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# Reflections on Yosemite National Park

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Reflections On Yosemite National Park

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PREFACE

Yosemite National Park celebrates its centennial this year, 1990. The park, located about 200 miles east of San Francisco, is comprised of scenery that tourists worldwide come to California to see. Containing waterfalls, granite cliffs, and forests, the beauty is overwhelming. Many have written on the merits of Yosemite, but perhaps none so eloquently as John Muir. Regardless of one's origins, the spectacle of this valley surpasses the imagination.

Geology began millions of years ago, forming the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range, and subsequently Yosemite, into what it is today. The Earth's forces stretched and pulled, creating land masses, but not until the glaciers arrived, did the area begin to look as it does now. It is not known how many glaciers travelled through the area, but those who did, dug as deep as 6,000 feet below the level of the ice itself (Jones 12). Rivers were directed off granite cliffs, forming waterfalls thus finishing the look that Yosemite has to this day.

The valley was first inhabited by the Ahwahneechee Indians who believed the cliffs and surrounding areas to be alive, and formulated legends to explain their existence. Not much is known of the Ahwahneechees, but one story tells of their downfall. Their chief, Choo-too-se-ka, lived on El Capitan where he could view the rest of the valley and address his people. He fell in love with a visitor to the valley, Tis-sa-ack. He proposed, she refused, and one night she left. The chief parted from his tribe to seek the maid, and thus began the tribe's demise (Will 39). After the Ahwahneechees left, the Miwok Indians moved into the valley and were those whom the settlers first encountered when entering the valley. The discovery of gold started a rush up to the Yosemite area, consisting of people hoping to "strike it rich." The Miwok Indians,

resenting the intrusion, met this influx with violence. Due to superior weaponry, however, the settlers defeated the tribe, which left soon afterward.

Problems started almost immediately once the settlers were introduced to the valley. Cattle and sheep overgrazed areas, causing the native plants to die out and allowing exotic varieties to encroach on the area. Large wooded areas were cleared to make room for building or mining. It was President Abraham Lincoln who set aside 56 square miles in the area of Yosemite Valley in 1964. His wording was that the land was given to California "upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort, and recreation (and) shall be inalienable for all time..." (Reinhardt 20). On October 1, 1890, the area was designated Yosemite National Park (although the valley itself did not become part of the park until 1906 when the state of California returned it to the federal government) (Will 42).

John Muir was one of the first preservationists to visit Yosemite and realized the park's need for protection from man's abuses. This was the beginning of his lifelong struggle to conserve the park. His love for Yosemite inspired many books, and of the park he writes:

Yosemite Park is a place of rest, a refuge from the roar and dust and weary, nervous, wasting work of the lowlands, in which one gains the advantages of both solitude and society. Nowhere will you find more company of a soothing peace-be-still kind. Your animal fellow beings, so seldom regarded in civilization, and every rock-brow and mountain, stream, and lake, and every plant soon come to be regarded as brothers; even one learns to like the

storms and clouds and tireless winds. This one noble park is big enough and rich enough for a whole life of study and aesthetic enjoyment. It is good for everybody no matter how benumbed with care, encrusted with a mail of business habits like a tree with bark. None can escape its charms, its natural beauty cleanses and warms like fire, and you will be willing to stay forever in one place like a tree. (Yosemite Reflections 3).

John Muir co-founded the Sierra Club in 1892 and was the club's first president. Years of devotion show in his studies and investigations making his largest and most disappointing loss, the damming of Hetch Hetchy Valley, all the more sad. Hetch Hetchy was the valley in Yosemite that was considered comparable to Yosemite Valley in beauty. It was dammed in 1913 to provide water and electricity for San Francisco. The flooding of the valley took place just before John Muir's death, making his last fight for wilderness a loss. His dedication and adherence to maintaining the splendor of the area throughout his life has given him the name "the father of Yosemite National Park" (Jones 46).

The valley itself consists of many sites, each seemingly more impressive than the next. The waterfalls include Bridalveil Falls, where winds blow the mists out from the rock cliffs, so that the onlookers below are showered; Yosemite Falls, which is comprised of three separate parts that together create the highest falls in North America; and Vernal and Nevada Falls, which both reward the viewer with their beauty. If one is lucky, and catches the correct light, he or she may spot a rainbow coming from any of these beauties. The cliffs themselves are awesome to behold. At first glance El Capitan appears to be standing strong and proud,

untouchable, but upon close inspection, one can often see people climbing it. Half Dome, perhaps the most often seen trademark of Yosemite, is breathtaking to see and draws the visitor's eye time and time again. Another rock formation, perhaps not as stupendous but certainly unique, is Three Brothers. Each of the three rocks seem to climb higher than the next. Mirror Lake, after passing rivers and rapids to reach it, reflects the surrounding scenery, almost as a carbon copy it remains so still. Perhaps most inspiring of all is the view from Glacier Point. Looking down, one can see all of the previously mentioned sites and more. Although the magnitude of the rock formations is not as evident as from the valley floor, the presence of them altogether takes one's breath away.

Many trails are available for the visitor to choose from, which range from easy to difficult to hike, allowing all to enjoy close association with their surroundings. Plants and animals abound, there being 27 types of trees, countless wildflowers, 231 varieties of birds, 76 varieties of mammals, and 29 types of reptiles and amphibians (Yosemite Magazine 67). The more common animals include coyotes, deer, and Steller's Jays, but if one looks carefully, other species of wildlife can be seen. The scenes and delights found in Yosemite National Park are endless.

"Earth has no sorrows that Earth cannot heal" (The Yosemite 92) wrote John Muir in 1912, but unfortunately, due to man's influences, this is no longer true. Yosemite is not exempt from man's harm to the environment. Luckily, preservation movements aid in protecting the park so it remains in its natural state and each of four interest groups has suggestions on how to do it. The public is probably most aware of the media's representation of the park which is sometimes positive, but more often negative. Conservation of Yosemite is now becoming increasingly more important to the park's concessionaire, The Yosemite Park and Curry

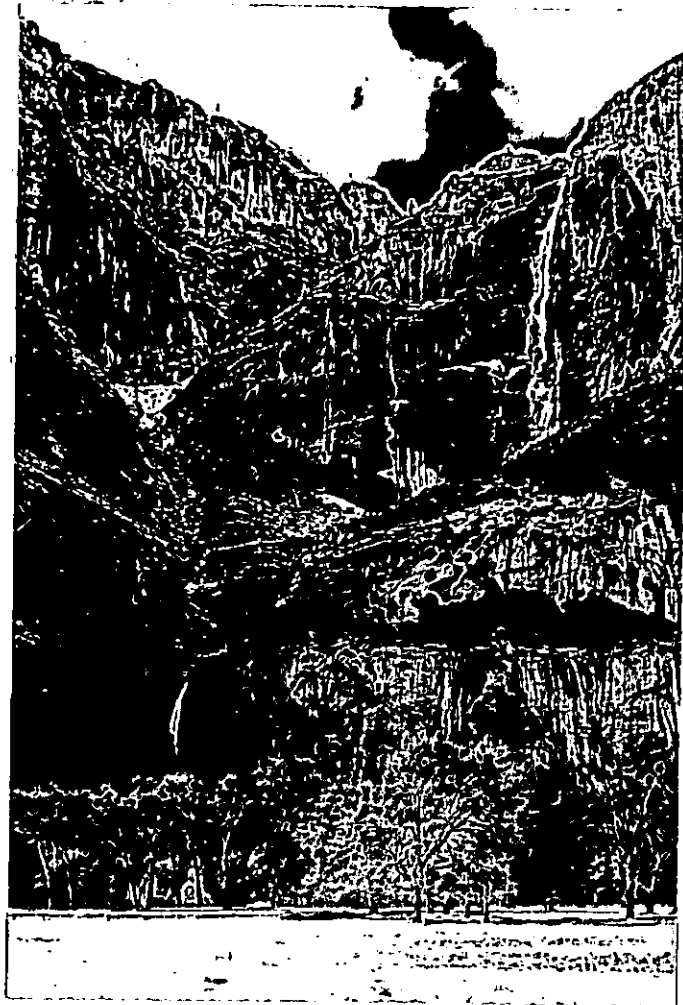
Company. Environmentalists, another interest group, can be designated into two categories, one with a more preservationist outlook than the other. The 1980 General Management Plan, published by the government, suggests ways to better conserve the area, but ten years later not much has been accomplished. This paper will examine the many controversies surrounding Yosemite National Park from the perspective of the media, the environmentalists, the concessionaire, and the government. In conclusion, I will offer my predictions for the best solutions for Yosemite National Park.



