

UC Riverside

UC Riverside Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Playing in the Park: Winter Sports and Sports Spectacles in Yosemite, 1900-1950

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7bw0b031>

Author

Wrenn, Rebecca Louise

Publication Date

2017

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Playing in the Park:
Winter Sports and Sports Spectacles in Yosemite, 1900–1950

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Rebecca Louise Wrenn

June 2017

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Catherine Gudis, Chairperson

Dr. Molly McGarry

Dr. Brian Lloyd

Copyright by
Rebecca Louise Wrenn
2017

The Dissertation of Rebecca Louise Wrenn is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

Acknowledgments

I am exceedingly grateful for the support I've received from so many people while working on this project. My committee members—Dr. Catherine Gudis, Dr. Molly McGarry, and Dr. Brian Lloyd—have been unfailingly supportive, gracious, and patient, and I hope they realize how much I value the encouragement and advice they have cheerfully offered ever since I first took classes with each of them. As Chair, Dr. Gudis had the extra hurdle of dealing with a long-distance student for three years, and her emails and phone calls were incredibly helpful. Dr. Juliette Levy took me under her wing as a student and a T.A., and I greatly appreciate the many words of wisdom and the bottle of whiskey. Iselda Salgado heroically steered me through the last few years of forms and policies, and I am very thankful for her good humor and aid. Jamie Green and Emily McEwen were absolutely the best cohort buddies imaginable and made grad school—and life—far better, as did Vanessa Stout, an almost-cohort buddy, who wound up just down the road from me in Virginia.

I was fortunate to receive grants from the UC California Studies Consortium and the UC Riverside history department which allowed me to spend several very memorable weeks in Yosemite in 2013, scrambling through archives just before they were closed to the public due to the federal government sequester. (They have since reopened.) I am very grateful for the funds and the time. The archivists, librarians, and rangers who offered assistance, ideas, and juicy park gossip made my work easier and much more enjoyable. Gwen Barrow and Brenna Issoway at the Park Service archives in El Portal, just outside the park, welcomed me into their remarkable Cold-War-bunker-style building and offered helpful suggestions. Linda Eade, who spent decades living and working in Yosemite as head of the Yosemite Research Library, was always generous with her time and stories—even in the last few days before her

retirement—which made each trip to the cozy attic room in the park’s museum building a true treat. Deputy Chief of Interpretation and Education Paul Ollig, Rangers Sheldon Johnson and Erik Westerlund, and historian and musician Tom Bopp graciously let me pick their brains about the park and the Park Service. Staff at the Huntington Library, the National Archives in College Park, the Library of Congress, the Department of the Interior, Harpers Ferry Center, Stanford University, and the Palo Alto Historical Society have also offered invaluable assistance and suggestions, if not quite as spectacular scenery. I will miss the research trips. More recently, Wade Myers and Nancy Russell (Harpers Ferry Center for Media Services), Paul Rogers (Yosemite), Fabrizio D’Aloisio (St. Moritz Tourism), Brooke Childrey (Mount Rainier), and Virginia Sanchez (Yosemite Research Library) have generously helped me find photographs. After moving to Virginia unexpectedly three years ago, I needed to find a new place to write, and the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond proved the perfect spot to reflect on the natural world. More importantly, Ginter staff, especially Laura, Mabel, Annie, and Shane, welcomed me and my family with open arms, good cheer, and a library with a fireplace. And in Williamsburg, my former bosses Sally Mason and Ron Hoffman took me back in as an editor, and their sound advice, wry humor, and nearly-unbelievable stories are very much appreciated.

My family inspired me to write about Yosemite. My dad, Jim, took my mom, Joan, on her first trip to the park soon after they got engaged in 1968, and clearly it must have gone very well. They took my brother Gregg and sister Colleen and I to the park at least yearly and taught us how to both appreciate it and play (gently) in it. Gregg, Colleen, and I ran through Camp Curry, played in the river, “climbed” rockfalls, and tried to learn how to take pictures half as well as our dad. My mom devoted a large chunk of her summer in

2013, just months after my dad died, to corralling my one-year-old in the park while I did research. She more than earned the “large beer” she would occasionally upgrade to after a long day of chasing Helena through a national park. More recently, she and Colleen patiently dealt with a whole lot of editing, because they “have the best words” (and eagle eyes), for which I am very grateful. Jason Sampson, who wisely agreed to marry me on Glacier Point, has been roped into editing, advice-giving, and road-tripping. He lucked out by getting to come along on research trips; I lucked out by getting a partner in crime whose wit and brains match his writing abilities. Our kids, Helena and Mallory, are not quite ready for editing pens, but their pictures of Half Dome and smiley faces have been surprisingly helpful. Helena’s first snow, first time ice skating, and first car accident—all before age two—were in Yosemite, and while Mallory has already experienced the first two elsewhere, I hope someday she’ll get to see what all this typing was about. Curiosity and enthusiasm—which they both inherited in droves from their grandpa—are two traits the world needs much more of if places like Yosemite are to survive and thrive.

I can’t thank them all enough.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Playing in the Park:
Winter Sports and Sports Spectacles in Yosemite, 1900–1950

by

Rebecca Louise Wrenn

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in History
University of California, Riverside, June 2017
Dr. Catherine Gudis, Chairperson

Since its founding, the National Park Service has struggled with a dual mandate to both protect sites within its charge and provide for the enjoyment of these spaces by current and future generations. This conflict was especially consequential in Yosemite, the world's first park set aside for preservation and public use. The park was best known for its natural wonders—thunderous waterfalls, massive granite domes, towering Sequoias—and yet over the course of the early twentieth century, tourists increasingly played in the park, instead of merely gazing at it. This marks a remarkable conceptual shift from “sacred space” to public playground. Visitors still admired the scenery, but became more physically engaged with the natural surroundings, thereby changing the very meaning of a national park vacation. Winter sports had a particularly significant impact on Yosemite's early history. They boosted park visitation during the slow season, introduced tourists to relatively unknown forms of recreation (especially skiing), and helped redefine both the park and the state of California as year-round vacation destinations. The program was so successful that Yosemite even bid on the 1932 Winter Olympic Games, a stunning move considering the infrastructure, crowds,

and congestion that generally accompanied even early Olympics. The bid failed, but the park's snow and ice sports grew exceedingly popular by the 1930s and 1940s. Winter carnivals and other sports spectacles transformed Yosemite into a stage for human achievement, with people—often collegiate or professional athletes—as the star attractions. However, concerns over spectatorship, park atmosphere, artificiality, and more, eventually doomed many of Yosemite's most popular sports facilities and events. By exploring this often-overlooked slice of park history, this study helps reframe early debates over preservation and public use. The two were not mutually exclusive in the minds of early visitors, who believed using the land for play was an appropriate function of public landscapes.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Playing in “A Fairyland of White”	62
Chapter Two: The St. Moritz of the Sierra Nevada? Yosemite Bids on the 1932 Winter Olympics	108
Chapter Three: Making “a hurly-burly of the park”? Debating Public Use	164
Chapter Four: Ski Lifts and Snow Queens: Sports Centers and Spectacles	207
Epilogue	262
References	282

List of Images

Image I-1: Costume Skating Carnival, 1931	4
Image I-2: Stephen Mather and his staff	12
Image I-3: Officials visit the site of the Ahwahnee	26
Image I-4: Patriotic vaudeville on ice	31
Image I-5: A stagecoach leaving the Valley, 1903	33
Image I-6: Tourists at Camp Curry tent cabin, 1920s	39
Image I-7: Camping in Yosemite Valley	41
Image I-8: St. Moritz	50
Image 1-1: Group on horseback near Nevada Falls	69
Image 1-2: Half Dome cables	80
Image 1-3: Snowshoeing, 1917	87
Image 2-1: Yosemite Valley in Winter	109
Image 2-2: Waiters on ice in St. Moritz, Switzerland	115
Image 2-3: Ski jump at the 1928 St. Moritz Olympics	119
Image 2-4: Lake Placid bobsled poster	125
Image 2-5: Four-man bobsleigh at the 1932 Olympics	145
Image 2-6: Opening ceremonies of the 1932 Olympics	151
Image 2-7: Women's 500 meter Olympic speed skating	155
Image 3-1: Skiers outside the Paradise Inn, Mount Rainier	174
Image 3-2: NPS officials at a campfire in Yellowstone	178
Image 3-3: Badger Pass ski jump, 1939	182
Image 3-4: Ski race in Stoneman Meadow, 1932	199
Image 4-1: Badger Pass ski slopes	214
Image 4-2: Sailors at Tunnel View	216
Image 4-3: Yosemite ski patrol	219
Image 4-4: The Queen Mary at Badger Pass	224
Image 4-5: Camp Curry ice rink	226
Image 4-6: Women's speed skating race	236
Image 4-7: Shirley Ann Ewins figure skating	237
Image 4-8: College hockey teams at the Curry rink	238
Image 4-9: Enid Michael dancing with a bear	245
Image 4-10: Joyce Williams, Queen of the carnival	251
Image E-1: Jim Wrenn sledding at Camp Curry	264

Introduction

Nature invited visitors to Yosemite; sports enticed them to stay. This was the hope of early-twentieth-century concessionaires and park officials who eagerly invested in facilities and equipment and organized recreational activities designed to occupy tourists once the novelty of sightseeing wore off. Visitors could be *doing*, and not merely seeing. Choices ranged from ice skating to mountain climbing, with options for nearly every age and skill level. Since not all tourists were willing (or competent) athletes, concessionaires also enlisted professional, amateur, and collegiate sports-men and -women to captivate the crowds. Visitors who chose not to play could watch others do so from the comfort of packed grandstands. These competitions and athletic carnivals deftly combined sport with spectacle, framing the landscape as a stage for human achievement.

In the 1920s the park's primary concessionaire, the Yosemite Park and Curry Company (YPCC), and other business interests began advertising the park as "California's All-Year Playground."¹ The new label clearly branded the park as a recreational site, and not merely as a scenic wonderland—a notable change from nineteenth-century conceptions of parks as "sacred spaces."² The "all-year" designation was also significant. National Park Service officials and the YPCC hoped to boost winter visitation and believed that winter sports and spectacles would attract more tourists and inspire them to remain for longer

¹ See, for example, the seal on the *Annual Report of the Yosemite Park and Curry Co.*, 1938, in Curry Family—Sargent File 1938–1980, Box 4, YPCC Series 4, Subseries 3, NPS Archives at El Portal. The Yosemite Park and Curry Company, often referred to simply as "the Company" or the "YPCC," was the park's primary concessionaire from 1925 through 1993.

² For a thorough exploration of perceptions of American parks and other natural landscapes as "sacred" spaces, see John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

periods. Yosemite became one of the first national parks to offer organized winter sports and its programs helped shape Park Service policies on public recreational use. The park even submitted a bid in 1929 to host the world's largest snow and ice event, the Winter Olympics Games. Moreover, as skiing and skating grew increasingly popular throughout the country, California boosters began to promote the state as a winter recreation destination, thanks in part to Yosemite's program. Some sports (such as skiing and sledding) utilized the landscape; for others (including hockey and ice skating) the scenery was mere backdrop. Winter and summer, informal and organized, amateur and professional, participant and spectator—early-twentieth-century visitors could choose from a wide variety of options that made Yosemite one of the largest sports resorts in the West and in the National Park System. These activities and spectator events—particularly those offered in the winter—helped propel Yosemite, in public imagination, from a “sacred” scenic wonderland into a year-round public space for play.

Yet sports also cut to the heart of a conflict over the purpose of national parks: was it more important to cater to public usage or to preserve pristine landscapes? As with virtually every other parks controversy, the answer depended largely on who was asking, and when. The National Park Service (founded in 1916) initially encouraged athletic events and activities, in part because the resulting boost in visitation might convince Congress to increase park appropriations. The YPCC, eager to attract more visitors (particularly in the winter) built several recreational facilities in the 1920s and 1930s. Badger Pass Ski Area, completed in 1935, was the most notable of these developments. As one of the earliest ski centers in California, it had an enormous impact on the state's winter tourism industry and, more broadly, helped influence discussions about the suitability of winter sports in national

parks.³ By the late-1930s some critics argued that sports activities and facilities could cheapen the very spirit of national parks by prioritizing amusement and entertainment over reflection and inspiration. The NPS also began to acknowledge that recreation programs might conflict with the agency's mission. Sports and spectator events, therefore, helped shape conversations about public use and preservation in the National Park System long before the modern environmental movement was popularized in the 1960s.⁴

The first half of the twentieth century was particularly significant in the development of tourism and winter sports in Yosemite, the West, and the National Park System. In Yosemite, a few informal recreational activities like sledding and skating were available in the 1910s, but the winter sports program grew most rapidly in the 1920s through the 1940s. Focusing on this timeframe allows for a close examination of changing conceptions of public use in national parks as the fledgling NPS grappled with the constraints of its dual mandate to both protect the park and open it for public "enjoyment." It was a remarkable period in the history of the park system, and was especially eventful in Yosemite, as the park transferred from state to federal control. More broadly, as historian Marguerite Shaffer notes, the period also marked "the emergence of a modern, corporate, urban-industrial

³ Badger Pass remains open and is one of only two ski facilities in the National Park System that still have chair lifts. The ski center is discussed in chapter 4.

⁴ The modern American environmental movement took off in earnest in the 1960s, in part because average Americans became involved. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), for instance, convinced many readers that purportedly helpful chemicals were poisoning the environment. Her work helped transform ecology "from a science understood by an elite into a central concern of humankind," as former Interior Secretary Stewart Udall notes (Udall, "How the Wilderness Was Won," *American Heritage* 51, no. 1 [February/March 2000], <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/how-wilderness-was-won>). This movement is better known than earlier, and generally localized, efforts to preserve lands and resources, like the campaigns to create various national parks.

nation-state and the concomitant development of a society centered around consumption and leisure.⁵⁵ Both of these societal shifts were evident in national park tourism.



Image I-1: The first Costume Skating Carnival of the 1931–1932 winter season, Camp Curry ice rink, December 30, 1931. Yosemite National Park Archives, Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection, Winter Club Scrapbook, page 43.

⁵ Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880–1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001), 264.

Yosemite was one of the first national parks to remain open and accessible through the winter.⁶ Then, as now, the vast majority of tourists stayed in Yosemite Valley, a large gorge which houses most of the park's most iconic landscape features. The Valley's climate was ideal for winter recreation—just enough snow to sustain snow sports, but not enough to prohibit travel.⁷ Participatory activities like skiing, tobogganing, and skating were immensely popular, as were spectator events, including collegiate hockey games, figure skating demonstrations, ski championships, and even elaborate theatrical ice carnivals. Snow and ice sports helped transform the park into a year-round destination, a particularly remarkable shift considering the difficulty of travel through the mountains during the winter. Other factors, including advances in transportation, the completion of a year-round road into the park (1926), and the opening of the Ahwahnee Hotel (1927), also helped increase winter visitation. Yet winter sports, significantly, gave tourists something new to do while in the park, luring in additional visitors and prompting some to extend their vacations. Scenery was no longer the sole winter attraction, and nineteenth-century conceptions of national parks as shrines to American landscape exceptionalism eased a bit as tourists discovered the joys of playing in the park.

⁶ Isabelle Florence Story, "National Parks in Winter," *National Republic* 15 (1927): 22. Some of the other early all-year parks—including the Grand Canyon and Hawaii National Park—had relatively mild climates, and therefore could not offer winter sports. By 1927, over half of the existing national parks remained open all year. Even today, however, many of those in colder climates, including Yellowstone, close many visitor facilities during the winter.

⁷ Story, "National Parks in Winter," 22. The Valley occasionally required plowing, but travel was generally far easier than in northern parks. As discussed in chapter 3, once Yosemite's backcountry was opened up for winter sports, snow plowing became a far more complicated enterprise.

Volumes have been written about Yosemite's power to inspire artistically, intellectually, and religiously. And the landscape itself, quite apart from visitors' reactions to it, has inspired countless works on geology, climate, and ecology. Scholarly works on the park's history are less common and, as historian Alfred Runte writes, "the secondary literature about Yosemite has not lived up to the park's reputation."⁸ Historian and activist Rebecca Solnit's assessment is more poetically dismissive: "great forests have been laid waste to supply paper for all the books about Yosemite, yet they echo each other curiously. There is an enormous gap between the scenic rhapsodies of the many official histories and the hard dry facts of the few anthropological treatises."⁹

Since Runte's *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* and Solnit's *Savage Dreams* were first published in 1990 and 1994, respectively, the field has expanded somewhat. This renewed interest was largely in anticipation of the Yosemite grant's 150th anniversary in 2014, Yosemite National Park's 125th birthday in 2015, and the National Park Service's centennial in 2016. Most academic works, however, continue to focus largely on specific environmental issues—especially the landmark battle over damming the Hetch Hetchy Valley—and the park's establishment and very early years.¹⁰ These are critical topics, of

⁸ Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 257.

⁹ Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Hidden Wars of the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 391.

¹⁰ Runte's *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* is one of the more comprehensive books on the park's early history. The classic introduction to Yosemite's origins is Hans Huth, "Yosemite: The Story of an Idea," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 33, no. 3 (March 1948): 47–78. This article helped plant the seeds for Huth's book, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), an important contribution to the scholarship on Park Service history. Carl P. Russell's *One Hundred Years in Yosemite*, Omnibus edition (Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Association, 1992) is an indispensable reference. Dr. Russell served as both chief naturalist and superintendent of Yosemite. His book was first published in 1932, but substantial updates and very thorough appendices are a welcome addition to this edition. Other useful contributions to general park history include: Margaret Sanborn, *Yosemite: Its Discovery, Its Wonders, and Its*

course, and such works are important contributions to the broader corpus of environmental and national park histories. Yet the tourist experience is another crucial element of the national park story, and outdoor recreation has been exceedingly popular among visitors for decades. Surprisingly, scholars have largely ignored sports.¹¹ This is particularly notable considering that public use of the parks has been such a contentious issue for over a century.

This work attempts to address that neglect by tracing the development of winter sports and sporting spectacles in Yosemite and their impact on the National Park System. Chapter one details the emergence of a new understanding of parks as playgrounds and examines the role of recreation in early park tourism. Inspired by the burgeoning popularity of snow sports, Yosemite launched a bid for the 1932 Winter Olympics, the subject of chapter two. Although it failed, the effort established an important precedent by officially endorsing large-scale competition and pageantry on protected landscapes and helped propel travel boosters' efforts to rebrand California as a winter sports paradise. The bid also set the

People (New York: Random House, 1981); Jen A. Huntley, *The Making of Yosemite: James Mason Hutchings and the Origin of America's Most Popular National Park* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011); Harvey Meyerson, *Nature's Army: When Soldiers Fought for Yosemite* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); and Linda Wedel Greene, *Historic Resource Study: Yosemite: The Park and Its Resources: A History of the Discovery, Management, and Physical Development of Yosemite National Park*, California. 3 Vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987). Geographer Stanford Demar's *The Tourist in Yosemite, 1855–1985* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991) is one of the few scholarly books to discuss tourism in detail. Local historians have also published several valuable books, based largely on oral histories, personal recollections, and archival research. Unfortunately, these works are sometimes dismissed by academic historians as not sufficiently scholarly. Shirley Sargent, the park's best-known author, lived much of her life in the park and her close relationships with a number of notable Yosemite officials, employees, and residents provided valuable inside insight into the park's development.

¹¹ The history of Yosemite mountain climbing has received considerable attention, mostly in the form of memoirs and personal narratives rather than scholarly accounts. As discussed briefly in chapter 1, Yosemite played a critical role in the development of the sport. It has been the subject of several works, most of which are aimed at a more general audience, including: Steve Roper, *Ordeal by Piton: Writings from the Golden Age of Yosemite Climbing* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University, 2003); Dean Dielman and John Long, eds., *Yosemite in the Fifties: The Iron Age* (Patagonia Books, 2015); and Joseph E. Taylor III's *Pilgrims of the Vertical: Yosemite Rock Climbers and Nature at Risk* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).

stage for the rapid expansion of Yosemite’s winter sports program and new National Park Service debates over public use, as discussed in chapter three. The final chapter addresses the YPCC’s attempts to fashion a European-style resort and NPS efforts to formally regulate recreation and minimize spectator events via official winter sports policies in the 1930s and 1940s.

Creating a Park and a Park Service

Yosemite’s unique origin story set a crucial precedent for government intervention into preservation, tourism, and public recreation. More broadly, the creation of the National Park System and the National Park Service heralded a sea change in the way that Americans viewed both travel and national landscapes. Although Yosemite’s establishment and the Park Service’s founding have been thoroughly explored elsewhere, a brief recap will help place into context the remarkable early-twentieth-century expansion of tourism and the importance of debates over public recreation in the parks.

Soon after the first white men—a “battalion” in pursuit of a group of Native Americans accused of raiding a nearby trading post—staggered into Yosemite Valley in 1851, eager outsiders began arriving to glimpse the “the unspeakable, stupendous grandeur” for themselves.¹² The tourist stream began as a mere trickle, with only 653 visitors between

¹² It is likely that other white people had at least glimpsed the Valley before then, but the Mariposa Battalion is the first known group to have entered it. Their descriptions of the Valley were widely reported and helped spur travel to the region. The quote comes from Galen Clark, who served as the park’s first official guardian. The passage is typical of the glowing early accounts of the area: “No painting or photograph gives [Yosemite’s] vivid, thrilling life expression. I have seen persons of emotional temperament stand with tearful eyes, spellbound and dumb with awe, as they got their first view of the Valley from Inspiration point, overwhelmed in the sudden presence of the unspeakable, stupendous grandeur” (Galen Clark, “Yosemite—Past and Present,” *Sunset* 22, no. 4 [April 1909], accessed May 23, 2017, http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/yosemite_past_and_present).

1855 and 1864, yet several ramshackle hotels, stores, and transportation services were hastily established.¹³ Promoters and visitors wrote glowing tributes to the scenery, attracting more tourists and prompting calls to protect the region. Yosemite was first designated a park in 1864, when Congress set aside 56 square miles in the Sierra Nevadas, about 150 miles east of San Francisco, to be managed by California's governor and a board of eight appointed commissioners.¹⁴ That initial land grant—which was only a fraction of the park's current size—contained its best-known scenic features: Yosemite Valley and, about fourteen miles away, the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias.¹⁵ This was the first instance of any national government setting aside land for preservation and public use, and it set an international precedent for land and wildlife conservation.¹⁶ Early preservationists were pleased by the park designation, but lobbied the federal government to protect a far larger swath of land in

¹³ Peter J. Blodgett, "Visiting 'The Realm of Wonder': Yosemite and the Business of Tourism, 1855–1916," in *Yosemite and Sequoia: A Century of California National Parks*, ed. Richard J. Orsi, Alfred Runte, and Marlene Smith-Baranzini (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 38.

¹⁴ President Lincoln signed the act on June 30, 1864. "An Act Authorizing a Grant to the State of California of the 'Yo-Semite Valley,' and of the Land Embracing the 'Mariposa Big Tree Grove,' Approved June 30, 1864 (13 Stat. 325)," in *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Lary M. Dilsaver (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 11; Greene, *Yosemite: the Park and its Resources*, 51. The first commissioners included renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and park guardian Galen Clark.

¹⁵ The Mariposa Grove is 14.48 miles (as the crow flies) from Bridal Veil Falls at the western end of the Valley. Via modern roads, the distance is 28.3 miles; the current driving route follows nineteenth-century trails for much of the way (Google maps, accessed March 3, 2017, maps.google.com).

¹⁶ However, Yellowstone (established in 1872) gets credit as the world's first official *national* park. Its designation as such was more a matter of practicality than a concerted effort to establish centralized national control over public landscapes. The park is located in present-day Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho, which did not achieve statehood until 1889, 1890, and 1890, respectively. With no state governments to manage the park, the national government assumed control. Yellowstone thus inadvertently set a precedent for the creation of additional national parks, such as the 1890 incarnation of Yosemite National Park, discussed below ("An Act to Set Apart a Certain Tract of Land Lying Near the Headwaters of the Yellowstone River as a Public Park, Approved March 1, 1872 [17 Stat. 32]," in *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Dilsaver, 28–29).

the region. Congress obliged in 1890, creating a new national park (also known as Yosemite) that surrounded the Valley and the Mariposa Grove. The originally-designated parklands remained under California's control. Yet rampant development in the Valley angered Yosemite advocates like John Muir, who complained, "at the present rate of progress, flimsy buildings will soon bedraggle the valley from end to end, making it appear like the raw pine towns of a new railroad. . . . all destroyable natural beauty in general is fast fading before the armed presence of vulgar mercenary 'improvement.'"¹⁷ Muir and others were also troubled by budgetary problems and frequent conflicts within the California commission, and they fought to have the state's lands transferred to federal control. In response, President Theodore Roosevelt signed a bill re-ceding the state-administered areas to the national government in 1906. The two Yosemites were combined into one large national park and placed under the control of the United States Army until 1914, when the Department of the Interior assumed guardianship.¹⁸

The founding of the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916 ushered in a new era of park stewardship. An agency of the Department of the Interior, it was established to consolidate the management of federally-protected lands. The NPS assumed control over a motley assortment of parks and monuments that had previously been administered by

¹⁷ John Muir, "Yosemite in Winter (1872)," in *John Muir: His Life and Letters and Other Writings*, by John Muir and Terry Gifford (Seattle: Mountaineers Books, 1996), 493.

¹⁸ A company of United States Cavalry, commanded by Captain A. E. Wood, set up headquarters on the south side of the national park at Wawona on May 19, 1891. Until 1914, various units of the Army protected the park and occasionally assumed ranger-like duties. The Army played a similar role guarding Yellowstone and other national parks as well. Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness*, 57.

several offices within the Interior Department, the Army, and the U.S. Forest Service.¹⁹ Most of these early park units were massive landscape wonders located in the West. At 1,125 square miles, Yosemite was the third largest of the 16 parks managed by the NPS during its first year, behind Yellowstone and Glacier (Montana).²⁰ Yosemite also enjoyed the third highest visitation numbers, with a total of 33,390 visitors in 1916, after Hot Springs (Arkansas) and Yellowstone.²¹ In all of its parks, the agency set to work drafting regulations, increasing and maintaining infrastructure, and selecting concessionaires to operate accommodations and other visitor services. The Park Service also helped promote tourism and shape public conceptions about nature, leisure, and American landscapes.

Unfortunately, the NPS has often been hamstrung by its own founding mandate.

The Organic Act, which established the agency, ordered it to:

promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations . . . to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.²²

¹⁹ For an insider's look at the founding and early years of the National Park Service, see Horace M. Albright and Marian Albright Schenck, *Creating the National Park Service: The Missing Years* (Norman, Ok.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

²⁰ Stephen T. Mather, *Progress in the Development of the National Parks* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916), 28–29. Yosemite's boundaries have been altered a few times since then. It is now 1,169 square miles ("Park Statistics," National Park Service, accessed April 28, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/management/statistics.htm>).

²¹ Mather, *Progress in the Development of the National Parks*, 28.

²² "An Act to Establish a National Park Service, and for Other Purposes, Approved August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535)," in *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Dilsaver, 46–47. The bill is commonly known as the Organic Act.

This dual objective—to provide for both conservation and public “enjoyment”—has stymied generations of Park Service officials, environmental advocates, and tourism boosters. For the last 101 years, the NPS has sought to strike a balance between protecting nature and pleasing visitors, but the agency’s commitment to each side of the conservation/recreation equation has varied with changing public demands for facilities, fluctuating funding, and evolving views of the environment.

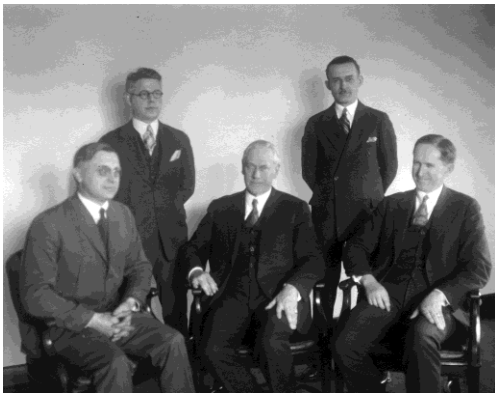


Image I-2: Stephen Mather and his staff—Horace Albright, Arno Cammerer, Arthur Demaray, and George Moskey, in Washington, D.C., 1927 or 1928. Unknown photographer. Courtesy National Park Service, NPS History Collection, HFCA # HPC-000045.

Stephen T. Mather, a UC Berkeley alumnus, retired Borax millionaire, and Sierra Club member, was the first director of the National Park Service and one of its fiercest champions. His civil service career began in early 1915, when he moved to Washington to serve as a special assistant to Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane, in charge of parks issues. He also helped convince Congress to create the National Park Service in 1916.²³

²³ Lane attended UC Berkeley as well. An oft-repeated founding myth of the NPS claims that Mather and Lane were school friends, but there is no evidence they knew each other at Cal. Many key figures working

Mather played a key role in shaping the agency’s vision for park usage and protection until his death in 1930. He was ably aided by Horace Albright, another Berkeley graduate, who served as assistant director of the NPS from 1917 to 1929. Albright also doubled as superintendent of Yellowstone from 1919 to 1929, was stationed in Yosemite for a few months in 1928–1929, and filled in for Mather when the latter was occasionally sidelined by serious health problems. He succeeded Mather as director in 1929, but left the Park Service for a business career in 1933. Through its first few decades of existence, the Park Service was run by a tightly-knit cadre of Mather’s associates. In fact, three of his four high-ranking staff members (as of 1928, his last full year of leading the agency) would serve as directors of the Park Service, covering most of the period discussed in this study. Their visions of public land and nature shaped the next several decades of national park history.

Notions of Nature

National parks have always been inextricably associated with the natural world. Yet the meaning of nature has long been contested. On the surface, it’s the outdoor stuff: the giant redwoods, volcanoes, mud, nudibranchs, thunderstorms, honey badgers, and other items and phenomenon, living or not, whose existence is not the product of human meddling. But then things get murky. Domesticated cats, printer paper, olallieberries—none of which existed in a “virgin” landscape—are manmade tweaks of “real” nature. It’s easy to enough to spot the differences between a blue whale and a genetically-modified

for the Park Service and for Yosemite concessionaires attended college at Berkeley or Stanford, giving Californians a prominent role in the establishment of the park system and the early years of Yosemite tourism.

tomato, but the exact nature of landscapes is considerably less clear-cut. Views of the natural world and the ways in which humans use it have evolved considerably, and it is necessary to review such changes to understand why the debate over public park use mattered.

Scholars of nature, including historians, scientists, environmentalists, and others, still debate the meaning of both “nature” and its cousin, “wilderness.” To the lay person, “wilderness” often connotes a specific type of nature, far removed from civilization and possibly overgrown and intimidating. The 1964 Wilderness Act defined it as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”²⁴ Most scholars agree wilderness is a cultural construct and that its meaning has evolved in response to population growth, deforestation, government intervention, economics, and other societal changes.²⁵ Roderick Nash explored conceptions of the term in his landmark study, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), which helped spawn decades of debate.²⁶ Nash argues that wilderness is more an idea than a concrete objective reality. Early American settlers felt threatened by it, viewing it as empty, unaltered space that had not yet been “civilized” by European or American culture. They rapidly set to work obliterating large swaths of wilderness and commodifying its contents via tree

²⁴ “An Act to Establish a National Wilderness Preservation System for the Permanent Good of the Whole People, and for Other Purposes, 1964 (78 Stat. 890),” *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Dilsaver, 278.

²⁵ See, for example, William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1995) and Michael Nelson and J. Baird Callicott, *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008) for discussions on how “wilderness” is a cultural construct.

²⁶ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

cutting, farming, and other forms of labor. In contrast, Europeans began to feel more sentimental and less terrified of wilderness in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, likely in part because it was rapidly disappearing. A similar shift emerged later in the United States and arrived first in the east, where, as in Europe, population growth contributed to deforestation. Americans had learned to conquer the wilderness, profit from it, and eradicate it. But as it, and the frontier, moved ever westward, Eastern writers like James Fenimore Cooper and Henry David Thoreau began to celebrate the romantic and sublime aspects of wilderness. No longer terrifying—or useful merely for raw materials—the wilderness acquired gentler, but similarly awe-inspiring meanings, based on what William Cronon labels a “late romantic sense of a domesticated sublime.”²⁷ Westerners, still surrounded by seemingly untrammelled forest, were slower to embrace these new conceptions. Nevertheless, by the late nineteenth century wilderness was generally considered more worthy of veneration (and sometimes protection) than of dread.

National parks typically attempt to preserve the spectacular elements of nature: the most monumental cliffs and valleys, the clearest streams, the most imposing buffalos. Yet whatever we may wish them to be, national parks are not virginal, unaltered spaces. Landscapes, fauna, and flora have long been manipulated by humans, often in ways that are not immediately visible. Nineteenth-century parks scattered across the vast American West had already been modified by human intervention. For instance, Native Americans had routinely set fires to clear out underbrush and promote tree health in Yosemite Valley, long

²⁷ William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 12.

before the park was established.²⁸ Park officials under both state and federal control also removed trees and shrubs, but for the benefit of tourists. In 1909, Yosemite Guardian Galen Clark wrote that the Valley was regularly cleared “to afford better views of the distant scenery and to be better able to control fires . . . In many localities where the work of thinning out and trimming up the young growth has been done, are desirable clean, shady groves for camping parties.”²⁹ Clark argued that this was a project “of great importance and national interest, [and] it should be done in accordance with plans submitted by the best landscape engineers . . . so as to show all scenery, local and surrounding, to the best advantage from the carriage roads, private walks and local resting places.”³⁰ The Park Service generally deemed such manipulations necessary to accommodate tourism in the park, particularly in the early twentieth century, and especially if the alterations were not immediately visible. Despite millennia of human intervention in seemingly “wild” spaces, as Rebecca Solnit notes, “the idea persists that nature in a natural state is nature without people.”³¹ If this really were the case, there would be precious little of it left.

The perception of a people-free natural world endured largely because promoters sold national parks as empty spaces, and because tourists were perfectly happy to ignore a long history of non-European human habitation. Americans poured over paintings, photographs, and other visual representations of pristine and empty landscapes, and they

²⁸ Clark, “Yosemite—Past and Present.”

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Solnit, *Savage Dreams*, 299.

hoped to replicate these same views when they visited parks. If people were mere intruders into the natural world, they should not be depicted in art that celebrated it. Solnit notes the oddity of this omission: “Yosemite is . . . usually pictured as a virgin wilderness. Literally pictured: In most of the photographs that have made the place familiar to the world, there are no people.”³² The problem is that such views have produced an erasure of both peoples and cultures from “natural” landscapes.

Dispossession

For Americans to view nature as a blank canvas devoid of human intervention, they had to mentally and physically erase the memory of previous inhabitants. This was especially true in national parks, which invited visitors to escape modernity and return to a theoretically primordial space. In reality, “uninhabited wilderness had to be created before it could be preserved . . . [and] reified in the first national parks,” as Mark David Spence explains in his work on Indian removal, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*.³³ Yellowstone officials drove Native Americans off park lands in the late 1870s, then attempted to establish a small living history Indian village two decades later on the park’s Dot Island. The latter scheme, which quickly failed, grudgingly acknowledged the park’s human history, but fashioned Native Americans into exhibits to be gawked at by white tourists, as in ethnographic villages at World’s Fairs.³⁴ Other parks have similar histories of dispossession. For instance, Blackfoot Indians agreed

³² Ibid., 221. Solnit notes that modern park signage and other interpretive efforts now make it clear that Yosemite Valley was not a virgin wilderness when white men first arrived.

³³ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

to sell territory in Montana to the federal government in 1895 in return for the right to continue using the land. This property was incorporated into Glacier National Park when it was established in 1910 and officials promptly violated the agreement and attempted to bar the Blackfeet from the park.³⁵

The Ahwahneechee (who are related to the Southern Sierra Miwok) had lived in Yosemite Valley for at least 600 years before the first white visitors arrived. Yosemite was no virgin landscape, and its occupants had spent centuries altering nature via tree and brush clearing, hunting, and more. If not for the work of the Ahwahneechee, Rebecca Solnit argues,

the valley might have been nothing more than a dense forest of conifers. . . . when [Lafayette] Bunnell [of the 1851 Mariposa Battalion], [Frederick Law] Olmsted, and their peers rode into the valley and wondered at it for its resemblance to an English landscape garden, it resembled such a garden because it *was* one, an explanation that never occurred to them and their successors.³⁶

While the comparison to an English garden might be bit of a stretch, the point remains that the “wilderness” early visitors envisioned was actually a highly-managed landscape that produced resources and provided housing for its many occupants.

The Mariposa Battalion had hoped to subdue the native peoples and remove them from the area in 1851, but the Ahwahneechee, led by Chief Tenaya, soon returned to the park and remained. By the early twentieth century, however, their lives, movements, and

³⁵ Ibid., chapters 5 and 6. Meanwhile, the Great Northern Railroad hired Native Americans to portray stereotypical Indians at the park’s hotel and train station. This ploy let tourists “see” Indian “culture,” within the familiar surroundings of a luxury hotel and a transportation hub. Indians were reimagined as a curiosity, and not as the rightful occupants of the park lands.

³⁶ Solnit, *Savage Dreams*, 307.

actions were circumscribed by the National Park Service. Many Ahwahneechee worked for the NPS or the concessionaires, and thus interacted with tourists on a regular basis. Some “played” Indian for tourists, performing a song or dance for a fee. Others sold baskets or other art pieces.³⁷ The Park Service also organized an annual “Indian Field Days” in the 1920s, in a cynical (but effective) ploy to attract visitors during the slow season, as discussed in chapter four. Apart from such organized, tourist-oriented events, the Park Service was displeased with the ongoing and visible presence of Native Americans in the Valley. While some visitors were happy to buy baskets, cheer at Field Days, or meet “actual Indians,” others derided the “dirty” Indian Village and complained that seeing the Ahwahneechee in their ancestral homeland somehow debased the tourist experience in “nature.” In response, NPS officials initiated a plan of dispossession by enforcing a series of strict employment and housing regulations, starting in the 1930s.³⁸ The erasure was gradual but effective. By 1970 the very few Ahwahneechee still working and living in the park had been forced to move into employee housing and both the “Old” and “New” Indian Villages had been unceremoniously eradicated, destroying the most obvious visual reminder of Yosemite’s pre-park human history.

³⁷ Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 107.

³⁸ Superintendent Charles Goff Thomson ordered the construction of a new Indian village in 1931, initially composed of 12 429-square-foot cabins. The NPS forced the Ahwahneechee to either leave Yosemite or move to the new village and pay rent. Occupants were required to work in the park and were kicked out once they retired. By 1938 there were 15 cabins housing 57 people, and park officials decided who could live in the village based on the length of time they had worked in Yosemite, their behavior, their ancestral connections to the park, their “usefulness to the community,” and other mostly arbitrary criteria that effectively allowed the Park Service to evict whomever it chose. When a family moved out, their cabin was destroyed; officials claimed that living in the village impeded the Ahwahneechee’s assimilation into American society. By 1969 only a few residents (and cabins) remained. The NPS moved the remaining residents into employee housing, then literally burned the village to the ground in a firefighting training session (Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 125–126, 129–130).

“Worthless” National Treasures

As Americans grew to appreciate wilderness in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Alfred Runte argues, the government was most likely to protect natural landscapes that were considered economically “worthless.” In the case of parks, “worthless” meant there were few easily extractable or exploitable natural resources.³⁹ Congress could preserve spectacular scenery for the public’s benefit without fearing that American businesses would miss out on potential fortunes. Some scholars have since attacked this thesis. Richard Sellars, for instance, accuses Runte of focusing on too few parks (one of which is Yosemite), and of defining “worth” somewhat narrowly. Yet these objections do not change the reality that Yosemite, Yellowstone, and several other parks were indeed labeled worthless during the Congressional debates that established them. The fact that some parks are situated in areas that currently have high real estate values—as Sellars also points out—is mostly irrelevant, since in the late nineteenth century the land around Yosemite (and most similar parks) was neither scarce nor valuable. At the time of Yosemite’s establishment, worth was associated with extractable natural resources. Timber, ore, and gold were still more profitable than tourism, and while early National Park Service officials hoped park units would eventually become self-supporting, no one expected Yosemite or its fellow parks to generate a windfall. Prohibited from becoming working landscapes in the conventional sense, the parks emerged instead as pleasure grounds (for

³⁹ For Runte’s “worthless land” thesis, see Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lanham, Md.: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2010), especially chapter 3.

some Americans, at least). Most park work centered around providing tourist services, including accommodations, food, and recreation.⁴⁰

A fundamental philosophical split emerged in the early twentieth century between two government agencies charged with managing natural landscapes. The United States Forest Service, established in 1905 under the leadership of Chief Gifford Pinchot, promoted a “conservation ethic” and employed scientific management practices. Pinchot believed that mankind should benefit from the careful use of natural resources. Rather than clearcutting, for instance, the Forest Service both cut and planted carefully selected trees, providing a source of timber while maintaining forested landscapes. Humans could and should profit from nature, Pinchot believed, so long as such actions were thoughtfully managed. In contrast, the National Park Service ostensibly preserved landscapes in their natural state. In reality, however, national park landscapes were frequently modified by humans, usually for the benefit of tourists. Natural resources were generally protected, except when they impeded tourism, as in the case of trees cleared to create downhill ski runs. These trees were not cut for profit, at least not explicitly. In general, the Park Service argued that natural resources were meant to be viewed and appreciated in place, inside the parks. In the early twentieth century, the government set aside millions of acres of land for both “preservation” and “conservation.” Teddy Roosevelt’s administration alone preserved 230

⁴⁰ Concessionaires were (and are) required to pass along a percentage of their revenues to the government as payment for the right to operate in the parks. The exact amount has varied considerably by time and place. For instance, Yosemite Hospitality, the current primary concessionaire in Yosemite, pays a “franchise fee” of 11.75% of its gross receipts. Eighty percent of that fee is used to help fund facilities and Park Service operations in Yosemite (“New Yosemite Concessionaire Signs Contract, Trademarks Up in the Air,” *National Parks Traveler*, October 8, 2015, <https://www.nationalparkstraveler.org/2015/10/new-yosemite-concessionaire-signs-contract-trademarks-air>).

million acres, including five national parks, 18 national monuments, 51 federal bird reserves, four national game preserves, and 150 national forests.⁴¹ Both forms of public land were popular, but the schism between conservation and preservation goals reflected broader disagreements over how humans should interact with, and benefit from, the natural world.

One of the first major American battles to publicly test conceptions of wilderness usage erupted in Yosemite. By the 1880s San Francisco was in search of a large and reliable water supply, and in 1903 Mayor James Phelan applied to the Interior Department for a permit to transform the park's Hetch Hetchy Valley into a reservoir. Although it was not as popular an attraction as the park's more famous Yosemite Valley, about 15 miles to the south, Hetch Hetchy was generally described in equally rapturous terms. The Interior Department initially rejected the proposal—it was, after all, part of a protected landscape—setting off a protracted battle and lobbying efforts on both sides. The Sierra Club and its founder, John Muir, led an impressive grassroots effort to save Hetchy Hetchy Valley, but in 1913 Congress and President Woodrow Wilson passed and signed the Raker Act, which granted San Francisco the right to dam it. While the bill prioritized human consumption over the preservation of Hetch Hetchy, it also prohibited San Francisco from selling water or power it extracted from the park. The government had ruled that in this case, a reliable water supply was necessary—especially in the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake and fire—and counted as “public use.” O'Shaughnessy Dam was completed in 1923 and the first Yosemite water reached San Francisco and other Bay Area cities eleven years later. Despite

⁴¹ “Theodore Roosevelt and Conservation,” National Park Service, accessed May 20, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/theodore-roosevelt-and-conservation.htm>; Udall, “How the Wilderness Was Won.”

San Francisco's victory, the controversy represented an important shift in views of both the built world and nature. Many Americans lobbied Congress and dozens of newspapers published editorials in support of the Sierra Club's campaign to leave this slice of nature to its own devices. As Nash explains, "for three centuries they [Americans] had chosen civilization without any hesitation. By 1913 [the Hetch Hetchy battle], they were no longer sure."⁴² The beauty and relative emptiness of this landscape had transformed from threatening to worthy of protection.⁴³

Hetch Hetchy was one of many casualties of rapid population growth and modernization throughout the United States in the early twentieth century. In this case, a national park was tapped to hydrate one of the few major metropolitan areas in the West. Throughout the country, industrialization and urbanization had pushed a large portion of the population out of rural areas, for work, housing, or both. By 1920, just over half of Americans lived in cities, a significant increase from 39.7% only twenty years before.⁴⁴ Population density was especially high in the Northeast and Midwest, thanks to booming industrial production and increased migration. In contrast, the western United States was often viewed as vast and open, so lightly populated that the frontier had only recently been

⁴² Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 181.

⁴³ The fight over Hetch Hetchy is one of the United States' most notable (and most studied) environmental controversies. It helped inspire other environmental protests, such as a successful fight to prevent the construction of a dam in Dinosaur National Monument in the 1950s. For a thorough discussion of this complicated controversy, see Robert Righter, *The Battle over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). For a thorough timeline (from the Sierra Club perspective), see "Timeline of the Ongoing Battle over Hetch Hetchy," Sierra Club, accessed May 21, 2017, <http://vault.sierraclub.org/ca/hetchhetchy/timeline.asp>.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Rees, *Industrialization and the Transformation of American Life: A Brief Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2015), 44.

pronounced “closed.” It is no surprise, therefore, that the first several national parks were established in the West—this, after all, was where the “empty” and majestic landscapes were found. “The West,” notes Lynn Ross-Bryant, “with its wildness, grandeur, openness, monumental mountains and deserts, canyons and rivers, represented the limitless possibility of America.”⁴⁵ If the West embodied the American ideal, so too did the national parks, which showcased some of the region’s most impressive and expansive natural features. Until the 1930s, only one national park was located east of the Mississippi. A map of national parks and monuments in the 1931 edition of the *National Parks Portfolio* highlights the skewed geography of the park system by cropping out everything east of the Mississippi River and relegating sites in Maine, the mid-Atlantic, Hawaii, and Alaska to mere map insets.⁴⁶

Are We There Yet?

National parks belonged to the general American public, in theory, yet the first wave of park tourists was comprised solely of the rich and leisured. Pullman cars ferried the wealthy to scenic wonders like the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Glacier long before most parks had been established, at prices well out of reach for average Americans.⁴⁷ Their

⁴⁵ Lynn Ross-Bryant, “Sacred Sites: Nature and Nation in the U.S. National Parks,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 36.

⁴⁶ Robert Sterling Yard, *The National Parks Portfolio* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), 274.

⁴⁷ The Grand Canyon became a federal forest reserve in 1893, a game preserve in 1906, a national monument in 1908, and a national park in 1919; the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway began offering service to its South Rim in 1901. The Northern Pacific Railroad opened a branch line to Yellowstone in 1883. Glacier (established as a national park in 1910) was served by the Great Northern Railroad starting in 1893 (Blodgett, “Visiting “The Realm of Wonder,”” 44).

views of nature were framed by picture windows and guided by parallel metal rails—an experience far removed from the prototypical family station wagon vacations of a century later. In some cases, railroad companies were as influential in the parks' early development as the government agencies charged with actually administering them. By building luxury lodges (including Yellowstone's Old Faithful Inn [1904] and the Grand Canyon's El Tovar Hotel [1905]), advertising scenic vacations, and lobbying for the establishment of several parks, railroads helped propel American tourism westward.

When the Park Service set to work in 1916 establishing a tourist infrastructure throughout the National Park System—creating campgrounds, constructing roads, building power plants, and embarking on a host of other essential projects—securing financial and political support was especially urgent. Director Mather believed that national parks (at least popular ones) would eventually become economically self-sufficient, but initially, the parks needed wealthy visitors willing to lobby the government for increased appropriations and to stay in pricey hotels for extended vacations.⁴⁸ In Yosemite, for example, Stephen Mather commissioned the YPCC to build the Ahwahnee, a luxury hotel completed in 1927, specifically to draw the wealthy to the park.

⁴⁸ National Park Service, "The Ahwahnee Historic Information" (pamphlet), [by 2009].



Image I-3: Left to right: Sequoia road engineer Austin, Yosemite Superintendent W. B. Lewis, NPS Director Stephen Mather, architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood, and YPCC President Donald Tresidder at the proposed site of the Ahwahnee Hotel, May 1926. Photograph probably by James V. Lloyd. Courtesy National Park Service, NPS History Collection, HFCA # HPC-000048.

A remarkable twentieth-century domestic travel boom made it possible for middle-class Americans to finally visit national parks themselves. Several economic, political, and cultural factors contributed to this increase in stateside tourism. Not surprisingly, transportation innovations had the most immediate impact. The mass production of automobiles, starting in the 1910s, literally mobilized a large portion of the population: by 1948, 54% of American families owned a car.⁴⁹ Auto travel was an entirely different

⁴⁹ Susan Rugh, *Are We There Yet? The Golden Age of American Family Vacations* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 19.

experience than a train journey: car tourists could set their own itineraries and vacation at their own paces, for whatever lengths of time they could afford. They also interacted fairly directly with their surroundings, feeling the bumps on the road and the wind on their faces. In contrast, railroads “annihilat[ed] . . . space and time” by hurtling visitors in a mechanical tube from point A to point B, “destroy[ing] the close relationship between the traveler and the traveled space,” as Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes.⁵⁰ Cars even opened up new lodging options for thrifty (or adventurous) travelers, as auto camping offered an inexpensive alternative to hotels and railroads.

Alongside transportation developments, new labor policies helped increase middle-class tourism. As more people moved into office jobs in the early twentieth century, employment benefits, including vacation time, increased; by the 1920s, one week of paid vacation was the norm for most white-collar workers.⁵¹ Average wages rose as well, allowing many workers to accumulate enough disposable income to afford modest vacations. For the first time, a large portion of the middle class had sufficient leisure time and money for pleasure travel as well as access to relatively affordable personal transportation.

Armed with the means for travel, middle-class Americans needed a reason to leave home. In the nineteenth century, most had only journeyed short distances, usually for practical purposes such as visiting family. In the early twentieth century, however, the middle class increasingly embraced both vacations and recreational pursuits. For many,

⁵⁰ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 37, 53.

⁵¹ Daniel T. Rogers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 106.

traveling provided a welcome break from the rigors of industrial city life. In the 1920s, Hal Rothman argues, tourists “began a recognizable modern trend: they traveled primarily to see different things but also to escape the pace of their life in the industrial world.”⁵² Vacations in national parks offered a welcome change of scenery, a relaxing return to nature. In an 1865 report on Yosemite (state) park, Commissioner Frederick Law Olmsted identified several benefits of encountering the natural world. He explained:

It is a scientific fact that the occasional contemplation of natural scenes of an impressive character, particularly if this contemplation occurs in connection with relief from ordinary cares, change of air and change of habits, is favorable to the health and vigor of men and especially to the health and vigor of their intellect beyond any other conditions which can be offered them . . . The want of such occasional recreation where men and women are habitually pressed by their business or household cares often results in a class of disorders the characteristic quality of which is mental disability, . . . incapacitating the subject for the proper exercise of the intellectual and moral forces.⁵³

By the early twentieth century, both nature and recreation were touted as tonics to re-energize a population beaten down by the stresses of contemporary life. Americans blamed urbanization and modernization for many health issues, including “neurasthenia,” a condition reportedly caused by “excessive brain work and nervous strain,” which struck middle-class professionals and businessmen starting in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Many viewed this new disorder as proof that white middle-class men had lost a measure of

⁵² Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 149.

⁵³ Frederick Law Olmsted, “The Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove: A Preliminary Report” (1865), in *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Dilsaver, 18.

⁵⁴ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13. In Europe and in the United States, the wealthy had long traveled to towns and resorts with mineral springs—such as Bath, England, and its namesake Bath, Virginia—to treat ailments ranging from sciatica to gout. Such travels had been out of reach for the non-elite.

virility—a quality still retained by more “primitive” working-class men in rural areas who were far removed from modern culture. According to William Cronon, upper-class men also shared a fear of emasculation, so that “the very men who most benefited from urban-industrial capitalism were among those who believed they must escape its debilitating effects.”⁵⁵ Richard White found a similar concern among factory workers, whose workplaces were increasingly mechanized: “In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, blue-collar workers regarded physical work as a mark of manhood. They often saw the machines that broke their connection with nature as emasculating them; they associated these machines with women.”⁵⁶ Men were feeling less manly in an increasingly mechanized world, and nature might prove the solution.

Meanwhile, a masculine ideal that celebrated physical exertion—as famously championed by President Teddy Roosevelt—was growing more popular. After leaving office, Roosevelt traveled to Africa to do what Gail Bederman characterizes as “the next most virile thing he could imagine: travelling back in time to the period when the primitive man first appeared on earth.”⁵⁷ Together with his sons, Roosevelt wrote about his journeys in books such as *African Game Trails*, allowing Americans to vicariously tag along on his outdoors adventures. The “primitive” American West, though far removed from Africa

⁵⁵ Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 14.

⁵⁶ Richard White, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?: Work and Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 180.

⁵⁷ Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 207.

geographically, enjoyed a similar reputation for wide open spaces, impressive wildlife, and rugged living.

Vacations had the potential to re-energize visitors by temporarily removing them from the pressures and automation of modern life and returning them to the great outdoors. Stephen Mather seized on this view in his 1921 report, claiming that “travelers returned refreshed, rejuvenated, better men and women from their visits to the great open breathing spaces.”⁵⁸ He saw park vacations as restorative, for both men and women, and clearly believed that national parks provided more than mere inspirational landscapes. National park travelers could view spectacular sights *and* escape the drudgery of industrial life, regain manly vigor, and engage in rejuvenating Roosevelt-style physical exercise. William Hornaday put it more colorfully: “if your nerve wracked American will but get on out into the rough places, and make his body fit to kill while his brain and stomach rest, he shall come back to his desk wholly made over and as good as new.”⁵⁹

The early-twentieth-century tourism industry also successfully linked domestic travel to notions of American exceptionalism and nationalism, especially in the West. Travel boosters, railroads, gas stations, government agencies, and others helped spread images and stories of unmatched scenery in books, pamphlets, newspapers, and artwork. Nineteenth-century notions of Manifest Destiny helped spur migration and travel as Americans embraced the goal of spreading the United States from coast to coast. By heading west and visiting unique landscapes, Americans could participate in a virtual rite of citizenship. This

⁵⁸ Stephen Mather, *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1921 and the Travel Season 1921* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 12.

⁵⁹ William T. Hornaday, “America’s Next Great Playground,” *Recreation* 31 (May 1910): 211.

sentiment was neatly expressed in 1905, when western boosters developed the slogan “See America First.” The motto was soon popularized by the Great Northern Railroad and appropriated by a wide range of travel boosters, businesses, and government officials. It encouraged Americans to visit and learn about “their” country (especially in the West), rather than embark on tours of smaller, more crowded Europe. “See America First” was particularly relevant during World War I, when restrictions limited travel abroad, yet it remained a popular marketing tool for several decades.⁶⁰



Image I-4: Catherine Lally (as Columbia) and Leroy Rust (as Uncle Sam) perform a patriotic figure skating act at the Camp Curry ice rink as part of the vaudeville program of the San Joaquin Valley-Sierra Winter Sports Carnival, January 13, 1934. Unknown photographer. Yosemite National Park Archives, Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection, Winter Club Scrapbook, page 146.

Tourists and travel interests were especially quick to associate national parks with American exceptionalism. “Nature ‘set apart’ in the parks,” writes Lynn Ross-Bryant, became “the embodiment of an archetypal America, which [was] the ever-pristine source of the greatness of the nation and the people. As such, it serve[d] as a sacred site and a unifying

⁶⁰ Today the National Park Service website implores visitors to “Experience your America”—a phrase similarly associated with nationalism, patriotism, ownership, and American exceptionalism (“National Park Service” [and other pages on the NPS website], accessed April 26, 2017, www.nps.gov/index.htm).

symbol in U.S. American culture.”⁶¹ Nature—or rather, perceptions of it as pristine and untouched—helped fashion an idealized national image.⁶² By the 1920s, National Park Service guidebooks encouraged visitors to explore the “park-to-park route,” which stopped at several “canonical” parks and was meant to parallel the European Grand Tour. As Director Mather explained in 1921, “National Parks are stabilizing and inspiring influences in times of national restlessness. . . . They are the first in the worthwhile things in our national life that make for better citizens.”⁶³ The parks aided American efforts to craft a new national identity, free from the legacy of the Old World.

Personal travel narratives, an increasingly popular genre in the early twentieth century, illustrate that tourists readily internalized these nationalist messages and framed their national park vacations as American pilgrimages. Effie Price Gladding, for instance, wrote glowingly about her cross-country trip in 1915: “We have a new conception of our great country; her vastness, her varied scenery, her prosperity, her happiness, her boundless resources, her varied immense possibilities, her kindness and hopefulness. We are bound to her by a thousand new ties of acquaintance, of association, and of pride.”⁶⁴ Fifteen years later Maria Letitia Stockett also advised her readers to tour domestic sites, though she was clearly more impressed by the United States’ landscapes than its government, perhaps an acknowledgment of the hardships of the Depression. “By all means see America First and

⁶¹ Ross-Bryant, “Sacred Sites,” 62.

⁶² Stephen Germic, *American Green: Class, Crisis, and the Deployment of Nature in Central Park, Yosemite, and Yellowstone* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001).

⁶³ Stephen Mather, “Fifth Annual Report (1921),” as cited in Ross-Bryant, “Sacred Sites,” 31.

⁶⁴ Effie Price Gladding, *Across the Continent by the Lincoln Highway* (New York: Brentano’s, 1915), ix.

then see it again,” she urged. “Don’t miss the rangers. See the National Parks—it will restore your faith in democratic government—almost. But I do not wish to exaggerate.”⁶⁵

In most such accounts, the United States’ wide-open spaces—especially in the West—were presented as evidence of American exceptionalism and of a unique natural heritage, which the National Parks were meant to showcase.



Image I-5: A stagecoach leaving the Valley, with Bridal Veil Fall in the background, 1903. Photograph by J. T. Boysen. Courtesy National Park Service, NPS History Collection, HFCA # HPC-000600.

⁶⁵ Maria Letitia Stockett, *America: First, Fast and Furious* (Baltimore: Norman-Remington, 1930), vi.

“Thumped along at the pace of lunatics” to Yosemite

Early excursions to Yosemite were both expensive *and* physically exhausting. An 1873 article in *Scribner's Magazine* estimated the cost of a ten-day trip (including accommodations and food) at \$150 per person, a price very few could afford.⁶⁶ The journey was not for the poor, or the faint of heart. Rather than arriving in the comfort of a Pullman car, early visitors reached Yosemite Valley by stagecoach, horseback, or foot—and often a combination of all three.⁶⁷ Narrow dirt roads and trails wove haphazardly through though the mountains, and any journey over them could only be described as grueling. Olive Logan, an actress, writer, and public speaker, made the journey in 1870 and had quite a lot to say about it. It took her three days to reach the Valley from Stockton via stagecoach and horseback.⁶⁸ “[We were] ensconced,” she lamented, “in a hard, lumbering, springless, unpainted fiend (I am satisfied this wagon was a thing of feeling, and chuckled in every one of its rusty bolts and creaked in all its ugly joints at the pain it caused us), and were thumped along at the pace of lunatics over the stony ascent.”⁶⁹ The Valley floor itself was only a slight

⁶⁶ Anne F. Hyde, “From Stagecoach to Packard Twin Six,” in *Yosemite and Sequoia: A Century of California National Parks*, ed. Richard J. Orsi, Alfred Runte, and Marlene Smith-Baranzini (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 71.

