



YOSEMITE

THE GRANITE CATHEDRAL

ISSUE 04 · AUTUMN · A FIELD REPORT FROM THE SIERRA NEVADA

The vertical mile

How a single wall rewrote what climbing could be

Four seasons in the valley

A photographic essay, from snowmelt to first frost

Counting the visitors

Four million people, one road in — the arithmetic of crowding

The grove that outlived us

*Fire, drought and the long patience of *Sequoiadendron**

Cover line 1 should carry the climber's name — it is the only one readers will recognise.

DRAFT FOR REVIEW — NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Editorial round 2 · circulated to art, copy and science desks

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EDITORIAL

A slow argument between ice and stone

A valley is an argument that takes a million years to finish. Ice pressed down this one and left the sides standing; the river has been tidying up ever since. What we call scenery is really just the wreckage, seen from a comfortable distance.

We came back to Yosemite this year with a narrower question than usual. Not what the place looks like — that has been settled by better photographers than us — but what it costs to keep it looking that way while **four million people arrive to see it**. The answer turned out to be a story about arithmetic: parking spaces, permit lotteries, snowpack measured in centimetres of water on the first of April.

The reporting in this issue leans on the park's own numbers. Where we could not verify a figure against a published source we have said so in the margin rather than round it off ~~quietly~~. The science desk should read those margins first.

— The editors

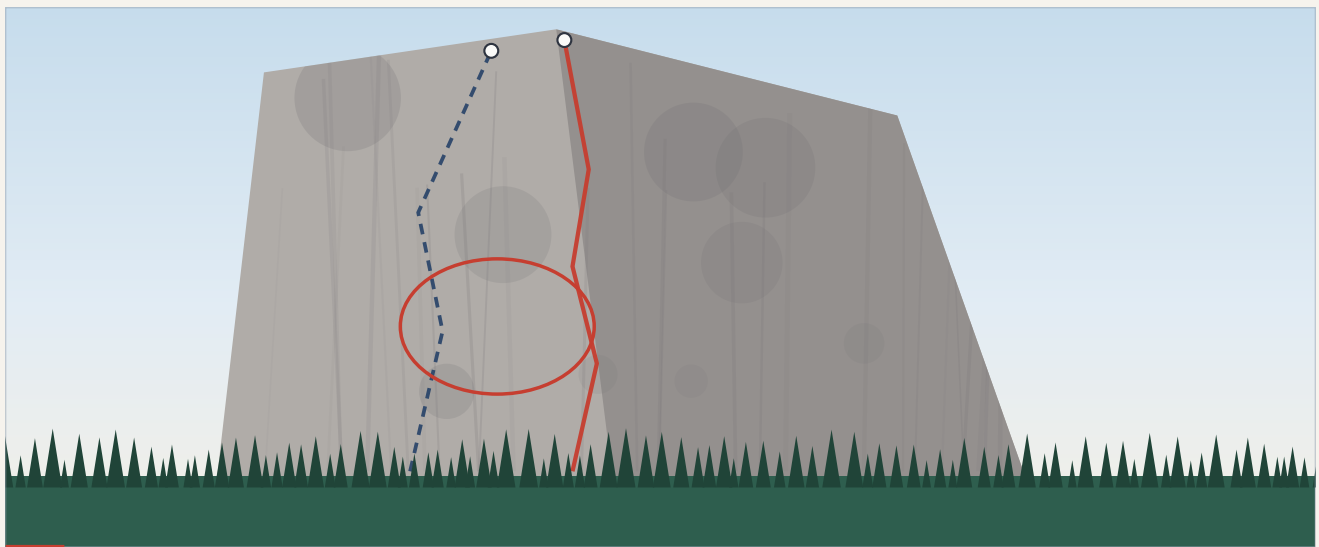
ON THE COVER

Half Dome from Glacier Point, an hour before the light goes. The north-west face on the left is the one the glaciers cut; the dome on the right is the one they spared.

CLIMBING

The vertical mile

Nine hundred metres of unbroken granite, and a sixty-year argument about the right way to get up it.



El Capitan from the meadow. Solid line: The Nose, first climbed over 47 days in 1958. Dashed: the Salathé Wall, 1961. The summit is 2,307 m above sea level and about 900 m above the talus.

The wall is one piece. That is the first thing climbers say about El Capitan and the last thing they stop being surprised by: nine hundred metres of granite with no ledge wide enough to be called a terrace, no band of softer rock to break the fall line, nothing that lets the eye rest on the way up.

