

Romancing the Sierra: Part 2

The following articles originally appeared in the Yosemite Highway Herald newspaper as a regular column called "Romancing the Sierra".

All articles are by Sharon Giacomazzi.

Two books of Sharon's have been published by Bored Feet Press:

Tales and Tales of Yosemite and the Central Sierra and Exploring Eastern Sierra Canyons

These books can be purchased through www.BoredFeet.com or Amazon.com, or at Tuolumne County bookstores.

Contents of Articles Below:

Foresta and Little Nellie Falls

Through the Artist's Eye: Thomas Hill

Rainbow Pool

V-9: Key to a Hidden Yosemite



[Home Page](#)

Books and Maps

[New for 2007](#)

[Browse by topic](#)

[Best Sellers](#)

[Hip Pocket Guides](#)

[Hiking the California Coastal Trail](#)

[More Hiking, Climbing, and Biking Books](#)

[Outdoor Recreation Maps](#)

[Travel & Languages](#)

[Nature & Photography](#)

[Food, Wine, Fiction, Satire, & Poetry](#)

[Western History](#)

[Children's Books](#)

[Fine Art](#)

[Health](#)

[Tide Charts & Playing Cards](#)

Trail of the Month

Trail Updates

Trails and Tales of Yosemite and the Central Sierra

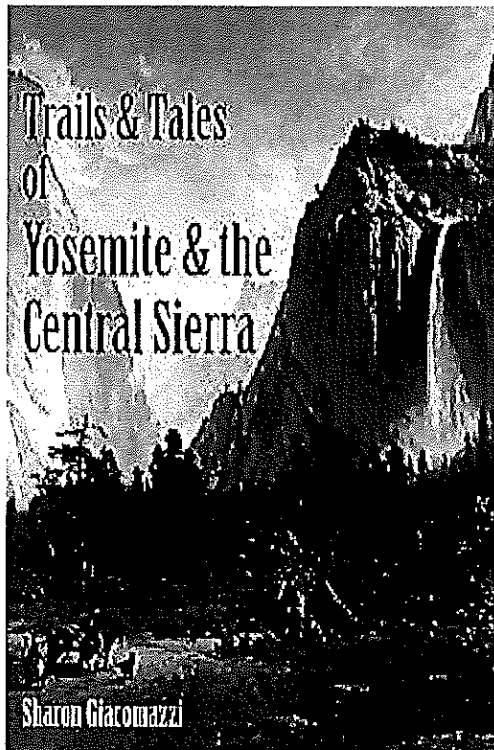
A Guide for Hikers and History Buffs

by Sharon Giacomazzi

Sharon Giacomazzi loves to tell history tales and she loves to hike. She combines these passions in an enthralling guide to the glorious Central Sierra, presenting more than 60 fun excursions. The book's five sections, Gold Country, Western Slope, Yosemite Valley, Other Yosemite Park, and Eastern Sierra, are made richer with their fascinating historical context, and Sharon is a born storyteller who makes history fun.

You'll find ghost towns, waterfalls, wildflowers, Sequoia groves, historic roads, hot springs, river canyons, lakes, mountain peaks, and railroads, both excursion trains and historic lines long gone.

While Sharon includes some of the popular hikes, she also leads you to destinations off the beaten path, hidden corners in Yosemite Valley and the surrounding popular region. She emphasizes easy day hikes, but you'll also find peaks to climb, places to backpack, and resorts where you can just relax amidst scenic grandeur.



304 pages, 6" x 9", full-color cover, 59 historic and scenic photographs, 38 maps by Marsha Mello, bibliography, index, 2001.

New printing with updates for 2004.

ISBN 0-939431-25-4 trade paper

Foresta Forever A History Ramble To Little Nellie Falls

Foresta is a historic 200-acre tract on the extreme western edge of Yosemite National Park. Even though it is only ten miles from grand and incomparable Yosemite Valley, where millions of sightseers visit each year, few are aware of Foresta's existence. While an occasional visitor can be seen snapping a quick photo of lovely Big Meadow with its ancient barns, Foresta is certainly not a tourist destination. Virtually unknown are its miles of secluded hiking, beautiful waterfalls, spring wildflowers, and rich and lively history.

A hike to nearby Little Nellie Falls provides a delightful early season ramble. Formed by Little Crane Creek, Little Nellie Falls gracefully tumbles 40 feet into deep granite pools. Colorful, fragrant wildflowers add charm and visual appeal to this pristine setting in a shady canyon. Ardent seekers of obscure waterfalls will want to add this one to their list. Begin your walk on dirt Coulterville Road heading northwest from Big Meadow three miles to this picturesque cascade. The falls are just outside the boundary of Yosemite in Stanislaus National Forest.