⁶⁷ Modern visitors entering the park on horse or foot pay only half the entrance fee charged to cars.

⁶⁸ Stockton is about 120 miles from Yosemite Valley.

⁶⁹ Olive Logan, “Does it Pay to Visit Yo Semite?,” *The Galaxy* 10, no. 4 (October 1870), <http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/logan>. Logan’s mood did not improve upon reaching the Valley. After finally seeing the sights, she remained convinced that even a veritable paradise would have been insufficient compensation: “if every one of the waterfalls in Yo Semite were magnified, every one of its granite domes were an Olympus, if its rivers were the Rhine, and its valley the fairy gardens of Versailles, the sight of it would not repay one for the suffering involved in getting to it.” Her account is unique because of its public insistence that the Valley’s beauty was no match for the journey’s misery. She assures readers that most other visitors share her despair, but, like the Emperor with new clothes, they refuse to admit it.

improvement. It was covered in a “fine disintegrated granite sand” and passengers arriving via stage at Camp Curry, a patch of tent cabins at the east end of the Valley, were promptly assaulted with feather dusters to dislodge the thick coats of dust that camp owner David Curry referred to as “pulverized scenery.”⁷⁰ The Yosemite Valley Railroad (YVRR), a short line track running from Merced to just west of the park in El Portal, was completed in 1907, finally bringing train service to the area.⁷¹ The journey took three hours and forty minutes; passengers then transferred to a stagecoach for a four-hour trip to the Valley floor, where they too experienced the painful physicality of the stage ride.⁷² Despite these rustic conditions, the vast majority of early Yosemite’s visitors were wealthy, just as in other western national parks. By 1916, the railroad transported 14,000 people to the park each year, but it was soon upstaged by automobile travel and ceased operations in 1945.⁷³

The first car to reach the Valley arrived in 1900—seven years before the YVRR was completed—and was followed immediately by angry protestations that autos were noisy menaces. In response to the complaints, as well as concerns about the dangers of cars sharing roads with horses, the park’s army officials banned automobiles in 1907. After a few

⁷⁰ Shirley Sargent, *Yosemite’s Innkeepers: The Story of a Great Park and Its Chief Concessionaires* (Yosemite, Ca.: Ponderosa Press, 2000), 12.

⁷¹ Most passengers arrived in Merced from Los Angeles on the Southern Pacific or from San Francisco via the Southern Pacific or Santa Fe railroads, then transferred to the YVRR. The path of the tracks is still visible in some places. It is an exceedingly narrow roadbed running alongside the Merced River and Route 140; thanks to a 2006 rock slide onto Route 140, that road is “temporarily” re-routed onto the railroad bed for a short stretch near the park.

⁷² “1915–1916 Public Time Table,” Yosemite Valley Railroad, accessed May 27, 2010, http://www.yosemitevalleyrailroad.com/public_tt.dir/yvptt.front.html.

⁷³ Blodgett, “Visiting ‘The Realm of Wonder,’” 44.

years of apparent quiet, the ban was revoked in 1913.⁷⁴ Once cars arrived, Yosemite visitation mushroomed, but safety concerns remained. In 1914, park officials issued a set of 65 auto regulations, including a strictly-enforced speed limit that imposed extraordinary fines on speeders (up to \$25.00, and ejection from the park).⁷⁵ Most notably, the 1914 rules introduced a mandatory \$5.00 park entrance fees for cars. Henry Ford instituted a well-publicized policy of paying factory employees \$5.00 per day the same year. Clearly, even well-paid workers might find the trip financially out of reach. Fees were lowered, however, in subsequent years, making the park marginally more accessible to middle- and working-class visitors. By 1932, officials charged \$2.00 per car to enter Yosemite, and several other national parks had abandoned entrance fees entirely.⁷⁶

With no nineteenth-century railroad to provide transportation and lodgings, a motley assortment of adventurers, investors, and locals built accommodations in Yosemite that ranged from glorified tents to converted stables. Theoretically, the competition for customers should have worked in tourists' favor, but each business attracted only a small slice of the tourist market, and so had trouble collecting enough money to fund

⁷⁴ 127 cars entered the Valley in 1913, with the numbers rising dramatically almost every year since. Mark Daniels, "Report of the Acting Superintendent of the Yosemite National Park to the Secretary of the Interior, 1914," accessed May 15, 2010, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/reports/yose/1914b.htm.

⁷⁵ Rangers stamped each entrance permit with a time of arrival, allowing officials at subsequent checkpoints to ensure that drivers proceeded at a sufficiently leisurely pace (assuming they didn't make any stops along the way). Once inside the Valley, travelers were required to house their cars in a central garage, and drivers were allowed to pause at hotels and camps for "only the necessary time for the purpose of letting off or taking on passengers or baggage, or both, not to exceed five minutes" ("Regulations of June 3, 1914, Governing the Admission of Automobiles," accessed May 15, 2010, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/reports/yose/1914e.htm).

⁷⁶ Barry Mackintosh, *Visitor Fees in the National Park System: A Legislative and Administrative History* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1983), <http://www.craterlakeinstitute.com/online-library/visitor-fees-park-service/1c.htm>.

improvements to facilities or to provide decent service. The first public lodgings in Yosemite Valley, The Lower Hotel, opened in 1857 and set the stage for future development of the tourist industry in the park.⁷⁷ After 1864, new construction had to be approved by the state-appointed park commissioners. Tourism entrepreneurs constructed new hotels in the late 1860s and 1870s, including Leidig's Hotel (1869), La Casa Nevada (1870), and the Cosmopolitan (1870). Although none boasted accommodations rivaling those of Yellowstone's luxurious Old Faithful Inn, they at least expanded the selection for tourists. John C. Smith's Cosmopolitan Bathhouse & Saloon was the most "civilized" of the Valley hotels, offering hot and cold baths at all hours, a bar, a barber, a parlor, pool tables, and other amenities not found in neighboring accommodations. State commissioners closed the hotel in 1884 and the building, which was put to other uses, burned down in 1932. In 1888 the commissioners ordered the demolition of Leidig's and Black's and fire destroyed La Casa Nevada two years later.⁷⁸ The California State legislature tried to provide a more upscale option by commissioning and financing the construction of a new four-story hotel, the Stoneman House (1887).⁷⁹ Yet even the Stoneman did not meet the same standards as the railroad-owned luxury lodges in other western parks, and it met an untimely fate, burning down in 1896.

⁷⁷ A long series of owners operated Lower Hotel as a saloon and inn, and the hotel endured periodic setbacks, such as being crushed by snow. A competitor, "Upper Hotel," opened two years later and was renamed Hutchings House when James Hutchings (one of the park's earliest promoters) bought it (Russell, *One Hundred Years in Yosemite*, 91–92).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 99–100, 103.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 108–109.

Of the nine lodgings built in Yosemite in the nineteenth century, only three were still operating in 1899. Apart from the Wawona Hotel (located outside the Valley), the lone property that exists today is the venerable Curry Village, better known as Camp Curry.⁸⁰ David and Jennie Curry's own travel frustrations inspired them to found the "hotel-camp" in 1899, five years after the couple had attempted to visit Yosemite but found the \$4.00 per day hotel costs prohibitive. In addition to a cot and access to bathrooms, Curry campers received a meal "and a clean napkin" for \$2.00 per day, less than half the cost of the park entrance permit. The rustic accommodations offered a hint of adventure without the mess or work of traditional tent camping. The camp opened with seven tent cabins (small, one-room, wood-framed structures with canvas walls), and expanded rapidly. By the end of the first summer season there were 25 tent cabins and the camp had hosted 290 of the 4,500 visitors to Yosemite Valley.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Camp Curry was renamed Half Dome Village in 2016 due to a copyright dispute between the National Park Service and the Delaware North Company (the concessionaire from 1993 to early 2016, which had lost a bid to renew its contract in Yosemite). The DNC had quietly secured the copyright to the names of dozens of facilities in the park—even though those names predated the company's association with Yosemite by decades. So when the NPS selected a new concessionaire, the agency was forced to select new names, "temporarily," while the dispute is waged in court. The Ahwahnee, for instance, is now "The Majestic Yosemite Hotel," Badger Pass Ski Area is "the Yosemite Ski & Snowboard Area," and so on.

⁸¹ Sargent, *Yosemite's Innkeepers*, 13. A large number of the initial guests were educators, thanks to the Currys' affiliation with Stanford University and the academic grapevine. Many of the camp's employees were Stanford students (Ibid., 46).

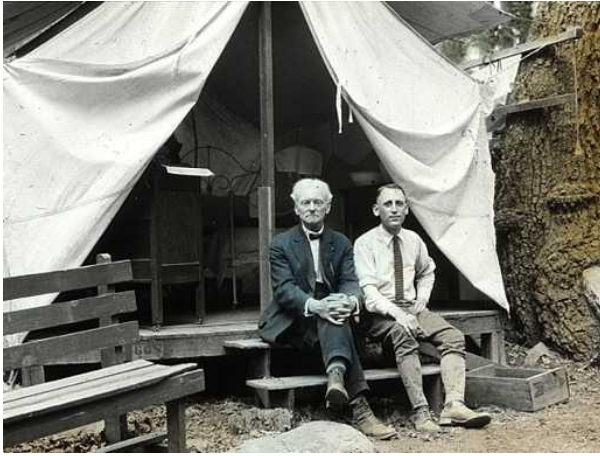


Image I-6: Tourists at Camp Curry tent cabin, 1920s. Unknown photographer. Courtesy National Park Service, NPS History Collection, HFCA # HPC-001810.

The hotel-camp formula proved so successful that Camp Curry attracted thousands of repeat visitors and spawned imitators in the Valley, including Camp Yosemite/Camp Lost Arrow (1901–1915) and Camp Ahwahnee (1908–1915). In 1915, 11,715 guests stayed at Curry Village, more than at any other hotel or campground in Yosemite.⁸² Visitation continued to increase dramatically, particularly as cars began to enter the Valley in the 1910s and 1920s. Families who had been unable to afford train or stagecoach fares and extended vacations were suddenly able to travel more cheaply, and at their own pace. These new visitors found Camp Curry far more accommodating to their budgets than neighboring hotels. Curry brochures trumpeted the campground’s informal atmosphere: “Ladies unaccompanied by gentlemen may make the trip with ease and comfort. . . . Conventional customs of dress are laid aside in Camp Curry. The camp is a place for the enjoyment of Nature and the necessary incidentals of eating and sleeping.”⁸³

⁸² Ibid., 13.

⁸³ Ibid., 17.

In 1925, Director Mather ordered the Yosemite Park & Curry Company to “build a first-class hotel that would be open year round to attract people of influence and money.”⁸⁴ Mather hoped that, if sufficiently impressed by the elaborate hotel and its beautiful surroundings, wealthy visitors would support the National Park System both financially and politically.⁸⁵ His plan worked. Since its opening in July 1927, the Ahwahnee has attracted wealthy elites ranging from Hollywood royalty to actual royalty, with a brief mid-century break to host injured U.S. Navy personnel during a stint as a WWII naval rehabilitation hospital. The hotel opened a year after the park’s first all-season road was completed, and thus played an important role in the rapid development of winter tourism. In addition to hosting wealthy sports aficionados—many of whom also patronized elite European ski resorts—the Ahwahnee frequently played host to events sponsored by the Yosemite Winter Club, and still boasts a lounge area named after the group.

“A fitful sleep on an impossible bed”

Director Mather viewed national parks as monuments to spectacular Western scenery, yet he had no illusions about preserving “virgin” landscapes in a completely “natural” state. The director believed that parks must serve visitors. Although he acknowledged that concessionaires faced unique challenges (such as high start-up costs,

⁸⁴ National Park Service, “The Ahwahnee Historic Information”; Laura Soullière Harrison, “The Ahwahnee Hotel,” in *Architecture in the Parks: A Natural Historic Landmark Theme Study* (1986), accessed April 19, 2010, http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/harrison/harrison15.htm. The Ahwahnee was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1987.

⁸⁵ Harrison, “The Ahwahnee Hotel.”

competition from outside-the-park businesses, great distance from suppliers, and strict government regulations), he stressed the importance of providing high quality service, proclaiming, “scenery is a hollow enjoyment to a tourist who sets out in the morning after an indigestible breakfast and a fitful sleep on an impossible bed.”⁸⁶ In his 1916 report to Secretary of the Interior Franklin Knight Lane, Mather noted: “You requested me to make every effort to provide accommodations in the national parks for all classes of visitors, and to give as much attention to the needs of the tourist with a small income as to those of the wealthy visitor accustomed to luxury.”⁸⁷ To accommodate the growing hordes of middle-class tourists, the NPS ordered the construction of public campgrounds and some relatively affordable lodgings.

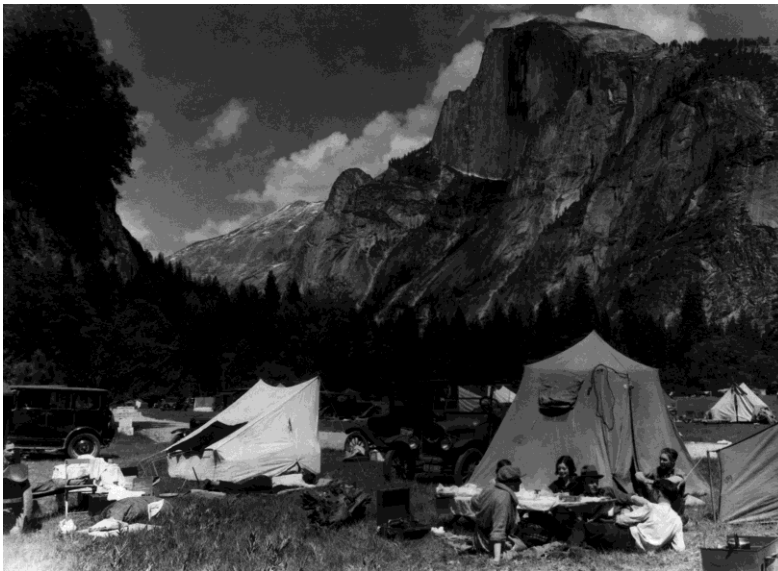


Image I-7: Camping in Yosemite Valley, with Half Dome in the background, ca. 1920s. Unknown photographer. Courtesy National Park Service, NPS History Collection, HFCA # HPC-001933.

⁸⁶ Peter J. Blodgett, “Striking a Balance: Managing Concessions in the National Parks, 1916–33,” *Forest & Conservation History* 34, no. 2 (1990): 61.

⁸⁷ Mather, *Progress in the Development of the National Parks*, 3.

Camping proved a popular option. Irene Penk Hahn drove cross country with two fellow twenty-something teachers in 1932 and found that camping was often the only affordable option available along their route.⁸⁸ In Yosemite, the three women pitched their tent at Glacier Point, and Irene noted that their “experiences [in the park], close to the beauty and the grandeur of the American West, more than compensated for the sometimes dangerous and miserable camping situations.”⁸⁹ Park concessionaires in Yosemite and elsewhere rented out equipment, allowing even novices to camp. *The National Parks Portfolio*, published by the Park Service, claimed that “travelers on the trails do not carry tents because it does not rain. A sleeping bag, a pine-needle mattress, a sheltered grove, and a ceiling of green leaves amply suffice.”⁹⁰ This romantic view framed camping as a way of connecting with the natural landscape, a far cry from the insulated experience of Pullman cars and luxury hotels. Hahn agreed, declaring that “the great delight of camping was the feeling of being close to nature.”⁹¹ Most Park Service campgrounds were free, which Director Mather touted as another sign of American exceptionalism. In 1921 he claimed that “time and again European visitors express astonishment that all this service can be free. To them it is as

⁸⁸ Their entire two-and-a-half month journey cost \$300, some of which was spent fixing their Ford Model A, first affectionately nicknamed “The Chariot,” then demoted to “Lemon.” Most nights they camped in their \$15.75 tent and cooked on a \$3.75 Coleman camp stove.

⁸⁹ Irene Penk Hahn, *Hiking Down the Grand Canyon and Other Adventures: The Travels of Three Minnesota Women in 1932* (self-published, undated memoir), [Ch. 3, p. 1].

⁹⁰ Yard, *The National Parks Portfolio*, 49.

⁹¹ Hahn, *Hiking Down the Grand Canyon and Other Adventures*, [Ch. 3, p. 6].

incomprehensible as is our sense of American freedom.”⁹² The seemingly democratic approach was not entirely altruistic; building more and better facilities could increase visitation, forcing Congress to provide more generous funding. The Park Service *needed* visitors, which ensured that the parks’ public use functions would often be given precedence over conservation efforts.

“A place to spend the summer”

Nature evolved into a site of recreation in the early twentieth century. There had been hints of this shift earlier, as wealthy tourists flocked to newly-established parks to sightsee—in other words, to use the land for leisure, not labor. Apart from the incidental physicality of horse and stage travel, however, these first guests planned to view the wilderness, not to exert themselves in it. Those who worried the United States was culturally inferior to Europe found comfort in the spectacular scenery, and paid tribute to it in travel writings that portrayed the landscape as sacred. Bruce Wallace and James David Smillie penned an 1880 ode to Yosemite full of religious imagery: “Alone in a temple vast and grand/With spire and turret on every hand— /A world’s cathedral with walls sublime/Chiselled and carved by the hand of time.”⁹³ James Mason Hutchings, a member of an 1855 expedition to the Valley, wrote of his party’s first impressions: “We were almost speechless with wondering admiration at its wild and sublime grandeur. ‘What!’ exclaimed

⁹² Stephen T. Mather, “The Ideals and Policy of the National Park Service,” in *Handbook of Yosemite National Park: A Compendium of Articles on the Yosemite Region by the Leading Scientific Authorities*, edited by Ansel Franklin Hall (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1921).

⁹³ Bruce Wallace and James David Smillie, *The Yosemite* (Lee & Shepard, 1880), iii.

one at length, ‘have we come to the end of all things?’ ‘Can this be the opening of the Seventh Seal?’ cries another. ‘This far, very far, exceeds Niagara,’ says a third.”⁹⁴ Hutchings combined commentary on the untamed nature of the great west—even better than Niagara Falls, North America’s most popular early-nineteenth-century natural wonder—while using religious imagery. Naturalist John Muir employed similar language. On Yosemite, which he had helped establish as a national park, he wrote:

Nowhere will you see the majestic operations of nature more clearly revealed beside the frailest, most gentle and peaceful things. . . . Yet it is full of charming company, full of God’s thoughts, a place of peace and safety amid the most exalted grandeur and eager enthusiastic action, a new song, a place of beginnings abounding in first lessons on life, mountain-building, eternal, invincible, unbreakable order.⁹⁵

Such reverential descriptions are quite common in writings about Yosemite and other natural wonders. Even non-believers could embrace parks as hallowed spaces. As John F. Sears argues in *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century*, extraordinary natural landscapes were often seen as “sacred”—but not always explicitly religious—sites. In a nation of multiple faiths, he explains, tourist spots were “the sacred places of a nation or people, not a sect. . . . In a pluralistic society they provided points of mythic and national unity.”⁹⁶

By the 1910s, however, Park Service officials began to fear that spectacular scenery was no longer sufficient to keep masses of tourists interested, occupied, and in the parks for

⁹⁴ James Mason Hutchings, “California for Waterfalls!” *San Francisco Daily California Chronicle*, August 18, 1855 [originally published in the *Mariposa Gazette*, August 9, 1855; this reprint is a slightly abridged version].

⁹⁵ John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1902), 78.

⁹⁶ Sears, *Sacred Places*, 7.

extended periods. Park administrators and concessionaires hoped that providing outdoor activities and recreation would tempt visitors to linger longer. What a tourist *did* in a park began to matter as much as what she saw and felt; engagement became as significant as inspiration. This shift was due, in part, to changing visitor demographics. As Hal Rothman argues, “the cultural dimensions of tourism shifted from the tastes of the elite, the sometimes cumbersome intellectualizing of places such as the Grand Canyon, and toward the more common tastes of ordinary people, often oriented toward recreation. Experience achieved primacy over enlightenment and insight.”⁹⁷ Historian Stanford Demars situates this change as part of a broader shift away from nineteenth-century Romantic ideals. Early tourists liked to see and be seen in the park, with physical exertion generally confined to sightseeing and social activities like dancing. Their romantic, emotional, and intellectual view of nature tourism gave way in the early twentieth century to more active physical engagement with the landscape itself, Demars finds.⁹⁸

Even before the Park Service was founded, R. B. Marshall, Chief Geologist of the U.S. Geological Survey, lobbied to increase the number of athletic and social offerings in Yosemite. At the 1911 National Parks Conference, he memorably declared: “there are no attractions [in Yosemite] save an unkept nature’s wonderland.”⁹⁹ Marshall’s solution? More activities:

⁹⁷ Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains*, 147–148. As Rothman points out, this shift was not confined to national park tourism.

⁹⁸ For more on Romanticism in Yosemite, see Stanford E. Demars, *The Tourist in Yosemite, 1855–1985* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991).

⁹⁹ *Proceedings of the National Park Conference Held at the Yellowstone National Park, September 11 and 12, 1911* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912), 109.

There are any number of people who would travel miles for the pleasure of golf, tennis, open-air concerts, skating, skeeting, sleighing, and similar attractions in the wonderful Yosemite. . . . I believe the Secretary [of the Interior] would be tempted to forget the affairs of state and make at least one trip a year to the Yosemite for a chance to put a ball over the bunker, El Capitan.¹⁰⁰

Five years later, in his 1916 report on the national parks, Mather bemoaned the hurried itinerary of a typical tourist, a schedule that prioritized sightseeing over recreation and play. Although he was discussing Yellowstone, Mather's complaints applied to other national parks as well:

Visitors have always been rushed through Yellowstone, with no encouragement whatever to spend vacation periods in the park. Neither have facilities for making long stays pleasant been provided, although splendid hotels, with every modern convenience, are operated each season. Golf links, tennis courts, swimming pools, and other equipment for outdoor pastime and exercise should be provided by concessions, and the park should be extensively advertised as a place to spend the summer instead of five or six days of hurried sight-seeing under constant pressure to keep moving.¹⁰¹

Mather's vision was reminiscent of a pleasure resort, in which tourists sought out "fun" as well as scenery. He preferred active participation to mere passive gazing, and believed park concessionaires should provide such opportunities for tourists—primarily wealthy ones, if they were expected to remain in the park for large stretches of the summer. Five years later, in a piece about Yosemite, Mather continued his crusade for active engagement in the parks. In the process, he managed to malign European tourists as too passive:

To encourage clean living in God's great out-of-doors should be one of the primary ideals of the [National Park] Service. The European visitor whose ideal vacation so often consists in lounging about a hotel and viewing Nature from the veranda, marvels at the number of people he finds hiking, riding,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Mather, *Progress in the Development of the National Parks*, 10.

swimming, or otherwise engaged in strenuous sports in the Yosemite. Let us encourage this American spirit to be up and doing.¹⁰²

Marshall and Mather's pleas reflected a growing consensus among park officials that concessionaires should provide ample recreational options to keep visitors active and in the parks.

Yosemite's ranger-naturalists regularly led hikes, gave lectures, hosted campfires, and generally attempted to educate visitors about the park and the environment. In contrast, hotels and camps organized a full slate of entertainment activities designed to keep guests busy, though many of these offerings would later be dismissed as mere "cheap amusements." David Curry, the "obstreperous showman" who had co-founded Camp Curry with his wife Jennie, was particularly skilled at organizing memorable entertainments, including nightly campfires and the Firefall.¹⁰³ Curry Village also showed movies, hosted evening programs, and ran a "Kiddie Kamp," complete with a miniature train.¹⁰⁴ By 1919 the camp featured a swimming pool, dance hall, bowling alley, and pool hall. A 1922 nightly schedule promised "Moving Pictures by the Camp Fire. DANCING IN THE AUDITORIUM at 9 P.M. The program is under the personal direction of Carol Weston, and the cooperation of our talented guests is cordially invited. (Auditions gladly arranged by

¹⁰² Mather, "The Ideals and Policy of the National Park Service." This criticism of Europeans idly gazing at nature is reminiscent of earlier characterizations of the wealthy passively viewing the scenery from Pullman cars and luxury hotels.

¹⁰³ Daniel Schaible, Patrick Chapin, and Brian Chilcott, *Camp Curry Historic District Cultural Landscape Report* (Yosemite: National Park Service, 2010), 13. David Curry died in 1917. His relationship with Yosemite officials and the Park Service had often been contentious—his requests for long-term concessions contracts were denied and he made no secret of his contempt for the park bureaucracy. His wife Jennie, known as "Mother Curry," remained an executive of the Curry Camping Company and its successor, the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, until her own death in 1948.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

appointment.)”¹⁰⁵ Although Camp Curry was the hub of social activity, other lodgings offered activities as well. Perhaps most notable was the “Firediver” at the Yosemite Lodge, in which an employee in a fireproof suit was set aflame, then dived into the pool. It was short-lived.

Many of the concessionaire-sponsored activities (bowling, dancing, and so on) were more entertaining than informative, and most were available outside the park. Some critics deemed these “artificial” amusements and worried they were inappropriate for a national park. In 1922 NPS officials raised similar concerns at a Superintendents’ Conference, arguing, “the mission of the national parks is to provide, not cheap amusement, but healthful recreation and to supplement the work of schools by opening the doors of Nature’s laboratory.”¹⁰⁶ Mather and other Park Service personnel beseeched the concessionaires to provide generally wholesome options: “Of course there are those who require ‘artificial’ amusements and there will always be entertainments, dancing, bowling, pool, etc., at the larger hotels, camps, and lodges. Let us not, however, ‘vulgarize’ the parks as has been the accusation of some visitors,” Mather urged.¹⁰⁷ These “amusements” had little redeeming value, according to the NPS, because they were neither educational nor healthy and they had no clear relevance to the park. Thirteen years later, A. E. Demaray, then acting director of the Park Service, made a more pointed plea in a letter to Yosemite’s superintendent:

¹⁰⁵ Camp Curry nightly program, 1922, as shown in the film *Camp Curry Memories* (Finley-Holiday Films, 2005).

¹⁰⁶ “Superintendents’ Resolution on Overdevelopment: Prepared at the National Park Service Conference November 13–17, 1922; Yosemite Park, Calif., with Explanatory Letter,” in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Dilsaver, 58.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen T. Mather, “The Ideals and Policy of the National Park Service.”

National parks must be so administered as to afford a dignified type of entertainment and that any tendency to let entertainment fall into the class of that of beach resorts [is] to be staunchly avoided. No park has been so severely criticized as has Yosemite regarding its tendency toward ‘jazz.’ . . . It is important that instead of our stooping to the level of requests of the public, we set a high standard and make the public appreciate finer things. Certainly we are not interested in attracting the type of public who can only appreciate cheap shoddy entertainment.¹⁰⁸

Since Camp Curry hosted most of the events in question, the criticisms fell disproportionately on the park’s most affordable lodgings and its middle-class guests. Demaray (and others) judged these activities unworthy of a park environment. His paternalistic insistence on helping the public “appreciate finer things” reflected Park Service efforts to maintain an appropriate “park atmosphere,” as explored further in chapter four.

Californian Winter Wonderlands

At the same time Americans were embracing both leisure travel and national parks, California boosters were working to forge a new state identity as a winter sports destination. Yosemite played a notable role in this effort. By the mid-1920s some promoters had begun to publicize the state’s wintry locales. The Sierra Nevada (in Spanish, “the snow-covered mountain range”) contains some of the highest peaks in the country, and was therefore an ideal setting for the newly popular sport of skiing. Yet convincing travelers that California was a wintry wonderland—much less a snow sports paradise—was no small task. Boosters had long boasted about year-round sun as a welcome escape from cold, wet, dreary Eastern

¹⁰⁸ A. E. Demaray to Charles Thomson, February 13, 1934, in Yosemite Public Utility Operators: Yosemite Park and Curry Company—Miscellaneous Correspondence part 11, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1874, RG79, NARA College Park.

winters. In most regions of the state, the climate was ideal for all sorts of outdoor pursuits, including swimming, biking, hiking, and other activities traditionally associated with summer weather. Winter sports certainly did not fit within this sun-drenched narrative. Yet California promoters were eventually able to capitalize on the growing popularity of winter recreation (especially following the 1932 Winter Olympics) and the increase in middle-class leisure travel throughout the country.



Image I-8: St. Moritz's blend of sports, scenery, and glamour lured wealthy tourists from around the world. Photograph courtesy of St. Moritz Tourism / www.stmoritz.ch.

To promote California in winter, boosters frequently drew comparisons to the Old World. Wealthy skiers from around the world flocked to Europe for world-renowned resorts, like those in St. Moritz, Switzerland, and Chamonix, France. The Alps offered spectacular terrain, excellent weather, and outstanding ski schools for tourists wealthy

enough to afford the trip. While American travel boosters and businesses promoted the American West as a stunning natural paradise that equaled or eclipsed the Old World's cultural and architectural heritage, early-twentieth-century winter sports enthusiasts considered Europe's ski areas superior to the New World's, in a sort of inversion of the "See America First" mythos. Nevertheless, California persisted. As discussed in chapter two, Yosemite's bid for the 1932 Winter Olympics was, in part, an effort to prove that American mountains—particularly those in the West—offered similarly impressive winter sports opportunities. "We are waking to the fact that the California Sierra Nevada compares favorably with the world's best-known winter sports centers," a winter carnival program gushed in 1932, "[and] skis and skates are becoming as necessary to Californians as golf clubs and tennis racquets."¹⁰⁹ A 1936 *Los Angeles Times* editorial agreed: "California winter sports should be able to attract as big a patronage as St. Moritz in Switzerland, Chamonix in France, Oslo in Norway or Lake Placid in New York. Indeed, we may improve on one or all of them."¹¹⁰ It was an uphill battle, but by the early 1940s California was home to dozens of ski areas, ranging from small ski hills with no permanent facilities to Sugar Bowl, a large resort co-founded in 1939 by the former director of Yosemite's ski school. These new businesses helped re-brand the state as a year-round tourist destination with climates and activities to suit all tastes.

¹⁰⁹ Program, Second Annual San Joaquin Valley-Sierra Winter Sports Carnival, January 9–10, 1932, p. 1, in Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

¹¹⁰ "California Winter Sports," December 27, 1936, *Los Angeles Times*, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

Yosemite's winter sports program was one of the most successful in the state by the 1930s, as discussed in chapters three and four. With its sunny summers and snowy but relatively mild winters, the park epitomized the combination of spectacular landscape and perpetually pleasant weather ideal for outdoor sports, and thus had the potential to draw visitors to the region throughout the year. California boosters, confident that Yosemite could help expand the state's winter sports industry, urged the Park Service to support informal recreation and to sponsor athletic competitions and festivals in national parks. Superintendent Charles Goff Thomson believed that "Yosemite . . . pioneered winter sports in California," and acknowledged that the recreation program was designed to boost year-round visitation. "A wide miscellany of winter enjoyments have been provided," he explained, "not to produce outstanding champions and great crowds, but to impart a sufficient skill to permit many thousands to enjoy the exhilaration of the Sierra in winter. . . . [and] to spread the appropriate use of the park and its facilities throughout the entire year, instead of the former brief summer season."¹¹¹

Promotional materials neatly illustrate the importance of sports to this shifting conception of winter in Yosemite. Early publicity focused on wintertime views, while largely ignoring the cold. For instance, a 1908 ad for the Yosemite Valley Railroad read: "Thousands have seen [Yosemite] in summer and attest its grandeur. The few who have seen it in Winter praise it for its enhanced beauties."¹¹² Six years later, the YVRR promised

¹¹¹ Charles Thomson to Arno Cammerer, June 18, 1936, p. 2–3, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

¹¹² Yosemite Valley Railroad advertisement, *Pacific Monthly* (1908), accessed May 16, 2014, www.yosemitevalleyrailroad.com/YosemiteValleyRailroad.html.

surprisingly pleasant weather: “Delightful climatic scenic attractions during winter season, lasting throughout JANUARY and FEBRUARY. The general atmospheric condition is clear and dry with plenty of warm sunshine and no wind.”¹¹³ Remarkably, neither ad mentioned snow, which would soon become a key selling point. By the mid-1920s, however, many advertisements for the park billed winter sports as a primary reason to visit, often eclipsing the scenery itself. In 1924 the Yosemite National Park Company advertised “new Yosemite excursions” with snow and sports galore: “whizzing toboggans—jingling sleighbells—and everywhere the snowy majesty of peaks and waterfalls, completely different from anything you ever saw before—that’s Yosemite in Winter.”¹¹⁴ A January 1931 Southern Pacific ad enticed readers to “see this famous valley of natural wonders made doubly beautiful in its winter mantle of ice and snow. Enjoy tobogganing, skiing, skating . . . every variety of winter sport at its best, in settings of unparalleled scenic grandeur.”¹¹⁵ Southern Pacific also promoted Yosemite alongside Lake Tahoe and Truckee, California, in a 1930 ad that featured all three regions and touted their winter carnivals, skiing, skating, tobogganing, snowshoeing, curling, and Yosemite’s Intercollegiate Winter Sports Games.¹¹⁶ Retailers capitalized on the winter sports boom as well. Los Angeles department store J. W.

¹¹³ Yosemite Valley Railroad advertisement, *Out West Magazine* (March 1914), accessed May 16, 2014, www.yosemitevalleyrailroad.com/YosemiteValleyRailroad.html.

¹¹⁴ Yosemite National Park Company advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1924, p. 6. The Yosemite National Park Company (formerly the D. J. Desmond Co.) was a concessionaire that competed with the Curry Camping Company until the NPS forced the two to merge in 1925, forming the Yosemite Park & Curry Company.

¹¹⁵ Southern Pacific advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 1931, p. 6. The ellipses are in the original.

¹¹⁶ Southern Pacific advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1930, p. 6.

Robinson Co., for example, advertised winter sports outfits with a photograph of a Yosemite ski run and the suggestion to “spend a few moments with an instructor who grew up in the Alps if you want to hear impressive praise of California’s snow slopes.” The snowy sight of a national park was apparently ideal for selling \$25.00 chintz-lined flannel “skating costumes.”¹¹⁷

Sports Tourism

Sports tourism has grown dramatically in the last three decades, both as an industry and an academic field, yet scholars have had some difficulty defining it.¹¹⁸ Sean Gammon and Tom Robinson developed a conceptual framework in 1997 that has been widely adopted and adapted by others. Their model distinguishes between “sports tourism”—in which “sport is the prime motivation to travel, though the touristic element may act to reinforce the overall experience,” and “tourism sport,” where visitors travel “outside their usual environment and participat[e] in, actively or passively, a competitive or recreational sport as a secondary activity.”¹¹⁹ The key difference lies in the tourist’s primary motivation for travel. Within these two main categories, Gammon and Robinson further distinguish between “soft” and “hard” forms. Hard sports tourism requires competition, but tourists can either compete personally or watch others do so (at the Olympics, for instance). Soft sports

¹¹⁷ J. W. Robinson Co. advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1940, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ “After 20 Years, What are the Big Questions for Sports Tourism Research?” (editorial), *Journal of Sport and Tourism* 19, no. 1 (2014): 1.

¹¹⁹ Sean Gammon and Tom Robinson, “Sport and Tourism: A Conceptual Framework,” *Journal of Sport Tourism* 8, no. 1 (2003): 23–24.

tourism is “active recreational participation in sport” (like running a half marathon in a new city). In hard tourism sport, visitors “passively or actively participate in sport” as a secondary aspect of their travels, while in the soft version, tourists “engage in some minor form of sport or leisure . . . [but] their participation is purely incidental.”¹²⁰ Notably, any given sport or activity could fit into multiple categories, depending on the context and the tourist’s motivations.¹²¹ For instance, one could travel to Sochi, Russia, to watch Olympic skiing, visit St. Moritz specifically to ski with friends, or go to Lake Tahoe to sightsee, but hit the slopes for a few hours between scenic tours. The model provides an important reminder that tourists’ goals vary widely, and that there is a significant difference between, say, flying thousands of miles to support one’s national team at the World Cup and joining a pick-up soccer game with locals while traveling on a family road trip.

Some scholars have criticized Gammon and Robinson “for assuming that either sport or tourism takes a dominant role.”¹²² Mike Weed and Chris Bull proposed a broader framework in 2009, arguing that sports tourism “aris[es] from the unique interaction of activity, people and place.”¹²³ This is certainly true, but could apply equally to virtually any

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ While the terms “play” and “sport” are sometimes used interchangeably, there are significant distinctions. Allen Guttman, in his pioneering work *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*, defines “play” as “any nonutilitarian physical or intellectual activity pursued for its own sake.” Organized play (“games”) tends to have rules and sometimes involves competition. Sports, he argues, are “‘playful’ physical contests, that is . . . nonutilitarian contests which include an important measure of physical as well as intellectual skill.” Here I generally follow Guttman’s characterizations while tracing the shift in conception of parklands from “sacred spaces” to “playgrounds” and in discussing the development of organized sports and recreation programs (Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1978], 3, 7).

¹²² Mike Weed and Chris Bull, *Sports Tourism: Participants, Policy and Providers* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009), 112.

¹²³ Ibid., 63.

form of tourism, such as visiting public history sites, winetasting, or following a band. Other scholars worry that all of the above models are too expansive, and that incidental recreation, such as mini golf in a seaside resort town, should not qualify as any form of sports tourism. “Tourism sport” is also difficult to quantify, and thus is often ignored by scholars. Much of the current literature focuses instead on major events or facilities. The Olympic Games, the World Cup, and many other international and national sports competitions have evolved into elaborate productions that drive tourism and contribute to (or harm) the local economy. Even infrastructure can inspire tourism, with diehard fans making pilgrimages to their teams’ stadiums or participating in fantasy sports camps at training facilities.

Early-twentieth-century Yosemite concessionaires staged plenty of activities and events that fit within the many modes of sports tourism. Yet it is more instructive to think of tourists’ athletic experiences as points on a spectrum rather than trying to force them into one of four boxes in a model. Some tourists primarily sought out spectacular vistas and happened to watch a ski-joring race or two as well. Others journeyed to Yosemite specifically to compete in ski races at Badger Pass, but also enjoyed the pleasant views on the drive in. Still others may have planned on sightseeing for the entire vacation, but unexpectedly discovered the thrill of tobogganing. In other words, Gammon and Robinson’s framework, while a useful starting point for exploring sports tourism, can be too confining. A 1932 survey of Yosemite visitors, for instance, found that “many [respondents] expressed the opinion that they did not know which lure was the greater, the winter sports or the scenic beauty of the Valley in winter, but that the combination of the two was an

irresistible attraction.”¹²⁴ These tourists could not pinpoint which was a more important motivator in the winter. In general, recreation was not a principle goal in the park’s early years, but as the YPCC expanded its winter sports program in the 1920s through the 1940s, many visitors made a point of spending extra time playing in the park.

John Urry’s research on leisure travel provides a notable contrast to scholarship on sports tourism. Urry famously developed the concept of the tourist gaze, which emphasizes the primarily visual nature of tourism.¹²⁵ Some critics argued that his thesis made tourism a rather one-dimensional experience; Urry later responded by noting that “obviously, tourists do all sorts of things while ‘away’ and it was never my intention to suggest that various other senses are not stimulated on holiday.”¹²⁶ Visitors direct the gaze at geographic features, buildings, plants, and so on that are different from their regular surroundings, and often reproduce the gaze via photographs and videos. Tourists generally arrive in a location with a set of expectations about a place, based on stereotypes or reality, and search for “authenticity” based on those preconceptions.

Urry’s theory is most commonly associated with cultural and heritage travel but it can certainly be applied to nature tourism as well. Many national park tourists crave an “authentic” experience immersed in “nature,” based on faulty assumptions that parks encompass largely unaltered virgin landscapes. Cameras in tow, they seek out both literal

¹²⁴ “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 1–2, in Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

¹²⁵ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 1990).

¹²⁶ John Urry, “The Tourist Gaze ‘Revisited,’” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 36, no. 2 (November 1992): 172.

visual spectacles—such as waterfalls, bears, and cliffs—and metaphorical and actual signs representative of the location—like a uniformed ranger or the NPS logo on a park entrance sign. Urry notes that media, boosters, local governments, and other parties help direct the tourist gaze by shaping expectations of a location; this is certainly the case for national parks, which have been widely promoted by both private and public organizations. Similarly, Rebecca Solnit has explored the ways in which parks are “conceptualized as a work of art,” concluding that “if nature is a painting, then we are viewers.”¹²⁷ The Park Service helps direct this gaze by building trails to and around specific views, designating scenic viewpoints (like “Tunnel View” in Yosemite, whose very name promises a visual treat), and, in many parks, offering art and photography classes.¹²⁸ Tourists are taught to frame the landscape (and sometimes the flora and fauna) in both their pictures and their memories. The first Kodak camera for amateurs was sold in 1881, allowing visitors to both consume and record the scenery. Hordes of camera-toting visitors then (as now) reframed travel itineraries as quests for the perfect shot, the so-called “Kodak moment.” Travel was—and is—understood, at least in part, as an “accumulation of visual images to be surveyed, collected, and consumed.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Solnit, *Savage Dreams*, 263.

¹²⁸ As early as 1865, in a report on the management of the Yosemite state park, landscape architect Frederick Law made clear that paths and trails should be thoughtfully arranged, “leading to points of view which would only be accessible to persons on foot,” so that pedestrians could get off the dusty stage roads and view the scenery (Olmsted, “The Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove,” 26). Yosemite visitors can choose from a wide range of photography classes led by experts from the park’s Ansel Adams Gallery (a store in the Valley once run by the Adams family) and take classes at the Yosemite Art Center.

¹²⁹ Shaffer, *See America First*, 272. Consuming and documenting views did not directly impact the natural resources under protection. The caveat, of course, is that tourists can harm the environment simply by being there, by trampling plants, compacting soil, adding to car pollution, and so on. But the act of taking a picture itself does no harm, and thus does not compound environmental damage that would occur whether or not a visitor is taking a picture.

Urry also argues that simply being in a visually-impressive space helps elevate otherwise mundane activities. While on vacation, even “shopping, strolling, sitting having a drink, or swimming, appear special when conducted against a striking visual backcloth.”¹³⁰ In other words, the ordinary is rendered extraordinary in the right setting. This was clearly the case for many tourists in Yosemite. Most early-twentieth-century visitors would never consider skiing mundane, but for some Americans, a dip in the pool, a hike, or even a ride on a sled were normal activities. Swimming in the Merced river, hiking up Half Dome, or flying down a snow-covered Valley slope, on the other hand, were exceptional. The Park Service recognized that this combination of spectacular setting and sports activities was important to visitors. The 1932 survey of tourists reported that “according to the visitors themselves, Yosemite has everything that any of the other winter resorts can offer and in addition the attraction of unsurpassed scenic grandeur during the winter months.”¹³¹ This is especially notable since most winter resorts are located in mountain settings, and therefore offer their own impressive scenery. Yosemite, however, provided visitors with sports amidst iconic and easy-to-recognize backdrops, thereby elevating the experience above that of a trip to an “average” mountain located outside of a national park.

Other scholars have highlighted the multi-sensory nature of tourism, something Urry himself has acknowledged, although he continues to view the visual as paramount to the traveler’s experience. David Crouch, for instance, notes that simply by “‘being there’ we discover a panoply of participation: the feel of the wind, and its smell . . . the sounds around

¹³⁰ Urry, “The Tourist Gaze ‘Revisited,’” 172.

¹³¹ “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 31.

us and through us; the feel of the ground over which we tread.”¹³² His stress on the physicality of tourism is especially relevant to sports tourism. If just being present in a vacation location provokes such a full-body reaction, actually playing in the landscape presents an even more immersive experience. Crouch does not deny the importance of the tourist gaze, but rather stresses the need to look beyond mere passive interaction with the surroundings. The National Park Service has long recognized the differences between such forms of tourism—particularly in connection with athletic activities—though it did not articulate the issue in quite the same terms. By the 1940s NPS officials urged park visitors to participate in sports activities for their own enjoyment and health, rather than merely watch as others performed athletic feats at competitions and winter carnivals. The tourist gaze was appropriate for viewing landscape, but sports demanded more than a mere detached, spectatorial gaze.

For a century and a half, tourists have converged on Yosemite in search of spectacular nature. They were drawn to the park by promises of wonder, like Robert Sterling Yard’s 1916 description of the park: “[Yosemite’s] 1,100 square miles contain scenic features of beauty so unusual and variety so wide that adequate description reads like romance.”¹³³ Yet national parks evolved into public playgrounds in the first half of the twentieth century. As domestic travel increased throughout the country, Yosemite experienced a surge in visitation and park officials and concessionaires expanded programs to keep tourists engaged in the park. Recreational activities and spectator events—

¹³² David Crouch, “Unravelling Space and Landscape in Leisure’s Identities,” in *Landscapes of Leisure: Space, Place and Identities*, ed. Sean Gammon and Sam Elkington (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 16.

¹³³ Robert Sterling Yard, *Glimpses of Our National Parks* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), 16.

particularly those offered in the winter—were so successful that they helped transform Yosemite into a year-round destination. Even more importantly, winter sports helped shape the Park Service’s policies on public usage. Playing in the park was not mere child’s play. Rather, sports and spectacle played a critical role in shaping perceptions of the National Park System, of California tourism, and of the balance between preservation and “enjoyment” of protected landscapes.

Chapter One: Playing in “A Fairyland of White”

Careening down a winding, snow-covered slide along the southern wall of Yosemite Valley one night in January 1928, E. C. Solinsky likely had a spectacular, moon-lit view of Half Dome. However, as his out-of-control toboggan sailed over the edge of a groomed snowbank and slammed into a tree, he may have been too busy to notice. Solinsky, the assistant to the park superintendent, was well-versed in the park’s winter sports program, but had snuck the toboggan onto the ash can slide, a course meant for slower sleds. His companions that night—National Park Service Assistant Director Horace Albright, Yosemite’s Chief Engineer Frank A. Kittredge, and a few other friends—were likely also familiar with the park’s recent rash of sled crashes. Solinsky’s ride (and his broken leg) was yet another reminder of the powerful draw of nature and the occasional pain of playing in it.¹

At the start of the twentieth century, “sports” in Yosemite consisted primarily of informal activities such as hiking, horseback riding, and swimming in the Merced river. Most tourists likely spent at least a portion of their visit exploring the great outdoors on foot, since some of the best-known attractions are tucked away from the main roads. Though sightseeing with a side of exercise has long been an important element of a park visit, the Yosemite Park and Curry Company and the National Park Service introduced more

¹ The accident is described in *Superintendent’s Monthly Report for January 1928* (February 7, 1928), 10, in *Superintendent’s Monthly Reports*, NPS Archives at El Portal (Hereafter cited as: *Supt. Report for [Month Year]* ([Date]).)

deliberately physical forms of recreation, primarily in the 1920s and 1930s.² During the same period, park attendance increased dramatically, especially during the winter. The park became a haven for cold-weather adventure-seekers, exercise enthusiasts, and active families who used the landscape as either a facility or a backdrop for their athletic pursuits. These visitors challenged the Park Service's mandate far more than those who traipsed gently, and briefly, through the landscape. Sports and recreation would eventually force Yosemite officials and the NPS to reevaluate the very meaning of "public use" in a protected landscape.

"Enjoyment of the people"

Ambiguous language in the establishment of the state park and in its incorporation into the National Park System helped spawn later conflicts over sports in the park. The 1864 Yosemite Grant specified, in part, that the state-managed park would be open to "public use, resort, and recreation," a maddeningly abstract endorsement of outdoor activities.³ When Congress established a national park in the area surrounding the Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees in 1890, the language was even less clear. The bill "set apart [the land] as reserved forest settlement" under the management of the secretary of the interior, who would "provide for the preservation from injury of all timber, mineral deposits,

² Of course one tourist's easy morning jaunt is another's grueling endurance march, so the terms "recreation" and "physical activity" are relative. Here I will focus on activities in which, for most tourists, some form of play or physical exercise was a goal and not merely a consequence.

³ "An Act Authorizing a Grant to the State of California of the 'Yo-Semite Valley,' and of the Land Embracing the 'Mariposa Big Tree Grove,' Approved June 30, 1864 (13 Stat. 325)," in *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Lary M. Dilsaver (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 11.

natural curiosities, or wonders within said reservation, and their retention in their natural condition.”⁴ The Secretary could grant leases to concessionaires to provide “buildings for the accommodation of visitors” and revenue from those leases would be used for the “construction of roads and paths.”⁵ The establishing act never directly discussed sports, recreation, or “resort,” yet Congress clearly intended the public to use the parks, and thus explicitly allowed for the construction of accommodations, roads, and trails. In contrast, the act establishing Yellowstone National Park in 1872 *had* specifically mentioned public use, though only very briefly. The language regarding land preservation, concessions, and road construction was nearly identical to that in Yosemite’s establishing act, but the Yellowstone bill also declared that the land was being “set apart as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.”⁶ There is no evidence that such language was deliberately omitted from the Yosemite act or that Congress hoped Yosemite would be any less a “pleasuring-ground” than its northern counterpart. Yet the lack of clarity certainly did not help park officials hoping to craft consistent policies on public use.⁷ More than half a

⁴ “An Act to Set Apart Certain Tracts of Land in the State of California as Forest Reservations,” October 1, 1890, Chapter 1263, Session 1, 26 Stat. 650, p. 651, accessed May 16, 2015, <http://legisworks.org/congress/51/session-1/chap-1263.pdf>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “An Act to Set Apart a Certain Tract of Land Lying Near the Headwaters of the Yellowstone River as a Public Park, Approved March 1, 1872 (17 Stat. 32),” in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Dilsaver, 28.

⁷ Despite the more specific language, the “pleasuring-ground” debate still rages in Yellowstone as well. For instance, a decades-long controversy over snowmobile use in that park began in the 1970s and continued well into the 2010s. One side argued that the vehicles allow large numbers of people to visit otherwise inaccessible winter landscapes, while others contended that snowmobiles and similar contraptions disturb the park atmosphere and that visitors should instead tour the park on skis and snowshoes. In this case, recreation (via skis and snowshoes) was the less environmentally destructive alternative, but the debate over land preservation versus visitor pleasure was based on the same fundamental conflict that has shaped arguments over recreation in Yosemite and other parks. For summaries of the Yellowstone controversy, see

century after Yosemite state park was established, the 1916 Organic Act directed the newly-established National Park Service to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life [in national parks] and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”⁸ Instead of clarifying the issue, the term “enjoyment” left the question of public use open for interpretation. As a California park and as a national park, Yosemite had the dubious distinction of confusing officials and the public under both state and federal governments.

Two years after the Park Service was established, Secretary of the Interior Franklin Knight Lane issued a letter which attempted to clarify his department’s position on park recreation. “All outdoor sports which may be maintained consistently with the observation of the safeguards thrown around the national parks by law will be heartily endorsed and aided wherever possible,” the letter explained.⁹ It also predicted that “mountain climbing, horseback riding, walking, motoring, swimming, boating, and fishing will ever be the favorite sports. Winter sports will be developed in the parks that are accessible throughout the year.

Elizabeth Shogren, “15 Years Of Wrangling Over Yellowstone Snowmobiles Ends,” National Public Radio October 22, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2013/10/22/239705610/new-rules-mean-more-and-cleaner-snowmobiles-in-yellowstone>; and “Yellowstone in Winter: The Role of Snowmobiles and Snowcoaches,” National Park Service, accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/management/role.htm>.

⁸ “An Act to Establish a National Park Service, and for Other Purposes, Approved August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535),” in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Dilsaver, 46.

⁹ Franklin Lane to Stephen Mather, May 13, 1918, “Secretary Lane’s Letter on National Park Management,” in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Dilsaver, 50. According to Dilsaver, “Lane’s” letter was actually written by Horace Albright (Dilsaver, “The Early Years, 1864–1918,” in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Dilsaver, 10).

Hunting will not be permitted in any national park.”¹⁰ The document suggested that sports and preservation were compatible goals by opening with a list of three main Park Service objectives: “First that the national parks must be maintained in absolutely unimpaired form for the use of future generations as well as those of our own time; second, that they are set apart for the use, observation, health, and pleasure of the people; and third, that the national interest must dictate all decisions affecting public or private enterprise in the parks.”¹¹ In other words, although the Secretary explicitly sanctioned a number of recreational activities, this approval was contingent on the parks’ continued commitment to preservation. Seven years later another secretary of the interior, Hubert Work, reiterated Lane’s endorsement of sports, nearly word-for-word. Work also noted that winter sports were already increasing in significance: “Winter sports are being rapidly developed in the parks and this form of recreation promises to become an important recreational use.”¹² Both documents argued that sports were acceptable and even ideal in park settings, but failed to explain how to reconcile public use and preservation. Nevertheless, there were apparently no major objections to the recommendations for more sports activities, probably because the statements offered vague endorsements rather than specific plans for building infrastructure.

Following the Interior Department’s lead, the National Park Service initially supported most forms of recreation in the parks. NPS Director Stephen Mather heartily

¹⁰ Lane to Mather, May 13, 1918, p. 50.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹² Hubert Work, “Statement of National Park Policy—Secretary Work, March 11, 1925,” in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Dilsaver, 63–64.

endorsed recreational facilities, arguing that a resort-like setting would encourage visitors to linger in parks. He acknowledged that natural beauty alone was not sufficient to occupy tourists for long periods and believed that “golf links, tennis courts, swimming pools, and other equipment for outdoor pastime and exercise should be provided by concessions.”¹³ The NPS feared that visitors would feel “the initial experience is not long sustained when it is nothing more than amazement at a stupendous visual project,” as Joseph Sax notes.¹⁴ Notably, Mather was asking concessionaires to construct sports infrastructure, and not merely to provide equipment for less-invasive recreational activities, such as rafting and cross-country skiing. He knew that high visitation statistics—inflated by extended vacation periods—could increase Congressional appropriations for the Park Service. It was a practical approach to a difficult problem: promoting visitation could boost public awareness and governmental funding, thereby enabling the NPS to better preserve the parks. And if recreational facilities could encourage the public to linger in a park, Mather reasoned, then concessionaires should be encouraged to build them.

During a 1922 NPS conference held in Yosemite, park superintendents issued a similar statement urging development in the parks. The “Superintendents’ Resolution on Overdevelopment” argued, repeatedly, that “the best interests of the nation will be served by a more adequate development of the national parks.” In particular, plentiful roads and accommodations would help the parks “better fulfill their mission of healthful recreation

¹³ Stephen T. Mather, *Progress in the Development of the National Parks* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916), 10.

¹⁴ Joseph L. Sax, *Mountains without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 87.

and education to a larger number of the people.”¹⁵ The statement stressed that access to the parks was crucial: visitors should be able to take advantage of their shared national spaces, though some areas must remain lightly- or un-developed, in order to preserve at least some “wild” space. Moreover, within the parks, “outdoor recreation should supplant cheap amusements.”¹⁶ However, like many previous documents, the resolution failed to define appropriate forms of recreation, leaving individual parks to establish their own activities.

“Playgrounds for the American people”

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, promoters and officials began using the term “playground” to describe various national parks, including Yosemite. This label represented an important change: the parks were increasingly billed as places in which to actively engage with nature, not merely stand in awe of it. In contrast, nineteenth-century Americans had envisioned landscapes like Yosemite’s as sacred spaces. These outdoor “temples” were frequently viewed as secular American counterparts to Europe’s revered (but man-made) cathedrals and historical sites. In his pioneering work *Sacred Spaces*, John Sears argues that nineteenth-century tourist attractions like Yosemite “assumed some of the functions of sacred places in traditional societies,” offering visitors spaces for contemplation and reflection amidst the sublime grandeur of western landscapes.¹⁷ Tourists often spoke of

¹⁵ “Superintendents’ Resolution on Overdevelopment: Prepared at the National Park Service Conference November 13–17, 1922; Yosemite Park, Calif., with Explanatory Letter,” in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Lary M. Dilsaver (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994)57.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁷ John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 5.

these wide open spaces as “uniquely American,” and typically spent most of their visits viewing the park, rather than directly engaging with it. After all, the federal government had initially set aside national parks to preserve exceptional landscapes, and most organized activities—such as stagecoach tours, horseback rides, and ranger-led hikes—were designed to showcase the scenery. Although the distinction between “seeing” and “doing” was muddled by the fact that sight-seeing required some physical effort in the pre-automobile era, the primary goal of such activities was to view nature, rather than to play in it.



Image 1-1: Group on horseback, near Nevada Falls. Unknown date, by 1918. Photograph by George Fiske. Courtesy National Park Service, NPS History Collection, HFCA # HPC-000532.

The twentieth-century emergence of the term “playground,” however, represented a gradual break from this older conception of visiting nature. The term’s adoption coincided with an increase in park visitation, and both government officials and park promoters embraced the label. In his 1916 report on the parks, Director Mather assured Secretary Lane that he was busy “exercising administrative supervision of the national parks and general

control of their development and operation as playgrounds for the American people.”¹⁸ Mather used the term only twice in his report, and in neither instance did he mention any type of sport or recreation.¹⁹ Here, “playground” was a relatively abstract label, connoting scenic landscapes welcoming vacationers with visitor facilities. Promoters initially used the term in a similar manner. Montana’s Glacier National Park, for example, was labeled “America’s next great playground” in 1910 by conservationist William T. Hornaday and billed as the “Playground of the Northwest” the following year by developer Louis W. Hill.²⁰ The change in conception from sacred space to playground was gradual, both within and outside the government, and initially the term referred to general tourist infrastructure more often than to modern sports or recreational offerings. In those early years of the twentieth century, park officials and concessionaires focused primarily on building hotels, camps, roads, and other facilities necessary to accommodate guests.

Most parks initially offered few organized outdoor activities, most of which were as practical as they were pleasurable. For instance, the Great Northern Railway (the primary concessionaire at Glacier) carried visitors to the park and coordinated a series of activities including horseback riding and boating—forms of sightseeing that could double as recreation. In Yosemite at the dawn of the century, options for recreation were similarly limited, and simply arriving in the park was a form of exercise for visitors who endured

¹⁸ Mather, *Progress in the Development of the National Parks*, 3.

¹⁹ In his 1916 report, Mather used the term in passing to describe the benefits of building new gates to mark the entrances to the parks: “it is with a thrill of pride in our great national playgrounds that the average visitor passes through these gates” (Mather, *Progress in the Development of the National Parks*, 9).

²⁰ C. W. Buchholtz, “The National Park as a Playground,” *Journal of Sport History* 5, no. 3 (Winter 1978): 23–24. Hill’s father James J. Hill was a railroad tycoon, so Louis had certainly witnessed firsthand the power of salesmanship in American travel and tourism.

arduous stagecoach and horseback rides into the valley. For late nineteenth-century tourists, such modes of transportation to and through the park were physically strenuous, but hardly playful.