"The snow melting into music"

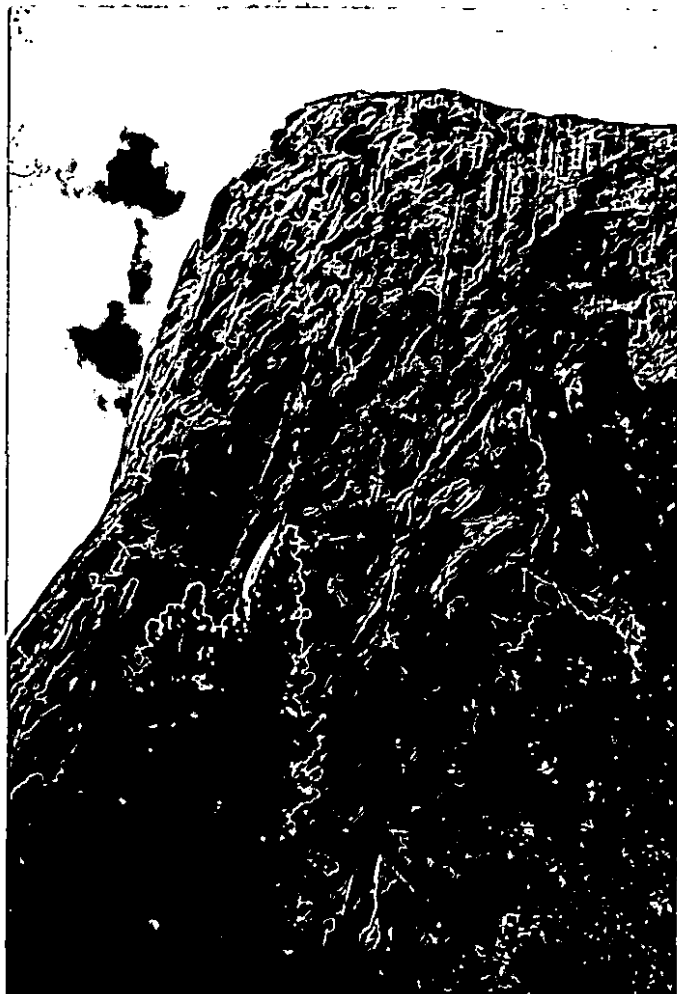
John Muir





"Everyone needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and  
pray in where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to  
body and soul alike."

John Muir



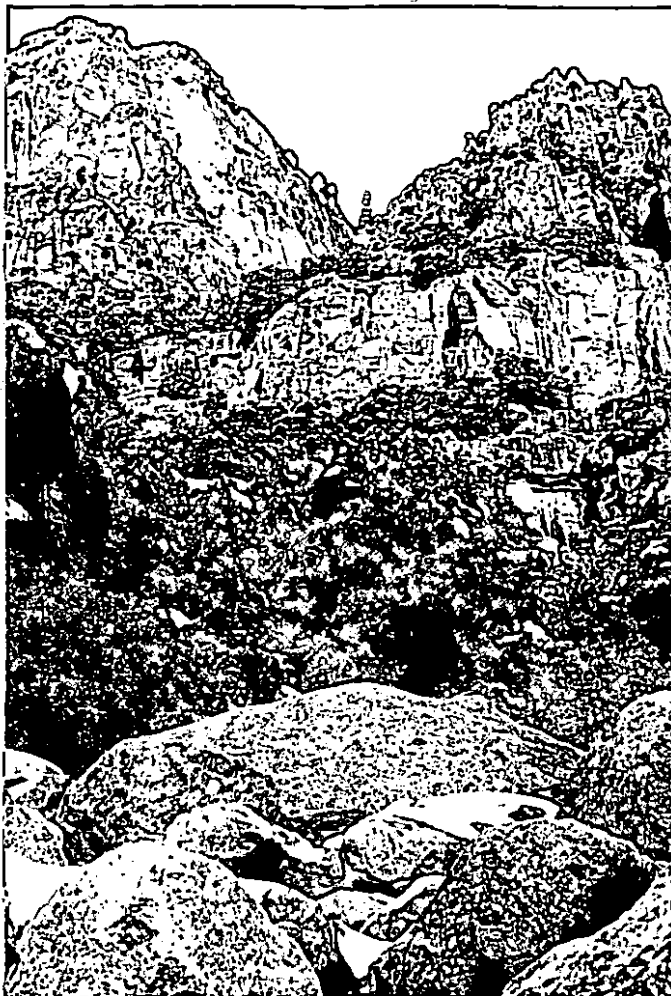
"The whole landscape showed design, like man's noblest sculptures."  
John Muir



describing half dome:

"most beautiful and most sublime of all the wonderful  
Yosemite rocks."

John Muir



"When I reached Yosemite, all the rocks seemed talkative, the more telling and lovable than ever. They are dear friends, and seemed to have warm blood gushing through their granite flesh; and I love them with a love intensified by long and close companionship."

John Muir



"While Yosemite's immediate appeal is to the senses, it's  
final appeal is to the spirit." David Robertson



"How ineffably, spiritually fine is the morning glow on the mountaintops . . . Well may the Sierra be named not the Snowy Range, but the Range of Light."

John Muir

THE MEDIA

The media is one strong influencing factor in creating the public's image of Yosemite National Park. For the past decade, the park has been depicted as overcrowded and on the brink of destruction. Statistics such as "on July 2, 1988, 8,509 cars containing 24,676 came into the park, joining thousands of others already there" (MacNamara 8A) are numerous. The titles of these articles such as "Careless Love: The Pitfalls of Affection in the Incomparable, Valley of Yosemite", "Unraveling the Snarls at Yosemite", and "Yosemite Valley: Can it be Salvaged?" give the reader the feeling that Yosemite is close to ruin. Overcrowding is a main topic illustrated by the media, but other topics such as accommodations, relocations, and restorations are also discussed. On the other side, there are some articles that do show Yosemite in a positive light, but these are few and far between. As a whole, the media, rather than promoting the splendor, exploits the news by showing the darker side to the park.

"You may never have heard of Yosemite City," Star Jenkins a summer park ranger wrote, "but it is a fair sized city - 40,000 to 60,000 people - complete with smog, crime, juvenile delinquency, parking problems, traffic snarls, rush hours, gang warfare, slums, and urban sprawl. It sprouts every summer in the congested upper end of the spectacularly beautiful Yosemite Valley..." (Reinhardt 17). This type of remark is evident in almost any article on Yosemite. Topics brought up include statistics on the ever increasing number of people and thus the overcrowding. As the number visiting the park increase, so does the traffic, and articles continually bring up the large number of cars and trailers filling the roads. Only on second thought does the media sometimes mention the shuttle bus service that the park offers.