If the name is recognized at all, Foresta may stir a memory of the 24,000-acre conflagration that raged in Yosemite and destroyed the small community in the summer of 1990. More recently Foresta has been associated with a controversial plan to move most National Park Service and concessionaire offices/ employee housing out of overdeveloped Yosemite Valley. Or, Foresta may be remembered as the site of a government land grab in the 1960s when Park Service officials decided that the private inholding was "incompatible with the purposes of the park and an intrusion to the natural area." But the heavily timbered land known since the early 1900s as Foresta harbors still older memories. Its history is filled with colorful and stirring events. To Native Americans, the region was called O'Pim; and for more than 2,000 years, Miwok Indians lived in the Big Meadow-Foresta area. According to estimates by the Yosemite Park archaeologist, there are at least 50 archaeological sites in the environs, nearly two dozen of which have been studied and documented. Foresta's centuries of relative anonymity ended with completion of historically significant Coulterville Road in June of 1874. This very first stage road into Yosemite Valley passed through the Miwok safehold a few miles below the Merced Grove of Big Trees. Big Meadow's lushness, good soil, abundant grass and water, and vast stands of timber caught the interest of early ranchers.

German-born John Meyer and Peter Mieson are considered Big Meadow's first pioneers. Agreeing that Big Meadow would be an ideal location to raise crops and graze cattle, in 1873 they began improving the land. Within a few years John Meyer's holdings were acquired by his brother George along with the partnership with Mieson. After becoming U.S. citizens, each man homesteaded 160 adjoining acres around Big Meadow.

Enterprising and hard-working, the young men also collected tolls for the Coulterville Road, provided meals for travelers, tended horses, and raised vegetable crops for an eager market in Yosemite.

The old house just beyond the barns in Big Meadow (now occupied by Yosemite Institute employees) was the Meyer ranchhouse. The original structure burned years ago. In 1874 Meyer and Mieson permitted an independent, maverick Scotsman named George Anderson to build a cabin on the property in exchange for carpentry work. Anderson became well known in Yosemite for his trail-building skills, climaxed by a three-month labor establishing a route up the supposedly inaccessible heights of Half Dome. Anderson is best remembered for his triumph as the first person to stand on the brink of 8,842-foot Half Dome summit in October 1875.

In 1878 the fourth pioneer to reside at O'Pim's was Thomas Rutherford; he homesteaded 160 acres along the southern boundary of Big Meadow. Rutherford built a blacksmith shop and sawmill near Crane Creek; his mill sold most of its product to Yosemite Valley residents. The ditch from Crane Creek, used to power his mill, is still visible 117 years later. The mill was across the road from the old Meyer ranchhouse on the edge of the meadow.

Rutherford lived only six years after establishing his homestead. Upon his death in 1884, Rutherford was the first to be interred in Big Meadow Cemetery, the only white burial ground in the area. Between 1886 and 1911 four other men were buried beside him. Non-engraved chunks of granite were used as markers which, over the years, became obscured by brush and pine needles. In 1957 the tiny pioneer graveyard was cleared, and natural granite tombstones once again

denoted the deceased. To come upon these tall granite stones is a moving experience—almost as if unexpectedly stumbling across an ancient Druid ruin.

In 1887 Rutherford's homestead came into the hands of James McCauley for \$100 through public auction. His nearby 40 acres combined with Rutherford's 160 acres comprised the area that would be called the Foresta subdivision. McCauley was not a Johnny-come-lately to the area. Arriving in Yosemite in 1870, he was one of its earliest settlers. Accomplishments of this pioneer entrepreneur include originating the famous Yosemite Falls firefall display in 1871; building the Four Mile Trail between Yosemite Valley and Glacier Point, and being owner/operator of the popular Mountain House hostelry atop Glacier Point.

After the government effected a major overhaul on boundary lines in 1905, Meyer and McCauley's ranches became private enclaves within Yosemite National Park. Although their homesteads were patented, as legal owners of private property within and surrounded by U.S. government lands, they had to comply with strict federal rules and regulations, as would all future owners of Foresta property.

Following McCauley's death in 1911, his family sold 40 acres of their original homestead to Charles Snell and Veranus Lothrop for \$5,500. Snell and Lothrop were promoter/real estate developers interested in subdividing the property. Their expansive plans included many conveniences for future residents and tourists, as well as a road between the subdivision and El Portal in the Merced River canyon below. Foresta was chosen as its name "to designate it as a forest tract." Expenses were much higher than anticipated, and lot sales were disappointingly low. In spite of this, the promoters bought an additional 160 acres from the McCauleys; the private inholding now consisted of 200 acres. By summer of 1913, Snell was in financial trouble and had no option but to forfeit his Foresta dream. Costs of building the road to El Portal far exceeded estimates. The seven-mile road was a critical link in Snell's plan to create a community for educators and philosophers to hold cultural programs. The road was necessary to connect the community with the Yosemite Valley Railroad station in El Portal. From the depot, sightseeing buses would transport people to Foresta and on to Yosemite through the Tuolumne Grove of Big Trees.