Warren Harding, Wayne Merry and George Whitmore reached the top of The Nose in November 1958, after **forty-seven days** spread across eighteen months of siege. They drilled, they fixed rope, they came down for supplies and went back up. Three years later Royal Robbins, Tom Frost and Chuck Pratt climbed the Salathé Wall in a single push and made the siege look like a failure of nerve.

Everything since has been an argument about subtraction. Take away the fixed ropes. Take away the aid. In 1993

Lynn Hill freed The Nose, then did it again in a day, and the sport spent a decade catching up with her. In January 2015 Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson finished nineteen days on the Dawn Wall, the blankest line anyone had thought to try. On 3 June 2017 Alex Honnold climbed Freerider with no rope at all, in **three hours and fifty-six minutes**, and there was nothing left to take away.

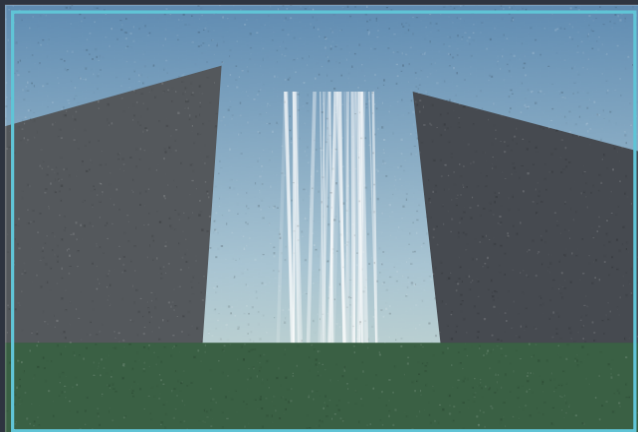
What the wall gives back is scale. From the meadow a climber on the Great Roof is a speck you find by looking for the wrong colour. Stand there long enough with

“Everything since has been an argument about subtraction.”

ON THE ETHIC OF THE FIRST ASCENT

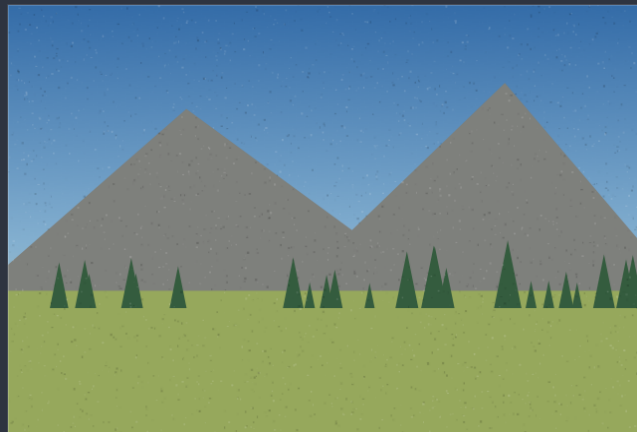
Four seasons

One year, one meadow, four returns. The camera did not move; everything else did.



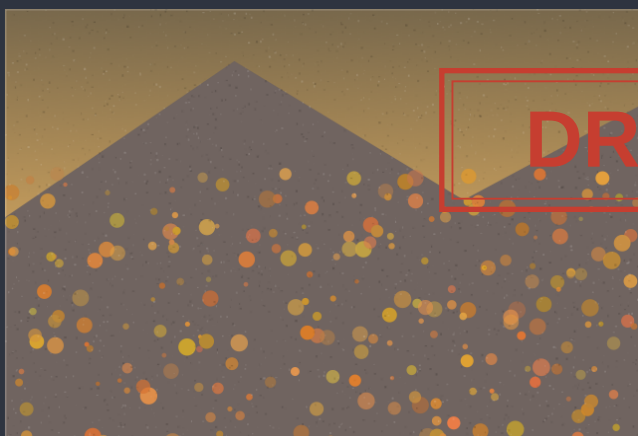
Spring · the falls at flood

Snowmelt peaks in late May; the upper fall carries most of the year's water in **six weeks**.