Recreational options increased in several parks in the 1910s, but many of the offerings were indoor activities that were widely available elsewhere. For instance, “informal” dancing events were quite popular at the Glacier hotels by 1918. Yosemite’s Camp Curry gradually built a veritable entertainment and recreation complex, complete with croquet and tennis courts (1902), a 5,500 square-foot dance pavilion (1913), a 3,600 square-foot swimming pool (1913), a bowling alley (1918), and a pool hall (by 1921).²¹ Other hotels and camps added similar facilities in the 1910s and 1920s. More sedentary Curry amusements included an outdoor movie screen, candy store, photography studio, and soda fountain. These amenities kept visitors within the camp and hotel complexes—giving tourists a view of nature, but little direct interaction with it. This eventually led to some criticism that such activities were not suitable for a national park, but there were few serious objections to the activities before the 1930s, and even then, the primary concerns related to overcrowding. For instance, NPS Acting Director Arthur Demaray complained in 1939 that “the concentration of people around Camp Curry and the upper part of the Valley has attracted some unfavorable comment.” But instead of suggesting a reduction in Curry accommodations or facilities, he recommended reopening a dance pavilion at Yosemite

²¹ Daniel Schaible, Patrick Chapin, and Brian Chilcott, *Camp Curry Historic District Cultural Landscape Report* (Yosemite: National Park Service, 2010), 177, 179, 183, 184. There was also at least one nineteenth-century dance floor: in the mid-1870s enterprising saloon operator William Howard built a forty-by-sixty-foot dance platform over Mirror Lake, creating “the liveliest location in the Valley until the [state park] Commissioners shut him down in 1879” (Ibid., 40).

Lodge to draw away some of the Curry crowds.²² Not until 1955 did the Park Service begin to earnestly cut down on amenities in Camp Curry, and even then it was crowding—and not the potential for environmental damage—that initially drove the change.²³

Dancing, billiards, and other indoor activities remained popular for decades, but by the late 1910s many park officials and concessionaires believed that introducing organized outdoor sports would lure in more visitors, particularly during the winter. Tourists had already taken to the snow and ice, snowshoeing through the Valley, skating on frozen rivers, and sliding down slopes. Like a modern playground, these activities were fun for fun's sake. The Yosemite Park and Curry Company and the Park Service recognized that outdoor recreation could both entertain visitors and allow them to physically engage with the great outdoors. Such sports became part of a conscious effort to shape national parks' development as tourist destinations. No longer would the parks attract visitors merely with dazzling "sacred" landscapes; instead, Yosemite and its counterparts invited tourists to play in Americans' shared public space.

The park advertised winter sports as important elements of an "all-year playground" in an attempt to attract visitors with physical activities in all seasons. Such promotional efforts were effective, as *Motor West* reported enthusiastically in 1920: "The visit of nearly 50 persons of importance . . . to Yosemite National Park in the last week of January signifies

²² Arthur Demaray to Harold Ickes, June 13, 1939, as quoted in Schaible, Chapin, and Chilcott, *Camp Curry Historic District Cultural Landscape Report*, 66.

²³ *Ibid.*, 70–71. In 1955, for instance, the NPS convinced the Company to reduce the number of bicycles available for rental to 350. The Park Service also asked the YPCC to "'tighten up' on modern dancing at the [Curry dance] Pavilion" in order to bore younger visitors into apathetically avoiding the dance hall (*Ibid.*).

wide propaganda for that national playground as an all-year resort.”²⁴ Thanks to nature, the concessionaire, and the NPS, the Valley boasted both unique scenery and outdoor activities in every season. A 1932 report on winter sports in the Park quoted several satisfied visitors and noted that, based on their remarks, “one cannot help but get the impression that the Valley is very dear to the hearts of many. We have a sacred trust in keeping it the finest, cleanest and best managed all-year playground in the West.”²⁵ Yosemite businesses, most notably the YPCC, also embraced the year-round playground theme. “Yosemite National Park, California’s All-Year Playground,” appeared with a picture of Half Dome in the YPCC seal, and “California’s world-famous all-year scenic playground” graced the masthead of the Yosemite Transportation System’s *Monthly Bulletin from Yosemite National Park*.²⁶ Both business interests and the NPS were embracing national parks’ role as spaces to play, and not just to see.

Anne Farrar Hyde documented this shift from sacred space to playground in her innovative study of Sierra Club photo albums. In 1901 the Club, a group best known for championing nature preservation, launched a series of annual outings in which 100–200 members took month-long excursions to scenic landscapes such as Yosemite. Hyde found that pictures from the earliest trips focused solely on spectacular scenery, while later albums

²⁴ “Huge Plans for Yosemite Loom,” *Motor West*, February 1, 1920, 40.

²⁵ National Park Service, “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 33, in Winter Sports—Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal, Ca.

²⁶ *Annual Report of the Yosemite Park and Curry Co.*, 1938, in Curry Family—Sargent File 1938–1980, Box 4, YPCC Series 4, Subseries 3, NPS Archives at El Portal; and Yosemite Transportation System, *Monthly Bulletin from Yosemite National Park*, November 1930, in appendix of *Supt. Report for October 1930* (November 2, 1930).

showed participants scaling mountains, playing in the snow, or otherwise confronting and playing in nature. Although the initial trips involved some rigorous physical activity, it was usually in the form of hiking, climbing, or riding between locations, not recreation in the more modern sense. Later albums show an embrace of “fun” activities (like a 1912 snowball fight) and portray a shift in how the participants visualized and documented their experiences in nature. During the Club’s first annual outing, to Yosemite in 1901, “the Sierrans, awed and intimidated by the wilderness, ventured into it with trepidation,” Hyde explained. “They hoped to learn of the mysteries of nature and responded to its challenges with wonder and respect.” But by the end of the decade, the photos told a different story:

Later, the wilderness evoked a new reaction from the Sierrans. They met its challenges with vigorous activity rather than dumb awe. The Outing participants conquered mountains and recorded their presence in the landscape. Finally [after 1915], the wilderness, now conquered, evolved into a place for people to play . . . For its users, the wilderness had changed from a temple to a playground.²⁷

Hyde dated the last change to approximately 1915, just prior to the Park Service’s founding and Mather’s endorsement of concession-led recreation. The “play” was organized by the Club itself, rather than park or concession officials. Sierra Club members, often pioneers in interacting with nature, used parks as playgrounds (in the modern sense of sites of physical recreation) before average tourists had many opportunities to do so. The relatively small size of their constituency—and Club members’ general support for physical exertion—made it relatively easy for Club officers to plan recreational activities. However, the change in picture topics might also reflect the fact that participants had grown more accustomed to the

²⁷ Anne Farrar Hyde, “Temples and Playgrounds: The Sierra Club in the Wilderness 1901–1922,” *California History* 66, no. 3 (September 1987): 219.

outings, more comfortable with each other and their surroundings, and more animated in front of the camera. Or perhaps the albums' compilers felt a newfound desire to remember the people as well as the places. Was the shift a reflection of changes in activities, in the types of photographs taken, or in the types of pictures included? Whatever the cause, the photographs provide one example of a broader trend toward viewing parks as recreational spaces, both in the park and when remembering a visit after the fact.

Early written accounts appear to support Hyde's conclusions. For instance, Francis Fultz detailed his experiences on the 1907 Club outing to the Sierras (including Yosemite) in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*. Clearly awed by the landscape and "pleased beyond expression at the opportunities offered to see the region," he portrayed the Sierras as a scenic wonderland, rather than an active playground.²⁸ He "had expected to do considerable 'hiking' and to attempt some climbing of mountains" and "saw much more of the High Sierra than [he] thought was possible in the time allotted, a result only attributable to the previous careful planning of the Outing." If the party engaged in any other recreational activities, Fultz did not bother to note them, and he mentioned hiking and climbing only in the context of sightseeing.²⁹ Written accounts of later Club outings mentioned swimming, riding, and a few other activities in a more playful context, but the authors generally concentrated on the social and educational aspects of the trips, such as campfires and lectures by nature experts. These stories make clear that the Sierra Club emphasized camaraderie and appreciation for the great outdoors on its outings. Later accounts do not explicitly portray parks as

²⁸ Francis M. Fultz, "An Easterner's Impression of a Sierra Club Outing," *Sierra Club Bulletin* VI, no. 4 (January 1908): 256.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

playgrounds, but they are less purely devout in tone toward the landscape. Taken together, the albums and accounts reflect an understanding that the parks were to be actively enjoyed, and not merely reverentially observed. As Hyde put it, “The Sierrans now conquered nature’s wonders instead of worshipping them.”³⁰ If a group devoted to protecting nature could view Yosemite as a recreational space, it is no surprise that average visitors would also come to see the park as a place to play, as well as to be inspired.

This shift in conceptions from “sacred space” to playground is notable, but of course the two views of national parks are not mutually exclusive. While concessionaires and the NPS added more recreational options in the early twentieth century, tourists continued to seek inspiration in the landscape. Many activities simultaneously highlighted the natural scenery, allowed for contemplation, and provided exercise. In *Mountains without Handrails*, Joseph Sax notes that backpacking, mountain climbing, fishing, and similar pursuits can combine personal reflection with physical engagement, and he labels these experiences “reflective” or “contemplative” recreation. Visitors engaged in such activities “range from the purely contemplative wanderer in the woods who, like Thoreau or John Muir, has the capacity to detach himself from social convention and structured activity, to the agile climber arduously working his way to the meaning of the summit.”³¹ Although parks were increasingly viewed as playgrounds, it remained impossible to separate outdoor physical activities from their “sacred” surroundings. The very landscapes so often portrayed as

³⁰ Hyde, “Temples and Playgrounds,” 215.

³¹ Sax, *Mountains without Handrails*, 45.

“temples” and “cathedrals” in the nineteenth century could still inspire visitors, even those who sought out sports and recreation.

Using backpacking as an example, Sax notes that direct interactions with nature offer an “intensity” of experience in part because they demand physical exertion and adaptation to the environment. In contrast, merely touring through a park in a car or remaining in a resort complex for most of one’s vacation lacks “intensity” and provides an insulated experience.³² Sax argues that encouraging contemplative recreation “should be a primary function of national parks. Rather than seeking mainly to serve the wide variety of recreational preferences visitors bring with them, park managers [should] encourage all visitors . . . to try more challenging and demanding recreation.”³³ Clearly, neither the NPS nor park concessionaires could or should cater to every visitor’s recreational interests, but more practical considerations (safety, cost, environmental impact, and so on) dictate which activities are offered far more often than an official federal endorsement of certain “challenging” or “demanding” options. Park officials are responsible for protecting the land and allowing the public to use it, not for determining which forms of exercise the public *should* embrace.

Summer Sports

This dissertation focuses primarily on winter sports, which played a particularly significant role in promoting park tourism and in guiding national Park Service policies on

³² Ibid., 31.

³³ Ibid., 61.

public use. Summer sports were also popular, but many of these activities (with a few notable exceptions, such as rock climbing) were widely available outside the park. Biking and swimming might be more enticing with a mountain backdrop, but they can still be enjoyed elsewhere. Skiing, sledding, and figure skating were more exotic pursuits, at least for most visitors.

According to Ansel Adams, the park's surroundings made its wide range of activities irresistible. "Summer is playtime in Yosemite, he wrote, "the pure mountain air is filled with the fragrance of pine and cedar, distilled by a warm sun in cloudless skies. Hiking, riding, fishing, swimming, golf, tennis . . . all have an added zest in this ideal climate and grand setting of natural beauty."³⁴ Swimming in the Merced River, Mirror Lake, or other water holes was always a crowd-pleaser. Pools in Camp Curry and the hotels also provided a convenient (if less scenic) option for those preferred to stay close to "home." Golf was available at two hotels. Wawona still boasts a nine-hole course that in 1918, the first regulation golf course in the Sierras.³⁵ The Ahwahnee course (1930) provided a stunning Valley view and, according to Superintendent Charles Thomson, "add[ed] rather than detract[ed] from the appearance of the hotel area."³⁶

³⁴ Ansel Adams, *The Four Seasons in Yosemite National Park: A Photographic Story of Yosemite's Spectacular Scenery*, ed. Stanley E. Plumb (Los Angeles: Times-Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1938), http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/four_seasons_in_yosemite/summer.html.

³⁵ Linda Wedel Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and its Resources; a History of the Discovery, Management, and Physical Development of Yosemite National Park, California* (Denver: National Park Service, 1987), 2:671. The Wawona course has survived in the park in part because it is outside the Valley and because supporters have argued that it has historic value.

³⁶ *Supt. Report for June 1930* (July 3, 1930), 8; and "Open All Winter," *Monthly Bulletin from Yosemite National Park* (November 1930), 1.

Horseback riding, used primarily as a means of transportation in Yosemite in the nineteenth century, became a popular recreational activity in the twentieth. Concessionaires operated stables and ran guided tours in the Valley and the backcountry.³⁷ Cycling was also popular and Yosemite was the only national park to offer bikes by 1940. About 100 “lightweight” bicycles that “ride very well,” including a few tandems, were available for rental at Camp Curry. Visitors could enjoy half-day bike tours through the Valley in the spring and fall, but the lack of designated bike paths led to “many a ‘narrow escape’” on the crowded roads.³⁸ Roland Geist, founder and secretary of the College Cycle Club of New York, urged the NPS to establish cycling programs in other parks as well, arguing that “it is a healthful and pleasant exercise as a sport by itself or an adjunct to another sport or recreation.”³⁹

The park had a profound effect on the development of mountain climbing and is home to some of the world’s most challenging climbing routes, but the sport played a relatively minor role in early park tourism. In 1875 Blacksmith George Anderson became the first known person to summit Half Dome, drilling holes and placing eyebolts into the granite as he scampered up the eastern side of the mountain. Remarkably, his nineteenth-century equipment and pathway formed the basis for the “Cable Route,” an exceptionally steep trail that still terrifies and thrills visitors today. After Anderson’s feat, the next major

³⁷ The Valley stable closed permanently in October 2015, a casualty of the Merced River Plan (discussed in the epilogue). The stable’s closing caused quite an outcry among staff and longtime park visitors.

³⁸ Roland C. Geist, “Bicycling in our National, State, and Municipal Parks,” in *1940 Yearbook: Park and Recreation Progress* (Washington, D.C: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), 45.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

development came in 1931, when Bestor Robinson and Richard M. Leonard pioneered the use of ropes in climbing in Yosemite.⁴⁰ Also in the 1930s, the Sierra Club founded a rock climbing section and members helped develop new techniques, guidebooks, and equipment while studying German climbing texts, training in the Bay Area, and embarking on occasional climbs in Yosemite and elsewhere in the Sierras.⁴¹ Despite all of this practice and study, by 1939 many Sierra Club members still preferred to mix mountaineering (essentially low-level climbing and scrambling combined with hiking) with the more grueling sport of climbing. As Leonard reported in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*, “Many enjoy general mountaineering and wilder and higher country rather than pure rock-climbing in the valley.”⁴²



Image 1-2: Left: CCC workers replacing the cables on Half Dome, with new, heavier materials, 1932. Unknown photographer. Courtesy National Park Service, NPS History Collection, HFCA # HPC-000967. Right: the Half Dome cables in 2010, photograph by Jason Sampson.

⁴⁰ Hal Burton, “They Risk Their Lives for Fun,” *Saturday Evening Post*, February 25, 1956, p. 34.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴² Richard M. Leonard, “Mountaineering Notes: Rock-Climbing in Yosemite,” *Sierra Club Bulletin* XXV, no. 1 (February 1940): 118.

Only in the second half of the twentieth century—as techniques and equipment improved—did Yosemite become a world-renowned climbing destination, revered for its steep valley walls and iconic granite formations. Half Dome’s vertical northwest face (the model for the North Face’s logo) was “regarded as one of the most tantalizing climbing problems in the United States” until it was finally conquered by Royal Robbins, Jerry Gallwas, and Mike Sherrick in 1957.⁴³ El Capitan proved equally challenging, and the first ascent up its face required a remarkable forty-seven days of climbing spread over the course of sixteen months in 1957 and 1958.⁴⁴ The park also played host to ongoing debates over climbing methods. In particular, a rivalry arose between climbers who relied heavily on ropes, bolts, and other equipment and those who preferred to use little or no gear.⁴⁵ The Yosemite Mountaineering School, one of the first schools of its kind, was founded in 1969 and offered classes for beginners and experts alike. Although the program let adventurous tourists take classes in an unparalleled setting, rock climbing in Yosemite has always been out of reach for the vast majority of people.⁴⁶ The average visitor is far more likely to watch

⁴³ Burton, “They Risk Their Lives for Fun,” 34.

⁴⁴ Most of that time was spent establishing a route, with roughly a dozen climbers working as a group to set up bolts, gear, and food. The final, full ascent took three men (Warren Harding, George Whitmore, and Wayne Merry) twelve days in November 1958 (Lynn Ferrin, “Rock Star,” *The Atlantic* [May 2009]: 24).

⁴⁵ Over the last few decades, “free climbing” has become increasingly popular. Free climbers use ropes only for safety purposes (not to aid their ascent), and rely almost exclusively on their hands and climbing shoes to scale a rock face. Perhaps the best-known free climber in the world is Alex Honnold, a Yosemite regular who free climbed Mount Watkins, El Capitan, and the northwest face of Half Dome—all in a single stretch of less than nineteen hours in 2012.

⁴⁶ But no longer! The trek up El Capitan—“the most iconic rock climb on earth,” according to Google—is so impressive that the tech giant enlisted world-class climbers Lynn Hill, Alex Honnold, and Tommy Caldwell to climb with cameras and document their journey in a Google “street view.” The project allows anyone with an internet connection to take a virtual climb with 360-degree views: <https://www.google.com/maps/about/behind-the-scenes/streetview/treks/yosemite/#trek>.

an expert scale El Capitan through binoculars than to “go climb a rock.”⁴⁷ It is perhaps the park’s only true remaining spectator sport.

Although all of these summer activities were popular in the park, they had less of an impact than winter sports on early twentieth-century tourism. There is no evidence that summer sports drew large numbers of people into the park, although it is possible that visitors may have remained longer in order to participate in more recreational pursuits, as Stephen Mather had hoped back in 1916.⁴⁸ Moreover, while some activities (including swimming, biking, and golf) were concentrated in certain areas near the hotels, there was no designated sports center comparable to Badger Pass, the park’s ski complex. Winter sports had a much more significant impact on tourism and on debates over land use, particularly in the 1920s through 1940s.

Yosemite’s Winter Sports Roots

Despite fickle weather conditions, a failed winter Olympic Bid, and ongoing squabbles over the purpose of the park, Yosemite played a crucial role in the development of winter sports in California and the West. It was the first national park unit in which winter sports were purposely developed, and it became a testing ground for system-wide NPS

⁴⁷ “Go Climb a Rock” has long been the motto of the Yosemite Mountaineering School and is a popular Yosemite t-shirt slogan.

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, there is no real way to assess the extent to which summer sports affected visitation numbers. Recreational activities were introduced gradually over the years, while new roads and hotels, along with a rise in car ownership and middle-class vacations, all contributed to increased national park visitation in the early twentieth century. In contrast, it is easier to assess the ways in which winter visitation increased (especially as a proportion of annual visitation) as new winter sports and athletic spectacles were introduced.

policies on winter recreation.⁴⁹ Yosemite was the site of several major milestones, including California's first winter sports club, first ski lift, and first ski school, and the first (and at one time largest) outdoor ice rink west of the Mississippi. The Yosemite Park and Curry Company also hosted a number of collegiate and professional competitions, allowing visitors to be spectators of sports, and not just of scenery. With these innovations the YPCC helped shape the park into a popular year-round destination.

Park officials and concessionaires had a practical reason to promote Yosemite as a public playground, especially in the winter months. The YPCC was particularly interested—and invested—in increasing year-round traffic to the park, since it had bills to pay even when facilities were largely empty. The hotels needed maintenance work, heating, and water year-round, and leaving buildings empty or nearly so did nothing to defray those costs. If the YPCC could fill at least some of its accommodations in the winter, visitors' fees would help cover the company's annual expenses, even if it was still operating at a loss. The introduction of organized winter sports was one means to this end. Recreational activities encouraged tourists to visit throughout the year and linger longer in park hotels and created a new source of revenue in the form of fees, equipment rentals, and the like.

The Park Service—which offered fewer ranger programs in the winter—also benefitted from increased tourist traffic. More visitors meant more entry fees and, hopefully, increased financial aid from Congress. The Park Service firmly supported the YPCC's efforts to build up a sports program in the 1920s and helped by approving

⁴⁹ Isabelle Florence Story, "National Parks in Winter," *National Republic* 15 (1927): 22.

Company plans, maintaining facilities, and plowing roads. NPS Assistant Director Horace

Albright praised the Company's efforts in a 1928 letter to Director Mather:

In my judgment, the Company is doing everything in its power to popularize winter sports in Yosemite Valley and is going about its activities with admirable public spirit. It deserves every encouragement. It can be depended upon not to request any rate increases that would have a tendency to discourage travel. It would rather give away accommodations under present conditions than to have a guest go away disgruntled and with a determination to knock the Park and its facilities.⁵⁰

Although the YPCC led in the development of Yosemite's winter sports, the Park Service was an eager partner in the early twentieth century.

Snow and ice sports were therefore especially critical to Yosemite's growth as a tourist destination, yet winter sports are often given short shrift in park literature. In part, this may be because national parks are typically associated with summer vacations, both in popular imagination and in terms of visitation numbers. Families often have more time for travel in the summer, and visitors can avoid the potential dangers of icy roads and the added expense of winter equipment and clothing. Even today visitation remains dramatically lower in the winter than in the summer—despite the wide availability of tire chains, all-wheel drive, and heated seats—but modern winters are far more crowded than those of the early twentieth century. From 1985 through 2007, an average of only 13% of Yosemite's approximately 3.5 million annual visitors arrived between December 1 and March 31.⁵¹ It's a

⁵⁰ Horace Albright to Stephen Mather, December 21, 1928, in Yosemite National Park: General, H Albright 1927–1933, Box 7, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁵¹ "Visitation Statistics," National Park Service, accessed May 16, 2016, <http://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/visitation.htm>. During this period, an average of 3,568,963 people visited the park each year.

small percentage, but 13% is an impressive increase over the figures for 1925, for instance, when a mere 1.5% of the 210,112 annual visitors entered the park during the same four-month span.⁵² For most visitors and scholars, summer has always loomed much larger in Yosemite's tourist past and present.

In his seminal work on the park, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness*, Alfred Runte touches only briefly on winter sports, devoting just over a page total to the toboggan, skating, the Winter Club, sports carnivals, skiing, and the Olympic bid. In this remarkably brief summary, Runte claims that Badger Pass ski area "brings crowds seeking entertainment rather than greater awareness of the environment," but fails to consider that perhaps park visitors drawn to winter sports might *also* spend time appreciating the natural surroundings and learning about the environment.⁵³ Runte's implication is that such visitors could not fully embrace both recreation and environmentalism, a rather black-and-white assessment. A caption for a 1932 photo of a winter carnival notes: "Winter sports became the perfect rationale for opening Yosemite National Park to more special events, even those better suited to urban surroundings."⁵⁴ True, spectacles such as the winter carnival featured a mix of sporting events and theatrics, and they were certainly designed to draw large numbers of

⁵² These statistics are computed slightly differently than the visitation statistics cited above for 1985–2007. For the early records, I combed the monthly superintendent's reports and counted the total number of visitors to enter the park each month. I used these reports because they are the only accounts that include monthly figures for years prior to 1979. The NPS annual visitation stats show 209,166 visitors in 1925; my total from Superintendent reports came to 210,112. There were a total of 3,112 winter visitors in 1925 and 4,086 the previous year; the decline was likely due to poor weather in February and March 1925. The difference between winter and summer visitation remains stark, even when the total number of visitors differs slightly according to the source. See *Supt. Reports* for January 1925–December 1925.

⁵³ Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), unpaginated section after page 216, caption for picture #43.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, caption for picture #42.

spectators. Yet Runte fails to mention that such events were discontinued in the mid-twentieth century, largely because the NPS came to believe that attracting large crowds and hosting unnatural spectacles ran contrary to the Park Service's mission. Instead, a reader might reasonably assume that the costume contests, ice capades, and related festivities continue to this day. By mentioning winter recreation only in passing, Runte implies that it should be obvious to any proper environmentalist why sports are inappropriate in a park. A more detailed study of sports' environmental impact or of visitors' attitudes towards natural resources might have revealed that the issue is not quite so cut and dry as he implies. In fact, Runte spends more time criticizing the role of alcohol in the park than he does investigating recreation, which likely has a more direct impact on Yosemite's natural features.⁵⁵

Many writers who study public usage pay far more attention to crowds, traffic, and accommodations than to recreation. Overcrowding is a major concern, and the mere presence of large numbers of people in the park certainly affects the landscape. Critics have complained of a city-like atmosphere in the Valley for decades, and transportation and housing issues continue to generate passionate debate. Cars were banned in Yosemite from 1907 to 1913, and proposals to limit or entirely eliminate private transportation have been seriously considered several times since.⁵⁶ There have also been several campaigns to

⁵⁵ Alcohol is discussed on nine pages, primarily regarding its pre- and post-prohibition history and the presence of bars in park hotels. While it is an interesting history, it would be difficult to claim that alcohol has had much of an environmental impact on the park landscape; instead, Runte argues that its presence is more appropriate in "a big-city barroom." This echoes the "park atmosphere" argument against certain recreational activities, discussed in chapter 3.

⁵⁶ Yosemite Valley has been likened (derisively) to a "city" for decades, and countless articles and editorials have bemoaned the crowds and traffic. See, for example: George Dusheck, "Yosemite Valley Will Die Within 50 Years," *The San Francisco News*, August 17, 1954, p. 1, 6 (just one of a series of August 1954 articles by Dusheck about the Valley's overcrowding); Connie Parrish, "Nature Wins First Round" and Eric

remove infrastructure, including visitor accommodations, from the Valley; a major flood and several rockfalls have helped accomplish some of these goals.⁵⁷ Clearly, these are critical issues in the context of Yosemite tourism history. Yet how visitors choose to use the park recreationally is also exceedingly important and demands further study. Of the few authors who have tackled sports, Stanford Demars is the most successful in placing Yosemite activities in the context of Mather’s goal to fashion the parks as “playgrounds.” Other authors, most notably Gene Rose in *Magic Yosemite Winters*, focus on narrative histories of sports in the park, based largely on oral histories from Yosemite employees and regular visitors. Shirley Sargent, Yosemite’s most prolific historian, also discusses the development of Badger Pass and other facilities in her work on concessionaires, *Yosemite’s Innkeepers*.⁵⁸ Most academic authors, however, have overlooked Yosemite’s pioneering role in establishing winter sports in the West and within the National Park System.



Image 1-3: Snowshoeing, 1917. Unknown photographer. Courtesy of Mike Novak.

Julber, “Why Abolish All Comfort?” *Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 1975, part VIII, p. 5; Glen Martin, “The Selling of Yosemite,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 23, 1989, “This World” Section, p. 7–13.

⁵⁷ A major flood December 31, 1996–January 2, 1997 caused \$178 million in damage and closed the Valley for 2 ½ months (“Flood-Damaged Yosemite Valley Reopens,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1997, http://articles.latimes.com/1997-03-15/news/mn-38565_1_yosemite-valley).

⁵⁸ Stanford E. Demars, *The Tourist in Yosemite, 1855–1985* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991); Gene Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters: A Century of Winter Sports* (Truckee, Ca.: Coldstream Press, 1999); Shirley Sargent, *Yosemite’s Innkeepers: The Story of a Great Park and its Chief Concessionaires* (Yosemite: Ponderosa Press, 2000).

Long before the Yosemite Park and Curry Company began building winter sports facilities, visitors found ways to play in the valley. Tourists (and employees) often ice skated on the Merced river, Mirror Lake, and a pond behind the Chapel, but these activities depended on sustained cold spells. Trails and clearings offered opportunities for ski-touring (cross-country skiing) for those who had access to skis. The Company had not yet invested heavily in sports infrastructure, but by the mid-1920s it was renting and selling equipment to visitors eager to play in the natural landscape. As Superintendent W. B. Lewis noted approvingly, “the company furnished excellent service [in December 1926] with their sleighs and toboggans, and rented out skates, sleds and special clothing and wearing apparel to the visitors. There were no complaints from anyone in spite of the difficulties of handling such a large crowd.”⁵⁹ Two years later Horace Albright also praised the Company’s performance, despite the fact that it was operating at a loss:

All of the winter sport activities of the Yosemite Park and Curry Company are being conducted at a considerable loss, and there is no possibility of the Company coming anywhere near breaking even. The rates submitted [for approval by the NPS] are reasonable; in fact when one considers the way the tourists handle most of this equipment the rates seem low. There is a considerable amount of loss in equipment through bad treatment by inexperienced visitors.⁶⁰

The rental program was not sufficient to pull the YPCC into winter profitability, but it helped defray operational costs.

The Company’s quest to develop winter sports became particularly urgent in 1926, when a new all-year freeway instantly increased visitation and demand for visitor facilities

⁵⁹ *Supt. Report for December 1926* (January 4, 1927), 4.

⁶⁰ Horace Albright to Stephen Mather, December 16, 1928, in *Yosemite National Park: General, H Albright 1927–1933, Box 7, RG79, NARA College Park.*

and activities. State Route 140, which opened that July, carries visitors from the San Francisco Bay Area and other western points to El Portal at the western edge of the park. Its low elevation (compared to other park entrances) provides relatively easy winter driving conditions. In 1927, the highway's first full year of operation, overall visitation climbed to 496,127, with 10% of visitors coming during the winter, compared to just 210,112 total in 1925 (the last full year before the all-year highway opened).⁶¹ The leap is especially notable when comparing specific months before and after the road's opening: the number of January–March tourists increased by 1522% between 1926 and 1927, but rose by only 34% from December 1926 to December 1927, since the road had opened during the summer of 1926.⁶² The freeway provided the first major leap in winter tourism, leaving park and YPCC officials to determine how to occupy and house the new crowds.

The first real man-made sports facility in the park was built nearly a decade before the freeway and was managed by the National Park Service. “Ash Can Alley” took sledding, that staple of snowy backyards everywhere, and elevated it to a National Park Experience. The name comes from a bastardization of “trash can.” As Gene Rose explains, riders “induced the village blacksmith to remove the handles from trash can lids discovered nearby at the Camp Curry dump.”⁶³ Rangers supervised the 800-foot snow slide, standing watch as riders of all ages sped down the slope on trash can lids, trays, and whatever else they could find. It was free, conveniently located in the Valley, and easily enjoyed by people of all ages.

⁶¹ *Supt. Reports* for January 1925–December 1925 and January 1927–December 1927.

⁶² *Supt. Reports* for January–March 1926, December 1926, January–March 1927, and December 1927.

⁶³ Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters*, 13.

To many visitors and park officials, this type of family-friendly and unskilled recreation was ideally suited for a national park. Although the slide was manmade, the landscape underneath was left relatively unaltered, so there were few concerns about seriously damaging the terrain. Even as more formal winter sports like skiing and skating were introduced in the Valley in the 1920s, Ash Can Alley remained a perennial favorite. In the winter of 1928–1929, for instance, more than 25,000 visitors rode it. On January 2, 1932, riders took 4,168 trips down the slope, and “there were no where (sic) near enough can covers to supply the demand.”⁶⁴ Long lines of visitors trudged up the slope while throngs waited at the bottom, hoping to grab a lid from a finished rider. Even watching the slide was exciting: the Park Service declared Ash Can Alley “the biggest fun creator in Yosemite Valley[,] both for the riders and the spectators.”⁶⁵ A 1932 report concurred: “it is the one big ‘Laugh Factory’ of the winter sports—the shouts of the riders and the spectators can be heard way down the road.”⁶⁶ Park officials made no note of whether this noisy enthusiasm was in keeping with the “spirit” of a peaceful wilderness. This was only the start of a varied program of snow and ice activities in the Valley.

Inspired by Ash Can Alley’s success, in 1927 the Yosemite Park and Curry Company built a new toboggan slide near Camp Curry to provide a similarly thrilling ride down the landscape.⁶⁷ It was more than half a mile long and was modified over the years to

⁶⁴ Caption for photo of Ash Can Alley, ca. Jan. 1932, in Winter Sports—Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ NPS, “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 22.

⁶⁷ Schaible, Chapin, and Chilcott, *Camp Curry Historic District Cultural Landscape Report*, 189.

accommodate more riders and provide an even more entertaining experience.⁶⁸ A December 1929 press release praised a new set-up: “In place of the two track toboggan slide of last year, this season finds a four track toboggan illuminated with many colored lights for night use. With the installation of an improved escalator to convey the toboggan and passengers to the top, experts declare the local slide to be one of the best in the country.”⁶⁹ A portable building, designed to store toboggans and to “offer a place where tobogganists may warm themselves and dry their clothing” was also built nearby.⁷⁰ These new features were certainly not essential, but they added a festive spirit that seemed fitting for a resort-like setting. Both the ash can and the toboggan were located in an area prone to rockfalls, and both fell victim to the landscape. The former was mangled by a rock fall in 1926 and the latter was heavily damaged in an avalanche two years later, but both were rebuilt.

For visitors, the more immediate threat of carnage was posed by fellow riders. Though the Company used a blaring “signal horn telling those below that another speedster is on his way and his right-of-way cannot be disputed,” superintendents’ reports are littered with grim accounts of toboggan injuries, most of which apparently resulted from riders reaching the bottom and failing to leap out of the path of oncoming sleds quickly enough.⁷¹ Miss Berta Beers, for instance, was one of four people to suffer a notable toboggan-related

⁶⁸ C. G. Thomson to Jerry Carpenter, September 24, 1935, p. 2, in *Winter Sports 1933–49*, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁶⁹ James V. Lloyd, press release, Dec. [1929], p. 2, in *Supt. Report for December 1929* (January 1, 1930).

⁷⁰ *Supt. Report for November 1929* (December 2, 1929), 7.

⁷¹ *Supt. Report for December 1931* (January 5, 1932), 2.

injury in January 1928. When “the party on the toboggan ahead of hers failed to pull his sled entirely clear of the runway,” she collided with it and sustained “a bad scalp wound,” just one of several head injuries on the slopes in those years.⁷² Ash Can Alley could also be hazardous, as E. C. Solinsky had learned that same month. As a result of his late-night escapades, Solinsky’s boss declared dryly in his Superintendent’s report that “the use of toboggans on the [ash can slide] was forbidden and the rangers were instructed to enforce the rule.”⁷³ Even an occasional spectator was felled. The park’s “most serious accident” in February 1930 involved a hapless observer, Superintendent Thomson reported. Mr. C. H. Miller of Merced, who “was standing very close to the track,” “suffered a fractured skull” and was hospitalized for eleven days after he “was struck and knocked down by one of the toboggans.”⁷⁴

Nevertheless, the toboggan provided a popular activity for visitors and a welcome source of income for the company. In winter 1931–1932, for instance, the ten-cent rides earned \$1,882 for the YPCC.⁷⁵ During World War II, when the park hosted hundreds of injured Navy personnel in the Ahwahnee, the Company turned the toboggan slide over to the Navy “for the exclusive use of patients and Navy Personnel at the U.S. Naval Convalescent Hospital.”⁷⁶ It reopened to the public under Company control in December

⁷² *Supt. Report for January 1928* (February 7, 1928), 10–11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁴ *Supt. Report for February 1930* (March 1, 1930), 16.

⁷⁵ “Winter Sports Sales and Expense,” attachment to NPS, “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 33.

⁷⁶ *Supt. Report for January 1944* (February 1, 1944), 1.

1947, but the return was short-lived.⁷⁷ The toboggan was dismantled in the early 1950s, due (in part, at least) to the large number of injuries. At least one major accident was reported in January 1951, but Superintendents' reports made no further mention of the slide.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, the toboggan's roughly quarter-century history is notable because of its role in helping to establish the Company's winter sports program. Ash Can Alley had already proven that national parks visitors were eager to slide downhill at high speeds; the toboggan allowed them to do so on a festive and brightly lit track. Encouraged by its success, Tresidder and other park officials were eager to increase recreational activities, particularly those which might attract more visitors and promise further income.

The late 1920s were a turning point for winter sports in Yosemite. The Company's winter sports program grew considerably, thanks largely to the efforts of Tresidder and a few hand-picked European employees. Tresidder dreamed of a winter sports resort to rival those in the Alps, and he hired his experts accordingly. In 1928 Swiss-born Ernst Des Baillets, who had been living in Canada and had previously "formed the famous snowbirds of Lake Placid and . . . devoted the past twenty-five years of his life to the development of winter sports," became the company's first Winter Sports Director.⁷⁹ Des Baillets played a significant role in creating and expanding a number of sports programs in the park and was a key figure in Yosemite's Olympic bid. Also in 1928, the YPCC founded the Yosemite Ski

⁷⁷ Schaible, Chapin, and Chilcott, *Camp Curry Historic District Cultural Landscape Report*, 199; and *Supt. Report for December 1947* (January 1, 1948), 3.

⁷⁸ Schaible, Chapin, and Chilcott, *Camp Curry Historic District Cultural Landscape Report*, 68 n. 156; and *Supt. Report for January 1951* (February 12, 1948), 3.

⁷⁹ *Supt. Report for November 1928* (December 6, 1928), 5.

School under the direction of Jules Fritsch, another Swiss native and well-known skier. The school was “the earliest sizable ski school west of the Mississippi,” and the first of any size in California.⁸⁰ Together, Des Baillets and Fritsch, along with a number of other European-born and -trained athletes, lent an air of Continental expertise to the fledging program. Tresidder hoped to create an Alpine-style resort; hiring staff familiar with European sports and establishing a ski school were the first steps.

In addition to hiring new experts, the Company added sports facilities to supplement the toboggan and ash can slides with more organized activities. The YPCC first built a 275' x 80' ice rink in Camp Curry in 1928, then replaced it with a much larger one the following year.⁸¹ The government also offered a more natural (but still supervised) skating option, posting a ranger at a “splendid natural skating pond” along the river near Camp Six. The NPS provided benches and installed electric lights at their site, resulting in a far more festive setting than might normally be found on a river.⁸² Located in a parking lot with spectacular views of Half Dome, the 1929 Curry ice rink was a remarkably elaborate “center of winter merriment.”⁸³ The 60,000-square-foot rink (nearly 1.4 acres!) was designed to accommodate a hockey game, curling, and skating simultaneously.⁸⁴ The Company installed bleachers for

⁸⁰ Morten Lund, “The Short, Sweet Ski Life of Hannes Schroll in America,” *Skiing Heritage Journal* (December 2009): 10.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 5; and E. P. Leavitt to Horace Albright (telegram), October 17, 1928, in Yosemite 1928, H Albright 1927–1933, Box 7, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁸² *Supt. Report for November 1928* (December 6, 1928), 7.

⁸³ “Winter Sports in Yosemite National Park” (brochure), [1932?], in Winter Sports—Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

spectator events and brought in portable buildings “of the northern European design” to use for rental equipment, warming huts, changing rooms, and more.⁸⁵ The rink was an immediate success, both as a recreational facility for visitors and as an arena for spectator sports and carnivals. It also provoked a great deal of controversy (and continues to do so), as discussed in chapter four. Much like Ash Can Alley and the toboggan slide, the skating areas invited tourists to play in a man-made setting within a broader natural environment. This allowed the Park Service and the Company to supervise and control sports to a greater degree than previously possible. While the NPS activities remained free, the Company charged a small admission fee for its rink and the toboggan slide and continued to rent out equipment as well.⁸⁶ These and other new activities marked the emergence of more formal and organized winter recreation, in which visitor play was managed by the Concessionaire and the National Park Service. Participants were still surrounded by nature in a skating rink or on a toboggan slide, but it was not as direct an interaction with the environment as snowshoeing through the woods or skating on a pond. As winter park visitation increased, organized recreation allowed officials to control crowds, provide a (mostly) safe setting for visitors, and earn additional revenue for the Company. At the same time, such changes

⁸⁵ Schaible, Chapin, and Chilcott, *Camp Curry Historic District Cultural Landscape Report*, 60.

⁸⁶ In winter 1931–1932, the Company charged 75¢ for half a day of skating on the rink, including skate rental. Skis (with poles) cost 75¢ for half a day as well, but there was no charge to use the ski hill. The YPCC also offered ski boots (\$1.00/day), mittens (50¢/day), snowshoes (75¢/day), sleds (75¢/day), sweaters (\$1.00/day), heavy socks (35¢/day) and other apparel and equipment (“Yosemite Winter Events” [brochure], winter 1931–1932, p. 7, in Winter Sports—Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal).

helped reinforce the idea that Yosemite Valley was becoming more of a resort than a wilderness.

The YPPC introduced additional recreational options in the late 1920s, including activities that combined sightseeing with only mild physical effort. The Company offered sleigh rides by 1927 and dog sled rides by 1928 in and around Stoneman Meadow, near Camp Curry.⁸⁷ The road to Mirror Lake was closed to car traffic and “rolled and packed for sleighing,” providing visitors with a scenic ride and freeing rangers from snow-plowing duty in that section of the Valley.⁸⁸ A 1929 press release announced that “James B. Fritz, well known dog team driver of Truckee and his 35 Canadian and Malamute Newfoundland dogs will be available for visitors at all times. There will be two dog teams operating over a one mile course, in the winter sports area.”⁸⁹ Sleigh and sled rides proved immensely popular, and in 1929 the Company doubled the numbers of sleighs and cutters because of high demand the previous year. Ski-joring—getting towed by a trained horse through the snow on skis—provided a more athletic activity in the same part of the Valley. Visitors could attempt it themselves or watch others get dragged along a half-mile course through the

⁸⁷ *Supt. Report for December 1927* (January 9, 1928), 4. Dog Sleds, sleigh rides, ski-joring, and other such activities were subject to weather and frequently had to be cancelled due to insufficient snow.

⁸⁸ “Badger Pass Celebrates Fifty Golden Years!” *Yosemite Sentinel* book XII, vol. 1 (January 1986), 1. The January 1928 Superintendent report explains: “A sleigh road was laid out on the south side of the Valley, and certain roads were set aside as one-way roads for automobiles pulling sleds, so as to prevent accidents” (*Supt. Report for January 1928* [February 7, 1928], 1). Other accounts and reports of winter sports discuss roads closed to traffic, and appear to be referring to horse-drawn sleighs. The car-drawn sleds were likely just a temporary option.

⁸⁹ James V. Lloyd, press release, December [1929], p. 3, in *Supt. Report for December 1929* (January 1, 1930). The term “winter sports area” assured readers that sled rides were just one part of a larger formal sports program.

meadow in occasional ski-joring races.⁹⁰ In 1932, Superintendent Thomson described the scene as somehow both chaotic and idyllic: “They [tourists] were here in large numbers and eager to be entertained. Several horses racing over the crusted snow with from one to six skiers hitched on behind; old fashioned cutters, with the customary sleigh bells, traveling up and down the Valley; three colorful dog teams operating on a full schedule with dozens of people waiting for a ride behind ‘huskies.’”⁹¹ His report on winter sports is highly complimentary—clearly, in his mind, many tourists found outdoor play preferable to quiet solitude, at least for some portion of their visits.

The Company established a small ski hill on a moraine near the Valley stables by 1929, a modest start for what would become the park’s signature winter sport. Downhill skiing was not yet widely popular in the United States, and a 1929 press release promoting Ski Hill referred to the sport, inauspiciously, as “ski coasting.”⁹² The low slope was also in a poor location, as at least one visitor complained: “I would like to suggest a better place to ski. Ski hill ends up on the road and isn’t a very good place for beginners.”⁹³ Park Service officials agreed the slope was inadequate, and even hazardous for beginners. Assistant Park Supervisor F. B. Ewing reported in 1932 that the hill was “too short and dangerous for beginners at present due to the road and numerous trees at the base of the hill.”⁹⁴ Despite

⁹⁰Ibid., 2.

⁹¹ *Supt. Report for December 1931* (January 5, 1932), 2.

⁹² James V. Lloyd, press release, December [1929], p. 2, *Supt. Report for December 1929* (January 1, 1930).

⁹³ NPS, “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 19.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 25.

the slope's shortcomings, by 1932 the Company was consistently renting out all of its 97 pairs of skis on weekends, and Ewing speculated that on some days they could have used double that number.⁹⁵ "Ski Hill" also featured a small area for sledding, "special tracks for beginners," and a small ski jump on which instructors offered weekly jumping demonstrations.⁹⁶ The Yosemite Ski School provided free group ski lessons (and paid skating lessons at the Curry rink), "since comparatively few Californians have yet had opportunity to become proficient." The school assured prospective students that "with intelligent instruction, tolerable skill in skiing and skating, the major sports, is quickly acquired. Both are fun from the first moment."⁹⁷

Providing play was only half the battle—in order to lure more visitors to Yosemite, the park needed to construct additional year-round accommodations. In 1925 Stephen Mather ordered the YPCC to construct a luxury hotel in the heart of the Valley, one that would attract wealthy and politically influential visitors to Yosemite. In the short term, the money guests spent in the park would provide a welcome economic boost. More importantly, such visitors could lobby the government for increased funding for the National Park System. Mather's brainchild, the Ahwahnee Hotel, opened under the management of the YPCC in July 1927. It was so well-received that wealthy "special invitees" who attended a grand opening celebration pilfered several thousand dollars' worth

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "Winter Sports in Yosemite National Park" (brochure), ca. 1932, in Winter Sports—Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

of hotel property, including “pewter ink stands, Indian baskets and even bedspreads.”⁹⁸ Over the twentieth century, other existing lodgings were renovated to accommodate guests year-round, but the Ahwahnee had the single largest impact on winter sports. Although affordable only for the wealthy, the new hotel helped relieve some of the previous strain on winter accommodations in the park. So many visitors had been in the Valley on New Year’s Day 1927, for instance, that 350 guests had crowded into the Sentinel Hotel (which had a typical capacity of 125–150 people) “and about 70 more were taken care of by permitting them to sleep on the floor in the Camp Curry Studio and Office.”⁹⁹ Three types of accommodations were operating in the Valley the following winter: the lavish new Ahwahnee, the more affordable Sentinel, and the Yosemite Lodge’s redwood bungalows (“for visitors desiring to do light housekeeping while enjoying winter sports in the Valley”).¹⁰⁰ Public campgrounds and Camp Curry were typically closed for much of the winter, but officials occasionally opened them to accommodate overflow crowds. By the time Badger Pass ski area opened in 1935, the Ahwahnee had become a particularly important facet of the winter sports program. As Gene Rose notes, “the marriage of the hotel and the ski area helped lure the rich and famous. Hollywood stars—Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and Madeline Carroll—added their glamour.”¹⁰¹ With Hollywood flocking to the park, Yosemite began to develop a reputation as a thriving winter resort.

⁹⁸ “Ahwahnee History Fact Sheet,” Delaware North Company, accessed May 16, 2015, http://www.apacalifornia.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/C2005_Accom_ahwahnee_history.pdf.

⁹⁹ *Supt. Report for December 1926* (January 4, 1927), 4.

¹⁰⁰ James V. Lloyd, press release, December 8, [1927], in *Supt. Report for December 1927* (January 9, 1928).

¹⁰¹ Gene Rose, “The Ahwahnee: Yosemite Grandeur,” *Skiing Heritage* 15, no. 1 (March 2003): 23.

Even as the park's winter visitation increased dramatically during the 1920s, inconsistent weather and a shortage of usable space plagued the YPCC's winter sports efforts. Parts of Yosemite Valley see little or no snow in the winter months. There are essentially two climates: temperatures in the western portion of the Valley average above 32 degrees throughout the winter, while the eastern end is several degrees colder, largely because cliffs along the southern wall leave the Camp Curry area almost perpetually in shade throughout the season.¹⁰² Isabelle Story praised this unique weather pattern: "The climate here is ideal, for while on one side of the valley, in the shade, abundant snow and ice are afforded for sleighing, skating, tobogganing, snowshoeing and skiing, on the other side, in the warm sun, coats often may be discarded with impunity."¹⁰³ She overestimated the "abundant snow," however, as even the cold end of the Valley sometimes saw insufficient snowfall for winter sports. And poor weather hurt travel, as Superintendent Thomas lamented in early 1930: "The complete absence of any snow up to January 4th caused a loss in travel for December of 33%. The unfavorable weather during the first two weeks no doubt accounts for the 30.8% loss during January."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² The mean winter temperatures in the Valley, 1905–2015, were: December, 36.95°F; January, 36.58°F; February, 40.64° F; March, 45.01° F ("Yosemite Park HQ, CA: Monthly Average of Average Daily Temperature [Degrees Fahrenheit]," Western Regional Climate Center, accessed August 18, 2015, <http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/cliMAIN.pl?ca9855>). These statistics are for Yosemite Village, which is consistently a few degrees warmer than a couple miles down the road at Camp Curry, where most Valley winter sports were held. Unfortunately, statistics are unavailable for the Curry area, but even with a difference of 4 degrees, the average at Curry would still be well above freezing for half of the winter, and only just at freezing for the other half.

¹⁰³ Story, "National Parks in Winter," 22.

¹⁰⁴ *Supt. Report for January 1930* (February 3, 1930), 13. The ongoing Depression probably contributed to the slump as well.

The Valley's cramped spaces also posed a problem for sports. By the early 1930s, sledding, sleighing, tobogganing, ash canning, skating, dog sledding, ski-joring, and downhill skiing were all confined to the east end of the Valley. This concentrated most visitors in a very small portion of the park: the Valley is less than 8 miles long and, at its widest point, roughly a mile across. The main sports area covered less than a quarter of the length of the Valley, a region chock full of trees, boulders, roads, and buildings. Activities like skiing and sledding required a good deal of open space, preferably far enough from roads and buildings to prevent regular collisions. As more people converged on the park each year, demands for winter sports threatened to overwhelm the existing sports area. Yet, despite this increased usage, there were still very few concerns about sports' environmental impact on the landscape. Most activities required little infrastructure, and even the toboggan and skating rink could be disassembled, if necessary, with few obvious permanent physical scars. Sports infrastructure had a smaller footprint and had required less tree-clearing than accommodations in the Valley, and even environmental groups like the Sierra Club had yet to regularly protest building projects meant for visitor use in national parks.¹⁰⁵ In fact, many Sierra Club members were also active in the Yosemite Winter Club and other groups that promoted sports in park. The Sierra Club was firmly in favor of outdoor winter recreation, even in Yosemite, and did not voice major objections to such activities in the park in the 1920s and early 1930s.

¹⁰⁵ By the late 1920s the most significant environmental controversy in Yosemite had been the construction of Hetch Hetchy reservoir, as discussed in the introduction. Visitor infrastructure, including sports facilities, was rarely publicly criticized in the very early twentieth century.

These weather and space constraints prompted the Company to seek new sites for winter sports outside of the Valley. Thirty-two hundred feet above Camp Curry, open meadows, steep slopes, and abundant snow welcomed the few hardy skiers willing to hike the Four-Mile Trail up the valley wall to Glacier Point. In his 1922 National Park Service Report, Mather gushed about the area: “[the] Mountain House, at Glacier Point on the heights above the valley, is ready all winter to receive visitors piloted over the beautiful trail by competent guides. At Glacier Point are found opportunities for winter sports far surpassing the offerings of foreign winter resorts.”¹⁰⁶ Mather did not elaborate about these “opportunities for winter sports,” but formal sports facilities were not available at Glacier Point. Instead, the area was ideal for downhill and cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, activities which took advantage of the natural landscape and which Joseph Sax would likely consider “contemplative recreation.” Despite Mather’s rave review, few visitors seized the opportunity to trudge over four miles through snow and ice up a vertical cliff. So the Company occasionally compensated for poor conditions in the Valley by shuttling visitors to the rim for snow play day trips. In December 1925, for instance, there was virtually no snow in the Valley for ski touring, snowshoeing, or ash can sliding. The Company arranged to have “large parties . . . taken to Tamarack Flat on the Big Oak Flat Road and to Monroe

¹⁰⁶ Stephen T. Mather, *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1922 and the Travel Season 1922* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 26. Visitors were also free to hike the trail to the Mountain House without guides. It was eventually declared too dangerous, and has been replaced by a nearby “Four Mile Trail” (which is actually closer to five miles). Even on this safer trail, the top portion is closed during the winter and early spring “due to treacherous conditions” (undoubtedly the same conditions that existed when the NPS director encouraged visitors to hike the earlier trail in the 1920s). During periods of heavy snow or ice, the entire trail closes (“Four Mile Trail,” National Park Service, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/fourmiletrail.htm>).

Meadows on the Glacier Point Road, where excellent snow conditions obtained and sports of this nature were indulged in” during the exceptionally busy holiday period.¹⁰⁷ Other portions of the high country proved similarly ideal for winter sports but were only accessible when roads were relatively free of snow. Until the Park Service began plowing some areas in the mid-1920s, if the roads were clear enough for the average tourist to drive all the way up to the Valley’s rim, there was likely not enough snow to make the trip worthwhile.

Luckily for the YPCC, 230 tons of dynamite helped alleviate Yosemite’s winter sports woes. In 1931 the NPS began building a 4,230-foot-long tunnel along the Wawona Road, which connects the Valley and the Southern entrance to the park. The tunnel (which was usable by 1932 and officially opened in 1933) allowed year-round access to Chinquapin and Badger Pass, two areas that would play major roles in Yosemite’s winter sports history. One year before it opened, a Park Service report predicted that the tunnel would have a tremendous impact on winter recreation:

Yosemite will be able to guarantee snow and winter sports for its visitors regardless of deficient snowfall in the Valley in dry years. There are great possibilities of developing some of our finest winter sports—skiing, tobogganing, and snowshoeing—in the Chinquapin, Wawona and Glacier Point regions. Yosemite will be able, in a few years, to offer anything in the way of snow sports that is obtainable anywhere in California plus the added attraction of Yosemite Valley in its unequalled winter glory. Due to the opening of the Wawona Road [and the tunnel] there is a general feeling that Yosemite is just at the starting point of its fullest winter development.¹⁰⁸

This official NPS report was openly trumpeting development in the park—making it very clear that the Park Service fully supported expanding the sports program. Park and

¹⁰⁷ *Supt. Report for December 1925* (January 5, 1926), 9.

¹⁰⁸ NPS, “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 3.

concession officials believed that Yosemite could (and should) be able to compete with any other winter sports resort in the state. The landscape—the “added attraction of Yosemite Valley in its unequaled winter glory”—is nearly an afterthought in this assessment. It was a pleasant bonus, giving Yosemite an appealing advantage over other regions.

As predicted, the newly-accessible region began attracting more skiers, snowshoers, and other winter sports buffs in the early 1930s. The NPS permitted the YPCC to clear some trees at Chinquapin to create an informal ski area, and the Company occasionally ran “eighteen-passenger White touring cars” from the Ahwahnee for skiing day trips.¹⁰⁹ Although it was steeper and usually snowier than the Valley’s Ski Hill, Chinquapin was “essentially a beginner’s run with a lunch room in the gas station at the bottom of the trail”—hardly the marks of a world-class winter resort.¹¹⁰ In search of more challenging terrain, some intrepid skiers trudged from Chinquapin to nearby Monroe Meadow (elevation 7,200), which was located at the base of a slope better suited to downhill skiing. By late 1935 Monroe Meadow and its hill had been transformed into Badger Pass Ski Area, one of the first downhill ski centers in the West, and the new centerpiece of Yosemite’s winter sports program, as discussed in chapter four.

The new tunnel and new activities helped increased winter visitation, but Mother Nature could still deal a financial blow. By 1932 the YPCC expected to earn winter profits in the near future (despite the Depression), and claimed that poor weather was largely to

¹⁰⁹ Morten Lund, “The Short, Sweet Ski Life of Hannes Schroll in America,” *Skiing Heritage Journal* (Dec. 2009): 11.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

blame for not yet achieving them. Extremely heavy snowfall in winter 1931–1932 had increased maintenance costs, but under normal conditions, one report noted, the Company’s winter sports program “should pass from the experimental stage into a period of profitable operation.”¹¹¹ That winter the YPCC reported a loss of \$14,509 for winter sports—a considerable amount, the Company acknowledged, but lower than previous years, and a figure that was likely to continue to shrink in the future.¹¹² In fact, the YPCC expected that winter sports would be self-sustaining “within the next five or ten years.”¹¹³ In the meantime, the sports program helped double the number of winter visitors to the park, according to Company estimates, thereby substantially boosting revenues from park entry fees. The YPCC also believed that tourists who would normally plan only a day trip to the park for sightseeing were more likely to spend the night if tempted with organized outdoor sports.¹¹⁴

Yosemite was the first national park with an organized winter sports program, but it was not alone in its winter operations. By 1927 over half of the national parks remained at least partially open year-round, though most had closed for the winter just “a few years before.”¹¹⁵ Yosemite offered skiing, tobogganing, sleighing, skating, snowshoeing, and a

¹¹¹ NPS, “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 33.

¹¹² National Park Service, memo on finances attached to NPS, “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, following page 34.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Story, “National Parks in Winter,” 22. The roster of open parks, however, also included ones that received little or no snow, like Hawaii National Park and the Grand Canyon.

brand-new luxury hotel; other parks, particularly in the West, had similar activities. In Sequoia and General Grant national parks (Yosemite's neighbors in the Sierra Nevadas), "snowshoeing, skiing and tobogganing [were] enjoyed in the heart of the giant forest, in the midst of the hoary giants of the tree world."¹¹⁶ Washington's Mount Rainier National Park had become "exceedingly popular with winter sport enthusiasts of recent year," especially after the park began plowing a key road in the mid-1920s.¹¹⁷ Mount Rainier shared a number of activities with Yosemite, including dog sled rides, sleigh rides, snowshoeing, and skiing. In addition, the park boasted a "sporty toboggan slide, a permanent runway a quarter of a mile in length, built only after a thorough study of slides of this type in many winter resorts." The toboggan, likely modeled partly on Yosemite's, also featured "brilliant illumination" for night rides.¹¹⁸ In Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park offered recreational skiing and hosted an annual ski tournament.¹¹⁹ The only other large national park with a winter sports program was Acadia, then called Lafayette, one of the very few national parks in the east. Lafayette, located in Maine, "provide[d] an interesting winter playground for the people of our northeastern communities," with skating, ice boating, skiing, and snowshoeing.¹²⁰ Even today, however, some parks shut down entirely during the winter months, while others close some tourist facilities and cut staff to a minimum.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 39.
SUp

In Yosemite, the 1910s through 1920s were a period of remarkable growth in recreation and visitation. Visitors, the Park Service, and even members of the Sierra Club and other conservationists initially embraced Yosemite's winter sports program. Winter activities were especially popular and helped draw visitors to the park in unprecedented numbers. The YPCC was instrumental in establishing Yosemite's sports program, but the NPS also played an important role in creating activities like the Ash Can Alley, approving new facilities, and supervising various sports. By 1932 the Company could boast:

Cliffs and trees, snow-covered . . . a fairyland of white. Graceful figures gliding over spacious open-air ice. Delighted cries of tobogganers, breathless from unaccustomed speed. A skiing party setting out for days of sport at a High Sierra ski lodge. The merry tinkle of sleighbells in the meadows. Impatient Eskimo dog-teams. Color . . . ACTION . . . FUN! . . . It's the Yosemite winter sports holiday—that everyone may now enjoy!¹²¹

¹²¹ "Winter Sports in Yosemite National Park" (brochure), ca. 1932, in Winter Sports—Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal. All ellipses are in the original text.

