Behind the Scenery

Pull back the curtains of history to find out how Yosemite came to be.

By the time preservationist John Muir visited Yosemite in 1868, artists had already captured the beauty of the area, captivating the nation’s imagination. And before them, people had been living in the park for more than 4,000 years. In fact, the last Miwok village in the park was demolished in 1969. That’s 79 years after Yosemite became a national park.

While more than 5 million people visited the park last year, there’s an unusual sight tucked in the northwest corner that less than 1 percent of all Yosemite visitors see. Amid towering granite domes lies the 8-mile-long Hetch Hetchy Reservoir. It’s liquid gold, supplying more than 2.4 million San Francisco area residents with water.

But it also sparked one of the first national conversations on valuing wilderness over development in the early 1900s. Muir and others argued a San Francisco water source should be built outside the park. In 1913 Congress approved the dam construction. Muir died a year later of pneumonia, but the loss of Hetch Hetchy Valley echoed profoundly in his heart. He wrote, “The destruction of the charming groves and gardens, the finest in all California, goes to my heart.”

Today, if you visit the Hetch Hetchy area in Yosemite, you’ll feel the same wonder Muir felt more than 100 years ago, even with the reservoir. Away from the crowds, it’s the park’s best kept-secret.

PARK PASS
A park pass costs $30/vehicle at the Yosemite National Park entrance stations and is valid for seven days. You also can purchase the Yosemite Pass for $60 for unlimited visits to the park for 12 months. Planning on visiting more than one park this year? Consider the America the Beautiful annual pass for $80. The Access Pass is a free lifetime admission pass for U.S. citizens and permanent residents with lifelong disabilities. The Senior Pass is a one-time $80 fee for U.S. citizens/permanent residents 62 and older. Fourth-graders and their families get a complimentary one-year pass. Print out a voucher at everykidinapark.gov and bring it to a park entrance.
**YOSEMITE PARK OVERVIEW**

Scope out the enticing possibilities for creekside camping, dome scrambles, and more.

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**MAJOR PARK THOROUGHFARES**

**Glacier Point Road**
The 30-mile drive from Yosemite Valley to Glacier Point climbs 3,200 feet to spectacular vistas at Washburn Point and Glacier Point. The road is open 24 hours a day, late May through October.

**Wawona Road**
The 27-mile road between Wawona and Yosemite Valley is open year-round. However, the road from Wawona to Mariposa Grove closes in winter.

**Tioga Road**
The 55-mile stretch of CA 120 between the park’s Tioga Pass Entrance and Crane Flat is closed due to snow from approximately early November through May.

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**HIGHLIGHTS**

1. **Hetch Hetchy**
An alternative to crowded Yosemite Valley, the Hetch Hetchy Entrance Station is open year-round during daylight hours. You’ll find a campground, numerous hiking trails accessing high-altitude lakes, a picturesque reservoir, and several waterfalls.

2. **Tuolumne Grove**
This lesser-visited grove of 25 giant sequoias on Tioga Road near Crane Flat is accessible via a steep, 1-mile hike or cross-country ski. See more sequoias in nearby Merced Grove off Big Oak Flat Road.

3. **Olmsted Point**
A must-stop pull-out on Tioga Road, the granite-domed overlook gazes down onto Tenaya Lake, Yosemite Valley, and the shoulder of Half Dome.

4. **Mt. Hoffman and May Lake**
Hike to the top of this 10,850-foot peak in 3 steep miles or, alternately, walk a leisurely 1.2 miles as far as May Lake.

5. **Tenaya Lake**
This gem has sandy beaches (the largest is on the northeast shore), picnic tables, and a loop hiking trail around the lake.

6. **Parsons Memorial Lodge**
Follow a 1-mile path from Lembert Dome or Tuolumne Visitor Center parking to this historic Sierra Club site at Soda Springs. Free lectures in summer.

7. **Lembert Dome**
A 2-mile trail leads to the granite dome and an unmatched 360-degree view. Trailhead parking lot is on Tioga Road.

8. **Gaylor Lakes**
Hike 2 miles (round-trip) past views of Mt. Dana and Dana Meadows to this collection of glacial remnant ponds in Tuolumne Meadows. Begin the hike at the Tioga Pass Entrance Station.

9. **Mariposa Grove**
Wander among 500 mature giant sequoias and visit a natural history museum in the park’s largest grove. (Note: The road and Lower Grove are closed in 2015 and 2016).

10. **Yosemite Ski Area**
This family-friendly resort has five lifts and 10 ski runs, a terrain park for snowboarders, and snow tubing (yosemitepark.com).

11. **Taft Point and Sentinel Dome**
A less-crowded alternative to Glacier Point, these two vistas are accessible via a 2.2-mile trail (with trailhead parking) near the top of Glacier Point Road.

12. **Glacier Point**
Drive (or snowshoe/ski) Glacier Point Road to this view of the Valley’s granite monoliths and waterfalls, plus excellent stargazing.

13. **Half Dome**
Yosemite’s most famous icon can be viewed in all its granite glory from Glacier Point and Washburn Point. Or hike to the top via a difficult, 16-mile round-trip trek (permit required).

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*Make campground reservations at recreation.gov; see “Plan It” (page 7).*