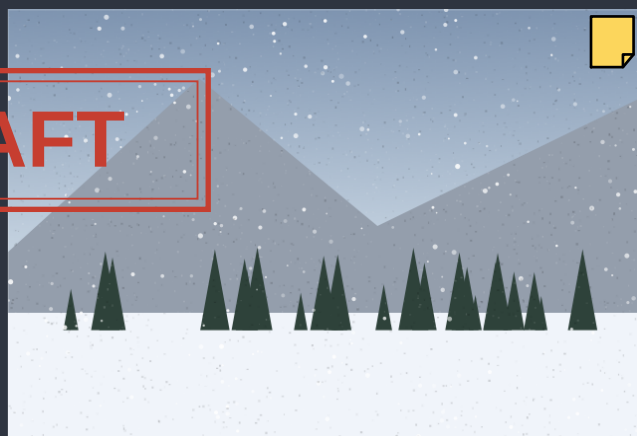
Summer · Tuolumne, 2 620 m

Above the tree line the granite is bare and the meadows are wet until August.



Autumn · black oak and maple

The valley floor turns for about ten days, and the shuttle queues double.



Winter · the valley closes

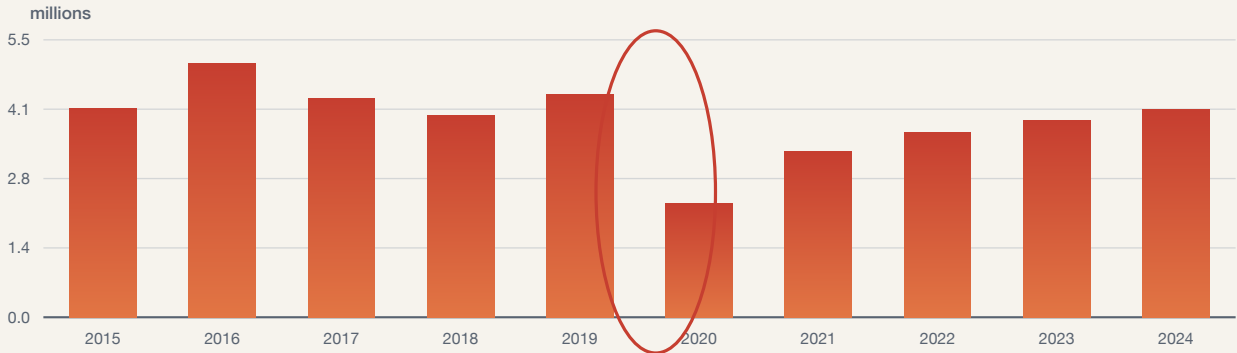
Chains or snow tyres from November. Tioga Road stays shut until the crews cut it open.

ACCESS

Counting the visitors

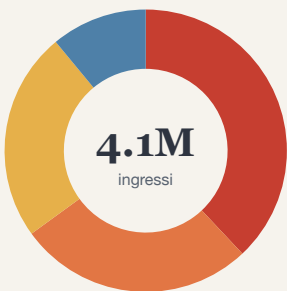
Yosemite is a park with one valley and, in practice, three ways into it. Every question about crowding ends up being a question about that geometry — and about how much water was sitting on the high country the previous April.

RECREATION VISITS, MILLIONS



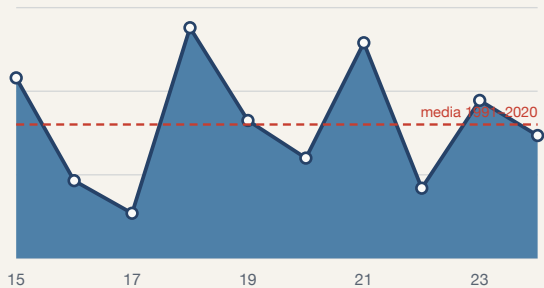
Source: to be confirmed against NPS Visitor Use Statistics before press.

WHERE THEY ENTER



- Arch Rock (Hwy 140) 38%
- South (Hwy 41) 27%
- Big Oak Flat (Hwy 120) 24%
- Tioga / east 11%

