on Jawbone Ridge and along Jawbone Creek, some 12 miles below Cherry Lake. The mammalogists separated the herd into two distinct groups, the Clavey Unit deer, occupying the rich, brushy, volcanic-earthed Clavey River basin, and the Cherry Unit deer, ranging throughout the Cherry Creek drainage. Mule deer of the Cherry Unit must subsist in poorer conditions than Clavey deer, owing to the prevalence of forage-poor, glacier-polished granite terrain and food-poor, fire- or logging-caused brushy areas in the Cherry Creek basin. When springtime snows begin to melt, Cherry mule deer begin to drift from their winter range, following budding plants upward, keeping generally 1,000 feet below the receding snowline.


By contouring along canyon slopes that are first to sprout new vegetation, most of the deer reach the prime summer range by late June. Once on the summer range, the deer fawn and fatten themselves on forbs and shrubbery. Deer populations are most dense between 6,000 and 7,500 feet, in forest fringes near meadows and brush. In this habitat, moderate summer deer populations reside below Lookout Point and Kibbie Lake, while deer are rare in higher elevations in the open, soil-deficient granite terrain. On Kibbie Ridge, as elsewhere, deer prefer the open, brush-floored Jeffrey pine community, and they are less common in the shadier red fir community. The most preferred browse species for jawbone deer in summer months is snow bush, and huckleberry oak is also favored. Aspen and willows are desired foods for pregnant or lactating does, as well as young black oak leaves and mountain misery.



In fall, prompted by the first snowstorms, deer in the Cherry drainage begin a downward migration, the highest deer moving first. They finally reach their winter range by early December. There are two main travel corridors followed by Cherry deer heading south to the winter range. One begins west of Emigrant Lake, heads north of Hyatt Lake to West Fork Cherry Creek, and then goes down Hells Mountain, passing along the ridge west of Cherry Lake. The second migration route begins south of Emigrant Lake and bisects the region visited in this hike by traversing to Lord Meadow, and then going east of Many Island and Kibbie Lakes to lower Kibbie Ridge, between Cherry Lake and Lake Eleanor. Other park deer have similar migratory routes.

summer-warm, shallow waters of 7,329-foot Many Island Lake.  (The start of this route is indicated on the map with an arrow.) **END OF SIDE TRIP**

The trail now passes through a narrow, joint-controlled gully to reach Styx Pass (9.2 miles), where it leaves Yosemite National Park and reenters Stanislaus National Forest’s Emigrant Wilderness. As you descend, enjoy the superb views of the North and East Fork Cherry Creek drainages. All but a few of the highest peaks have been rolled over by glaciers, and the view is still of mostly bare granite: soaring domes and smooth aprons with just occasional lines of trees where soil has accumulated in wide-scale fractures. Eight tight, rocky switchbacks, decorated by clumps of magenta mountain pride penstemon, Sierra penstemon, and spreading phlox, bring you to a long downward traverse east. Just 250 feet before the trail next switchbacks west, on a steep, broken slope of exfoliating granite, is an unmarked and easily missed junction with the spur trail leading to Boundary Lake (10.0 miles).

Headed for Boundary Lake, you make a switchbacking ascent south-southeast toward a low point on the nearby crest. The trail is little used and rugged, but rocks adequately mark

the trail's location. The ascent becomes less steep as it turns directly east and climbs through a jumble of lodgepoles and rocks to a hemlock-and-heath-ringed tarn. From it, a final rise takes you back into Yosemite, where you are immediately confronted by a pair of seasonal ponds that, in early season, connect with the north shore of 7,531-foot Boundary Lake (10.6 miles). Sandy flats with sparse conifers make for good camping on this side of the lake, while the east shore has high bluffs. The trail around Boundary Lake's west side winds over granitic outcrops, through patches of huckleberry oak and past stands of fir and pine. The undulating path keeps generally away from the irregular rocky shore, but in some places you can head toward the shore to find a snug camp near clumps of willows or Labrador tea. 

S OFF-TRAIL SIDE TRIP TO LITTLE BEAR AND SPOTTED FAWN LAKES At Boundary Lake's south end, about 0.75 mile from its northwest shore, you steer through a notched dome, then descend east down a joint gully to a step-across ford of the outlet. Look back here for telescoped views across the lake's slate-gray entirety to Gillett Mountain. Just steps away is the slab-lined north end of 7,526-foot Little Bear Lake (1.25 miles) and a fine camp.  Head for the northeast corner of this islet-speckled, 25-acre lake, then turn south, looping behind a red-fir-and-lodgepole grove entangled in a marshy maze of bracken and manzanita; here, the trail peters out. From the south end of Little Bear Lake, you could extend your trip by descending 0.5 mile southeast to granite-cupped, 7,331-foot Spotted Fawn Lake, which has adequate camping in its north-shore lodgepole curtain.  Those with considerable mountaineering expertise can continue cross-country a mile southeast to a brink above the Kendrick Creek canyon. Steep slopes, convoluted topography, brush, and lack of trails make this canyon's half dozen lakes among the least visited in the park. (*This route is shown on the map as far as Little Bear Lake.*) **END OF SIDE TRIP**

A OFF-TRAIL ALTERNATE ROUTES FROM UPPER LAKES TO KIBBIE LAKE Rather than retracing your steps, you could start a cross-country route from Many Island Lake, paralleling its outlet, Kibbie Creek, first south and then southwest about 2.5 miles to the northeast shore of Kibbie Lake. From here, you will likely have to go up cliffs and through dense brush, regardless of which way you go around the lake; or you can wade sections of the shoreline. If you're at Boundary, Little Bear, or Spotted Fawn Lake, you'll add a mile or two to your cross-country route to Kibbie Lake. From Boundary Lake, one good route is to start from a low divide about midway along the west shore of the lake. From it, descend about 0.3 mile west-southwest to an obvious lakelet, then climb briefly west-northwest to a second low divide, from which you traverse, with a 200-foot descent midway along it, about half a mile due west to the northeast shore of Many Island Lake.

You can, of course, make additional routes, including one past many lakes, lakelets, and ponds along Bartlett Creek, going as far as Flora Lake before heading more or less across forested terrain to descend to the southeast shore of Kibbie Lake, thereby avoiding the difficult topography around that lake. As a longer alternative, from Flora Lake's west shore, ascend for about half a mile to a horseshoe-shaped lakelet, then ascend northwest


for a similar distance to a shallow bowl with a seasonal pond. Before the fires ravaged this landscape, a use trail near here made a diagonal-trending ascent southwest 0.75 mile up to a sandy divide at a shallow gap with views to the south and southeast; now it is best just considered a route. Onward, the faint use trail descended southwest. After about a mile, it reached the ridge extending southwest from the KIBBIE benchmark and followed it about half a mile southwest, reaching the eastern trail to Kibbie Lake at about 7,100 feet in elevation in a pleasant, dry red fir forest. Turn north and follow the trail 1.3 miles to Kibbie Lake's south shore, where you'll meet the heavily used main Kibbie Lake Trail taking you 4.1 miles back to the trailhead (see Trip 11). For any of these additional routes, the *Kibbie Lake 7.5'* topographic map is very useful, although even then it is easy to find yourself staring down a 20-foot cliff or a passageway with nearly impenetrable brush—this is not fast terrain, so allow yourself ample time to poke around for a good route. A good fact to remember is that southwest-trending master joints dominate the lands in this northwestern part of the park, so this is the easiest direction of travel. (*The start of this route is indicated on the map with an arrow.*) **END OF ALTERNATE ROUTES**

A ALTERNATE ROUTE VIA WEST FORK CHERRY CREEK AND JACK MAIN CANYON

Boundary Lake only touches upon the expansive slab country of the southwestern Emigrant Wilderness. This area's trail network is covered in Wilderness Press's *Sierra North* and its out-of-print *Emigrant Wilderness and Northwestern Yosemite* book, but if you have access to one of these titles, once you've visited Boundary Lake and returned to the Boundary Lake junction (11.2 miles into the trip description), consider the following route—a 60.0-mile loop that passes Huckleberry Lake, Horse Meadow, and Bond Pass—to reach Trip 44 in upper Jack Main Canyon, 16.4 miles past the Boundary Lake junction. Or take the 1.5-mile-longer variant via the shelf with Lower Twin, Black Bear, Bigelow, and Snow Lakes. Follow Trip 44 down upper Jack Main Canyon (an additional 8.3 miles), Trip 16 through lower Jack Main Canyon to the Beehive (11.2 miles), and a collection of trails described in Trips 11, 12, and 15 to return via Laurel Lake, Miguel Meadow, and Lake Eleanor to the Lake Eleanor Trailhead and then back to your car (a final 12.9 miles).

END OF ALTERNATE ROUTE

TRIP 11 Kibbie Lake

DIFFICULTY **E** **TRIP TYPE**  **DURATION** Day hike, backpack **DISTANCE** 8.2-mile out-and-back **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 5,900'/6,550'; one-way: +980'/-340'; round-trip: ±1,320' **SEASON** May–October **USE** Moderate **MAPS** *Cherry Lake North*, *Kibbie Lake* **PERMIT** Kibbie Lake, issued by Stanislaus National Forest

TRAIL LOG					
0.0	Kibbie Ridge Trailhead	3.0	saddle into Kibbie Creek drainage	4.1	Kibbie Lake
1.2	Kibbie Lake–Kibbie Ridge junction	3.7	Kibbie Creek crossing	8.2	Kibbie Ridge Trailhead

ALTERNATE ROUTE Alternate return route from Kibbie Lake (3.7 miles longer)

■ Trips of Yosemite's ■ West-Central Lands Northwest of the Tioga Road

Introduction to This Area

THIS CHAPTER AND the next one cover lands in the north-central part of Yosemite National Park, above the low western lands described in chapter 2 and below the higher-elevation eastern realms covered in chapters 1, 5, and 6. It also includes the two giant sequoia groves that are located in the northern half of Yosemite (Trips 21 and 22), even though Trip 21, the Merced Grove of Big Trees, does not lie along the Tioga Road but rather along the Big Oak Flat Road, about 3.75 miles west of the Tioga Road junction in Crane Flat.

Elevations range from about a mile high down in the Merced Grove to 2 miles high atop the summit of Mount Hoffmann (Trip 31). Between these antipodes lies a dense network of trails that lead to lakes between Tioga Road and the southern rim of the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne River (Trips 23, 24, and 27–31). Short, easy hikes take you to Harden, Lukens, and May Lakes. The first is fishless and, in late season, too shallow for swimming; the second is great for fishing and swimming; and the third is good for fishing and camping, but swimming is forbidden. Two trips lead to the beautiful Ten Lakes Basin, spread across a shelf high above the Tuolumne River. Too many folks visit only the three easily reached lakes, leaving the other four with only light-to-moderate use. While most hikers return the way they came to the main Ten Lakes Trailhead (Trip 29), an enticing longer trip continues along the Tuolumne River Canyon's rim toward Tenaya Lake, offering unmatched views of Yosemite's north country (Trip 30). Also included in this chapter is the hike along the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne River to Tuolumne Meadows (Trip 25), rightfully one of Yosemite's headliner hikes, with 15 miles of near-continuous waterfalls and cascades. Trip 26 is an extensive loop that traverses farther north into Yosemite, intersecting trails described in chapters 1 and 2 along a route where you will go miles at a time without seeing another soul.

