

# UC Berkeley

## Places

### Title

Maintaining the Yosemite Experience [Place Debate: Yosemite National Park - Prospects]

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8840s5z7>

### Journal

Places, 6(3)

### ISSN

0731-0455

### Author

Brower, David R

### Publication Date

1990-04-01

Peer reviewed

## Maintaining the Yosemite Experience

Yosemite is where the national park idea began. President Lincoln's signature made Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees the first landscape deemed worthy of protection by the federal government. The idea became one of our culture's best exports—and perhaps our own best institution for the future. Yellowstone was an afterthought.

Yosemite is my second home, operated and maintained, happily, at federal expense. I have visited Yosemite as often as pos-

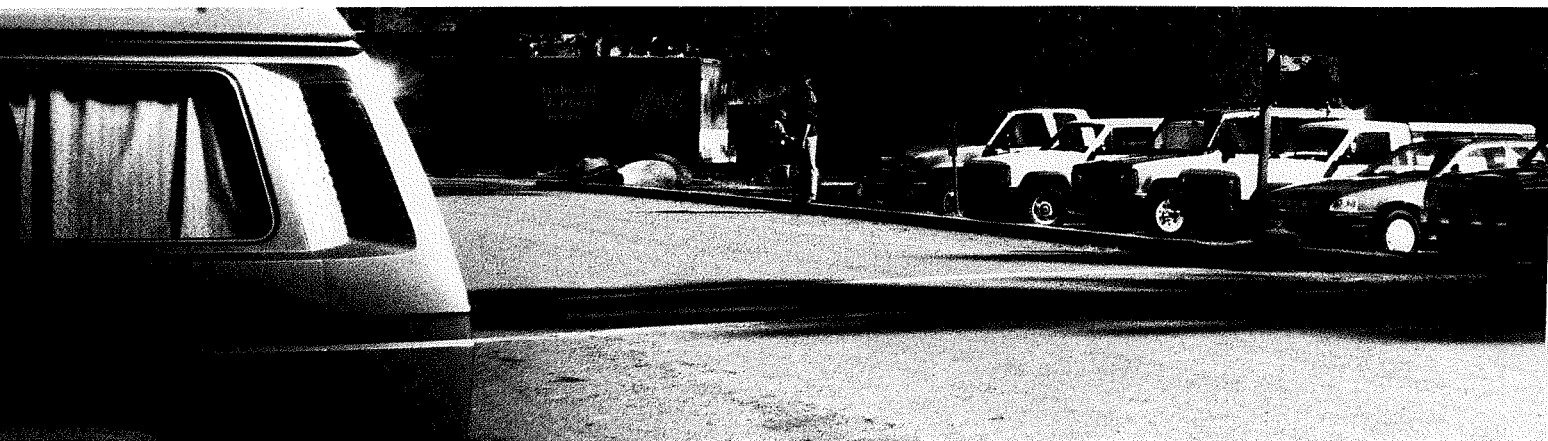


Photo by Hugh Hardy.

sible since 1918, lived in the Valley from 1935 to 1938, traveled many of its trails, made 17 first ascents on the Valley's walls and four first winter ascents of Yosemite's peaks, have read almost everything written about it, seen a lot of it through the mind and eyes of Ansel Adams and have exposed my wife and children to it at every opportunity.

When asked to assess the natural environment of Yosemite, I can only say that I wholly approve of it and defy any part of the earth to surpass it. I admire the design and management decisions that created Yosemite, decisions in which human beings had no role at all.

The principal design and management decisions are still carried on by the Creator. Nature should be designed exactly as it is. Neither I nor anyone else needs to second-guess God. At the earliest opportunity we should cease trying to.

The built environment created to support visitors in the Valley is exemplary, with special credit due the work of the late Eldridge T. Spencer in the design of Yosemite Lodge. Certain logistics in the management of visitation have altered Yosemite to let more people experience the grand design, and I think they have been initiated and carried out in a way that is exemplary.

The visitor count is now six times what it was when I lived in the Valley, and, thanks principally to the shuttle buses, the impact has been diminished—except for the chalk and bolt holes on the cliffs, which are probably less damaging than my pitons were. (No more placing of bolts from rappels. Let climbers earn the tough faces, not mechanize them.)

What should we do to protect this place? Yosemite should be surrounded by a Yosemite Biosphere Reserve, it and the present

will be fewer people per acre for at least part of the year.

I would like to see the clock turned back and mature thought given to realigning the Tioga Road. Restore the old road in Lee Vining Canyon and let rock slides obliterate the over-engineered grade in the lower stretch, where a road should never have been built in the first place. At Tenaya Lake build two one-way roads over the Snow Flat route and require former NPS Director Connie Wirth (or his heirs) and the NPS Denver office to put every single piece of shattered granite back where it was before they vandalized that beautiful glaciated slope. Since clocks don't turn back, I would simply hope we never repeat these mistakes.

Even so, there should be a more fundamental re-evaluation of the role of private automobiles in the park. Our human relationship to nature at Yosemite is limited, far more than it need be, by



park constituting a Greater Yosemite National Park. The reserve would extend from ancient Mono Lake's farthest shore to where the Merced River disappears in the McClure Reservoir, with buffers north and south to protect the biosphere from incompatible uses. Existing ownership and management would be maintained and the integrity preserved with performance standards to be agreed upon.

Overnight experience in the Valley should be retained, even though not everyone can partake of it. Pillow count should not govern design and management decisions. Accommodate more people only if that can be accomplished with no more visitor impact (or conceivably with less).

Nor should the National Park Service (NPS) hard-sell off-peak times in autumn or early spring. Let people discover on their own the beauty of Yosemite in those seasons; that way there

the wheel, the internal combustion engine and the excessive pavement they require. The prospect of a Yosemite Valley minus private transportation should be the world's goal.

There should be more opportunity for, and encouragement of, foot travel, minus pavement. At the earliest opportunity, as much as possible of Yosemite Valley pavement should be removed and what is left should serve only for service vehicles, shuttle buses and bicycles. The Yosemite Valley Rail Road should be restored, its use subsidized and private automobiles parked in the vicinity of Merced.

Do not make access by private automobile any easier. Let it become more difficult, adding to the experience the value that comes along with things that are earned, not just given away. We remember where we have walked, we forget where we have driven. Yosemite should not be a forgettable experience.