APRIL 1 SNOW WATER EQUIVALENT

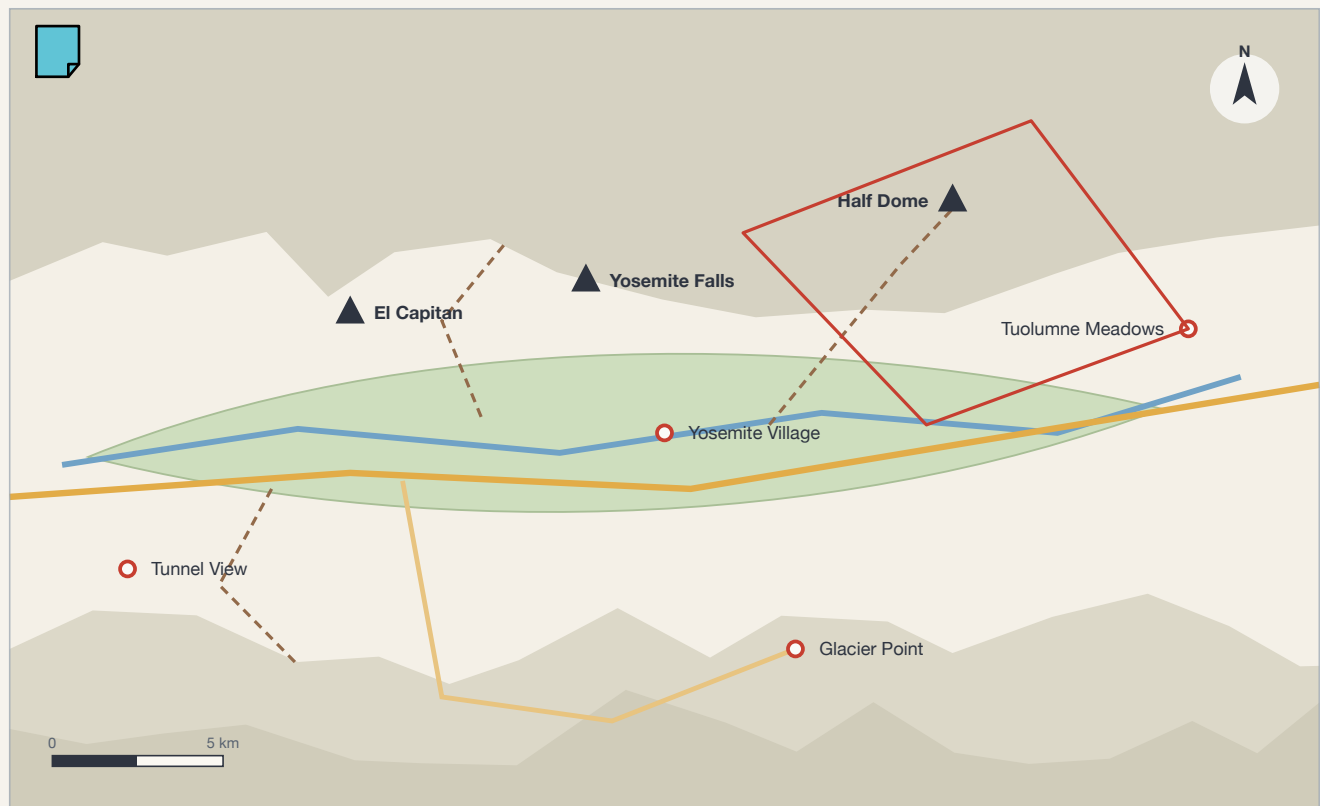


PRESSURE POINTS

LOCATION	CAPACITY	PEAK DAY	WAIT, PEAK
Yosemite Village day lot	1 100 cars	1 100	40–70 min
Half Dome cables (permit)	300 / day	300	lottery
Mist Trail, Vernal Fall bridge	—	5 200 walkers	single file
Mariposa Grove shuttle	1 800 seats	1 800	25 min
Glacier Point road parking	310 cars	310	45 min

CARTOGRAPHY

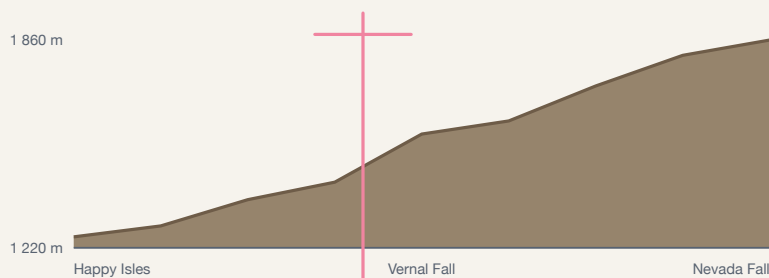
Reading the valley



Schematic. Relief is indicative and the trail network is simplified — this is a reader's orientation map, not a navigation document.

— Merced River
— Park road
- - - Trail

MIST TRAIL — ELEVATION



THE VALLEY IN FIGURES

Park area	3 027 km ²
Valley floor	1 190 m
Half Dome summit	2 694 m
El Capitan, wall	≈ 900 m
Yosemite Falls	739 m
Protected since	1864 / 1890
Wilderness	94 % of park

The shape is glacial and the timing is recent: ice filled this trench as late as the last glacial maximum, ground the sides into the profile a geologist would call U-shaped, and left the tributary valleys hanging. That is why the waterfalls here arrive from nowhere and fall so far — they are streams that used to meet a river which has since been dug out from under them.