Another problem associated with Yosemite, that the media highlights, concerns the park's accommodations. On one hand, the overcrowding of the park is so great that there is not enough room within the valley to house the people. The other side says that there is too much hotel lodging provided, and the number should be cut back. Even the campsites fill up quickly. Kris Dahister, on and off resident on the area says "There's a tenseness among people. You ought to be here on a Saturday at 4 p.m. when everyone's trying to meet the check-in deadline (It can take 45 minutes to go two miles)" (MacNamara 8A). The media gives the impression that many facilities are often unnecessary and excessive. Services such as one hour photofinishing, hair dressing, and available tennis courts are mentioned as extravagant and the reader gets the idea that many items contained in Yosemite are not needed, and in fact, detract from the area's natural beauty.

The articles continue the viewpoint that structures which do not blend in or enhance the surrounding scenery should be removed. The removal of the park's headquarters, excess hotel space, and frivolities such as tennis courts should be withdrawn from the park. These items are to be taken out so that more of the park can be restored to the way it was originally. This would allow visitors to view the park in its natural state, without many of today's conveniences, but as an area of great natural beauty. The media reports that once those structures are eliminated, they are to be returned to natural conditions with the help of man. Unfortunately, the media does not report on the lack of funding to make this possible. This gives the reader the impression that these preservation measures should be taking place.

Since the late 70's, the media has taken the General Management Plan and regarded it as the naturalist's Bible. Specific goals of the plan are



brought up in many articles, such as the removal of offices, accommodations, and facilities that do not correlate to the park's "resources." The media expects these goals to be implemented but the lack of money prevents such corrections from happening. The reader, however, believes that the park service and the Yosemite Park and Curry Company are to blame for the lack of accomplishment.

The other view the media presents is one that shows Yosemite as a paradise, but these are rare. Articles of this sort are appearing now to promote the centennial anniversary of the national park. Events of the celebration are described, such as a visit from President Bush, the burial of a time capsule, book signings, and the exhibition of art (Rowell 8T). One can expect many more of such articles as October approaches.

At times possible solutions to problems are presented by the media in a positive light. One such subject is the free shuttle bus service provided by the Curry Company. This system is available for the park's visitors to use so that they need not drive their cars. In the future this system may be used as a way to try to remove the use of cars within the park. This solution is not, however, foreseeable in the near future as the bus service is not yet that complete.

Another positive point that the media focuses on is the beauty of the park itself. Often the writer returns to his or her own past to describe the park of his childhood or a description that his parents may have seen. The author may even describe it through a naturalist's eyes. Often John Muir is mentioned, for his love for Yosemite transcends the years. Individual descriptions of the sites are also common in articles that accentuate the positive. Activities abound in the beautiful scenery and articles assert that one can pick from hiking, mountain climbing, fishing, rafting, caving, or many other things to do. Regardless of any problems, the area's beauty makes anyone's stay enjoyable.

THE YOSEMITE PARK AND CURRY COMPANY

The Yosemite Park and Curry Company, Yosemite Park's concessionaire, has a different view of the park than the media. In fact, it resents the view the press presents. Although the company's past environmental concerns were remiss, now it has dedicated itself to the park's preservation, so that future generations may enjoy it. Its major concerns are similar to the media's in terms of preservation, but they are implementing programs as well. Overcrowding and traffic are two of its challenges. Accommodations and relocations of buildings affect the concessionaire more than any other group because those buildings generate profits. Interest has now been sparked for preserving and protecting the nature within the park. They have implemented many environmentally sound programs that benefit both the park and the earth as a whole.

The Curry Camping Company first became settled in the park in 1899. In 1925 the unification of Curry Camping Company and Yosemite National Park Company took place, forming The Yosemite Park and Curry Company. By the 1960's, the park had become resort-like, due to all the amenities provided by the concessionaire. When in 1973 the company was bought by Music Corporation of America (MCA), rather than attempt to alleviate the problems of overcrowding, as one executive said "we're making a concerted effort to promote business" (Sumner 35). Wishing to continue fostering business, MCA's influence swayed the Yosemite Master Plan, the General Management Plan's (GMP) forerunner, into placing emphasis on building rather than dismantling facilities in the valley. However, in 1978, a new master plan was formed. This plan called for the "de-development of Yosemite Valley" (Reinhardt 20). Since then the attitude of the Curry Company has changed dramatically.

The main spokesman for Yosemite Park and Curry Company, in terms of environmental concerns, is Garrett DeBell, the company's professional ecologist. He comments on how out of proportion the media depicts the problems in Yosemite and attempts to explain how such reporting is obtained. He agrees that Yosemite is indeed overcrowded, but only in a small area and only at certain times of the year. As for the rest of the park and year, it is available for the public's enjoyment. Telephoto lens are used in already filled parking lots to make the photographs look "even more congested" (DeBell "Yosemite" 1). The reason for such misrepresentation is because the media does not wish to cover the whole story, but has a preconceived notion of the problems associated with the park. Its wish is to show the public the far more interesting and controversial story. Ratings are what the media are interested in and if the full story does not bring in good ratings, the story is edited before ever being written.

One example DeBell uses is when the television program "48 Hours" visited Yosemite. The very fact that the show came to film on Fourth of July weekend already would give the public the impression that the park is greatly overcrowded. The film crew searched for people's opinions on the state of the park, but when they could find no one willing to talk doom and destruction, "they imported a well known critic of Yosemite from Washington state, brought him in at their expense, and filmed him stating his view of Yosemite" (DeBell "Yosemite" 2). Throughout the program, no mention was made of the park's improvements and it gave the public a slanted view of the overcrowding and traffic.

As for accommodations, critics say that Curry Company is expanding the number of hotel rooms in the park rather than decreasing them. DeBell argues that they are not adding any hotels, just remodeling previous

space. In the Ahwahnee Hotel, due to complaints of its containing too many bars, one was closed down. In the space the bar had filled, two new hotel rooms were created. The same remodeling took place at Yosemite Lodge. When the bear management plan was formulated. Some cabins contained kitchenettes, which often attracted bears. The Curry Company remodeled new rooms out of the space previously occupied by a kitchen area. When opponents of the company complain that more hotel rooms are being built, the information that the new rooms are built in already existing space within the buildings is omitted. (DeBell Interview).

DeBell has a difficult time justifying the relocation of the buildings already located in Yosemite Village. The problem is that funding for that move is not available. He understands the reluctance on the governments part to pay money to move good houses and buildings, when there are homeless on the streets all over the country (DeBell Interview). To offset the costs and provide funding for those moves, some say that the franchising fee of \$600,000 paid by the Curry Company should be raised. This is not a solution, however, because that money is deposited directly into the U.S. Treasury, not given to the park. These same people then say the laws should be changed so that the money would go directly to the park, but as DeBell states, that is putting the "cart before the horse" (DeBell Interview). One must first deal with the real problems in the country before removing buildings whose removal may even cause more problems. The company has, however, removed many buildings including "The Big Trees Lodge, a small hotel in the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias:(and) all the employee houses between the old village site and Curry Village" (DeBell "State" 1-2). Also the buildings that have burnt down have not been rebuilt. So progress is starting in the relocation and removal of buildings, but is far from being complete.

Curry Company is also helping nature. Money has been donated to environmental programs which protect the Merced River and allow for research on predatory bird relocations. The implementation of the bear management program has refused bears access to dumps for foraging so they may return to their natural habits. Even the garbage containers throughout the valley are bearproof. The golf course by the Ahwahee Hotel, as well as a sewer plant in the park, has been removed and allowed to return back to nature. Each is a step in returning Yosemite to its former grandeur.

