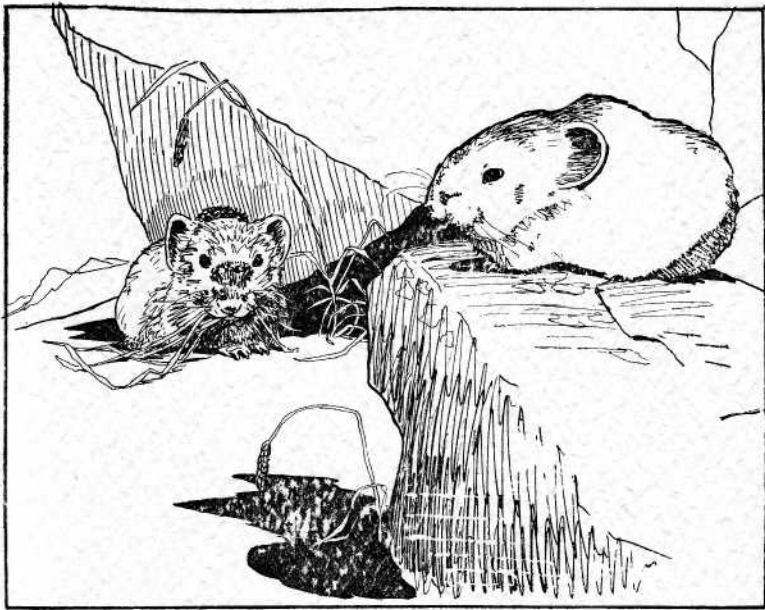


YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DEPARTMENT
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F. A. Kittredge, Superintendent

C. F. Brockman, Park Naturalist

M. V. Walker, Associate Park Naturalist

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HYMN TO POHONO (*)

By June Alexander

Moan through the water-hollowed caves,
Spirit of evil, spirit of ill.
Send your misty maiden slaves
Chanting and singing your ominous will
Frightening the Indians, telling your kill.
Swell through the trembling fir trees and pines,
Wind of the waterfall, breath of the spray,
Send your bad omens of death and its signs
Through the deep Valley; exult in the way
The night birds sit silent and dumb with dismay.
Whisper your thoughts to the grasses and flowers;
Breath your dark omen through the Valley turned
chill;
Roll down the canyon throughout the night hours;
Stir all the air with your spirit of ill—
The Valley succumbs to your ominous will!
Wrap the sheer cliffs in your thick evil veiling,
Swirl round the tallest peaks, coil through the tomb
Of your own waterfall, Pohono, assailing
All souls overwhelmed by your threatening gloom
In the Valley of darkness, Oh Spirit of Doom!

* Pohono, the Indian name of Bridalveil Fall, is supposed to signify "puffing wind"—referring to the updraft from the Valley floor. Some people interpret Pohono in the more fanciful manner of "spirit of the evil wind." (See Farquhar, F. P.—"Place Names of the High Sierra;" also Smith, Bertha A.—"Yosemite Legends," pp 13-17).

JOSEPH N. LECONTE

By Elizabeth H. Godfrey

If an early introduction to Mother Nature forms a background for a later and deeper appreciation of her charms, Joseph N. LeConte is an outstanding example. The father, Dr. Joseph LeConte, (1) set the pace, and the son followed in his steps not only academically, but in "climbing the mountains and getting their good tidings."

Joseph N. LeConte was born February 7, 1870, in Oakland, California. In 1874 his family moved to Berkeley. Both his father and uncle were members of the University of California faculty. At that time the University, but recently organized, had only two buildings — North and South Halls.

There Joseph N. LeConte grew up in a "University atmosphere" amid

the pleasant surroundings of Strawberry Canyon and the Berkeley Hills.

