



John Muir's Birthplace Fact Sheet

Number 1.2 - Yosemite

Yosemite National Park lies in the heart of the Sierra Nevada and covers an area of 1200 square miles. Its beautiful meadows and valleys, mountains, canyons, rivers and waterfalls have inspired many artists, photographers and writers.

For centuries Native American Indians inhabited Yosemite. The Ahwahnichi lived there from around the 8C. White settlers arrived in 1849, looking for gold. Inns were set up, by pioneers such as James Hutchings, to accommodate the many tourists who followed.



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Pauline Smeed

John Muir, father of the American National Park system, described Yosemite Valley as *...not the Nevada, or Snowy Range, but the Range of Light*. He first visited the Valley in 1868 and wrote many articles and several books on the area. For years scientists believed that the valley was created by a huge catastrophic event. John said that it was in fact formed by **glaciation**. Today it is accepted that rivers also played a large part.

In 1864 the valley was given to the State of California 'for public use, resort and recreation'. Many however became concerned over the damage caused by settlers, logging and sheep farming.

John Muir and his friend, editor Robert Underwood Johnstone, led the campaign to save Yosemite. Yosemite National Park was created in 1890. The valley itself became part of the Park in 1906. At first, military units looked after the Park. They were later replaced by Rangers from the National Park Service.

In Yosemite lies Hetch Hetchy Valley. In 1913, after a bitter fight and campaign initiated by John Muir, this smaller valley was dammed to provide drinking water and power for San Francisco.

Yosemite is home to the giant sequoias, the *kings of their race*. Douglas firs, several kinds of pine trees and hundreds of species of wildflowers grow there. Today, people enjoy walking the many trails. There are deer, raccoons, squirrels and even black bears and coyote. Many birds can be spotted, from stellar jays to peregrine falcons. The National Park Service works to protect the wildlife, and the wilderness.



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Over 4 million people now visit each year. They stay in tents, cabins or one of the 2 historic hotels. Visitor centres and programmes of events add to their enjoyment.

Glossary

Glaciation – the effects of the movement of glaciers on the landscape.

Further Reading

- Muir, John. My First Summer in the Sierra.
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- Sierra Club. 100 Years of Protecting Nature. New York; Harry N Abrams Inc, 1991.

Websites

- John Muir's Birthplace www.jmbt.org.uk
- The Sierra Club www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit
- US National Parks/Yosemite www.nps.gov/yose