

Hiking Yosemite National Park

A Guide to 59 of the Park's Greatest
Hiking Adventures

Third Edition

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FALCON GUIDES

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1 East Valley Floor

This is a leisurely, flat, loop hike with views of North Dome, the Royal Arches, and Yosemite Falls, where you can visit Happy Isles Nature Center and the infamous 1996 rockslide, then stroll along sometimes boisterous, sometimes tranquil stretches of the Merced River.

Start: Hikers parking lot east of Curry Village

Total distance: 1.9-mile loop

Approximate hiking time: 1 to 2 hours

Difficulty: Easy

Elevation change: 100 feet

Nearest facilities: Curry Village; snacks, water, and toilets at Happy Isles Nature Center

Seasons: Year-round

Permits: None

Map: USGS Half Dome quad

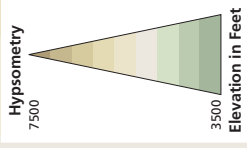
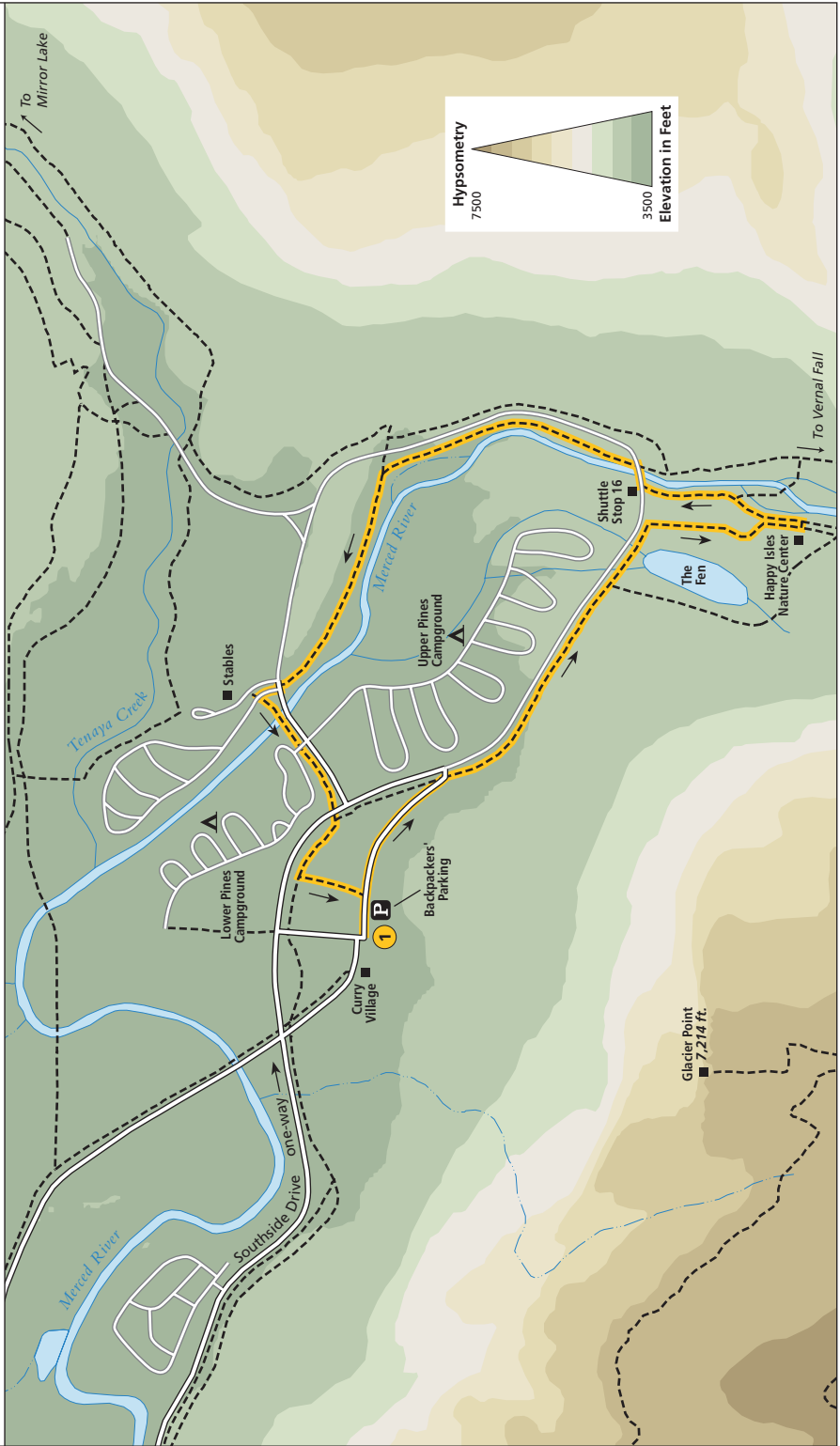
Finding the trailhead: Take Southside Drive (one-way, east) almost to its end, passing Curry Village, passing Shuttle Stop 15, passing the DO NOT ENTER sign, to the turnoff to the right marked TRAILHEAD PARKING. Or board the Yosemite Valley shuttle bus from anyplace in the valley and get off at Stop 15, Upper Pines Campground, and continue east along the road to the Trailhead parking lot lying in the shadow of Glacier Point. Trailhead GPS: N37 44.09/W119 33.97