Replacing Snell was Alfred Davis, C.E.O. and stockholder of a mining company in South Dakota. His first project was completion of the all-important route known as Davis Road to El Portal. Davis then continued the scenic byway up to meet the Big Oak Flat Road at Crane Flat, allowing tourists to travel through the Tuolumne Grove enroute to Yosemite. Davis spent considerable money advertising and promoting Foresta's 1,230 lots and the Summer Assembly with "seminar discussions under the peacefully thought provoking surroundings of the primeval forests of Yosemite." Like Snell, Davis had great optimism for the future of Foresta. However, most of his grandiose plans never materialized and lot sales provided little income. Designed to appeal to people of culture and education, the Chautauqua-like Foresta Summer Assembly featured programs presented by prominent intellectuals. Instead of the hundreds expected to attend, often only 20 or 30 were present. Davis was broke by fall of 1918 and out of the picture by 1919. Other developers tried unsuccessfully to turn Foresta into a profitable venture. On paper at least, Foresta was a good idea, but timing was wrong. Transportation difficulties, under-capitalization, World War 1, and the Great Depression all contributed to the failure of this grand but doomed scheme.

Troubles, human-caused and natural, have plagued Foresta's history from the beginning. After the collapse of various real estate projects, Foresta was nearly forgotten for a number of years. During the Depression and World War II, many property owners lost their lots because they were unable to make payments or pay taxes. Until 1950 only a few cabins had been built, but when electricity arrived in 1951, 74 cabins were constructed during the next ten years. The National Park Service had been lusting after Foresta's private land since 1929. Finally, in 1962, the U.S. government began condemning unimproved lots and launched an aggressive program to acquire the rest.

The area has witnessed many fires throughout its existence, but the monstrous inferno that roared through Yosemite in 1990 was the worst in 100 years. By some miracle, 17 of the 80 cabins were left standing. More than half of Big Meadow burned, but by another miracle the historic Meyer barns and ranchhouse were untouched.

Looking down on Big Meadow and Foresta from Big Oak Flat Road, the picture is grim. Except for a startling patch of green here and there, blackened tree skeletons spear the sky for miles around; the earth seems a ruined and sterile moonscape. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Like the mythical Phoenix rising out of the ashes, Foresta has reborn. Just three weeks after the firestorm, green shoots of plants and tree seedlings began appearing in the nutrient-rich ash. The following spring, the wildflower display was spectacular, made all the more so in contrast with the darkness of the scorched earth. Rebirth on the human level, too, is evident as some of the property owners rebuild their dwellings.

Not long after the conflagration, a resident was seen wearing a T-shirt with a touching, life-affirming message. White pine trees and lettering on a bright green background proclaimed "Foresta Forever." As one park ranger advises, "Don't look up at the blackened trees. Look down at the life that's coming back." The forest will not completely regenerate in

our lifetime, but it will grow back with a vigorous and astounding diversity of plant life created by the same forces that destroyed it. It's true Foresta is forever.

Besides Little Nellie Falls, there are other unpublicized and off-the-beaten path destinations. A peaceful walk around trailless Big Meadow is an enjoyable experience. Please respect the antiquity of the venerable barns and any Native American objects you may find. A more ambitious trek is to follow old Foresta Road (no longer open to vehicles) for seven miles downhill to El Portal. A car shuttle is necessary unless you plan to walk back to Foresta. Tranquil Foresta and Little Nellie Falls, many species of wildflowers, and solitude are among the rewards of this delightful journey. You will not likely encounter another person while hiking in this unique and quiet niche in the Sierra Nevada.

Getting There

From Mariposa: Follow Highway 140 to Yosemite National Park. Four and turn north (left) 4.2 miles beyond the entrance pay station at the sign indicating Highway 120. Proceed 3.2 miles and turn west (left) onto the first road (unsigned) after the long, lighted tunnel. From the turn-off, drive 1.7 miles on paved Coulterville Road and park across from Big Meadow near a wooden bulletin board.

To reach Little Nellie Falls, follow Coulterville Road 3.0 miles northwest. Approximately 2.0 miles from Big Meadow, where the road forks, bear left to the falls. The road straight ahead is closed to auto traffic by a locked gate; this was the road to Crane Flat built by Davis in 1914. About one-third mile before the falls is a gate marking the boundary between Yosemite and Stanislaus National Forest. The area around Little Nellie Falls was mostly untouched by the 1990 fire. The road beyond the falls reaches the Merced Grove of Big Trees six miles distant.

Other hiking: Foresta to El Portal. Park at the wooden bulletin board and walk through Foresta. After Foresta Falls you will enter Stanislaus National Forest. Follow Foresta Road to El Portal in Merced River Canyon. A good place to leave the shuttle car is at the El Portal post office.

Accommodations: Camping Indian Flat Campground west of El Portal along Merced River, first come, first served. Hodgkin Meadow (Yosemite), reservations through Mistix, 800-365-2267. Food and Lodging at Cedar Lodge, El Portal, 209-379-2612. For a comprehensive and definitive study, Foresta and Big Meadow by renowned Yosemite historian Shirley Sargent is recommended reading.

Stanislaus National Forest, Groveland Office, Star Route, Box 570, Groveland, CA 95321, 209-962-7825

Little Nellie:

Distance: 6 miles round trip

Elevation: From 4200 feet to 4600 feet

Topo Map: El Portal, 15 Min

El Portal:

Distance: 7.0 miles one way

Elevation: 4200 feet to 2000 feet

Topo Map: El Portal, 15 Min

Through the Artist's Eye

Thomas Hill

By Sharon Giacomazzi

Just four years after Yosemite Valley was "discovered" by Major James Savage and his Mariposa Battalion while in punitive pursuit of local Indians, the first Valley artwork by a Caucasian was produced. Author James Mason Hutchings was attracted to Mariposa in June 1855 in search of "scenes of wonder and curiosity" for his monthly, illustrated magazine about California. He had heard rumors about a waterfall six times the height of Niagra Falls and incredible granite formations in a remote, little-known place called Yosemite Valley.