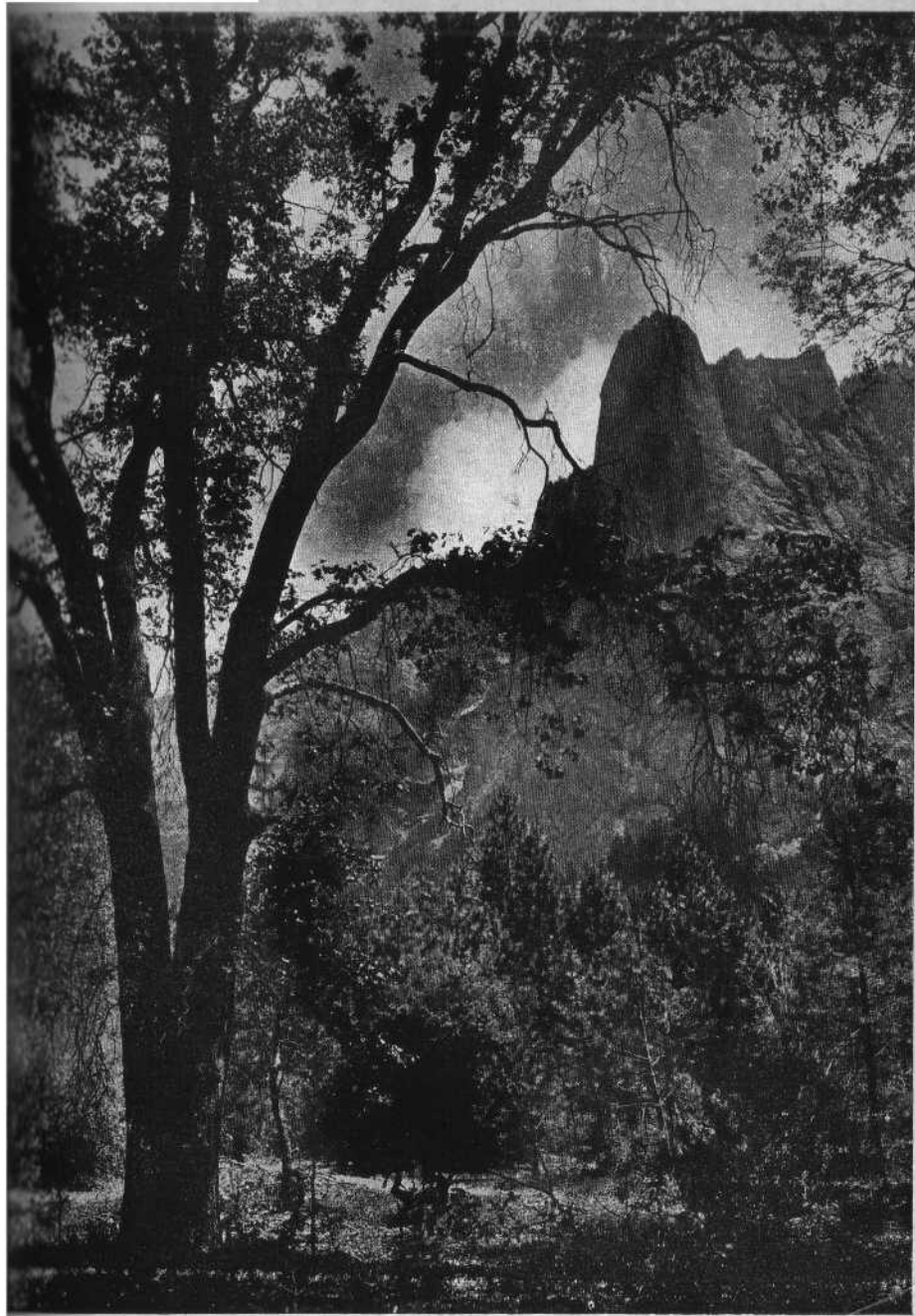
In the summer of 1878, young Joseph's father took the family to Yosemite on a camping trip. With wagon and animals they journeyed to Stockton via steamboat, and from there camped out each night by the roadside. The journey required six days and nearly three weeks were spent in Yosemite Valley. Through this and similar trips, young Joseph acquired an early love for hiking and the Sierra, which resulted in his exploration, over a period of 45 years, of this vast rugged range.

