



SCENIC FEASTING is offered visitors to Yosemite National Park, famed for its waterfalls, majestic granite monoliths like El Capitan, three groves of giant sequoia trees--and panhandling bears. Other highlights of the Magic Circle tour around central California: eerie Mono Lake, the ghost mining town of Bodie, Bridgeport's Victorian Court House, historic and colorful towns of the '49 Gold Rush, such as Mariposa and its classic Court House.

Grizzly Giant, age 3,000 plus years, 209 feet tall and with a base diameter of 34.7 feet. At one point the road passage is through the Wawona Tunnel Tree, photographed since tourists first started to carry cameras.

The route continues on to the historic settlement of Wawona, where the Pioneer Yosemite History Center depicts man's activities in the area since 1851. The Wells Fargo office, Swiss-like in appearance, contains the old safe and roll top desk. A small box-like log and shingle house, used as park headquarters in the 1890's, has a bellows organ and period furniture. Another History Center attraction is the old covered wooden bridge over the south fork of the Merced River. The nearby Wawona Hotel, a wooden Victorian building with a long veranda, is one of the few remaining old-time resort places.



Note to Editors: ***** indicates where quick cuts can be made.

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YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK--Magic Circle Area of the Week

Dramatic Mountain Scenery and Historic Ghost Towns Highlight Central California Motor Tour

By Edward Collier

Back in 1855 an English adventurer, James Mason Hutchings, brought the first tourist party into Yosemite Valley and described his discovery in an article as "luxurious scenic banqueting".

Today 1.5 million visitors annually attend the feast of nature in Yosemite National Park. Driving up from Fish Camp, we started our Magic Circle tour around this delectable part of California with a breathless climb (Calif. 41) through Sierra National Forest.

Once inside the park's south entrance, a thrilled hush came over our family as a side road tapered into the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoia trees. Shafts of light penetrate down into the aisles between these monarchs; their unblemished red trunks reach straight up to a pompon crown of branches that are like emerald frescoes on a ceiling of vivid blue sky. King of them all is Grizzly Giant, age 3,000 plus years, 209 feet tall and with a base diameter of 34.7 feet. At one point the road passage is through the Wawona Tunnel Tree, photographed since tourists first started to carry cameras.

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Majestic Scenery

Stands of majestic sugar pine highlight the Wawona Road north. Your introduction to Yosemite Valley is spectacular. From the Wawona Road tunnel there is a framed view of El Capitan, whose gray granite face towers 3,600 feet above the valley, and Bridalveil Fall, dropping 620 feet. The petite volume of water descends in a tiara of lacy mist, swelling into a long train of gossamer finery over the rocks. Cathedral Spires, two delicate pillars of rough-cut granite, taper nearly 2,000 feet above the valley floor.

Black bears, more photographed than the President, frequently congregate at the well visited spots. These shaggy panhandlers, well fed by refuse and thoughtless tourists, amble around and give no heed to the constant battery of cameras.

Proper prelude to enjoyment of your visit is the park headquarters museum in Yosemite Village. Here a raised relief map of the area covers an entire wall. Another model in bas relief shows Yosemite during the last ice epoch. The Yosemite Indians are portrayed by dioramas with models illustrating life and dress. Their taste for Manzanita cider and gambling with dice and gaming trays is a fascinating, pre-Las Vegas touch.

Star Performer

Star attraction of the valley is Yosemite Falls, which gives a three-phased performance by spilling a total of 2,400 feet. Water plunges over the cliff top releasing a fine veneer of spray, cascades to the next level, then finally roars to the bottom and into the Merced River.

Popular at night is a breathless phenomenon, the Firefall, which can be seen from the valley floor at Camp Curry. A bonfire of red fir bark embers is pushed, or rather "poured", off Glacier Point to tumble down a thousand feet. The glowing cataract resembles an infernal waterfall before it perishes.

Leaving Yosemite Village, the way west out of the valley is over Big Oak Flat Road (Calif. 120) first opened in 1874. At Crane Flat the route turns east over Tioga Road, balancing on a rim of the mountains where wide patches of rock show through the lush evergreens like a molting animal. Farther on is stately Red Fir Forest, and then Big Meadow, a glacial disposal basin of gravel, silt, and placid little lakes.

Blue Lake Tenaya, another glacial period after-product, is in a bowl of delicately rounded gray cliffs that have a machine-turned look. Small beaches are shielded by odd canyons. For miles the road continues through the lush Tuolumne Meadows, part of the unbroken Sierra Nevada Range that is being invaded by the forest. Soda Springs, near the highway, has effervescent water with a high carbonate compound.