WILDERNESS PERMITS AND REGULATIONS

Overnight wilderness permits for all trips described in this chapter are issued by Yosemite National Park; see page 61 and nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm for details on obtaining both reserved and first-come, first-served wilderness permits in Yosemite. For all these

trailheads, the priority permit station for first-come, first-served permits is the **Big Oak Flat Information Station**. For reserved permits, if you are entering Yosemite from the east via Tioga Road, pick up your permit at the **Tuolumne Meadows Wilderness Center**. If you are entering Yosemite from the west via Big Oak Flat Road (CA 120) and then Tioga Road, pick up your permit at the Big Oak Flat Information Station. If you are entering Yosemite via CA 140 or CA 41 (Wawona Road), you'll have to detour to either the **Yosemite Valley Wilderness Center** or the Big Oak Flat Information Station to pick up your permit. In Yosemite National Park, campfires are prohibited above 9,600 feet. Bear canisters are required throughout Yosemite National Park.

CAMPGROUNDS

There are six national park campgrounds along the section of Tioga Road covered in this chapter: **Hodgdon Meadow**, **Crane Flat**, **Tamarack Flat**, **White Wolf**, **Yosemite Creek**, and **Porcupine Flat**. Of these, only Hodgdon Meadow and Crane Flat allow reservations. For the other four, plan on arriving by 8 or 9 a.m. in summer and pouncing on a site as soon as its occupants pack up. **Tuolumne Meadows Campground** (reserved and first-come, first-served sites) and the Yosemite Valley campgrounds (all reservable save Camp 4; see page 5) are also within an hour's drive of all the trailheads described. Backpackers can also spend a night before or after their hike at the **Tuolumne Meadows Backpackers' Campground**, in the main Tuolumne Meadows Campground, or the **Yosemite Valley Backpackers' Campground**, at the back of Upper Pines Campground.*

TRIP DESCRIPTIONS

TRIP 21 Merced Grove of Big Trees

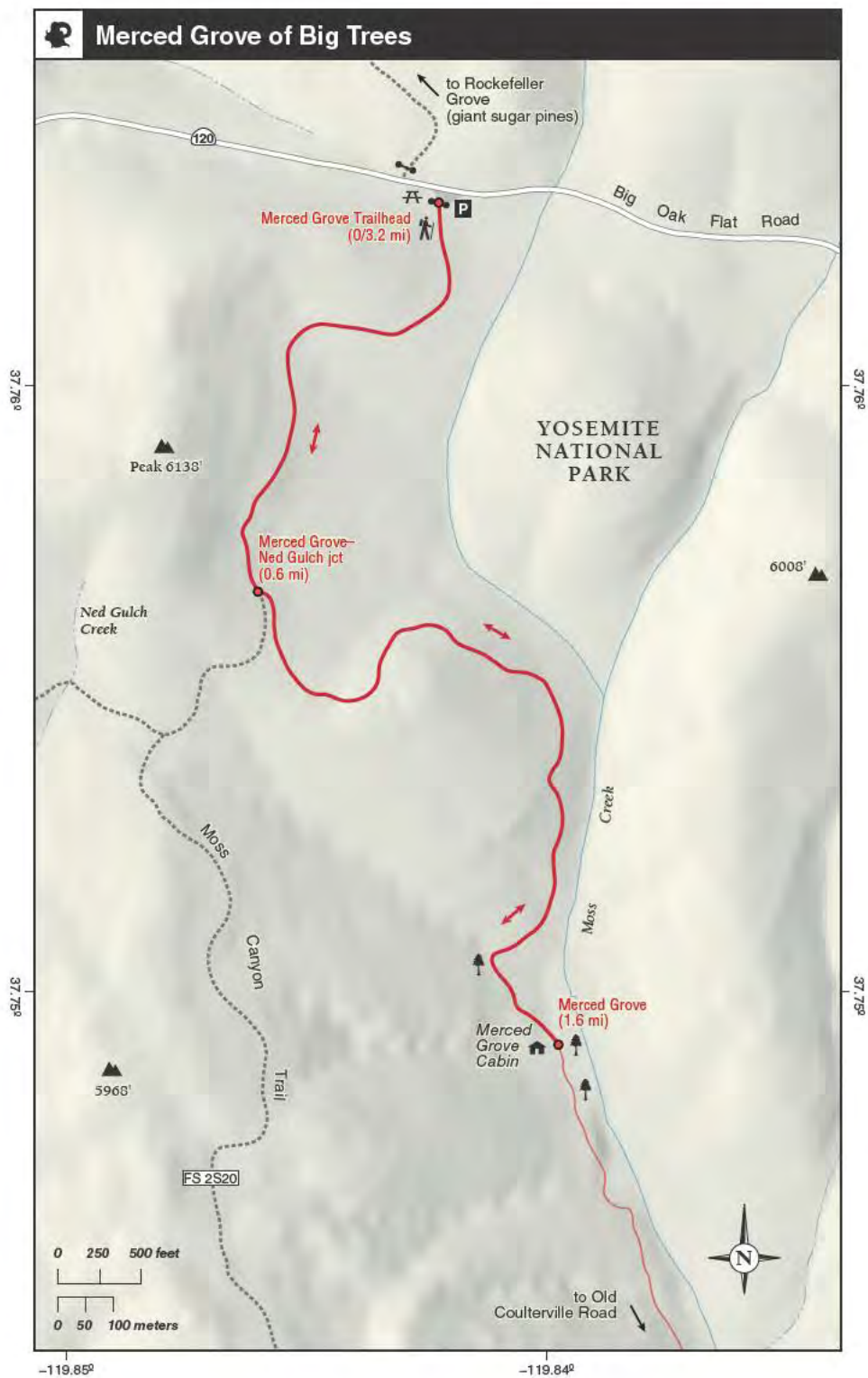
DIFFICULTY **TRIP TYPE** **DURATION** Day hike **DISTANCE** 3.2-mile out-and-back **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 5,370'/5,900'; one-way: +50'/-540'; round-trip: ±590' **SEASON** April–mid-November **USE** Moderate **MAPS** Ackerson Mountain, El Portal **PERMIT** No-camping zone (day use only)

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Merced Grove Trailhead	1.6	Merced Grove
0.6	Ned Gulch junction	3.2	Merced Grove Trailhead

INTRODUCTION

Being the least advertised of the park's three sequoia groves, this hike is for you if you want to see giant sequoias *and* avoid crowds. While the Merced Grove and the nearby Tuolumne Grove (next hike) have more than a dozen trees at least 10 feet in diameter near the base and a few trees reach about 15 feet in diameter, both pale in comparison with the trees in the much larger Mariposa Grove (Trip 89). You should choose to walk to the Merced Grove for the beautiful conifer forest, the solitude, a row of six of my favorite big sequoias in the park, or if you are entering Yosemite via CA 120 from the west, convenience. If you are driving along CA 120, this grove and the Tuolumne Grove are on your route, while the Mariposa Grove is more than an hour's drive to the south.

*At the time of this writing, only reservable campsites and Backpackers' Campgrounds were open, and no first-come, first-served sites were available; see [nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/camping.htm](https://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/camping.htm) for details.



DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEAD The trailhead is located along the Big Oak Flat Road (CA 120), 4.0 miles east of the Big Oak Flat Entrance Station and about 3.7 miles west of the Tioga Road junction in Crane Flat. From the west, the parking area is on the right (south) as you come to the crest of a long hill.

DESCRIPTION Within Yosemite National Park there are three giant sequoia groves—Merced, Tuolumne, and Mariposa—with a fourth, the Nelder Grove, about 5 miles due south of the Mariposa Grove. Before 15 million years ago, when the summers were wetter, the Merced and Tuolumne groves may have been one large grove, as probably were the Mariposa and Nelder Groves; sequoias need a water source throughout the summer. What all four have in common today are similar elevations, between 5,000 and 6,000 feet, and, perhaps more importantly, some underlying metamorphic bedrock. Indeed, the Merced and Tuolumne Groves grow entirely on metamorphic bedrock. Metamorphic bedrock weathers to produce soils with more nutrients and more water-holding capacity than soils derived from granitic bedrock, and, in times of warmer, drier climates, such as a few thousand years ago, metamorphic soils may have enabled these sequoias to survive. This difference in soils probably explains the absence of sequoias in similar-elevation alcoves on granitic bedrock in the Yosemite area. In Sequoia National Park they do thrive on granitic bedrock, but the biggest grove, the Giant Forest, sits on remarkably unfractured bedrock, which keeps ground water close to the surface.

The hike follows a gated dirt road, the first stretch nearly level, shaded to varying extents by white firs, incense cedars, and ponderosa pines. A sequence of fires has approached the area, but fortunately all have been stopped before razing the grove. One, in 1987, stopped just above the road you are following, and the slope is now a mixture of shrubs and young conifers. Meanwhile, downslope is a dense conifer forest, including some impressive sugar pines with their giant cones at the end of long, gangly branches. After 0.6 mile the dirt road you have been following trends right (southwest) to Ned Gulch, while you branch left (southeast) onto the Old Coulterville Road, an early route into Yosemite Valley. This makes a counterclockwise,



Giant sequoia in the Merced Grove

moderate, arcing descent through a gully shaded by Douglas-firs, white firs, and sugar pines—typical sequoia associates at this latitude. In late spring, you’ll be treated to seeing mountain dogwood in bloom, the tree’s large, white bracts the “petals” around the cluster of small, green, actual flowers in the center; the showy bracts are actually leaves. A diverse collection of shade-loving flowers including orchids and rare nonphotosynthetic plants compose the understory, joined in places by tangles of wild roses.

The road next makes a clockwise, still moderate descent onto a drier slope above Moss Creek. Curving into a small gully, you reach a half dozen sequoias, ranging, at chest height, the standard point of measurement, between 5 and 8 feet in diameter. As a generality, for the first 800 years, the sequoia adds a foot in diameter per century, making these about 500–800 years old. To reach 12 feet takes about 1,500 years, and 15 feet takes about 2,000 years. Although the sequoias in this gully are relatively young, they nevertheless are close to a maximum average height of about 250 feet. Beyond that height, they tend to lose height by breakage as fast as they gain it, and it is only their girth that increases. How these particular trees broaden at the base always reminds me of a cluster of sturdy, oversize elephant feet. Fences have been added to protect the trees’ shallow roots from visitors’ feet; please respect these barriers.

You pass several more giants and soon find yourselves opposite a cabin in the heart of Merced Grove, some 1.6 miles from the trailhead. Here, you’ll see a number of sequoias, from saplings up to wizened giants, about 14 feet in diameter and up to 270 feet high. Superficially, one gets the impression that the trees are not regenerating. However, small trees are easily missed and as many as 200 saplings grow within the grove, the great bulk of them in the lower part of the grove. Meanwhile, the last large tree is about 200 yards past the cabin. Beyond here, the road narrows to a little-used trail and most people return to the trailhead.