Accompanying Hutchings was the young artist Thomas Ayres, hired to sketch the fabulous sights of their journey. Because no one in Mariposa knew much about this mysterious valley, two Indian guides were enlisted to lead the way. Hutchings, Ayres and two other companions constituted the initial tourists in Yosemite Valley where they spent five days in "luxurious scenic banqueting," exploring and sketching.

When the party returned to Mariposa, Hutchings wrote the very first printed description of Yosemite for the infant Mariposa Gazette. Soon afterward, journalists throughout the state and across the nation reprinted his article. The following year in Hutchings' California Magazine the feature story was about Yosemite and included sketches by Ayres. And so began the publicity of Yosemite—from 42 tourists in 1855 to more than four million in 1996. During the past 142 years poets, painters and photographers have endeavored to portray its extraordinary scenery.

The untimely death of Thomas Ayres reveals an interesting historical side-bar. The young artist was lost at sea en route from San Pedro to San Francisco in April 1858. Sometime between 1856-1860, USN Commander James Alden purchased ten of Ayres' original Yosemite sketches in San Francisco. Many, many years later the heirs to these priceless drawings brought them "home" to the Yosemite Museum, which stands near the spot where some of them were created.

Although Ayres was the front-runner of many distinguished non-Native American artists of national and international fame, he was by no means the first artist in Yosemite. Thousands of years before his sketches made in 1855 Native Americans created pictographs (rock paintings) using primarily white, gray, orange and red paint. Because of their antiquity and inestimable cultural and historical significance, the location of the pictographs is not publicized.

Several renowned landscape artists in the late 1880s were so captivated by Yosemite's grandeur and uniqueness they lingered for months or even years. Among these prestigious mid-19th century artists who strove to capture the essence of this incomparable place was Thomas Hill. Hill's first visit was in 1863, but from 1884 until his death in 1908 Yosemite was his home. Born in England in 1829, 11-year-old Hill emigrated with his parents to Massachusetts. He began his career painting coaches. Later he decided to become an artist and studied at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts.

In 1861 and in poor health Hill moved to San Francisco. He established a studio and for the next few years made frequent sketching trips to Yosemite. Favorable recognition of his work prompted Hill in 1868 to study for six months in Paris with a well-known figure painter. His mentor was so impressed with Hill's painting of a French forest scene he urged him to concentrate on landscapes, rather than pursue an ambition as a portrait artist.

Hill returned to the United States and took up residence in Boston. It was there, from a previous sketch, that he painted "Yosemite Valley" which earned him great acclaim as a landscape artist. Also, his canvas of Yosemite was one of the earliest portrayals offered to the eastern art circles of the sublime valley in the Sierra Nevada.

Once again in frail health due to a chronic respiratory condition, Thomas Hill returned to San Francisco in 1871 and became associated with the San Francisco Art Association. A gargantuan painting (10' by 6'), titled "Grand Canyon of the Sierras," revealed a powerful view of Yosemite as seen from a spot near Inspiration Point. Judge Crocker of Sacramento purchased it for \$10,000, an enormous sum of money in those years. By now Hill had joined the ranks of prominent landscape painters such as Albert Bierstadt, William Keith, Chris Jorgensen, Lady Constance Gordon-Cummings and Thomas Moran.

From his base in San Francisco Hill continued to make frequent forays into Yosemite. Hill was a prolific worker, often returning to the studio with as many as a hundred sketches. He worked furiously to keep up with the rush of orders and commissions throughout the United States and Europe. At the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, Hill's "Yosemite Valley" and "Donner Lake" paintings garnered the top awards for landscape painting. Along with this honor, his reputation as one of the premier artists of the era was assured.

One of Hill's most famous works had nothing to do with Yosemite or other locations in the Sierra. Governor Leland Stanford commissioned him to paint a picture commemorating the meeting of the Union and Central Pacific Railroads on May 10, 1869. Titled "The Last Spike," it depicted the driving of the final golden spike and the silver hammer that struck it, along with the Governor and other distinguished dignitaries. However, much to Hill's great disappointment, the Governor refused to accept the finished canvas. It is believed that because Hill painted Stanford so conspicuously in the large group witnessing the ceremony, other influential colleagues were offended by the lesser attention paid to them. Curiously, the painting was purchased after Hill's death because of its historical significance. It now resides in the Crocker Gallery in Sacramento.

By 1883 Hill could be found in residence at his studio in Yosemite Valley. After gale force winds swept his workshop off its foundation in 1884, Hill moved to rooms 10 and 11 in the charming and stately Wawona Hotel, 25 miles south of the valley. During the winter months he hung his hat in the much warmer foothill climate of Raymond in eastern Madera County. The Washburns, owners/concessionaire of the extensive Wawona complex, considered his presence an important cultural asset and tourist attraction for their enterprise. Besides, one of Hill's nine children, Estella, was engaged to hotelkeeper John Washburn.