Additionally, the company has an expanded recycling program. Not only do they recycle aluminum, glass, paper, and plastic, but now recycle Freon 12 and antifreeze as well. They have funded cleanup projects with the money obtained from the recycling program (all profits are used for environmental programs) and "since 1977, more than 25 sites in the backcountry have been cleared of plane wrecks, damaged bridges and other man made debris" (Yosemite Magazine 82). They also provide the service of the shuttle buses. These buses allow visitors to leave their cars behind and travel to many areas within the valley as well as Badger Pass Ski Resort. Riders are charged no fee to use this system and it decreases congestion as well as air pollution within the park.

No longer are styrofoam products used, not only as cups, but also the trays used for meat. This refusal to not use styrofoam any longer is due to the fact that it is not biodegradable, and so causes pollution, as well as the fact that its production creates chloroflourocarbons which have been proven to deplete the ozone. The Curry Company now buys recycled products such as paper, toilet paper, and paper towels to create a market for the products. DeBell is now working on obtaining recycled office paper, but due to a new environmental awareness, many companies are trying

to use recycled products and there is a scarcity in the market. In order to obtain recycled office paper he is trying to band all the companies owned under MCA together to form a purchasing team to get recycled products not found on the market (DeBell Interview).

The concessionaire supports a few other smaller issues that are not as directly linked to the park, but are nonetheless environmentally sound. The selling of helium balloons is not permitted by any shops within the park. This is due to the fact that many of these balloons float away and end up in bodies of water killing marine animals. Also the Curry Company has a policy starting on the first of next year saying it will only buy tuna that is certified to have been caught without nets and has supported legislation for labelled tuna containers. In this way it is able to save dolphins by putting economic pressure on the tuna companies who then put pressure on the fishermen. These are just some of the many projects that Curry Company is involved in at the present time.

### The Environmentalists

Putting the environmentalists into a solitary grouping is next to impossible, for there are different views among them all. One grouping wants to shift emphasis from major revisions of the park to helping the present day visitor to enjoy his or her stay in the present. Even such environmental heavy weights, such as David Brower, believe the park not to be on the verge of devastation and in fact may actually be improving. The other group wants many more changes, to better preserve the park. Each of the schools believe their position to be the correct one.

The first group of environmentalists, who want to save Yosemite, wish to do it in a way to make today's visitor enjoy his or her experience. Unlike other environmentalists, they do not hold the Curry Company responsible for following the General Management Plan and believe that the concessionaire is receiving undue criticism. David Brower, former Yosemite Park employee and former Sierra Club president, says "I now wish the Curry Company were receiving the bouquets it merits instead of the bricks it doesn't deserve" (Brower 3). He says that compared to when he visited the valley for the first time in 1918, the park now looks better, even with many times more visitors. He believes that this is mainly due to the shuttle bus system that the Curry Company provides. He suggests another possible solution for the congestion problem which plagues Yosemite, to restore a railway system throughout the park. With a railway system, along with the shuttle buses already provided, tourists could easily have access to almost any area of the park they may wish to visit without having to drive their cars to get there.

His other major suggestion is to tear down the O'Shaughnessy Dam to revive Hetch Hetchy Valley. The proposal would allow the Army Corps of Engineers to remove it and "with the Berlin Wall as a precedent, pieces of

the Hetch Hetchy dam could be sold to tourists as mementos, then invest the revenue obtained into the Yosemite railroad (Brower 3). No cars would be allowed in the valley so that the same problems encountered in Yosemite Valley would not happen. San Francisco would do fine without the excess electricity, and profits could be made from the fragments of the dam that are sold.

Michael Finley, the new Yosemite superintendent, also agrees that the Curry Company is not to be held responsible for the park's problems and he wishes to make the experience of visiting Yosemite better for the visitor. Through acquaintance with the park's visitors, he attempts to determine what the tourists encounter to make their stay so enjoyable. In doing so he believes that enforcing the General Management Plan at times can be a mistake. Many parking spaces were removed to follow the plan, but now visitors are having a difficult time trying to find a parking place. This in itself causes congestion on the roads and pollution. The other, more preservationist side of the environmentalists, refuse to restore these spaces though (Stall M1). Just as Garrett DeBell, Finley also has a difficult time trying to defend spending large amounts of money to move good buildings 15 miles away when other national parks are in a much greater need of money. Better things can be done with the money if it were available, than follow the General Management Plan.

The more widely known environmentalists, such as the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, National Parks and Conservation Association, Yosemite Action, and National Audubon Society, have very different opinions on what the park should do. They wish to follow the park service's General Management Plan to better improve the park. One major goal they wish to accomplish is to decrease the congestion in the valley. The shuttle bus system, that the Curry Company provides, is a good solution, as even these



conservationists believe, but they have some additional suggestions for the service. They wish the bus service to be extended to other more remote areas of the national park, not just the valley and Badger Pass. The purchase of "smaller, narrower shuttle vehicles rather than the large-size tour buses" (Wayburn 2) would be wiser so that the roads need not be expanded. Parking would be available for the visitor at the edge of the park and shuttle buses would pick up and drop off frequently. Incentives should be offered for the tourists to use this bus system such as free parking as well as free admittance into the park. Disincentives are also suggested, like high parking fees for the minimal amount of parking within the valley. The fees collected could help pay for the shuttle bus service (Whitney 2). The environmentalists also believe that investigations into a rail system should be continued as well. This way the traffic congestion would be greatly reduced.

Another plan proposed by these environmentalists group highlights reduction of the number of hotel accommodations within the park, and expanding rooms on the park's borders. The General Management Plan suggests a 17 percent reduction in the living accommodations within the valley. This does not mean only the removal of the lowest cost tent cabins (for they are some visitors' only way to afford to stay at Yosemite), but across the board. As the number of accommodations in the park decreases, the number of them will go up outside the park. These can be run by either the concessionaire or private citizens. As for the Curry Company's wish to upgrade some facilities within the park, they believe that it should not begin to be done until that 17 percent reduction first takes place.

The last major stance that the environmentalists take is on the relocation of facilities. They wish for the de-development of the park,

and many of the buildings located within it, to be moved outside the valley or even outside the whole park. The removal of these buildings can be broken down into three categories. The first group of facilities to be moved are the nonessential buildings belonging to the National Park Service. "El Portal was chosen as the administrative site for Yosemite National Park over 30 years ago, and it remains in our view (the environmentalists') the preferred option" (Whitney 4). They not only wish to move the administration out, but also maintenance and warehousing. The second is for the removal of the concessionaire's nonessential buildings. Although Curry Company disagrees with this, the environmentalists think that today's advanced communication network makes those buildings unnecessary in the valley. The environmentalists wish that the next contract for a concessionaire, which is coming up in 1993, to follow these plan provisions. The third step to relocation is to remove much of the employee housing to outside the valley. They believe that new housing of an improved quality should be outside the valley, not within it.

As a whole, the environmentalists do not wish for all structures and accommodations to be removed from the valley. They want to preserve the park for the next generations. This may call for some relocations or reductions, but in the long run, may be what the park needed for survival.

The Government: General Management Plan

The National Park Service (NPS) put forth a publication in 1980, the General Management Plan (GMP), that discussed issues on how it believed to best preserve Yosemite National Park. The reason for this plan is a result of studies and public opinions on how to best administer the park for the following decade. It begins by telling the merits of the valley and how the time has come when problems have developed due to man's influences. It discusses the purposes of the park, the first being the "preservation of the resources that contribute to Yosemite's uniqueness and attractiveness" and the second "is to make the varied resources of Yosemite available to people for their individual enjoyment, education, and recreation, now and in the future" (General 5). It discusses many issues already mentioned in this paper, such as the removal of nonessential structures, the reduction of traffic and overcrowding, and the return of areas to natural conditions. The funding for this was estimated at \$155,000,000 to cover all goals. Action was to be taken in the years 1980-90 to achieve these goals. Now that decade is past and the government has issued two more publications reviewing what has been accomplished.