TRIP 22 Tuolumne Grove of Big Trees

DIFFICULTY **TRIP TYPE** **DURATION** Day hike **DISTANCE** 2.6-mile semiloop **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 5,710'/6,220'; entire trip: +560'–560' **SEASON** April–mid-November **USE** Heavy **MAP** Ackerson Mountain **PERMIT** No-camping zone (day use only)

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Tuolumne Grove Trailhead	START SIDE TRIP: 0.25 mile to Lower Tuolumne Grove	
1.1	Tuolumne Grove Loop upper junction	1.5	Tuolumne Grove Loop upper junction
1.2	Tuolumne Grove Loop lower junction	2.6	Tuolumne Grove Trailhead

INTRODUCTION

While the Tuolumne Grove and the nearby Merced Grove (previous hike) have more than a dozen giant sequoia trees at least 10 feet in diameter near the base and a few trees reach about 15 feet in diameter, both pale in comparison with the trees in the much larger Mariposa Grove (Trip 89). However, if you are entering Yosemite via CA 120, this grove and the Merced Grove are on your route, while the Mariposa Grove is more than an hour’s drive to the south. This

■ Trips of Yosemite's ■ West-Central Lands Between the Tioga Road and Yosemite Valley

Introduction to This Area

OF ALL THIS GUIDE'S SECTIONS, this is the only one lacking a prominent peak. It is chiefly a heavily forested uplands landscape, with broken slab ridges extending above the sea of green. Most of its creeks dry by late summer, making it less enticing to backpackers in August and September. Along this land's southern perimeter, however, the slopes end in the steep-walled cliffs that make up the north escarpment of Yosemite Valley. Indeed, there are five spectacular viewpoints along Yosemite Valley's north rim: El Capitan, Eagle Peak, the Upper Yosemite Fall brink, Yosemite Point, and North Dome. There are also great views from the Devils Dance Floor, reached by a short cross-country route (Trip 33). Finally, Trip 38's descent into Tenaya Canyon offers striking views of Half Dome. Lacking alpine scenery, the trails in this section get only light-to-moderate use, except for the stretch of trail that descends from the brink of Upper Yosemite Fall to the valley floor and from Tioga Road to the summit of North Dome.

WILDERNESS PERMITS AND REGULATIONS



Overnight wilderness permits for all trips described in this chapter are issued by Yosemite National Park; see page 61 and nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm for details on obtaining both reserved and first-come, first-served wilderness permits in Yosemite. For all these trailheads, the priority permit station for first-come, first-served permits is the **Big Oak Flat Information Station**. For reserved permits, if you are entering Yosemite from the east via Tioga Road, pick up your permit at the **Tuolumne Meadows Wilderness Center**. If you are entering Yosemite from the west via Big Oak Flat Road (CA 120) and then Tioga Road, pick up your permit at the Big Oak Flat Information Station. If you are entering Yosemite via CA 140 or CA 41 (Wawona Road), you'll have to detour to either the **Yosemite Valley Wilderness Center** or the Big Oak Flat Information Station to pick up your permit. In Yosemite National Park, campfires are prohibited above 9,600 feet. Bear canisters are required throughout Yosemite National Park.

CAMPGROUNDS

There are six national park campgrounds along the section of Tioga Road covered in this chapter: **Hodgdon Meadow**, **Crane Flat**, **Tamarack Flat**, **White Wolf**, **Yosemite Creek**, and **Porcupine Flat**. Of these, only Hodgdon Meadow and Crane Flat allow reservations. For the other four, plan on arriving by 8 or 9 a.m. in summer and pouncing on a site as soon as its occupants pack up. **Tuolumne Meadows Campground** (reserved and first-come, first-served sites) and the Yosemite Valley campgrounds (all reservable save Camp 4; see page 5) are also within an hour’s drive of all the trailheads described. Backpackers can also spend a night before or after their hike at the **Tuolumne Meadows Backpackers’ Campground**, in the main Tuolumne Meadows Campground, or the **Yosemite Valley Backpackers’ Campground**, at the back of Upper Pines Campground.*

TRIP DESCRIPTIONS

TRIP 32 Cascade Creek from Big Oak Flat Road

DIFFICULTY  **TRIP TYPE**  **DURATION** Day hike, backpack **DISTANCE** 7.8-mile out-and-back **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 4,850’/6,050’; one-way: +1,540’/–430’; round-trip: ±1,970’ **SEASON** May–mid-November **USE** Light **MAPS** *El Capitan* **PERMIT** Old Big Oak Flat Road

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Old Big Oak Flat Trailhead	3.8	Old Big Oak Flat Road junction
1.5	Wildcat Creek crossing	3.9	Cascade Creek bridge
2.6	Tamarack Creek crossing	7.8	Old Big Oak Flat Trailhead

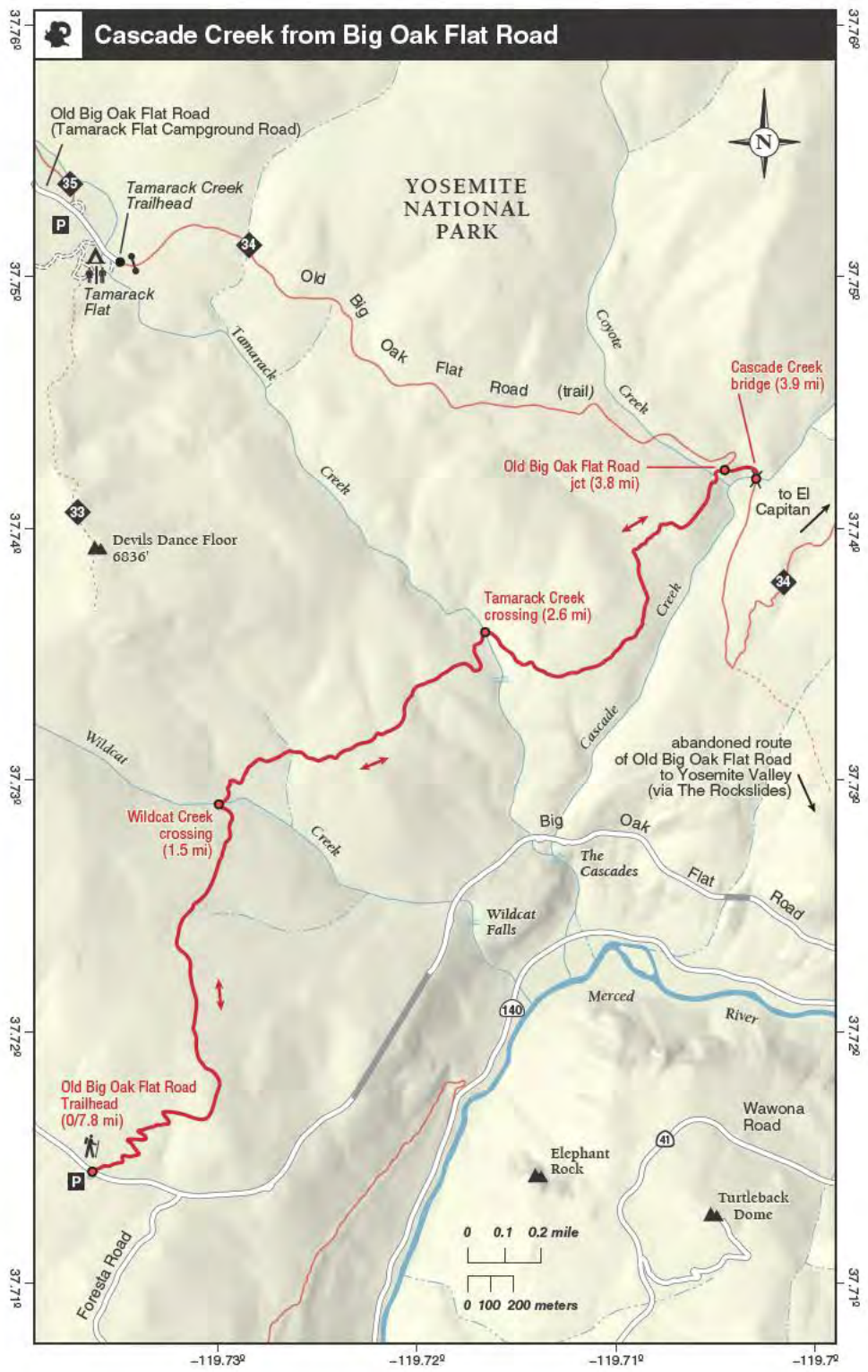
INTRODUCTION

During late spring, when most of Yosemite’s trails are under snow, this trail is at its best. With broken views of Yosemite Valley and abundant wildflowers, this walk will appeal to those who appreciate the finer details of mid-Sierran ecology. With some decently steep trail stretches, it is an invigorating yet not exhausting walk.

DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEAD From the Tioga Road (CA 120)–Big Oak Flat Road junction in Crane Flat, drive southeast 5.9 miles on the Big Oak Flat Road toward Yosemite Valley, stopping at a small but signed trailhead parking area, on the right. This is 0.25 mile before the Foresta Road junction. The trail starts just across the road.

DESCRIPTION The start of your route was so severely burned in the August 1990 lightning-caused A-Rock Fire and then reburned in the 2009 Big Meadow Fire, an escaped hazard reduction fire, that only the occasional charred snag still stands. Shade is a fanciful notion, but all the light reaching the ground has resulted in a profusion of shrubs and wildflowers. The shrubs are chaparral species—chamise, deer brush, and whiteleaf manzanita are all common—while spring wildflowers include the ephemeral diamond-petaled clarkia and whiskerbush. As the trail is little-traveled and at a fairly low elevation, this is prime rattlesnake country—watch your step.

*At the time of this writing, only reservable campsites and Backpackers’ Campgrounds were open, and no first-come, first-served sites were available; see nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/camping.htm for details.



After the initial 400-foot ascent, you round a ridge to an east-facing slope, providing views to the top of El Capitan, of Half Dome, and broken views into Yosemite Valley. These views continue as the trail first ascends moderately, then levels off, passing a moist area with a seasonal spring and dense vegetation; crimson columbine, narrow-leaved lotus, Sierra tiger lily, and cardinal monkeyflower all provide color. At about the 1.25-mile mark you enter less severely burned landscape. Here some tall conifers survive, including both incense cedars and ponderosa pines, providing seeds for the next generation of plants. Over the next quarter mile, you descend to usually flowing Wildcat Creek (1.5 miles).

Soon you begin to climb again, and you do so for almost a mile until you start a short, steep descent along a ridge with a view, across the Merced River canyon, of the Wawona Road traversing the flanks of Turtleback Dome. The descent continues down to nearby Tamarack Creek (2.6 miles), where in summer giant-leaved umbrella plants flourish in its streambed, although their flowers are only seen by late-spring hikers. At times this creek is a wet ford.

Again, you climb, slowly arcing into the Cascade Creek drainage. Briefly on a drier slope, you angle a little left into a flatter white fir glade with a delightful collection of orchids, including phantom orchids and coralroots, as well as parasitic heath species such as pine drops and snow plants. Continuing high above Cascade Creek, you make a momentary drop to a Cascade Creek tributary, where serviceberries hug the bank of a small pool fed by a photogenic cascade. You boulder-hop it only steps before reaching the old Big Oak Flat Road (3.8 miles). Once on the road, turn right (east) and briefly walk down to the Cascade Creek bridge—a good spot for a lunch break or to camp (3.9 miles). ▲ In late summer, the flow of Cascade Creek is slow and warm enough for safe and enjoyable splashing around in the small pools immediately downstream. By mid-July, when the road to Tamarack Flat Campground is open and the flowers along this trail have vanished, you'll probably choose to take the shorter walk to Cascade Creek described as the start of Trip 34.



Umbrella plants (aka Indian rhubarb) grow thickly along Cascade Creek.

■ Trips of the Tuolumne ■ Meadows Area South and East of the Tioga Road

Introduction to This Area

THIS CHAPTER COVERS hikes on the southern side of the Tioga Road between Tenaya Lake and Tioga Pass, describing the trails radiating out of six trailheads. This is Yosemite's subalpine and alpine landscape at its zenith: Tenaya Canyon's granite slabs, the most extensive in the park; the granite spires of the Cathedral Range; and the expansive panorama from Mount Dana, Yosemite's second highest summit. Between the awe-inspiring rock steeples lie endless broad, slab-ringed lakes and wildflower meadows.

