

The Yosemite Yodel

1-2 July 2011

Yosemite National Park, California



Encountering another hiker on Yosemite's Four Mile Trail (story starts inside)

A walk in the park



Sometimes it's good to get out of the house.

I felt like I was cheating by taking the bus up to Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park.

But I got over it.

I'm not in shape to make the climb up right now, but I badly needed a Yosemite hike to begin a vacation that was thrown into disarray when my cousin Beth and her partner Nan had to cancel their plans for a visit when Beth got sick.

She's probably going to undergo surgery in about a week and will be OK, but a long-awaited 10-day break for stress relief that was to be everyone's summer highlight was suddenly a source of stress.

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A walk in the park



Four Mile Trail has plenty of great views of the highlights of Yosemite Valley, including 8,836-foot Half Dome. This picture is in honor of Maureen Chandler, a hiking buddy of Emily's and mine from church, who climbed Half Dome on June 24. That hike is 14 miles roundtrip from the valley floor and climbs 4,800 feet.

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Stress relief means different things to different people. For Emily it means quality time with Clark Gable and Cary Grant.

For me it's getting to the mountains, which is why I was taking the hour-long, 30-mile bus ride from the floor of Yosemite Valley up to Glacier Point so I could hike the 4.6 miles and 3,200 vertical feet back down.

My seatmate was a young woman from

India who now is a doctor in Miami, Fla. Her name began with "V" and went on 'til Thursday. Her husband in the row in front of us was a doctor in Louisville, Ky. Let's call him "Sam."

They were in a group of about 25 Indians from around the United States making their initial trip to California and Yosemite, seeing snow for the first time and planning a Fourth of July week of big rocks, big trees and big picnics.

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A walk in the park

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The cashier who sold me the ham and cheese sandwich at Glacier Point before I started out said she had gone down the trail the previous week in an hour and 15 minutes.

But she was a woman, young and wiry. I am ... not. It took me 2:45.

The first half-mile or so going down is fairly straight and gently sloping. It felt good to let the climbers heading up know that they had finished the tough part when we stopped to chat and swap cameras.

But then you get to the heart of the trek - dozens of steep switchbacks built in the 1930s by men employed by the government with borrowed money so they wouldn't lose their homes.

There comes a point during this section of the descent that, in good conscience, you can no longer tell the weary headed up that they're near the finish; all you can offer is encouragement that their goal would be a worthy accomplishment.

Yet farther down you encounter struggling folks moved to ask - far too soon in their ascent - "Are we getting near the top?"

It is difficult not to see in their pained



Three quarters of the way up the Four Mile Trail, the boys and girls from Venezuela are still smiling.

expressions the faces of all today's people without pensions who are under the illusion they will be able to retire on their 401ks or IRAs and wonder who convinced them this trail was a good idea.

I had no honest encouragement for them, only the unspoken hope that their deaths would be merciful and soon. They got my extra water.

Yosemite is a place where tens of thousands of Americans come to celebrate the Fourth for the same reason people flock to Times Square on New Year's Eve. They are there to look up, gape and share with each other how fortunate they are to be there.

The valley, where the vast majority of them congregate, becomes a crowded city. Meanwhile, hidden by vast forests or distances that shrink their size to invisible specks, thousands more from around the globe walk in solitude through wilderness only occasionally interrupted by chance encounters and an inquiry about whether they'd like their picture taken.