A three-room studio was built for him in 1886 only a few yards from the main hotel building. It was a cozy, frame cottage with a screen porch that Hill, for some reason, had painted pink. The interior, in addition to his landscapes, was filled with curiosities. Various animal pelts, wasp nests, huge (but dead) rattlesnakes, dried flowers, Indian baskets and war implements, deer antlers, mounted animals and other natural artifacts attracted nearly as much interest as his paintings.

Even when he was at work, guests were always welcome in his studio. Genial, hospitable, short and slight in stature, never without a cigar in one hand and a paintbrush in the other, Hill was capable of chatting, chewing his cigar and creating simultaneously. With the possible exception of his pink studio, he possessed none of the Bohemian traits usually associated with his calling. Hill was also a devoted father to his several sons and daughters. He earned several small fortunes during his lifetime with his paintings of Yosemite and other Sierra landscapes, but he was not a shrewd investor. As a consequence, he suffered the loss of almost as much money as he made.

Long-ailing, 79-year-old Thomas Hill died on June 30, 1908 in Raymond, California. Hill and other prestigious artists of the period were influential contributors to the recognition, popularity and, ultimately, the protection of Yosemite as a national park. His magnificent landscapes were viewed by untold numbers of admirers nationally and internationally. People who had never seen this great national treasure could visualize it through his work and realize the importance of its preservation.

Some of Hill's paintings can be seen at the Yosemite Museum, and several enormous landscapes are on display in the Oakland Museum and in Sacramento. His studio, no longer pink, was remodeled after this death. Since then it has been used as a soda fountain, recreation hall for employees and for storage. In 1967 the Park Service restored its historical character, furnished it appropriately and opened it to the public as a living history display in the summer months. For a unique way of connecting with the vision of both Thomas Ayres and Thomas Hill, an easy walk up the old Wawona Road to Artist Point is very rewarding. It also offers a secluded, hidden Yosemite away from summertime crowds. At Artist Point the modern visitor can experience what Ayres and Hill experienced more than 100 years ago, a picture of Yosemite Valley unmarred by roads, vehicles, structures, and people.

Getting There: From Yosemite Valley

Leave your car in the Bridalveil Falls parking area. Walk carefully for .3 mile on the left side of the road leading to Glacier Point and Wawona; bear left onto a boulder-blocked, dirt road. Climbing gently uphill through deep forest cover, this cool and shaded route is mostly viewless until it reaches Artist Point in 1-1/2 miles.

Even if you're not a good judge of distance, the breath-taking vista will be very obvious. Pause here for awhile where Artist Creek tumbles down the mountainside and take in the overwhelming scenery before retracing your steps. Should you feel like a longer jaunt, continue up the historic road (built in 1875), which in 1/2 mile makes a connection with the Pohono Trail to Glacier Point.

Distance: Easy 1 1/2 miles, one way to Artist's Point.

Rainbow Pool

A Small Dot On The Map With A Big History

By Sharon Giacomazzi

The central Sierra Nevada is blessed with soul-stirring scenery, a broad spectrum of year-round recreational opportunities, and an abundance of historical sites. Located in the bosom of this diverse territory, Tuolumne County alone would require a lifetime to fully explore. For backpackers and day hikers, the options are virtually unlimited on its hundreds of miles of trails and seldom-used forest service roads.

For those who enjoy combining a scenic hike with lively history, an exploration of Rainbow Pool on the South Fork of the Tuolumne River is a rewarding experience. Nearby is an easy, eye-pleasing hike into the heart of the Tuolumne River canyon. Maps of the area are peppered with tiny dots indicating small communities or historical sites. Rainbow Pool is one of these flyspecks, occupying but an infinitesimal portion of the county. Nonetheless, it was the setting for interesting and significant events in the chronicles of the Sierra Nevada.

Traveling east on State Highway 120, just past Buck Meadows, one of the finest vistas along this incredibly scenic stretch of road makes a sudden, dramatic appearance. At a turn-out known as Rim of the World, the profound canyons of the South and Middle Forks of the Tuolumne River magnetize one's attention. The shiny, silver ribbon that is the Tuolumne River threads its way through a nearly vertical chasm more than 2,000 feet below. Onward and upward from this awesome abyss, forested ridges and other far-off gorges lead to snowy crags puncturing the skyline above the high country. To the right (east), the twin 100-foot falls of the Middle Fork appear as bright specks in the distance. Shortly beyond this dizzying viewpoint, Highway 120, the modernized version of historic Big Oak Flat Road, plummets its way into the South Fork of the Tuolumne River canyon. A keen eye can spot the old road twisting back and forth over the newer route. A high bridge now completely bypasses Rainbow Pool where freight wagons, stagecoaches, pedestrians, and autos once crossed the river over a covered bridge.

By turning off the main highway before the new bridge, a short, paved access road leads to Rainbow Pool picnic area and an inviting swimming hole. Except for, a foundation or two, shards of crockery, bits of broken glass, and a few puzzling feet of rusty rails, nothing remains to tell the tale of its moment in history. In early January 1997, when an unprecedented volume of water rampaged through the South Fork canyon, the old bridge buckled and collapsed. Torrential rainfall also considerably remodeled the sandy beach and shoreline surrounding the pool.