The 1980 Yosemite GMP: A Draft Analysis of Accomplishments To Date describes all that has, has not, and partially been done since 1980. The goals and recommendations of the original GMP are restated, but the difference in this analysis is that the accomplishments that were made up to the date of publication are stated, as are changes from the GMP. Some of the recommendations include retaining some facilities such as certain gift shops, eating places, and parking areas. Most often those that are to be kept, they consider accomplished. The problem appears when certain facilities are to be removed or redesigned. More often that not, "not or

partially accomplished" follows those areas designated to be changed. In the section discussing the Ahwahnee Hotel area, the goal to retain hotel and cabin rooms, the gift shop, bar, dining areas, and parking areas are all done. The removal of the tennis courts has not been done while the dismantling of the golf course has. Removal of cabins, cottages, and the post office have not been accomplished while retaining other rooms, gift shops, restaurants and more have been done. Removal of some clothing sales and the redesigning of a parking lot to remove spaces has been accomplished. As for park operations, removal of facilities is seldom accomplished. The retention of certain structures constitute much of what has been done.

After what has an has not been accomplished is stated, the analysis next lists projections for the future, scheduling dates such as the 1990's or by the year 2000 are often discussed, however, sources for the funding for such projects are omitted. While reading, one should take into consideration that the GMP as a whole was supposed to be implemented by the present year of 1990.

A review of the GMP is made in the Draft Yosemite GMP Examination Report. Once again this document discusses the major emphasis of the 1980 GMP, those being to reduce traffic, reduce accommodations, relocate unnecessary facilities, and to allow for the restoration of areas to natural conditions. As of August 1989, \$75,000,000 had been spent to accomplish these goals, yet little has been done (Draft 3). Again the dilemma of preservation yet promotion of the park is mentioned. This document from its beginning continues the vision that "The total Yosemite vision prescribed for 1980 in the GMP, especially as it focused on the valley, is far from being realized. Spatial limitations and funding realities have slowed, and will continue to slow the full implementation

of the 1980 GMP recommendations. It is important for everyone to understand the National Park Service's continued commitment to the 1980 GMP vision, the 1989 realities and the progress for the coming years" (Draft 4-5).

One of the major goals of the GMP was to reduce traffic congestion within the valley. The fact that the shuttle bus is available to all visitors helps with the problem. The costs of the bus systems are funded by extra charges put on Yosemite Park and Curry Company purchases. Evaluations have been made offering other possible methods of transportation ways to maintain the roads. Lastly more bicycle trails have been created for visitor use.

The goal to remove all cars from the park as a method of reducing congestion has many obstacles. People enjoy the convenience of their own car at the park, allowing them to stop in areas the buses would not. The physical area needed for parking lots outside the park for cars is limited. Also the number and cost of the shuttle bus service would rise drastically and the present day roads would not be able to handle the bus traffic. Usually traffic congestion only occurs on a few holiday weekends of the year or during poor weather conditions. Thus this problem is not as severe as many would make it out to be.

The 1980 GMP stated that accommodations should be reduced by 10 percent park-wide and 17 percent within the valley, and as a result of the extra 7 percent reduction in the valley, additional housing could be provided in other areas. The number of accommodations has basically remained the same since 1980 mainly because "demand exceeds supply" (Draft 16). Even with the present number of rooms, reservations must be made, and many visitors are turned away. Eighteen percent of all accommodations are allotted to commercial bus tours (which also lessen congestion) and

because of these tours, even fewer rooms are available to the individual visitor. Now, many varieties of rooms are available to the tourist, from high class rooms at the Ahwahnee Hotel to cabins without individual bathrooms. Visitors enjoy the ability to make a choice as to where they will stay at the park and for some, the low cost cabins are the only way they can stay. Those very cabins, because of their low cost and thus low profits, would be those to be removed. One success in accommodations that has been happening is that greater numbers of rooms are being provided just outside the park boundaries, at a distance requiring only a 30-60 minute drive to the valley.

There have been many relocations of facilities out of the valley. Those that have been removed or relocated include a waste treatment plant, offices, storage, a power plant, and housing. One problem is who is to decide which facilities are nonessential within the valley and will that evaluation change in the future? Currently the matter of defining "essential" is being approached by an employee housing survey and an environmental impact statement. Also some buildings to be removed are considered historic and therefore "should be retained by law" (Draft 20). These buildings, even if vacated, cannot be removed and creation of a new structure to take over its use, only creates more awareness of man's influences. El Portal has been chosen as the site for much of the relocation, but even this area has its restrictions. "Steep slopes, limited water supply, the presence of toxic tailings from the barium mines, high levels of radon gas emission, and a presence of archeological sites in the flatter portions of the area, all pose constraints on acceptable building sites" (Draft 22). If housing were moved, the employees would then need to accept the increased costs of commuting as well as adding to congestion already within the valley. Thus there would

be even more hindrances to the goals of the 1980 GMP than they originally thought.

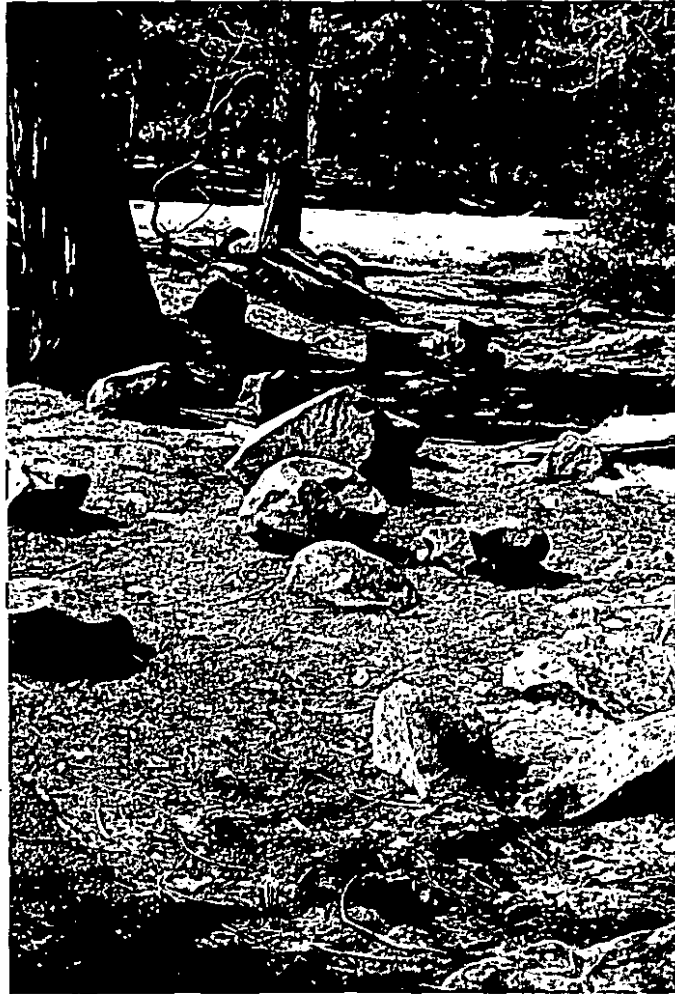
The draft also discusses the restoration of areas so that they may be returned to a natural state. Much has been done for this goal including the restoration of Stoneman Meadow, reintroduction of bighorn sheep, the removal of many parking areas and of a waste treatment plant, the cleanup of many back country areas, and removal of exotic plants as well as many other projects. Funding, however, for these projects is limited. Much of this work is being done as funding becomes available and now many more plans and studies have been begun so that the GMP's ideals can be carried out.