Outside of Yosemite Valley, this is Yosemite's most popular destination, both for day hikers and backpackers. The extreme popularity of this area is due in part to its supreme scenery, which is dominated by the Cathedral Range and the Sierra Crest. Its acclaim is also due to its accessibility, for in a few hours' hiking time, you can easily reach crest passes and subalpine lakes. Several of the area's lake basins (Budd Lake, Trip 54; Elizabeth Lake, Trip 55) are off-limits to camping, along with much of the area around Mono Pass (Trip 60)—a good idea considering the areas' enormous visitor numbers and ease of accessibility for day hikes.

WILDERNESS PERMITS AND REGULATIONS

Overnight wilderness permits for all but one of the trips described in this chapter are issued by Yosemite National Park; see page 61 and nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm for details on obtaining both reserved and first-come, first-served wilderness permits in Yosemite. For all these trailheads, the priority permit station for first-come, first-served permits is the **Tuolumne Meadows Wilderness Center**, located on your right a short distance down Tuolumne Meadows Lodge Road at the eastern end of Tuolumne Meadows. Most Tuolumne Meadows trailheads are popular throughout the summer hiking season, making wilderness permits very difficult to get. It is best to plan ahead and have a backup itinerary if you can't get your permit of choice.

Permits for Trip 63, as well as permits for Trips 59 and 61 if hiked in reverse, are issued by Inyo National Forest and can be picked up at the **Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center** in northeastern Lee Vining or at ranger stations in **Mammoth Lakes, Bishop, or Lone Pine**. The Inyo Wilderness trailheads all have quotas from May 1 to November 1. Sixty percent of permits can be reserved in advance through recreation.gov (search for “Inyo National Forest wilderness permits”) six months in advance of your start date, and 40% are available on a first-come, first-served basis at an Inyo National Forest ranger station the day before your trip starts. See page 62 or fs.usda.gov/main/inyo/passes-permits/recreation for more details.

In Yosemite National Park, campfires are prohibited above 9,600 feet. In the part of Inyo National Forest covered in this chapter, campfires are prohibited above 10,000 feet, at Waugh Lake and the adjoining Rush Creek corridor, and along the northern shore of Gem Lake. Bear canisters are required throughout the park and the section of Inyo National Forest covered here.

CAMPGROUNDS

The most convenient campground for the trips described is **Tuolumne Meadows Campground**, with reservable and first-come, first-served sites. You can also try the first-come, first-served sites farther west along Tioga Road: **Porcupine Flat, Yosemite Creek, White Wolf, and Tamarack Flat**. In addition, there are nine first-come, first-served campgrounds in Inyo National Forest along CA 120 east of Tioga Pass: **Lower Lee Vining, Moraine, Aspen Grove, Big Bend, Ellery, Junction, Sawmill Walk-In, Tioga Lake, and Saddlebag Lake**. Backpackers can spend a night before or after their hike at **Tuolumne Meadows Backpackers’ Campground**, in the main Tuolumne Meadows Campground.*

TRIP DESCRIPTIONS

TRIP 49 Upper Tenaya Canyon

DIFFICULTY **TRIP TYPE** **DURATION** Day hike, some off-trail hiking required **DISTANCE** 3.8-mile out-and-back **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 7,720’/8,170’; one-way: +110’/–530’; round-trip: ±640’ **SEASON** July–October **USE** Light **MAP** Tenaya Lake **PERMIT** No-camping zone (day use only)

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Sunrise Lakes Trailhead	1.2	trend east around knob
0.15	spur to Tenaya Lake shoreline	1.6	back along Tenaya Creek
0.2	Tenaya Lake perimeter trail junction	1.9	bottom of Tenaya Creek cascades
0.4	leave trail	3.8	Sunrise Lakes Trailhead
1.1	cross Sunrise Lakes outlet creek		

INTRODUCTION

Tenaya Canyon, the gorge Tenaya Creek follows from Tenaya Lake to Yosemite Valley, is a spectacular, steep, deep granite slab canyon—indeed, the biggest unbroken expanse of rock in the park—that is notoriously difficult to descend. Many an experienced party has taken twice the intended

*At the time of this writing, only reservable campsites and Backpackers’ Campgrounds were open, and no first-come, first-served sites were available; see nps.gov/yose/playourvisit/camping.htm for details.



time to descend the complete canyon, and there have been countless rescues of people who find themselves cliffed out. The day hike described here gives you an introduction to the rugged beauty of Tenaya Canyon, but it requires only minimal route-finding and off-trail walking skills. Enough visitors have gone before you that there is a mostly conspicuous trail to follow through the forested cross-country sections. Note that although it has an easy rating and generally lacks the dangers of the main Tenaya Canyon route, this cross-country route can be potentially dangerous, especially in times of high water. Even when the route is dry, if you are not adept at walking on slick (even when dry), water-polished slabs, you should not attempt this route.

DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEAD The Sunrise Lakes Trailhead is along Tioga Road (CA 120) at a large pullout at a highway bend near Tenaya Lake's southwest shore. It is located 30.7 miles northeast of Crane Flat and 8.7 miles southwest of the Tuolumne Meadows Campground. There are pit toilets at the trailhead, but the closest water is at the Tuolumne Meadows Visitor Center.

DESCRIPTION From the trailhead parking area, follow the eastbound trail, passing a small spur trail that departs to the right (south) toward May Lake and Olmsted Point and crossing the usually flowing, broad outlet of Tenaya Lake on large rock blocks. Use the water levels here as an indication of the walking conditions and water flow downstream. If the rock blocks are submerged, especially if the water flowing over them is up to your knees, the cascade on the creek near the end of your cross-country route will be impressive, but swimming will be dangerous. If you can walk across stepping stones, it may be mundane. If the creek is barely flowing, the cascade will be disappointing, but the three potholes below it and the pool at the bottom of the descent can be great for afternoon swimming and sunbathing.

Just across the creek a spur trail trends left (northeast) toward Tenaya Lake's shore (0.15 mile). Turning right (south), you soon reach a bigger trail junction (0.2 mile). The trail left (northeast) goes along Tenaya Lake's southeastern shore, then continues onto Tuolumne Meadows. Meanwhile, you veer right (south) on the trail signposted for Sunrise Lakes and Clouds Rest, initially following the eastern banks of Tenaya Creek. After 0.2 mile, where the trail trends left (south-southeast) away from the creek, you'll see a use path continuing down the creek (0.4 mile). This marks the start of the 1.5-mile cross-country route to the upper part of Tenaya Canyon.

Except in times of very high water, you can follow this creekside trail for about 0.4 mile. It then becomes vague and essentially dies out due to pervasive slab. There are multiple parallel use trails through here. At high water, staying a little east of the creek is easiest, while at low water, the creekside walking is mostly straightforward.

Tenaya Creek splays out across the unbroken slab.



You briefly reenter a lodgepole pine flat and then cross a sometimes-dry tributary creek that drains the Sunrise Lakes and Mildred Lake (1.1 miles). After another 0.1 mile, as you approach a conspicuous knoll rising along the east side of the creek, you trend around the left (southeast) side of the knob and ascend a small draw to a sandy saddle. Continuing due south, you drop down broken granite slabs, ultimately reconverging with Tenaya Creek (1.6 miles).

Unseen along your route, Tenaya Creek has just cascaded down a slope that would have been dangerous for you to navigate. The bottom of the cascade ends in a large pothole, which is safe for entry when the water is slow flowing. Onward, it continues a tad less steeply, allowing you to walk beside it. But take care: the water-polished rock along the drainage is incredibly slippery. This last stretch of the route is sublime. Forward views take in Clouds Rest and Half Dome, rising along the south side of Tenaya Canyon. Meanwhile, Tenaya Creek's cascades are breathtaking at high flow: small waterwheels, glissading water, little pools, steep polished slabs, and chatter marks (curved marks left where a glacier dragged a boulder along the bedrock). Small clusters of flowers, especially mountain pride penstemon and Sierra stonecrop, grow from tiny cracks in the rock.

Tenaya Creek continues down more similar-angled slabs, and as you descend, you'll pass two more large potholes, followed by a large pool at the base, again suitable for swimming when water flow is low (1.9 miles). At this point, it is best to retrace your steps to the trailhead. The coming 1.5 miles down Tenaya Canyon are still safe but brushy and, in places, talus-strewn and less inspiring. At the end of this distance, you'll reach the brink of impressive Pywiack Cascade—and the dangerous stretch of Tenaya Canyon.

■ TRIP 50 Sunrise Lakes and Sunrise High Sierra Camp

DIFFICULTY **TRIP TYPE** **DURATION** Day hike, backpack **DISTANCE** 10.4-mile out-and-back **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 8,150'/9,780'; one-way: +1,810'/-660'; round-trip: ±2,470' **SEASON** Late June–mid-October **USE** Heavy **MAP** Tenaya Lake **PERMIT** Sunrise Lakes

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Sunrise Lakes Trailhead	3.0	Lower Sunrise Lake
0.2	Tenaya Lake perimeter trail junction	3.6	Upper Sunrise Lake
0.9	Mildred Lake outlet crossing	5.1	Sunrise High Sierra Camp backpackers' camp
1.4	Sunrise Lakes outlet crossing	5.2	Sunrise Lake–JMT junction
2.6	Sunrise Lakes–Clouds Rest junction	10.4	Sunrise Lakes Trailhead

■ INTRODUCTION

The terrain passed on this quite short hike is varied and scenic, with two superb camping possibilities, the upper Sunrise Lake and Sunrise High Sierra Camp. The former offers sheltered camping beside a scenic subalpine lake, while those at the latter are rewarded with a beautiful sunrise—the reason the camp is situated where it is. Hikers pursuing this route must, however, be prepared for a steep climb as you rise above the Tenaya Creek drainage: you ascend 1,000 feet in just 1.1 miles, an unusually sharp climb for a Sierra trail. You can't avoid this climb, but if you wish to make it a shorter day, the hike to upper Sunrise Lake is just 3.6 miles each way.

■ Trips in Yosemite Valley ■ and Up to Its Rims

Introduction to This Area

AS JOHN MUIR NOTED, the Sierra Nevada has several Yosemitees, but none matches Yosemite Valley in grandeur. Hetch Hetchy, to the north, is the foremost example of another such Yosemite. Though some of these Yosemitees rival or exceed “The Incomparable Valley” in the depth of their canyons and the steepness of their walls, none has the winning combination of its wide, spacious floor; its world-famous waterfalls; and its unforgettable monoliths, El Capitan and Half Dome.

This hiking section is actually composed of two groups. Trips 64–69 are relatively flat, easy trails that acquaint you with the views and natural history seen along the Valley Loop Trail that encircles Yosemite Valley. In contrast, Trips 70–72 are strenuous, climbing quite steeply from the floor. Trips 70 and 71 guide you up to Yosemite Valley’s north rim, first to the brink of Yosemite Falls, and either west to Eagle Peak (Trip 70) or east to Yosemite Point and North Dome (Trip 71). Trip 72 guides you up to Stanford, Crocker, and Dewey Points, along the western part of the valley’s south rim, leading past the viewpoints the early white visitors to Yosemite Valley celebrated. Additional Yosemite Valley trips are included in chapter 8, including those departing from Happy Isles, as well as the Panorama Trail and Four Mile Trail that link Glacier Point to Yosemite Valley.

WILDERNESS PERMITS AND REGULATIONS

Most of the hikes in this section are day hikes. Wilderness permits for all overnight trips described in this chapter are issued by Yosemite National Park; see page 61 and nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm for details on obtaining both reserved and first-come, first-served permits in Yosemite. For all these trailheads, the priority permit station for first-come, first-served permits is the **Yosemite Valley Wilderness Center**, in Yosemite Village between the Ansel Adams Gallery and the post office. Permits out of Yosemite Valley are hard to get, so have a backup plan if you can’t get your permit of choice. In Yosemite National Park, campfires are prohibited above 9,600 feet. Bear canisters are required throughout Yosemite National Park.