Today's picture pages

**Why people go to
Glacier Point >>>**





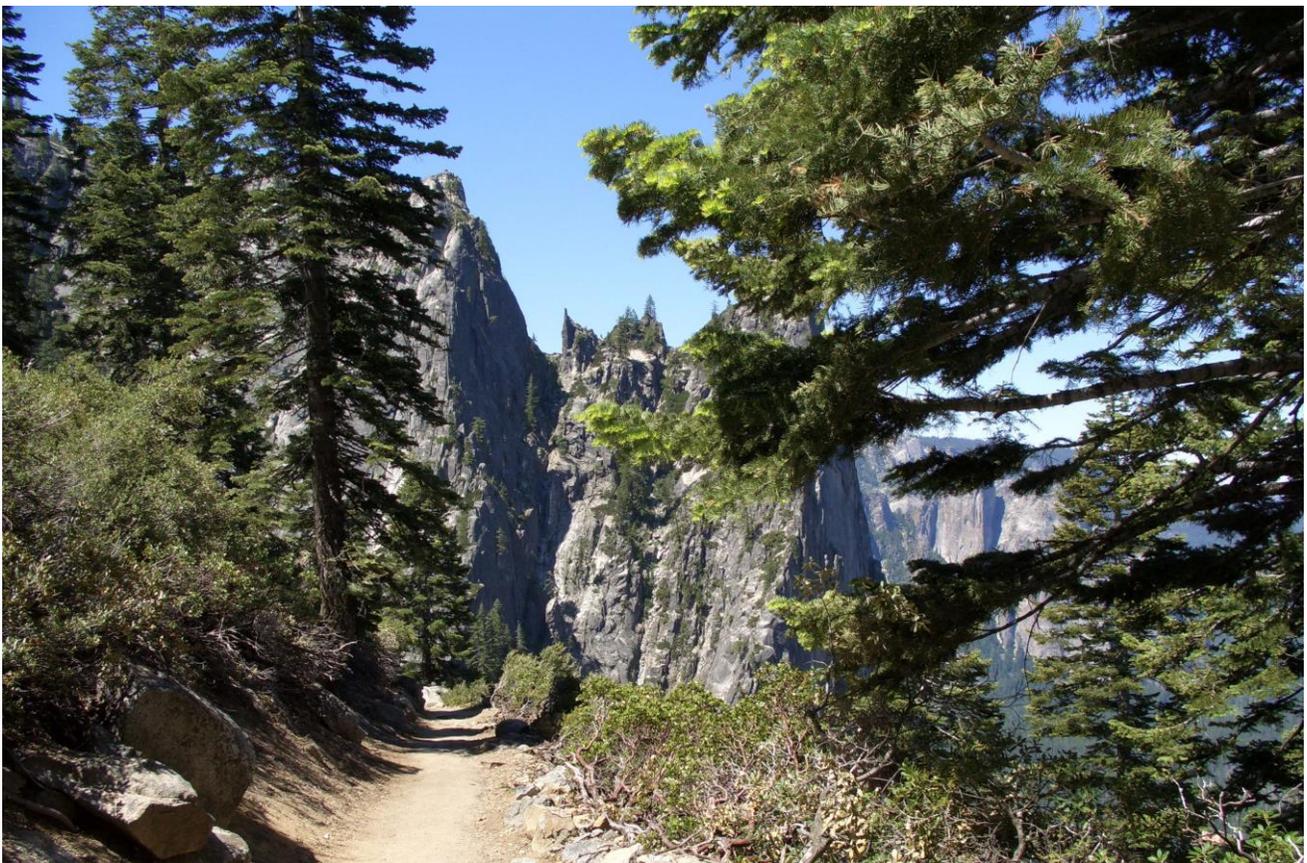
Fourth of July picnics in full swing on the banks of the Merced River on the valley floor.



<<< The middle section of the Four Mile Trail plunges steeply down these zig-zags toward the Merced River.



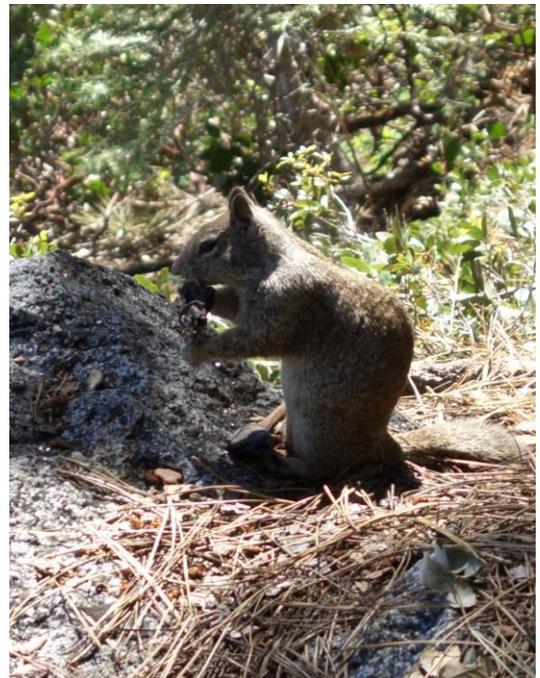
<<< Looking west down Yosemite Valley in the direction that, eons ago, a 3,000-foot deep glacier flowed to carve this canyon through solid granite. El Capitan, America's top cliff for rock climbers, is at top center. Here and there among the trees you can make out the Merced River, the melted remains of the original glacier.