Before the Big Oak Flat Road Company built a covered bridge in 1870, the South Fork was simply spanned by logs. The Company lost the race by only one month with the Coulterville Road Company in 1874 to be the first stage route into Yosemite Valley. Big Oak Flat Road was a toll road until it was purchased by Tuolumne County in 1915. Between 1895 and 1915, a salty, eccentric character named John Cox was the one and only toll keeper. Before 1895 tolls were collected at Crane Flat within Yosemite National Park.

The toll gate was situated near the bridge's south entrance, and here Cox was master of all he surveyed for 20 years. The covered bridge, reminiscent of those built in the East, was the handiwork of James Lumsden. Talented James and brother David built a number of bridges, flumes, and trails in the county, but they are most famous for carving a tunnel through The Dead Giant in Tuolumne Grove of Big Trees in 1878. Cox was in his sixties when he arrived at the South Fork. Before transplanting to the mountains, he worked as a reporter for a San Francisco newspaper. Exactly why he chose to leave city life is unknown, but local legend has it that a broken romance caused him to abandon civilization and turned him into a loner. During the Civil War Cox was a bugler in the Confederate Army, and the plaintive sounds of his horn could be heard piercing the clear mountain air as travelers left his hermitage on the river. Immediately below Lower Bridge, as it was called, a lovely, small waterfall tumbled into a deep pool. Cox was so charmed by this beautiful spot that he built his cabin on a large rock formation jutting out over the cascade. In spite of the vastness of the country surrounding his cabin, his arena was limited to a few hundred feet of the toll gate. He always had to be within hearing distance of the toll station. His year-round, solitary existence in such a narrow sphere would drive most people around the bend. But Cox, who was spellbound by this tiny bit of real estate on the South Fork, was a contented man. Actually, the teamsters supplied him with all he needed; food, firewood, tobacco, and medicine were delivered to him regularly. Besides, these freight men always found time to gossip and bring news of the outside world.

Margaret Schlichtman, in her wonderfully informative book, *The Big Oak Flat Road*, relates that in spite of his gruff manner, Cox was really softhearted. Weighted down with a heavy pack, a man showed up at the toll gate one day. Tired and penniless, he asked if John might turn his head while he crossed the bridge. He had urgent business up the line, and the river was so dangerously high that he couldn't risk fording it. Cox took his job very seriously and could not allow such an impropriety. But he offered an alternative: "I'll tell you what; seeing that the rate is 25 cents for a man walking, suppose you run instead." John watched with his integrity intact as the weary pedestrian sprinted across the bridge.

After the turn of the century, the colorful and exciting stagecoach era gave way to the automobile age. The Holmes brothers of San Jose made history in 1900 when their Stanley Steamer arrived in Yosemite Valley, via the Wawona Road. In 1901 two Locomobiles wheezed into Yosemite on the Big Oak Flat Road, causing great anxiety to toll-keeper Cox. An urgent letter to company headquarters asked "What toll should I get from the new horseless vehicles that occasionally struggle by?" His answer was "50 cents for each passenger each way" and a definition for an automobile as "a vehicle not used with horses."

The advent of these "blunt-nosed beetles," as described by John Muir, stirred up such great controversy and commotion in the park that they were disallowed entrance. Not until 1913 were autos cautiously permitted entrance; even then, some 65 stringent regulations and a five dollar entry fee were imposed on early motorists. For better or worse, times had changed, and octogenarian John Cox was out of work when his position was terminated after the Big Oak Flat Road became a free route in 1915.

Rainbow Pool, once home to a reclusive toll collector, became the busy location of a thriving inn for tourists. First known as Fall Inn, it was later renamed Cliff House. A brother and sister partnership leased the property from Tuolumne County in 1924 and added rooms to Cox's cabin on the rock ledge overhanging the South Fork. The concrete foundations on the upstream side of the bridge are the remnants of a few cabins cantilevered over the river. With the refurbished old dwelling as the hub, Nellie Bartlett and William Wilson soon developed a bustling resort complex that survived for 34 years.

Besides catering to national and foreign travelers, some of the engineers on the Hetch Hetchy project boarded there during the construction of O'Shaughnessy Dam between 1919 and 1923. The pool below the waterfall that had so captivated Cox, and into which he plunged for his daily bath, became a popular swimming hole for the inn's guests. After a destructive fire in 1939, the owners immediately rebuilt the resort. But in 1958 another disastrous fire razed Cliff House and one more landmark on the Big Oak Flat Road was lost.

Two other important ventures further enrich the significance of the Rainbow Pool area. The Hetch Hetchy Railroad steamed through here during the construction of San Francisco's colossal water project in Hetch Hetchy Valley just inside Yosemite's boundary to the northeast. Built between 1916 and 1917 mainly to haul cement to the dam site, it also carried supplies and equipment to this enormous undertaking. The line was abandoned in the late 1930s after the dam was raised an additional 85 feet to its present height of 430 feet above bedrock, and the tracks were removed for scrap in 1949. Below the pool a sharp eye can see a few feet of tracks protruding from the earthen bank.