CAMPGROUNDS

There are far too few campsites in Yosemite Valley to accommodate everyone who would like to camp here, so for most visitors, camping in Yosemite Valley will remain an unfulfilled dream. There

are three regular campgrounds—**North, Upper, and Lower Pines**—whose sites may be reserved at recreation.gov. Note that these campsites disappear within seconds of becoming available on the 15th day of the month, four months in advance of your stay. Even with a perfectly calibrated clock and fast mouse-clicking reflexes, I have missed out on a campsite about half the times I’ve tried—I wish you the best of luck! There are also two smaller, walk-in campgrounds—**Camp 4** and **Yosemite Valley Backpackers’ Campground**. During peak summer months, vacancies at the former are now allocated by mini-lottery one day in advance, with the campground reverting to a first-come, first-served basis in mid-September; the latter is for backpackers who have a wilderness permit and need a place to stay the night before they start their hikes, as well as for visitors arriving by public transportation, but again just for a single night.*

■ TRIP DESCRIPTIONS

■ TRIP 64 Valley Loop Trail: Bridalveil Fall, El Capitan, and Pohono Bridge Loop

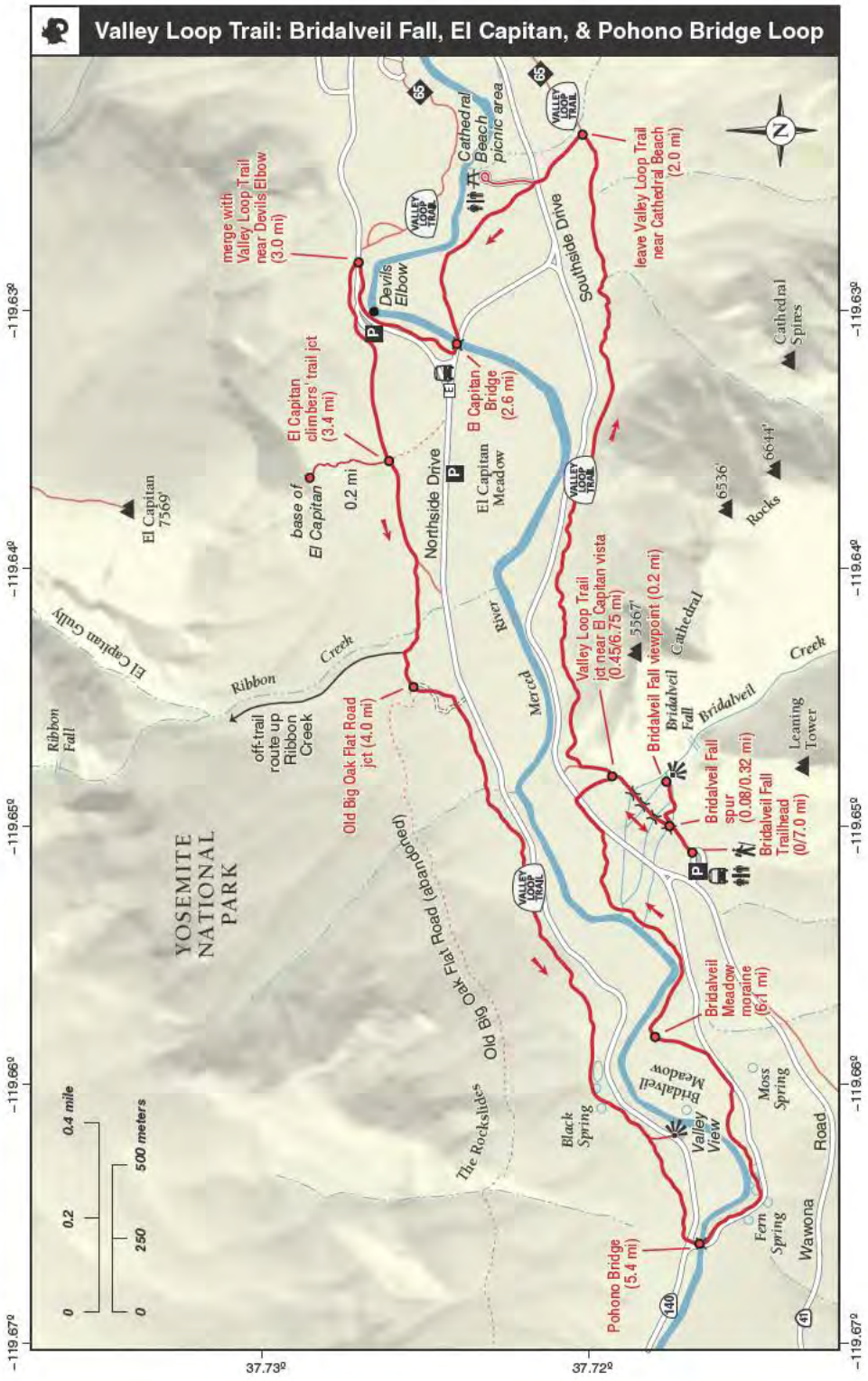
DIFFICULTY E **TRIP TYPE**  **DURATION** Day hike **DISTANCE** 7.0-mile loop **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 3,870'/4,050'; entire trip: +470'/-470' **SEASON** March–November **USE** Moderate (packed around Bridalveil Fall) **MAP** El Capitan **PERMIT** No-camping zone (day use only)

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Bridalveil Fall Trailhead	3.9	S START OFF-TRAIL SIDE TRIP: 0.75 mile to the base of Ribbon Fall
0.08	Bridalveil Fall spur	4.0	Old Big Oak Flat Road junction
0.2	Bridalveil Fall viewpoint	5.1	S START SIDE TRIP: 0.1 mile to Valley View
0.45	merge with Valley Loop Trail near El Capitan viewpoint	5.4	Pohono Bridge
2.0	leave Valley Loop Trail near Cathedral Beach	6.1	Bridalveil Meadow moraine
	S START SIDE TRIP: 0.3 mile to Cathedral Beach Picnic Area	6.75	leave Valley Loop Trail near El Capitan viewpoint
2.6	El Capitan Bridge	7.0	Bridalveil Fall Trailhead
3.0	merge with Valley Loop Trail near Devils Elbow		
3.4	El Capitan climbers' trail junction		
	S START SIDE TRIP: 0.2 mile to the base of El Capitan		

■ INTRODUCTION

This is the first of six Yosemite Valley floor hikes in this book, arranged from west to east, that together cover the majority of the 23.3-mile Valley Loop Trail. Because Yosemite Valley contains so much history, natural history, and spectacular scenery, the hike descriptions are long, even though the hikes are relatively short. On this first loop hike, you’ll see Bridalveil Fall, the Cathedral Rocks, and El Capitan—all at close range. Bridalveil Fall is extremely popular, and most people hiking from the fall’s parking lot make no more effort than the brief walk up to and down from the fall’s viewpoint. Once you leave the fall’s vicinity, you’ll have most of this route all to yourself.

*At the time of this writing, only reservable campsites and Backpackers’ Campgrounds were open, and no first-come, first-served sites were available; see nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/camping.htm for details.



DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEAD The trail starts at Bridalveil Fall parking lot, less than 0.1 mile before the descending Wawona Road (CA 41) reaches a junction on the floor of Yosemite Valley. If you're driving east on the main Yosemite Valley loop road (Southside Drive), turn right onto the road signed for Wawona (CA 41), and almost immediately turn left into the Bridalveil Fall parking lot. There are toilets at the trailhead, but to fill water bottles you'll need to visit one of the more easterly Yosemite Valley destinations, such as Yosemite Village or Yosemite Valley Lodge.

You could start this loop from any of several pullouts along Yosemite Valley's roads, but the description is written starting from the Bridalveil Fall parking lot, since it has the most parking space. If you are staying in Yosemite Valley, a better alternative is to leave your vehicle at your campsite or lodging and take the El Capitan shuttle to stop E4, at the El Capitan Bridge (at the eastern edge of El Capitan Meadow; mile 2.6), and begin your walk from there. Be aware, however, that this shuttle did not run in 2020 or 2021—your authors hope this is a temporary loss.

DESCRIPTION The trail begins at the parking lot's northeastern corner. You hike just 400 feet along a broad paved trail to a junction with the spur leading to Bridalveil Fall. Turn right (east) onto it and parallel a Bridalveil Creek tributary as you climb to the Bridalveil Fall viewpoint (0.2 mile). During May and June, when Bridalveil Fall is at its best, your viewpoint will be drenched in spray, making the last part of the trail very slippery and making photography from this vantage point nearly impossible. By midsummer many people are scrambling up the boulders beneath the falls to swim in alluring pools or catch the best angle for photography. (*Note:* Reconstruction of the trail and parking area began in 2019, and the trail remains closed at the time of this writing. Once the project is completed, the exact route here may change subtly.)

Early settlers named this fall for the filmy, veil-like aspect it has in summer after its flow has greatly diminished. The Ahwahnechee, however, gave it a more evocative name: *Pohono*, the “fall of the puffing winds,” for, at low volume, its water is pushed around by gusts of wind.

Of Yosemite's other falls, only Vernal Fall leaps free over a dead-vertical cliff, but its flow—the Merced River—is too strong to be greatly affected by the wind. The other major falls drop over cliffs that are less than vertical, and hence the falls partly glide down them. Bridalveil's cliff owes its verticality to vertical joints, along which the cliff's granite flakes off. A precursor to the Merced River has likely flowed through Yosemite Valley for tens of millions of years. During the predominantly warm, wet climates between 30 and 50 million years ago, a nascent Yosemite Valley widened principally through river downcutting and hillslope weathering, the pervasive fracture systems delineating the shape of its famous features. At this time, Bridalveil Creek was likely graded to the same elevation as the Merced River in Yosemite Valley. In the past 2–3 million years, glaciers flowed into Yosemite Valley from the range crest, picking up the pace of erosion and deepening and widening the valley. Compared to Yosemite Valley, Bridalveil Creek was only rarely occupied by glaciers, leading to a “mismatch” in the erosion rates that created the hanging valley over which Bridalveil Fall plunges.

After descending back to the trail junction and turning right (northeast; 0.32 mile), you quickly encounter several branches of Bridalveil Creek, each churning along a course that cuts

through old rockfall debris; you cross each on a sturdy bridge. Soon you reach a junction that proclaims you are on the Valley Loop Trail, the route you will follow for most of the walk. This also marks the start of the loop component of this hike; you will later retrace your steps from here to your car. Left (north), the trail quickly leads to Yosemite Valley's eastbound Southside Drive, while you continue ahead (right; east) on the broad trail—the old Wawona Road, until 1933.

Along most of your easy hike, you'll be treading across glacial sediments. Locally, they are as much as 1,000 feet deep, grading to 2,000 feet deep in the eastern part of Yosemite Valley. It is likely that early glaciations scoured the valley floor to expose the bedrock while the more recent, smaller, Tioga-age glacier scoured off only some of the sediments.

The trail loops almost to Southside Drive and then angles right (east) at the toe of Lower Cathedral Rock to climb to the crest of Bridalveil Moraine. From it, you get a good view of both the loose west wall of Lower Cathedral Rock and the overhanging west wall of Leaning Tower.

