

The Yosemite Delp

Yosemite National Park, California

25-26 June 2016

*Happy Fourth
of July*

Rafters float down a lazy stretch of the Merced River in Yosemite Valley. From its source less than 20 miles away, the Merced has already fallen more than 8,000 feet through waterfalls and rapids to reach this rest spot, which is still 4,000 feet above sea level. In the background, the Merced's most famous tributary, Yosemite Creek, rushes to join by leaping 2,425 feet over Yosemite Falls, the tallest in North America and 14 times taller than Niagara.





Lynn Stock (in front), her husband Stephen and Emily head down Four Mile Trail from Glacier Point to Yosemite Valley keeping an eye peeled on the scenery. The trail descends 3,200 feet over its 4.6-mile length with scenery like this almost every step of the way.



Sugar pines tower above our group near the top of the Four Mile Trail.



To descend as rapidly as it does, the Four Mile Trail often goes through a series of switchbacks. On the valley floor the Merced River meanders through green meadows. The four tiny multi-colored dots on the right side of the river's leftward bend are river rafts.

A kayaker crosses Tenaya Lake in the Yosemite high country, elevation 8,150 feet. The Tioga Pass Road, which we used to get here, reaches 10,000 feet at the crest of the Sierra Nevada a few miles farther on at the park's eastern entrance after passing through Tuolumne Meadows.

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When in the course of human events it becomes necessary to tell the boss that you've got to leave early on Friday afternoon because you want to get a head start on the crowd to Yosemite, he will tell you in all seriousness: "Sure, you can go. But you won't beat the crowd."

We hold this truth to be self-evident, that Yosemite is the fourth incarnation (after Yellowstone, Sequoia and Kings Canyon) of what documentary filmmaker Ken Burns correctly called "America's best idea:" national parks.

And that for the birthday of a nation conceived on ideas, there is no more fitting or patriotic way to celebrate its 240th birthday than to spend it in one of its best ideas, enjoying what one of our wisest immigrants, Scotsman John Muir, said "is a place of rest, a refuge from the roar and dust and weary, nervous, wasting work of the lowlands, in which one gains the advantages of both solitude and society."

Emily and our fellow Tar Heel transplants, Lynn

and Stephen Stock, started from one of the park's most scenic views, Glacier Point, and descended 3,200 vertical feet down Four Mile Trail to the floor of Yosemite Valley last Saturday.

It's a day hike of relentless switchbacks and one stunning view after another: waterfalls, granite domes, snowy peaks and the green meadows and brown water of the meandering Merced River at the bottom. It begins in a cathedral of red cedar and sugar pine and ends in grass and the crowd we did not beat.

There, after chilled wine and hot showers, we stepped through a portal from wilderness to 1920s luxury, the dining room of what was once – and after the lawsuits are settled and rights fees paid – will someday again be called the Ahwahnee Hotel.

And we enjoyed another Fourth of July tradition, a special meal among friends.

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Recuperating from our hike in the dining room of the currently named Majestic Yosemite Hotel on the Yosemite Valley floor. Since opening in 1927, guests here have included Queen Elizabeth II and what's-his-name the prince, Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Reagan, the Shah of Iran, Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, Lucy and Ricky, Charlie Chaplin, Judy Garland, William Shatner, Will Rogers and Emily Meacham's Soul Feast group from the Stone Church of Willow Glen.