Another massive water project, the Golden Rock Ditch, ran along the mountainside above Rainbow Pool. Originating at Hardin Flat a few miles up the road, the 100-mile-long ditch began carrying water in 1860 to supply the mines as well as orchards and ranches between Big Oak Flat and Coulterville. Water from the South and Middle Forks of the Tuolumne was dammed at Hardin Flat before flowing through a complicated network of canals, flumes, and reservoirs. At Buck Meadows the remains of an inverted siphon pipe can be seen on the north side of Highway 120. The pipe replaced a 12-story-high flume which thundered to the ground in 1868 during a windstorm. A historical plaque commemorates the site of the Golden Rock Water Company's Big Gap Flume.

Highly recommended, especially during spring run-off, is a beautiful one-mile walk to the confluence of the South and Middle Forks. Witnessing the power of the Tuolumne River roaring and leaping through a wild canyon is a thrilling experience. Cross the bridge at Rainbow Pool and walk on the paved road (closed to autos) that leads under the modern bridge; this was the old Big Oak Flat Road. On the uphill side of the highway you will soon bear left (west) on a dirt road heading down through a narrow canyon. The long-abandoned road was used by "tractor trains," pulling sled trailers on steel runners filled with men, materials, and supplies from the railroad to South Fork Tunnel Camp, one of the Hetch Hetchy project's major construction sites.

The tunnel camp buildings precariously clung to the steep mountainside, and the cookhouse actually spanned the waterfall where the two rivers merge. At the end of the road, a U-shaped tunnel under the streambed replaced an elevated 92-foot steel pipe, 225 feet long, that joined the tunnels on opposite sides of the canyon walls. A hiker today will have to search diligently to find the slightest trace of all these engineering works. Retrace your steps back to Rainbow Pool, leisurely enjoying the ruggedness, wildflowers, and seclusion in this river-carved canyon.

Although largely forgotten, a wealth of noteworthy history surrounds the dot on the map known as Rainbow Pool. It is well worth your time to explore this special niche in the Sierra. Even if you are not a history buff, it is a great spot for a picnic, and the deep pool below the fall is just as alluring as it was to the crusty toll collector 100 years ago.

Getting There

From Stockton/Modesto: Take Highway 120 to 14 miles east of Groveland, turn right (south) off Highway 120 immediately before the bridge spanning the South Fork Tuolumne River to reach Rainbow Pool. Picnic tables and restrooms are available.

By following directions in the article to Rainbow Pool and the nearby hike, maps are not necessary; however, they are helpful orientation tools for the plentiful recreational opportunities within Stanislaus National Forest (SNF). At the Groveland Ranger District Office a few miles east of Groveland, ask for USGS Jawbone Ridge (7.5 min.) quad which pinpoints the region surrounding Rainbow Pool and/or a forest service map. Be aware of two errors on the Jawbone Ridge topographical map: Rainbow Pool is at the gauging station symbol, NOT where it is marked on the map, and there is NO campground at the pool. The route into the canyons of the South and Middle Forks is correct and indicated by a dashed line. Note that the SNF map does not show this infrequently-used path.

Lodging is available in Groveland (full service small town) at Charlotte Hotel (209-962-6455) or in Buck Meadows at Buck Meadows Lodge (209-253-YOSE). For camping: Between Groveland and Rainbow Pool are two small Forest Service campgrounds for tents and small RVs, The Pines and Lost Claim. A mile past the pool is Sweetwater. Vault toilets, water, and tables are provided.

Groveland Ranger District Office, 24525 Highway 120, Groveland, CA 95321, 209-962-7825

Distance: One mile, one way, to the confluence of the Middle and South Fork

Difficulty: Easy

Elevation: 2,800' to 2,400' elevation (400' loss/gain)

V-9

Key to a Hidden Yosemite

By Sharon Giacomazzi

Few places on this planet are as beautiful as Yosemite Valley in springtime. Yosemite National Park, about the size of Rhode Island, is a 1,200-square-mile preserve of Sierra splendor near the eastern border of central California. Yosemite Valley is compact and small, seven-miles-long by one-mile at its widest, and occupies only a microscopic portion of the entire park. But it is here within these seven square miles that Mother Nature has concentrated an incredible array and variety of scenic wonders, absolutely unique and unmatched anywhere else in the world. John Muir, bewitched by Yosemite's magic for nearly 50 years, called it the "incomparable valley" as if into this one mountain mansion Nature had gathered her choicest treasures."

Each season is spectacular, but between April and June Yosemite Valley is particularly spellbinding. Awakening from the hush of winter, dormant waterfalls explode into existence. Drab meadows are transformed into lush green lawns, and all growing things burst with new life. Pumped up with snow melt, the Merced River roars and races through the valley. Towering granite walls and bold, polished domes rivet the eye. Nearer to earth and shining with fresh growth, the spicy scent of cedars and pines commingle with the heady fragrance of wild azaleas. Perhaps nothing symbolizes spring in Yosemite more eloquently than the blooming of the mountain dogwood in May. The large, creamy white blossoms are especially striking because this graceful little tree grows in the shade beneath huge conifers. Since the day it was "discovered" people have tried to portray Yosemite's grandeur, but words and paintings are puny substitutes for witnessing this pageant with your own eyes.