Just past the moraine's crest, you enter a gully lined with big-leaf maples, and here you have an excellent head-on view of mammoth El Capitan. Then, only yards away from the base of the

A close-up of Bridalveil Fall



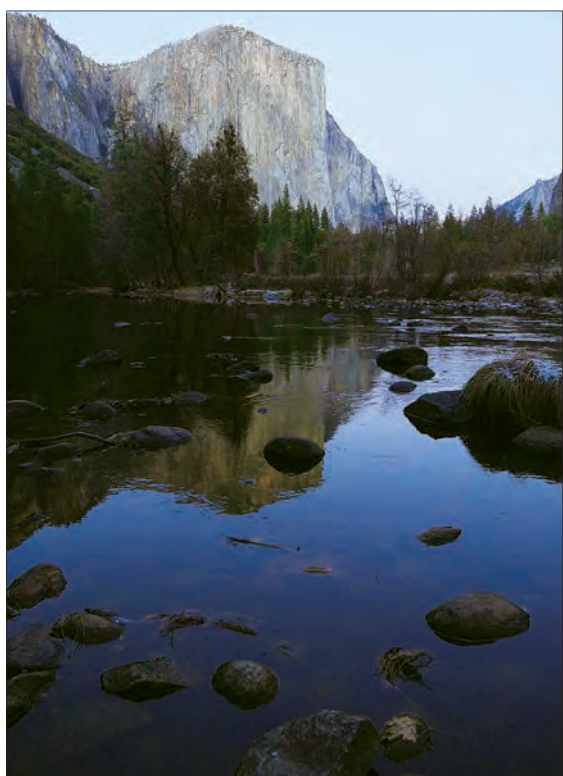
forbidding north wall of Lower Cathedral Rock, you can stretch your neck and look up at its large ledge, which almost cuts the face in two. While violet-green swallows perform aerial acrobatics high overhead, you continue east through a conifer forest, soon crossing a narrow, open talus field. At its base stands a second moraine, similar to Bridalveil, and, like all of Yosemite Valley's moraines, it is recessional—that is, it was left where a glacier temporarily halted its retreat. Geologists, including Matthes, once believed that the El Capitan Meadow moraine, left by the Tioga-age glacier about 16,000 years ago, dammed the Merced River to create a lake that extended wall-to-wall, dubbed Lake Yosemite. There is, however, no clear evidence that such lake existed. This is one of the park's geologic mysteries that are currently being investigated, and geologists' understanding of the past is likely to continue being revised. The working hypothesis is that the depression behind the moraine would have been quite shallow and that following the glacial retreat Yosemite Valley was a collection of interconnected ponds and braided rivers. Temporary dams created by recessional moraines or periodic rockfalls that originated on Lower Cathedral Rock's loose north wall would have kept the valley floor quite swampy.

Indeed, the first visitors found the valley too swampy and mosquito-ridden, so, in 1879, the large rockfall blocks clogging the nearby Merced River channel were blasted apart. This deepened the channel some 4.5 feet and thereby lowered Yosemite Valley's water table. The river, rather than meandering widely and changeably across the valley, became entrenched, and ponderosa pines and incense cedars invaded at the expense of wet-meadow vegetation and black oaks. The blasting was also expected to reduce flooding, but major floods still occurred about every 15–20 years. Two exceptionally large ones, which covered about two thirds of Yosemite Valley's floor, occurred in 1955 and 1997.

Winding among white firs, incense cedars, ponderosa pines, Douglas-firs, and black oaks, your generally view-impaired route nearly reaches the base of Middle Cathedral Rock. Here you'll find it worth your effort to scramble 150 feet up to the actual base; there is a collection of marked climber's trails that you can follow upward. From the cliff base, you'll see most of El Capitan plus Middle and Lower Brother, North Dome, Sentinel Rock, and Taft Point. But greater than this panorama is a sense of communion with nature one gets just touching the base of this rock's 2,000-foot-high, monolithic face. It can be a humbling experience.

Beyond the massive northeast face and its two pinnacles, you gradually descend to a level area, continuing through the conifer forest at

Valley View offers a perfect view of El Capitan.



the base of the slope. Soon you reach a junction where the Valley Loop Trail continues straight ahead (right; east; Trip 65), while you turn left (northwest) toward the Cathedral Beach Picnic Area (2.0 miles). This trail leads you across Southside Drive and just beyond to the entrance to the aforementioned picnic area; a detour to it offers good access to a Merced River beach and toilets.

[S] SIDE TRIP TO CATHEDRAL BEACH PICNIC AREA The few people who head north to the picnic area will be rewarded with one of two classic views. Looking northeast, through the growing pines, note the amazing similarity among the Three Brothers. They present a classic case of joint-controlled topography. Each is bounded on the east and south by nearly vertical joint planes and on the west by an oblique-angle joint plane. These three planes govern the shape of each brother, and when a rockfall does occur, the rock breaks off parallel to one of these planes, thus maintaining the triangular shape. Now look northwest and see the massive south face of El Capitan and, on the east part of it, identify the dark-gray “North America map,” which is a band of diorite that intruded and then solidified within the slightly older El Capitan granite. This excursion adds 0.3 mile round-trip to the length of the main route. **END OF SIDE TRIP**

Onward the trail continues northwest through valley floor conifer forest not far from the Merced River, before turning west to reintersect the cutover road at El Capitan Bridge (2.6 miles), just south of busy Northside Drive. Here, by the eastern edge of El Capitan Meadow, the hiker gets a noteworthy view of the Cathedral Rocks, and one can see why the Ahwahnechee visualized the lower monolith as a giant acorn. You can also plainly see the two Cathedral Spires. These spires, and the 500-foot buttress they stand on, resemble a two-towered Gothic cathedral—hence the name. Despite their apparent inaccessibility, both were first climbed way back in 1934, during the early days of Yosemite Valley rock climbing. Until the 1960s, both were popular climbs, but since rockfall altered the original ascent routes, they are somewhat dangerous and undesirable.

At this bridge you have choices—the trailed route now turns first north, then east, following alongside Northside Drive past Devils Elbow, a tight bend in the Merced River. Shortly you reach the Valley Loop Trail again (3.0 miles). Unfortunately, this bypasses El Capitan Meadow, a magical location from which to stare at the face of El Capitan and hopefully glimpse rock climbers slowly making their way upward. So, alternatively, you could walk along the roadside for 0.75 mile until the trail next comes close to the road. Or perhaps follow the trail for now, just duck briefly into the meadow for the view, and then return to the trail—my preference. The trip map accurately shows the trail network.

In Yosemite’s early days as a reserve and then a national park, the valley’s most popular campgrounds were in meadows, in contrast to the forested ones you have today. Ones in El Capitan Meadow and Bridalveil Meadow were among the first established. Back then, horse pasture was a prime concern—hence the need for meadow sites. In 1906, however, all five meadow campsites were closed, because sanitation—or lack thereof—had become a problem. Now it is a regenerating expanse of grass with scattered oak trees. Since the 1970s, Yosemite

vegetation management teams have turned to controlled burns to return Yosemite Valley's vegetation to its former character—a more open, mixed stand of oaks and conifers. When you walk around Yosemite Valley you will always spy clusters of recently charred ground and tree bases, with crews taking care that the canopies of mature trees do not ignite in the carefully managed “wilderness” that is Yosemite Valley.

Returning to your route, you cross Northside Drive just beyond Devils Elbow and reach a small, shaded parking area, another possible starting point for this walk. The views along the next stretch are more open than along the south side of the valley, including across to the Cathedral Rocks and up El Capitan's massive face. Continuing beneath El Capitan's east face, the trail crosses a gigantic rockfall that broke from high up on El Capitan about 1600 B.C. At its western side, in an open forest of predominantly black oak, an obvious use trail crosses your path. This is the main climbers' trail ascending to the base of El Capitan's nose, the prominent, massive prow at the center of the monolith. It is well worth walking to its base and staring upward.

[S] SIDE TRIP TO BASE OF EL CAPITAN For visitors who are new to Yosemite Valley, the size of El Capitan, like the Cathedral Rocks and other valley landmarks, is too large to really comprehend. If you take the climbers' trail up to the base of El Cap's “Nose,” which you'll reach in 0.2 mile, you'll probably see rock climbers, who, hundreds of feet up the monolith's 3,000-foot-high walls, are reduced to antlike stature. You can walk either left (west) or right (east) along the base of the walls. Walk up to the wall and stare upward—I suspect that from this perspective you'd be hard-pressed to know if you were looking 1,000 or 10,000 feet up. Notice also how few rocks are at the base of the wall—it stands so high and vertical, because the rock right here has few fractures and sheds little, most of the time. However, you did just walk up a vegetated talus pile, confirming that, on occasion, rocks tumble down here as well. **END OF SIDE TRIP**

Beyond the climber's trail, the Valley Loop Trail continues through open forest and then curves increasingly southeast, again coming close to Northside Drive. At a junction, stay right, continuing to parallel the road westward. Along this stretch you will cross two or more branches of Ribbon Creek, and, in times of high water, you will have a wet ford of at least one of them. In pioneer days Ribbon Creek was known as Virgin Tears Creek—a name in harmony with Bridalveil Creek, across the valley floor. Ahead, to your left, is the north end of the El Capitan recessional moraine.

[S] OFF-TRAIL SIDE TRIP TO RIBBON FALL For the adventurous (yet safety-minded) cross-country hiker, an ascent to the base of Ribbon Fall is extremely rewarding. This is quite strenuous, following Ribbon Creek about 0.75 mile, gaining about 1,400 feet in elevation to reach the alcove into which Ribbon Fall plunges. At 1,612 feet, it is Yosemite Valley's highest waterfall (versus about 1,430 feet for Upper Yosemite Fall). On both your ascent and descent, be wary of loose boulders and possible (although unlikely) encounters with rattlesnakes. The nearly vertical walls of the alcove are quite intimidating, and

you may get the feeling that they are about to close in on you or at least spall rockfall, which although unlikely, is of course how this cleft formed. Before you go to the trouble of ascending, note that Ribbon Fall is seasonal—make sure you can see water flowing before taking the time to ascend. (*The start of this route is indicated on the map with a labeled arrow.*) **END OF SIDE TRIP**

You next intersect the Old Big Road Flat Road, which has descended from the Tamarack Flat Campground (4.0 miles). Continual rockfalls from an unstable band of highly fractured cliffs eventually led to the tunneled replacement for the Big Oak Flat Road in June 1940. The



Staring up the face of El Capitan

Rockslides, the giant unstable talus piles along a stretch of the old road, make it nearly impassable today, even to walkers, but this was the original route from the north into Yosemite Valley and offers some very different views of Bridalveil Fall than can be glimpsed from any currently maintained roads or trails.

For the next 0.1 mile you can either wind down along the old road to Northside Drive or follow the sometimes-amorphous path of the Valley Loop Trail; once near Northside Drive a singletrack again heads west.

Within 5 minutes, you cross a low recessional moraine, then drop almost to the paved road's edge, where a turnout provides an unobstructed view of Bridalveil Fall. Also note that the rock deposited on the Merced River's south bank is rounded, while that on its north bank is angular; the rounded rocks are water-laid, the angular ones deposited by rockfall. Under

the pleasant shade of ponderosa pines and incense cedars, you continue west, passing some cabin-size rockfall blocks (derived from the Rockslides) and then skirting the north end of the Bridalveil Meadow recessional moraine; the glaciers left behind a lot of debris. The terminal moraine would have been lower down, in the Merced Gorge, but it has been long since washed away by riverine floods.

Soon you enter a swampy area with cattails, and at its west end, you cross trickling Black Spring. Past the spring, the trail again parallels the westbound road, shortly arriving above the back side of the Valley View scenic turnout.