**Chapter Two:
The St. Moritz of the Sierra Nevada?
Yosemite Bids on the 1932 Winter Olympics**

In 1928 Yosemite launched a campaign to host the 1932 Winter Olympics, an unexpected ambition for a national park. The Olympic bid was an important moment in the history of Yosemite tourism, yet it has been overlooked by most historians. This neglect is surprising, in part because several themes traditionally associated with the study of National Parks—especially tourism, recreation, land use, and nationalism—overlap with Olympic studies. Even though the park eventually lost to Lake Placid, the bid process united Yosemite Park & Curry Company and National Park Service officials with local and statewide business interests in an effort to promote tourism and winter sports in California. The bid also helped shape NPS views and policies on recreation in national parks. In particular, it paved the way for dramatically expanding Yosemite’s winter sports program in the 1930s. Compared to an official endorsement of world-class sports facilities and thousands of spectators in the park, the addition of a few ski lifts, a few hundred more rental skis and skates, and a handful of annual competitions and ice carnivals actually seemed a relatively restrained development. If Yosemite was prepared to host the world’s greatest athletes, surely it was ready to welcome tourists who hoped to play amidst spectacular scenery. Like the construction of the all-year freeway and the Wawona tunnel, the bid process played a critical role in assuring Yosemite’s growth and promotion as a winter playground. Because the Games blended sport with spectacle on a vast scale, even their potential presence in Yosemite illustrates the remarkable degree to which parks were viewed as sites of play, where public use might trump conservation. Yosemite’s Olympic aspirations helped bridge the gap between the park’s past as a spectacular landscape with assorted

recreational diversions and its 1930s and 1940s future as a recreation and entertainment resort set within a sensational landscape. The Olympic bid's celebration of sport and spectacle helped to reimagine park tourism and jump-start a statewide winter sports industry.



Image 2-1: Yosemite Valley from Tunnel View, December 2010. El Capitan is center left, Half Dome is in the center in the far background, Bridal Veil Fall is center right. Photograph by author.

Launching the Bid

Early twentieth-century Olympics were smaller affairs than the massive televised pageants of today, but hosting the festivities has always required expertise in managing both sport and spectacle. The 1932 Winter Olympics were just the third Winter Games, and the first to be staged outside of Europe. This placed extra pressure on the seven United States

bid cities to prove that American winter sports facilities could meet Continental standards.¹ In 1928, 464 athletes (including just 26 women) from 25 countries competed in 14 events in St. Moritz, Switzerland. The 1932 Lake Placid Winter Games produced even smaller numbers (252 athletes from 17 countries), largely because fewer European competitors and spectators were willing to travel across the Atlantic, especially during the Depression.² Yet even with these relatively low numbers, hosting the Games was a complicated undertaking. Host cities had to provide world-class sports facilities, accommodations, plowed roads, and transportation for competitors, officials, reporters, and spectators. In addition to infrastructure, organizers had to produce both athletic events and entertainment. The Olympics are as much a spectacle as a sporting event, and many of the ceremonial aspects of the Games had been introduced by 1932. The Opening Ceremony has been included since the first modern Olympics in 1896, the “March of Nations” was added in 1906, the Closing Ceremony in 1920, and the Olympic flame in 1928. Although these events played on a smaller stage than at recent Winter Games, early Olympics were already a highly choreographed mix of athletic endeavor and nationalistic theater.

¹ Six months before the 1924 Paris Summer Olympics, organizers staged a week of winter sports contests in Chamonix. The following year the International Olympic Committee amended its charter to create a separate winter competition and retroactively labeled the week-long French event the first official Winter Olympic Games (John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, *Olympic Cities: City Agendas, Planning and the World's Games, 1896–2016* [London: Routledge, 2011], 56).

² “St. Moritz 1928,” International Olympic Committee, accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.olympic.org/st-moritz-1928-winter-olympics>; and “Lake Placid 1932,” International Olympic Committee, accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.olympic.org/Lake-Placid-1932-winter-olympics>. In comparison, the 2014 Games in Sochi, Russia, drew more than 2,800 athletes from 88 countries (including one athlete competing independently) who competed in 15 disciplines. Over 1.1 million tickets were sold and 102,000 hours of broadcasting was aimed at up to 4.1 billion viewers (“Sochi 2014,” International Olympic Committee, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.olympic.org/sochi-2014-winter-olympics>). Despite this tremendous expansion, the Winter Games remains considerably smaller than its summer counterpart in terms of the numbers of athletes, nations, spectators, and events.

The Yosemite Park and Curry Company had not staged a comparable international event, but it had plenty of experience dazzling large crowds with displays such as the Firefall, evening programs, and other entertainments.³ The YPCC had also already hosted some winter meets and races, and was busy planning additional collegiate, amateur, and professional competitions in hockey, ice skating, and other winter activities.⁴ Thanks to this record with both sports and spectacles, YPCC President Donald Tresidder was certain that the Company and the NPS could host the 1932 Olympics. In the process, the YPCC hoped to raise awareness of Yosemite's burgeoning winter sports program and to construct first-rate facilities that could attract and entertain winter tourists for years to come. Had Yosemite won, hosting the Olympics would have required a great deal of new construction, including a bobsled run, an indoor ice rink, extra outdoor rinks, a ski jump, a tram to the backcountry, and a new hotel—at least some of which would have remained in the park after the Games concluded. The bid's defeat meant that the YPCC lost a convenient excuse to build these facilities and the park missed a chance to host a man-made spectacle of international proportions, in which athletes were the attraction, and scenery the mere backdrop.

Yosemite's Olympic campaign, launched by YPCC President Donald Tresidder in mid-1928, involved the concessionaire, the NPS, and business and media interests in

³ The Olympic torch relay and the ceremonial lighting of the torch were not introduced until 1936, but in Yosemite, a well-timed Firefall during the Opening Ceremonies might have provided an impressive alternative.

⁴ For instance, in December 1929 Yosemite first hosted the annual Pacific Coast Inter-Collegiate Winter Games. In an effort to lend some gravitas to the proceedings, Tresidder convinced President Hoover to loan his name to the tournament, and the winning school was awarded a large silver "Hoover Cup." Hoover was a fellow Stanford alum and was close friends with Secretary of the Interior Ray Lyman Wilbur.

promoting park tourism and California's winter sports industry. Together, they hoped to prove that the park offered outstanding weather, terrain, and infrastructure, and that the region could furnish suitable accommodations and transportation for thousands of visitors. With Los Angeles set to host the 1932 Summer Olympics, many Californians believed—erroneously—that the state was guaranteed the right to hold the Winter Games as well.⁵ Once they learned that other states were allowed to bid, boosters also had to prove that, despite its sun-soaked reputation, California boasted conditions and topography equal to any resort in the eastern United States. The NPS had the additional task of publicly vowing that an international sports event was a suitable “public use” for federally-protected land.

Tresidder and his allies first attempted to secure the endorsement of the California Tenth Olympiad Association, the organization responsible for staging the 1932 Summer Games.⁶ In May 1928 Tresidder began to argue his case to Association president William Garland, claiming, “I do not believe there is a more favorable place for winter sports than Glacier Point and it is the purpose of this Company to make that section the outstanding winter resort of the West.”⁷ It was thus clear from the very start of the bid that Tresidder

⁵ Until 1938 IOC policy practically guaranteed that a Summer Games host nation would be awarded the Winter Games as well. That country was allowed to bid first; if none of its proposals were acceptable, other nations would be allowed to submit their own bids. However, the IOC policy made no mention of favoring host states (or regions) for winter bids. Gold and Gold, *Olympic Cities*, 56.

⁶ Tresidder and other Yosemite officials initially believed that the Association would choose one of the California bids, then the International Olympic Committee would simply rubber-stamp that selection as the 1932 Winter Olympics host. In reality, the IOC made the decision (with some input from the international sports federations that governed the four main winter Olympic sports), choosing in April 1929 from among seven U.S. bids, only two of which were from California.

⁷ Donald Tresidder to William Garland, May 24, 1928, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new-per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca. Garland is widely credited with winning the 1932 summer games for Los Angeles. He was also a United States representative to the International Olympic Committee. Glacier Point is located about 3,200 feet above Camp Curry. At the time, it was largely inaccessible during the winter, but intrepid visitors hiked up the valley walls to reach snow fields and the Glacier Point Hotel.

saw the Games as a way to promote Yosemite as a sports destination. At the time, winter sports were still confined to the Valley because no organized recreation was offered at Glacier Point, and because Badger Pass—the eventual site of most Yosemite snow sports—had not yet been built. Garland was skeptical that Yosemite received sufficient snowfall and wondered if sports facilities, roads, and other infrastructure would be ready in time. Though he “doubt[ed] very much” that Yosemite would be a suitable host, he asked Tresidder to send detailed weather records, as well as “any sound information you can give me regarding the practicability of having these games at Yosemite.”⁸ Above all, Garland made clear that “we [California] can’t possibly run the risk of having these sports a failure,” noting that Lake Placid, St. Paul, Montreal, Quebec, and other possible bid cities had dependably cold and snowy climates.⁹ Tresidder might have gritted his teeth writing his testy reply: “We quite realize the importance of assuring ourselves of snow,” he informed Garland, and noted that he had “a thorough personal acquaintance with winter sports conditions at Montreal and Lake Placid” and was certain neither could compare to Yosemite.¹⁰ In fact, Don and his wife Mary Curry Tresidder had attended the 1928 St. Moritz Games, and both fully believed

⁸ Garland to Tresidder, May 28, 1928, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca. Garland also requested information about a proposal to build a funicular connecting the Valley with Glacier Point. A few such plans were discussed at different times during the twentieth century; proponents usually claimed that it would alleviate traffic while providing spectacular views, and opponents usually argued that it would be a horrific and unnatural blight on the landscape. No such tram was ever constructed in the park.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Tresidder to Garland, May 31, 1928, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

that the park's terrain and weather were comparable to those of well-respected European sports resorts. To support his claims, Tresidder spent the next few months gathering snow and temperature data, seeking advice from winter sports experts, studying IOC requirements, and developing a plan to stage the Games.

Alpine Envy

European comparisons had long been employed in discussions of American national parks, and in most cases, landscapes of the western United States were proclaimed superior to those of the old world.¹¹ As Lynn Ross-Bryant explains, western landscapes “were at the same time embodiments of the culture’s virtues and power that demonstrated it was the equal of, if not superior to, Europe. Always a stepchild to European culture when it came to history and tradition, America could now look to its natural spaces for its ancient history.”¹² In particular, “Yosemite was described as America’s national cathedral, and Greek temples and Gothic cathedrals paled in comparison. Not only were the U.S. sacred shrines far vaster in scale, they were also far older in time—and made by God, not humans.”¹³ Robert Sterling Yard was especially confident about American landscapes in his guidebook, *Glimpses of Our National Parks*. Eight of the fourteen national parks that existed in 1916 offered such “scenic

¹¹ This was particularly the case during the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, when National Parks were often discussed as “sacred places”—natural (or God-created) landscapes that inspired as much awe and reverence as a centuries-old European cathedral or other man-made architectural wonder (John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1989]).

¹² Lynn Ross-Bryant, “Sacred Sites: Nature and Nation in the U.S. National Parks,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2005), 37–38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

magnificence” that, “considered together, they contain more features of conspicuous grandeur than are readily accessible in all the rest of the world together.”¹⁴ About Yosemite, Yard claimed: “it is conceded the world over that there is no valley in existence so strikingly beautiful as our Yosemite Valley.”¹⁵ His sentiment was shared by many, including O. W. Lehmer, who had written four years earlier that “it is safe to say that in this limited area [Yosemite Valley] are gathered a world of varied beauty and magnificence, unequaled anywhere else on the globe.”¹⁶



Image 2-2: Waiters on ice in St. Moritz, Switzerland. Photograph courtesy of St. Moritz Tourism / www.stmoritz.ch.

¹⁴ Robert Sterling Yard, *Glimpses of Our National Parks* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916), 3. Notably, Yard did acknowledge the Alps, unlike many commentators: “Even the far-famed Swiss Alps are equaled, and, some travelers believe, excelled by the scenery of several of our own national parks.” Yard’s eight exceptional parks were: Mount Rainier (Washington), Crater Lake (Oregon), Yosemite and Sequoia (California), Glacier (Montana), Yellowstone (mostly Wyoming), and Rocky Mountain and Mesa Verde (Colorado). He also considered the Grand Canyon (Arizona) “one of the great wonders of the world,” but at the time it was classified as a national monument. The parks that did not make the cut were: Hot Springs (Arkansas), General Grant (California; later subsumed by a new national park, Kings Canyon, which is now administered jointly with neighboring Sequoia National Park), Platt (Oklahoma; merged with another site in the 1970s to become Chickasaw National Recreation Area), Sullys Hill (North Dakota; now a National Game Preserve), Wind Cave (South Dakota), and Casa Grande Ruins (Arizona; now a national monument) (*Ibid.*, 3–4).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

¹⁶ O. W. Lehmer, *Yosemite National Park* (Chicago: Poole Bros. Printers, 1912), 9.

Winter sports neatly reversed this pattern of American one-upmanship. Although “See America First” proponents cited Europe’s manmade cathedrals and monuments as poor substitutes for America’s natural spectacles, winter sports enthusiasts were thrilled with the Continent’s mountains. Perhaps early parks boosters had unfairly ignored the Alps. Europeans had developed Alpine resorts that helped boost both winter sports and tourism. St. Moritz, for example, provided stunning Swiss scenery at high elevations, with plenty of recreational opportunities for tourists. The resort began winter operations in 1864—the same year Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove became a California state park—when a hotel owner convinced summer visitors from England to return for the winter, thereby helping to create a new European industry of winter sports tourism.¹⁷ By the 1920s “tourists from all over the world” were flocking to the resort, and it hosted the Winter Olympics in 1928 and 1948.¹⁸ Today, St. Moritz bills itself as “the birthplace of white winter holidays . . . [and] the true home of Alpine winter sports.”¹⁹ Until around the 1930s, Americans who wanted to learn to ski—and who could afford the trip—travelled to European resorts to do so. For most Americans in the very early twentieth century, skiing was thus a prohibitively

¹⁷ “History & Pioneering Spirit,” St. Moritz, accessed July 25, 2016, <https://www.stmoritz.ch/en/st-moritz/history-pioneering-spirit>.

¹⁸ Annie Gilbert Coleman, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing,” *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 4 (November 1996): 587.

¹⁹ “History & Pioneering Spirit,” St. Moritz, accessed July 25, 2016, <https://www.stmoritz.ch/en/st-moritz/history-pioneering-spirit>. St. Moritz has maintained its allure as an elite ski resort, as *The Telegraph* explained in January 2016: “St Moritz was the first and, 150 years since its birth as a tourist destination, remains the best all-round wintersports (sic) resort in the world, boasting a myriad of on and off-snow activities. . . . The resort is the world capital of winter glitz and attracts a clientele with the kind of stratospheric incomes only otherwise found in the famed hangouts of the rich and richer, Courchevel, Megève or Vail.” For the most part, modern Yosemite does not appeal to the same audience (“Ski St. Mortiz: Resort Guide,” *The Telegraph*, accessed January 29, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/ski/resort-guides/Ski-St-Moritz-resort-guide>).

expensive and not terribly appealing hobby. Other winter sports, such as tobogganing and ice skating, were more widely available in the United States.

Yosemite, constrained by federal government policies, funding difficulties, and early-twentieth-century American indifference to snow and ice sports, was still a relative novice in the field of winter athletics in the 1920s. Even the east coast of the United States—a more urbanized and far less elevated region—had developed a handful of winter sports centers and ski clubs before California. New York’s Lake Placid Club, which had been founded in 1895 as a summer resort, began year-round operations in 1904–1905, thus making it the oldest continuously operating winter resort in the United States. The Club offered a number of winter sports, including skiing and skating, but accommodations and activities were available only to paying members. Unlike Yosemite, it was a very private playground. In the West, a handful of ski areas had sprung up in Colorado, but they were visited primarily by local residents, most of whom had been cross country skiing for years out of necessity rather than for pleasure. Steamboat Springs, Colorado, attempted to drum up additional visitation by hosting a winter carnival starting in 1913. The following year carnival organizers recruited world-famous ski jumper and former Barnum and Bailey circus performer Carl Howelsen (a European by birth, naturally), whose performances lured in visitors from the surrounding regions to watch and participate in activities.²⁰ Over the next several years, Steamboat Springs and a few similar operations in the West served area residents, but attracted little widespread attention. The first large and nationally-known winter resort in

²⁰ Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 173–174, 176.

the West, Sun Valley (Utah), did not open until 1936, one year after Yosemite's Badger Pass.²¹ Despite the spectacular wintry setting of the Sierra Nevadas, the winter sports industry did not yet exist in popular imagination in early-twentieth-century California.

Ski culture finally spread through the United States in the 1930s, according to Annie Gilbert Coleman. American resorts seized upon the Continental origins of modern skiing and co-opted a generic European identity on the slopes. New American winter sports resorts built Alpine-style lodges, taught Continental techniques, sold European equipment, and made explicit comparisons to famous Old World resorts in advertisements. In fact, as early as the late nineteenth century, some promoters had likened Western mountain ranges to the Alps. In 1869, for instance, Samuel Bowles published *The Switzerland of America*, a travel narrative about his visit to Colorado. Such "Alpine similes," Earl Pomeroy noted, "helped the traveler to transport himself in fancy to more famous scenes."²² Decades later, Martha Louise Baker claimed that the "sheer walls, rugged peaks and snow-capped ranges" of Sequoia National Park's Kern River Canyon "has caused mountain tourists to acclaim this mountainous territory the 'Alps of America.'"²³ St. Moritz, in particular, was so revered that a number of American ski areas—ranging from prestigious Sun Valley to the less-successful Rainbow Valley Ranch, Colorado—appropriated the nickname "the St. Moritz of America."²⁴ Similarly, a 1917 article argued that Lake Tahoe, "that superb masterpiece of

²¹ John B. Allen, *From Skisport to Skiing: One Hundred Years of an American Sport, 1840–1940* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 139.

²² As quoted in Coleman, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing," 592–593.

²³ Martha Louise Baker, "The Greater Sequoia Park," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* (January 1927), 15.

²⁴ Sun Valley, Idaho, was built in the mid-1930s by W. Averell Harriman, chairman of Union Pacific, and became one of the most successful ski areas in the West (Allen, *From Skisport to Skiing*, 139). Rainbow

nature's handiwork[,] . . . could be made the St. Moritz of America, a winter as well as a summer resort for thousands from every corner of the land."²⁵ The nickname was meant to connote high quality terrain, sports, and resort facilities. Other areas promised a more generic "Alpine" experience, which also implied superior winter sports and conditions.



Image 2-3: Jacob Tullin Thams of Norway gets a bird's eye view of St. Moritz and Olympic crowds during the individual men's 70 meter ski jump competition at the 1928 Winter Olympic Games. Thams fell on a 73-meter jump and finished in 28th place.²⁶ © 1928 / Comité International Olympique (CIO) / Albert Steiner.

Valley Ranch Ski Area labeled itself the St. Mortiz of America in a 1962 pamphlet, as quoted in Caryn Boddie and Peter Boddie, *Lost Ski Areas of Colorado's Front Range and Northern Mountains* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2014), 112.

²⁵ Henry B. Joy, "The Traveler and the Automobile," *The Outlook* (April 28, 1917): 741. Joy was president of the Lincoln Highway Association and his article attempted to raise interest in (and funding for) a nationwide highway system, in part to compete with European tourism. As E. John B. Allen explains, Godfrey Dewey also attempted to create the "St. Moritz of America" in Lake Placid (Allen, "The Failure of the First Global Winter Olympics: Skiing at Lake Placid 1932," *Journal of Olympic History* 16, no. 1 [March 2008], 27).

²⁶ "Jacob Tullin Thams," International Olympic Committee, accessed June 2, 2017, <https://www.olympic.org/jacob-tullin-thams>. Thams had won the gold medal in the 1924 Games. His 73-

Since Europe was generally acknowledged as the birthplace of winter sports, it is no surprise that Continental athletes—like Old World mountains and resorts—were usually considered superior to their New World counterparts. As confident as Americans were in football, baseball, basketball and other summer sports, Europeans were widely acknowledged as superior in winter events. Americans dominated the total medal counts in the 1920, 1924, 1928, and 1932 Summer Olympics, but the squad finished third in 1924 in the Winter Games, second (by a great distance) in 1928, and sixth in 1936.²⁷ The American team's first place finish at Lake Placid in 1932 was primarily due to the fact that relatively few overseas athletes participated that year. These winter results were respectable, but seem less impressive in light of the massive population disparity between the United States and individual European nations. The U.S. was full of millions of young people raised in a culture that celebrated hearty self-sufficiency, masculinity, and summer sports, but that vast resource had not yet been tapped and trained on ski slopes and ice rinks. In the early twentieth century, the modest cadre of American winter athletes and fans acknowledged the United States' relative inexperience, and openly attempted to emulate European sports culture. American resorts capitalized on this preoccupation, and hired European-born skiers to manage and teach in their new ski schools.²⁸ A large number of these ski instructors,

meter jump in 1928 was the longest recorded jump to that point, but the fall lowered his score substantially. He also won a silver medal in yachting at the 1936 Summer Olympics.

²⁷ Medal counts taken from webpages for the individual Games on the IOC Website, all at Olympics.org and accessed June 16, 2016: "Antwerp 1920," <https://www.olympic.org/antwerp-1920>; "Paris 1924," <https://www.olympic.org/paris-1924>; "Amsterdam 1928," <https://www.olympic.org/amsterdam-1928>; "Los Angeles 1932," <https://www.olympic.org/los-angeles-1932>; "Chamonix 1924," <https://www.olympic.org/chamonix-1924>; "St. Moritz," <https://www.olympic.org/st-moritz-1928>; "Lake Placid 1932," <https://www.olympic.org/lake-placid-1932>; and "Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936," <https://www.olympic.org/garmisch-partenkirchen-1936>.

²⁸ Coleman, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing," 597.

some of whom were fleeing Nazi persecution, moved to the U.S. in the 1930s. Coleman argues that “Sun Valley was the first resort to capitalize on this ethnic [European] image; Averill Harriman established an entirely Austrian ski school in 1936 and encouraged the instructors to wear native costumes.”²⁹ Yosemite, however, was well ahead of the curve. The YPCC opened a ski school in late 1928 that was staffed by Europeans teaching Continental training techniques. They weren’t all Austrian and the YPCC did not require “native costumes,” but Tresidder and the YPCC were quick to publicize instructors’ European heritage and methods at every opportunity. A 1935 press release was typical: “Swiss ski technique, the method officially adopted by the best Swiss schools and the Ski Club of Great Britain, which has a membership of 5,000, is taught by Jules Fritsch, a native of Switzerland with 16 years of ski experience in that country and eight years in the United States.”³⁰ Yosemite was a pioneer among western ski centers, both in terms of providing facilities and by ensuring visitors that they were instructed by proper Europeans. In fact, several of the Yosemite Ski School’s earliest employees went on to lead other ski resorts, including Sun Valley, Sugar Bowl, Donner Summit, and Alpine Meadows.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., 597.

³⁰ Yosemite National Park, press release, February 2, 1935, Winter Sports 1933–49, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

³¹ Robert Frohlich, “Mountain Dreamers: Visionaries of Sierra Nevada Skiing,” *Yosemite: A Journal for Members of the Yosemite Association* 59, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 10.

The Park Service Goes to Bat

In support of Yosemite's Olympic bid, NPS officials concurred that the park offered superior topography, climate, and venues, while neatly avoiding any discussion of potential environmental repercussions. In late 1928 Acting Park Superintendent Ernest P. Leavitt wrote directly to Garland (of the California Tenth Olympiad Association) to lobby on Yosemite's behalf. He also suggested to Tresidder that Park Service and Company officials meet to "outline a tentative program so that we all could be working along the same lines."³² In November, the NPS made its support public by "announc[ing] . . . that negotiations toward this end [winning the Games] are in progress between the superintendent of Yosemite and Olympic officials."³³ To demonstrate its commitment, the Park Service also declared that it would seek funds from Congress to build a road to Glacier Point, a likely site for the cross country race and/or other events. However, officials' enthusiasm extended beyond the Games themselves. Correspondence between Tresidder, Leavitt, and the NPS's Horace Albright, reveals that all three were excited that the Olympics would likely boost visitation and winter sports in Yosemite even after the Games concluded.³⁴ In September 1928, for instance, Tresidder informed Albright that "I do not believe any amount of

³² Ernest P. Leavitt to Donald Tresidder, November 28, 1928, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

³³ "Yosemite Park Seeks Winter Olympic Games; Ready to Ask Congressional Appropriation," *New York Times*, November 29, 1928, p. 38.

³⁴ National Park Service Assistant Director Horace Albright succeeded founding director Stephen Mather as Director of the NPS on January 12, 1929, right in the midst of the bid process. However, Albright had already handled most Park Service correspondence related to the bid. He had also recently served as interim superintendent of Yosemite for a few months (while remaining assistant director of the NPS), and was therefore very familiar with the park. Mather resigned in January 1929 after suffering a stroke; he died in 1930.

advertising in the next twenty years would go as far towards putting us on the map as a winter resort as the securing of the winter sports of the Olympic Games.”³⁵ Albright raised no objections to this explicit goal of promoting the park as a “resort.” In February 1929 he reiterated to Leavitt that the government would almost certainly provide funding for roads and ensure that sufficient “sanitary facilities[,] . . . police, telephone[,] telegraph[,] and other facilities and services” would be available for the Games. He closed by expressing his “sincer[e] hope [the] California Development Association will favor Yosemite for winter sports of the Olympiad.”³⁶ Both the YPCC and the NPS viewed growth in the form of new infrastructure and increased tourism as a benefit—not a hazard—of hosting the Olympics. Many of the facilities built or renovated for the Games could serve future park tourists, whether they sought scenery, sports, spectacle, or all of the above.

Park Service and Company officials also courted support for the bid from outside businesses, chambers of commerce, and newspapers. In a letter to a Merced Chamber of Commerce official, for instance, Leavitt argued the park was better suited than Lake Tahoe (Yosemite’s primary Olympic rival in California) for winter sports and large crowds. As proof, he offered the wide range of available sports sites (both within and outside of the Valley), the forthcoming road to Glacier Point, and the park’s proximity to additional lodgings in El Portal, San Joaquin Valley, Fresno, and Tracy.³⁷ He assured the Chamber that

³⁵ Tresidder to Albright, September 4, 1928, in Yosemite National Park General, H Albright 1927–1933, Box 7, RG79, NARA College Park.

³⁶ Albright to Leavitt, February 26, 1929 (telegram), in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

³⁷ Leavitt to T. W. Fowler (Secretary of the Merced Co. Chamber of Commerce), November 19, 1928, p. 1–2, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

“thousands” of tourists unable to secure accommodations in the Valley would stay in local hotels and commute to events, spending quite a bit of money outside the park in the process.³⁸ Not surprisingly, a number of local interests became vocal supporters of the bid.

Remarkably, there is no record of any serious objection that a massive sports spectacle might damage federally-protected lands. The California Tenth Olympiad Association and competing bid cities expressed doubts about Yosemite’s ability to stage the Games, but they were worried about weather and infrastructure, not the possibility that crowds and facilities might harm the landscape. The NPS was equally mute about environmental concerns in its enthusiastic support for the bid. In the 1920s, the Park Service made a conscious effort to attract large numbers of people to the parks, as Lary Dilsaver notes: “it was implicit [among NPS officials] that any and all efforts be made to assure maximum use of the units by the public. It was both democratic and prudent to . . . promote use.”³⁹ The Olympics would have provided a prime opportunity to boost public usage by luring new American and foreign visitors, many of whom might not otherwise travel to Yosemite. At the time, officials were not terribly worried that heavy usage and new facilities might impact the landscape. In contrast, today’s Park Service is directed to “avoid, or to minimize to the greatest extent practicable, adverse impacts on park resources and values.”⁴⁰ In particular, the modern NPS is concerned about “adverse impacts” on:

³⁸ Ibid., 1.

³⁹ Lary M. Dilsaver, “Defining the System: 1919–1932,” in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Lary M. Dilsaver (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 41.

⁴⁰ National Park Service, *Management Policies 2006* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006), 10. This large handbook is the Park Service’s guide to system-wide policies that are designed to govern everything from concessions contracts to tourists’ fishing rights. The 2006 edition is the most recent version.

the park's scenery, natural and historic objects, and wildlife, and the processes and conditions that sustain them; . . . scenic features; natural visibility, both in daytime and at night; natural landscapes; natural soundscapes and smells; water and air resources; soils; geological resources; paleontological resources; archeological resources; cultural landscapes; ethnographic resources; historic and prehistoric sites, structures, and objects; museum collections; and native plants and animals.⁴¹

Surely, the addition of first-class athletic infrastructure and an influx of large crowds would have affected many of these “park resources.”

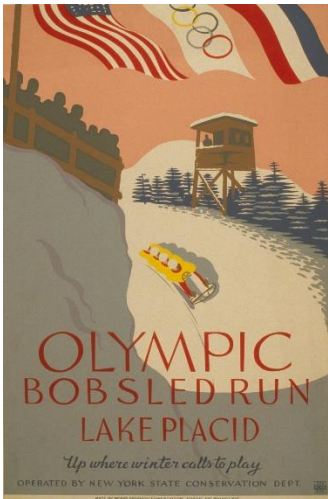


Image 2-4: Lake Placid re-purposed some of its Olympic infrastructure for tourists after the 1932 Winter Olympics. Yosemite had hoped to do the same as well, had it won the Games. This promotional poster, created by the Works Progress Administration, ca. 1936–1938, illustrates how visitors could benefit from the Games long after 1932. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Reproduction Number: LC-USZC2-5630.

Yet the Park Service voiced no such worries during the bid process. Visitation was still relatively low in the 1920s, particularly in the winter, so tourists had a smaller physical impact than today. Furthermore, the Park Service had fairly lenient construction standards

⁴¹ Ibid., 11.

and had issued few regulations designed to minimize the environmental impact of new facilities and infrastructure.⁴² The NPS was more concerned with the feasibility of funding and finishing new facilities in time for the Games than with the impact such construction would have on the park's resources and landscapes. Ironically, Lake Placid faced legal troubles over environmental concerns after it won the bid. In 1930 the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks sued to stop construction of Lake Placid's proposed Olympic bobsled run, arguing that building it on state-owned land would violate New York's constitution and that it would damage the environment. In response, the Olympic Organizing Committee built the track at a different site, now known as Mount Van Hoevenberg.⁴³ Overall, throughout the correspondence on both sides of the Yosemite bid process, discussions about Olympic infrastructure focused on the park's ability to finance and construct suitable facilities in time for the Games, not on the environmental ramifications of hosting the festivities. In the late 1930s, however, NPS officials would slowly begin to express concerns about damage to the landscape and the park "atmosphere," as discussed in the following chapter. The National Park Service would probably not have supported an Olympic bid just ten years later.

⁴² The NPS now sets a high bar for new facilities: "The National Park Service will provide visitor and administrative facilities that are necessary, appropriate, and consistent with the conservation of park resources and values. Facilities will be harmonious with park resources, compatible with natural processes, esthetically pleasing, functional, energy- and water-efficient, cost-effective, universally designed, and as welcoming as possible to all segments of the population. NPS facilities and operations will demonstrate environmental leadership by incorporating sustainable practices to the maximum extent practicable in planning, design, siting, construction, and maintenance" (Ibid., 123).

⁴³ Gold and Gold, *Olympic Cities*, 61. New York state owned some land in the Lake Placid region. The organizing committee was able to deal with such bureaucratic red tape by simply moving the controversial event off of government property, an option that would have been unavailable to Yosemite organizers.

There was at least one notable—though ineffectual—voice of dissent within the NPS ranks, but it had nothing to do with the environment. Sequoia Superintendent John White wrote a remarkable letter to Albright in January 1929, in a clear attempt to undermine Yosemite’s bid while half-heartedly arguing that his own park might be a more appropriate choice for the Games. Sequoia offered an assortment of winter activities, including skiing, tobogganing, and snow shoeing, but its winter sports program was not as advanced or as popular as Yosemite’s.⁴⁴ It is unclear if White realized that Yosemite had already been working on the bid for several months with the full support of the NPS, but his letter was written exceedingly late in the process. It hints at a gross misunderstanding of the amount of work involved in both bidding on the Games and hosting them. “While realizing that Sequoia National Park is quite unprepared to house the large number of visitors who would attend the Sports,” he began, “I feel that perhaps it may be a better situated place physically than the Yosemite National Park for the conduct of winter sports under California conditions of weather and particularly the sun.” White freely admitted that he was “not sufficiently acquainted with the Yosemite physical conditions in winter,” but he firmly believed that his own park must be better: “I do, however, know, or believe, that in the Sequoia National Park such a place may be found” with suitable terrain close to roads.⁴⁵

As for accommodations, he “presume[d] that devotees of winter sports should be willing to use the simple and primitive types of accommodations which are found in many

⁴⁴ Isabelle Florence Story, “National Parks in Winter,” *National Republic* 15 (1927), 22.

⁴⁵ John R. White to Albright, January 16, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new-per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

places—large log fires and warm but not elaborate beds, and good, but (sic) luxurious food—rather than expect the accommodations of metropolitan hotels.”⁴⁶ However, he neglected to mention whether Sequoia (or Yosemite) lodgings measured up to his primitive standards. Yosemite’s luxurious Ahwahnee Hotel had opened two years earlier, and perhaps White was taking a subtle jab at its opulence. Yet, despite his assertions about “primitive” accommodations, the Ahwahnee became quite popular among Yosemite’s winter sports aficionados, particularly after Badger Pass opened. White’s entire closing paragraph—

”Which is not saying that I particularly would want to see the Olympic Sports in the Sequoia National Park”—is a model of inexplicable ambivalence toward the bid.⁴⁷ White acknowledged that he was unfamiliar with Yosemite’s qualifications, yet he felt free to dismiss them. His letter never denounced the Olympics themselves, nor the idea of hosting highly structured, competitive, and crowded events within a national park. On the contrary, his tepid suggestion that Sequoia could host the Games implies that he had no ideological qualms about mounting high-profile international sports festivities in a national park. Only seven years later, White would address a Park Service Superintendents’ conference on the importance of maintaining a proper “park atmosphere,” largely by minimizing “featured performances and competitions,” “artificial” amusements, and “hurly-burly.”⁴⁸ His apparent change of heart reflected a broader philosophical shift within the Park Service. Officials

⁴⁶ Ibid. Presumably, he meant to write: “good, but not luxurious food.”

⁴⁷ Ibid. The one-page letter is solely about the Olympic bid.

⁴⁸ John R. White, “Atmosphere in the National Parks” (Address to Special Superintendents’ Meeting, Washington, D.C., February 10, 1936), in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Lary M. Dilsaver (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 142–148.

began to question in the mid-1930s whether large spectator events, competitions, and spectacles constituted appropriate public uses of a national park.

A California Olympics

Yosemite and Lake Tahoe quickly emerged as the California frontrunners for the Olympics. Both sites were popular vacation spots situated in the Sierra Nevadas, and boosters for both hoped to emulate the popularity and success of European ski resorts. Yosemite had a longer winter sports season than the Lake. During those months the YPCC lost a great deal more money than did the multiple private interests that managed accommodations, transportation, and winter sports at Tahoe.⁴⁹ To Tresidder, the Company's substantial investments and perseverance in operating at a loss throughout the winter proved Yosemite's commitment to winter sports. "No company," Tresidder claimed, "is spending so much money in the development of winter sports in California as is the Yosemite Park and Curry Co."⁵⁰ At Lake Tahoe, a number of private companies competed for tourist dollars without the considerable burden of federal bureaucratic oversight. For the Olympic bid, Lake Tahoe also had a powerful outside ally: the Southern Pacific Railroad. Tresidder complained bitterly that even though the company served both regions, Southern Pacific had thrown its considerable weight behind Tahoe's bid. "The principal (sic)

⁴⁹ In a letter to Paul Shoup (then vice president of Southern Pacific), Tresidder explained that Lake Tahoe's facilities were only open briefly during the winter and could therefore earn a profit during a few peak weeks. In contrast, the YPCC kept most facilities open throughout the winter and suffered serious losses during slow periods. The Company had invested \$750,000 over the previous four years and had sustained a "net operating losses since October 1 . . . in the neighborhood of \$60,000.00" (Tresidder to Shoup, January 7, 1929, p. 4, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new-per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

argument advanced by the Southern Pacific,” he wrote Albright in September 1928, “is that we have no facilities for getting passengers to real winter conditions in Yosemite.”⁵¹ Indeed, there was no train service to potential Olympic event sites within the park, and Southern Pacific serviced Yosemite only indirectly. Trains ferried passengers from San Francisco and Los Angeles to Merced, where they transferred to the Yosemite Valley Railroad for the final 80 miles of the journey to El Portal.⁵² Despite the lack of direct train access, however, the YPCC and the NPS were confident that plowed roads (and possibly an aerial tram) would offer plenty of access to Olympic events.

The competition grew more antagonistic on January 4, 1929, when the California Tenth Olympiad Association held a meeting on short notice. As Tresidder recounted it, Yosemite officials were caught by surprise, and were not given a chance to present a full proposal. Even worse, as he wrote Albright, during the meeting Southern Pacific and Lake Tahoe officials attempted to force Yosemite to withdraw its bid. A telegram from the railroad’s president, Paul Shoup, had been read aloud. According to Tresidder, Shoup’s message said that he “had reached the conclusion there could never be any adequate winter sports development in Yosemite.”⁵³ If this represented the opinion of the Railroad itself,

⁵¹ Tresidder to Albright, September 4, 1928, in Yosemite National Park General, H Albright 1927–1933, Box 7, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁵² Southern Pacific’s link to Lake Tahoe was more direct. In 1925 the company began leasing a 16-mile stretch of track from Truckee to Tahoe City, on the lake; it bought the line in 1933, then abandoned it ten years later. At Truckee, passengers could connect to other destinations via Southern Pacific (“Lake Tahoe” (brochure), ca. 1900, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno, <https://specoll.blogs.unr.edu/2014/04/18/lake-tahoe-tourist-brochure>.) In Yosemite, SPRR faced a bit of competition for business from the Santa Fe Railroad, which also ran trains between San Francisco and Merced.

⁵³ Tresidder to Albright, January 7, 1929, p. 2, in Yosemite National Park General, H Albright 1927–1933, Box 7, RG79, NARA College Park. This quote is Tresidder’s recollection of what Shoup had written. Shoup had advanced rapidly through the ranks at Southern Pacific, becoming President of the Company in January 1929. He was also an accomplished writer who had helped found both *Sunset Magazine* (which was

Tresidder explained to Albright, “it is tremendously discouraging to feel that the one big outside interest serving Yosemite has no confidence in our ability to develop a winter business.”⁵⁴ The previous month Tresidder had complained that Southern Pacific placed “an elaborate display of winter sports equipment” with a sign advertising Tahoe’s snow sports in its San Francisco office and ran newspapers ads “dealing wholly with winter sports at Lake Tahoe and not even referring to the winter sports developments in Yosemite.”⁵⁵ He worried that such efforts damaged Yosemite’s chances of winning the Olympics and discouraged winter visitation to the park. The telegram was the last straw. Tresidder sent Shoup an angry five-page missive on January 7, complaining that his comments were baseless but could seriously damage winter tourism in the park. Tresidder touted Yosemite’s stellar winter conditions and explained that members of the YPCC winter sports staff had years of training and professional experience, largely in Europe. Together, they had spent months assessing Yosemite’s Olympic prospects, and in their expert opinions the park would be ideal for the Games. Tresidder even compared Yosemite with the “famous resort” Lake Placid. Yosemite Valley already offered every winter sport found at Lake Placid, he assured Shoup—with the exception of long-distance skiing, which instead was available in

originally published by the railroad to promote travel along its routes), and Los Altos, California, the town next door to Tresidder’s sometimes-homebase of Palo Alto. Shoup was elected a trustee of Stanford in 1923—twenty years before Tresidder assumed the presidency of the University.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁵ Tresidder to Harry Chandler, December 12, 1928, in Yosemite National Park General, H Albright 1927–1933, Box 7, RG79, NARA College Park. In the same letter, Tresidder asked Chandler to speak with Shoup about SPRR’s unfair treatment of Yosemite. “I have taken it up with officials as far as I can,” he complained.

the backcountry and was “unequalled anywhere in the country.”⁵⁶ Moreover, the YPCC employed “a trained winter sports personnel second only to that of Lake Placid.”⁵⁷ In other words, Yosemite’s winter sports program was comparable to Lake Placid’s, and therefore the park must be qualified to host the Olympics.

Participants in the January 4 meeting also claimed that bureaucratic hassles and funding problems would hamper Yosemite’s efforts to build Olympic facilities, an accusation that infuriated Tresidder. He asked Albright to assure the Association that the government would provide adequate facilities and funding and urged him to convince “other influential people” to wire Garland as well.⁵⁸ Perhaps playing the martyr, Tresidder also informed Albright that the YPCC had recently considered requesting permission to close most Valley accommodations during the winter and to “abandon all efforts toward Fall and Winter business . . . [because] the present losses which are continuing even into this month cannot long be endured.”⁵⁹ This was more a plea for assistance (and perhaps sympathy) than a genuine admission of defeat. The Company’s supposed reluctance to continue winter operations was apparently overcome half a week later, when its Board of Directors passed a unanimous resolution to “invest whatever sums of money are necessary for the successful

⁵⁶ Tresidder to Shoup, January 7, 1929, p. 4, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Tresidder to Albright, January 7, 1929, p. 3, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

holding of these [Olympic] Winter Sports.”⁶⁰ Clearly, YPCC officials still believed in the virtues of winter sports in the park, and were well aware that facilities built for the Games could later be used for tourists.

Albright obliged and sent a telegram to the Association on January 15. His message provides important evidence that the Park Service understood the massive amount of work and infrastructure required to host the Olympics, and that the agency nevertheless approved of staging the Games on a federally-protected landscape. The telegram addressed each of Tresidder’s long list of suggested talking points, touting the park’s “outstanding scenery[,] world wide fame[, and] ideal winter climactic conditions,” as well as its tourist facilities, including hotels, a hospital, police department, and train, telephone, and telegraph service.⁶¹ By praising both natural and manmade features, Albright acknowledged that the NPS considered creature comforts as necessary as spectacular scenery. This was true year-round, and not merely when hosting the Olympics; many facilities that would be needed for the Games already existed and were used regularly by park tourists. Albright knew that the Association had questioned Yosemite’s ability to accommodate large numbers of visitors and his telegram was meant to assure the group that the park was already well-equipped with man-made infrastructure and visitor services. He also explained that the Park Service was in the midst of a “large road building program.”⁶² These roads would provide easy access to

⁶⁰ Tresidder to Zach Farmer, January 14, 1929, p. 1, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca. The resolution was passed at a January 11 meeting, during which Tresidder informed the Board that the Games would likely require “an investment of several hundred thousand dollars” (Ibid.).

⁶¹ Albright to Garland (telegram), January 15, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

⁶² Ibid.

several potential sports sites outside the Valley. Olympic spectators would be able to drive to events in their own vehicles and future tourists could easily reach backcountry activities and scenic vistas. Most importantly, Albright proclaimed that the NPS was “whole heartedly in favor” of hosting the Games, and he urged the Association to delay its decision until the NPS and the YPCC had an “opportunity [to] present Yosemite[’s] possibilities in detail.”⁶³ The telegram emphasized the Park Service’s commitment to the Games and the federal government and the concessionaire’s ability to host both athletes and spectators.

The bid process, however, soon evolved into a collective effort at state boosterism. Rather than choosing between Yosemite and Tahoe, the Association decided to delay an official endorsement. In February, Garland told Tresidder that he was “absolutely neutral” about the California bids, explaining that he would simply “like to have the games held in California if we are able to hold them in a successful manner.”⁶⁴ The group announced that it would support whichever site—or sites—could best showcase California’s winter sports opportunities and would help present the bid(s) to the IOC.⁶⁵ Tresidder and other Yosemite boosters quickly fell in line, aware that a joint effort could raise awareness of California snow and ice sports and help boost tourism throughout the state. Shortly after the ill-fated Association meeting—and on the same day he begged Albright to wire the Association on Yosemite’s behalf—Tresidder proclaimed: “we [Yosemite interests] share with every loyal

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Garland to Tresidder, February 7, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

⁶⁵ Yosemite and NPS officials believed (erroneously), through at least January 1929, that the Association would choose between Lake Tahoe and Yosemite before going to the IOC.

Californian the desire of having the 1932 Olympic Winter Sports Games held in a place that will reflect the greatest credit on our State.”⁶⁶ He also contacted newspaper editors to explain “that all loyal California interests are desirous of securing the 1932 Olympic Winter Sports Games for California if possible.”⁶⁷ The state’s best interests were theoretically of foremost concern, though Tresidder and company remained convinced that a Yosemite Olympics *was* in the state’s best interest.⁶⁸ YPCC board member Al Esberg wrote to *Los Angeles Times* publisher Harry Chandler (a fellow Yosemite advocate) that if California did have a suitable site for the Games—and could prove it—submitting an Olympic bid could “very much promote the Winter Sport Games consciousness in California and would in due course permit the orderly development of our whole California Winter Sport theme,” even if the IOC did not choose a California site for the 1932 Winter Olympics.⁶⁹ He also fretted that ‘it would be very bad promotion work to bring the games here [to California] if they could not be held properly and satisfactorily.’⁷⁰ Even Tresidder claimed that if California

⁶⁶ Tresidder to Shoup, January 7, 1929, p. 2, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

⁶⁷ Tresidder to Shoup, January 17, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

⁶⁸ Yosemite backers had also supported California’s Olympic aspirations the previous fall, when they lobbied on behalf of a state bond issue to raise \$1,000,000 for the 1932 Olympics. They likely hoped some of that money would be allotted to the Winter Games, if a California site won. “Approving California Olympiad Bond Act” (Proposition 2), in *Amendments to Constitution and Proposed Statutes, with Arguments Respecting the Same, to be Submitted to the Electors of the State of California at the General Election on Tuesday, November 6, 1928*, compiled by Fred B. Wood (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1928), 22. In 1927, the state Legislature had approved the California Olympiad Bond Act, which would raise \$1,000,000 to help fund the 1932 Summer Games; voters formally approved the bond issue in November 1928.

⁶⁹ Al Esberg to Harry Chandler, February 15, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

bids did not meet strict standards established by winter sports experts, it would be “better to stage the games elsewhere than to have them in California under conditions that might cause dissatisfaction throughout the winter sports world.”⁷¹ He clearly believed Yosemite was up to the challenge, but was also concerned with California’s long-term reputation for winter sports. If experts did not admit that Yosemite was ideal for the Games, it would be best to hold them elsewhere and not risk damaging the park’s efforts at promoting and expanding the winter sports program. Once again, doubts—even among some supporters—concerned the state’s ability to compete with established winter sports destinations, rather than the wisdom of holding such an event on protected land.

While pledging support for a united California effort, Yosemite boosters urged the Association to arrange a thorough evaluation of both prospective sites. In December 1928 the Association informed Tresidder and Tahoe bid officials that “it has been suggested” that a winter sports expert visit both locations to assess their potential, and that the two sites and the Association split the cost of the visits.⁷² Yosemite supporters eagerly embraced the prospect of hiring outsiders. Park officials clamored for an “impartial survey of California’s winter resources” conducted by winter sports authorities, confident that professionals would be impressed by Yosemite’s potential. For months Tresidder had proclaimed that his own experts—mostly European-born and -trained members of the Yosemite winter sports

⁷¹ Tresidder to Harry B. Smith (Sporting Editor, *S.F. Chronicle*), January 17, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

⁷² Zach Farmer to Tresidder, December 8, 1928, p. 2, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca. It is not clear who initially made the suggestion.

staff—had fully endorsed Yosemite’s terrain and climate for the Games. J. V. Lloyd (assistant to the park superintendent) wrote newspaper editorials and asked “our San Joaquin Valley friends” to lobby the Association, which by mid-January had not followed through on its tentative plan to enlist expert help.⁷³ According to Lloyd, Chambers of Commerce “from Stockton to Bakersfield took immediate action and filed their requests for a thorough survey of the whole region.”⁷⁴ Some of these missives accused the Association of being biased against the Yosemite area, a charge Association Secretary-Manager Zach Farmer indignantly denied.⁷⁵ The Stockton Chamber of Commerce even asked Farmer for contact information for members of the IOC. Irritated, Farmer told Tresidder to inform the Chamber that pestering IOC officials directly would only hurt Yosemite’s case. Tresidder agreed to do so, but may have been privately pleased that the business interests he’d cultivated were rallying so enthusiastically to the cause. In addition, local clubs, including the Lions, Rotarians, Kiwanis, and Exchange clubs from Merced, Stockton, Modesto, and other cities passed resolutions endorsing Yosemite’s bid.⁷⁶ By February Tahoe had agreed to abide by expert opinions on the matter if members of the international winter sports federations were to inspect the sites, but, Garland warned Tresidder, it was possible such experts could also find “advantages” in other U.S. locations. Worse, the experts might “not find the natural

⁷³ J. V. Lloyd to Albright, January 14, 1929, p. 2, in Yosemite Winter Sports 1929, H Albright 1927–1933, Box 7, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Zach Farmer to Wm. E. Metzger (San Joaquin Valley Tourist and Travel Association), January 18, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

⁷⁶ J. V. Lloyd to Albright, January 14, 1929, p. 2, in Yosemite Winter Sports 1929, H Albright 1927–1933, Box 7, RG79, NARA College Park.

facilities in the United States equal to the high standards of availability (sic) at Chamonix and St. Moritz,” in which case they might recommend holding the Games in Europe or Canada instead.⁷⁷ Once again, even American winter sports boosters feared that United States winter sports facilities would be judged lacking.

“The Storehouse of America’s Sunshine”

Even as boosters united behind a group effort, California’s well-groomed reputation as a sun-soaked paradise threatened the state’s chances of securing the Games. Few Americans in the 1920s associated California with snow sports, and for good reason. Promoters had spent decades successfully selling the state’s mild climate as a healthy and invigorating escape from colder regions. Since the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, thousands of tourists had fled west for pleasure, health, or a combination thereof. A 1910 travel guide published by Southern Pacific announced: that “climate, that will-o’-the-wisp that has led travelers in search of comfort or health a weary chase over many lands, comes closest to the ideal in California.”⁷⁸ The book acknowledged the state’s varied terrain (seas shores, deserts, mountains, and so on), but stressed “the three hundred days of sunshine that make brilliant every year” and California’s “charm to set one searching for summer clothes for winter in a land where December is known only by the calendar and where at Christmas and New Year’s they throw roses instead of snowballs and wind up with

⁷⁷ Garland to Tresidder, February 7, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new-per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

⁷⁸ *California for the Tourist: The Charm of the Land of Sunshine by Summit Sea and Shore* (San Francisco: Southern Pacific, 1910), 5.

an ocean dip as a cooler.”⁷⁹ In a 1926 guide, Harry Byron Magill was more succinct, anointing California “the Storehouse of America’s Sunshine.”⁸⁰ As Henry Knight argues, California (and Florida) boosters promoted their states as “renewing ‘tropics’ that offered a range of hopes for incoming Americans.”⁸¹ Wealthy Easterners “wintered” in California, spending weeks or months at luxury hotels like Riverside’s Mission Inn and San Diego’s Hotel del Coronado, and a resort culture soon developed in these areas which further advanced a narrative of sun and relaxation. Other visitors sought warm, dry weather as a cure for consumption or other ailments.⁸² Southern California’s highly romanticized and mythical mission past (promoted by Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona* and other popular works) and the region’s Mediterranean climate also helped fuel popular impressions of the state as a sunny, sparkling, and warm vacation destination.⁸³ These perceptions were most closely associated with Southern California, but they extended northward as well, leaving many Americans under the distinct impression that the entire state was a year-round summery pleasure ground. It was this always-sunny reputation that California winter sports boosters

⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁰ H[arry] B[Byron] Magill, *Motoring thru the Yosemite* (San Francisco: Yosemite Publishing Co., 1926), [3]. Magill acknowledged that the “Golden State [was] possessed of unequalled and diversified climate,” but he greatly emphasized the sunshine and warmth.

⁸¹ Henry Knight, *Tropic of Hopes: California, Florida, and the Selling of American Paradise, 1869–1929* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 2.

⁸² As Kevin Starr notes, in the 1870s “a sanatorium culture” emerged in Southern California; “sunshine and fresh air helped in the recovery of many.” (Starr, *California: A History* [New York: Modern Library, 2005], 147).

⁸³ Phoebe S. Kropp’s *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) explores Southern California’s constructed Spanish-Mexican past via case studies of specific locales. Other scholars have focused more specifically on literature’s role in forging California’s mythical past. See, for example, Dydia DeLyser, *Ramona Memories: Tourism and the Shaping of Southern California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

had to overcome. As a March 1929 piece in the *Stockton Record* put it, “the advertising to the world that California, in addition to being the land of sunshine, is also the land, of all lands in America, for winter sports would be worth untold hundreds of thousands to this state.”⁸⁴ The Games would raise awareness of a growing western industry—winter sports—while showcasing California’s scenic wonders to a global audience, likely increasing tourism throughout the state. Eventually such efforts would pay off: as Annie Gilbert Coleman notes, since World War II, “ski tourism has been an economic force in the West.”⁸⁵ However, in the late 1920s, Tresidder and others were still working to convince the rest of the country and Europe that California was a winter sports paradise.

As part of the statewide campaign to boost winter tourism, the Sacramento regional advisory council of the California Development Association held a meeting in late February 1929 attended by business interests and representatives of California bids. They hoped to “unit[e] the efforts to get the games for California first and [let] the selection of the site in California await investigations.”⁸⁶ Swiss-born Ernst Des Baillets, whom Tresidder had hired in 1928 to direct the YPCC’s winter sports program, represented Yosemite at the meeting along with Leavitt, Lloyd, and YPCC secretary H. H. Hoss. Des Baillets “was the only man present with any detailed information as to what would be required to hold the winter games,” according to one newspaper account, “and his statements as to the cost of

⁸⁴ L. V. Peterson, “State Has Best Chance for Snow Sports in 1932,” *Stockton Record*, March 2, 1929.

⁸⁵ Coleman, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing,” 584.

⁸⁶ Peterson, “State Has Best Chance for Snow Sports in 1932.”

equipment for holding the contests left his hearers gasping.⁸⁷ Yet the Games would be worthwhile, the meeting concluded, largely because they would help promote California tourism. At least 1,000 athletes, officials, and foreign reporters were expected, and crowds might reach 15,000–20,000 at especially popular events. Moreover, “among spectators from abroad will be members of nearly if not all of the royal families,” offering a nice boost in prestige to the proceedings.⁸⁸ The meeting adopted a resolution urging the “immediate development and popularization of winter games in California with the objective of bringing the 1932 Olympic winter games to this state if possible, and urging the united support of all interested communities to make winter sports a great California ‘industry.’”⁸⁹ The resolution also encouraged Californians to form clubs for winter sports such as hockey and skating, and to affiliate these new groups with national sports organizations.⁹⁰ Tresidder had already done his part in this respect, helping to found the Yosemite Winter Club in 1928 and forging connections with other skating and skiing associations. The California Development Association’s resolution firmly supported the growth of winter sports in the state, encouraging the development of an organized recreation industry and the forging of national networks that would connect California with the wider world of snow and ice activities.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Attendees were informed that the cost would likely “run into several hundred thousand dollars.”

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

A Plan for the Games

Throughout early 1929, even as Yosemite boosters made pronouncements about the “state’s best interests,” they remained convinced that the park was the best choice for the Games. Now they had to convince the International Olympic Committee that the park was an ideal host. In March 1929, Des Baillets prepared a plan for the Games which became the basis for Yosemite’s formal bid presentation at the IOC’s April 1929 meeting. His familiarity with European ski resorts lent the bid an air of Continental credibility, and his previous position on the winter sports staff at the Lake Placid Club and as a founding member of the Lake Placid Sno Birds could prove useful in assessing the competition. Perhaps fed up with the ongoing bid process, Des Baillets hoped California boosters would rally around Yosemite as the state’s best hope. “If California is really interested in securing the Olympic Winter Games,” he wrote, “time will be saved by at once concentrating all efforts on Yosemite National Park as the foremost winter station in California and in making such a statement, I absolutely bear in mind the greatness of those Games and would never for one minute advocate a place which would not provide the very best facilities in every respect.”⁹¹ By that March, Tresidder’s initial proposal to hold events at Glacier Point had fallen by the wayside. Yosemite officials had also considered Tuolumne Meadows, Shippey Meadows, Tenaya Lake, and other backcountry locations, but this would have required

⁹¹ Ernst Des Baillets, “Bid for the Winter Olympic Games in 1932,” March 12, 1929, p. 4, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new-per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca. Des Baillets also reminded readers of his twenty years’ of experience in winter sports in Switzerland, France, Canada, and the United States, just in case there was any doubt about his expertise.

providing transportation and plowed roads, goals that had thus far eluded the YPCC during the winter. Instead, the final plan called for holding most events in the Valley.⁹²

Des Baillets explained that the park already had a number of excellent sports facilities and planned to construct others as needed for the Olympics. For instance, the Company would build an Olympic-quality ski jump on the shady side of the Valley, with grandstands for “at least 5,000 people” and enough standing room that “at least fifteen thousand people . . . [could] witness this event.”⁹³ The YPCC also planned to build a second ice rink, a reference to the 60,000 square foot rink that would open in Fall 1929. “This [ice rink] situation is exceptional and will not be found anywhere else in the United States,” he explained, particularly because the rink would be shaded for all but one to two hours each day.⁹⁴ The new rink would feature a ¼-mile track for speed skating and include grandstand seating for 5,000–10,000 and standing room for 10,000 additional spectators. The Company would also build two or three additional rinks for hockey practices and “numerous curling

⁹² Tresidder believed all events except for the 33-mile cross country race and the bobsled could be held in the Valley, but Yosemite officials surveyed a wide variety of locations before arriving at a (still surprisingly open-ended) plan in March 1929. As late as January 1929, Tresidder was still unsure of some locations, noting, for instance, that if the Park Service could complete road construction in the back country (and make a minor modification to the initial road plans), a “championship ski jump” could be built at Badger Pass, the site that would become Yosemite’s primary ski area by the mid 1930s (Tresidder to Albright, January 7, 1929, p. 1, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new-per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.). Modern Olympic bid cities must submit detailed plans several years in advance of the Games, and a country can submit no more than one bid to the International Olympic Committee. After winning approval from its own National Olympic Committee, a bid city applies directly to the IOC. For the most recent Winter Olympics—2014 in Sochi, Russia—initial bids were due to the IOC in 2005, nearly a decade before the Games. The IOC selected three finalists in June 2006, conducted extensive site visits (a much more bureaucratic version of the “expert visits” Tresidder sought), and selected Sochi as the winner in July 2007.

⁹³ Des Baillets, “Bid for the Winter Olympic Games in 1932,” 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

rinks.”⁹⁵ Remarkably, the YPCC even offered to construct an indoor ice rink for hockey and figure skating—simply as a backup, should weather conditions interfere with events on the outdoor rinks. This extremely expensive contingency plan (Des Baillets estimated the indoor rink would cost \$150,000 and would seat at least 3,000 spectators) demonstrated the park’s commitment to securing the Games.⁹⁶ Any indoor ice rink—let alone one large enough to seat a few thousand people—would certainly betray the ideals of scenic outdoor play that the Company had so successfully espoused while building its winter sports program in the 1920s.⁹⁷ And although some new facilities could later be used by visitors, there was no reasonable justification for retaining several outdoor rinks and one large indoor rink. Other Winter Olympics hosts have dealt with similar issues when constructing facilities. In their study of Winter Olympics from 1924 through 2002, Stephen Essex and Brian Chalkley found that Winter Games facilities “can have considerable physical and aesthetic implications for natural and seminatural landscapes within the region. The installation of

⁹⁵ The IOC required 2–3 hockey practice rinks in addition to a main rink for games. In Yosemite’s case, games would be played on the 60,000-foot rink. (Des Baillets, “Bid for the Winter Olympic Games in 1932,” 2.)