If you shun the valley during tourist season because of the crowds who, like pilgrims, come to view this incomparable display, you are making a big mistake. Unfortunately, the valley's size does not equal its beauty. Be that as it may, as one writer put it, it would be like going to the Louvre in Paris and skipping the Mona Lisa. It is possible to visit the valley during peak months and leave the masses far behind.

Basically, there are two ways to get acquainted: you can merely see it, or you can experience it. You can see it rather quickly from your car, a shuttle bus or a narrated tram tour. But to experience it you must get out of the car and walk. By doing so, 95% of the crowds swiftly disappear. Arriving during the week, rather than on a weekend, further reduces the numbers of visitors. Keep in mind that the valley floor is virtually flat, and its miles of interconnecting trails are easy for most everyone.

drive a short distance to its end. Usually a large number of logs are piled up in this small parking area. The trail, which is the former Big Oak Flat Road, begins here.

The route heads gently uphill through an interesting mix of vegetation: pines, cedars, black and gold-cup oaks, bay trees, the rare California torreyia (yew), colorful clumps of thistle, lupine and Indian paint brush. Note that the blacktopped surface is still intact in many places. Less than a mile brings you to the first major rock-slide. The roadbed was wiped out, but an obvious trail skirts the edge of a gully and then over some boulders. On the other side of the gully the narrow, macadam road resumes. Large chunks of granite lining the canyon side served as guard-rails. Perch on a boulder and take some time to let this vista fill your senses. It's amazing how such a minimal effort can offer the superb panorama you are privy to.

Directly across the valley (south), a dramatic view of Bridalveil Fall thundering 620 feet down a sheer cliff before wending its way to the Merced River will thoroughly capture your attention. The meadow near the base of the fall is where John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt camped one night in 1903 while Muir urged the President to work for the preservation of America's wilderness.

The view of Yosemite Valley is framed by El Capitan on the left and Cathedral Rocks on the right. This vista allows an "up close and personal" acquaintance with El Capitan, one of the largest exposed granite blocks in the world, rising more than 3,000 feet above the valley floor. At the far end of the valley to the east, the unmistakable shape of Half Dome dominates the horizon. A free map, available at the entrance station, will help in the identification of other prominent features.

Retrace your steps or, if you're reluctant to leave and still feeling energetic, continue on the Big Oak Flat Road. About another mile further and some scrambling over boulders leads to the metal railings of Rainbow View. It was here that early travelers on the downhill route were treated to their first glimpse of Yosemite Valley. Rainbow View takes its name from the rainbow dancing in Bridalveil Fall during summer mid-afternoons. Pioneer settlers named the fall for its "filmy, veil-like aspect,"² which it has in summer after its flow has diminished. Native Americans called it Pohono, the "fall of the puffing winds," because at low volume its water is pushed around by gusts of wind.

In 1928 the Secretary of the Interior summed up Yosemite's popularity in his annual report: "The heavy influx of visitors during the past two years has caused serious congestion and brought about conditions similar to those encountered in a small city." What would he have had to say about 1997 when visitation reached more than four million?

Even though Yosemite Valley's combination of spectacular natural features draws enormous crowds during the spring and summer months, take heart in knowing that it is easily remedied by, literally, walking away from the heavily impacted areas. In spite of busy weekends and holidays, the many quiet and secluded havens of hidden Yosemite are readily available to visitors.

Unknown to the vast majority of tourists there is a "hidden Yosemite" awaiting the visitor who is willing to abandon his automobile, and V-9 is one of the many options to escape the jam-packed environs surrounding the visitor center complex. V-9 is one of the valley's 27 roadside markers but is meaningless unless you have a copy of the Yosemite Road Guide in hand. The numbers are keyed to paragraphs in the book which identify and explain important features. Road markers are also in place throughout the entire park.

V-9 denotes an interesting geological formation near El Capitan, one of the valley's most famous and photographed landmarks. What the book doesn't tell you is that it marks the spot where the historic Big Oak Flat Road entered the park in July 1874, or that it leads to an unbelievably stunning vista of Yosemite Valley. From a viewpoint not far up this ancient roadbed, you can envision how Yosemite looked on the day of its "discovery"—no roads, no structures, no vehicles, and no people are visible. As you absorb the astonishing scenery and solitude it's easy to pretend that you are the only person in the park. As a bonus, it is rare to encounter hikers on this little known route.

The steep and unstable portion of the Big Oak Flat Road between Crane Flat and Yosemite Valley was replaced by today's tunneled road in 1940. The old route, switch-backing for three miles across an often shifting rocky slope, was used for downhill traffic only until 1942. At that time, recurrent rock-slides obliterated the infamous "Zigzags" section, converting it instantly from a road to a seldom-used trail.

In Yosemite Valley, driving around or paying for an informative tram tour is a good starting point, but if you want more than an overview, more of an intimate and unforgettable experience, here's how to get off the beaten path. Make a circuit of the valley and look for marker V-9 near El Capitan. Turn onto a dirt maintenance road, bearing right, and