Every summer from 1887 to 1931, from Hetch Hetchy to Mount Whitney, he camped in the Sierra. He mapped by triangulation this far-

(1) Joseph LeConte was born on the Plantation Woodsmanton, Liberty County, Georgia, February 26, 1823. Following graduation from the University of Georgia in 1841, he continued his education at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, completing his training there in April 1845. Although he achieved moderate success in medicine he gave up practice in 1850 to study for fifteen months under Louis Agassiz, Professor of Geology and Zoology at Harvard. He began his life work as Professor of Geology at Oglethorpe University soon afterward. In 1852 he became a member of the faculty of the University of Georgia, and in 1856 began a thirteen year association with South Carolina College at Columbia. During the Civil War, when the college was disbanded, he served as a chemist in a large manufactory of medicines for the Confederate Army. In December 1869 he accepted a position as Professor of Geology and Natural History on the staff of the newly organized University of California. He served this institution for 32 years, during which time his broad education and gift for imparting knowledge endeared him to associates and students alike.

His first visit to Yosemite was in 1870, thereby beginning an association with this region that was to continue to the time of his death (July 6, 1901 at Camp Curry) at 78 years of age.

Dr. LeConte contributed much to scientific thought and had a far-reaching influence, through his writings and lectures, on geology, biology, philosophy, and the phenomena of binocular vision. His reputation as a geologist won him membership in the National Academy of Science and in 1891 he was elected to the presidency of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the International Geological Congress. He was also a charter member of the Sierra Club. The LeConte Memorial Lodge in Yosemite Valley, built by the Sierra Club in 1903, (dedicated 1904) was erected as a memorial to him.



Sentinel Rock. Photo by Joseph N. LeConte

stretching area before the United States Geological Survey started its work.

He became highly proficient as an amateur photographer, taking his first pictures of Yosemite in 1889 when nineteen years of age, with one of the first kodak cameras.

In 1887, after graduating from high school in Berkeley, he entered the University of California, enrolling for the course in mechanical engineering. After graduation from the University he studied at Cornell University for a year, receiving a degree in mechanical engineering in 1892.

For 45 years after his return to Berkeley, where the position of assistant in mechanics at the University of California was awarded him, he served on the University staff. He became outstanding as a professor of mechanics and of hydraulic engineering. One of his more interesting accomplishments was his association, in 1895, with a research program at the University which included the study of X-rays. He supervised the construction of the necessary apparatus which, but one week after Rontegen's discovery, was used in making what was probably the first radiograph in the United States, and certainly the first on the Pacific Coast. The subject was the son of one of the professors who had been accidentally shot in the arm. After an exposure of $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours the photographic plate indicated the location of the bullet to the attending

physician.

When the Sierra Club was organized in 1892, Joseph N. LeConte, like his father, became a charter member. He was president of this organization for two years following the death of John Muir, the first president, who had served from the time of the founding of that organization. For 42 years he served continuously on the Board of Directors and, with the exception of two years, was treasurer from 1899 to 1931.

In 1901, Joseph N. LeConte married Helen Gompertz who he had known since childhood, and who shared his interests in camping and the out-of-doors. The marriage was a happy one. There were two children, a daughter Helen and a son Joseph.

In 1906 when the fire caused by the earthquake burned San Francisco from the water front to Van Ness Avenue, Joseph N. LeConte was employed to estimate some of the damage.

The death of Mrs. LeConte in 1924, was a great loss and sorrow. During the ensuing year he devoted his spare time to the writing of a book on Hydraulics which was published by the McGraw Hill Book Company in the fall of 1926.

Joseph N. LeConte's second marriage to Miss Adelaide Graham, an old friend of the family, took place in February, 1929.