Time and time again these projects rely on funding. Now there are many projects prioritized for the 1990s. The cost for these programs is \$145,795,000 in today's dollars (the cost in actuality in the future as projects are done will be considerably greater) yet none is funded. The rank according to these projects that are most likely to be funded does not follow the list according to priorities. This means those items most necessary to implement may not be done in the near future. The National Park Service claims its continual dedication to the GMP and states over and over that the goals will be accomplished regardless of the time period it may take.



Site of a past dam, which created an unnatural lake in Yosemite Valley. This area is close to the meadow that John Muir took Theodore Roosevelt to camp. \*





Area where asphalt pathway was removed, but due to chemicals,  
will not revegitate again for years.



Power lines to be taken down and relocated to an area under the road so that they are no longer visible. \*



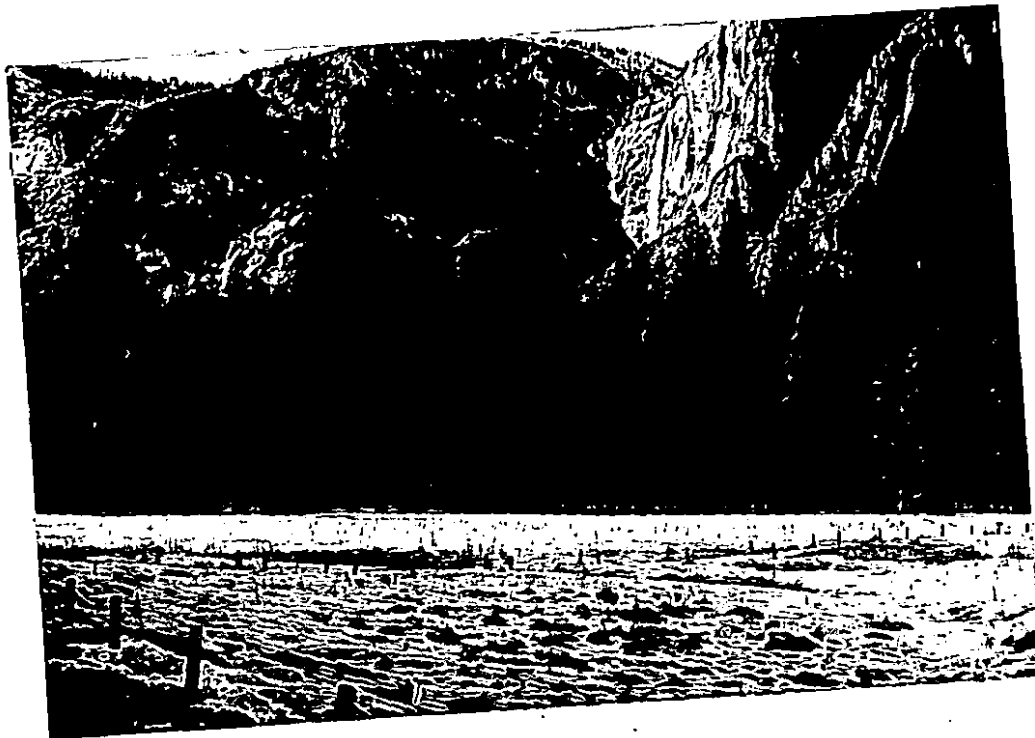
Area by four mile trail in which a parking lot has been removed. Revegetation has not taken place yet due to past asphalt. \*



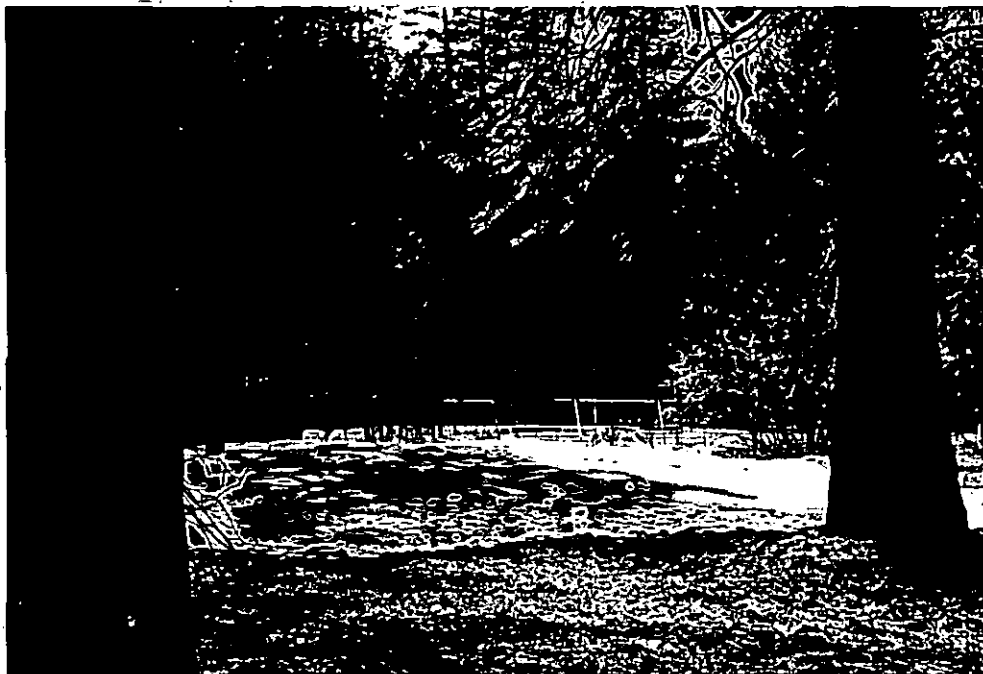
Area of past parking lot across the street from the four mile trail. \*



Stoneman Meadow, a successfully revegetated area as a result of the GMP. The small sign marking the fence reads "Native Plant Restoration Please Stay on Maintained Trails. \*



Other side to Stoneman Meadow which is also being  
revegetated. \*



The tennis courts by the Ahwahnee Hotel, slated for removal by the GMP. \*



A section of the golf course by the Ahwahnee, removed as part of the GMP. \*





A full sized road cut down to half size to create a bike path.  
This is part of the approximate 7-8 miles of trail built of  
the proposed 16 mile trail in the GMP. \*



A road in which the asphalt has been removed, but budget restrictions prevent it from being revegetated. \*



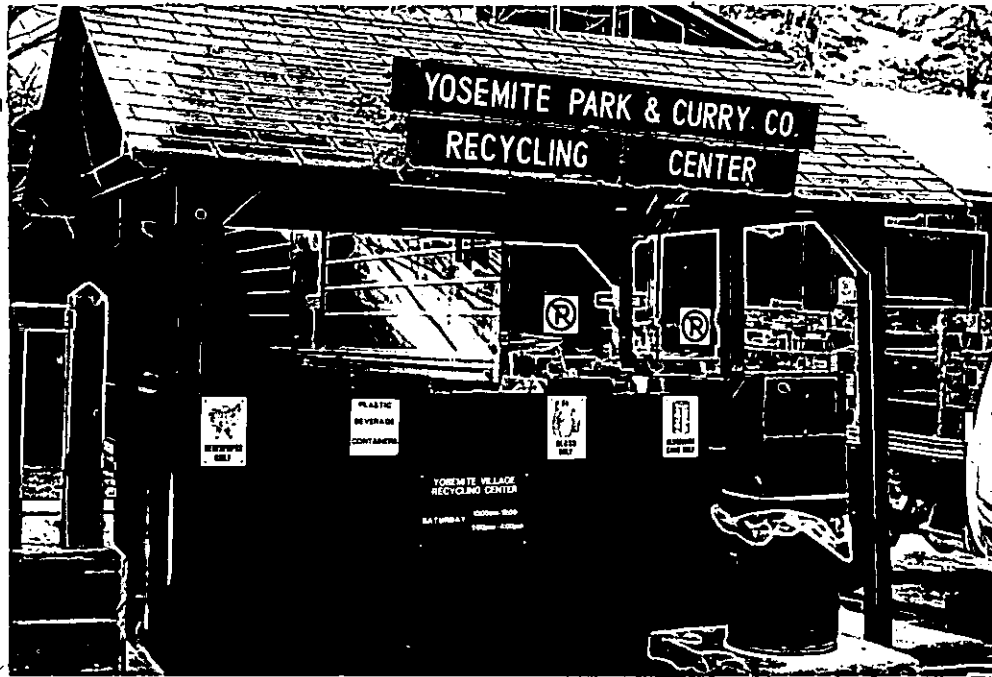
Another side of the nonrevegetated road. \*