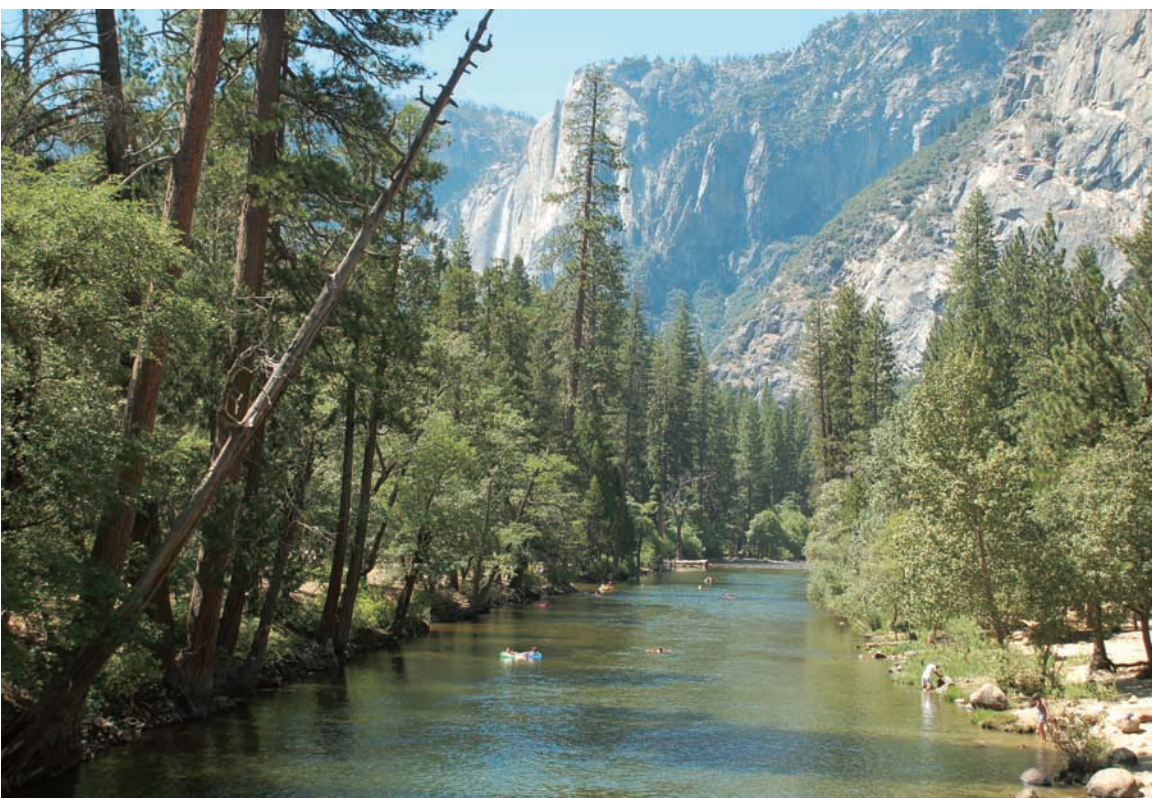
The Hike

After depositing any food in the bear boxes, find the trailhead marked JOHN MUIR TRAIL, MIST TRAIL at the southeast end of the parking lot just beside the big yellow BEAR WARNING sign. Follow the wide dirt path beneath incense cedar, ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and black oak. You might see other hikers veering left to follow the path that runs alongside the shuttle bus road, but keep right for a quieter, less-traveled route.