Weird Land

The climb to 10,000-foot Tioga Pass is bordered by craggy hills, lifeless and somber, its pines gnarled and dwarfed from the wind. The hair-raising old road down the pass has been replaced by a safe new highway cut out of sheer canyon walls. Spectacular views lead across the gray and tan desert valley and to the blue-green mountains that stretch east into Nevada. Below is silent, eerie Mono Lake, shimmering like an oil slick.

A garden of white statuary, grotesque and unreal, typifies Mono's south shore. There are several towers of these coral-like tufa formations, but the majority are less than six feet high. These unearthly pillars of calcium stand in the shallow, alkaline waters, so dense that the only living thing is a brine shrimp that swarms near the edges. Two islands rest in this dead sea: Paoha with hot and cold springs and the remnant of a goat herd; Negit, an ancient black volcanic crater, now a sanctuary for thousands of sea gulls.

From Mono Lake the Magic Circle route is north (U. S. 395) with a side trip to the ghost town of Bodie. Recently purchased by the state, Bodie has been preserved by the aridness of the foothills and is covered with yellow mining residue.

^{almost} Composed/entirely of frame buildings -- many with false fronts -- the bleached, sagging skeletons seem to be resting on history alone. Decaying houses hint of its exciting and prosperous past, which began in 1859 with the Fortuna gold strike. At one time 10,000 people lived here at a fever pitch, drawing \$80 million from the barren hills. Until state park rangers were assigned a year ago, the only resident we saw was the "ghost patroller", who packed a six gun.

Musty Elegance

The main street still has its board sidewalks, splinted and warped. The museum (admission), once a miners' union hall, holds early Bodie relics. Gambling tables and two town hearses,

glass paneled and fitted with children's coffins, are among the remnants of a now musty elegance that was Bodie. Outside are the old mail sleigh and ore wagons.

Wood tooling on the buildings suggests a faded wealth. The watchman's house previously was a glass-fronted, ornate mansion. The fragile old Methodist Church across from the livery stable is petrified in its weathered state; this outpost in lawless, sinful Bodie had the Ten Commandments on a plaque large enough for the whole congregation to read.

Above the town on a rise is the cemetery where gamblers and other disreputables were buried outside in "Virgin Alley" and the respectable town folk inside. Collapsed wooden picket fences, bleached and cracked, surround many of the lonely plots and tumbled markers sprawled over a few acres of sagebrush and dust.

Desolation is left behind when you return to the main highway and drive into the green mountain basin that holds the town of Bridgeport. Often photographed is Mono County Court House, a quaint Victorian structure erected in 1880 after a survey showed that the county seat of Aurora actually was in Nevada. Bridgeport is a favorite headquarters for deer hunters, fishermen, and rockhounds who come from afar to hunt for gem stones.

Entering Toiyabe National Forest just outside town, the Magic Circle turns west (Calif. 108) to climb over Sonora Pass on a tightly twisting road that is hemmed in by the furrowed rocks. Continuing through the hamlets of Confidence and Twain Harte, you hit the historic Mother Lode country whose fame was heralded around the world during the California Gold Rush of 1849.

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Curving south (Calif. 49) at Sonora, the way is through Chinese Camp, where the oriental miners and merchants fought the first Tong War. In Coulterville you are greeted with the tiny wood-burning locomotive for the Mary Harrison mine, resting in front of the shell of the Wells Fargo office.

There is an interesting 10-mile side trip to Homitos, once the wickedest of towns, but now an agricultural and cattle center. Homitos, which means "Little Ovens", refers to the stone and dirt graves above ground by the little chapel on the hill. The tiny and historic stone block jail, a "one-stop" cell, has walls two feet thick and a special door from England. Men put here by the vigilantes were usually hung within hours; only one escape was recorded.

Final stop after returning to the main highway at Mt. Bullion -- once large enough to support a brass band and weekly concerts -- is at Mariposa. Presiding over the town is the classic little white frame county courthouse with its huge clock tower. Built with hand planed lumber cut from nearby forests in 1854, it is still in use. Another civic pride is the Mariposa Gazette, California's oldest weekly newspaper in continuous operation. The legends of the era of the '49ers is given full historical coverage, with emphasis on Mariposa County, in the Historical Center. Panels show fronts of stores, assay offices, apothecary shop and saloon.