⁹⁶ Lake Placid Olympic organizers built a new indoor ice arena for their Games. It wound up hosting figure skating, curling, and half of the hockey games, due to inclement weather. The arena was roughly 34,000 square feet and had a capacity of 3,360 (III Olympic Winter Games Committee, *Official Report: III Olympic Winter Games, Lake Placid 1932*, compiled by George M. Lattimer [Lake Placid, NY: III Olympic Winter Games Committee, 1932], 156. Hereafter cited as *Official Report: III Olympic Winter Games*). The report proclaimed that “no resort in the world, outside the larger cities, can boast of such a building. Never before had any part of a Winter Olympic program been held under a roof” (*Official Report: III Olympic Winter Games*, 150). The report also gave bid organizer Dewey all credit for the indoor rink. It attributed the arena’s existence to “his vision, his faith, and his tenacity of purpose in the face of obstacles that would have discouraged most men” and implied that no other site would have built one (Ibid.). In fact, before Lake Placid finally decided in late 1930 to build the arena, IOC officials had recommended constructing one as an insurance policy in case of poor weather and had suggested that it would also provide a permanent memorial to the Games. The memorial justification would have been less appropriate had Yosemite won the bid.

⁹⁷ Des Baillets, “Bid for the Winter Olympic Games in 1932,” 1. The document made clear that the indoor rink would be built specifically for the Olympics, but Des Baillets did not mention if it would be torn down following the Games.

large structures and the use of chemicals, such as ammonia for artificial freezing, represent two examples of obvious Olympic intrusions into fragile environments.”⁹⁸ Historically, environmental impacts have been more noticeable after Winter than Summer Olympics, because Winter Games are typically held in less populated areas in which large-capacity structures may have little subsequent use. Lake Placid’s Olympics were staged in a relatively remote region, but many of the facilities built for the Games were retained for future events. Most notably, the Olympic Stadium did double duty as the local high school’s football and track stadium, then was reused for the 1980 Lake Placid Winter Olympics.⁹⁹



Image 2-5: Four-man bobsleigh at the Mt. Van Hoevenberg Olympic Bobsled Run, 1932 Winter Olympic Games at Lake Placid. © 1932 / Comité International Olympique (CIO).

⁹⁸ Stephen Essex and Brian Chalkley, “Mega-Sporting Events in Urban and Regional Policy: A History of the Winter Olympics,” *Planning Perspectives* 19 (April 2004), 206.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

Planning outdoor events was also problematic in Yosemite. The bobsled presented an extra challenge because strict Olympic regulations governed the grade and length of the course. Des Baillets believed the park could create a bobsled run on the old Wawona-Glacier Road: “it will be easily possible to find a perfect track on the old road with the finish near the floor of the Valley, and thus allowing a large crowd to witness the races.”¹⁰⁰ Converting a section of the road would cost \$25,000–\$40,000; but if the road proved insufficient, Des Baillets estimated it would cost \$100,000 to build an entirely new track, located within the Valley. He breezily noted that the park had “just received the latest models of bob sleigh made in switzerland (sic), an exact copy of the one which won the Olympic Games in Chamonix, France in 1924, and we will experiment with it on this track in the near future.”¹⁰¹ It is difficult to imagine how to test a bobsled run before it is built, but Des Baillets may have hoped that the mere mention of elite European equipment would distract attention from the hypothetical track.

Long distance skiing, on the other hand, could provide the park an edge over its competition. Des Baillets explained that “expert ski-ers” had spent the past winter scouring the park’s high country for the very best terrain for cross country skiing, and had found especially “magnificent snow fields . . . at and around Tuolumne Meadows district.”¹⁰² This

¹⁰⁰ Des Baillets, “Bid for the Winter Olympic Games in 1932,” 4. At the time, officials were planning to build a new road to Glacier Point which would follow a different route.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 2. The 1928 Winter Games had featured three cross-country races: a 31.5-mile race, a 12-mile race, and an 18-mile “military ski race.” Des Baillets wrote that the military race was basically an exhibition event and would probably not be staged if the Olympics were held in the U.S. (*Ibid.*, 2).

raised the difficult prospect of transporting visitors out of the Valley and into a region that was usually inaccessible during the winter, but Des Baillets promised that the YPCC was already investigating “the building of an elevated railroad, similar to the one existing in Switzerland.”¹⁰³ Any comparison to Swiss facilities was usually well-received by winter sports enthusiasts, and Des Baillets claimed the tram could transport roughly 500 people from the Valley to Tuolumne Meadows in three hours. The YPCC would also build a new hotel for up to 150 people to provide onsite accommodations for athletes and Olympic officials. Not surprisingly, neither project was seriously considered after the bid process ended.

Des Baillets, who had skied and worked at many of the world’s best-known resorts, was confident that Yosemite’s terrain was perfect. “It is my opinion,” he concluded, “that Yosemite National Park offers better skiing cross country territory than Lake Placid or even Canada.”¹⁰⁴ He breezily dismissed the latter’s prospects, arguing that its “tame rolling hills” (the Laurentian Mountains) would make races “a matter of endurance where skiing skill will not count at all” and that “Lake Placid is still in a worse fix.”¹⁰⁵ Yosemite’s course, on the other hand, would “provide necessary difficulties that we should offer to expert ski-ers from Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland.”¹⁰⁶ Once again, the goal was to impress the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 3. The Laurentian Mountains are in southern Quebec; the Adirondacks, where Lake Placid is located, are a southern extension of the same range. Des Baillets wrote that the average altitude of the Laurentians is 2,000–3,000 feet (Ibid., 3). The highest peak in the range is 3,825 feet; in contrast, Tuolumne Meadows is at an elevation of 8,600. Lake Placid Village is at 1,801 feet.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

European winter sports community, and Des Baillets argued that Yosemite came closer than its North American competitors to meeting Continental ideals for cross-country skiing. Alpine skiing (downhill and slalom) was not introduced to the Olympics until 1936, so there was no need for a new venue to replace the diminutive Ski Hill.¹⁰⁷ Despite the great heights of Yosemite's peaks, the park's cross-country skiing terrain was far superior to the Valley's petite 1920s downhill slope.

Des Baillets further explained that the YPCC was proficient in organizing winter sports—contrary to popular belief that American ski resorts were ill-prepared to stage-manage such events—and that the park would host a number of competitions before the Olympics. For instance, during the following winter, the Yosemite Winter Club was planning to stage both an international skating meet and “a week of horse races on a hard snow track,” featuring ski-joring and horse trotting, which had been exhibition events at the St. Moritz Games.¹⁰⁸ The Curry ice rink hosted hockey games at the collegiate, amateur, and professional levels, and would continue to do so. Des Baillets also promised to stage “at least two international ski jumping contests” in winter 1929–1930 on a 150–175 foot jump, and additional competitions on a “new jump of Olympic standard,” should Yosemite be awarded the Games.¹⁰⁹ He believed that “by conducting such international events each year,

¹⁰⁷ The only skiing events at the 1932 Games were Nordic competitions, and they were for men only. There were two cross-country races (18 km and 50 km); a ski jump; and the Nordic combined (a cross country race and a ski jump). The other Olympic competitions were: three figure skating events (women's singles, men's singles, and doubles); four speed skating races (500m, 1,500m, 5,000m, and 10,000m); men's two-man and four-man bobsled; and men's ice hockey. Curling, dog sled racing, and women's speed skating were exhibition sports at the 1932 Games (“Lake Placid 1932,” International Olympic Committee, accessed May 16, 2017, <https://www.olympic.org/lake-placid-1932>).

¹⁰⁸ Des Baillets, “Bid for the Winter Olympic Games in 1932,” 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

the officials in charge of these contests will be familiar with rules, etc., by 1932.”¹¹⁰ In other words, although Yosemite was geographically far removed from Europe, the park was prepared to host the world’s best athletes and to impress the Continental winter sports community.

The International Olympic Committee issued its decision during an April conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, at which seven American cities presented bids. Des Baillets was remarkably optimistic right before sailing to the meeting, informing Harry Chandler that Southern Pacific had sent its own representative along to help “secure the Games for California.” He concluded: “I beleive (sic) that our chances are nearly perfect.”¹¹¹ The IOC formally crushed Yosemite’s Olympic dreams on April 10, based in large measure on location and reputation.¹¹² If winter sports had to cross the Atlantic, at least New York was closer than California to its most ardent fans and accomplished athletes, and the Lake Placid Club was one of the oldest winter sports centers in the United States. According to the official report on the Games, which was prepared by Lake Placid’s own Olympic organizing committee, Lake Placid won because of “its pre-eminent standing as a winter sports resort, its climate and terrain, its existing sports facilities, its experience in staging winter sports, and its guarantee that the additional facilities necessary for the conduct of the Games would be

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹¹ Des Baillets to Harry Chandler, March 23, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

¹¹² In addition to Yosemite, Lake Tahoe, and Lake Placid, Bear Mountain (New York), Duluth (Minnesota), Minneapolis, and Denver submitted bids. Lake Placid, Yosemite, and Lake Tahoe were the most serious contenders, according to most accounts leading up to the meeting. Montreal and Oslo were prepared to present bids as well, if all of the United States candidates were rejected. Des Baillets, Garland, and other California boosters attended the meeting (*Official Report: III Olympic Winter Games*, 48).

provided.”¹¹³ Tresidder believed Yosemite possessed the same qualities, if not quite as long a history as a “pre-eminent” resort. He learned of the loss via telegram: “Games awarded Lake Placid disregarding splendid effort made by Garland[,] Lansdale[,] Sanders[,] and sell[,] distance being decisif (sic) factor,” Des Baillets wrote.¹¹⁴ William F. Humphrey, Vice President of the 10th California Olympiad Association, did not take the loss well. He “called the decision an ‘outrage,’” the *Los Angeles Times* reported, and suggested that the Association stage “winter sports in opposition” in Northern California during the 1932 Games.¹¹⁵ Still apparently under the impression that California had already earned the right to host both the Summer and Winter Games, he argued that the state “will have more right to call our games the Olympic Games, than Lake Placid will have.”¹¹⁶ Lake Placid Club President Godfrey Dewey was perturbed, and let Tresidder know. He thanked Don for a congratulatory note and explained that he had read it out loud at a public meeting to “help offset the effect of Mr Humphrey’s vulgar outburst, which was widely publisht (sic) and did more harm to California’s good name than anything else.”¹¹⁷ He also complained that Des Baillets had informed the *New York Evening World* that the Games really would be held in Yosemite, after all. Tresidder explained that Des Baillets had been misquoted, and he assured Dewey that

¹¹³ Ibid., 48.

¹¹⁴ Des Baillets to Tresidder (telegram), April [10?], 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca. “Sell” may have been a typo for “self” in the telegram.

¹¹⁵ “Lake Placid Gets Games,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 1929.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Dewey to Tresidder, May 15, 1929, p. 1, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

the Humphrey kerfuffle was “a closed incident now” and that “our interests here took very definite steps . . . to prevent a situation which might have resulted disastrously, both to Lake Placid and California.”¹¹⁸ Humphrey’s protest plans thus squashed, the Games proceeded as planned in New York.



Image 2-6: The American delegation in the Opening Ceremony of the 1932 Winter Olympic Games, Lake Placid, with NBC journalists on the ice. © 1932 / Comité International Olympique (CIO).

Lake Placid

Yosemite likely would have won the Games, had the New York resort not submitted a bid. Lake Placid’s victory is especially noteworthy because the site operated under very different conditions than Yosemite. The bid was led and organized primarily by the private

¹¹⁸ Tresidder to Dewey, May 27, 1929, p. 1, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

Lake Placid Club—a group with discriminatory membership policies and strict rules of personal conduct—an environment (in every sense of the word) far afield from that of Yosemite’s public “playground.”¹¹⁹ Godfrey Dewey, son of Club founder Melvil Dewey, led the Olympic effort.¹²⁰ Lake Placid was dominated by the private and exclusive Club, and both it and Dewey wielded a great deal of influence in the region. Although the state of New York provided some funding for the Games, Lake Placid was not subject to the government oversight and regulations that often constrained Tresidder at Yosemite. Lake Placid was also better known for winter sports than either Yosemite or Tahoe, and it was quite a bit closer to Europe. However, while the Lake Placid Club had more experience than Yosemite in organizing winter sports, it did not yet have a bobsled run or sufficient housing

¹¹⁹ Lake Placid Club founder Melvil Dewey resigned as New York’s State Librarian in 1905 after the Regents investigated blatant racism at the Lake Placid Club. One petition demanding Dewey’s dismissal quoted a Club circular (allegedly authored by Dewey) and argued that anyone with such views should not hold public office. The circular read, in part: “No one will be received as member or guest against whom there is physical, moral, social, or race objection, or who would be unwelcome to even a small minority. . . . This invariable rule is rigidly enforced; it is found impracticable to make exceptions to Jews or others excluded, even when of unusual personal qualifications.” (“Ask Regents to Depose State Librarian Dewey,” *New York Times*, January 21, 1905, p. 5.) An official 1928 yearbook noted that the Club “excludes rigorously every person against whom there is social, race, moral or fysical objection. The Race objection does not bar foreners of refinement, many of whom come to us each year” (as quoted in Ned P. Rauch, “Lake Placid Club: The Beginnings” in *The Lake Placid Club, 1890 to 2002*, ed. Lee Manchester [Jay, N.Y.: Makebelieve Publishing, 2008], 3). After Melvil’s death the Lake Placid Club maintained exclusionary membership policies under Godfrey’s direction and into the 1970s (Peter Crowley, “Why did the Lake Placid Club Close?” in *The Lake Placid Club, 1890 to 2002*, 21).

¹²⁰ Godfrey Dewey and Donald Tresidder had a great deal in common. Both were avid skiers and active in their states’ winter sports movements. Dewey’s father Melvil had co-founded the Lake Placid Club in 1895, while David and Jennie Curry (Tresidder’s parents-in-law) had founded Camp Curry in 1899, and both sites originally catered to educators rather than to the wealthy elite. Later in their careers, both Godfrey and Don served as college presidents, Dewey at Emerson College (1949 to 1951) and Tresidder at Stanford (1943 to 1948). Famous in his own right, Melvil Dewey was an enthusiastic proponent of “simplified spelling” and the metric system. His namesake, the Dewey Decimal System, was designed to simplify the library cataloging process. Following in his father’s reformist footsteps, Godfrey served as founder and president of the Phonetic Spelling Council; his passion for “simplified spelling” might have confounded members of the Olympic “family,” as the *Official Report: III Olympic Winter Games* and correspondence of the III Olympic Winter Games Committee is littered with words like “evinst,” “exprest,” “voist,” and “Sno Birds.” Melvil himself was born “Melville,” and simplified his own name. (See, for instance, *Official Report: III Olympic Winter Games*, 45, for creative spellings.) Here I retain the original spelling and avoid using “[sic].”

for Olympic athletes and spectators, and therefore needed to raise a large amount of money to stage the Games. Dewey won the hearts (and wallets) of Lake Placid locals by claiming that the region could develop as a winter sports destination comparable to “leading French and Swiss resorts.” He also managed to obtain funding from the New York state legislature and support from governor Franklin Roosevelt.¹²¹ In this respect, Dewey’s mission was similar to Tresidder’s—he needed to enlist community assistance and secure government funding—but Tresidder had the added bureaucratic burden of operating a concession on federal land and coordinating Olympic planning with the Park Service.

For its members, the Lake Placid Club provided a pleasant escape from the rigors of modern life in a setting that purposely evoked an idyllic European village. By 1920 the Club owned 6,000 acres and 258 buildings, including guest accommodations, farm buildings, sports facilities, and a 10,000-volume library; by 1930, it had expanded to approximately 370 buildings spread across 10,600 acres.¹²² Members could participate in summer and winter sports, regattas, hikes, dances, golf tournaments, pageants, an annual “Iroquois Council Fire,” and a host of other activities deemed sufficiently wholesome by the Club.¹²³ The resort remained open through the winter for the first time in 1904–1905, and within 10 years, according to Godfrey Dewey, it “was fully established as the leading winter sports

¹²¹ *Official Report: III Olympic Winter Games*, 45. Lake Placid’s Chamber of Commerce offered \$50,000 in July 1928; much of the rest of the funding came from New York State, working in partnership with local village boards and commissions as the “New York Olympic Winter Games Commission” (Essex and Chalkley, “Mega-Sporting Events in Urban and Regional Policy: A History of the Winter Olympics,” 216).

¹²² Rauch, “Lake Placid Club: The Beginnings,” 4; Crowley, “Why Did the Lake Placid Club Close?,” 20. In comparison, Yosemite is currently 748,036 acres, 704,624 of which are “designated wilderness” outside of the Valley (“Park Statistics,” National Park Service, accessed July 11, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/management/statistics.htm>).

¹²³ Rauch, “Lake Placid Club: The Beginnings,” 4–5.

center in the United States.”¹²⁴ The Sno Birds, a group of winter sports enthusiasts within the Club, was established in 1920 to sponsor events and local athletes. Like the Yosemite Winter Club (founded eight years later), the Sno Birds arranged competitions and exhibitions at the amateur, collegiate, and professional levels in skating, skiing, curling, and other events. Godfrey Dewey was especially proud of the Lake Placid Club’s relatively long history with winter sports, a point he seemed delighted to belabor in a letter he wrote Tresidder shortly before the Games were awarded: “For the best interests of winter sports in the United States as a whole, I of course hope that the Third Olympic Winter Games will be awarded to Lake Placid. Wherever they are awarded, however, please be assured of our fullest cooperation at all times in placing the results of our long winter sports experience at your disposal.”¹²⁵

Tresidder responded after the loss with a congratulations and his own offer of help, though it is difficult to gauge his level of sincerity: “If there is any way in which we can be of service, either directly or indirectly, please do not hesitate to call on us.”¹²⁶ Tresidder clearly wanted to remind Dewey of the YPCC’s own experience with winter sports.

¹²⁴ Ned P. Rauch, “Inventing Winter Sport at the Lake Placid Club,” in *The Lake Placid Club, 1890 to 2002*, ed. Lee Manchester (Jay, N.Y.: Makebelieve Publishing, 2008), 8.

¹²⁵ Dewey to Tresidder, March 29, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.

¹²⁶ Tresidder to Dewey, April 18, 1929, in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca. In the same letter, Tresidder also asked if he could reserve three rooms at the Lake Placid Club for the duration of the games. A Club official responded to the request two *years* later, advising Tresidder that the best way to guarantee a room would be to become a member of the Lake Placid Club, a suggestion Tresidder promptly rejected (C. W. Holt to Tresidder, February 9, 1931; and Tresidder to Holt, February 20, 1931; both in in Olympic Games 1928–1931, YPCC Collection, Series 4: Executive Office, Subseries 3: Historical Files new–per, Box 6 of 11, National Park Service Archives, El Portal, Ca.).



Image 2-7: Women's 500 meter speed skating (a demonstration sport) at the 1932 Winter Olympic Games, Lake Placid. Canadian Lela Brooks-Potter is on the right. © 1932 / Comité International Olympique (CIO).

After such a devastating blow as losing the Games, Yosemite boosters may have experienced some *schadenfreude* when Lake Placid's Olympics fell victim to a heat wave in February 1932. Officials had to haul in snow on trains from Canada, delay the conclusion of the bobsled competition by a week, and place hay bales at the bottom of the ski jump. The press was not kind: "a spring day and a town humiliated," proclaimed the *Washington Post*.¹²⁷ The bobsled races were postponed for so long that "it [was] no fantastic dream that the main event of the winter sports [would] have to be called off on account of summer."¹²⁸ They

¹²⁷ Westbrook Pegler, "Signs of Spring Bring Tragedy to Lake Placid, Jading Winter Olympics," *The Washington Post*, February 13, 1932, p. 13.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14. Weather remains an issue in the Winter Olympic bidding process, but the wide availability of snow-making equipment has somewhat alleviated these concerns. In 2010, Olympic organizers in Vancouver "tried airlifting snow by helicopter at five-minute intervals; hauling snow by the lorryload from three hours away; shooting ice and water out of a snow cannon; spreading layers of snow with a Zamboni ice-smoothing truck; and studding the slopes with tubes packed full of dry ice, to keep the snow from melting, and replenishing them every 12 hours." Even bales of straw were used. Vancouver had been the warmest Winter Olympic bid city to win the Games, and the winter of 2010 turned out to be its mildest on record (Suzanne Goldenberg, "Canada's Mild Climate Leaves Winter Olympics Short of Snow," *The Guardian*, February 10, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2010/feb/10/vancouver-lacks-snow>; "Canada's Top Ten Weather Stories for 2010," Government of Canada, accessed July 20, 2016, https://www.ec.gc.ca/meteo-weather/default.asp?lang=En&n=933F667B-1_) Temperature records fell again four years later when the

eventually concluded after the closing ceremonies, on the last possible day to count as an official Olympic event. Meanwhile, in Yosemite, the weather was “ideal . . . for winter sports and all outdoor activities. Clear days and cold nights . . . kept snow conditions in good shape, which was enjoyed by a record number of winter visitors to the fullest extent.”¹²⁹ Along Glacier Point Road, tourists could frolic in twelve feet of snow.¹³⁰ According to Superintendent Charles Goff Thomson, “the visitors seemed to display a more genuine enjoyment in winter sports than ever before.” The park also hosted a sports-themed spectacle one week after the Olympics concluded: “the ice carnival held on the night of February 21 was thoroughly enjoyed, and many of the visitors spoke of it as being unusually fine.”¹³¹ Visitation was higher than the previous February, and a record 5,441 people entered the park on Washington’s birthday, a remarkable increase over the previous one-day winter

Games were held in Sochi, Russia, a popular resort town on the shores of the Black Sea with palm trees and a climate similar to that of Atlanta, Georgia (the average temperature in Sochi in January 2014 was 51 degrees, 3 degrees warmer than Atlanta’s average). Once again, organizers manufactured and shipped in snow, as “not one moment of the Sochi Olympics was below freezing” (Eric Holthaus, “It’s Official: Sochi Was the Warmest Winter Olympics Ever,” *Slate*, February 24, 2014, http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2014/02/24/sochi_s_average_temperature_it_was_the_warmest_winter_olympics_ever.html). Remarkably, the 2022 Winter Games have been awarded to Beijing, China, site of the 2008 *Summer* Olympics. Four reliably snowy European cities withdrew their bids during the bidding process, leaving China to just barely nose out Almaty, Kazakhstan, a more wintry region (Olympic bid slogan: “Keeping it real”). China has promised to create and import as much snow as necessary for the unusually dry host city. Perhaps concerns over human rights issues, smog, and even allegations that an official Beijing Olympic theme song plagiarizes *Frozen*’s “Let it Go,” have trumped worries over climate (Matt Schiavenza, “A Winter Olympics in a City Without Snow,” *The Atlantic*, July 31, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/07/a-winter-olympics-in-a-city-without-snow/400250/>). Clearly weather issues would no longer hurt Yosemite’s chances at winning an Olympic bid, but of course modern NPS concerns over crowds, infrastructure, environmental damage, and park purpose would prevent a bid in the first place.

¹²⁹ *Superintendent’s Monthly Report for February 1932* (March 3, 1932), 1, in Superintendent’s Monthly Reports, NPS Archives at El Portal. (Hereafter cited as: *Supt. Report for [Month Year]* ([Date]).)

¹³⁰ Jerry E. Carpenter, *California Winter Sports and the VIIIth Winter Olympic Games, 1960 at Squaw Valley* (San Francisco: Fearon Publishers, 1958), 64.

¹³¹ *Supt. Report for February 1932* (March 3, 1932), 9.

record of 979 people, set the year before.¹³² The park experienced an increase in winter travel and interest in winter sports, even without the draw of hosting the Winter Games. Publicity surrounding the Olympics likely helped boost visitation, as did the YPCC's ongoing investments in winter sports programs and the ideal weather conditions in February 1932.

No one had expected warm weather at Lake Placid, but some observers had feared a financial flop, and not merely because of the Depression. Journalist Westbrook Pegler worried that the Games could fail because "there are comparatively few Americans who are familiar with winter sports or so fond of cold weather as to go out of their way to seek it."¹³³ However, he also predicted that the festivities might help increase "interest in winter sports," and that the costs might be recouped at some point in the future.¹³⁴ In particular, Pegler believed the Games would promote spectatorship, making sports interesting even to those unable or unwilling to participate themselves. Lake Placid, he wrote, would "be bright with the colors of not only the 17 competing nations, but of the most spectacular costumes ever designed for sport. The New York shops have been promoting ski costumes for women spectators of the Olympic games for several weeks and the designers wore out their color cards achieving some of their effects."¹³⁵ The fact that clothes were being marketed specifically to Olympic spectators reflected remarkable growth in the winter sports industry. Businesses could profit from selling clothing and equipment to both participants and

¹³² Ibid., 1. 16,338 visitors entered the park during February (Ibid., 9).

¹³³ Westbrook Pegler, "Olympic Winter Games Open Today at Lake Placid: Speed Skaters, Hockey Teams Begin Program," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 4, 1932, p. 22.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

spectators, creating an expanded market that would benefit American winter sports. Overall, the Lake Placid Games increased Americans' interest in snow and ice activities, indirectly aiding winter sports development in Yosemite and elsewhere in the U.S. The organizing committee boasted that "the Lake Placid Games [had] given a tremendous impetus to winter sports in the United States," by helping "other communities . . . [find] that snow and ice are among their greatest assets for sport and recreation."¹³⁶ The 1932 Olympics were also a success for the American team. It edged out Norway to finish first in the total medal count, with twelve to Norway's ten, and received a good deal of press coverage.¹³⁷

The Olympic Aftermath

Yosemite's bid had a profound impact on the park's history but it has been given little scholarly consideration, probably because the park failed to win the Games. Despite the loss, the process helped shape Yosemite's development as a winter destination and validated the YPCC's campaign to expand its winter recreation program. The bid raised awareness of snow and ice sports, of the park's recreational facilities, and of the state's burgeoning winter sports industry. Although an international sports festival may seem antithetical to the quiet idyllic usually associated with a national park, the study of the Olympic Games and of the National Park System overlap on range of themes, most notably nationalism, outdoor recreation, tourism, and land use. Both Olympic tourists and regular park visitors require services such as accommodations and transportation, and both groups

¹³⁶ *Official Report: III Olympic Winter Games*, 7.

¹³⁷ After 1932, the U.S. Olympic team did not win the total medal count in any Winter Olympics until the 2010 Vancouver Games ("Vancouver 2010," International Olympic Committee, accessed July 20, 2016, <https://www.olympic.org/vancouver-2010>).

hope to witness something spectacular. Examining the bid in the context of these overlapping issues helps place in perspective Yosemite's tremendous growth as a winter destination and the National Park Service's changing views on spectacle in protected landscapes.

Sports grew in popularity and assumed a more nationalistic tone in the early twentieth century—the same time period during which national parks became increasingly popular vacation destinations. In particular, the 1920s was considered a “‘golden age’ of American sport” by many contemporary commentators and modern sports historians.¹³⁸ As S. W. Pope explains, sports such as baseball, basketball, and football spread across the country, “a recreation movement blossomed on the nation’s playgrounds[,] . . . [and] tennis, golf, and bicycling swept through the middle class, while workers started their own semiprofessional and amateur leagues in a variety of team sports.”¹³⁹ The widespread availability of print media also helped create and shape an American sports culture. Newspapers covered competitions for fans unable to witness the action in person, allowing Americans across the country to follow the same athletes and competitions. Furthermore, many sports began to cross previously firm class boundaries, uniting Americans of different backgrounds and professions as spectators or athletes.¹⁴⁰ Boxing, for instance, had long

¹³⁸ Mark Dyreson, “Aggressive America: Media Nationalism and the ‘War’ over Olympic Pictures in Sport’s ‘Golden Age,’” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22, no. 6 (2005), 974.

¹³⁹ S.W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876–1926* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 1.

¹⁴⁰ Many sports were associated with particular classes, particularly prior to the Civil War, and several activities still are (such as golf). For a general assessment of the class-based nature of early American sports, see Pope, *Patriotic Games*. Roy Rosenzweig discusses working-class sports in *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), and Elliott J. Gorn examines boxing and class in *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

been popular among the working classes, while cricket was enjoyed primarily by eastern elites, but some activities began to enjoy a broader appeal in the early twentieth century.

Furthermore, both athletics and travel were often associated with nationalism.¹⁴¹ In the absence of war, international athletic events are often the most visible expression of foreign competition, providing countries a safe space in which to wage peaceful battle and to prove the athletic superiority of their citizens. In the 1920s, the Olympics were the only major international sports contest; today's nearest competitor in terms of popularity, soccer's World Cup, did not begin until 1930. To Americans, according to Mark Dyreson, the Olympic Games "were the most important international measuring stick for a nation that considered itself the globe's leading sporting power."¹⁴² Post-World War I, of course, the United States considered itself a regular super power as well, and had a well-established role as an imperial force. Sports were an outlet for expressing this global dominance and for showcasing American physical prowess. American servicemen had already helped export baseball, basketball, and other activities to various possessions and territories, and after the war they made a concerted effort to spread American sports through Europe as well. In

¹⁴¹ In 2007 Steven Pope noted that surprisingly few historians (and even sports historians) had explored ties between sports and imperialism, and surmised that this oversight might stem in part from longstanding feelings of American exceptionalism and a general reticence to fully acknowledge the United States' imperial past and present. This explanation seems too simplistic—it may have been the case in the past, but work on American imperialism has become far more common in the last few decades. Even the general public seems aware of, for instance, the popularity of baseball in Cuba, which is tied to the United States' tumultuous history with that nation. American exceptionalism might posit that baseball was introduced to Cuba during the American occupation. In fact, it has been played on the island since the mid-nineteenth century, but Americans visiting the island and stationed there in later years helped further popularize the sport, creating a rather complicated history. A few more authors have tackled sports imperialism since Pope's 2007 lament, yet the topic is still ripe for exploration (Steven W. Pope, "Rethinking Sport, Empire, and American Exceptionalism," *Sport History Review* 38 [2007]: 93).

¹⁴² Dyreson, "Aggressive America: Media Nationalism and the 'War' over Olympic Pictures in Sport's 'Golden Age,'" 975.

1919, for instance, the U.S. Army and the YMCA organized the Inter-Allied Games, a massive, Olympics-like event near Paris. The organizing committee hoped that showcasing allied countries in friendly athletic competition would help promote sports in nations that “came into being in the travail of world war and which in the future will take part in the improvement of athletics.”¹⁴³

Pope argues that athletics furthered early twentieth-century American nationalism because “sports traditions evoked the resilience of individualism, the work ethic, democracy, class conciliation; and, thereby, helped shape an emergent national identity on the world stage—an effort profoundly bolstered by American involvement in World War I.”¹⁴⁴ Allen Guttman, in *From Ritual to Record*, agrees that modern sports breed nationalism, among other key -isms: “In addition to capitalism, Western sports have increasingly been vehicles for the inculcation of militarism, nationalism, and imperialism.”¹⁴⁵ Sports competitions placed a premium on physical strength and endurance, two traits that were particularly desirable in a populace during politically unstable times. The early 1930s were also an important period in sports history, according to Barbara Keys, who argues that the United States (along with the Soviet Union and Germany) helped the IOC and various sports federations force a shift to make sports truly global, further boosting nationalistic tendencies.¹⁴⁶ The Yosemite bid fell in the midst of these important developments in sports

¹⁴³ Pope, “Rethinking Sport, Empire, and American Exceptionalism,” 103.

¹⁴⁴ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 160.

¹⁴⁵ Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 62.

¹⁴⁶ Barbara Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006).

history. Throughout the twentieth century, the Olympics were the best-known athletic celebration of nationalism, but even contests waged among fellow Americans could promote patriotism. Exercise itself was American, at least according to Teddy Roosevelt and other figures who promoted outdoor living as part of an ideal “strenuous life.”

And what could be more American than a National Park, a very literal piece of America? By the mid-1910s, in the midst of various lobbying efforts to promote visitation to national parks and to create the National Park Service, “the parks were transformed into America’s preeminent tourist attractions, and touring the parks was presented as a ritual of citizenship.”¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, nature and nationalism were becoming increasingly intertwined, as the Sierra Club, Boy Scouts, and other organizations developed outdoor education programs that promoted good citizenship as well as appreciation for the great outdoors, particularly by the 1910s. “It was largely understood that exposing children to the vast and seemingly infinite landscapes of their native region, could perpetuate nationalism, a strict belief in America as the dominant culture,” noted Jeffrey Pappas, and “local chapters [of such groups] sprung up all over the country, promising a simple but profound message: that in wilderness lays the essence of the American character.”¹⁴⁸ If national parks were the most explicit manifestation of the wonders of American landscape, if sports represented the best of American spirit and individualism—and if *both*, by 1920s, celebrated the democratization of leisure culture—then it is no wonder that sports and the national parks were a natural fit in the early twentieth century.

¹⁴⁷ Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity 1880–1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001), 101.

¹⁴⁸ Jeffrey Peter Pappas, *Forest Scholars: The Early History of Nature Guiding at Yosemite National Park, 1913–1925* (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2003), 37.

The Olympics are nearly as heavy on spectacle as sport, a fitting combination for a park and a concession company that were beginning to thrive on providing visitors with both. Although Yosemite's formal winter sports program was still in its infancy during the bid process, Tresidder was confident in the park's ability to host the Games. In the lead-up to the 1932 Olympics, he and fellow American winter sports enthusiasts grew increasingly eager to demonstrate that the New World could compete with the Old, at least in terms of terrain and facilities, if not yet on the ice and through the snow. Despite its ultimate failure, the Yosemite bid helped advance the conception of national parks as resorts for sport and entertainment. In the 1930s the YPCC would offer several events each year that merged athletic accomplishments with pageantry. Most notable were the elaborate ice carnivals, which lured thousands of visitors to the Camp Curry ice rink. Such spectacles were exceedingly successful, yet they helped spawn a contentious debate over public usage and spectatorship in national parks. The Olympic bid left a legacy of increased interest in winter sports, but it also set the stage for controversy over how the public should play in the park.

Chapter Three: Making “a hurly-burly of the park”? Debating Public Use

Following its ill-fated 1932 Winter Olympics bid, Yosemite—and especially the Yosemite Park and Curry Company—fashioned a winter resort that charmed visitors with a mix of sport, spectacle, and natural splendor. The program helped boost tourism and promote winter sports in California and throughout the park system. For many visitors, Yosemite was transformed from a breathtaking landscape with assorted winter activities into a winter sports destination set amid lovely scenery. New activities and events elevated winter sports from the floor of the Valley onto its colder and snowier rim. Explaining Yosemite’s appeal in 1933, the Yosemite Transportation System proclaimed, “Nowhere else in California is there as complete a winter sports program **every day of the week**; a comparable staff of skiing (sic) and skating instructors; as comfortable accommodations as conveniently close to the sports; as extensive a stock of modern winter sports rental equipment.”¹ In addition to organizing recreational activities, the YPCC also hosted several major athletic competitions and winter carnivals. This combination of sport and spectacle was a logical follow-up to the Olympic bid and proved successful in further boosting park tourism. The National Park Service aided the Company by improving winter access to and within the park and by supporting the construction of new sports facilities like Badger Pass Ski Area. By the late 1930s, Yosemite ranked among the most celebrated snow resorts in the West. Sport and spectacle mixed, both playing a pivotal but often overlooked role in park Yosemite Park and

¹ “Winter Sports! . . . Best in the West!” *Bulletin from Yosemite National Park* (Yosemite Transportation System), December 1933, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

Curry Company—fashioned a winter resort that charmed visitors with a mix of sport, spectacle, and natural splendor. The program helped boost tourism and promote winter sports in California and throughout the park system. For many visitors, Yosemite was transformed from a breathtaking landscape with assorted winter activities into a winter sports destination set amid lovely scenery. New activities and events elevated winter sports from the floor of the Valley onto its colder and snowier rim. Explaining Yosemite’s appeal in 1933, the Yosemite Transportation System proclaimed, “Nowhere else in California is there as complete a winter sports program **every day of the week**; a comparable staff of skiing (sic) and skating instructors; as comfortable accommodations as conveniently close to the sports; as extensive a stock of modern winter sports rental equipment.”² In addition to organizing recreational activities, the YPCC also hosted several major athletic competitions and winter carnivals. This combination of sport and spectacle was a logical follow-up to the Olympic bid and proved successful in further boosting park tourism. The National Park Service aided the Company by improving winter access to and within the park and by supporting the construction of new sports facilities like Badger Pass Ski Area. By the late 1930s, Yosemite ranked among the most celebrated snow resorts in the West. Sport and spectacle mixed, both playing a pivotal but often overlooked role in park tourism, while the Park Service, business interests, and the public contested the meaning of public usage. Concerns about spectatorship, park atmosphere, “artificialization,” and related issues compelled the Park Service to draft a series of winter sports policies, starting in 1936. These

² “Winter Sports! . . . Best in the West!” *Bulletin from Yosemite National Park* (Yosemite Transportation System), December 1933, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

changing attitudes about the ways in which sport and spectacle affected the park set the stage for crucial debates over public usage throughout the national parks.

The Park Service had initially encouraged the Yosemite Park and Curry Company's efforts to increase winter sports offerings largely because the park was not yet overcrowded, visitors sought family-friendly outdoor activities, most activities required little permanent infrastructure, and the YPCC needed to recoup some of its financial losses. Winter activities in the 1920s were not part of a large-scale, profit-driven program, but rather were elements of a relatively restrained effort to attract and occupy an increasing (but still manageable) number of tourists. Visitors engaged directly with the park—sliding down it, gliding across it, falling into it, and generally using the landscape rather than merely gazing at it. Activities such as skating and skiing, performed by relatively small numbers of visitors, rarely had an immediately apparent long-term physical impact. Tourists could sample new pursuits they might never encounter at home, together with their friends and family in a spectacular setting.

Following this promising start, the 1930s and 1940s were a critical period in the development of tourism in Yosemite and winter sports in California. Even during the Great Depression and World War II, the park attracted travelers and the YPCC expanded its winter offerings. Visitation plummeted in 1933, but climbed again each following year, surpassing the 1929 figure in 1937.³ In the meantime, the YPCC built Badger Pass. The ski

³ 461,257 visitors arrived in Yosemite in 1929 and 498,289 in 1932. Visitation plunged to 296,088 in 1933, hovered in the 300,000s in 1934 and 1935, easily surpassed 400,000 in 1936, and reached 481,492 in 1937 ("Yosemite NP," NPS Stats: National Park Service Visitor Use Statistics, accessed August 16, 2016, [https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20\(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)?Park=YOSE](https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)?Park=YOSE)). These official NPS statistics count only "recreation visits" (essentially, tourists). The figure excludes people entering the park on business, park employees, and people who live within the park. Most national parks (including Yosemite) now use

center was an immediate hit when it opened in late 1935, inviting tourists to both play and spectate on the slopes. On the Valley floor, ice skating, tobogganing, ski-joring, and other outdoor activities remained popular. Visitation surpassed half a million in 1940, but suffered again during World War II amid wartime rationing, travel difficulties, and rumors that the park was closed.⁴ Tourists who made it to the park in winter—whether in lean or prosperous years—flocked in large numbers to the Company’s recreational programs. A 1932 survey of Yosemite winter visitors found that about two-thirds of respondents participated in at least one sport in the park, and nearly all agreed with the statement “winter sports should be emphasized as part of the National Park program in Yosemite.”⁵ The continued popularity of winter recreational activities and the great success of Badger Pass through the 1930s and 1940s suggests subsequent visitors concurred on the importance of winter sports.

Remarkably, the Park Service continued to support Yosemite’s winter athletics offerings in the early 1930s, despite the financial hardship of maintaining access to snow-

exceedingly complicated mathematical formulas to calculate recreation visits, so the numbers are educated estimates, not definitive head counts. Nevertheless, trends in visitation are clear, even though precise figures are unavailable.

⁴ Visitation first exceeded 500,000 in 1940 (506,781), increased dramatically in 1941 (597,863), then fell precipitously in 1942 (319,816) and 1943 (116,682). The tide turned, barely, in 1944 (120,494), then more than doubled each of the next two years: 1945 (290,569) and 1946 (640,483). With only a few exceptions, Yosemite visitation has increased every year since then; 2015 brought 4,150,217 visitors. (“Yosemite NP,” NPS Stats: National Park Service Visitor Use Statistics, accessed August 16, 2016, [https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20\(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)?Park=YOSE](https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)?Park=YOSE)).

⁵ From the survey—Question: “Did you participate in winter sports?” Response: 52 yes, 13 no (6 of the “no”s said it was too stormy); Question: “Do you think winter sports should be emphasized as part of the National Park program in Yosemite?” Response: 68 yes, 2 no. Survey results reported in “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 15–16, in Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

covered sites during the Depression. Tresidder feared the Company might have to close some lodging facilities during the winter of 1933–1934, after a “calamitous” year, but Park Service Director Horace Albright remained hopeful that the government could continue to plow roads and to “justify some degree of winter operation and continuation of winter sports.”⁶ Albright’s optimism is notable because plowing was exceedingly expensive and benefitted relatively few visitors (compared to the large crowds of the summer season). Moreover, thanks to the newly-opened Wawona Tunnel (1933), skiers could drive to Chinquapin to enjoy slopes more challenging than the Valley’s petite ski hill, but plowing that far added a considerable amount of work at a significant cost.⁷ Nevertheless, the NPS agreed to keep clearing roads to winter sports areas if at all possible, tacitly acknowledging the importance of providing recreational activities for tourists, even during a national financial crisis.⁸ The Park Service managed to plow the Wawona Road in winter 1933–1934,

⁶ “Calamitous” is from Donald Tresidder to Horace Albright, March 3, 1933, as reported in Hillory A. Tolson, Memorandum for the Director [Arno Cammerer], September 25[?], 1933, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. This memo summarized several pieces of correspondence from 1933 concerning Yosemite’s winter sports program. Tolson, the Park Service’s Acting Assistant Director, prepared the summary for the new Director of the NPS, Arno B. Cammerer, who assumed office August 10, 1934. Tresidder was expecting another financial disaster in the winter of 1933–1934, and explained in May 1933 that if the government could not provide funding to keep at least some roads cleared to ski areas, the YPCC would probably close the Ahwahnee and the Lodge for the winter season. (Donald Tresidder to Charles Thomson, May 23, 1933, as reported in Tolson, Memorandum for the Director, September 25[?], 1933, p. 1. Albright’s reply is in Albright to Thomson, June 13, 1933, as reported in Tolson, Memorandum for the Director, September 25[?], 1933, p. 1.

⁷ Snow plowing was rather costly even when confined within Yosemite Valley. As winter sports moved out of the Valley and into the backcountry, plowing had to increase dramatically. From the very western edge of the Valley (near Bridal Veil Falls) to Chinquapin (at the intersection of Wawona Road and Glacier Point Road) is a little over nine miles by road, most of which is uphill; continuing to Badger Pass adds another 5 miles (Google Maps, accessed December 5, 2016, maps.google.com).

⁸ Horace Albright to Charles Thomson, June 13, 1933, as reported in Tolson, Memorandum for the Director, September 25[?], 1933, p. 2. Tresidder and Albright agreed that if road clearing were at all possible, it was important to continue offering winter sports during the Depression. In the 1932–1933 season, plowing in Yosemite had cost \$8,134.75; the park’s 1933 budget allotted only \$28,000 to road maintenance throughout the park for the entire year (Thomson to Albright, May 25, 1933, as reported in Tolson, Memorandum for the Director, September 25[?], 1933, p. 1.

allowing year-round access from the Valley through the Wawona Tunnel to Chinquapin.⁹ Luckily for the YPCC, business improved that winter. In early 1934 the Company even began searching for sites to establish new “ski fields for cross-country, slalom races, downhill races, and jumping” in the high elevation area between Badger Pass and Bridal Veil Meadows. Tresidder also hoped the Park Service could complete a new road to Glacier Point in 1935.¹⁰ Less than a year after announcing that the Company might have to drastically curtail winter operations, Tresidder was confident that the YPCC could soon operate a new ski area outside the Valley and that the government would be able to build and maintain a year-round road in the backcountry.¹¹ Sure enough, Badger Pass Ski Area opened in December 1935 and the road to Glacier Point (which passes Badger Pass) was kept open for most of the winter 1935–1936 season.¹²

The newly-accessible roads were an impressive feat, especially considering the relatively primitive nature of 1930s snow-clearing equipment. Yet some tourists took

⁹ *Monthly Bulletin from Yosemite National Park*, January 1934, p. 2, in Yosemite Public Utility Operators: Yosemite Park and Curry Company—Miscellaneous Correspondence part 11, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1874, RG79, NARA College Park.

¹⁰ Donald Tresidder to Charles Thomson, February 16, 1934, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

¹¹ Of course, it wasn't quite that easy. In response, new NPS Director Arno Cammerer told Superintendent Thomson: “should traffic really warrant the opening of roads we will do our utmost to fill the demand,” but he believed that such “heavy expenditure of public funds for the benefit of only a few sport-loving individuals” could not yet be justified (Cammerer to Thomson, February 28, 1934, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park).

¹² “Resorts and Hotels,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1935, p. A20. The Park Service no longer plows the Glacier Point Road beyond Badger Pass. Instead, the 10.5 mile stretch of road from Badger Pass to Glacier Point is used for cross-country skiing. The NPS still manipulates the snow along the road, however, by using machinery to create ski tracks (two parallel tracks a few inches deep) to ease the way for novice and casual cross-country skiers. Other cross-country trails in the park are left track-free.

plowing for granted nearly immediately, as Charles Page, executive vice president of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, demonstrated somewhat peevishly in a February 1937 letter to Superintendent Thomson. He complained that road conditions between the Valley and Badger Pass had been “very unsatisfactory” during his recent visit because equipment was unavailable to clear the road past Chinquapin for two days.¹³ Thomson replied that park officials were “trying to maintain 58 miles of mountain highway free of snow, an unprecedented undertaking in any country, so far as I know, for recreational purposes.”¹⁴ This was indeed a remarkable goal, and it clearly illustrated the Park Service’s commitment to winter play. The superintendent also pointed out that the park had remained open and accessible to the outside world, unlike many nearby mountain communities, because “our primary job is to keep open the main highways into the park; access to the play areas always will be secondary in priority.”¹⁵ Just one year after the Park Service was able to provide automobile access to Badger Pass and neighboring snowfields throughout the winter season,

¹³ Charles Page to Charles Thomson, February 17, 1937, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. Page offered to assist Thomson with the problem by contacting his Congressman. He also mentioned that even once the road was re-opened, “most of the cars had to be towed through the snow at one point on the road,” though this was likely true for only a day or two (Ibid.).

¹⁴ Charles Thomson to Charles Page, February 24, 1937, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. Thomson acknowledged that Yosemite could use additional snow clearing equipment, and pointed out that the park had recently ordered an additional Snogo (a large mobile snowblower/plow) for \$14,000. A similar Snogo, produced in 1932 and used in Rocky Mountain National Park, is one of only a “handful” of mobile resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This is a testament not only to the Snogo’s impressive engineering but also to the importance of winter visitation to the National Parks in the 1930s and beyond (Vaughn L. Baker to Sue Jesion, November 24, 2006 [scan of letter], “Snogo Listed on the National Register of Historic Places,” accessed January 2, 2017, <http://www.wausauequipment.com/brands/snogo/letter>).

¹⁵ Charles Thomson to Charles Page, February 24, 1937, p. 2.

tourists were already expressing frustration at a two-day, storm-related, partial closure of a high-altitude road. Among visitors the bar for access was set high, quickly. This sense of entitlement reflected a public perception that the Park Service should cater to Americans' recreational pursuits.

Yosemite was not alone in improving access and adding facilities. Development increased during the 1930s in many NPS sites, and the National Park System itself expanded dramatically as well. In 1933 Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 6166 transferred management of 56 national monuments and military sites from the Forest Service and the War Department to the Park Service.¹⁶ The order added dozens of properties to the NPS's domain and, more importantly, expanded the agency's reach to include locations of historical—and not merely scenic—significance. Before the reorganization, most NPS units had been landscape wonders like Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Glacier. As Hal Rothman put it, the transfer made the Park Service “not only arbiters of the natural and prehistoric heritage of the nation, but the guardians of its federally preserved history as well.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Executive Order 6166—Organization of Executive Agencies, June 10, 1933, in Office of the Federal Register, *Codification of Presidential Proclamations and Executive Orders*, accessed January 1, 2017, <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/06166.html>. The Antiquities Act of 1906 had given the president authority to proclaim “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States to be national monuments.” The Act helped preservation-minded presidents circumvent Congress, which had the sole authority to establish national parks. Some of the monuments established under this act were landscape wonders. For instance, Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed the Grand Canyon a national monument in 1908; it did not achieve National Park status until 1919. Before FDR's executive order, some monuments had been administered by the War Department, the Forest Service, or other agencies; others were managed by the Park Service from the beginning. “An Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities” (34 Stat. 225), Approved June 8, 1906, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/anps/anps_1g.htm.

¹⁷ Hal Rothman, *America's National Monuments: The Politics of Preservation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 202.

With increased responsibility came increased funding—a remarkably good fortune, considering it was the height of the Depression. After FDR asked Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to manage the Public Works Administration in 1933, Ickes helped ensure funding for more than 150 Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects in the national parks in just his first year of oversight.¹⁸ At the same time, the Park Service reaped the rewards of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) labor. Many parks established CCC camps and embarked on significant construction projects. Yosemite officials took advantage of the infusion of funding and 6,816 CCC workers to build trails, roads, bridges, campgrounds, lookout points, and the Wawona Tunnel, and to replace the Half Dome cables.¹⁹ The labor program also had a direct impact on winter sports: CCC men built the Badger Pass Ski Area complex and the Ostrander Lake Ski Hut, each in less than a year.²⁰ This system-wide influx of new and improved infrastructure further normalized development on protected lands and helped make possible an increase in visitor services—including winter athletic activities—in Yosemite and fellow parks.

Thanks largely to the efforts of the YPCC, Yosemite was among the first national parks to establish a formal winter sports program, but it was certainly not the only one. Twenty-three of the 26 national parks were open year-round by 1937, and many offered at least one winter recreational activity, spectator sport, or athletic spectacle. “America . . . is

¹⁸ John C. Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks: Playground or Preserve* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 73.

¹⁹ Lois Orr, “The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in Yosemite,” *Yosemite* 67, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 3–6. The CCC also worked at landscaping: planting non-native plants near employee housing, “revitalizing” a historic apple orchard near Camp Curry, replanting a garden near the museum as a wildflower meadow, and so on (Ibid.).

²⁰ Ibid., 6.

learning that the grandest ski slopes, snow vistas, icy skating rinks and toboggan slides lie within its national parks. Here winter sports facilities belong to all people of the United States, almost as though they existed in their own backyards, though on a considerably vaster scale and a little harder to reach,” the *Washington Post* proclaimed in 1937.²¹ Yet few parks had winter programs as comprehensive as Yosemite’s. For instance, visitors to Maine’s Acadia National Park could skate on “natural skating rinks framed by growing Christmas trees” or snowshoe through the park, but there was no formal snow sports schedule.²² The western parks, unsurprisingly, provided the most athletic options. Mount Rainer (Washington), Crater Lake (Oregon), Rocky Mountain (Colorado), and Lassen, Sequoia, and General Grant (California), all offered skiing; most had other winter activities as well. Mount Rainier was particularly successful. It hosted the 1936 Olympic Ski Trials, the “hairy, scary,” and “legendary” annual Silver Ski downhill race, and other high-profile races and spectacles and offered informal activities including toboggan and ash can slides.²³

Park Service Director Arno Cammerer raved about winter recreation, explaining that “all the exhilarating frolics in the parks are staged amid scenes of almost incredible grandeur. Beauty and well being—both belong in our national parks, Winter and Summer. But especially in Winter do they beget a greater delight, when the keen, pure air, wintry sunshine,

²¹ “23 of 26 U.S. Parks Are Open for Sport,” *Washington Post*, January 10, 1937, p. F1.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Mike Dederer, “Silver Skis: Derring-Do on Mt. Rainier,” *Skiing Heritage* (September 2004): 25. In its first year (1934), 5,000 spectators witnessed the Silver Ski race, which was sponsored by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Jeffrey T. Meyer, “Alpine Experiments: The National Parks and the Development of Skiing in the American West” [M.A. Thesis: The University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 2015], 76). Mount Rainier hosted its final Silver Ski race in 1948; the race was revived in 1964 at nearby Crystal Mountain, a more developed ski resort outside of the national park (Dederer, “Silver Skis,” 29).

and vigorous exercise send the blood bounding through every artery.”²⁴ Concessionaires generally operated winter sports activities, but the Park Service also had an important role to play by clearing roads and posting rangers at ski areas and other crowded areas. Most importantly, the NPS could approve or deny proposals for athletic events, activities, and facilities, and thus remained the arbiter of winter sports in the parks. This power proved critical in governing public use in the 1930s and beyond.



Image 3-1: Skiers outside the snow-covered Paradise Inn (built 1917) at Mount Rainier National Park, unknown photographer, 1951. Courtesy of Mount Rainier National Park Archives.

“Healthful out-of-door recreation”

By the mid-1930s, most NPS officials welcomed informal recreational activities, but many began to argue that large organized competitions and athletic spectacles—such as collegiate hockey games, national ski championships, and winter carnivals—were better suited to private resorts. This was a remarkable shift considering the widespread support

²⁴ Arno Cammerer, “Snow Lures Travelers to the National Parks,” *New York Times*, January 6, 1935, p. XX9.

Yosemite's Olympic bid had enjoyed just half a decade earlier. The Games were competition and spectacle personified. The change was spurred largely by increasing visitation and evolving opinions about how sport and spectacle affected both landscapes and visitors. In response to concerns about park usage, the Park Service issued four system-wide winter sports policies from 1936 through 1946—two each under directors Arno Cammerer and Newton Drury. All four policies applauded “informal” recreational activities such as skiing, sledding, and skating. To Cammerer and Drury, these activities fit nicely within the Park Service's mandate to provide for public use. “If made available under proper controls,” Drury asserted in 1945, “the use of our areas for healthful out-of-door recreation during the winter months is a very desirable way to make the scenic and other natural values of the System available for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.”²⁵ While encouraging participatory sports, NPS officials grew increasingly leery of major competitive events and athletic spectacles, worried that such occasions prioritized spectatorship over participation, damaged “park atmosphere,” promoted artificialization, and contributed to overcrowding and overdevelopment. These issues led to serious conflicts over winter sport and spectacle in the 1930s and beyond.

The Park Service's focus on informal participatory use extended the vision of park-as-playground. By largely eschewing highly competitive and theatrical events in favor of “simple” recreational activities for Joan and John Q. Public, the NPS asserted that a park's purpose was to engage visitors, not perform for them. While there were certainly plenty of

²⁵ Newton B. Drury, “Memorandum for the Director's Office and the Regional Directors,” August 13, 1945, p. 1, in *Winter Sports Policy*, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park (hereafter cited as: Drury, *1945 Winter Sports Policy*.)

logistical and ideological reasons to minimize spectacles, there is also a whiff of presumption in the notion that tourists would or should prefer to careen downhill rather than watch others do so. Yosemite Superintendent Frank Kittredge, for instance, echoed NPS talking points by explaining to a tourist that spectator events were “a detriment to family and other groups who come to enjoy the use of the slopes, rinks, and other facilities themselves and not with the intention of standing on the sidelines while some[one] else performs.”²⁶ The clear implication was that in the realm of sports, tourists should prefer to *do* rather than *see*. According to a growing number of NPS officials, families hitting the slopes together constituted a highly appropriate public use; those same families traveling to the park to observe others do so did not.

The distinction between spectator and participatory activities—essentially, seeing versus doing—was critical in debates about winter park usage. For decades, tourists had traveled to Yosemite and other parks specifically to spectate. They arrived with mental checklists of spectacular scenery, seeking out the waterfalls, cliffs, geysers, rivers, and other natural wonders that park boosters and travel writers had proclaimed “must-see.” Scenery was the star attraction of a turn about the park. As concessionaires set up shop, many created man-made spectacles such as Yosemite’s Firefall to supplement the landscape features, to entertain visitors, and to entice them to remain in the park even longer. Athletic spectacles like the Olympics offered a twist: visitors watched *other people* perform physical activities within a natural setting. Several national parks, including Yosemite, hosted

²⁶ Frank Kittredge to Margaret Reynolds, November 9, 1945, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

spectator sports and athletic festivities by the 1930s. Ski meets and carnivals did not supplant participatory sports; tourists kept skiing and skating and sledding even as tournaments and frolics crowded the winter schedule. Yet the Park Service feared that large spectator events might cause overcrowding, making it more difficult for the public to play in their parks. According to Ben Thomson, assistant to Director Cammerer, “it was our desire that the parks be used as fully as possible in winter and . . . we were trying to guide our developments so that visitors would participate in sports rather than to become mere spectators.”²⁷ Differentiating between participatory and spectator activities became crucial in evaluating and managing public use by the mid-1930s, as did growing concerns about a host of other issues related to visitor experience.

Park Atmosphere

Many NPS officials in the 1930s were especially worried about preserving “park atmosphere,” which they believed was particularly vulnerable to the crowds and construction associated with some spectator events and sports. Park atmosphere, however, was rather ill-defined, subjective, and difficult to quantify. Historian Lary Dilsaver described the philosophy, which originated among landscape architects, as “an immature holistic approach to the environment that considered entire visual and experiential scenes and the inspiration they provided as the highest preservation targets.”²⁸ During the New Deal, according to

²⁷ Ben H. Thomson to Arno Cammerer, August 7, 1936, p. 1, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park.

²⁸ Lary Dilsaver, “Introduction to Chapter Three: The New Deal Years, 1933–1941,” in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Lary Dilsaver (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 112.

Dilsaver, “most NPS personnel practiced . . . atmosphere preservation.”²⁹ The approach was not inherently critical of sports and recreation. By prioritizing both vistas and the sense of wonder they evoked, however, atmosphere advocates made clear that visitors did not have to physically engage with a park to benefit from it. It was not as reverential a doctrine as the nineteenth-century “sacred places” philosophy articulated by John Sears, but the concept of park atmosphere similarly stressed an emotional and internal response to park landscapes.³⁰ Atmosphere advocates worried that visitors seeking inspiration or solitude within natural surroundings might find neither when confronted with the carnival-esque ambiance and boisterous crowds of major sports competitions and spectacles.