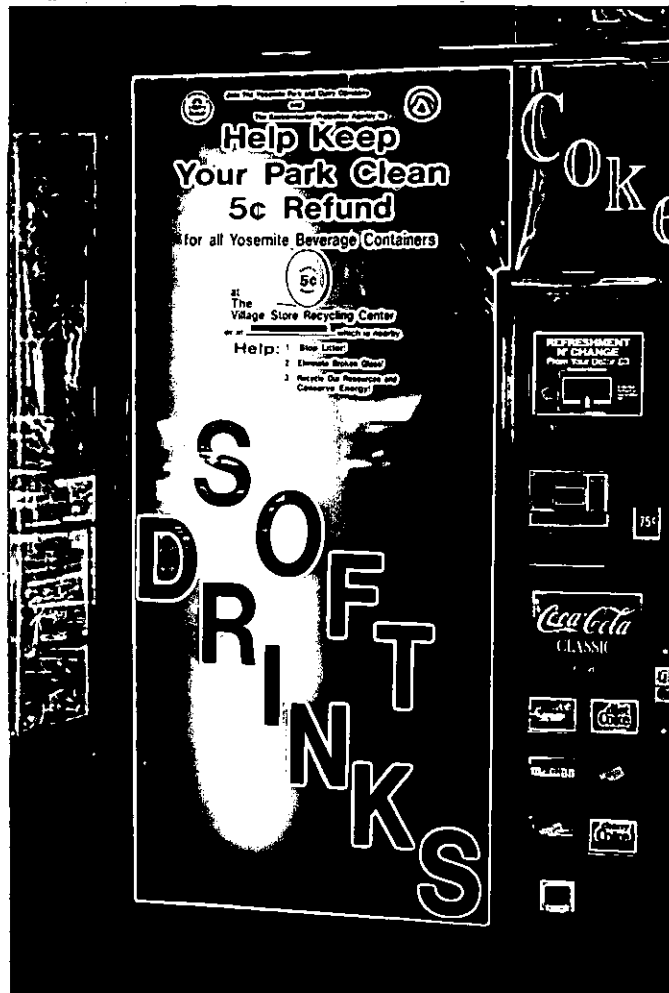
Mirror Lake which is now becoming Mirror Meadow due to the lack of dredging which was previously done. This allows the natural cycle to continue as the sand is washed in.



The Yosemite Park and Curry Company executive office located in Yosemite Village slated for relocation in the GMP.



The recycling center provided by Curry Company in front of a store in Yosemite Village. The proceeds from this program are returned to the park.



A coke machine explaining a 5 cent refund to promote recycling.

### Summary and Conclusion

As I well know, there are no set answers in response to those concerns regarding Yosemite National Park. Each interest group has its own merits and also its follies concerning all matters. The media for the most part depicts the park as nearly destroyed, with little hope for the future. Discussion of its values causes exposure, thus inviting more visitors. The Yosemite Park and Curry Company has funded many projects to aid in the park's recovery, yet is also in the business for the profit. The park's preservation is self serving to them in the long run. The environmentalists often are extreme in wishing little human impact on the area. They forget that people's appreciation for that beauty is what has kept the park in existence in today's world. The government and the GMP describe a very idealistic vision, yet explanation of where funding will come from for such projects is never given. I, for one, have never seen such an area so wholly composed of beauty, even in its present state. I also know, if preventative measures are not taken, the park's very beauty may be the cause of its destruction. Although each idea is intertwined with the others, I will attempt to express my views on the main points.

As stated before, the media mainly presents a gloom and doom outlook. One main complaint is the overcrowding that is encountered within the park. When the media reports on the number of visitors, that includes the whole year. Severe overcrowding occurs only in certain places on certain days of the year. In the summer months, flocks of people come to see the park as part of vacation. Within the park, the main attraction is the valley, where the major Yosemite landmarks are located. The rest of the year, however, is much less congested and allows the visitor a more solitary experience. This season also provides time for the park to readjust to the pressure put on it during the summer months. Regardless,



summer will continue to hold the most attraction to tourists, causing overcrowding. This holds true with traffic as well. So long as it is not busy summer months or severe bad weather, traffic (if you can call it such) is only held back due to the sighting of a deer or some other wildlife.

As far as accommodations go, I believe the number should be kept as it presently is, no more and no less. I do not believe the accommodations that are already built to be overly unsightly nor would I cut 10-17 percent of those rooms. By keeping all of the present rooms, visitors of all types and income brackets would still be able to visit the park, and Yosemite would not just be available to those who can afford the Ahwahnee Hotel. The fact that more accommodations are becoming available outside the park, yet within a reasonable range for the visitor to commute back and forth to the valley, is promising. If the hotels within the park were reduced, people would begin to rely even on these accommodations. Due to their distance, and the present lack of a shuttle bus system to these areas, there is liable to be more traffic congestion and pollution from the influx of more automobiles in and out of the park daily. Keep the number of rooms as it is, and as the number of rooms available increase outside of the park, those people will be allowed in the park so long as parking is available. Some may not be allowed visitation at certain times, but this is unavoidable.

I believe that some nonessential structures should be removed from the valley and some should not. Those whose nature does not have anything to do with the Yosemite experience and are only there for convenience should be taken out. One example is the tennis courts by the Ahwahnee Hotel. If people are playing tennis for exercise, they should hike or jog in the surrounding beauty. If they are playing tennis just to play

tennis, they can do that at their local park district or recreation center, not in a national park. Also some of the shops and dining areas can be removed as well. One or two per village is more than enough. Their large numbers are only to obtain higher profits and to provide convenience for the tourists and are not necessary to one's experience. As for removing structures that are just to be rebuilt at El Portal, they should not be taken out. This seems to me a waste of money as well as being destructive to two different areas as opposed to one. Moving the problem does not solve it, but may only postpone the destructive outcome.

The converse of all this is when the media discusses the highpoints of Yosemite, for it only serves to draw more people to the area. More people means increased problems. Problems such as overcrowding and congestion would become even more exaggerated, the same holds true with limiting the number of accommodations.

I can not fault the media for its reporting for it seems to be a Catch-22. Reporting on the controversy attracts readers, but does not tell the whole truth. The reporting on the good qualities only serves to bring in more tourists. I cannot ask the media to stop reporting on Yosemite, but my suggestion would be to tell the whole story--both good and bad. This allows the public to make a choice. At the end of an article or broadcast, addresses can be given for the Yosemite Association or Yosemite Fund so that more money is available to implement those projects meant to repair damage.

The Yosemite Park and Curry Company has indeed gotten some hard knocks from the press, many not deserved. Its environmental views were far from perfect in the past, but now the company exhibits a new ecological awareness. Talking with Garrett DeBell, I found him to be genuinely concerned with the environment. His frankness and willingness

to talk to some college student impressed me almost as much as what he had to say. For nearly an hour, he discussed the Curry Company's views on how to best preserve Yosemite and then outlined many programs they sponsored which followed these views. His appreciation for the beauty even overcame my knowledge that this type of talk is his job. The Curry Company does what it can to help preserve Yosemite because the day that Yosemite stops being beautiful is the day when tourists stop visiting and no more profits are to be made.