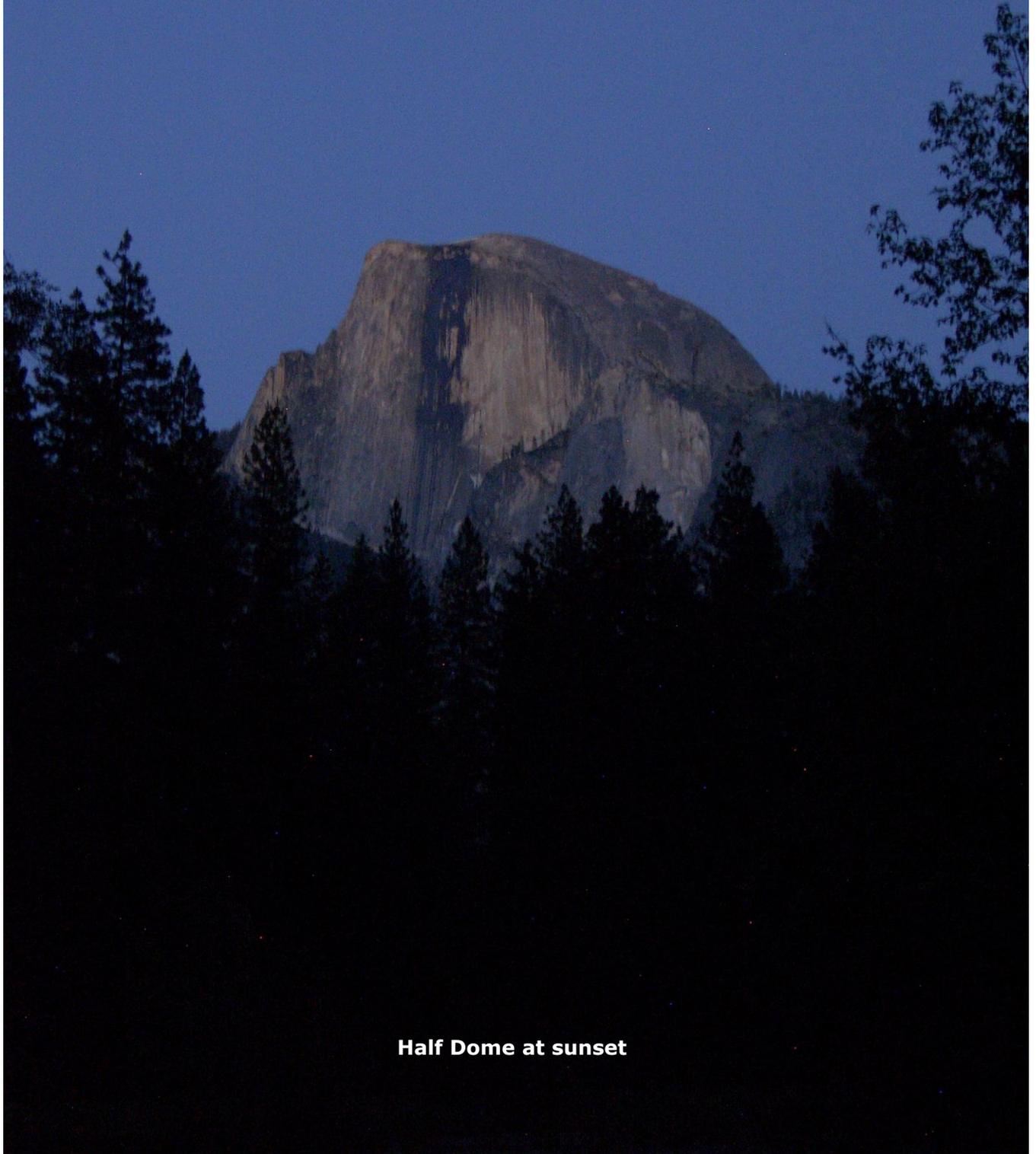
Upper part of the trail



Midday traffic jam on the valley floor. This is why God invented 7:30 a.m.



Goodbye from Yosemite National Park



Half Dome at sunset