S SIDE TRIP TO VALLEY VIEW The Valley View scenic turnout on Northside Drive is perfectly obvious and about 300 feet away. The view from the riverside turnout is one of Yosemite Valley's most famous. Here, you see El Capitan, Bridalveil Fall, and the Cathedral

Rocks magnificently standing high above the stately conifers that line Bridalveil Meadow. Barely rising above the trees are the distant landmarks of Clouds Rest, Half Dome, and Sentinel Rock. As elsewhere in Yosemite Valley, you'll see a sign showing how high the floodwater was at 11 p.m. on January 2, 1997, the largest flood in memory. The water here was sufficiently deep to flood the entire meadowlands you see. For a brief spell, Yosemite Valley had its Lake Yosemite, and you could have rafted across the inundated floodplain, from near the base of Half Dome west through forests and across meadows to the west edge of El Capitan Meadow. **END OF SIDE TRIP**

Continuing, you reach the Valley Loop Trail's westernmost point at the Pohono Bridge (5.4 miles). Your feet now tread a riverside path past a collection of springs, rimmed by lush vegetation, especially ferns. Since the trail is below the road, you won't see roadside Fern Spring, but where you cross its outlet creek, you can climb up the roadbank to reach this popular pullout. Pacific dogwoods add springtime beauty to this forest as sunlight filters down to light up their translucent leaves and their large, petal-like, creamy-white bracts. Douglas-firs locally dominate the forest as you hike along, tracking the banks of the Merced River until you reach the west edge of Bridalveil Meadow. The meadow is a gently sloping alluvial fan that contains enough groundwater originating from south-side slopes to generally prevent trees from invading it.

From its edge, you see a panorama from Ribbon Fall clockwise past El Capitan, the Cathedral Rocks, and the Leaning Tower up to often-ignored points on the valley's south rim. Avid map readers will identify Dewey, Crocker, Stanford, and Old Inspiration Points, all of which are located along the Pohono Trail (Trips 72 and 76). Now you walk northeast along the road's side, staying above seasonally boggy Bridalveil Meadow. At the meadow's east edge, the trail diverges from the roadbank and goes north toward a river bend, where you cross the Bridalveil Meadow moraine (6.1 miles).

From here, one can walk 40 yards north to a large rock by the Merced River's bank and see a plaque dedicated to Dr. Lafayette Bunnell, who was in the Mariposa Battalion, the first known party of white men to set foot in Yosemite Valley. Camping in the meadow on March 27, 1851, Bunnell suggested the name "Yo-sem-i-ty," which he had incorrectly inferred was the name of the Indian tribe that inhabited Yosemite Valley. While Bunnell may have shown a greater interest in his surroundings than his compatriots, the plaque, positioned in 1925, fails to mention that the Ahwahnechee were driven from the ancestral lands by the battalion, initiating the unsolicited transfer of Yosemite's stewardship from American Indian tribes to white settlers.

From the moraine, you parallel the Merced River southeast, crossing multiple channels of Bridalveil Creek before cutting back to Southside Drive. In spring and early summer these crossings are likely wet fords; if you wish to stay dry, stay alongside the road. The trail next reaches Southside Drive at an extensive pullout designed for tourists to stop and stare at El Capitan. Walking alongside the parked cars, don't miss the crosswalk that marks where the Valley Loop Trail crosses back to the south side of the road. Here you quickly reach the junction where you first merged onto the Valley Loop Trail (6.75 miles) and will turn right (southwest) to retrace your steps 0.25 mile to the Bridalveil Fall parking lot (7.0 miles).

■ Trips from the ■ Glacier Point Road and Happy Isles

Introduction to This Area

THIS CHAPTER COVERS the lands immediately south of the Merced River. It includes both hikes departing north from the Glacier Point Road to access Yosemite Valley's southern rim and Yosemite Valley and hikes starting from Happy Isles, in the southeast end of the valley, and heading east along the Merced River corridor. Views of Yosemite Valley and its many waterfalls dominate this chapter's attractions. The walk to Merced Lake leads farther afield—up the Merced River past steep granite domes and dashing cascades.

While Glacier Point is arguably the best easily reached viewpoint in the entire park, this chapter directs you to equally worthy vantage points. Whereas you can drive almost to Glacier Point (requiring just a 0.2-mile walk at the end) and you can drive to Washburn Point (also spectacular), you'll have to make short hikes (a few hours round-trip) to tiny Dewey Point (Trip 73), Taft Point (Trip 74; not for the acrophobic), or broad-topped Sentinel Dome (Trip 75). Trip 76 links these wonders together, as you traverse the entire length of the Pohono Trail to Yosemite Valley. Then Trip 77, the Four Mile Trail, and Trip 78, the Panorama Trail, lead from Glacier Point to Yosemite Valley via breathtaking routes; a fit hiker can combine them as a long day's excursion, ascending the Four Mile Trail, descending the Panorama Trail, and eliminating the car shuttle.

Trips 79–81 start from Happy Isles, and the hiker use is insanely heavy on the first mile, up to the Vernal Fall bridge, dropping to just incredibly heavy up to the brink of Nevada Fall. Beyond it, hundreds of people on a summer day still continue to Little Yosemite Valley (the most popular backcountry site in the park), and those with permits continue up Trip 80 toward Half Dome. In contrast, traffic to Merced Lake (Trip 81) is merely moderately heavy.

WILDERNESS PERMITS AND REGULATIONS

Overnight wilderness permits for the trips in this chapter are issued by Yosemite National Park; see page 61 and nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm for details on obtaining both reserved and first-come, first-served wilderness permits in Yosemite. For trailheads along Glacier Point Road (Trips 73 and 74), the priority permit station for first-come, first-served

permits is the **Wawona Visitor Center** at Hill's Studio, along the access road to the Wawona Hotel. For the Happy Isles Trailhead (Trips 80 and 81), the priority permit station for first-come, first-served permits is the **Yosemite Valley Wilderness Center**, in Yosemite Village between the Ansel Adams Gallery and the post office. Permits out of Yosemite Valley are hard to get, so have a backup plan if you can't get your permit of choice. You can pick up reserved permits at the most convenient permit station; see page 62 for their locations. In Yosemite National Park, campfires are prohibited above 9,600 feet. Bear canisters are required throughout Yosemite National Park.



CAMPGROUNDS

Bridalveil Creek Campground is the only campground along the Glacier Point Road. Its entrance lies about 7.7 miles up this road. Your other choice near the Glacier Point Road is **Wawona Campground**, about 1 mile north of the Wawona Hotel. Both campgrounds require reservations. In addition, south of Yosemite along CA 41 is a U.S. Forest Service facility, **Summerdale Campground**, along with many other choices around Bass Lake.

Three campgrounds in Yosemite Valley—**North**, **Upper**, and **Lower Pines**—have reservable sites (at recreation.gov). These sites disappear within seconds of becoming available on the 15th of the month, four months in advance of your stay. Even having a perfectly calibrated clock and fast mouse-clicking reflexes, I've missed out on a campsite about half the times I've tried—I wish you the best of luck! There are also two smaller, walk-in campgrounds—**Camp 4** and **Yosemite Valley Backpackers' Campground**. During peak summer months, vacancies at the former are allocated by mini-lottery one day in advance, with the campground reverting to a first-come first-served basis in mid-September. The latter is for backpackers who have a wilderness permit and need a place to stay the night before they start their hike, as well as for visitors arriving by public transportation, but again just for a single night.*

TRIP DESCRIPTIONS

TRIP 73 McGurk Meadow and Dewey Point

DIFFICULTY  **TRIP TYPE**  **DURATION** Day hike, backpack **DISTANCE** 7.8-mile out-and-back **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 6,770'/7,330'; one-way: +840'/-580'; round-trip: ±1,420' **SEASON** June–October **USE** Moderate **MAPS** Half Dome, El Capitan **PERMIT** McGurk Meadow

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	McGurk Meadow Trailhead	3.8	spur to Dewey Point
0.7	McGurk Meadow creek crossing	3.9	Dewey Point
1.9	Pohono Trail–McGurk Meadow junction	7.8	McGurk Meadow Trailhead
2.9	start uphill		

ALTERNATE ROUTE Alternate start from Bridalveil Creek Campground (0.9 mile longer)

*At the time of this writing, only reservable campsites and Backpackers' Campgrounds were open, and no first-come, first-served sites were available; see nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/camping.htm for details.



■ INTRODUCTION

Dewey Point provides an aerial view of Yosemite Valley's landmarks from a western perch. You peer over the Cathedral Rocks as you gaze down the length of Yosemite Valley and up Tenaya Canyon. The hike from the McGurk Meadow Trailhead is the easiest of routes to scenic Dewey Point, requiring less than half the climbing effort of Trip 72. Unlike the rigorous, hot climb from the Wawona Tunnel, your route is a much cooler, rolling traverse between 6,800 feet and 7,385 feet. You have views only at the walk's terminus, but along the way you pass through flower-filled McGurk Meadow and the dense, rich conifer forests along the valley's south rim. If your group has two cars, consider a car shuttle, starting with this hike and then completing Trip 72 in reverse. If you're in search of a short wildflower walk, walking just the 0.7 mile to McGurk Meadow is a delightful excursion.

DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEAD The trailhead is along the Glacier Point Road. First navigate to the Chinquapin junction along Wawona Road (CA 41), 9.25 miles south of the terminus of CA 41 in Yosemite Valley and 12.25 miles north of Wawona. Turn east onto Glacier Point Road and drive 7.4 miles to the signed trailhead, on your left, effectively a broad pullout with bear boxes. This is 0.25 mile before the spur road to the Bridalveil Creek Campground, which is the only campground along Glacier Point Road.

The closest water faucets and toilets are at the pullout at the Wawona Road junction, in the Bridalveil Creek Campground, and at Glacier Point.

A ALTERNATE START FROM BRIDALVEIL CREEK CAMPGROUND If you are camping at Bridalveil Creek Campground, you have the option of starting from your campsite. Take a closed road that departs southwest away from the camp's Loop A. After a quarter mile you cross a creek that drains Westfall Meadows and immediately beyond reach a four-way trail junction. South, this trail passes through the Westfall Meadows, then drops down drier, brushier slopes to an old logging area in the Alder Creek drainage (Trip 86). This was a 1920s "battleground" between environmentalists and the Yosemite Lumber Company. The environmentalists won, but the scars are still visible in places. Straight ahead (west) leads along an old road alignment to Badger Pass, a popular winter ski route. Your route is to the right (north): take the trail, climbing gently over weathered sandy terrain to reach the Glacier Point Road. This alternate start adds 0.9 mile to your hike to Dewey Point. **END OF ALTERNATE ROUTE**

DESCRIPTION Starting from Glacier Point Road, the lodgepole-shaded trail drops gently to skirt the northern edge of largely hidden Perego Meadow before topping a low divide. Next it drops moderately, passes an old cabin, and reaches the south edge of sedge-filled McGurk Meadow, where you cross its creek on planks (0.7 mile). Until late summer, the meadow will have an abundance of wildflowers, including shooting star, paintbrush, cinquefoil, and corn lily. The trail skirts the western edge of a narrow finger of McGurk Meadow; a much larger expanse of meadow lies hidden to the west of the trail. Looking east from the trail, note the low, unglaciated summits of the Ostrander Rocks; indeed, the entire Bridalveil Creek drainage north of the Glacier Point Road is unglaciated.

You reenter lodgepole forest, with McGurk Meadow's northernmost meadow finger still to your side. The trail leads over a shallow, viewless saddle and then descends at a reasonable gradient to a low-crest trail junction with the Pohono Trail (1.9 miles). The right (eastern) fork quickly drops to Bridalveil Creek, where there is a collection of campsites along the creek's western bank, a pleasant late-summer destination for a family trip. **▲** Day hikers: if you haven't brought along sufficient water, you can obtain some from this perennial creek.