NATURAL HISTORY

Six you will meet

Between the river and the rim the park stacks four life zones on top of each other.

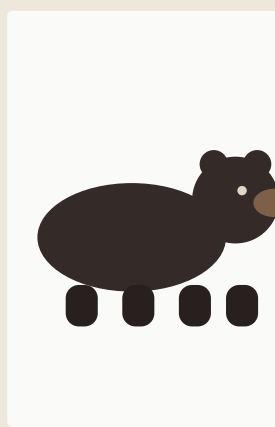
These six are the ones a visitor is most likely to see, and the ones most often reported wrongly.



Giant sequoia

Sequoiadendron giganteum

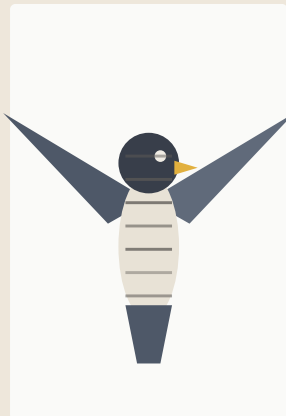
Grows only on the western Sierra slope. Bark up to 60 cm thick; the cones need fire's heat to open, so a grove that never burns slowly stops reproducing.



American black bear

Ursus americanus

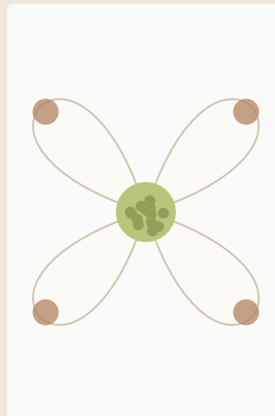
Cinnamon as often as black. Roughly 300–500 live in the park; a bear that learns to open a car is usually a bear that was fed by someone who thought it was a photograph.



Peregrine falcon

Falco peregrinus

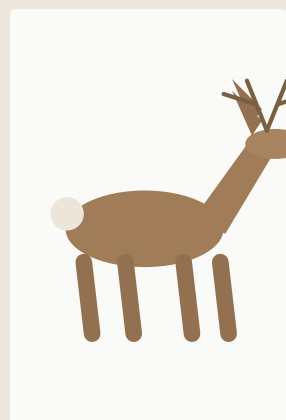
Nests on the big walls, which is why some climbing routes close in spring. Recovered from near-extirpation after DDT was banned; stoops faster than anything else here.



Pacific dogwood

Cornus nuttallii

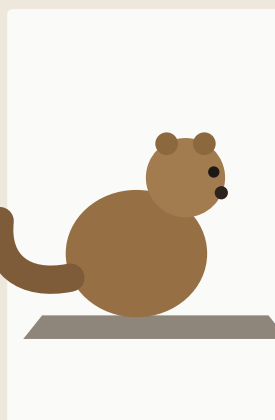
The white 'petals' are bracts, not petals. Flowers on the valley floor in April and again, in leaf colour, in October — the two weeks the shuttle queues are worst.



Mule deer

Odocoileus hemionus

The most commonly photographed animal in the park and the one that injures the most visitors. Ears give it the name; the bounding four-footed gait gives it the escape.



Yellow-bellied marmot

Marmota flaviventris

High country, above 2 000 m, sunning on talus. Hibernates up to eight months. Known at Tioga trailheads for chewing radiator hoses for the coolant salt.

READER SERVICE

Wilderness permit request

Fill this in on screen and return it with the issue's reply address. Fields marked with a red rule are required by the permit office; the rest help us plan the next field report.



1 · APPLICANT

FULL NAME

EMAIL

PARTY SIZE

ENTRY DATE

NIGHTS OUT

MEMBERSHIP NO.

2 · ITINERARY

ENTRY TRAILHEAD

EXIT TRAILHEAD

EQUIPMENT DECLARED

EXPERIENCE

Approved bear canister

First visit to the park

Stove (no open fire above 2 900 m)

Been before, not overnight

Stock animals

Regular wilderness permit holder

3 · READER FEEDBACK

WHICH DESK SHOULD WE SEND NEXT?

HOW DID THIS ISSUE REACH YOU?

NOTES TO THE EDITORS

SIGNATURE