Image 3-2: NPS officials at a campfire in Yellowstone National Park, 1930s. John White (Superintendent of Sequoia National Park) is seated third from left; Horace Albright (Director of the National Park Service, 1929–1933) is seated fifth from left. Unknown photographer. National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection, Harpers Ferry Center; Catalog Number: HPC-001763.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Sequoia Superintendent John R. White became an enthusiastic champion of atmosphere preservation by the mid-1930s, just a few years after suggesting his park might be better suited than Yosemite to host the world's largest winter sports spectacle. In 1936 he spoke on the topic at a meeting of park superintendents, explaining that atmosphere "concerns the intellectual or moral, even in some aspects, the physical environment which we want in the parks. . . . [it] depend[s] upon what we permit in the way of public use, and equally what we do not permit. Perhaps the public uses which affect the atmosphere of a national park are those connected with the recreation and entertainment of visitors."³¹ It was so essential, he argued, that "when a new project is proposed, the first question should be, 'how will it affect the park atmosphere which we desire to maintain or restore?'"³² White considered winter sports particularly problematic. He believed that once concessionaires made hefty financial investments in the form of facilities and equipment there was a substantial risk of harming the park atmosphere. If large programs and "artificialities" were permitted, "winter sports [would] dominate the picture, be improperly commercialized, and make a hurly-burly of the park in winter," he warned.³³ Sequoia offered some winter sports activities, including skiing, skating, and tobogganing, but the superintendent believed these amusements were acceptable because the park did not have ski lifts, toboggan elevators, or other mechanized aids and did not host large spectator events. In contrast, Yosemite's

³¹ John R. White, "Atmosphere in the National Parks," in *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Lary M. Dilsaver (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994)142. White gave the speech at a "Special Superintendents' Meeting," in Washington, D.C., on February 10, 1936.

³² *Ibid.*, 148.

³³ *Ibid.*, 146.

winter activities grew more popular each year, further endangering the purportedly fragile park atmosphere. “Here is to be found everything that the winter sports enthusiast desires, even to the noise and the crowds,” a 1934 article proclaimed. While the author clearly viewed “noise and crowds” as a perk of the winter sports experience, NPS officials disagreed. Most troubling to many national park advocates (like White) was the fear that national parks were devolving into mere amusement parks—entertaining perhaps, but lacking a certain gravitas and reverence toward nature. Director Cammerer noted in 1936 that the Park Service was “constantly besieged [sic] by requests for the use of the parks for commercial enterprises, and must wage a continual fight to prevent their becoming typical tourist resorts of the ‘Coney Island’ type, with all the money-making devices and crowds that the term connotes.”³⁴ Coney Island did not epitomize the type of atmosphere the Park Service wished to preserve. Atmosphere preservationists believed inspiration and engagement—not mere amusement—were the primary goals of a park.

“Artificiality” posed a particularly strong threat to park atmosphere. By the mid-1930s, critics regularly derided some facilities built for outdoor activities—including both spectator and participatory sports—as “artificial” and inappropriate in a national park.³⁵ White lectured his fellow superintendents on the problem in his 1936 speech, noting that sports facilities “should be as natural as possible and with little or no artificial

³⁴ Arno Cammerer to Senator Hiram W. Johnson, June 24, 1936, p. 1, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park.

³⁵ Although “artificiality” usually described features of the built environment, it could also refer to manipulations of the landscape. For instance, in his recommendations for establishing cross-country skiing, Bestor Robinson advised against plotting straight trails and recommended varying the width of a path to make it appear more natural (Bestor Robinson, “Memorandum on Standards of Construction and Location of Ski Trails and Huts in National Parks,” [April? 1940], p. 2, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park).

construction.”³⁶ His contempt for artificiality, however, was based largely on appearances. For instance, he proudly explained that Sequoia had “no artificial or commercial pool and [we] don’t want one,” yet in the next sentence noted that “we have worked out and improved two or three river pools, and might even consider warming them if the apparatus could be hidden.”³⁷ To White, the invisibility of a heating mechanism rendered its artificiality acceptable. Swimming holes could look natural, even when “worked out,” “improved,” and altered by technology. Appearance was of utmost importance where artificiality was concerned.

Yosemite’s Superintendent Thomson also criticized “artificializations” and worried that such facilities would damage park atmosphere. He “resented” the “year-round presence” of the toboggan slide, a man-made track that remained a visible blight on the slope during the summer, and was vexed by public demands for “novelties” such as full-size ski jumps and bobsled tracks.³⁸ “I think that such stunts have no logical place in our winter sports program, nor in a national park. They merely attract peak loads, and simply don’t fit the general atmosphere of a national park,” he wrote in fall 1935.³⁹ Rather than noting that “peak loads” of tourists might cause environmental damage, Thomson implied that large

³⁶ White, “Atmosphere in the National Parks,” 146. Although White did not explicitly mention it, surely facilities for several Olympic sports—like ski jumping and bobsledding—failed to meet this “natural” criteria.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁸ Charles Thomson to Arno Cammerer, November 2, 1935, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

³⁹ Charles Thomson to Jerry E. Carpenter, September 18, 1935, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.



Image 3-3: Dave Quinney and Dick Kimball of Utah execute a double jump on the ski jump at Badger Pass, March 1939. Yosemite National Park Archives, Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection, Winter Club Scrapbook, page 435.

crowds would hurt park atmosphere, and therefore degrade the general visitor experience.

He did not object to the activities themselves, but to the artificial structures required to engage in them and the large numbers of spectators they attracted. He relented somewhat and approved the construction of a small ski jump at Badger Pass in fall 1936, but insisted there would be no “artificial runway.”⁴⁰ Crucially, the “homespun affair” could be removed

⁴⁰ Charles Thomson to Arno Cammerer, September 26, 1936, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. Thomson consulted with Arthur Demaray (then Associate Director of the NPS) and other officials before deciding to build the ski jump. Some dirt had to be moved about and a “log crib [built] for the jump-off,” but he (and other NPS officials) deemed it far preferable to a typical large runway structure.

and the hillside restored to a natural appearance in just two or three days.⁴¹ Artificiality, in this case, was acceptable because it was seasonal and did little foreseeable permanent damage.

“No one is selfish enough to wish to withhold development”

Most park tourists viewed permanent structures such as accommodations and visitors' centers as necessary features of a vacation destination, rather than as artificial blights on the landscape. Some within the scientific community, however, began to express fears about overdevelopment in the national parks in the 1920s and 1930s. Biologists Joseph Grinnell (at U.C. Berkeley) and George Wright (at the NPS), for instance, criticized road and hotel developments that might cause ecological harm. Wright co-authored *Fauna of the National Parks of the United States* (1933), a pioneering work which called on the Park Service to restore habitats to a more natural state. The agency was exceedingly slow to consider such recommendations. In Yosemite, Superintendent Thomas made clear that ecological efforts were not a top priority. He informed Director Albright in 1931 that he would not allow “balances of nature or other hypothetical or similar theories” to interfere with providing visitor services.⁴² Other NPS officials were less dismissive of scientific study, but

⁴¹ Charles Thomson to Arno Cammerer, September 26, 1936, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3. Thomson did not warm to the ski jump in its first season: “Contrary to many predictions, the ski jump at Badger Pass was little used either by local or visiting skiers. It provided an added thrill for a score or so, but the trend toward individual participation in winter sport as against onlooking is definite” (Charles Thomson to Arno Cammerer, March 15, 1937, p. 3–4, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park).

⁴² Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 124.

the Park Service generally ignored most calls to reverse or limit development for ecological reasons until the 1960s.

The large size of most parks was partially responsible for this permissive attitude toward construction. In such vast spaces, early-twentieth-century infrastructure seemed to leave a relatively small footprint.⁴³ At 1,169 square miles, Yosemite is less than 100 square miles smaller than the state of Rhode Island, and most facilities outside of the Valley are rather isolated.⁴⁴ Park advocates usually approved of winter sports infrastructure—such as the Badger Pass ski lodge and Camp Curry ice rink—that provided space for tourists to play. In planning sports facilities, officials generally believed the benefits of public recreational use outweighed any potential physical threat to the landscape. “If there were no development, no roads or trails, no hotels or camps, a national park would be merely a wilderness, not serving the purpose for what [sic] it was set aside, not benefitting the general public,” a group of park superintendents wrote in 1922. They concluded, “No one is selfish enough to wish to withhold development, but many are keenly interested in seeing development properly directed. The parks should be popular, but never commonplace. They should accommodate crowds if necessary but without over-crowding.”⁴⁵

⁴³ As discussed in the introduction, Hetch Hetchy is an important exception. Damming the valley affected a far larger portion of the park than, say, building a hotel.

⁴⁴ “[Yosemite] Park Statistics,” National Park Service, accessed January 16, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/management/statistics.htm>; “Rhode Island Facts and Figures,” Rhode Island Department of State, accessed January 16, 2017, <http://sos.ri.gov/divisions/Civics-And-Education/RI-History/ri-facts-figures>. Under the provisions of the 1964 Wilderness Act, 94.45% (1,101 square miles) of Yosemite National Park has been designated as wilderness. This means that most development and “permanent improvements or human habitation” is prohibited. To those who see only Yosemite Valley, the enormous scale of the park and its vast spaces of relative solitude go largely unnoticed; Valley visitors are faced with relatively dense development within a compact gorge.

⁴⁵ “Superintendents’ Resolution on Overdevelopment: Prepared at the National Park Service Conference November 13–17, 1922; Yosemite Park, Calif., with Explanatory Letter,” in *America’s National Park*

Codifying Fun

These issues—spectatorship, atmosphere, artificiality, and related matters—began to guide NPS management of winter sports and spectacles in the 1930s. Director Cammerer initially considered limiting “specialized winter sports programs” to just three parks: Yosemite, Mount Rainier, and Crater Lake, all of which already had well-established winter athletics and infrastructure. This proposal, he wrote in October 1935, would prevent “additional artificialization of the other western parks . . . and [ensure that] their utilization for winter recreation of a less formal uncommercialized nature will be encouraged.”⁴⁶ Cammerer also acknowledged the physical impact of winter sports, noting that “certain injuries” would occur in the three “specialized winter sports” parks, including “the building of roads and the cutting of timber to permit the construction of a ski slide, even though, with a snow cover, little injury may occur to actual soil conditions.”⁴⁷ Environmental consequences were certainly not his main reason to limit sports, but by mentioning them he admitted that winter athletics impacted the landscape. Yosemite’s Superintendent Thomson applauded Cammerer’s proposal, but urged imposing some restrictions even within the three parks. He argued that the NPS should prohibit “serious artificializations” and “exclude all artificial ski jumps, bob sled runs, and other highly competitive ‘stunts’ which require

System: The Critical Documents, ed. Lary M. Dilsaver (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 59–60.

⁴⁶ Arno Cammerer to Charles Thomson, October 25, 1935, p. 1, Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. Cammerer shared his proposal in letters to Thomson and other park superintendents and requested their feedback.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

structural blots or actual changes in topography” in Yosemite, Mount Rainier, and Crater Lake.⁴⁸ Thomson approved of winter sports in his park, provided they fit within his vision of appropriate activities. Large-scale spectator sports and those that required “artificial” facilities did not. The three-park plan was not implemented, but it was an important step in considering limiting public use.

Cammerer issued Order 319—the Park Service’s first official winter sports policy—in April 1936, just months after Yosemite’s Badger Pass Ski Area opened. The policy stressed that informal recreational activities were ideal and addressed several of the concerns discussed above:

National parks shall be kept open for recreational use in winter so far as consistent with cost and probable use, emphasis being placed primarily upon scenic values thus made available. Visitors should be encouraged to utilize parks informally with winter activities. Ski jumping contests, necessitating the construction of artificial ski jumps, are not desirable. Bob sled and other highly competitive contests and exhibitions which require artificialization of terrain must be avoided. The collection of admission fees for special winter sports events is prohibited.⁴⁹

The entire order contains less than 100 words and provides frustratingly few details. It caused confusion among concessionaires, sports boosters, and NPS officials, but it signaled that the Park Service was leaning toward limiting winter sports development, especially for events that drew large crowds or required artificialization. Most importantly, Order 319

⁴⁸ Charles Thomson to Arno Cammerer, November 2, 1935, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. Thomson wrote that Cammerer’s three-park plan was “wise for, say, the next 4 or 5 years.” Presumably, he felt it should be reassessed at that point, not necessarily overturned.

⁴⁹ Arno Cammerer, Office Order No. 319: National Park Service Winter Sports Policy, April 7, 1936, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park (hereafter cited as: Cammerer, *1936 Winter Sports Policy*).

established that participatory sports—those which allowed average tourists to play informally in nature—were a desirable form of public use, whereas spectator sports and formal competitions were often inappropriate on national park lands. Superintendent Thomson assured Cammerer that he had already been emphasizing informal sports programs in Yosemite: “Each winter sports facility has been developed primarily to effect a general participation of visitors, in the same way that we have developed trail systems, High Sierra Camps, etc., for hikers, fisherman, and horseback riders in the summer.”⁵⁰ Most Park Service officials embraced the renewed focus on participatory sports, which seemed to suit the agency’s mandate to provide for public use of the parks.

Even as the NPS began to regulate and restrict winter recreation and spectacles via official policy, many business interests hoped to expand winter sports programs in national parks. The California State Chamber of Commerce’s Winter Sports Committee, for instance, was eager to capitalize on the growing popularity of skiing, skating, and related activities. Its officials were not pleased with the Park Service’s reluctance to promote large winter athletic events. In a striking series of letters, Committee officers lectured NPS officials on the importance of providing snow and ice sports in national parks. The exchanges highlight ongoing conflicts between the Park Service and business interests both before and after Order 319.⁵¹ Jerry Carpenter, an official of the California State Chamber of

⁵⁰ Charles Thomson to Arno Cammerer, June 18, 1936, p. 2–3, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁵¹ The California State Chamber of Commerce’s Winter Sports Committee “consist[ed] primarily of representatives of sporting goods and department stores interested in supplying skis and winter outing equipment,” and was funded mainly by oil, hotel, and transportation companies (Bestor Robinson to Arno Cammerer, June 16, 1936, p. 2, Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park).

Commerce's Winter Sports Committee, informed Superintendent Thomson in April 1935 that his group was "trying to make Yosemite National Park . . . headquarters for all intercollegiate [winter athletic] competition" as part of a concerted campaign to "produce a large additional following" for winter sports.⁵² Carpenter also advised Thomson that the park must build a ski jump, which should be restricted to experienced jumpers and used only during competitions. In a mildly defensive reply, Thomson stressed the Park Service's longstanding support for winter sports. "I doubt if any other agency has made a contribution equal to ours in the last several years," he wrote, and we have "the full expectation that this contribution is going to become more considerable as time goes on, as we must meet, or even anticipate, the demands for the winter use of Yosemite."⁵³ Thomson noted that the Park Service wished to avoid events that produced large crowds of spectators, but he did not specifically address Carpenter's pleas for collegiate sports. He was also unwilling to relent on ski jumps because "gradually the parks have moved toward a policy against all [sports-related] stunts."⁵⁴ Overall, the NPS was "enthusiastic in forwarding those sports [such as skiing] in which people participate and which are otherwise appropriate to such an environment," Thomson informed Carpenter.⁵⁵

⁵² Jerry E. Carpenter to Charles Thomson, April 24, 1935, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁵³ Charles Thomson to Jerry E. Carpenter, April 29, 1935, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Thomson failed to explain how this gradual philosophical evolution would affect non-sporting spectacles, such as the Firefall, which survived for nearly a century. As discussed above, Thomson agreed a few months later to install a small seasonal ski jump that utilized natural topography rather than a large man-made structure.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

After Order 319 attempted to reduce competitions and admission fees, Carpenter renewed his efforts even more vociferously. He responded to the policy with an indignant and vaguely bellicose letter that he claimed to have written on behalf of National Park-friendly businesses and 1.5 million “recreationally inclined winter sports enthusiasts who contribute annually large sums collectively to the National Parks.”⁵⁶ Seemingly dismissive of the NPS’s conservation mandate, he urged Cammerer to reverse the policy “due to the fact that some of the best and most easily accessible snow areas are in the National Parks” and because the order would “obstruct the future growth of the [winter] sport[s] not only in the National Parks but elsewhere throughout the state.”⁵⁷ He also noted that ski jumps were especially popular among spectators and claimed that they did “not mar or disfigure the landscape to the extent of making this an objection to Park Service policy,” nor were they as dangerous as downhill racing.⁵⁸ The NPS, he argued, should actually help “secure competitive events and the increased attendance that they will draw for the Parks by providing the necessary facilities for the holding of events as recognized by the Winter Olympic Games Committee, the F.I.S.[Fédération Internationale de Ski] , . . . and other long active and organized bodies.”⁵⁹ This impressively tone-deaf defense of all that Cammerer had just rejected—highly competitive events, large crowds, artificialization, and, for good

⁵⁶ Jerry E. Carpenter to Arno Cammerer, June 2, 1936, p. 2, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, 2. Cammerer might understandably have wondered why California sports development was the Park Service’s responsibility.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2. This was a surprising tactic, considering it risked inspiring the NPS to ban downhill events as well.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

measure, outside regulatory bodies—argued that National Parks should aggressively court crowds and business opportunities. Finally, he asked Cammerer to rescind the ban on admission fees for athletic events. Carpenter’s primary objective was to promote winter sports and tourism within the state, and he seemed determined to disregard the Park Service’s growing concerns about large spectator events and competitions.

Carpenter was eager to drum up support in his fight against Order 319 and convinced a handful of government officials to contact the Park Service with complaints about the policy. Several Congressmen dutifully wrote letters, and Cammerer replied to each with an explanation of the policy’s background and purpose. He stressed that “simple winter use” was far more appropriate in the parks than “contests of a commercial type,” and that the order would guard against artificiality, large crowds, and activities that were designed primarily for expert athletes.⁶⁰ Above all, he explained, a “wholesome program” of winter activities should accommodate all visitors.⁶¹ Cammerer’s reply to Senator Hiram Johnson was more forceful. He warned that the Winter Sports Committee’s recommendations were “dangerous . . . to the integrity of national parks.”⁶² Hosting professional winter sports competitions, he argued, would create an alarming precedent, and professional leagues for football, baseball, and other sports would soon demand permission to stage their own events in the parks. Notably, Cammerer did not explicitly mention the potential for physical

⁶⁰ Arno Cammerer to Congressman Clarence F. Lea, June 24, 1936, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park. A note at the top of the National Archives’ copy of this letter explains that “practically this same letter” was sent to five additional Representatives.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Cammerer to Senator Hiram Johnson, June 24, 1936, p. 1, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park.

damage to the landscape, but rather stressed that professional sports drew large crowds and required artificial structures, and that “such contests in these surroundings would be extremely incongruous.”⁶³ Although he did not use the term “atmosphere,” these objections to professional contests mirror the concerns of park atmosphere advocates.

In Yosemite, Tresidder and Thomson—both of whom had supported winter sports development, although to different degrees—took issue with Carpenter’s attacks on Order 319. Tresidder informed Carpenter in June 1936 that the YPCC was “as keen as your own [organization] to see winter sports develop rapidly in California,” but that the Park Service had been very accommodating so far and was justifiably cautious about development because of its duty to protect park lands.⁶⁴ He noted that the NPS encouraged “general participation in winter sports rather than limiting the use of the parks’ winter facilities to a few highly skilled competitors,” and explained that Superintendent Thomson had “become genuinely interested in our winter sports program in the past year and . . . we can count upon him to go along with us on anything that does not run directly counter to park policy.”⁶⁵ Thomson had indeed proved a helpful advocate. He had supported the development of Badger Pass and helped convince the Park Service to provide funding for some of the ski area’s facilities, including the parking lot and water and sewer systems.⁶⁶ The superintendent, caught between local interests and the federal agency that employed him, informed Director

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Donald Tresidder to Jerry E. Carpenter, June 27, 1936, p. 1, Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁶ *Determination of Eligibility: Badger Pass Ski Area* (San Francisco: Page & Turnbull, August 13, 2009), 29, <https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/historyculture/upload/Badger-Pass-low-res.pdf>.

Cammerer that Carpenter's group had contributed to sports development and publicity efforts in the park, but noted there were "fundamental differences in the objectives" of the Committee and the Park Service.⁶⁷ In Thomson's view, Yosemite's winter sports program struck a suitable balance between promoting public use and protecting the park. He explained that

winter sports competitions have been designed to acquaint the public with winter sports, to make them aware of the beauty and the accessibility of Yosemite in winter, and to form the basis of a valid and restrained publicity. At no time have we felt it desirable to stage great competitions merely to attract overwhelming and destructive crowds of week-end spectators. . . . Every move has been directed toward encouraging participation of the visiting public in winter sports.⁶⁸

Thomson was not wholly opposed to competitions and carnivals in Yosemite, but he believed such events should be relatively restrained affairs, not large-scale spectacles.

The Sierra Club—one of the foremost environmental groups in the nation—also firmly supported Order 319. Bestor Robinson, chair of the club's own Winter Sports Committee, informed Cammerer that club members "felt that some action such as this [Order 319] is necessary in order to continue the use of National Parks for the benefit of participating sportsmen, rather [than] spectator sportsmen."⁶⁹ Robinson also explained that the Sierra Club had already been working with the State Chamber of Commerce to locate suitable land for sports on National Forest property, because club members and officials

⁶⁷ Thomson to Cammerer, June 18, 1936, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁹ Bestor Robinson to Arno Cammerer, June 16, 1936, p. 1, Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park.

believed there was a need to further develop winter sports areas somewhere in California.⁷⁰ Land managed by the U.S. Forest Service was appropriate for sports development, many people believed, because it was federal property that was regarded as a public resource rather than as a sacred landscape worthy of preservation. Appropriate use included utilitarian purposes such as harvesting timber and supplying water, but also less pragmatic functions like providing space for public recreation. The Forest Service eventually became so involved with skiing, in fact, that by 2014 there were 122 ski areas on land managed by the USFS.⁷¹ In contrast, the National Park Service was responsible for allowing public use *and* preserving the landscape—a task that was generally more complicated when combined with sports events and development. Sierra Club members and many other park advocates believed Order 319, which supported casual recreation and attempted to minimize large competitions and spectacles, was an important step in preserving park lands while allowing for public recreation. Private resorts and even Forest Service properties were more appropriate locations for large-scale sports because they were not bound by a preservation mandate.

Yosemite Sports Plow On

Order 319 was vague enough to have little immediate effect in Yosemite. Both participatory and spectator sports remained immensely popular in the late 1930s, and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2. The Park Service tended to agree that ski areas were appropriate on Forest Service land. For instance, in 1941 Arthur Demaray (Associate Director of the NPS) noted that there were no ski developments in Glacier National Park, but that the U.S. Forest Service had built one nearby which should prove sufficient for the region: “It has been the feeling of the [Park] Service that this area adequately meets the local needs and that any developments within the park would duplicate those already made by the Forest Service” (Demaray to Roger Langley, April 16, 1941, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park).

⁷¹ Meyer, “Alpine Experiments,” 3 n. 3.

downhill skiing became the park's foremost winter pastime thanks to the newly-accessible slopes outside the Valley. The new Badger Pass Ski Area, which opened in late 1935 to great acclaim, helped further cement the park's reputation as a snow resort. Competitions, carnivals, and other spectator events remained staples of the winter calendar through the 1930s and 1940s.

The park's winter sports program was supported in part by the Yosemite Winter Club (YWC). Founded in 1928—thanks largely to Tresidder's efforts—the group sponsored competitions, events, and social activities for Yosemite visitors and residents. The Club seamlessly blended sport and merriment and quickly “emerged as a leading force in the evolution of American skiing,” according to Gene Rose.⁷² Tresidder made sure to involve the Park Service from the very start, asking NPS Assistant Director Horace Albright to serve as “Active President” and Director Stephen Mather as “Honorary President.”⁷³ Both accepted. The club was founded “for the purpose of more aggressive promotion of winter sports activities in Yosemite,” Tresidder informed Albright, making it clear from the start that a key goal was to expand the park's winter sports program.⁷⁴ Several other prominent Californians and NPS employees served as officers or otherwise supported the club,

⁷² Gene Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters: A Century of Winter Sports* (Truckee, Ca.: Coldstream Press, 1999), 77. Rose notes that the park hosted over 100 “major winter sporting events under the leadership of the Winter Club” in its first decade of existence (Ibid.).

⁷³ “Active” was a bit of a misnomer. Tresidder assured Albright that his position would require little effort, making it clear from the start that Albright's appointment (like Mather's) was calculated to convey legitimacy on the new group: “We wish very much to have you act as the Active President and, as you know, there will be no duties or responsibilities associated with the office” (Donald Tresidder to Horace Albright, December 19, 1928, in Yosemite National Park General, H Albright 1927–1933, Box 7, RG79, NARA College Park).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

including Harry Chandler (publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*), Clement C. Young (governor of California), Forest Townsley (Yosemite's chief ranger), and Superintendent Thomson. By enlisting such notable backers, Tresidder helped ensure ongoing support for Yosemite recreation and tourism. The YWC was also instrumental in establishing two statewide sports organizations: the California Skating Association (founded 1929) and the California Ski Association (founded 1930), thereby allowing the park to stage officially-sanctioned state and national competitions.⁷⁵ In addition to athletic contests, the Club regularly hosted sports-related social gatherings, including weekly Friday night soirees at the Ahwahnee with gourmet dinners, ten-piece bands, and dancing, followed by skiing the next day and more revelry that night. The shindigs even attracted club members from the Bay Area, many of whom made the long trek on a regular basis. By promoting winter sports, camaraderie, and the park, the YWC had a profound impact on its members and helped frame the experiences of the thousands of visitors who skied, skated, and spectated in Yosemite in the 1930s, 1940s, and beyond.⁷⁶ Yet the club's influence extended past the park's borders, Rose

⁷⁵ J[erry] E. Carpenter, *California Winter Sports and the VIIIth Winter Olympic Games, 1960 at Squaw Valley* (San Francisco: Fearon Publishers, 1958), 64; "History of the Far West Ski Association," Far West Ski Association, accessed September 14, 2016, <http://www.fwsa.org/About/history-1.html>. Tresidder served as founding president of the California Skating Association and as founding Vice President of the California Skiing Association. Both groups were affiliated with their respective national governing bodies, which enabled California resorts to host official national competitions as well as statewide events.

⁷⁶ The Yosemite Winter Club still organizes a handful of competitions and festivities each winter, but they are considerably smaller affairs and primarily attract club members, park employees, and local residents. For instance, the annual Ancient Jocks competition is open to skiers 30(!) and older; its Over-the-Hill-Slalom includes a beer stop along the racecourse. The Silver Ski Slalom, another perennial favorite, is the longest-running competition for young skiers in the Sierra Nevada ("Announcements," *Yosemite Sentinel* Book XII, vol. 3 [March 1986], 4).

explains, as its members “helped propel the once little-known fringe sport of skiing into one of the world’s most popular winter activities.”⁷⁷

The “sparkling interest” of Skiing

Skiing became the park’s marquee winter activity in the 1930s. As both participatory and spectator sports, cross-country and downhill skiing helped to shape—and were shaped by—NPS winter sports policies. Yet few scholars have examined their impact in the parks. This is surprising because skiing in Yosemite (and in other national parks) was usually tangled in controversies over atmosphere, artificiality, spectatorship, overcrowding, development, and related issues that influenced national park management and policies. Jeffrey Meyer’s “Alpine Experiments,” which discusses lift-assisted skiing in national parks, is the only recent scholarly work to examine the role of national parks in ski history at great length. Ski lifts, he notes, are a prime example of mechanization in a theoretically natural landscape, and thus are ripe for study.⁷⁸ He explores how machines like Yosemite’s first lift—the “upski”—transformed the sport by eliminating skiers’ strenuous uphill climb, thereby reducing physical interaction with the land and democratizing skiing. Aside from Meyer, however, most scholars have either ignored skiing in the parks or given it only cursory attention. Its importance during the critical years of winter sports development in national parks should not be overlooked.

⁷⁷ Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters*, 67.

⁷⁸ Meyer, “Alpine Experiments,” 9.

Skiing was relatively unknown in the United States until the early twentieth century, even though cross-country, then known as snowshoeing, had been introduced to the Sierra Nevadas in the 1850s. Its most famous early practitioner was Norwegian-born John “Snowshoe” Thompson, who regularly crossed the mountain range on skis to deliver mail from the mid-1850s through the mid-1870s.⁷⁹ In the 1860s downhill skiing became a competitive sport in California—often featuring cash prizes—when mining towns in Plumas County staged what may have been the “first downhill races . . . ever held in the country, at a time when competition was hardly developed even in Scandinavia,” according to J. H. Hildebrand.⁸⁰ After the mining industry waned in the late 1800s, recreational skiing was largely abandoned in California until the early twentieth century, and it remained relatively obscure until the 1932 Olympic Games.⁸¹ Across the Pacific, people had been skiing for millennia in Russia and China, though ski scholars still debate the sport’s exact origins.⁸² In Europe, cross-country was popularized as a modern sport in the nineteenth century, after Swedish and Norwegian militaries began training and racing on skis in the eighteenth century. Alpine racing was slower to develop. Although downhill and slalom spread through much of Europe in the early twentieth century, it was not until 1931—a mere four

⁷⁹ J. H. Hildebrand, “Duelling (sic) Skis,” *California History* 61, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 276–277. Thompson’s 180-mile roundtrip took three days heading east and two days returning west, and skirted just north of what would become Yosemite National Park.

⁸⁰ J. H. Hildebrand, “A History of Ski-ing in California,” *The British Ski Year Book* 10 (1939): 78. John Fry claims these competitions were “the world’s earliest high-speed downhill races” (John Fry, *The Story of Modern Skiing* [Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2006], 6).

⁸¹ Carpenter, *California Winter Sports and the VIIIth Winter Olympic Games*, 39.

⁸² Meyer, “Alpine Experiments,” 23. Russia and China are among the foremost contenders for the invention of skiing, thanks to archeological fragments and paintings, respectively, that may be of early ski-like objects dating from 6,000 BC or earlier.

years before Yosemite's Badger Pass Ski Area opened—that skiing's governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Ski (FIS), sanctioned the first Alpine skiing world championship.⁸³

Meanwhile, European ski resorts had become popular vacation destinations and Donald Tresidder attempted to emulate their success at Yosemite. He hoped to provide ski instruction and architecture based on Alpine ski areas, in a similarly spectacular setting. Although Yosemite's winter sports program never achieved Alpine-esque levels of success, it proved remarkably popular and helped inspire the establishment of other Western ski areas. The YPCC's contributions toward the development of American skiing, according to Jerry Carpenter, were “the most outstanding [among American groups], largely because of the intense interest taken by Dr. Don Tresidder and Mary Curry Tresidder, who were great outdoor enthusiasts and skiers and skaters.”⁸⁴ The Tresidders hoped to share their passion for winter sports with tourists. As H. C. Bradley noted, skiing “converts a drab and tiresome season into one of sparkling interest for so many thousands of people,” and the couple (and the Company) worked to capture this “sparkle” in a park already brimming with natural interest

Surprisingly, “ski touring” (now better known as cross-country skiing) was less popular than its downhill counterpart in Yosemite. Ski touring seems a natural fit for a national park: it is a hearty outdoor activity that allows visitors to view landscapes without.

⁸³ Fry, *The Story of Modern Skiing*, 9.

⁸⁴ Jerry E. Carpenter, *California Winter Sports and the VIIIth Winter Olympic Games, 1960 at Squaw Valley* (San Francisco: Fearon Publishers, 1958), 62.



Image 3-4: Ski race in Stoneman Meadow, January 1, 1932. Yosemite National Park Archives, Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection, Winter Club Scrapbook, page 49.

causing much immediate physical damage to the environment. Few (if any) trees must be removed and lifts are unnecessary. And with just a little effort, people of all ages can ski cross country with little chance of serious injury. In practice, however, Yosemite visitors were relatively slow to embrace ski touring. Before the Wawona Tunnel opened, the most scenic and snowy trails were accessible only to the intrepid few willing to hike out of the Valley.⁸⁵ The YPCC, the NPS, and various winter sports enthusiasts hoped to increase cross-country skiing in the park. In 1929 the Company constructed a small cabin northeast

⁸⁵ For instance, the Four Mile Trail led skiers up a steep switchback trail along the face of the Valley's south wall to Glacier Point.

of the Valley on Mount Watkins, a modest start for what became the “first hut system for ski-mountaineering in the Sierra.”⁸⁶ The Snow Creek Ski Hut, a Swiss-style cabin designed by Eldridge T. Spencer, served as overnight accommodations for the Company’s new two-to-six-day cross-country ski excursions, the first tours of their kind in the United States.⁸⁷ The expeditions also stopped at two backcountry ranger cabins that the NPS allowed the Company to use in the winter. Despite its initial success, Snow Creek Cabin fell out of favor once the Wawona Tunnel opened in 1933 and provided easy access to ski areas near Chinquapin and Badger Pass. The YPCC abandoned the cabin the following year.⁸⁸ Mary Curry Tresidder (a long-time Company officer, and a daughter of Camp Curry founders Jennie and David Curry) was surprised and disappointed that Snow Creek Cabin had not flourished. An accomplished skier, she preferred backcountry trails to crowded downhill slopes. As she explained several years later, “We [had] confidently expected that within a few years the High Sierra Camps would be a series of winter huts like those in the Alps or the Tyrol, with skiers touring from one to another. We found, however, that people at that time did not know enough either about skiing or ski mountaineering to make that dream

⁸⁶ Hildebrand, “A History of Ski-ing in California,” 72.

⁸⁷ Eldridge Spencer was an accomplished San Francisco architect who had also designed outbuildings at the Camp Curry ice rink and worked on the Ahwahnee’s bungalows, and would later design the Lodge at Badger Pass. All of these projects were impressive, as the YPCC was determined to follow European winter sports norms and designs wherever possible. The skating rink outbuildings, for instance, were not mere slap-dash outhouses, but rather “small attractive buildings of the Northern Scandanavian [sic] type” and were used for equipment rental, dressing rooms, and a club area at the new 60,000 square-foot ice rink. James V. Lloyd, press release, December [1929], p. 2, appended to Superintendent’s Monthly Report for December 1929 (January 1, 1930), in Superintendent’s Monthly Reports, NPS Archives at El Portal; “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Snow Creek Cabin” (NPS Form 10-900), section 8, p. 2, accessed May 16, 2016, <http://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/historyculture/upload/Snow-Creek-Cabin.pdf>.

⁸⁸ “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Snow Creek Cabin,” section 8, p. 4.

workable.”⁸⁹ Cross-country skiing was a rare example of a winter sport that initially failed to thrive in Yosemite.

The Park Service renewed efforts to promote cross-country skiing in national parks in the late 1930s. At a November 1938 meeting NPS officials agreed to encourage the superintendents at Yosemite and Sequoia to build a few ski shelters, monitor their usage, and determine if there was sufficient interest to create and maintain hut-and-trail systems in the parks.⁹⁰ Such a scheme would cater to those who wished to spend a night or several exploring isolated areas of the park, away from roads and regular accommodations. Outside ski authorities echoed the call for more cross-country huts in the United States, claiming that American mountains were as well-suited to the sport as those in Europe. James Laughlin, for instance, argued that until such groups of huts were built, “the run of American skiers will never know what it means to tour, and, as anyone knows who has toured abroad, touring is the real cream of skiing.” Like others before him, Laughlin waxed poetically on the benefits of gliding in solitude through nature: “likely enough, the only tracks you will see will be those you make yourself . . . you climb for hours—two, three, four sometimes—up to a pass, full of the feel of discovery, with the good sweat pouring out and washing your lowland sins away.”⁹¹ He viewed cross-country skiing as both enjoyable exercise and as an escape from the grind of “lowland” life into the freedom of nature. Although Laughlin was

⁸⁹ Mary Curry Tresidder, as quoted in Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters*, 112.

⁹⁰ “Memorandum for the Files,” November 30, 1938, p. 2, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park.

⁹¹ James Laughlin, “A Plea for Huts in America,” in *American Ski Annual 1941–1942* (Brattleboro, Vt.: Stephen Daye Press, 1942), 61.

not referring to any specific location, a sport that promised both play and low-impact interaction with the landscape was theoretically ideal in a national park.

In Yosemite, ski-touring advocates hoped to build a new European-style hut and trail system in the backcountry. The Park Service commissioned Bestor Robinson, Chairman of the Sierra Club's Winter Sports Committee and "collaborator-at-large" for the NPS, to report on possibilities for Yosemite ski touring in early 1940. Robinson recommended a system of trails and rustic lodgings to accommodate multi-day cross country trips. He suggested building huts "of simple type" eight to ten miles apart and stocking them with "bunks, firewood, first aid equipment and toboggans for rescue use."⁹² Robinson stressed the need to showcase scenery when planning trails and noted that a primary goal of the national parks was "to make available the Nation's scenic treasures [and] this principle should apply to winter, as well as summer, use."⁹³ Skiers would be required to register before embarking so rangers could determine, "so far as is possible," that they were well-equipped for and physically capable of the trek. Robinson also urged the Park Service to offer ranger-guided cross-country tours, with the assistance of local ski clubs if necessary.

A few weeks later, H. C. Bradley, a chemist at the University of Wisconsin and an officer in both the National Ski Association and the Central United States Ski Association, wrote Secretary Ickes directly with his own detailed plan, titled "Skiing Opportunities in the National Parks."⁹⁴ Cross-country skiing was ideal in a national park, Bradley claimed,

⁹² Robinson, "Memorandum on Standards of Construction and Location of Ski Trails and Huts in National Parks," p. 5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ Bradley to Ickes, May 3, 1940, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

because it caused less wear and tear than summer activities.⁹⁵ Even better, he believed, skiers were “the most cooperative type that ever enters the Park, and . . . enthusiastic backer[s] of the whole National Parks idea. Under the circumstances [they] cannot deface the wilderness and [they] would be intolerant of anyone that did.”⁹⁶ Bradley was confident his ideas would work especially well in Yosemite, which he considered “the very top [among U.S. ski areas] in its terrain, its snow conditions, and in its [a]esthetic values.”⁹⁷ Skiers would traverse an 80-mile strip along Tioga Road, stopping overnight at ranger cabins along the way. The NPS would charge a minimal fee for use of the cabins and would stock them with bedding and “simple” food. His proposal is especially notable because he had no official affiliation with Yosemite or the NPS and had undertaken the survey on his own initiative. NPS Acting Director Arthur E. Demaray was impressed with Bradley’s “excellent presentation” and sent him copies of Robinson’s report and the 1940 Park Service winter sports policy. Demaray explained that “from these data you will note that the fundamental policy is directed toward an extension of skiing in national parks.”⁹⁸ The NPS was pleased with most of Robinson’s

⁹⁵ Ibid., 2. Bradley explained that he had asked permission to use the cabins in Yosemite and Yellowstone to test his plan but was refused by the parks’ superintendents: “I have been compelled to travers the Yosemite area I am recommending without official sanction—in fact with official refusal—entirely at my own risk and by the hard way of packing in everything on my back.” He wrote to Ickes directly because he had “come to realize that the matter is one of fundamental policy” and therefore it needed to be addressed by the Department of the Interior (Ibid., p. 10).

⁹⁶ Ibid., 9. Bradley and other ski boosters often noted that the act of ski touring caused little physical damage, but they rarely addressed the fact that the construction of huts might hurt the landscape.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 2. Bradley believed his plan could also be adapted in Yellowstone and possibly other parks, but his report focused primarily on Yosemite.

⁹⁸ Arthur Demaray to H. C. Bradley, May 18, 1940, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

and Bradley's ideas, and Robinson believed the two plans could be integrated to create a successful hut and trail system in Yosemite.

The Park Service opened one overnight ski hut at Yosemite's Ostrander Lake in January 1941, the park's first facility constructed specifically for cross-country skiers since Snow Creek Cabin. Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps and managed jointly by the Company and the NPS, the two-story stone building attracted 154 skiers in its first season. Visitors could bring their own food or be served by a live-in Company employee and his wife. Those who participated in cross-country skiing likely found that the secluded trails and the isolated Ostrander Hut offered far greater solitude and a more immersive experience in nature than the crowded slopes of Badger Pass, just as early ski touring advocates had predicted.⁹⁹ As the *Los Angeles Times* explained in 1940, "the competent skier who follows some of the longer and more scenic ski trails radiating from Badger Pass glides through a veritable fairyland high up above the southern rim of the valley."¹⁰⁰ For some visitors, ski-touring was the quintessential National Park winter experience. It offered spectacular views, outdoor recreation, interaction with the landscape, and time for quiet reflection, all in a

⁹⁹ The Ostrander Lake Ski Hut remains a popular overnight stop for twenty-first century skiers and is now run jointly by the NPS and the Yosemite Conservancy (a descendant of the non-profit Yosemite Museum Association). The Hut is so in-demand that prospective guests must enter a lottery to "win" reservations (Yosemite Conservancy, email to author, "Join us at Ostrander Ski Hut" October 28, 2014). A 2013 restoration project "preserve[d] the historic Ostrander Ski Hut experience that has been enjoyed by generations of visitors" (Yosemite Conservancy, "Preserving Ostrander," accessed September 18, 2016, <https://www.yosemiteconservancy.org/preserving-ostrander>). Ostrander Lake Ski Hut was far more successful than Snow Creek Cabin, largely because cross-country skiing had become a bit more popular and because the Ostrander Hut was somewhat more accessible and could be reached without joining an official expedition. The hut is about 10 miles by ski from Badger Pass; a large portion of the trail includes a rigorous uphill climb.

¹⁰⁰ Lynn J. Rogers, "Yosemite's Beauty Enhanced by Snow," *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 1940, p. F1.

relaxed, informal, non-competitive setting. In Yosemite, however, the downhill thrills of Badger Pass proved far more popular.

Downhill skiing had enjoyed minor success on the Valley floor's "ski hill" in the early twentieth century, but the gentle slope was too tame and too compact to ever compete with Continental ski areas. Despite its location in the heart of a major mountain range, Yosemite Valley had few relatively clear hills on which to ski. Tresidder and park officials understood that downhill skiing would never thrive in the park unless tourists could easily access the higher altitudes and steeper slopes outside the Valley. They had hunted for suitable sites during the Olympic bid process, convinced the backcountry would provide both the scenery and the topography to which European visitors and athletes were accustomed. After losing the Games to Lake Placid and suffering through the early years of the Depression, the YPCC renewed its search for new ski areas. The company found a suitable site at Badger Pass (then known as Monroe Meadow), and opened the ski center within a year of securing approval from the NPS. Badger Pass did not fulfill Tresidder's dreams of a world-class, European-style resort, yet its completion in late 1935—just months before the Park Service issued its first official winter sports policy—was a crucial milestone in the development of winter sports in the national parks.

A somewhat freewheeling spirit of recreational development had ruled winters in Yosemite in the 1910s and 1920s, and the sports program had expanded with assistance from the Park Service as visitation and interest in winter activities increased. The YPCC and outside business interests were determined to take advantage of the growing popularity of American winter sports and hoped to build on progress made during the Olympic bid process. By the mid-1930s, however, new philosophies cast doubt on the wisdom of

allowing the unfettered expansion of athletic activities and spectacles. With the Park Service entering its third decade, the conflict between public use and preservation grew more problematic, and the agency began earnestly debating the relative merits of participatory and spectator sports in the parks. Officials feared that with unrestrained growth parks would develop a Coney-Island atmosphere and be overrun by crowds and “artificialities.” To counter these fears, Director Cammerer issued Order 319, which hinted at a new direction in winter sports management but had little immediate impact in Yosemite. Nevertheless, by prioritizing participation over spectating, the policy set the stage for an important shift in conceptions of appropriate park use. It was the beginning of the end for major spectator events and spectacles, a return to the idea of park as playground.

Chapter Four

Ski Lifts and Snow Queens: Sports Centers and Spectacles

The twenty-year-old National Park Service was still negotiating its own role in park management, unsure how best to balance preservation and public use, when Director Cammerer wrote the Agency's first official winter sports policy in 1936. Yet winter sports programs continued to expand in Yosemite and other parks, prompting the agency to issue three additional winter sports policies in the 1940s. Yosemite's two winter sports complexes—Badger Pass Ski Area and the Camp Curry Ice Rink—predated Order 319 and provided a wide range of activities for participants and spectators. Both facilities played a significant role in increasing winter tourism, and their popularity demonstrated that visitors were eager to use the park as a year-round public playground and open-air sports theater. The Park Service's new policies and changing attitudes towards spectacles and spectatorship, however, eventually doomed Yosemite's exceedingly popular snow carnivals and major competitions, as well as Donald Tresidder's dream of establishing a world-class ski resort. The NPS used winter sports as a lens through which to reassess the ongoing conflict between preservation and public use and as a tool with which to implement a renewed system-wide focus on play over spectacle.

Badger Pass Saves the Day

The park's flagship winter sports complex, Badger Pass Ski Area, opened to great fanfare in December 1935 as one of the first ski resorts in the West.¹ The facility offered

¹ The definition of ski resort varies, but Badger Pass was among the very first facilities in the western United States with ski slopes, a ski house, equipment rental, and ski instruction. Badger Pass Ski House,

both participatory and spectator activities, and served as an important test case for winter sports management and Park Service policies. Donald Tresidder had envisioned a thriving, European-style ski resort, but as a park concessionaire he needed to attract large numbers of tourists and introduce them to the fast-growing sport under the watchful eyes of the federal government. This dichotomy presented a problem. The Park Service—which had recently embraced the concept of atmosphere preservation—wanted a ski center that was more modest than St. Moritz and its Continental competitors and that catered to families and average tourists rather than to spectators and elite athletes. Badger Pass’s relatively tame slopes and small size, coupled with restrictions imposed by the Park Service, ensured that it could never truly compete with world-class European resorts or even with large American newcomers like Sun Valley (1936) or Sugar Bowl (1939). Nevertheless, thanks in part to its secluded location, high altitude, and ample snowfall, Badger Pass helped save Yosemite’s winter sports program and did wonders to solidify the park’s status as a year-round playground.

Notably, the Badger Pass region was developed purely for recreational, not scenic, purposes. The site usually received abundant snow and offered far more room for ski runs than the Valley, allowing the Yosemite Park and Curry Company to introduce a more comprehensive winter sports program and accommodate larger crowds. The Company had considered several backcountry options and selected the Badger Pass site (then known as Monroe Meadow) in part because it was easily accessible by road, could accommodate a

dedicated on December 15, 1935, “was the earliest downhill ski lodge in California” (*Determination of Eligibility: Badger Pass Ski Area* [San Francisco: Page & Turnbull, August 13, 2009], 30). It has enjoyed more lasting success as a family-friendly recreation center where generations of visitors have learned to ski, and it remains the most successful element of the park’s sports program.

good-sized parking lot, and had terrain to tempt both novice and intermediate skiers. It was also isolated, which in the long run helped protect it from late-twentieth-century efforts to reduce physical infrastructure in the park.² Visitors would likely go there specifically to participate in or watch sports, not to seek out spectacular vistas, so the NPS believed little harm would come from constructing sports facilities and attracting moderate crowds. The Park Service permitted the YPCC to build a ski house and other buildings, clear trees, and install ski lifts. The Company also established a ski school for all ages and rented out equipment, allowing many visitors to sample skiing for the first time with no real commitment and no risk of damaging the park's most famous scenic features.³

The cold temperatures at Badger Pass were also critical to the ski area's success. Located 19 miles southwest of Camp Curry and 3200 feet above it, Badger Pass and the surrounding area are typically draped in snow and ice from December through at least March, unlike the much warmer Valley.⁴ Several warm winters in the Valley had nearly doomed the winter tourist season, Donald Tresidder wrote in early 1936, but Badger Pass's opening in December 1935 "must be credited with having changed the Holidays from a

² The Park Service moved many employee residences and other structures from the Valley to outside of the park in the late twentieth century to help alleviate congestion and to minimize at least some of the park's man-made scars. The process was accelerated after a massive flood hit the Valley on December 31, 1996. The flood left hundreds of buildings and campgrounds heavily damaged. This natural disaster gave the NPS a handy justification to bulldoze many structures in the flood zone. Ironically, many employees who once lived within biking or walking distance of work must now drive 30 minutes or more to reach the Valley, on narrow roads already crowded with tourist traffic. Facilities in the backcountry (like Badger Pass) were much more isolated than those in the Valley, and thus raised fewer concerns about congestion.

³ Although getting to and staying in the park can be expensive, Badger Pass has remained popular in part because of its relatively low prices (for lessons, rentals, and lift passes) compared to many major ski resorts. This has helped democratize an activity that can be prohibitively expensive—at least for those who can get to the park.

⁴ 19.3 miles by car; much shorter as the crow flies (Google Maps, accessed February 25, 2016, www.google.com/maps). Today, it is about a forty-minute drive in good weather.

dismal failure to an enthusiastic success.”⁵ He noted that in previous winters, overnight park visitors “left us by the hundreds” whenever warm Valley weather forced the closure of the skating rink, the toboggan, and the ash can slide, and many guests who had not yet arrived canceled their reservations.⁶ Opening up the backcountry to winter sports thus ensured a more consistent schedule of activities and greatly extended the ski season.

Tresidder was confident that Badger Pass would establish the park as “one of the great Winter Sports centers of America” because “both ski instruction and ski facilities compare with the best offered by any of Europe’s famous winter resorts.”⁷ Sure enough, the ski area proved a hit. Halfway through its first season, Tresidder gushed to Director Cammerer that “our fondest hopes never pictured the instantaneous success of the Badger Ski Area.”⁸ Jerry Carpenter, of the State Chamber of Commerce Winter Sports Committee, was similarly thrilled. “This is the most outstanding development in the United States and . . . it will do more to advance skiing than anything that has been done so far,” he predicted.⁹ Shortly after it opened, the *Los Angeles Times* raved that “the new ski house is the first of its

⁵ Donald Tresidder to Arno Cammerer, January 17, 1936, p. 5, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷ Donald Tresidder, “Announcement,” ca. November 1935, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁸ Tresidder to Cammerer, January 17, 1936, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3.

⁹ Carpenter also predicted that “attendance at Yosemite due to this development will be double (sic) that of last year and will be the clinching argument for additional developments of this nature” (J. E. Carpenter to F. A. Kittredge (NPS Chief Engineer), January 11, 1936, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

kind in the West . . . and has every convenience for both skier and spectator.”¹⁰ Badger Pass was so popular in its first month of operation, in fact, that the YPCC proclaimed the ski house already insufficient to accommodate the large crowds. According to Tresidder, “the Ski House itself came in for more enthusiastic praise from our guests than anything the Company has ever built, to my knowledge, but it was almost the universal comment that all of our facilities were much too small.”¹¹ Just a few months after it opened, he requested permission to enlarge the ski house, rebuild the kitchen and dining areas, expand parking, add more lockers and restrooms, and clear more runs. The YPCC also hoped to purchase more skis. All 175 pairs of rental skis were used regularly, Tresidder noted, and he estimated that the Company could have rented 500 pairs during busy weekends.¹² The Park Service agreed to a renovation and the ski house was enlarged in late 1936 to accommodate twice as many visitors.¹³ The YPCC also built a small ski jump and a new ski run, creating even more outdoor play space outside the Valley.¹⁴ The fact that expansion was approved and implemented so quickly is a testament to the Park Service’s continued support for winter sports development, despite the issuance of Order 319 earlier the same year.

¹⁰ “Ski House Dedicated,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1935, p. 14. The ski house featured a cafeteria, changing rooms, a lounge, and other comforts.

¹¹ Tresidder to Cammerer, January 17, 1936, p. 3, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹³ A. Sportsman, “Outdoor Activities,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1936, p. E5.

¹⁴ This was the small ski jump that Superintendent Thomson had grudgingly approved, as discussed in the previous chapter.

While Tresidder was thrilled by Badger Pass's popularity, he was less pleased that a large number of skiers were day visitors who came to the park to play for a few hours. The Wawona Tunnel allowed overnight tourists to hit the slopes during the day and return to Valley lodgings at night, but many Badger Pass patrons traveled in from nearby towns for a day of skiing.¹⁵ These latter visitors took advantage of the park's athletic facilities, sometimes bypassing Yosemite's foremost scenic wonders altogether. Tourists driving in from the Bay Area passed through the western edge of the Valley and were treated to a Kodak moment at "Tunnel View" along the way to Badger Pass; those entering the park from the South never came anywhere near the park's most iconic features.¹⁶ These "in-and-out-in-a-day guests," as he called them, were a thorn in Tresidder's side. He told Cammerer that overnight guests complained about day visitors crowding Badger Pass, and he sniped that they "used our Ski House facilities freely, even to the point of eating their lunches in the Lounge, opening cans of tomatoes, sardines, fruit, etc., and in some cases leaving their litter for us to clean up."¹⁷ Granted, many of these day visitors brought their own equipment and food, but they still contributed to the Company's coffers by buying lift tickets and to the

¹⁵ Many day visitors were residents of the surrounding communities; others were tourists spending the night outside the park. Tourists staying nearby may have spent other days in the park viewing the scenery, but it is impossible to determine how many did so. Tresidder considered anyone who did not spend the night in the park a day visitor, even if they overnighted just outside the park boundary and visited Yosemite on multiple days.

¹⁶ Tourists and local residents driving to Badger Pass from the South passed by the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, which first became accessible year-round with the opening of the Wawona Tunnel in 1933. This was an impressive attraction, but most of the park's best-known sites—including Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, and Half Dome—were miles away and were not visible from along the southern route or from Badger Pass.

¹⁷ Donald Tresidder to Arno Cammerer, January 17, 1936, p. 3, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3.

park's budget by paying the entrance fee. This was not a case of rowdy day-trippers crowding an elegant slope-adjacent hotel lobby with wet ski socks, but rather a matter of guests who chose not to stay in YPCC lodgings mingling with overnight Company customers nearly an hour away from the Valley's hotels and camps. The Park Service was not particularly sympathetic to Tresidder's complaints, and Director Drury's 1945 winter sports policy later ensured that skiers in most national parks would have to commute—whether from official park lodgings or from elsewhere—to reach ski slopes.¹⁸ The policy forbade building overnight lodgings in areas with heavy snowfall (like Badger Pass), thereby effectively barring hotels from national park ski areas. The Park Service justified the ban by explaining that in such regions “unusual and expensive problems of maintenance and operation are always found,” but concerns about crowding and commercialization also played a role in the decision.¹⁹ Tresidder was frustrated that day skiers did not spend the night in the Valley; the NPS was simply happy they could not overnight at Badger Pass.²⁰ This lack of slope-side lodgings made park areas significantly different from the village-like settings of many European ski resorts.

¹⁸ Newton B. Drury, Memorandum for the Director's Office and the Regional Directors (No. RD-207) [Winter Sports Policy], August 13, 1945, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park (hereafter cited as: Drury, *1945 Winter Sports Policy*).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Newton Drury's 1946 winter sports policy clarified that concessionaires could continue to operate pre-existing accommodations at ski centers, as long as certain conditions were met (Newton B. Drury, “Memorandum for the Director's Office and All Field Offices” (No. FO-331), March 21, 1946, p. 1, in Winter Use—Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG79, NARA College Park [hereafter cited as: Drury, *1946 Winter Sports Policy*]).



Image 4-1: Badger Pass ski slopes from the back patio of the Ski Lodge, a popular gathering spot. Photograph by Ralph H. Anderson, 1939. Courtesy National Park Service, NPS History Collection, HFCA # HPC-000828.

Badger Pass remained open through World War II, despite a decrease in park attendance. The park hosted thousands of military personnel during the conflict, including members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps stationed at an old CCC camp at Wawona for training, and soldiers, sailors, and their families who visited the park while on break from service.²¹ The YPCC explained in a 1943 advertisement that exhausted service members

²¹ Recreational travel decreased throughout the country during World War II. Persistent (and entirely false) rumors that Yosemite was closed and/or occupied by the American military further hurt Yosemite

would be “urgently in need of rest, recreation, and momentary escape from the horrors and strain of war. It will be imperative that an organized program be arranged to overcome fatigue and nerve strain and to restore the men to fighting trim with the least possible delay.” The Company offered up its sun, slopes, and sports as “valuable therapeutic agents in this vitally important rehabilitation program.”²² The Park Service also contributed to the war effort by leasing the Ahwahnee to the Navy, which converted the luxury hotel into a rehabilitation center for Naval personnel in 1943. Unfortunately, many patients felt isolated in the Valley, which certainly did little to aid recuperation for those suffering the emotional and psychological toil of warfare. For some, sports were a partial solution. In 1944 Chief Naval Athletic Specialist Robert K. Bronson developed a voluntary program in which patients could visit Badger Pass for skiing, snowshoeing, and outdoor relaxation. Halfway through the season the program became compulsory for some patients, many of whom “said they wished that they had been required to go up sooner.”²³ In the winter 1944–1945 season, 1,580 patients and staff skied at Badger Pass. “Skiing with its exercise and exposure to the sun and air of the High Sierras, has been a very popular part of our rehabilitation

visitation. For instance, in Fall 1942 Tresidder informed Drury that “ever since Pearl Harbor the rumor has been persistent that the Army was taking over Yosemite” and that at least two travel bureaus reported “their clients had started for Yosemite but had been turned back at Merced that morning by a State traffic officer because Yosemite had been taken over lock, stock and barrel that day by the Army and no civilians would be permitted in the park” (Donald Tresidder to Newton Drury, October 5, 1942, in Yosemite Park and Curry Company 1941–March 1951, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 26, RG79, NARA College Park).

²² Donald Tresidder, “Yosemite in Wartime” (advertisement), [1942?], in Yosemite Park and Curry Company 1941–March 1951, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 26, RG79, NARA College Park.

²³ Lt. D. H. Nelson, “Report of Navy Ski Activities, Badger Pass, Yosemite National Park, Winter of 1944–1945,” May 17, 1945, p. 2, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

program and most beneficial to our patients,” Lt. D. H. Nelson reported at the end of the season.²⁴ The mix of participatory sports and scenery—or, more accurately, the *change* in scenery—had succeeded as a rehabilitation tactic where simple rest and relaxation in a spectacular setting had failed. Traumatized and injured sailors were clearly not representative of the broader American public, but Company and park officials were particularly proud of the success of the Navy’s Badger Pass program.



Image 4-2: Sailors from the U. S. Naval Convalescent Hospital (at the Ahwahnee Hotel) pause at Tunnel View, 1944. Photograph by Ralph H. Anderson. Courtesy National Park Service, NPS History Collection, HFCA # HPC-001015.

Badger Pass’s European-inspired ski classes proved especially popular for visitors of all ages. The Yosemite Ski School, the “earliest sizable ski school west of the Mississippi,” had been founded in 1928 under the direction of Swiss native Jules Fritsch and the auspices of the newly-formed Yosemite Winter Club.²⁵ Initially, four experts (all European-born

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Morten Lund, “The Short, Sweet Ski Life of Hannes Schroll in America,” *Skiing Heritage Journal* 21, no. 4 (Dec. 2009): 10.

and/or -trained, naturally) taught on the Valley floor, at Snow Creek, and at Chinquapin; the school moved to Badger Pass when the ski center opened. Instructors also gave ice skating lessons and performed ski jump demonstrations. Ski historian J. H. Hildebrand argues that the Yosemite Ski School played a critical role in California winter sports history because “competent ski instruction was recognised by [only] a few far-sighted persons as essential if ski-ing was to become more than a sport for spectators viewing Scandinavian jumpers.” He credits Tresidder “with wisdom and devotion in the development of ski-ing in California.”²⁶ The program was so well-respected that Tresidder was able to convince Austrian Hannes Schroll, “one of ten best skiers in the world,” to take over as director of the ski school in 1936.²⁷ He noted that Schroll had “chosen [Yosemite] as his new home in America, after visiting most of the important ski centers in the country,” clearly implying Yosemite’s superiority to the American competition.²⁸ Schroll left Yosemite after only three years, however, to help found the larger and more exclusive Sugar Bowl Resort near Donner Pass in California’s Placer County. He was determined to create an “‘anti-Yosemite,’ a ski area filled with friends and fellow skiers staying in a hotel and in a small Tyrolean village at the base of the mountain,” as Morten Lund explained.²⁹ The ever-changing stream of novices

²⁶ J. H. Hildebrand, “A History of Ski-ing in California,” *The British Ski Year Book* 10 (1939): 78.