I believe it is wonderful that Curry Company is feeding some of those profits back into the park, particularly when a concessionaire may only be in the business for a fast profit. Charging slightly higher fees for items bought to fund the shuttle bus service alone shows the company to care. David Brower, in his article, says the shuttle bus service is most likely the reason why the park seems to be in better shape than several decades ago (3). The company sponsored recycling program also funds environmentally sound projects, while also making the public aware of the importance of recycling materials. These are just two of the projects discussed which I agree with.

I also agree with DeBell's assessment that money should not be spent to rebuild or relocate new buildings in different areas of the park than the valley. The government will stop funding projects in the park if the money is going to be spent in such ways. The buildings there now do not create insurmountable problems and should be left as they are. Only those that are nonessential (which I believe needs to be defined) should be removed and not be rebuilt at all.

DeBell's attempts at making all the companies owned by MCA environmentally aware is commendable. He realizes that these same problems are not solely encountered in Yosemite, but world-wide.

Everywhere, one sees similar issues and perhaps one way to combat them is to band together. Education is a key to let others know of the consequences of inaction. As society turns more toward ecological awareness, people will frown upon degradation of the earth.

I agree with many points along with David Brower, on the environmentalist's side. I, too, believe that Hetch Hetchy dam should be torn down. It amuses me that he suggests the sale of pieces to aid funding for the park just as they now do with pieces of the Berlin Wall. Should this valley be drained, the immediate refusal of cars into the area is necessary otherwise the same traffic problems occurring in Yosemite Valley will insue. I also agree with his appreciation for the shuttle bus system for having freed up much congestion.

I agree with Finley only up to a point. Yes, the visitor must enjoy his or her experience at the park, yet the park should not cater to the tourists' every whim. Given that today's society is one of convenience, and is not hesitant to waste or throw away what it deems no longer useful, the park must be careful as to what lengths it will go, to make the consumer happy. Frequently the public will harm the environment unknowingly. Again this ignorance must be replaced with education. With the emergence of the media's new interest in the 20th anniversary of Earth Day and the conservation movement, perhaps this attitude will change in the near future.

Should the bus service remove the role of the car in Yosemite, the incentives and disincentives in the plan are very reasonable (Whitney 2). Money talks in today's society and to save money, I believe that people would use the shuttle service without many complaints.

As a whole, the environmentalist's long term view is what I believe to be most important. There is a call for action now, so that future

generations may be able to enjoy a natural Yosemite, and if today's society must sacrifice convenience, so be it. The loss of some small comforts is not too much to ask.

I believe the government's GMP and the more recent examinations to be wish lists. They suggest some very nice ideas but provide no way to implement them. I find it sad that so much time and money was put into studies, plans, etc. when the money is not available for most of the suggestions to be fulfilled. I agree with Skip McLaughlin when he says "One of the most troubling aspects of the Examination Report is that it presents obstacles to implementation and fails in any way to look at creative solutions to the problem identified. Rather than looking for ways to insure that the 1980 GMP can be realized, the document focuses on why it cannot work and why it should be changed. Call it a negative vision" (4). He agrees that money is one problem, but also adds commitment. If the money were available, and people more willing to help, perhaps more could get done.

I believe some elements of the plan to cause problems themselves. If parking is to be removed, without an all encompassing shuttle bus service, more driving will take place. This will create more traffic. The same is true if employee housing was moved to El Portal. In fact, I do not believe it any better to move anything from the valley to El Portal. This is just moving the facilities to another area in the park and will destroy the natural beauty of that area as well. If the building has been built and is necessary for the running of the park, it should remain in the area it was originally put, even if the area is in the valley. Also, if a 10-17 percent reduction were to take place in accommodations, this would prevent tourists from being able to visit the park since there would be no available overnight accommodations for those who drove in.

In conclusion, I do not believe that the shuttle bus system is an end-all to the problems caused by private automobiles. Great amounts of funding would be necessary to prepare the roads for regular use by such heavy vehicles, as well as continual maintenance. Special buses that are narrower would need to be purchased to fit the roads. Also the shuttle bus system does not fit the needs of all visitors to Yosemite. The use of a private car is needed to get to some areas, both in and out of the valley, that the shuttle bus does not stop at. A complete shuttle bus service will be a great help, but will not totally replace the use of cars within the park today while cars are so widely used.

As I have stated before, the lack of funding to implement many programs outlined in the GMP is the main problem. I believe the National Park Service should prioritize better and use the little money available only for what is necessary. Using the money to replace perfectly good buildings is foolish and all funding will be stopped if the money is used as such. The last sentence in the Draft Yosemite GMP Examination Report says "The Yosemite National Park of the future will fulfill the promise of the 1980 General Management Plan" (33). Rather than say what will be done it ought to state how it will be done.

If I were in charge of how to best preserve the park, there are a few things I would do. My first suggestion, like Garrett DeBell's, is to reduce the number of cars allowed daily into the park. A lower capacity would serve to prevent overcrowding and traffic. Since fewer cars would be in the park at any given time, the congestion would disappear. This type of solution may even encourage car pooling among Californians, which may bring a few more people into the park, but would save energy and cause less pollution. The current number of accommodations already provided would be sufficient and fewer people would be turned away without a room.

Also a decrease in the number of people in the park would allow the area to recover from the previous overcrowding. If the decreased number originally picked is not enough, then just decrease the number even further.

There are obviously limits to this system. One cannot continue to decrease the number of people allowed to visit until only a handful remains, but most likely that number would remain small since this is on a daily basis, not for the whole year. To prevent people with reservations from being turned away, a system giving the park entrances computer access to the names and numbers of those who have reservations could be installed. The estimated number of vehicles would be subtracted from the number of cars allowed to enter the park automatically at the beginning of every day. When people with reservations come, and their names check out on the computer, they are allowed entrance and their number would be taken off the number on the reservation list. If people do not follow up on their reservations, then it was just fewer people in the park that day. This system would cost money, but this program would be less expensive than many of the others outlined in the GMP, and may even be more successful.

Another major proposal I would make is to accept the GMP's faults and discard much of what it wishes to accomplish. I think lowering the number of people permitted to visit the park on a daily basis would clear up many of the goals not yet implemented in the GMP. Those who reviewed the GMP, seem to be negative about its application, and since there is no funding, just drop the enforcement of the document. There is no use in beating a dead horse.

Education is the last key in solving Yosemite's problems. This problem stems from the way the park was, and still is, to be kept by the

National Park Service. Its goal is to both promote and protect the area, which seems to me a paradox. Our forefathers had no idea how exploitative man could get. They believed that domination over nature was progress. Now, a new environmental awareness has been born, one which leans more toward preservation. The promotion is no longer necessary because there are so few of such places left, that people flock to those that are still around. Once the National Park Service is educated and the main goal is changed, then the children should also be taught. Already one can see that people are learning because of such media events as Earth Day and slogans like "Give a hoot, don't pollute." Money saved on promoting the park can instead be used for its preservation, by educating the children. It is probably too late for most adults, but if the children are taught love and respect for nature at a young age, they will continue to do so for the rest of their lives. This is now not just necessary for the preservation of Yosemite National Park, but for the preservation of the whole Earth.



Those interested in the implementation of many of these programs may contribute money to . . .

Yosemite Fund  
155 Montgomery Street  
Suite 1104  
San Francisco, CA 94104

OR

Yosemite Association  
P. O. Box 545  
Yosemite National Park, CA 95389

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\*Information on sites for photographs marked with \*, supplied by Jim Snyder, Park Historian.