Pass a little A-frame structure used for ranger/naturalist talks and just beyond at mile 0.5 reach a swampy area known as The Fen. Here, a boardwalk runs through a lush growth of water-loving horsetails, sedges, and fragrant mints. An interpretive panel tells about the living things inhabiting soggy places like this one. The trail crosses a paved path and makes a quick left-right-left jog before meeting the Merced River. To the right is the Happy Isles Nature Center at 0.6 mile, with wonderful exhibits and books inside. Behind the building you can see the rubble and smashed trees left by the 1996 rockslide where a hiker was killed. Wooden bridges take you out onto the happy isles themselves where there are exhibits about interesting creepy-crawlies you'll find there, as well as information about how the islands got to be here in the middle of the Merced River. Now head downstream and follow the riverside path to the Happy Isles Shuttle Stop (Stop 16) on the road where you will find rest-rooms and a snack bar.

East Valley Floor





Swimmers and rafters enjoy the quiet Merced River in summer.

At the paved shuttle bus road, turn right to cross the Happy Isles Bridge, pausing mid-bridge for views of the river, which rushes toward the bridge in noisy white-water rapids, then emerges more quietly from the other side. The view of North Dome above the river on the downstream side is a photographer's favorite. Now on the north side of the bridge, leave most of the crowd behind and meander along the east bank of the Merced among incense cedar and pine, streamside alder and dogwood, and, in May and June, fragrant, showy white azaleas. The river changes character at every turn, sometimes gurgling busily, sometimes green and placid, occasionally splitting to flow around wooded islands. This section of the trail is shared by horses and mules because it connects their stables to the John Muir Trail. Remember to step off the trail to let them pass, since pack animals always have the right-of-way.

At 1.5 miles the stable area appears across the road on the right, and simultaneously Upper Yosemite Fall comes into view ahead. Turn left here and cross back over the Merced on the road on the Clark Bridge. On hot summer afternoons, a colorful collection of rafts and inner tubes drifts down the river. Once over the bridge, turn around to admire Half Dome on the right, North Dome and Washington Column on

the left. Pass between the entrances to Upper and Lower Pines Campgrounds, then cross Southside Drive. There are Curry Village tent cabins to the right. Turn left and follow the roadside path back to the trailhead parking lot.

Miles and Directions

- 0.0** Trailhead parking lot
- 0.5** The Fen
- 0.6** Happy Isles Nature Center
- 1.0** Happy Isles Bridge on the shuttle bus road
- 1.5** Stables
- 1.9** Return to trailhead parking lot

Option: Waterfalls—If you have time and energy to spare, take a short detour out into the open to see two of the valley’s finest features and prettiest early springtime waterfalls hidden from view in the parking lot. Walk to the entrance of the parking lot at its west end and go a few dozen yards down the driveway out to Southside Drive, then turn left and walk another 0.1 mile to the corner of the driveway into the Curry Village parking lot. Across the valley are the Royal Arches crowned by North Dome, with Royal Arch Fall trickling down to the west. Behind you, ephemeral Staircase Falls descend to Curry Village in a series of perfect, regular steps.

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Introduction

Yosemite National Park occupies the heart of John Muir’s “Range of Light” in the Sierra Nevada. The name means “snowy range” in Spanish, and in winter more than 60 feet of snow may accumulate. Yet the Sierra has also been called the gentle wilderness, because extremes of temperature are not great and the hiking days of summer are comparatively dry and sunny. It is a land of amazing diversity. Elevations in Yosemite range from 2,000 to over 13,000 feet, from the rolling oak woodlands of the western slope to the jagged mountain crest, where offspring of the great glaciers that carved the spectacular topography still lie in shady hollows above thousands of lakes. Then, to the east, the land abruptly drops away to the apparently endless sagebrush desert of the Great Basin. There are three groves of giant sequoia trees, the largest living things on earth, miles of forests and meadows, and a rich and varied collection of wildflowers, wildlife, and history galore. Then there is the incomparable valley itself, Yosemite, surrounded by massive granite domes and spires, booming waterfalls, and, in the summer season, teeming with tourists.

As many as 4 million people visit the park each year. Most concentrate their activities in Yosemite Valley, a mere 1-by-7-mile corner of the park. Those who are willing to explore on foot, however, can expect a genuine, uncrowded wilderness experience. Yosemite’s borders encompass almost 1,200 square miles, and almost 800 miles of excellent trails travel through some of the most dramatic and beautiful scenery on earth.

This book describes the best of them, how to find them, how to plan and equip yourself to tackle them, and what special, natural wonders to enjoy along the way.

How to Use This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help you choose and plan a day hike or backpack in Yosemite best suited to your time, energy, experience, and personal preferences. It offers a preview of what you are likely to see and experience along your chosen route: geological features, historical sites, trees, birds, flowers, and mammals. It also helps you anticipate places where the trail is faint, where it is clear, and where and when rivers and streams are special sources of delight, or possible obstacles to travel.