²⁷ Tresidder, “Announcement,” ca. November 1935, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry Winter Sports part 3.

²⁸ Ibid. In excitement, the Yosemite Winter Club sponsored a “Winter Sports Dance” in Schroll’s honor at the Hotel St. Francis in San Francisco.

²⁹ Lund, “The Short, Sweet Ski Life of Hannes Schroll in America,” 12. Several wealthy Californians who had skied with Schroll at Badger Pass invested in Sugar Bowl. Walt Disney, for instance, skied at the park several times before buying into Schroll’s new resort. The Disney family’s visits to Yosemite were often covered in the society columns of California papers. For instance, “the slopes of Badger Pass were crowded and . . . [among the] enthusiasts enrolled were Mr. and Mrs. Walt Disney,” the *L.A. Times* reported in 1938 (Christy Fox, “Castors Entertain Visitors,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1938, p. A6).

and day-trippers who thronged national park ski areas did not fit Schroll's dream of a European skier's paradise. Badger Pass would never be able to compete with his vision, hampered as it was by its relatively small size and National Park Service principles and policies. Tresidder had established a pioneering ski resort that looked Alpine in architecture and instruction, but he would never be able to truly replicate the St. Moritz experience in Yosemite.

French-Canadian Nic Fiore was better suited to working at a national park ski area. When he arrived in 1947, Fiore planned to stay for just one winter. Instead, in a career spanning nearly sixty years at Badger Pass, he taught at least 100,000 visitors to ski in Yosemite.³⁰ He was promoted to director, developed one of the nation's first ski classes for children (the "Badger Pups" program), and was heavily involved in national efforts to promote better ski instruction. He received several job offers from larger resorts, but unlike Schroll and many other Yosemite instructors, Fiore stayed put. His explanation was simple: "Obviously, with the park system, Badger could never expand. . . . How can a small area compete?" My answer, I say, 'Come to Yosemite. We have a ski school which really teaches people to ski and focuses on beginner and family. You can have a really lovely day here.'"³¹ The park, Fiore acknowledged, was not destined to host a world-class ski resort. Instead, Yosemite offered visitors of all ages and abilities the chance to learn a healthy outdoor activity and engage directly with nature in an informal and scenic setting—exactly the sort of

³⁰ Robert Frohlich, "Mountain Dreamers: Visionaries of Sierra Nevada Skiing," *Yosemite: A Journal for Members of the Yosemite Association* 59, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 12–13. Frohlich put the number of students at around 100,000, but the Yosemite Winter Club estimates Fiore taught nearly 140,000 visitors (Yosemite Winter Club, *The Snowflake* [2009–2010]).

³¹ Frohlich, "Mountain Dreamers," 13.

park usage the Park Service promoted with its winter sports philosophies and policies in the 1930s and 1940s.



Image 4-3: Steve Stevenson and William Nutley of the Yosemite Ski Patrol at Badger Pass, 1948. Courtesy of Theresa Nutley.

The Yosemite Winter Activities Committee, a three-man group tasked with drafting winter sports recommendations, issued a report in 1940 that focused primarily on ways to expand and improve skiing in the park. The Committee had an impressive pedigree in environmental activism and skiing: Dr. Joel H. Hildebrand was President of the Sierra Club, a dean at UC Berkeley, and active in both the national and California ski associations; Bestor Robinson was a Director of the Sierra Club and of the national and California ski associations; and Frank Wentworth was councilor of the Save the Redwoods League, a Bay Area civic leader, and a member of the Sierra Ski Club.³² Despite their commitments to

³² Press release, March 5th, 1940, p. 1–2, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

conservation organizations, the members clearly supported maintaining (and even expanding) ski facilities and programs in the park. The committee's April 1940 report concluded that Badger Pass was "so far as foreseeable, a permanent development."³³ They also recommended further additions to the ski area, including another tow rope, a new ski jump, and additional practice slopes to ease congestion.³⁴ "If interest in winter sports continues to increase," the report noted, "additional centers will be required in the future."³⁵ Two ski sub-centers in the backcountry seemed most practical, each with a few slopes and possibly a tow rope and rest house.³⁶ These sub-centers were never built, however, and formal downhill skiing remained confined to Badger Pass. The Committee's proposals were foiled, in part, by funding issues and the outbreak of war. Yet the fact members believed such ideas were feasible in a national park is telling. As had been the case in the 1930s, the NPS was not opposed to moderate recreation-related development in the 1940s, so long as it benefitted visitors and did not significantly mar the park atmosphere with artificiality and overcrowding.

Developing a downhill ski center usually requires destruction as well as construction, and Badger Pass was no exception. The Company had to remove quite a few trees to safely accommodate crowds on the slopes, even though ski runs were routed through relatively open areas when possible. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Park Service

³³ Yosemite Winter Activities Committee, "Report and Recommendations Concerning Development of Badger Pass Ski Area," April 4, 1940, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

generally permitted tree removal in small doses to make room for winter sports. The agency considered it a necessary evil, one that helped ensure tourists' safety and comfort. NPS officials also believed the Badger Pass region was isolated enough that mild clearing would have minimal impact on the park's overall landscape. Chief engineer Frank Kittredge, who would become Yosemite's superintendent in 1941, even recommended to Cammerer in 1936 that "skiing experts from the Company" be allowed to choose which areas to clear. Removing trees, he argued, would make the ski area safer and would not "seriously interfere with forestry activities nor appearances, as they will seldom be seen by anyone except those who are in the act of skiing."³⁷ As had been the case with discussions of built artificiality, visibility was key. If tree removal was not readily noticeable to most visitors, it was usually deemed an acceptable sacrifice.³⁸ Sierra Club officer William E. Colby agreed. He praised profusely the new ski center at Badger Pass, but claimed that additional tree clearing was "essential." Colby assured Director Cammerer that other Sierra Club members had no objections to clearing, "confined as it will be to this particular area which, aside from its winter sports opportunities, is a seldom visited region and not outstanding in any way."³⁹ Furthermore, allowing the YPCC to concentrate downhill skiing in one cleared area would "relieve any possibility of damage to other portions of the Park."⁴⁰ However, officials were

³⁷ Frank A. Kittredge to Arno Cammerer, January 2, 1936, p. 3, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

³⁸ Visitors skiing the slopes, of course, might realize that trees had been removed. But they would likely also realize that they were directly benefitting from clearing, and might therefore consider it worthwhile.

³⁹ William E. Colby to Arno Cammerer, January 10, 1936, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

hesitant to add to the timber carriage merely to host professional competitions or spectator events. In 1941, for instance, Acting Superintendent Wosky informed Tresidder that the Company had permission to hold the 1942 downhill and slalom national championships, as long as no additional clearing was needed to stage the races. Yosemite Superintendent Carl Russell, who held a Ph.D. in ecology and had previously served as chief naturalist of the Park Service, reflected on tree clearing in 1948.⁴¹ There was no question that “damage [had been] done to the Badger Pass area in connection with developments for skiing. An entire mountain side has been denuded in order that the ski lifts may be installed and the slopes opened for skiing,” he explained. Nevertheless, he noted that there was “no serious proposal at the present time to stabilize (sic) or reduce the use of the Badger Pass area.”⁴² Russell recognized the physical consequences of development and landscape manipulation, yet he believed Badger Pass would remain a popular feature of the park.

Ski lifts provoked similar debate: on the one hand, they visibly altered the landscape; on the other, they helped tourists participate in a form of outdoor recreation. The first lift in the park system was built at Yosemite. A mechanized sled-like contraption known as an “upski,” it began operation in the 1934–1935 ski season with full NPS approval.⁴³ A rope

⁴¹ Carl P. Russell followed Kittredge as Yosemite’s superintendent, serving from December 1, 1947, to November 1, 1952.

⁴² Carl Russell to Robert Zink, November 19, 1948, p. 2, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁴³ Jeffrey T. Meyer, “Alpine Experiments: The National Parks and the Development of Skiing in the American West” (M.A. Thesis: The University of Montana Missoula, 2015), 84. According to Meyer, Badger Pass offers the “longest operating lift-served skiing in the American West” (Ibid., 5). The upski was essentially a large sled pulled up the slope on a cable, powered by a Ford engine. Later versions had two sleds that counterbalanced each other. One was named “Queen Mary” in honor of Mary Curry Tresidder.

tow opened at Mount Lassen the following winter.⁴⁴ These were the only two national park ski lifts in operation before the Park Service issued Order 319. By winter 1941–1942 there were ski areas in ten western national parks, eight of which had lifts operated by concessionaires or local ski clubs.⁴⁵ Most of these lifts were temporary affairs that were disassembled and removed at the end of each winter season, thereby alleviating concerns about noticeably altering the landscape year-round. The Park Service was usually willing to permit lifts, warming huts, and other recreational amenities in the winter if a slope looked “natural” during the rest of the year. Director Cammerer informed NPS officials at a 1938 meeting “that he regarded these lifts as an aid to the enjoyment of the natural features and outdoor recreation in the parks.”⁴⁶ They opened downhill skiing to novices who lacked the willpower, stamina, or physical ability to trek up a snowy slope. To many visitors this was a boon, making it possible to ski several runs per day, but a few purists were troubled by the relative ease of lift-assisted skiing. As Emile Cochand, who began teaching skiing prior to WWI, later lamented, “the skiing they do now, you know, it is nothing. . . . They just go up on the tow and go ah! ug! ug! all day long. I don't call that skiing. And then they break their legs.”⁴⁷ Lift-assisted skiing was clearly not as physical an endeavor as its predecessor, yet this

⁴⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 91. Badger Pass added two rope tows in Fall 1940; by then there were more than 65 in the Sierras (Gene Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters: A Century of Winter Sports* [Truckee, Ca.: Coldstream Press, 1999], 55). The Park Service allowed ski clubs to operate rudimentary ski lifts in some parks on the condition that they removed the lifts at the end of each season. Clubs were generally easier for the NPS control than concessionaires (Meyer, “Alpine Experiments,” 105).

⁴⁶ Unnamed NPS junior executive officer, “Memorandum for the Files,” November 30, 1938, p. 1, Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park.

⁴⁷ Emile Cochand, as quoted in E. John B. Allen, “Values and Sport: The Development of New England Skiing, 1870–1940,” *Oral History Review* 13 (1985): 61.

was a lesser concern for most Park Service officials. The artificiality and intrusive nature of a lift was more problematic than the fact it allowed participants to avoid slogging uphill. Seasonal lifts alleviated these concerns. Eventually, however, lifts were removed entirely from nearly all national parks; Badger Pass and Mount Rainier are the only remaining holdouts.⁴⁸



Image 4-4: The Queen Mary upski, with Badger Pass Ski House in the background, April 16, 1938. Photograph by Dave Brower. Yosemite National Park Archives, Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection, Winter Club Scrapbook, page 389.

⁴⁸ In 1963 the Park Service's *Leopold Report*—a pioneering document that focused primarily on preserving wildlife and natural environments in the parks—recommended removing ski lifts, golf courses, and other “extraneous developments” (Meyer, “Alpine Experiments,” 8). Many lifts and other facilities were removed from national parks slowly, but surely, in its wake. Two downhill ski areas are located within Cuyahoga National Park’s boundaries, but both are on privately-owned land and are operated independently of the Park Service (Ibid., 5). It is still possible to ski in many other national parks, so long as visitors are willing to do so on their own power—either by cross-country skiing or by hiking up a slope before sliding down it. The current (2006) NPS Management Policies handbook forbids any new downhill facilities in any units of the Park System, based largely on their environmental impact: “Downhill skiing is an activity that requires extensive development with resulting significant environmental impacts, and it should only be provided outside park areas. When such facilities have been provided based on previous policy, their use may continue unless the development and use have caused or may cause impairment of park resources or values” (National Park Service, *Management Policies 2006* [Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006], 138).

In Tresidder's view, sports were essential in luring winter visitors to the park and to YPCC facilities. In this respect, the reliable snowpack at Badger Pass had a bigger impact on winter visitation than the scenery, even though the sights (rather than sports) were largely responsible for attracting massive crowds to the park in the summer. Downhill skiing requires exceptional topography, but biking, golfing, swimming, and many other warm-weather recreational pursuits do not. Summer visitors usually came for the scenery but might also play while in the park, whereas many winter visitors were drawn to Yosemite—or extended their visits—specifically to participate in or view sports that were unavailable in or near their hometowns.⁴⁹ In fact, most winter visitors in the late 1930s and 1940s probably made at least one trip to Badger Pass. In the 1945–1946 winter season, for instance, 71,700 of the park's 77,790 tourists visited the ski area, most of whom presumably participated in and/or watched winter sports.⁵⁰ Superintendent Frank Kittredge was pleased with the ski area's popularity, explaining to the NPS Regional Director in 1946, “we feel that the use of the area by this number of persons contributed greatly to their appreciation of the National

⁴⁹ In a 2009 survey of summer visitors, 93% of respondents listed “viewing scenery” when asked: “in which activities did you and your personal group participate?” 54% had taken a “day hike,” a category that included both rigorous exercise and a short jaunt from the car to a waterfall located a few hundred yards away. The next most popular recreational activity was biking, at just 12% (Ariel Blotkamp, Bret Meldrum, Wayde Morse, and Steven J. Hollenhorst, “Yosemite National Park Visitor Survey: Summer 2009” [National Park Service: April 2010], 44, www.nps.gov/yose/learn/nature/upload/Visitor-Use-Summer-2009-Study.pdf). Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate a comparable summer visitor study from the 1930s or 1940s. However, anecdotal evidence from correspondence, reports, and articles, as well as visitation and usage statistics, confirms that 1930s and 1940s winter visitors placed a higher priority on playing in the park than did their summer counterparts.

⁵⁰ Frank A. Kittredge, Memorandum for the Regional Director: Region Four, May 22, 1946, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. The figures cover December 1, 1945–April 1, 1946.

Parks and the purposes for which they were set aside.”⁵¹ It was a tacit admission that winter sports lured in many of the park’s visitors, but once in Yosemite, they might be inspired by the landscape as well. No longer limited by the Valley’s fickle winter weather, confined spaces, and gentle slopes, the YPCC could promote skiing as reason enough to visit Yosemite in the winter. Badger Pass’s great success—even during the Depression and World II—proved that winter sports could attract tourists and force them to interact with the landscape.

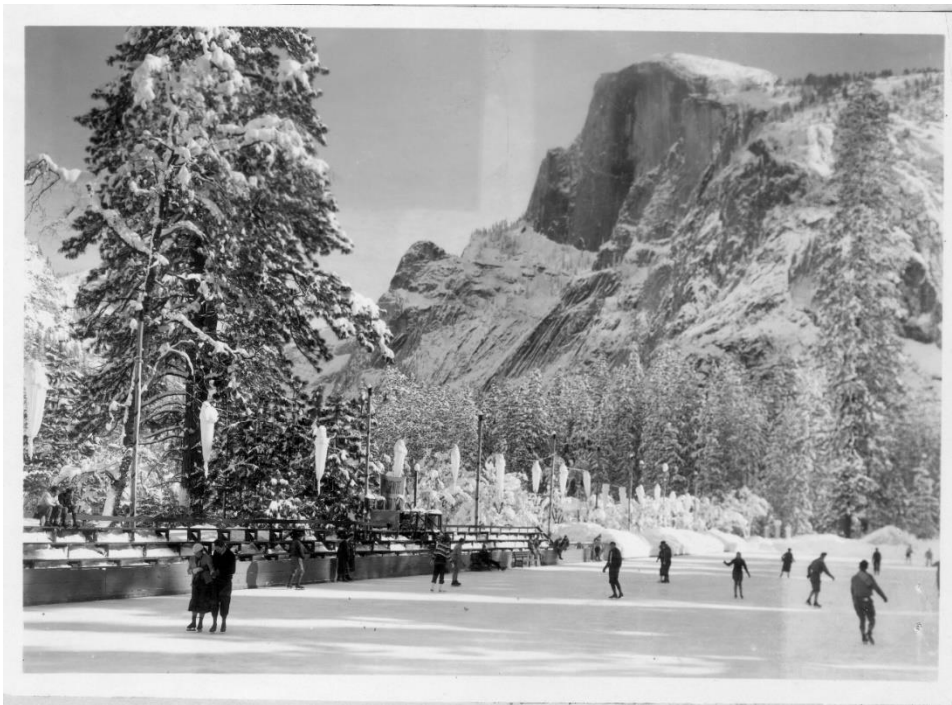


Image 4-5: Camp Curry ice rink, with Half Dome in the background, February 24, 1932. Unknown photographer. Yosemite National Park Archives, Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection, Winter Club Scrapbook, page 71.

⁵¹ Ibid. Kittredge served as Yosemite’s superintendent from August 1, 1941, to November 30, 1947.

60,000 Square Feet of Ice

Yosemite Valley's main winter sports facility, the 60,000-square-foot ice rink at Camp Curry, provides another excellent case study for a host of winter sports issues and illustrates the extent to which visitors felt a sense of ownership of the park. The rink, which remained immensely popular even after Badger Pass opened, hosted both participatory activities and spectator events. Unfortunately, warm weather frequently disrupted the skating schedule, prompting disappointed tourists to plead for an artificial rink. Tresidder periodically informed NPS officials of the growing public demand for refrigerated ice, clearly aware that it was a controversial proposal but likely hoping that visitor requests would aid the cause. In January 1936 he notified Superintendent Thomson that some fifty guests had asked for an artificial rink.⁵² High temperatures during several previous winter seasons had wreaked havoc on skating, and some tourists even complained that rink closures had ruined their vacations. Gertrude B. Woodward's plans were foiled when the rink closed for five of the six days of her 1940 vacation. "I had gone into the valley just for skating," she informed the Company.⁵³ She offered what was likely intended as friendly advice: if a refrigerated rink were installed, she explained, "the park authorities would not have to rack (sic) their brains for amusement for the people who came to enjoy winter sports."⁵⁴ Woodward and other letter writers even threatened, gently, to take their business elsewhere: "With other resorts

⁵² Donald Tresidder to Charles Goff Thomson, January 7, 1936, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁵³ Gertrude B. Woodward to Yosemite Park and Curry Company, January 6, [1940], in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

installing rinks with artificial ice, where one can count on skating regardless of the weather, the choice of winter sports fans is obvious. My preference, and that of hundreds of other people, is Yosemite. However, I wouldn't want to risk another disappointment like the recent one.”⁵⁵ Once again, Yosemite was compared to competing sports centers, though in this case it was to the Johnny-Come-Lately western ski resorts—some of which had installed temperature-controlled rinks—not the European stalwarts. Refrigerated rinks were a relatively recent innovation, yet some Yosemite tourists expected the park to keep pace with the latest in sports technology. Woodward’s letter was typical. She assumed that “park authorities” would be eager to compete for tourist traffic and would feel obligated to entertain visitors with the latest in winter sport offerings.⁵⁶ Gertrude Woodward and guests like her were more concerned with access to play than with issues of artificiality or park atmosphere.

Tresidder responded promptly, telling Woodward that ten years of studies had concluded refrigeration would be far too expensive and that the current rink already “operate[d] at a substantial loss.”⁵⁷ He made no mention of philosophical concerns about artificiality, but rather framed the entire debate as an economic issue. Had it been financially sustainable, the Company surely would have endorsed the proposal. In fact, four years

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Woodward addressed the letter to the YPCC, so it is possible that “park authorities” was supposed to refer to Company officials. Judging by the context, however, I am confident she meant the Park Service.

⁵⁷ Donald Tresidder to Gertrude Woodward, January 10, 1940, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. Although he rejected Woodward’s suggestion, Tresidder promised to pass along her letter to the Park Service. The first “permanent [year-round] outdoor ice rink west of the Sierra[s],” the Winter Lodge, opened in Tresidder’s adopted home town of Palo Alto in 1956 (“On Frozen Pond,” *Outside Magazine* [January 2006], <http://www.outsideonline.com/1875496/frozen-pond>).

earlier the YPCC had submitted to the Yosemite Advisory Board a 13-item wish list of Company “operations requiring new buildings on the floor of the Valley in order of time and importance.” Listed at number 11, behind general operational facilities such as warehouses and additional accommodations, was a 30,000-square-foot “indoor refrigerated skating area and winter sport center—part of or adjacent to [the] present outdoor [skating] area.”⁵⁸ It would be a permanent building, and could double as a storage site or assembly hall in the summer.⁵⁹ The Board and Yosemite officials were unmoved by the request, and the indoor rink was never built. Yet Tresidder likely hoped that if the Park Service heard enough complaints from the Gertrude Woodwards of the world, the agency might grant approval and funding for some form of artificial ice. This would allow the YPCC to operate a rink year-round, or at least throughout the winter season, even during warm weather.

Yosemite advisors were somewhat conflicted about refrigerated rinks. The Yosemite Winter Activities Committee waded into the fray in April 1940 with a partial endorsement of artificial ice. The committee declared that despite high demand—nearly 15,000 visitors had used the rink during winter 1938–1939—an enclosed or year-round skating facility “would be entirely out of place” in a national park.⁶⁰ On the other hand, they had no objections to

⁵⁸ “Data Prepared by Yosemite Park and Curry Co. as Requested by the Advisory Commission in their Letter of January 14 1936 to Colonel C. G. Thomson,” February 14, 1936, p. 4, in Yosemite Public Utility Operators: Yosemite Park and Curry Company—Miscellaneous Correspondence part 11, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1874, RG79, NARA College Park. At 30,000 square feet, the facility would be only half the size of the outdoor rink built in 1929, but still considerably larger than the current Camp Curry rink, which is a petite 7,200 square feet.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6. The Company also listed a separate year-round assembly hall that could fit at least 1,000 people (number 12 on the list) and a 15,000-square-foot outdoor dance pavilion (number 13) (*Ibid.*, 7, 4).

⁶⁰ Yosemite Winter Activities Committee, “Report and Recommendations Concerning Development of Badger Pass Ski Area,” 20. While the report focused primarily on skiing, the Committee recognized the popularity of skating. Evidently, they considered it a pleasant diversion at the end of a long day of “skiing and other snow sports” (*Ibid.*, 20). The three committee members had been appointed by the Secretary of the

adding “a small capacity freezing system which would maintain the [existing] ice [rink] only during the winter season.”⁶¹ Such a system would not fundamentally alter the nature of outdoor skating, but rather would allow visitors to participate during periods of temperamental winter weather. The Yosemite Advisory Board, in contrast, believed that “nature should be left alone and that no steps should be taken to provide artificial ice on the floor of Yosemite Valley or at any other point within the park.”⁶² Yosemite’s Park Service officials agreed. A man-made parking lot draped in frozen water was deemed suitable public use—artificial techniques to keep the rink frozen were not.

The public begged to disagree. Several frustrated visitors continued to pepper the Company and the Park Service with letters demanding refrigerated ice. Chalmers Graham’s family had spent the holidays in Yosemite for fifteen years, but fled to Sun Valley in 1941 for more reliable ice. He was convinced that many other visitors had done the same. “Today a large part of the attraction of National Parks in the winter time are the winter sport facilities that are offered, and since the National Park Service is maintained for and caters to the public demand, I believe there is a necessity for such an artificial skating rink installation in Yosemite,” he informed the Park Service.⁶³ Like Gertrude Woodward, Graham apparently

Interior as “collaborators of the National Park Service,” on the recommendation of Director Cammerer (Press release, March 5?, 1940, p. 2, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3).

⁶¹ Yosemite Winter Activities Committee, “Report and Recommendations Concerning Development of Badger Pass Ski Area,” 20.

⁶² Lawrence Merriam to Arno Cammerer, June 11, 1940, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. Merriam noted that “the majority” of the Yosemite Advisory Board believed “nature should be left alone” at the ice rink; he did not specify which (if any) of the three members disagreed.

⁶³ Chalmers G. Graham to the National Park Service, February 13, 1941, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

believed the Park Service's main responsibility was to serve tourists. Visitor George Stiles agreed that the NPS should be concerned primarily with visitation. "I know hundreds of people, in the state of California wo (sic) are interested in seeing an artificial rink built in Yosemite, and who would make trips to Yosemite in the summer to skate if a rink were available there," he claimed.⁶⁴ Hazel King Bakewell of San Francisco was most crafty in mounting her argument. Rather than simply speculating that an artificial rink would improve business, Bakewell praised the scenery and alluded to the Park Service's goal of providing wholesome, informal activities. "Expert skaters and travelled ones consider that the situation in Yosemite is one of the most beautiful natural settings in the world," she explained to Director Drury, "and it seems to me that in view of the fact that there are so many young people learning and enjoying such a clean, beautiful sport, they should be given the chance to enjoy it in one of their own parks."⁶⁵ It was the park's obligation, she implied, to provide this service to the public.

NPS and park officials responded to the missives with counter arguments about park usage and development. Yosemite Superintendent Merriam informed Stiles that "at this time no further winter activities development is contemplated on the floor of Yosemite Valley or at the Badger Pass ski center," although the park might consider building a rink outside of the Valley in the future.⁶⁶ He also forwarded the letter and his reply to Director

⁶⁴ George Stiles to Lawrence Merriam, February 17, 1941, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁶⁵ Hazel King Bakewell to Newton Drury, March 15, 1941, p. 1–2, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁶⁶ Lawrence Merriam to George Stiles, February 19, 1941, Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

Drury and, likely frustrated by tourists' frequent complaints, asked the NPS to establish a "definite policy with regard to artificial ice rinks."⁶⁷ NPS Associate Director Arthur Demaray responded by stressing the differences between natural and artificial activities, and by contrasting skiing with skating. "The general position of the Service," he informed Merriam, was that "the installation of artificial devices to attract or amuse visitors is contrary to park principles of preserving the natural scene. Since skiing is a natural winter use of some areas, reasonable facilities of a non-professional type have been installed for the accommodation and convenience of winter visitors."⁶⁸ Furthermore, ice skating could now be "enjoyed any day of the week by those living in large towns and cities."⁶⁹ Parks were not meant to provide everyday comforts and amusements. To Graham, Demaray explained that such artificial developments conflicted with park goals and that "there is a delicate balance between preservation and use of the national parks." He hedged his bets, however, by noting that the Park Service was "constantly studying things" and kept "an open mind on proposed improvements."⁷⁰ Rather than flatly prohibiting artificial ice, Demaray allowed a glimmer of hope that tourists might someday win a contest over artificiality or development. Graham took the opening, and politely continued his argument. He wanted to retain "the

⁶⁷ Lawrence Merriam, Memorandum for the Director [Newton Drury], February 19, 1941, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁶⁸ Arthur E. Demaray, Memorandum for the Superintendent of Yosemite National Park [Lawrence Merriam], March 17, 1941, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Arthur E. Demaray to Chalmers Graham, March 8, 1941, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

natural beauties . . . of this remarkable playground,” but firmly believed that “these sports attract people to the place [which] enable them to at the same time enjoy the natural beauty.”⁷¹ He either missed or willfully ignored Demaray’s implicit point—that artificiality threatened the park atmosphere and development threatened the landscape—and steered the discussion back towards catering to tourists. Next, Director Drury stepped in with his own letter to Graham, arguing that artificial ice was the top of a slippery slope. He explained that “too often a minor use attracts so much attention that it forces its way to a major enterprise. In park administration it has been learned by bitter experience that once the bars are let down, adverse practices come in.”⁷² The NPS did not want to open the door to further demands for a “skating pavilion” or a year-round rink by installing even a small refrigeration system for winter use.

Drury sent a similar response to Bakewell, stressing that the park’s “primary purpose . . . [was] to preserve the natural scene” rather than to “attract park visitors.”⁷³ Bakewell remained unmoved by the preservation explanation, and her response echoed a sense of entitlement exhibited by a number of tourists. “The fact remains that if there were no visitors at all there would be no really good reason for preserving the natural scene,” she blithely informed Drury, continuing, “we [the American public] are the ones to whom the Parks belong and we are the ones who cheerfully pay for their maintenance.” She further

⁷¹ Chalmers Graham to Arthur E. Demaray, March 18, 1941, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁷² Newton Drury to Chalmers Graham, March 27, 1941, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁷³ Newton Drury to Hazel King Bakewell, March 27, 1941, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

argued that Yosemite was becoming a popular winter destination and that the park was already well-developed: “So I feel that your statement that ‘Nature should take its course’ is not consistent. If it had always been followed there would be no buildings in our Parks, no roads leading into and through them, no trails out of them.”⁷⁴ Drury firmly disagreed that tourist play was of paramount importance, and explained that “it is not ice skating or other recreational attractions that make a national park visit long remembered. It is that outstanding experience of being in the world’s great natural cathedrals that keeps people coming back again and again.”⁷⁵ By highlighting parks’ natural landscapes—the very features that made Yosemite and its counterparts worthy of national park status in the first place—Drury tried to remind Bakewell that the preservation of such features trumped visitor amusement.

“Spectators on skis”

Badger Pass and the Camp Curry ice rink are still popular sites for winter play, but in the 1930s and 1940s they also provided plenty of opportunities to watch elite athletes and performers. Yosemite offered two main types of spectator events: competitions that featured collegiate, amateur, and/or professional sportspeople and theatrical productions that blended athletics with artistry. Both were exceedingly popular. The YPCC and the Yosemite Winter Club organized some of these events singlehandedly; outside sports clubs

⁷⁴ Hazel King Bakewell to Newton Drury, April 11, 1941, p. 2–3, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁷⁵ Newton Drury to Hazel King Bakewell, April 21, 1941, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

and organizations sponsored others, and staged them with the Park Service's permission and the Company's assistance. By the early 1930s—before Badger Pass even opened—the park was staging at least one major competition or spectacle involving college, amateur, or professional athletes nearly every week from mid-December through the end of February. The schedule for winter 1933–1934 provides a good example of the park's most popular spectator offerings. The season kicked off on December 16 with the annual Yosemite Winter Club Frolic, then continued with College Night on the Rink with a Costume Skating Carnival, the Fifth Annual Pacific Coast Inter-Collegiate Winter Games for the President Hoover Cup, a Skating Vaudeville on the Rink, the Fourth Annual California Amateur Outdoor Speed Skating Championships, the Fourth Annual San Joaquin Valley–Sierra Winter Sports Carnival, the Second Annual California Amateur Outdoor Figure Skating Championships, the First Annual Yosemite Winter Club Invitational Ski Meet at Chinquapin, a Fancy Costume Skating Carnival, a Mid-Winter Snow Frolic, a Gala Night on the Rink, and, finally, a Closing Ceremony at the end of the winter sports season.⁷⁶ A YPCC brochure promised these were the “major outdoor winter sports events held in California.”⁷⁷ Between the larger festivities, a full slate of more modest spectator events included ski-joring races, dog team races, ice skating gymkhanas, children's dog team races, hockey games, ski

⁷⁶ “Special Winter Sports Events in Yosemite National Park, 1933–34” (brochure), 1–2, in Yosemite Public Utility Operators: Yosemite Park and Curry Company—Miscellaneous Correspondence part 11, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1874, RG79, NARA College Park. College Night on the Rink was held in conjunction with the Hoover Cup meet, but they are listed as separate events in the brochure.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

races, figure skating exhibitions, speed skating races, curling matches, and baseball games on skates.⁷⁸



Image 4-6: Start of the senior women’s 440-yard race at the Third Annual California Outdoor Amateur Speed Skating Championships, Camp Curry ice rink, January 23, 1932. Yosemite National Park Archives, Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection, Winter Club Scrapbook, page 63.

High-profile events regularly attracted hundreds of visitors, making spectator sports a key factor in luring visitors to the park during what was once a slow season for tourism.⁷⁹

Both the NPS and the YPCC benefitted from increased attendance, in the form of park entrance fees and additional paying guests in company lodgings and facilities. Crowds

⁷⁸ “Yosemite Winter Events: December 19, 1931, to February 24, 1932” (brochure), in Winter Sports—Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

⁷⁹ In January 1932, for instance, the San Joaquin Valley Carnival and the speed skating championships attracted the largest crowds of the month. The 1932 Yosemite Winter Sports report concluded: “this indicates that ice carnivals and races are an added attraction, drawing larger crowds” than weekends with similar weather but no special events (“Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 8, in Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal).

delighted the Company, which argued that viewing sports with a spectacular backdrop was as appropriate a use for the park as simply viewing the scenery itself. The YPCC also appreciated that such events might inspire tourists to sample new sports using Company facilities and rental equipment. Large competitions and spectacles, however, became increasingly problematic for the NPS in the late 1930s and 1940s. The agency grappled with concerns over crowding, spectatorship, atmosphere, and more, finally inspiring a crackdown on many such events in the winter sports policies of the 1940s. Until then, the wide range of spectator offerings—from local ski meets to elaborate ice carnivals—delighted visitors.



Image 4-7: Shirley Ann Ewins of Los Angeles performs in a figure skating exhibition, December 29, 1931. Ewins learned to skate two years earlier, in Yosemite. Yosemite National Park Archives, Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection, Winter Club Scrapbook, page 23.



Image 4-8: Hockey teams of the University of California and the University of Southern California in Yosemite, by 1929. Unknown photographer. © Comité International Olympique (CIO).

Club and collegiate sports found a warm welcome in the park. In the 1930s, several regional winter sports clubs were founded throughout the west, and many of these groups competed in Yosemite. For instance, the Yosemite Winter Club triumphed in a three-sided meet at Badger Pass in February 1934 against the Placerville and Lake Tahoe ski clubs.⁸⁰ Several schools established their own winter sports clubs in the early twentieth century, but most lacked an on-campus mountain and ice rink on which to compete. For some western colleges, Yosemite proved an ideal host. The annual Pacific Coast Inter-Collegiate Winter Sports Meet, first held in 1930, was a highlight of the season.⁸¹ To add a dash of prestige, Tresidder persuaded President Hoover to loan his name to the tournament's trophy. The

⁸⁰ "Yosemite Club Wins Tri-Meet," *Los Angeles Time*, February 12, 1934, p. A9.

⁸¹ Jerry E. Carpenter, *California Winter Sports and the VIIIth Winter Olympic Games, 1960 at Squaw Valley* (San Francisco: Fearon Publishers, 1958), 64.

inaugural Hoover Cup competition featured speed skating and hockey and a mere three schools: UCLA, UC Berkeley, and the University of Southern California. Cross-country races were added to the program in 1932, then a separate collegiate downhill, slalom, and cross-country championship was introduced in 1935.⁸² By 1938 the Hoover Cup meet had expanded considerably, attracting fifteen schools from California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington. The Pacific Coast Intercollegiate Ski Championships grew as well, with nearly 200 athletes from 19 schools entered in the 1939 meet. The park also hosted smaller collegiate meets, sometimes with special guests. In March 1938, for instance, the University of Munich's yodeling Bavarian Ski Boys—"entertainers, as well as skiers of Championship caliber"—competed in a tournament against Stanford, UC Berkeley, the University of Nevada, and the Yosemite Winter Club. Naturally, a touch of spectacle accompanied the skiing. Revelers watched European ski movies at the Old Village Pavilion one night and the Bavarians "entertain[ed] with a program of yodeling, singing and schulplattling, in native costume" during a "ski dinner" at the Ahwahnee the following evening.⁸³

Yosemite also hosted state-wide meets and competitions sanctioned by the California Ski Association and the California Skating Association. The park played an important role in the history of California competitive skiing, including staging the state's first modern slalom competition in 1933.⁸⁴ Among the racers was Charlie Chaplin, who "did not finish but

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Famous Bavarian Ski Team Visits Yosemite" (press release), March 23, 1938, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁸⁴ Carpenter, *California Winter Sports and the VIIIth Winter Olympic Games*, 64. The Badger Pass area hosted a few ski competitions in the early 1930s before formal facilities and the upski were built.

provided much entertainment nevertheless.”⁸⁵ The first annual California Speed Skating Championships took place in 1930 at the Camp Curry ice rink, with 40 skaters competing in four events “witnessed by an enthusiastic crowd numbering 2,000 people from all parts of the State.”⁸⁶ Three years later the rink hosted the first annual California Outdoor Figure Skating Championships. The competition featured 49 amateurs and professionals in singles, doubles, and “juvenile” events, and was billed in a press release as “the most brilliant event of the winter sports season.”⁸⁷ Yosemite even shared a small slice of Olympic glory by hosting the 1931 Pacific coast heats of the Olympic Trials in figure skating, speed skating, and hockey.⁸⁸

One of Yosemite’s most notable competitions, the Far West Kandahar, illustrated the occasional difficulty of distinguishing between spectator and participatory sports.⁸⁹ Arnold Lunn, president of the Ski Club of Great Britain, wanted to establish an annual competition in the American west modeled after Europe’s famed Arlberg-Kandahar, a combined downhill and slalom meet and “one the finest skiing events in the Alps.”⁹⁰ The

⁸⁵ J. H. Hildebrand, “A History of Ski-ing in California,” *The British Ski Year Book* 10 (1939), 77.

⁸⁶ Ernst Des Baillels, as quoted in Paul Lowry, “Rabbit Punches: Those Good Old Days,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1930, p. F2.

⁸⁷ “Outdoor State Figure Skating Championships” (press release), January 19, 1934, p. 1, appended to Superintendent’s Monthly Report for January 1934 (February 1, 1934), in Superintendent’s Monthly Reports, NPS Archives at El Portal.

⁸⁸ Carpenter, *California Winter Sports and the VIIIth Winter Olympic Games*, 64. These events were preliminary competitions for selecting the U.S. team for the 1932 Olympic Games.

⁸⁹ Joel H. Hildebrand to Lawrence C. Merriam, September 12, 1938, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁹⁰ “Kandahar Ski Club,” accessed October 1, 2016, www.kandahar.org.uk; “History,” Kandahar Lodge, accessed October 1, 2016, www.kandaharlodge.com/news/history.htm. The race alternated between Austria and France.

Sierra Club's Winter Sports Committee agreed in 1938 to help sponsor the meet, "although rather reluctantly as its main interests are mountaineering and touring."⁹¹ Sierra Club President Joel Hildebrand asked Yosemite Superintendent Lawrence Merriam for permission to use the park, calling it California's "leading ski center." Well aware that Order 319 (which the club supported) discouraged highly competitive events, Hildebrand offered a curious rationale for approving the meet. "We realize that you are very properly reluctant to overemphasize skiing as a sport for spectators," Hildebrand wrote. "However, we believe that the event will prove very different from jumping in this respect, for the only spectators will be on skis."⁹² Merriam fell right in line. He sought Director Cammerer's approval, explaining that spectators would be "on skis so that actually, even though viewing the races, they are in effect participants in winter sports themselves and are receiving some of the high values that Yosemite has to offer during the winter months."⁹³ Fans would need skis to reach most portions of the course, which was not visible from the Badger Pass Ski House. Cammerer concurred with Merriam's "participant spectators" rationalization, and noted that a few other factors helped render the competition appropriate: the contestants would be amateurs, the terrain would not have to be altered or artificialized, and the race would be

⁹¹ Joel H. Hildebrand to Lawrence C. Merriam, September 12, 1938, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁹² Hildebrand to Merriam, September 12, 1938, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3. Superintendent "Colonel" Thomson died in the park, unexpectedly, of a heart attack on March 22, 1937; John B. Wosky served briefly as superintendent until Merriam assumed office on June 3, 1937.

⁹³ Merriam to Cammerer, October 4, 1938 (enclosing Hildebrand's letter), in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

conducted under the auspices of the highly-respected Sierra Club.⁹⁴ First held in Yosemite in 1939, the Far West Kandahar “attracted an international field of competitors and some of the most legendary names in skiing,” according to Gene Rose, and was highly regarded within the ski community.⁹⁵ Moreover, officials could point to the Kandahar and reassure themselves that such events were valuable forms of public use because they forced spectators to engage in physical activity to view the competition.

In March 1942 the park played host to an even larger sports spectacle, the downhill and slalom national championships, which were broadcast on CBS. The announcer interjected periodically during the broadcast with scripted praise of Yosemite’s scenery (“is there any more inspiring scenery in the country in which one may ski?”), the facilities, the roads, Badger Pass, the upski, and the Park Service’s road-clearing operations.⁹⁶ At the start of the telecast, Superintendent Kittredge announced to viewers that “we are delighted to see so many vigorous young men and women from all parts of this freedom-loving land of ours competing in this healthful exercise.”⁹⁷ He conflated physical activity in a national park with both patriotism and health, explaining that the Park Service preserved Yosemite and its

⁹⁴ Arthur Demaray to Lawrence Merriam, October 12, 1938, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁹⁵ The Far West Kandahar alternated between Yosemite and Mount Hood before World War II (Rose, *Magic Yosemite Winters*, 50, 57).

⁹⁶ Frank Kittredge, Memorandum for the Director, March 7, 1942, p. 1–2, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1. This document includes a script for the broadcast; I have been unable to locate footage of the meet. Even if the comments were altered somewhat during the telecast, these are the remarks Kittredge prepared for himself and the announcer, and they likely reflect the image that he and the Park Service wished to project to a national audience.

fellow parks in part so that “you skiers and you [hikers]” would “be stronger and healthier citizens, both mentally and physically; [and] . . . better equipped for carrying on the defense of our democratic institutions.”⁹⁸ In the context of wartime, competition and spectatorship were conveniently re-framed as acts of nationalism. As the CBS announcer proclaimed, “It is reassuring to any American to see the magnificent physiques of these skiers here in Yosemite National Park today . . . in healthy competition with other skiers. What better training could there be for fitting our young men for the armies of democracy?”⁹⁹ As discussed in chapter two, competitive sports were often associated with nationalism, and the 1942 downhill and slalom national championships allowed Yosemite to showcase its commitment to national pride. Clearly, the exigencies of war could momentarily cast aside concerns over competition and spectatorship, and the Park Service was likely pleased to have a national platform from which to promote the park and broadcast its patriotic credentials.

Sporty Spectacles

Yosemite had a long—and somewhat checkered—history of staging spectacles. The park’s winter Olympics bid may have failed, but both the Park Service and the Yosemite Park and Curry Company persisted in mounting productions to entertain the masses. Some were at least ostensibly related to the park’s history, environment, or culture. For instance, in Yosemite and several other parks the Park Service staged bear shows in which the animals feasted on discarded food in front of crowds of eager onlookers. Director Horace Albright

⁹⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 3.

described the scene in Yosemite Valley, at a site near the Merced river: “All is quiet and dark. Suddenly the lights are flashed on across the river, revealing the ‘salad bowl,’ with anywhere from half a dozen to a score of bears growling and feeding as the bear man dumps numerous garbage cans of supper for them. A tree stump in the middle of the platform is painted with syrup each evening, and there is great rivalry among the bears to get at this.”¹⁰⁰ The Park Service slowly came to recognize the damage done to bears, the environment, and the park atmosphere, and discontinued bear feedings in 1940. “Before that year,” explains a 1943 report, “it was not unusual for 40 or more bears to put in appearance at the feeding area to enjoy their garbage ‘banquet.’”¹⁰¹ Although these shows ostensibly allowed visitors a close-up glimpse of “nature,” they dramatically altered the environment. During summers in the 1930s, up to 60 bears lived in Yosemite Valley, yet under natural circumstances the area would only be able to accommodate three or four.¹⁰² Accustomed to human food, bears frequently strolled through campgrounds and approached cars to beg for scraps, and eager visitors happily complied.¹⁰³ All of these bear-human interactions set a dangerous precedent for treating wildlife as domestic animals and reinforced a view of the parks as recreational facilities rather than conservation sites.

¹⁰⁰ Horace M. Albright and Frank J. Taylor, *Oh, Ranger! A Book About National Parks* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1929), 39.

¹⁰¹ M. E. Beatty, “Sierra Nevada Black Bear (*Ursus americanus californiensis* J. Miller),” in *Bears of Yosemite* (Yosemite: Yosemite Natural History Association, 1943), accessed April 18, 2010, http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/bears/black_bear.html.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ In one season alone, more than 60 people were treated for bear-related injuries, prompting tourist/actor Will Rogers to remark: “they warn you not to feed the bears, but they have a hospital for those that do.” M. E. Beatty, “The Present Bear Policy and its Problems,” in *Bears of Yosemite*.



Image 4-9: Yosemite ranger naturalist Enid Michael dancing with a bear, 1920. Unknown photographer. Courtesy National Park Service, NPS History Collection, HFCA # HPC-000207.

The park's most famous manmade phenomenon, the Firefall, was a fiery monument to contrived nature. Its nearly 100-year run epitomized the park's longtime embrace of showmanship as means of entertaining visitors. Each night during the tourist season, a steady stream of burning embers was pushed off of Glacier Point, 3,000 feet above Camp Curry, to simulate a blazing waterfall. James McCauley, who operated a hotel at Glacier Point, invented the firefall in 1872 and continued the practice for twenty-five years. David Curry revived the tradition and incorporated it into his nightly campfire program, complete with stories and songs. The Park Service banned it from 1913 to 1917, and then again, permanently, in 1968.¹⁰⁴ The Firefall was too artificial for a national park, the agency

¹⁰⁴ David and Jennie Curry's son, Foster, was evicted from Yosemite by the park superintendent for assaulting a car driver in 1921. Years later, on his deathbed, he asked his mother to have his ashes pushed off Glacier Point with the Firefall. Mother Curry flatly refused, reportedly arguing, "If that were done, I could never bear to look at a Firefall again." The incident—an odd family spat played out on a public stage—is notable for the reasoning behind Jennie Curry's refusal: she was so attached to the camp's nightly manmade spectacle that she refused her son's dying wish. Instead, Foster's widow scattered his ashes from a plane flying over the Valley.

declared, and the crowds who thronged to witness it caused congestion and damaged meadows by parking in them. Many regular visitors were furious, but in this case, after nearly a century, preservation trumped public use.

Other park spectacles were loosely related to human history and culture. For instance, Yosemite hosted an annual Indian Field Days in the 1920s. According to its organizers—Caucasian park and concession officials—the event was supposed to “encourage and preserve among the Indians of this region the traditional arts such as basket making, bead work, etc., and the Indian field sports; and . . . encourage tourist travel to Yosemite in the fall season when travel is at its lower point.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, Indian Field Days invited tourists to gawk in person at Native Americans and their arts and sports during the off season. “The weird chant of Indian songs will resound from canyon wall to wall here,” a press release proclaimed, as Native Americans exhibited baskets, modeled “native costumes” and competed in events.¹⁰⁶ Tourists, rangers, and “cowboys” were invited to participate with Native Americans in a “grand mounted parade.”¹⁰⁷ The purported Indian field sports included events such as the “Roman race,” the “novelty relay race on mules,” and “mounted musical chairs,” alongside mildly more conventional competitions like trick

¹⁰⁵ H. H. Hoss to Mr. Knowles, August 9, 1929, in Indian Field Days 1926–1956, Box 79, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

¹⁰⁶ James V. Lloyd, Press release, undated, and “Check List of Requirements for Indian Field Days,” undated, both in Indian Field Days 1926–1956, Box 79, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

¹⁰⁷ Native American participants were paid \$1.00 for registering for the event, and “all Indians wearing their own costume as approved by the judges—feather headdress, buckskin jacket and buckskin pants or dress and moccasins—will receive \$2.50 each day.” Most competition winners received prize money, but a few events that were open to “guests” awarded Indian baskets instead. “Program of Events and Prize List,” September 6–7, 1929, in Indian Field Days 1926–1956, Box 79, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

riding, saddle horse races, and the steeplechase.¹⁰⁸ The Yosemite Advisory Board criticized the event as “a white man's [entertainment], in which some part is taken by Indians to whose Yosemite forebears such things are wholly unknown.”¹⁰⁹ The board did approve, however, of the Native American arts and industries regularly on display at the park’s museum. Exhibits of authentic art were appropriate; Indians playing to white stereotypes was not. Indian Field Days was discontinued after 1929.

For a taste of European culture, Yosemite visitors could attend the Bracebridge Dinner, an “old-fashioned ceremonial English dinner” and Christmas-themed show held annually at the Ahwahnee. First presented in 1927, the elaborate musical was loosely based on a story by Washington Irving about an eighteenth-century English holiday.¹¹⁰ For several years it was directed by Ansel Adams, who also helped revise the script and co-starred in the production. The YPCC’s Donald Tresidder had designed the Bracebridge Dinner to lure wealthy visitors to Yosemite during the park’s slowest season, and it succeeded so spectacularly that the show continues to this day and runs for several nights each year.¹¹¹ The Firefall, bear feedings, and the Indian Field Days were all open to the general public, but tickets for the Bracebridge are so expensive that few middle-class visitors were able to

¹⁰⁸ “Program of Events and Prize List,” September 6–7, 1929, Indian Field Days 1926–1956, Box 79, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

¹⁰⁹ Yosemite Advisory Board, “Draft Report: Meeting of the Board of Expert Advisors, Yosemite National Park, at Yosemite Valley, April 24 and 25, [1930],” as quoted in Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 124.

¹¹⁰ *The Bracebridge Dinner*, ca. 1980s booklet, Yosemite Research Library.

¹¹¹ Tresidder and his wife Mary Curry Tresidder (the daughter of David and Jennie Curry) co-starred in the production for several years. Even with several performances per run, the Bracebridge usually sells out. For some years, guests had to enter a lottery to win the right to buy tickets.

attend.¹¹² The Bracebridge has likely survived because it is staged indoors (and therefore does not pose a direct threat to the natural landscape), because regular attendees have clung to it as an important tradition, and because it continues to draw wealthy visitors to Yosemite.

Sports spectacles had the added attraction of showcasing physical engagement with nature, using the park landscape as a backdrop. Winter carnivals—theatrical productions that often included some competitive events—proved especially popular in Yosemite and elsewhere in the West. Truckee hosted one of California’s earliest “ice carnivals” in 1896. The event was promoted by Southern Pacific and featured demonstrations of the railroad’s plow in addition to more conventional activities like skiing and sleigh riding. Hot Sulphur Springs, Colorado, inaugurated a winter carnival in 1911 and neighboring Steamboat Springs began hosting its own annual ski festival two years later. Both were initially small local affairs but expanded to include such events as demonstration ski jumping and the crowning of the “Borean Queen, Ruler Supreme of the Slaves of Snowland.”¹¹³ Similar carnivals cropped up in several western states. Resorts comprising the “Rim of the World League” in Southern California’s San Bernardino Mountains (including Lake Arrowhead, Camp Seely, Twin Peaks, and Big Pines) staged several winter carnivals.¹¹⁴ They convinced 1000 drug

¹¹² Tickets for the 2017 Bracebridge cost \$427.99 per adult (for dinner and a photograph package) and \$236.10 per child (12 and under). “Bracebridge Dinner,” <http://www.travelyosemite.com/things-to-do/specialty-events/food-and-wine-events/bracebridge-dinner>, accessed May 4, 2017.

¹¹³ Hal K. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 173–177. The Borean Queen’s realm was in Steamboat Springs.

¹¹⁴ The Rim of the World League was founded by Walter E. Kruckman in December 1930 “to promote winter sports in the San Bernardino Mountains.” The Southern California Winter Sports League was founded the following year “to organize and promote winter sports” in the region (California Ski Library, “Southern California Ski History Timeline: History of Skiing in Southern California,” accessed January 30, 2017, www.skilibrary.com/timeline.html).

stores in the greater Los Angeles area to “display sports clothing as well as literature about the carnivals throughout January [1931]” and organized special trains to deliver visitors from San Diego and Los Angeles to the San Bernardino mountains on carnival weekends in the 1930s.¹¹⁵ Los Angeles even hosted a “California Winter Sports Carnival Week” in 1941—complete with exhibits of sports equipment and department store window displays of “the latest in winter sports fashion”—to promote events throughout the state.¹¹⁶ Carnivals helped publicize tourism and winter sports and provided a social outlet even for those unable or unwilling to personally participate in winter sports.

Yosemite also offered spectacular winter productions, but the park had the distinct advantage of staging its festivities in an incomparable setting. The park’s first winter carnival, held February 17–20, 1922, featured skating, tobogganing, sleighing, skating, and other winter sports.¹¹⁷ Once the new Camp Curry ice rink opened in 1929, festivals rapidly grew larger and more elaborate. In the 1930s they were often weekend-long affairs, with several events held at the ice rink, and ski races and other competitions staged nearby. They were usually hosted by the YPCC and the Yosemite Winter Club and often sponsored by outside clubs or businesses with permission from the Park Service. A curious hybrid of serious athletic skill and fancy dress-up ball, these galas became particularly problematic for the Park Service. They attracted high numbers of sedentary spectators, often charged

¹¹⁵ “Snow Carnivals Planned,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1930, p. A10; “Resorts, Hotels, Travel,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1933.

¹¹⁶ “Store Shows Help Angelenos Decide on Winter Sports Wear,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 5, 1941.

¹¹⁷ Meyer, “Alpine Experiments,” 57; “Yosemite Winter Carnival February 17th to 20th,” *Mariposa Gazette*, February 4, 1922.

admission fees, and did not conform to the reverential concept of “park atmosphere” developed in the mid-1930.¹¹⁸ “A Night in Fairyland,” for instance, helped draw exceptionally large crowds to Yosemite but likely failed to evoke a sense of awe toward nature. The park was so busy on the night of the show, February 21, 1932, that “every bed in the Valley was taken and more than 100 people slept out in cars and in the [Yosemite] Lodge lobby.”¹¹⁹ A standing-room-only crowd of 1200 jammed the Curry skating rink, paying 25 cents to a dollar for the privilege of watching Mother Goose characters glide across the ice in front of Half Dome in a program which sounds suspiciously like an early incarnation of Disney on Ice.¹²⁰ Visitors were awed by “the beauty of the costumes, grace of the actors, the good music furnished by an orchestra on the ice, and the wonderful lighting effects obtained by the use of hundreds of colored lights set in the banks of snow surrounding the rink.”¹²¹ Graceful performers could dart through twinkly lights to pleasant music elsewhere but, crucially for the YPCC, visitors also complimented the pageant’s unique setting. “Typical remarks” included: “I didn't know they held such gorgeous

¹¹⁸ Sports often feature theatrical elements. The Olympics is the most obvious example, but even minor league baseball teams have pre-game entertainment, high school basketball games feature half-time dance squads, and so on. The most talented and/or charismatic athletes can earn millions in advertising campaigns and endorsement deals, even after retiring from sports. World-record holding sprinter Usain Bolt of Jamaica summed up this marriage of sports and spectacle in a 2016 interview. When Bob Costas asked the sprinter why he enjoyed his running career, Bolt replied, “[Because] it’s a performance” (Usain Bolt television interview with Bob Costas, aired August 14, 2016, NBC Olympics Coverage).

¹¹⁹ “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 11, in Badger Pass 1932. For the YPCC these crowds were a welcome relief, coming just three weeks after a whopping 51 inches of snow in the Valley had brought winter sports to a “standstill” for ten days (Ibid., 10). February 21, 1932, was the most crowded winter day on record (to that point): 5,441 people entered Yosemite through the Arch Rock entrance, 22% more than the previous record, set February 22, 1931 (Ibid., 11).

¹²⁰ “A Night in Fairyland” was a six-act program plus a repeat of a January pageant that had “depict[ed] the characters of Mother Goose Rhymes” (Ibid.).

¹²¹ Ibid.

pageants in Yosemite” and “the setting was ideal with a full moon painting the cliffs of Glacier Point and Half Dome with a soft ivory.”¹²² The YPCC used positive feedback to rebut claims that sports and pageants were inappropriate in a national park simply because they were available elsewhere. Visitors did not come to Yosemite merely to watch ice skating, the Company line went. But once there, they certainly appreciated seeing it amid natural splendor, and they might be inspired to remain in the park even longer.



Image 4-10: Joyce Williams, Queen of the San Joaquin Valley-Sierra Winter Sports Carnival, and Governor James Rolph, Jr., January 13, 1934. Unknown photographer. Yosemite National Park Archives, Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection, Winter Club Scrapbook, page 146.

¹²² Ibid., 11–12.

The annual San Joaquin Valley Winter Sports Carnival was a particularly popular festival. Area businesses donated prizes and local clubs, schools, and other organizations sent competitors. The Carnival featured competitions in skiing, snowshoeing, curling, skating, tobogganing, hockey, and ice skating gymkhana, as well as a competitive Fancy Costume Skating Carnival (with prizes for “most beautiful and most comical” costumes and for “best couple”).¹²³ In its first year, events also included an on-the-ice tug-of-war pitting San Francisco “Travel Bureau Girls” against their Los Angeles counterparts and another match between San Joaquin Valley county supervisors.¹²⁴ Superintendent Thomson described the elaborate scene:

The rink was a brilliant spectacle that evening with its many costumed skaters. Gay banners and multi-colored electric lights, which in places glimmered through large cakes of ice, made this rink a fairyland. At the side, huge animals, not only of our present day, but the great Dinasa^{ur} (sic) of the past, had been constructed of snow and seemed to watch these festivities with solemn wonderment.¹²⁵

Each year, prospective “Winter Sports Queens” competed for the title based on athletic prowess, rather than beauty (though it appears both were appreciated). A press release for the fourth annual incarnation in 1934 announced that “Nine dashing, pretty, athletic maidens representing various San Joaquin Valley communities and organizations will compete in the queen contest . . . the girl who proves her supremacy in all branches of winter sport will be

¹²³ Program, Second Annual San Joaquin Valley-Sierra Winter Sports Carnival, January 9–10, 1932, p. 2, in Badger Pass 1932, Box 62, Collection 1001, YOSE 78585, NPS Archives at El Portal.

¹²⁴ James V. Lloyd, press release, January [1931], appended to Superintendent's Monthly Report for January 1931 (February 2, 1931), in Superintendent's Monthly Reports, NPS Archives at El Portal. Tug-of-wars may have continued in future years as well.

¹²⁵ Charles Goff Thomson, Superintendent's Monthly Report for January 1931 (February 2, 1931), [p. 13], in Superintendent's Monthly Reports, NPS Archives at El Portal.

crowned queen of the Carnival [by California Governor James Rolph] at the Fancy Costume Skating Carnival Saturday night.”¹²⁶ The skating carnival featured 400 skaters and “a delegation from the Hollywood movie colony headed by Miss Rose Amos, who has skated in many picture productions . . . among those present.”¹²⁷ Yet the immense popularity of the San Joaquin Valley Carnival and other winter festivities and competitions ultimately helped ensure their own demise by raising the specter of crowded parks jammed with sedentary tourists in a Coney Island-like setting. The Park Service’s growing concerns about atmosphere, artificiality, congestion, and the like forced the agency to crack down on sports spectacles via a series of new winter use policies.