When Professor LeConte retired from the faculty of the University of California in 1937, he was honored

by a banquet at International House in Berkeley, attended by 300 students and faculty members of the University, with President Sproul as toastmaster of the occasion. He has since made his home at Carmel-by-the-sea with his charming wife. On March 23, 1945, Charter Day at the University of California, Professor LeConte returned to the University to receive the Doctor of Laws degree.

In 1940, because of his broad understanding of the Yosemite region and the Sierra, Professor LeConte was appointed as Collaborator on the Yosemite Advisory Board which consists of three members. Two of

them, Duncan McDuffie (chairman) and Wm. Colby are old Sierra Club friends of Professor LeConte. The third member is Dr. John P. Buwalda, head of the Geology Department of the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California.

"Joseph LeConte," in the words of Ansel Adams, (2) "knows and loves his Sierra. He does not claim any glory, any prior rights of exploration, or any authority—other than the understanding of their meaning and beauty. He has gone among them many times, photographed them, written about them, and stimulated untold thousands to follow the fragrant paths under the clean skies."

(2) See "The Photography of Joseph N. LeConte" by Ansel Adams. Sierra Club Bulletin, October 1944.

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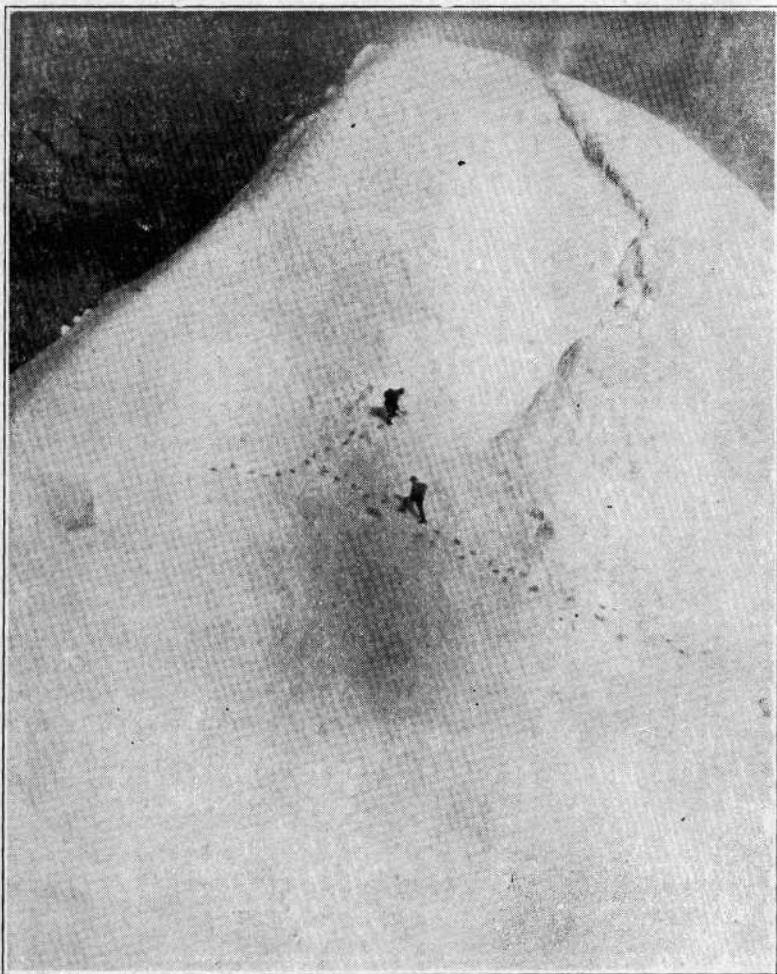
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THIS YEAR'S ICE CONE**By C. Frank Brockman, Park Naturalist**

Each winter one of the most interesting features of Yosemite Valley is the ice cone that forms at the base of the Upper Yosemite Fall. Although each of the principal waterfalls in

this area are characterized by the presence of an ice cone during the winter none are so large nor as conspicuous as this one. Consequently it is the subject of considerable in-



Ice Cone below the upper Yosemite Fall as it appeared in February, 1932

rest on the part of both visitors and residents.