Trail descriptions are intended to be used along with the US Geological Survey topographic maps available at wilderness outfitting and sporting goods stores, at visitor centers and shops in Yosemite, and through the USGS at P.O. Box 25286, Federal Center, Denver, CO 80225; (800) USA-MAPS; or www.mapping.usgs.gov.

Each trail description opens with a summary of the highlights and expectations for the hike. The statistical section provides a quick reference to the characteristics of the hike.

◀ *The Grizzly Giant is one of the largest trees in the Mariposa Grove.*



The classic view of Yosemite Valley looks to the east.

Within those characteristics, the **Distance** is described in miles. You'll also find out whether the route is a loop, in which you return to the place where you started without retracing your steps; an out-and-back hike, in which you return to the trailhead the same way you came; or a shuttle hike, in which you begin at one trailhead and end at another, requiring two vehicles, a shuttle bus, or another driver to pick you up or deposit you at either end.

The **Difficulty** rating is bound to be interpreted differently by hikers in varying degrees of physical condition, including their adaptability to high elevation. In general, Easy trails can be negotiated by anybody who can walk. Moderate trails are of greater length or involve some elevation gain and loss, and may challenge those who are not accustomed to much physical activity. Moderately strenuous hikes are for experienced hikers or those who are very physically fit. Strenuous hikes will challenge the most experienced and energetic of hikers.

Elevation change will give you some idea of how much climbing and descending you can expect, but don't forget that there may be many ups and downs between the lowest and highest elevations.

Seasons section refers, in most cases, to the only time that trails are open and safe to use at all. The hiking season in Yosemite is all too short. Most trails are passable only on skis, snowshoes, or with special winter climbing equipment for most of the year. More specific times to visit areas especially noteworthy for their seasonal displays of wildflowers, fall colors, or flowing waterfalls will be mentioned here.

2 Introduction

Permits for specific hikes are noted in the statistical section of the hike description. For a more general discussion, see the special Wilderness Permits section, starting on page 9.

Important safety or weather information is described in **Special considerations**.

Maps list the relevant names of USGS quads that will be useful for each hike. While our maps give you a great general idea of the hike, it's a good idea to carry these more detailed maps with you for safety.

Miles and Directions are landmarks on the trail, usually trail junctions. The distances are based on the official National Park Service measurements, but the park service cautions hikers to be aware that trails have been rerouted over the years to avoid obstacles like rockslides or washouts or to protect fragile vegetation in boggy meadows. The signs marking these trails have not always been corrected. Sometimes new signs have been added to one end of a trail but not to junctions along the way, so you will find that the miles don't always add up. Still, I have walked every trail in this book and have found none of the stated mileage between points to be inaccurate by more than a quarter mile.

Nearest facilities refers to sources of supplies or contact with emergency services nearest the trailhead.