1940s Winter Sports Policies

The winter sports program at Yosemite—including recreational activities, facilities, competitions, and spectacles—helped shape Park Service attitudes and policies in the 1940s. Order 319 had failed to significantly curb large carnivals and competitions in Yosemite and elsewhere, and park advocates remained concerned about park atmosphere, large crowds, and spectatorship. So the NPS issued three new winter sports policies in the 1940s, all of which attempted to further restrict “inappropriate” public usage. Each policy was longer than the last, yet the extra verbiage did little to clarify matters. The second official Park Service policy, which Cammerer issued in 1940, followed 1936’s Order 319 in endorsing

¹²⁶ Press release, January 7, 1934, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. The sports including skiing, skating, and snowshoeing.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

participatory sports: “Informal skiing, snowshoeing, ice skating, tobogganing, and other winter sports in which all people may participate are encouraged,” the 1940 version explained.¹²⁸ Cammerer also sanctioned the construction of ski centers, including “community buildings” and “rest houses,” as long as there was “no substantial impairment of the scenic values” (whenever possible, sites should be selected that had already “been cleared by natural processes”). The policy affirmed that trails and overnight huts for cross-country skiers were acceptable, as were ski jumps and ski lifts, so long as they were temporary structures or were sufficiently inconspicuous and did not impair “scenic values.”¹²⁹ In Yosemite, Badger Pass already offered such facilities and Ostrander Ski Hut would open within months. These types of developments, the NPS believed, were acceptable because they offered more opportunities for informal recreation without permanently damaging park atmosphere or landscapes.

The 1940 policy also decreed that “professional exhibits and contests designed to attract large groups of spectators are prohibited.”¹³⁰ Order 319, in contrast, had specifically discouraged “highly competitive contests and exhibitions” that required artificialization, but made no mention of spectators or crowding.¹³¹ In 1940 Cammerer seemed on the verge of

¹²⁸ Arno Cammerer, Memorandum for the Washington Office and All Field Offices: National Park Service Winter Sports Policy, January 27, 1940, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park. (Hereafter cited as: Cammerer, *1940 Winter Sports Policy*.)

¹²⁹ Cammerer, *1940 Winter Sports Policy*.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ From Order 319: “Ski jumping contests, necessitating the construction of artificial ski jumps, are not desirable. Bob sled and other highly competitive contests and exhibitions which require artificialization of terrain must be avoided” (Arno Cammerer, Office Order No. 319: National Park Service Winter Sports Policy, April 7, 1936, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park). The 1940 winter sports policy mentioned artificiality only in conjunction with the layout of ski runs: “Downhill runs which shall be cleared only to a sufficient width to insure safety to skiers and laid

banning large competitions and spectator events altogether, but instead attempted to differentiate between types of events by proclaiming that “amateur winter sports contests and events having educational and recreational value may be conducted.”¹³² This caveat was rather ambiguous. Most winter competitions staged in the parks were amateur contests, many of which drew large crowds, and “educational and recreational values” were subjective qualities. Major events that attracted large crowds and required an admission fee were considered the most problematic. Those that, like the Kandahar, were free and open to a ski-clad public were more likely to be approved.

NPS Director Newton Drury, who replaced Cammerer in August 1940, issued a new official policy in 1945. Like his predecessor, he supported informal recreation and discouraged large spectator events. He clarified that competitions and spectacles “designed to attract large crowds of spectators” were inappropriate because they were “a detriment to family and other groups who come to enjoy the use of the slopes, rinks, and other facilities themselves and not with the intention of standing on the sidelines while someone else performs.”¹³³ The California Chamber of Commerce, whose Winter Sports Committee had objected so strongly to Order 319, asked the NPS to reconsider the 1945 policy, complaining that it discouraged ski tournaments and ran counter to “the best interests of developing the

out so far as possible to avoid the appearance of artificiality.” Temporary ski jumps that were removed at the end of the season and those that did not create a “substantial impairment of scenic values” were specifically allowed. The policy also gave local park officials authority to determine whether bob-sledding, ski jumping, and similar activities were appropriate, but implied that these decisions should be based on safety concerns, with no mention of artificiality: “Officials in charge of park areas may prohibit or regulate the use of bob-sleds, toboggans, ski jumps, or other activities that are of an especially hazardous nature” (Cammerer, *1940 Winter Sports Policy*).

¹³² Cammerer, *1940 Winter Sports Policy*.

¹³³ Drury, *1945 Winter Sports Policy*.

sport.”¹³⁴ Drury replied that the NPS had already decided to “liberalize” a small portion of the policy in order to permit some competitive events and spectacles while still “giv[ing] priority to the interests of the general public and to public safety.”¹³⁵

As promised, Drury issued a revised policy in 1946. Like its predecessors, the 1946 version prioritized participation over spectatorship. It went further, however, by implying that the Park Service itself should play a role in actively promoting recreation, specifying that “the Service desires to develop and encourage a program of informal skiing, snowshoeing, ice skating and tobogganing, in which all those who desire to do so, whether they are skilled or unskilled, may participate.”¹³⁶ The new order acknowledged the ambiguity of the previous policies, noting that the 1945 version “has been interpreted as imposing restrictions on winter use which were not intended and which would prevent the holding of certain competitive events publicly desirable and not injurious to the natural values the Service is obligated to safeguard.”¹³⁷ Drury clarified that mass spectator events and competitions designed to attract large crowds should be “avoided” if they were likely to cause overcrowding of accommodations or facilities and would thereby deter “family and other groups” or cause traffic and administrative difficulties. Many Park Service officials believed that modest competitions and exhibitions posed little serious permanent threat to protected

¹³⁴ James Mussatti to Newton Drury, December 26, 1945, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park. Mussatti was the General Manager of the California State Chamber of Commerce and explained that the Chamber’s Board of Directors requested the policy reconsideration.

¹³⁵ Newton Drury to James Mussatti, February 8, 1946, in Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG 79, NARA College Park.

¹³⁶ Drury, *1946 Winter Sports Policy*.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

landscapes, and thus constituted appropriate forms of public use. Wiggle room remained: the 1946 policy granted regional directors (instead of park superintendents, as before) the power to grant or deny permission for individual events. Unfortunately, none of the four policies issued in the 1930s and 1940s provided specific examples of appropriate events or guidance on how to determine acceptable crowd sizes. The trend away from mass spectacles and competitions was clear, yet by shifting responsibility to regional directors and by neglecting to define appropriate winter use more specifically, the Park Service failed to create a truly consistent strategy for managing winter sports.

The 1940s policies succeeded in gradually reducing the number of large winter spectator events in Yosemite and other parks. NPS officials were determined to curb elaborate and crowded competitions and spectacles, but they recognized that such events were enormously popular and thus allowed for a good deal of discretion in evaluating their merits. The Kandahar, for instance, was sanctioned even after 1940 because ski-wearing spectators could be loosely described as participants, and the 1942 downhill and slalom national championships were acceptable because they helped promote nationalism, fitness, and the park itself during wartime. Even after the 1945 policy tightened restrictions on spectator sports, new YPCC General Manager Hil Oehlmann renewed the spectator-participant argument when he sought permission in January 1946 from Superintendent Kittredge to stage the Kandahar. “It is our understanding that this event is not contrary to the Director’s policy governing winter use of the national parks,” Oehlmann explained,

because rather than attracting mere spectators “it will be of interest to skiers, who will themselves be on skis to witness the competitions.”¹³⁸

Kittredge himself had expressed confusion just five days before, in his own letter to the NPS regional director. He had interpreted the 1945 winter sports policy to forbid carnivals and ski tournaments because they were “inappropriate.” Recently, however, he had heard through the grapevine that some events—those which did not interfere with “family or other groups,” did not “cause serious traffic or other management difficulties,” and were desired by the concessionaires—might be acceptable.¹³⁹ Kittredge urged the NPS to clarify its official stance on carnivals and “commercialized competitive events.” In a postscript he added that Director Drury had just granted permission to Oehlmann to stage the Kandahar and had also approved the upcoming Silver Ski meet at Mount Rainer. “If this is true,” Kittredge huffed, “we presume that the Director will issue a withdrawal of his original memorandum [the 1945 NPS winter sports policy].”¹⁴⁰ The 1946 policy, which Drury issued two months later, was meant to clarify this type of confusion. Debates over the Kandahar and similar contests had drawn attention to important questions about spectatorship, participation, and competition in the national parks, forcing the Park Service to grapple with

¹³⁸ Hil Oehlmann to Frank Kittredge, January 29, 1946, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. Longtime YPCC employee Hilmer Oehlmann became general manager of the Company and assumed many of Tresidder’s responsibilities when Tresidder became president of Stanford University in 1943. Tresidder remained highly involved in park and YPCC business, however, serving as a member of the Company’s board and regularly corresponding with NPS and park officials until his sudden death in 1948.

¹³⁹ Frank Kittredge, “Memorandum for the Regional Director: Region Four,” January 24, 1946, p. 1, in Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2. It turned out to be a moot point for the 1946 Kandahar, as poor weather forced the meet’s cancellation.

its public use mandate. Although the NPS continued to permit occasional (and relatively low-key) spectator sports in Yosemite and elsewhere after the 1940s, national parks gradually eliminated “artificialities,” mass spectator events, and admission fees. Winter sports programs channeled their focus back toward playing in the parks, rather than watching others do so.

“Various winter playgrounds”

Meanwhile, the growing popularity of other Western ski resorts gradually lessened the pressure on national parks to provide sports spectacles for the general public. As a 1934 *Overland Monthly* article gushed, “In the southern part of the state [California], which all the world has learned to consider a land of sunshine and oranges and blonde actresses, various winter playgrounds are growing steadily in favor year by year.”¹⁴¹ By the early 1940s, California had enough ski centers to stage a competition and/or carnival at one or more resorts every winter weekend. California ski areas ranged from modest ski hills to full-blown resorts with mountainside accommodations. Southern California was home to Big Pines recreation camp, Mount Baldy, and Lake Arrowhead, among others; Northern California boasted Yosemite, Mount Lassen, Mount Shasta, and more. A variety of ski centers dotted other western states as well, including large resorts like Sun Valley (Idaho, 1936), Mr. Hood/Timberline (Oregon, 1937), Snoqualmie (Washington, 1937), Alta (Utah, 1938), and Winter Park (Colorado, 1940).¹⁴² Reporting to Director Cammerer in early 1937, Yosemite

¹⁴¹ J. R. McCarthy, "Winter Sports by Choice," *Overland Monthly* (February 1934), 48.

¹⁴² John Fry, *The Story of Modern Skiing* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2006), xxii.

Superintendent Thomson urged the Park Service to stick with relatively simple developments while private resorts cropped up throughout the West. “In my opinion, the winter sports must be kept rather homespun. In the parks we must not follow such a trend as Sun Valley. We must realize that we are not operating a high-powered resort, but are making a national park as useful and enjoyable as possible throughout the entire year,” Thomson advised.¹⁴³ Similarly, Yosemite Superintendent L. C. Merriam felt compelled to assert in 1941 that “the national parks are, of course, not in competition with winter sports resort areas such as Sun Valley, Sugar Bowl, etc.”¹⁴⁴ These popular ski centers welcomed large crowds with numerous competitions, festivals, permanent chair lifts, and other modern amenities. Together, official NPS sports policies, changing attitudes about appropriate park usage, and the proliferation of outside winter sports resorts helped ensure that winter sports competitions and spectacles tapered off in Yosemite after the 1940s.¹⁴⁵

Controversy over winter use in national parks continues to this day, but the 1930s and 1940s were instrumental in shaping the conversation. Yosemite’s winter sports program reached its heyday in that period, boosted by increased park visitation, new and expanded

¹⁴³ Charles Goff Thomson to Arno Cammerer, March 15, 1937, p. 4, Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 3, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park.

¹⁴⁴ Lawrence Merriam, “National Park Service Winter Use Program in California, with particular emphasis on Yosemite National Park” (notes for a talk given to the Section on Forests and Recreation of the Commonwealth Club of California), May 28, 1941, p. 1, Yosemite Protection Service to Public & Forestry: Winter Sports part 4, Central Classified File, 1933–1949, Box 1854, RG79, NARA College Park. Sun Valley opened in 1936, Sugar Bowl opened in 1939.

¹⁴⁵ Current NPS policies permit “special events . . . such as sports, pageants, regattas, public spectator attractions, [and] entertainments” only if there is some “meaningful association” between the park and the event or if “the event will contribute to visitor understanding of the significance of the park area.” Organizers must secure permits for such events from the park superintendent and obey regulations designed to minimize damage to the landscape and park values. The NPS also continues to prohibit admission fees for special events held in areas that are generally open to the public (NPS, *Management Policies 2006*, 112).

facilities, and surging interest in skiing, skating, and other snow and ice sports. As a visitor from San Francisco explained in 1932, “Scenery will attract and hold people a day or two then there must be some activity.”¹⁴⁶ Yosemite was one of the most popular national parks and among the first to organize a formal winter recreation program. The park’s Badger Pass Ski Area and Camp Curry Ice Rink were exceedingly popular sites to play sports and to watch others do so. Yosemite thus played an important role in shaping Park Service opinions and policies on winter sports. As concerns mounted over park atmosphere, spectatorship, artificiality, overcrowding, and related issues, officials feared national parks might devolve from exceptional and inspirational spaces into mere common pleasure grounds set within sublime landscapes. National parks, Secretary Ickes insisted in 1946, “are not Coney Islands. Although they give a great deal of pleasure every year to millions, they are not, in the ordinary sense of the word, ‘resorts.’ They are the great outdoor places of America, and they should be kept so.”¹⁴⁷ The NPS and other park advocates increasingly argued that major competitive winter sports and spectacles should be eliminated in order to preserve park atmosphere and promote participatory recreation. By the mid-1940s the NPS more closely regulated public use and regularly rejected requests for special sports events. Visitors should play in the parks, not watch others do so, the Park Service decreed, and nature, not athletes, should provide most of the spectacle in America’s public playgrounds.

¹⁴⁶ August Fritze, comment on the 1932 Winter Visitation Survey, as reported in “Special Report on Winter Sports Season of 1931–1932,” March 4, 1932, p. 18, in *Badger Pass 1932*. Fritze wrote an impassioned explanation of his family’s love for Yosemite winter sports. He also suggested that the park open up access to the reliably snowy backcountry during winter months, a plan that the park had already considered and would soon implement.

¹⁴⁷ Harold L. Ickes, “Space for Play,” *Recreation* 40 (July 1946), 218.

Epilogue

“Winter sports have become institutional at Yosemite,” Superintendent Charles Thomson confidently proclaimed in 1930.¹ Nearly ninety years later, the toboggan slide, ash can slide, ski jump, sleighs, ski-joring horses, and dog sled teams are a distant memory; the ice rink is a mere fraction of its former size; and the ice queens have long since hung up their crowns and skis. The very name of Badger Pass’s annual Ancient Jocks slalom race seems to pay wistful tribute to a more active and engaged past—for the park, more so than for the racers.

Sixty-three years after Assistant to the Park Superintendent E. C. Solinsky crashed his toboggan so spectacularly, Jim Wrenn’s sled went bottoms-up nearby on the informal, “all-natural” slopes behind Camp Curry. My dad’s ill-fated 1991 ride helps illustrate the vast transformation of Yosemite’s winter program. Safety concerns and a growing distaste for unnecessary and artificial landscape modifications, starting in the mid-1930s, doomed many existing facilities and made the Park Service far less likely to approve new sports-related construction. Most man-made athletic structures—including the ash can slide of Solinsky’s wild ride—were removed from the Valley by the mid-1950s, and more recent visitors rely on gravity alone to make it downhill. Solinsky’s experience was a covert, moon-lit adventure, but during the daytime the ash can slide was managed and staffed by park rangers who spent long hours essentially monitoring play. Rangers are still stationed at Badger Pass, but the concessionaire is responsible for organizing most of the recreational activities there. NPS

¹ Superintendent’s Monthly Report for January 1930 (February 3, 1930), 2, in Superintendent’s Monthly Reports, NPS Archives at El Portal.

officials concerned about congestion and the urban atmosphere generated by activities like dancing and bowling complained in the 1930s that the park might turn into a “Coney Island.” Ironically, the giant snow slide they operated rarely provoked amusement-park comparisons. Because the Ash Can and toboggan rides were both informal, participatory activities in which tourists directly interacted with nature, park officials did not initially object to the crowds they generated. Decades later, without a centralized, man-made sledding area, the long lines, noise, and sense of camaraderie that characterized an afternoon of sledding in the 1920s and 1930s has been replaced by smaller groups of families or friends seeking out their own slopes. In many respects, winter recreation has become a less collective experience. Remarkably, winters in Yosemite Valley may be quieter in the twenty-first century than they were in the early-twentieth century, despite ever-increasing visitation.

The National Park Service’s 1930s and 1940s winter sports policies emphasized the importance of informal, non-competitive, participatory recreation, and strongly discouraged its opposite: formal competitions and spectacles in which tourists passively observed “real” athletes. This vision of appropriate park sports ultimately won out. Few organized winter sports activities remain in the Valley, and ice carnivals and winter festivals were phased out mid-century. The Yosemite Winter Club still sponsors ski and hockey teams and hosts occasional competitions, but they are much more modest affairs than the college and state championships of the early years. The Wrenn sled incident was typical of modern park sports—a longtime Yosemite visitor took his family to the park with some freshly-purchased \$3.00 plastic sleds, found a hill behind their Camp Curry cabin, and, with little experience,

attempted to make it down an icy, boulder-strewn slope in one piece.² This was the sort of “healthful out-of-door recreation” for the “benefit and enjoyment of the people” the Park Service had in mind when drafting winter sports policies in 1936 and in the 1940s.³



Image E-1: Jim Wrenn enjoying the scenery, Camp Curry, 1991. Photograph by Joan Wrenn.

² This slope is now inaccessible to visitors, thanks to massive rock falls in the early 2000s, which together forced the closure and demolition or relocation of about half of Camp Curry’s more than 500 cabins and tent cabins. In 2012 the NPS and the U.S. Geological Survey established a “rock-fall hazard line” in the Valley. A large portion of Camp Curry fell squarely in the danger zone and was declared off-limits to guests (Greg M. Stock, Nicolas Luco, Brian D. Collins, Edwin L. Harp, Paola Reichenbach, and Kurt L. Frankel, “Quantitative Rock-Fall Hazard and Risk Assessment for Yosemite Valley, Yosemite National Park, California,” U.S. Geological Survey Scientific Investigations Report 2014–5129 [2014], 1, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/sir/2014/5129/pdf/sir2014-5129.pdf>).

³ Newton B. Drury, “Memorandum for the Director’s Office and All Field Offices” (No. FO-331) [1946 Winter Sports Policy], March 21, 1946, p. 1, in Winter Use—Winter Sports Policy, Records of Director Newton B. Drury, 1940–1951, Box 24, RG79, NARA College Park.

Post-War Sports and Science

Recreation and leisure travel increased substantially after World War II as millions of Americans returned home and restrictions on travel were lifted. Interior Secretary Harold Ickes declared in 1946 that the country was “face to face with the biggest boom in recreation that the world has ever known.”⁴ He was particularly worried about the record-breaking crowds expected in national parks and encouraged tourists to visit in off-peak seasons. “Why cannot still more people take winter vacations and join the growing army of younger men and women who use the parks for winter sports?” he wondered.⁵ As he praised the snowy beauty of winter, Ickes also acknowledged that sports played an increasingly significant role in tourism and hoped such activities might entice some visitors to forgo traditional summer park vacations.

Skiing remained popular throughout the state, but by mid-century the California Chamber of Commerce was bemoaning the fact that few skiers spent more than a day or two at a time on the slopes. Resorts generally catered to young and skilled skiers out for a short weekend jaunt, Kenneth R. Hammaker reported in 1950, while neglecting “the simple pleasures which contribute to a snow vacation, and which everyone could enjoy.”⁶ Yosemite was a notable exception to this trend and made every effort to attract families and skiers at all skill levels. Badger Pass Ski Area offered innovated “Badger Pups” classes for kids, gentle slopes for novices, and relatively inexpensive lessons and rentals for everyone, making it

⁴ Harold Ickes, “Space for Play,” *Recreation* 40 (July 1946), 179.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁶ Kenneth R. Hammaker, “Must Winter Sports remain a Weekend Business?” December 1, 1950, in Badger Pass Ski Operations 1935–1970, Box 7, YPCC: Series IV:3, NPS Archives at El Portal.

possible for a family to learn ski basics more cheaply than at many other California resorts. Constrained by geography and Park Service regulations, the YPCC abandoned all hopes of establishing a truly European-style world-class ski resort by the mid-1950s. Nearly all ski competitions were discontinued by 1963.⁷ Badger Pass still offers relatively inexpensive lessons, lift tickets, and rental equipment, yet it is no longer a bustling, cutting-edge resort. Instead, memory and nostalgia have proved powerful forces in sustaining the ski area. Many skiers return with their children and grandchildren, so that multiple generations learn to ski in the park.

Advances in scientific research and changing attitudes about the environment drove other important shifts within Yosemite and among the broader community of park advocates. Early twentieth-century activists and organizations such as John Muir and the Sierra Club viewed national parks as natural wonders that must be protected, yet they also enthusiastically supported recreation and exploration in the parks, as in the Club's annual excursions.⁸ The Sierra Club edited its 1892 Articles of Incorporation in 1951, reflecting the group's evolving priorities. The original statement of purpose began with: "To explore, to enjoy, and to render accessible the mountain regions of the Pacific Coast," and was replaced by: "To explore, enjoy, and preserve . . . [American] scenic resources."⁹ The edit

⁷ *Determination of Eligibility: Badger Pass Ski Area* (San Francisco: Page & Turnbull, August 13, 2009), p. 16, <https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/historyculture/upload/Badger-Pass-low-res.pdf>. Junior-level competitions and low-key Yosemite Winter Club races are still occasionally staged at Badger Pass. Badger Pass was declared eligible for the National Historic Register in 2009, with a period of significance of 1934 to 1953.

⁸ Since its founding in 1892, the Sierra Club had been closely associated with the National Park System, and several of its officers and members have worked with the Park Service.

⁹ Sierra Club, "Articles of Incorporation" (Original Version [June 4, 1892]; Fourth Version [February 17, 1951]), accessed October 22, 2016, <http://www.sierraclub.org/articles-incorporation>. The quotes were listed first under the heading "the purposes for which this corporation is formed" and were presumably considered the primary goals. Other purposes included publishing information about the region and

demonstrated growing concern about crowding and overuse in the parks, problems that could be exacerbated by large sports events and spectacles. The Sierra Club became more engaged in environmental activism over the decades, and has remained highly involved with park issues in Yosemite.

Meanwhile, the Park Service began to take a more intellectually curious approach to the natural world. For much of the first half of the twentieth century, the agency had essentially ignored scientific management practices. George Wright, a biologist and park naturalist at Yosemite, published the first major study of fauna in the national parks in 1932 and 1933, but his untimely death in 1936 helped stall similar scientific efforts within the NPS for nearly 30 years. As Lary Dilsaver notes, rather than investing in research, the Park Service clung tenaciously to its concept of ‘atmosphere preservation’ and to other ideals promoted decades earlier by Stephen Mather.”¹⁰ The tide began to shift in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with a series of reports urging greater Park Service support for scientific practices. One of the best-known of these documents, the so-called Leopold Report, was issued in 1963 by the Wildlife Management Advisory Board, a group of five scientists appointed by Secretary Udall. The Leopold Report concluded that “the goal of managing the national parks and monuments should be to preserve, or where necessary to recreate [sic], the ecological scene as viewed by the first European visitors.” Or, more succinctly, “to

“enlist[ing] the support and cooperation of the people and government in preserving the forests and other natural features of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.” The Club cared about preservation from the beginning, yet replacing access with preservation at the start of the statement indicates a shift in official priorities. The Club’s geographic focus expanded as well, from “the mountain regions of the Pacific Coast,” to “the Sierra Nevada and other scenic resources of the United States and its forests, waters, wildlife, and wilderness” in 1951. (Ibid.)

¹⁰ Lary M. Dilsaver, “Questions of Resource Management, 1957–1963,” in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, ed. Lary M. Dilsaver (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 197.

maintain or create the mood of wild America.”¹¹ The committee argued that to do so, “observable artificiality in any form must be minimized and obscured in every possible way.”¹² As was so often the case in park system history, visibility was key.

These objections to artificiality were reminiscent of criticisms voiced in the 1930s and 1940s, except that the Leopold Report had relied on scientific study rather than simply declaring the “unnatural” inappropriate. It singled out sports infrastructure as particularly intrusive, noting that “it seems incongruous that there should exist in the national parks mass recreation facilities such as golf courses, ski lifts, motorboat marinas, and other extraneous developments which completely contradict the management goal.”¹³ Several recreational facilities were removed from parks over the next decade as a result, but Yosemite’s ski lifts survived. The report was especially significant because it promoted a scientific approach to the management of natural resources and argued that scholarly research, rather than visitor preferences, should take priority in directing park operations.

The following year, Congress passed the Wilderness Act, giving itself the authority to designate federal public lands as wilderness to be preserved as “area[s] where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”¹⁴ There are now more than 106 million acres of designated wilderness, 44 million of

¹¹ A. S. Leopold, S. A. Cain, C. M. Cottam, I. N. Gabrielson, and T. L. Kimball, “Wildlife Management in the National Parks” [Leopold Report], in Dilsaver, ed., *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, 250, 242. This latter statement implied, yet again, that the areas that would become national parks had been uninhabited prior to the arrival of whites.

¹² *Ibid.*, 242.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ “An Act to Establish a National Wilderness Preservation System for the Permanent Good of the Whole People, and for Other Purposes, 1964 (78 Stat. 890),” in Dilsaver, ed., *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, 278.

which lie within national parks.¹⁵ Visitors can enter the wilderness, but most recreational facilities are prohibited. So, for instance, a tourist is free to cross country ski through Yosemite's 704,624 acres of wilderness (nearly 95% of the total park area), but she will not find a chair lift for downhill skiing, or a bar in which to stop for a drink. Since permanent roads are prohibited, simply moving through the landscape requires some physical effort, whether skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, biking, or horseback riding. All of which are widely considered "appropriate" modes of park recreation.

The National Park Service, Congress, and park advocates have advanced a host of other policies, legislation, and goals since the mid-twentieth century that attempt to protect lands and resources. Science helps guide park management to a much greater degree than in the early twentieth century, but preservation ideals have not always triumphed. The debate over public use remains a fundamental concern for the National Park Service, and sports continue to play a significant role in this ongoing conflict.

The Merced River Plan

Controversy over sports in Yosemite took center stage again recently, in the form of the Merced River Plan. The proposal mobilized thousands of Yosemite visitors, past and present, in a campaign to save popular recreational facilities, most of which were run by the park's new concessionaire, Delaware North Company (DNC).¹⁶ Ironically, the DNC had

¹⁵ National Park Service, "Wilderness: Frequently Asked Questions," accessed May 31, 2017, <https://wilderness.nps.gov/faqnew.cfm>.

¹⁶ The Yosemite Park and Curry Company lost its concessions contract in 1993, largely because its parent company, MCA (which purchased the YPCC in 1973), had been bought by a Japanese company. The DNC had absolutely no previous experience working in national parks.

specialized in providing services at sports facilities, including dog and horse tracks, major league baseball stadiums, and Boston Gardens (which the company owned).¹⁷ With its new concession—the largest and most lucrative in the National Park System—the DNC was given the responsibility of operating recreational activities in a protected national landscape. Instead of operating spectator services for professional teams, the company was now dealing with a completely different breed of “athlete”—average Americans playing in the park. Like the YPCC had, the DNC managed the ice rink, bike rentals, raft rentals, Badger Pass, and other recreational facilities.

The Merced River Plan threatened many of these activities, and the battle it spawned illustrates the extent to which many tourists felt entitled to sports in the park. Congress had designated the Merced a Wild and Scenic River in 1987, requiring the National Park Service to take extra steps to protect the 81 miles of it that flow through agency-managed lands, including Yosemite. After a series of lawsuits and drafts, the Merced Wild and Scenic River Plan was made available for public comment in 2013.¹⁸ Among other major changes, it called for removing the Ahwahnee’s swimming pool and tennis court, the Yosemite Lodge’s swimming pool, and Camp Curry’s ice rink; and discontinuing bike, horse, and raft rentals in the Valley. A massive public outcry ensued. The *San Jose Mercury News* summed up the feelings of many park visitors in an editorial:

¹⁷ At the time of the transition, the DNC owned 11 horse and dog racetracks and a jai alai fronton, and held concessions at a number of other sports facilities, the Miami Zoo, and 40 airports. Aside from the zoo contract, the Company had little experience dealing with any type of conservation or environmental issue (Frank Clifford, “Curry Co. Turns Over Yosemite Concessions,” October 2, 1993, *Los Angeles Times*, http://articles.latimes.com/1993-10-02/news/mn-41470_1_delaware-north).

¹⁸ Yosemite National Park, “Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan, Record of Decision” (March 2014), 1–2, https://www.nps.gov/yose/getinvolved/upload/MRP_ROD_package_Full_web.pdf.

One person's outdoor recreation is another's environmental destruction. Most of these things [sports-related facilities] wouldn't be built today. But the park shouldn't be taking away the fun. Many of these features are part of park history and have a negligible effect on the land. Generations of families have made memories skating and rafting in the shadow of Half Dome, forging a connection to Yosemite that lasts a lifetime and builds support for parks.¹⁹

Many of the 30,000 messages the NPS received during the public comment period echoed the *Mercury's* points, arguing that skating, biking, and rafting were longstanding family traditions, and that such activities helped solidify visitors' sense of connection to, and support for, the park. One commenter explained that "keeping Yosemite an attractive place for a family vacation is part and parcel with maintaining public attachment to the valley and environmental integrity."²⁰ Some pointed out that such activities were already confined to a tiny portion of the park: "95% of Yosemite is absolute wilderness and I love it that way. But I see no need to attempt to make that last 5% more wilderness-like when that's not going to happen anyway. Just accept that the Valley is designed to accommodate a wide range of people," another writer advised.²¹ Others focused on class, claiming that parks were among the few places that offered such activities to middle-class families.²² "Do not allow the

¹⁹ "Yosemite Plan Would Take Away the Fun," March 29, 2013, *San Jose Mercury News*, <http://www.mercurynews.com/2013/03/29/yosemite-plan-would-take-away-the-fun>.

²⁰ Correspondence #2567, in National Park Service, *Merced Wild and Scenic River Final Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (2014) [hereafter known as *Final Merced River Plan/EIS*], p-211.

²¹ Correspondence #1018, in *Final Merced River Plan/EIS*, p-213.

²² One commentator seemed blissfully unaware of the actual cost of such activities. After castigating visitors who hoped to use concessionaire equipment and facilities, he or she concluded: "one would think that the only way for people to recreate in Yosemite Valley is to rent a bicycle, pay by the hour or day to ride a horse or raft, or pay admission to enter a swimming pool. But this is not true. Park visitors can picnic, swim or wade or play by or in the Merced River, hike, or bring their own rafts, bicycles, or even horses to use in Yosemite Valley for free. It seems that these forms of no-cost recreation would be appealing for the majority of Americans if they understood the actual situation in Yosemite Valley" (Correspondence #3325, in *Final Merced River Plan/EIS*, p-225). The idea of hordes of tourists strapping bicycles and rafts atop their Subarus, and

environmentalists to eliminate all the recreational possibilities for the middle class,” one commenter plead, “[because] people need to bicycle, ice skate, and rent rafts, and they should be allowed to do so. There are few places where recreation for the middle class is possible and our national parks are some.”²³ Yet some commenters supported the reduction in facilities, citing both environmental issues and concerns about the suitability of such activities in a national park. One writer explained, “I particularly like the focus on returning Yosemite Valley to more of its natural wonder. Some of the amenities are interesting, but I don’t think are appropriate in Yosemite, given the limits on space. For example, swimming pools belong in a Motel 6 not in the Valley.”²⁴

The draft was revised following the comment period and 60 public meetings, and the new plan, which proposed fewer changes to recreational programs, was approved. Rather than simply eliminating the ice rink—which was located within the “river corridor” region the plan was designed to protect—the permanent rink was removed, and a new small seasonal rink was installed in a Curry parking lot outside of the corridor. Bicycle and raft rentals were spared, with their rental facilities moved further from the river. Horse rentals were eliminated in the Valley, but the stables at Wawona remain.

The fight over the Merced River Plan was just the latest major battleground in Yosemite’s preservation and public use wars. The results are telling. In response to an outpouring of criticism from park visitors, the final plan backtracked on attempts to limit or

perhaps tossing a thoroughbred in the back, is a wee bit out of touch with the economic realities of most park visitors.

²³ Correspondence #73, in *Final Merced River Plan/EIS*, p-218.

²⁴Correspondence #3267, in *Final Merced River Plan/EIS*, p-225.

eliminate popular recreational activities. Nostalgia proved a powerful force, and many commenters cited family traditions as a justification for retaining the programs. After a century of understanding national parks as public landscapes, visitors feel a sense of ownership, particularly over recreational spaces within the parks.

This is not to suggest that visitors have no commitment to environmental stewardship. On the contrary, many Merced River Plan commenters noted that physical engagement with the landscape can help foster stronger emotional ties to the park itself and promote greater support for the park system. In a study on recreation and sustainability, scholars Garrett Hutson and Ryan Howard reported similar findings. They determined that “people are more likely to protect places that hold special meaning in their lives. . . . Additionally, the research literature suggests that outdoor recreation may be one catalyst for developing meaningful relationships with outdoor places.”²⁵ Playing in the parks is one way to establish a personal connection to the natural world, and those who do so may be inspired to support institutions and efforts that help protect it.

Another turn of the century

Yosemite continues to draw extraordinary crowds and in 2016 visitation topped five million for the first time.²⁶ Despite ongoing efforts to boost winter use, however, most

²⁵ Garrett Hutson and Ryan Howard, “Weaving Place Meanings into Outdoor Recreation Sustainability: The Case of the Niagara Glen,” in *Landscapes of Leisure: Space, Place and Identities*, edited by Sean Gammon and Sam Elkington (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 176.

²⁶ 4,150,217 people visited the park in 2015 and 5,028,868 came in 2016, an increase of nearly a million visitors. This boost was likely due, in part, to celebrations honoring the Park Service centennial in 2016. Nevertheless, visitation hovered between roughly three and four million for the ten previous years, a remarkable surge from the 498,289 who visited in 1932, the year Yosemite had hoped to host the Olympic Games (National Park Service, “Yosemite NP” [Visitation Statistics], accessed May 16, 2017,

visitors still view the park as a summer vacation destination, and nearly 75% of tourists visit from May through October.²⁷ The DNC and its replacement, faced with many of the same problems the Yosemite Park and Curry Company confronted decades earlier, have often offered discounts to lure more winter visitors to both lodgings and activities.²⁸ The Stay and Play package, for instance, included lift tickets—a modern take on the old practice of enticing tourists to the park with winter sports.²⁹ In summer, however, most park lodgings sell out well in advance. The difference between seasons is truly remarkable—even with several lodgings and restaurants closed for the winter, the park feels infinitely more spacious without the crush of summer visitors.

I was reminded of this effect while in the park in August and September 2013. One of the largest wildfires in state history ignited in mid-August and raged through parts of the Yosemite backcountry. Hundreds of visitors cancelled their reservations before even arriving, and at times the park felt nearly as empty as it does in the winter.³⁰ There was no line for bike rentals and the pool was practically empty. It was an interesting but unwitting demonstration of how crowds can impact recreation. Biking through the Valley with few

[https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20\(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)?Park=YOSE](https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)?Park=YOSE)).

²⁷ National Park Service, “[Yosemite] Visitation Statistics,” accessed May 16, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/visitation.htm>.

²⁸ Since March 2016 the concession has been held by Yosemite Hospitality, a subsidiary of Aramark.

²⁹ Camp Curry’s “Temp-Rate-Ture” plan rewarded visitors willing to brave winter temps—the rate for an unheated tent cabin was equal to that night’s temperature. The rate was capped at \$39 so that visitors “unlucky” enough to stay on a warm night were not penalized for it (DNC promotional email to author, December 17, 2011).

³⁰ One Curry front desk attendant told me the usually sold-out site was “only about half full.” It felt even emptier. The Rim Fire was not fully extinguished until the following November. It never spread to the Valley, but at times thick smoke filled the sky and ash littered the ground.

other people in sight was far more reminiscent of a solitary snowshoe walk than a typical summer ride. Yosemite's most popular summer sports rarely offer the same quiet immersion in nature as some of their winter counterparts. Even with spectacular scenery, crowded conditions when rafting, biking, and hiking can diminish a tourist's experience.

The Gaze, Revisited

If, as John Urry argues, the foremost element of the tourist experience is the visual—the gaze—my new phone app, “Treadmill Trails,” might be a tolerable alternative to actually playing in the park. It is just one of an ever-growing number of videos and programs aimed at consumers who want to watch nature while running in place, indoors. In Treadmill Trails, customers get a first-person viewpoint, complete with the appropriate up and down bobbling motion, of trails in a variety of scenic locations.³¹ I tested the Yosemite version, which follows a dirt path up to Sentinel Dome, overlooking Half Dome and much of the Valley. Seen on a four-inch phone screen, with repetitive dance music and the hypnotic voice of an unseen narrator, the video is hardly a convincing walk through the park. I felt more immersed in *Pride and Prejudice*, playing on a nearby tv. Yet the appeal is understandable because for many visitors the most memorable component of a national park visit is the visual spectacle. Just as Ansel Adams and Carleton Watkins framed the view decades ago, Treadmill Trails and similar products portray an idealized, empty landscape (with a constantly changing perspective) for modern audiences. No one would argue that a

³¹ There are several thirty minute videos of different locations, including Arches National Park, New York's Central Park, Mt. Kilimanjaro, Napa Valley, the Na Pali Coast Trail, and “Cool Alpine Wonderland,” the last of which is a run through the snow.

phone video replicates the experience of visiting a park, but the existence of such apps proves the popularity of seeing it. Does viewing the natural world inspire or improve physical activity in the manmade world? There is a certain disconnect in gazing at one landscape while physically treading along another; the fact that the latter is a utilitarian exercise machine makes it even stranger. This is a strange breed of the “informal,” “healthful,” “recreational” use Cammerer and Drury envisioned for national parks.

Ironically, the closest I have come to feeling completely immersed in the natural world was in a setting with literally no visual. It was in a claustrophobic underground “room” in South Dakota, surrounded by strangers—not an auspicious start when one views wilderness solely as vast, empty, and sublime landscapes. The ranger guiding us through Wind Cave National Park stopped the tour group and switched off the dim safety lighting installed throughout the cave. Several dozen feet below ground, with absolutely no ambient light, we were in perfect, unimaginable darkness. The visual evaporated. If Treadmill Trails and a black-out in Wind Cave prove anything, it’s that nature means more than just a properly-framed view. This was already clear, of course, but bears re-stating. Most of the early National Parks—Yosemite, Yellowstone, Sequoia, and so on—were set aside on the strength of their spectacular scenery. As travelers branched out beyond sightseeing, new ways of engaging with the parks demonstrated that the tourist gaze was not the sole driving force of tourism. In sports, in particular, physical interaction with the landscape is crucial. Recreation in the park is meaningful not merely because of the spectacular visual backdrop, but also because it helps forge a sense of connection to the landscape.

Loved to Death?

Critics often complain that Yosemite (and other national parks) are being “loved to death.” They worry that the preservation portion of the Park Service’s mandate is often overlooked in favor of pleasing tourists. This is hardly a new critique. Frederick Law Olmsted bemoaned tourist-related development in his 1865 report, and countless observers since have referred to the Valley disparagingly as a city.³² One hundred and one years after Olmsted’s report, a *Yosemite Sentinel* article attempted to calm such fears by arguing that “prediction[s] that there will be nothing left worth seeing in ten years surely represents a somewhat pessimistic view of the fragility of an area whose principal attraction is granite.”³³ Proposals to ban cars, limit visitors, and remove infrastructure are discussed fairly frequently, but the Park Service rarely seriously considers plans that would significantly limit visitation. The “enjoyment” of the people remains a driving factor in park operations.

Scholars and environmentalists are sometimes quick to dismiss this fundamental park purpose and the tourists whom, they believe, embrace the “enjoyment” aspect of the parks too closely. Rebecca Solnit’s description of visitors in the Valley hovers between judgmental and lightly condescending, though it is not clear that she meant it that way. “It was a strange place, full of crowds of people,” she wrote, “families, tour groups, gatherings—in the brightly colored clothes that signify leisure and pleasure, more intent on having recreation than on pursuing the sublime, or perhaps pursuing the sublime as a quick recreational

³² Frederick Law Olmsted, “The Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove: A Preliminary Report” (1865), in Dilsaver, ed., *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*.

³³ “Yosemite’s Critics,” *Yosemite Sentinel*, August 10, 1966, p. 3. The *Sentinel* was published as an employee newsletter by the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, which clearly had a vested interest in park development. Nevertheless, it helps illustrate the ongoing debate over park usage and preservation.

interval.”³⁴ Solnit does not explain why she assumes “brightly colored clothes” signify a disdain for the sublime.

Alfred Runte’s pronouncements about tourists can sound especially cynical: “Preservation, it seemed, was an ideal. Undoubtedly it demanded too much, insisting that people come to see the resource only and ask nothing more of Yosemite than what it had been offering for thousands of years.”³⁵ Sarcasm is nothing new to the park system, as illustrated by YPCC General Manager Hil Oehlmann, but he was the other side of the preservation and use debate. Responding to criticism of the Company’s “cheap amusements” in 1947, he wrote, “Our critics know in their hearts that they have a deeper appreciation of beauty than the mass of their fellows and discount accordingly any real or fancied enjoyment which shallower mortals may derive from a visit to a park.”³⁶ There is also a class component to such commentary. Early park visitors were wealthy, but starting in the 1920 it was primarily young, middle-class Americans who swarmed the parks, flocked to the Camp Curry dance hall, played pool, and otherwise “enjoyed” themselves. In the eyes of many preservationists, recreation in such non-elitist, urban forms was inappropriate.

Solnit, Runte, and others sometimes seem determined to categorize visitors as either seekers of “cheap amusements” or worthy environmentalists, with little chance of any crossover. This lack of nuance is troubling—the vast majority of park tourists were (and

³⁴ Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Hidden Wars of the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 229.

³⁵ Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 220.

³⁶ Hil Oehlmann to Charles G. Woodbury, October 20, 1947, as quoted in Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness*, 191.

are) somewhere in the middle. They chose to play in parks for the spectacular natural backdrop, the chance to try something new, or any number of other reasons. Their time in the park might inspire them to become environmentalists, or it might deepen an already existing commitment to nature. Or they might truly hate nature, and prefer to lounge at the hotel bar in bright clothing. One need not be a Thoreau in self-imposed exile in order to appreciate nature. For that matter, neither was Thoreau. For a man commonly associated with solitude and wilderness living, he had a surprisingly active social life at his pond-side cabin. Oversimplifying tourists' motivations may make for more provocative theses, but it does a great disservice to the complex factors that drive visitors'

There's a useful parallel to debates over zoos. Critics argue that animals kept in confinement for public display pay far too high a price emotionally and physically; supporters contend that zoos promote public education and awareness, perhaps prompting visitors to support conservation efforts. The same may be said for national parks—a vacation can inspire appreciation for the natural world and motivate visitors to help protect it. The cynical interpretation is that tourists visit merely for their own pleasure and “enjoyment”; a more charitable view holds that a memorable park trip might spawn more lasting interest in the natural world. In these scenarios, the best interests of the landscape (or the tiger) might be sacrificed somewhat for a (hopefully) greater good. Jerry Carpenter—the same man who had objected so strenuously to NPS winter sports policies because they might undermine the California winter sports industry—applied the zoo theory to skiing. He argued in 1958 that “skiers have done more to propagandize conservation of the wilderness than most other groups, since in order to convince people that the beauties of the mountains are worth preserving it is first necessary to get them up there, and skiing has

attracted thousands.”³⁷ As a ski historian, Carpenter was likely biased, but his opinion reflected a common and persistent belief that winter sports aficionados must be decent environmental stewards, based on their obvious love of the land. If Yosemite is damaged by overuse but visitors leave the park eager to invest time, energy, and/or money in protecting natural landscapes, do the ends justify the means?³⁸ It remains an open question, one that is particularly relevant in 2017 as public lands face new threats from government deregulation efforts. National monuments—and even national parks—are increasingly at risk. They need all the public support they can get, from both “real environmentalists” and average tourists who like to play in the park.

For a place whose major physical features seem so timeless, change is everywhere in Yosemite. Rockslides, floods, and erosion regularly alter the landscape. The park is not a static entity, but rather an evolving ecosystem in which humans play an oversized role. As Rebecca Solnit writes about an outdoor space next to the Ahwahnee, “Before it was a pristine meadow it was a golf course, and before that it was a cornfield. The cornfield, the golf course, and the meadow all reflect changing expectations of the landscape, to produce, to entertain, to inspire.”³⁹ Had the Ahwahnee meadow hosted any winter sports, we could add “exhilarate” or “energize” to her list. The meadow, of course, is just one small example of shifting priorities. As the park, its landscapes, and its programs continue to evolve, it will surely prove impossible to balance preservation and public use in a manner which would

³⁷ Jerry E. Carpenter, *California Winter Sports and the VIIIth Winter Olympic Games, 1960 at Squaw Valley* (San Francisco: Fearon Publishers, 1958), 52.

³⁸ This is an oversimplification, of course, but the main point remains valid. Zoos can present a particularly tricky moral quandary, since they vary wildly in quality and in their treatment of animals.

³⁹ Solnit, *Savage Dreams*, 250.

satisfy environmentalists, park officials, and the public. There's a wide range of options between restoring a natural landscape to a "pristine" state and allowing tourists free rein to run amok in public parks. So far, despite the constant tug between environmental stewardship and visitor services, many sports have endured. Tourists embraced the opportunity to play in the park, and transformed Yosemite into one of the largest and best-known winter resorts in the West. After NPS officials decided that snow queens, national ski championships, and the like were inappropriate on public land, winter visitors had "only" the natural spectacle to view, and the park in which to play. As debates over preservation and public use continue ad infinitum, the striped-down informal winter sports program will likely continue to attract and create new generations of snowbunnies and budding environmentalists.

References

Archives and Repositories

Harpers Ferry Center (Harpers Ferry, West Virginia; National Park Service archives)
The National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection
National Park Service records

The Huntington Library (San Marino, California)
Rare books regarding early tourism in Yosemite and California

Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.)
Rare journals and books about winter sports and Yosemite

National Archives and Records Administration (College Park, Maryland)
Record Group 48: Department of the Interior
Record Group 79: National Park Service

Palo Alto Historical Society (Palo Alto, California)
Local newspapers and records pertaining to the Curry family, Donald Tresidder, and the establishment of Camp Curry

Stanford University Special Collections (Palo Alto, California)
Manuscript on Yosemite winter activities

Yosemite Archives (El Portal, California; National Park Service archives)
Records of the Yosemite Park and Curry Company and other concessionaires
Superintendents' Monthly Reports
National Park Service records

Yosemite Research Library (Yosemite Valley, California)
Records related to park administration, concessionaires, activities, and individuals living and working in the park

Newspapers and Periodicals

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

San Francisco Chronicle

San Francisco Examiner

Sierra Club Bulletin

Sunset Magazine

Washington Post

Books and articles

III Olympic Winter Games Committee. *Official Report: III Olympic Winter Games, Lake Placid 1932*. Compiled by George M. Lattimer. Lake Placid, NY: III Olympic Winter Games Committee, 1932.

Adams, Ansel. *The Four Seasons in Yosemite National Park: A Photographic Story of Yosemite's Spectacular Scenery*. Edited by Stanley E. Plumb. Los Angeles: Times-Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1938.

_____. *Yosemite and the High Sierra*. Edited by Andrea G. Stillman. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994.

Albright, Horace M., and Robert Cahn. *The Birth of the National Park Service: The Founding Years, 1913–1933*. Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1985.

Albright, Horace M., and Frank J. Taylor. *Oh, Ranger! A Book About National Parks*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1929.

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

Allen, E. John B. "The Failure of the First Global Winter Olympics: Skiing at Lake Placid 1932." *Journal of Olympic History* 16, no. 1 (March 2008): 25–30.

_____. *From Skisport to Skiing: One Hundred Years of an American Sport, 1840–1940*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.

_____. "Values and Sport: The Development of New England Skiing, 1870–1940." *Oral History Review* 13 (1985): 55–76.

Allin, Craig W. *The Politics of Wilderness Preservation*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982.

Baker, Martha Louise. "The Greater Sequoia Park." *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* (January 1927): 15–16.

- Bederman, Gail. *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Biel, Alice Wondrak. *Do (Not) Feed the Bears: The Fitful History of Wildlife and Tourists in Yellowstone*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006.
- Blodgett, Peter J. “Striking a Balance: Managing Concessions in the National Parks, 1916–33.” *Forest & Conservation History* 34, no. 2 (1990): 60–68.
- Bunnell, Lafayette H. *Discovery of the Yosemite, and the Indian War of 1851, Which Led to That Event*. Chicago: Fleming H. Revel, 1880.
- Burton, Hal. “They Risk Their Lives for Fun.” *Saturday Evening Post*, February 25, 1956, p. 34–35, 99, 101–102.
- Carpenter, Jerry E. *California Winter Sports and the VIIIth Winter Olympic Games, 1960 at Squaw Valley*. San Francisco: Fearon Publishers, 1958.
- Clark, Galen. “Yosemite—Past and Present.” *Sunset* 22, no. 4 (April 1909): 394–396.
- Coleman, Annie Gilbert. “The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing.” *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 4 (November 1996): 583–614.
- Cronon, William, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1995.
- Dayton, Duncan. *Seed of the Future: Yosemite and the Evolution of the National Park Idea*. Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Conservancy, 2013.
- Dederer, Mike. “Silver Skis: Derring-Do on Mt. Rainier.” *Skiing Heritage* (September 2004): 25–29.
- Demars, Stanford E. *The Tourist in Yosemite, 1855–1985*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991.
- Determination of Eligibility: Badger Pass Ski Area*. San Francisco: Page & Turnbull, August 13, 2009. Accessed October 26, 2016.
<https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/historyculture/upload/Badger-Pass-low-res.pdf>.
- Dier, J. C., ed. *A Book of Winter Sports: An Attempt to Catch the Spirit of the Keen Joys of the Winter Season*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912.
- Dilsaver, Lary M., ed. *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994.

- Dyreson, Mark. "Aggressive America: Media Nationalism and the 'War' over Olympic Pictures in Sport's 'Golden Age.'" *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22, no. 6 (2005): 974–989.
- Essex, Stephen, and Brian Chalkley. "Mega-Sporting Events in Urban and Regional Policy: A History of the Winter Olympics." *Planning Perspectives* 19 (April 2004): 201–232.
- Farquhar, Francis P. *History of the Sierra Nevada*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965.
- Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration. *California in the 1930s: The WPA Guide to the Golden State*. Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 2013.
- Ferrin, Lynn. "Rock Star." *The Atlantic* (May 2009): 24–25.
- Frohlich, Robert. "Mountain Dreamers: Visionaries of Sierra Nevada Skiing." *Yosemite: A Journal for Members of the Yosemite Association* 59, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 10–13.
- Frome, Michael. *Regreening the National Parks*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992.
- Fry, John. *The Story of Modern Skiing*. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2006.
- Fultz, Francis M. "An Easterner's Impression of a Sierra Club Outing." *Sierra Club Bulletin* VI, no. 4 (January 1908): 255–257.
- Germic, Stephen. *American Green: Class, Crisis, and the Deployment of Nature in Central Park, Yosemite, and Yellowstone*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001.
- Gladding, Effie Price. *Across the Continent by the Lincoln Highway*. New York: Brentano's, 1915.
- Gold, John R., and Margaret M. Gold. *Olympic Cities: City Agendas, Planning and the World's Games, 1896–2016*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Greene, Linda Wedel. *Yosemite: The Park and its Resources; a History of the Discovery, Management, and Physical Development of Yosemite National Park, California*. Denver: National Park Service, 1987.
- Guttmann, Allen. *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.
- Hahn, Irene Penk. *Hiking Down the Grand Canyon and Other Adventures: The Travels of Three Minnesota Women in 1932* (self-published, undated memoir).

- Hall, Ansel F. *Guide to Yosemite: A Handbook of the Trails and Roads of Yosemite Valley and the Adjacent Region*. San Francisco: Sunset Publishing House, 1920.
- Hall, Ansel F., ed. *Handbook of Yosemite National Park: A Compendium of Articles on the Yosemite Region by the Leading Scientific Authorities*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921.
- Hearon, Fanning. "Skiing in the National Parks." *American Ski Annual* (1942): 69–86.
- Hildebrand, J. H. "A History of Ski-ing in California." *The British Ski Year Book* 10 (1939): 64–78.
- Hittell, John S. *Yosemite: Its Wonders and Its Beauties*. San Francisco: H. H. Bancroft, 1868.
- Hoss, Peter T. *Born in Yosemite*. Pacific Grove, Ca.: Park Place Publications, 2011.
- "Huge Plans for Yosemite Loom." *Motor West* 32, no. 8 (February 1, 1920): 40.
- Hummel, Don. *Stealing the National Parks: The Destruction of Concessions and Public Access*. Bellevue, WA: Free Press, 1987.
- Huntley, Jen A. *The Making of Yosemite: James Mason Hutchings and the Origin of America's Most Popular National Park*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011.
- Hutchings, James M. *In the Heart of the Sierras: The Yo-Semite Valley*. Oakland: Pacific Press, 1886.
- _____. *Scenes of Wonder and Curiosity in California: A Tourist Guide to the Yosemite Valley*. New York: A Roman and Company, 1872.
- Huth, Hans. *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.
- _____. "Yosemite: The Story of an Idea." *Sierra Club Bulletin* 33, no. 3 (March 1948): 47–78.
- Hyde, Anne Farrar. *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820–1920*. New York: New York University Press, 1991.
- _____. "Temples and Playgrounds: The Sierra Club in the Wilderness 1901–1922." *California History* 66, No. 3 (September 1987): 208–219.
- Ickes, Harold L. "Space for Play." *Recreation* 40 (July 1946): 179–183, 218.
- Inspiring Generations: 150 Years, 150 Stories in Yosemite*. Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Conservancy, 2014.

- Johnston, Hank, ed. *Ho! For Yosemite: By Foot, Horseback, Horse-Stage, Horseless Carriage, Bicycle, & Steam Locomotive*. Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Association, 2000.
- Jones, Holway R. *John Muir and the Sierra Club: The Battle for Yosemite*. San Francisco: The Sierra Club, 1965.
- Keys, Barbara. *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Kiester, Edwin, Jr. *Donald Tresidder: Stanford's Overlooked Treasure*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford Historical Society, 1992.
- Laughlin, James. "A Plea for Huts in America." In *American Ski Annual 1941–1942*. Brattleboro, Vt.: Stephen Daye Press, 1942.
- Lee, Ronald F. *Public Use of the National Park System, 1872–2000*. Washington: U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1968.
- Lehmer, O. W. *Yosemite National Park*. Chicago: Poole Bros. Printers, 1912.
- Logan, Olive. "Does it Pay to Visit Yo Semite?" *The Galaxy* 10, no. 4 (October 1870): 498–509.
- Lund, Morten. "The Short, Sweet Ski Life of Hannes Schroll in America." *Skiing Heritage Journal* 21, no. 4 (Dec. 2009): 9–13.
- Magill, H[arry] B[yron]. *Motoring thru the Yosemite*. San Francisco: Yosemite Publishing Co., 1926.
- Manchester, Lee, ed. *The Lake Placid Club, 1890 to 2002*. Jay, N.Y.: Makebelieve Publishing, 2008.
- Mather, Stephen T. *Progress in the Development of the National Parks*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916.
- _____. *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1921 and the Travel Season 1921*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921.
- _____. *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1922 and the Travel Season 1922*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922.

- Meyer, Jeffrey T. "Alpine Experiments: The National Parks and the Development of Skiing in the American West." M.A. Thesis: The University of Montana Missoula, 2015.
- Meyerson, Harvey. *Nature's Army: When Soldiers Fought for Yosemite*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001.
- Miles, John C. *Wilderness in National Parks: Playground or Preserve*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009.
- Muir, John, and Terry Gifford. *John Muir: His Life and Letters and Other Writings*. Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 1996.
- Muir, John. *Our National Parks*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1902.
- Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.
- National Park Service. *Management Policies 2006*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006.
- Newton, Norman T. *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture*. Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978.
- Orsi, Richard J., Alfred Runte, and Marlene Smith-Baranzini, eds. *Yosemite and Sequoia: A Century of California National Parks*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Pillsbury, Aetheline B. *The Real Yosemite: With Hints for those who See*. Oakland, Ca.: Pillsbury Picture Co., 1908.
- Pope, S. W. *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876–1926*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007.
- Pope, Steven W. "Rethinking Sport, Empire, and American Exceptionalism." *Sport History Review* 38 (2007): 92–120.
- Rees, Jonathan. *Industrialization and the Transformation of American Life: A Brief Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Righter, Robert. *The Battle over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Rogers, Daniel T. *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Rose, Gene. "The Ahwahnee: Yosemite Grandeur." *Skiing Heritage* 15, no. 1 (March 2003): 21–23.

- _____. *Magic Yosemite Winters: A Century of Winter Sports*. Truckee, Ca.: Coldstream Press, 1999.
- Ross-Bryant, Lynn. "Sacred Sites: Nature and Nation in the U.S. National Parks." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 31–62.
- Rothman, Hal. *America's National Monuments: The Politics of Preservation*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989.
- _____. *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998.
- Rugh, Susan. *Are We There Yet? The Golden Age of American Family Vacations*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008.
- Russell, Carl Parcher. *One Hundred Years in Yosemite*. Omnibus edition. Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Association, 1992.
- Runte, Alfred. *National Parks: The American Experience*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.
- _____. *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.
- Sanborn, Margaret. *Yosemite: Its Discovery, Its Wonders, and Its People*. New York: Random House, 1981.
- Sargent, Shirley. *Yosemite's Innkeepers: The Story of a Great Park and Its Chief Concessionaires*. Yosemite, Ca.: Ponderosa Press, 2000.
- Sax, Joseph L. *Mountains without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980.
- Schaible, Daniel, Patrick Chapin, and Brian Chilcott. *Camp Curry Historic District Cultural Landscape Report*. Yosemite: National Park Service, 2010.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Sears, John F. *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Sellars, Richard West. *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

- A Sense of Place: Design Guidelines for Yosemite Valley*. Yosemite, Ca.: National Park Service, 2004.
- Shaffer, Marguerite S. *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880–1940*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001.
- Sinclair, M. Thea and M. J. Stabler, eds. *The Tourism Industry: An International Analysis*. Wallingford, Oxon., U.K.: C.A.B. International, 1991.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Hidden Wars of the American West*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.
- Southern Pacific Company. *Yosemite Valley*. San Francisco: The [Southern Pacific] Company, 1908.
- Spence, Mark David. *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Stockett, Maria Letitia. *America: First, Fast and Furious*. Baltimore: Norman-Remington, 1930.
- Story, Isabelle Florence. “National Parks in Winter.” *National Republic* 15 (1927): 22–23, 39.
- Taylor, J. “Mapping Adventure: A Historical Geography of Yosemite Valley Climbing Landscapes.” *Journal of Historical Geography* 32 (2006): 190–21.
- Udall, Stewart. “How the Wilderness Was Won.” *American Heritage* 51, no. 1 (February/March 2000). <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/how-wilderness-was-won>.
- Urry, John. *Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London: Sage, 1990.
- _____. “The Tourist Gaze ‘Revisited.’” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 36, no. 2 (November 1992): 172–186.
- White, Richard. “‘Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?’: Work and Nature.” In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon, 171–185. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996.
- Yard, Robert Sterling. *Glimpses of Our National Parks*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916.
- _____. *The National Parks Portfolio*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931.