The cone begins to form when cold weather arrives in the fall and as winter progresses it gradually increases in size until, about the middle to the latter part of March, it achieves maximum proportions for the season. This winter it was evident that the cone was one of the largest in recent years, and to get a better estimate of its size a trip was made to its base on February 26th.

Although we were unable to make accurate measurements it was possible to roughly estimate its size by means of photographs made of the terrain at the base of the fall in November 1935, upon which data taken

by the engineering department at the same time was noted. A comparison of the existing cone with these photographs and data indicated its height to be approximately 275 feet. Its greatest diameter, about 100 feet above the base, was better than 500 feet.

The foregoing estimate might be compared with that of an ice cone which formed during the days of John Muir. Early photographs indicate that it was probably one of the largest on record. This one was 322 feet high, had a base area of 3.7 acres, and contained a total volume of 25 million cubic feet of snow and ice.

NATURE NOTELETS

One day late in January Chief Ranger Sedergren and Asst. Chief Ranger Robinson, while driving along the road in the vicinity of the El Capitan bridge, noted a small deer standing in the frigid waters of the Merced a short distance from shore. The animal had apparently been frightened for it was visibly trembling, and gave other evidence of fatigue from a recent chase. Closer inspection revealed a coyote lying in wait upon the bank of the river. Apparently the deer, pursued by the coyote, had sought refuge in the stream where the latter would not follow. Deer have often been observed using this maneuver in throwing off pursuit. However, the

stream at this point was too wide, deep, powerful, and cold to permit a ready crossing and the coyote had slyly secreted itself in nearby vegetation. There it awaited the return of its prey to dry land, at which time the chase could again be resumed. The "survival of the fittest" is a law of the wild; yet the two rangers could not resist the temptation to drive the coyote away in the hope that this effort would be successful in giving the deer a chance to make good its escape. (C. F. B.)

Varied thrushes are generally quite common in Yosemite Valley each winter and this year has been

no exception. Last January, while observing a flock of these attractive birds feeding in the vicinity of his residence, Mr. D. A. Miller witnessed an attack, indicative of the fact that all wild things must be constantly alert and watchful against danger in all forms. The quiet feeding of the thrushes was suddenly interrupted as a dark shadow sped swiftly over the ground. Alarmed, the birds rose quickly into the air as a sharp-shinned hawk, dropping swiftly from above, drove viciously into their midst. The attack was too sudden to go unrewarded. In a space of time hardly sufficient to identify its presence the hawk had knocked one of the thrushes out of the group and quickly bore it away. (C. F. B.)

On February 28, 1946, while hiking along the south bank of the Merced river—just below the Pohono bridge—several Sierra newts (*Triturus sierrae*) were discovered. They were quite active and moved around over the wet, moist ground. One individual was observed crawling over a small patch of snow in a protected and shaded area. The deep red to burnt umber color of the salamander made it stand out conspicuously against the white

background of snow. (Park Ranger Tom Rixon)

Roger Murray, a pupil in the fourth grade of the Yosemite school found a fine specimen of the Sierra Nevada salamander (*Ensatina sierrae*) on March 5, 1946, and brought it to the museum for identification. He discovered it while turning over rocks along the steep bank of Yosemite creek just above the bridge near Yosemite Lodge. The bright yellow to orange spots attracted his attention, and he brought it in because "it looked like a funny lizard." (M. V. W.)

An adult tree toad (*Hyla regilla*) that had been in a glass jar on the back porch (well shaded) was placed in a light brown to nearly white paper sack in order to carry it to the Yosemite Museum. Considerable dark pigment, in addition to the dark bar through the eyes, was evident when the specimen was placed in the sack. Some ten minutes later, when it was removed practically all traces of dark pigment had disappeared and the main body color was a light ashy-gray. The dark eye bar still remained however, as a distinctive marking. (M. V. W.)





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Dan Anderson