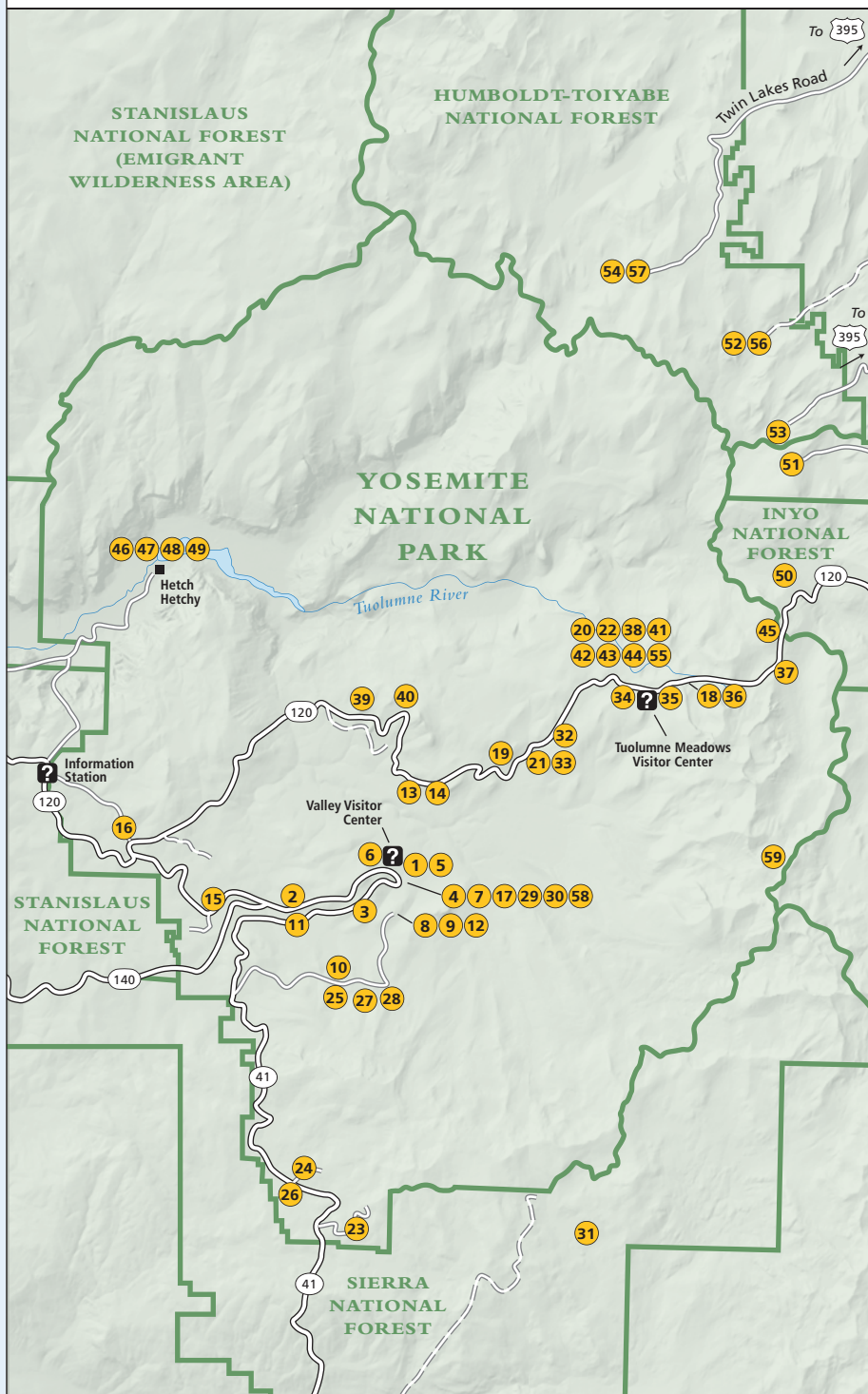
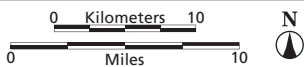
Life in Yosemite

Yosemite is a hiker's paradise because of its wonderful diversity. The range is only about 400 by 70 miles in extent and is mostly gray, granitic rock, yet every nook and cranny, and every stream drainage or mountain peak is different from the rest. The main reason for this variety is Yosemite's wide range of elevation. Extremes of topography lead to extremes of weather, temperature, and soil. These in turn provide habitats for a wide variety of plants and animals. More than 1,300 species of flowering plants, 223 kinds of birds, and 77 kinds of mammals are found here. Summer days in the western foothills can reach 100 degrees F; winter nights at the crest of the range may be 30 degrees below zero F. The foothills may receive as little as 15 inches of precipitation in a year while the forests at 8,000 feet may get 65 feet. Still, the Sierra Nevada is a gentle wilderness to hike because 95 percent of its precipitation falls as winter snow. Summers are usually sunny and dry, and though thundershowers can be expected in July and August at higher elevations, they are usually of short duration.

The hiking season can begin as early as April in the western foothills between elevations of 2,000 and 4,000 feet. The rolling hills are covered with a mixture of shrubby chaparral and oak woodland, green and carpeted with flowers usually through May, becoming hotter and drier later in the season. As elevations increase, wispy gray bull pines appear on the hillsides, along with the showy white wands of California buckeye.







At 4,000 to 6,000 feet a mixed coniferous forest of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and incense-cedar flourishes, along with live oaks, deciduous black oaks, and maples. Warm, moist pockets support three separate groves of giant sequoias. Yosemite Valley,

Overview Map




Map Legend









Transportation

-  U.S. Highway
-  State Highway/
Major Park Road
-  Primary Road/
Other Park Road
-  Unpaved Road
-  Featured Trail
-  Trail












Boundaries

-  National Park/
Forest Boundary



Hydrology

-  Major River
-  River
-  Intermittent Stream
-  Spring
-  Waterfall
-  Rapids
-  Lake
-  Marsh

Symbols

-  Trailhead
-  Ranger Station
-  Campground
-  Visitor Center/
Information
-  Point of Interest/
Structure
-  Parking
-  Picnic Area
-  Overlook
-  Bridge
-  Gate
-  Direction Arrow

Physiography

-  Pass
-  Peak

For my sister Jo

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