You, however, turn left, heading west along the Pohono Trail, passing through a series of sandy flats dotted with jewelflowers, pussypaws, and matted Brewer's lupines, and then crossing a broad, low divide. The fir forest here is wonderfully dense—this is one of the rare bits of Yosemite to not yet suffer the consequences of a catastrophic forest fire, and it is well worth enjoying the deep shade that the lichen-laden firs provide. On the damp, shady floor beneath the mix of red and white firs, you may find wintergreen, snow plant, and spotted coralroot, the last two parasitic plants that use soil fungi to tap into the trees' energy stores. Traipsing along, you cross three Bridalveil Creek tributaries, the first two larger, the third smaller (2.9 miles), and then start up a fourth that drains a curving gully. To your right (north) are some small campsites, if there is still water in these tributaries. **▲** On the gully's upper slopes, Jeffrey pine, huckleberry oak, and greenleaf manzanita replace the fir cover. In a few minutes you reach a spur trail (3.8 miles), and turning right (north), quickly reach highly scenic 7,385-foot Dewey Point (3.9 miles).

If you have a head for heights, you can look straight down the massive face that supports Leaning Tower. To the right are the steep Cathedral Rocks rising on the other side of Bridalveil Creek. Looking across Yosemite Valley, the broad, smooth face of El Capitan rises high above the valley floor. Also intriguing is the back side of Middle Cathedral Rock, with an iron-rich, rust-stained surface. Finally, you see the Cathedral Spires head-on, so they appear as one. If you are hiking before July, you're also likely to see wispy Ribbon Fall across Yosemite Valley. Bridalveil Fall, however, is blocked by the Leaning Tower. Due to transportation difficulties, most people will return the way they came. However, if a generous party member is willing to return for the car, some of the group can continue 5.1 miles west along the Pohono Trail to the Wawona Tunnel, Trip 76, on page 533.



Flower-filled McGurk Meadow

■ Trips South and East ■ of the Glacier Point Road

Introduction to This Area

THIS CHAPTER HAS the greatest geographic extent in the book, for it covers the quadrant of Yosemite with the least dense trail network—reflecting, for the most part, its less showy nature. This keeps the crowds at bay, and it is relatively easy to obtain overnight permits for the backpacking trips described. It does, however, have the park's most popular destination outside of Yosemite Valley: the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees (a giant sequoia grove), whose recently restored trails should be a highlight of everyone's Yosemite experience. Of the overnight trips, only Ostrander Lake (Trip 83) will regularly have its quota filled. Of the remaining hikes, two are day hikes, Bishop Creek (Trip 82) and the Wawona Meadow Loop (Trip 90); both have splendid spring-wildflower displays but are skippable later in the season. Trips 84, 86, and 88 visit the rolling uplands between the Glacier Point Road and Wawona, visiting a few lakes, waterfalls, and simply pleasant, mostly forested terrain. Trip 87 leads to the top of Chilnualna Falls, a lovely spring day hike or overnighter. Finally, Trip 85, a long circuit around the Clark Range vies as one of the park's top long excursions. It is every bit as showy as the High Sierra Camps Loop (Trip 43) or Trip 4 through northern Yosemite, and largely without crowds.

WILDERNESS PERMITS AND REGULATIONS



Overnight wilderness permits for all trips described in this chapter are issued by Yosemite National Park; see page 61 and nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm for details on obtaining both reserved and first-come, first-served wilderness permits in Yosemite. For all these trailheads, the priority permit station for first-come, first-served permits is the **Wawona Visitor Center** at Hill's Studio, located along the access road to Wawona Hotel. If you are entering Yosemite via CA 41 (Wawona Road), the Wawona Visitor Center is also the most convenient location to pick up reserved permits. If you are entering from another direction and your trip begins at Glacier Point, one of the other Yosemite permit stations is likely more convenient: **Big Oak Flat Information Station** if entering via CA 120 from the west, the **Tuolumne Meadows Wilderness Center** if entering via CA 120 from the east, and the **Yosemite Valley Wilderness Center** if entering via CA 140. In Yosemite National Park, campfires are prohibited above 9,600 feet. Bear canisters are required throughout the park.

CAMPGROUNDS

Bridalveil Creek Campground is the only campground along the Glacier Point Road. Its entrance lies about 7.7 miles up this road. Your other choice is **Wawona Campground**, about 1 mile north of the Wawona Hotel. Both campgrounds require reservations. South of Yosemite along CA 41 is a U.S. Forest Service facility, **Summerdale Campground**, along with many other choices around Bass Lake. You could also stay in one of the Yosemite Valley campgrounds, which require hard-to-get reservations (see page 5). Backpackers can spend a night before or after their hike at the **Yosemite Valley Backpackers' Campground**, at the back of North Pines Campground.*

TRIP DESCRIPTIONS

TRIP 82 Bishop Creek via Alder Creek Trail

DIFFICULTY  **TRIP TYPE**  **DURATION** Day hike **DISTANCE** 6.4-mile out-and-back **ELEVATIONS** Min/max: 3,930'/4,950'; one-way: +160'/-1,170'; round-trip: ±1,330' **SEASON** April–November **USE** Light **MAP** Wawona **PERMIT** No permit required but recommended as a day hike

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Bishop Creek Trailhead	3.2	Bishop Creek
0.7	diverge from Wawona Road	6.4	Bishop Creek Trailhead
1.2	enter Sierra National Forest		

INTRODUCTION

The descent to Bishop Creek *has been* a pleasant springtime hike, traversing slopes alight with colorful flowers. By early summer, the creeks run dry and temperatures soar, and the walk is best saved for another year. I use the words “has been” because the entire length of this walk falls within the perimeter of the 2018 Ferguson Fire, so the future condition of this trail is unknown. Having already been narrow and infrequently walked, the route will now quite possibly vanish without significant upkeep and use. The flowers are superb and will be even showier following the fire, so if you’re passing by in spring, stop at the trailhead and walk at least the first half mile of the trail.

DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEAD The Bishop Creek Trailhead is on the west side of Wawona Road (CA 41), 4.9 miles north of the Wawona Store (0.15 mile northwest of the bridge over Alder Creek) and 7.3 miles south of the Glacier Point Road junction. There are two pullouts just northwest of Alder Creek and the trail departs from the one farther to the west.

DESCRIPTION From the trailhead pullout, the trail, initially an abandoned road, drops below Wawona Road and parallels it northwest. The sign indicating your destination, Bishop Creek, is only visible after you’ve taken your first 30 steps from the parking lot, comforting you that you’re on a trail. Its verges are covered in a dense carpet of mountain misery; nowhere else in the park will you see such a spread of this low, aromatic shrub, and once the shrubs regrow over

*At the time of this writing, only reservable campsites and Backpackers' Campgrounds were open, and no first-come, first-served sites were available; see nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/camping.htm for details.



the coming years, you can expect legs covered in their sticky orange sap when you hike this trail. Despite its sticky nature, it is a favorite food of deer. This species, like most along this walk, has evolved in an environment where fire is the norm, and mountain misery rapidly resprouts from the base following a fire. Another bush to look for is the large whiteleaf manzanita, easily recognized by its smooth, red bark and its gray-green leaves. This species is readily killed by fire, but its life cycle depends upon fire, with its seeds germinating only following a fire; the seed coat must be damaged by fire for the seeds to germinate. Indeed, it is likely that the oils and waxes on the leaves have evolved to promote the spread of fire, to encourage seedling germination. Germinating following fire is an excellent, and widespread, strategy, with germinants having access to abundant light and fire-released nutrients. With these dominant shrubs quickly reestablishing themselves, the landscape won't stay blackened for long. In the past, incense cedars, ponderosa pines, the occasional foothill pine, and black oaks provided patches of shade. Of these, only the black oaks survive a hot fire, so the slopes will be yet more sun-scorched in the coming years.

In May or early June, you're likely to see many wildflowers blooming, including the butterfly mariposa lily, one of lower-elevation Yosemite's showiest flowers. The three broad petals of this species vary from white to vibrant deep pinks with intricate patterns at the petal centers. Other flowers that greet you will be darkias, twining brodiaea, Indian pink, mountain dogbane, soap plant, milkweed, miner's lettuce, small larkspur, and cinquefoil. Most of these





Butterfly calochortus grows abundantly along this walk.

herbs, shrubs, and trees were used by the local Indians either for food, drink, or medicine, or for basketry, bows, or shelter.

The trail undulates in and out of small drainages, first paralleling Wawona Road and then, at about the 0.7-mile mark, diverging from the road as the trail descends slowly toward Bishop Creek. About 1.2 miles from the trailhead, you leave the park and enter Sierra National Forest, descending an additional 0.8 mile to a springtime creek. A quarter mile beyond it, you climb to a low ridge, on which you'll find about a half-dozen Indian mortar holes just a few yards west of the trail. Stands of conifers have survived the fire, but there are also long, open stretches beneath the blazing sun. From the ridge, you have a steady descent, winding in and out of gullies as it drops about 550 feet to the banks of Bishop Creek. Prefire most of the route was pleasant walking, but for the final 0.5-mile descent to Bishop Creek, poison oak became ever more of a nuisance, encroaching on the trail. The fire has spared the riparian vegetation right along Bishop Creek, where alders, azaleas, and dogwoods provide a welcome contrast to the burned landscape (3.2 miles).

From Bishop Creek, you could continue down to the South Fork Merced River—a total drop of almost 800 feet along a dry, steep 1.4-mile course. However, the steepness, heat, abundant poison oak, and springtime ticks make the descent unappealing to most people. I suspect that postfire this route will quickly become even more overgrown and difficult to follow.

■ TRIP 83 Ostrander Lake

DIFFICULTY  **TRIP TYPE**  **DURATION** Day hike, backpack **DISTANCE** 12.4-mile out-and-back
ELEVATIONS Min/max: 7,000'/8,610'; one-way: +1,700'/-210'; round-trip: ±1,910' **SEASON** Mid-June–mid-October **USE** Moderate **MAP** Half Dome **PERMIT** Ostrander Lake

TRAIL LOG			
0.0	Ostrander Lake Trailhead	4.5	Horizon Ridge saddle
1.4	northern Bridalveil Creek junction	6.2	Ostrander Lake
2.7	southern Bridalveil Creek junction	12.4	Ostrander Lake Trailhead

ALTERNATE ROUTE Return via Hart Lakes (off-trail) and Mono Meadow (5.7 miles longer)



FIND THE BEST TRAILS. SEE THE BEST SIGHTS.

Yosemite National Park is a paradise for hikers, backpackers, and equestrians. With more than 800 miles of trails, the options for exploration are limitless. In this comprehensive guide, expert hiker Elizabeth Wenk describes every official trail in Yosemite—and most of the trails just outside the park—to help you choose where to go and what to see.

If you have just an hour, take in the stunning views from the summit of Pothole Dome. Plan a family backpacking trip into the Twenty Lakes Basin or an extended excursion deep into the park's north country. Enjoy endless views of El Capitan on the Valley Loop Trail. This essential book leads you to sequoias, waterfalls, and canyons in Yosemite and the surrounding Emigrant, Hoover, and Ansel Adams Wildernesses.

Inside you'll find

- 96 routes along popular and less-frequented trails
- Detailed trip narratives and accompanying maps
- At-a-glance icons highlighting the best spots for camping
- Comprehensive information on lodging, permits, and other park activities
- Descriptions of the region's history, geology, flora, and fauna

