

Report on Yosemite Gorge and Mariposa Grove

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General Land Office

June 25, 1864.

Sir:

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication of the 23rd {instant}, and in answer to your call, in behalf of the Committee on Public Lands, respecting the proposed Legislative concession to the State of California of the “Yo-som-e-te” Gorge, and the “Big Oak Grove,” the following is submitted:—

(1st) The Yosemite is a Cleft, in one of the lateral spurs, putting out Westwardly, and at night, angles from the great range of the “Sierra Nevada,” or “Snow clad mountain crags,” varying from 5000 to 8000 feet above the level of the Sea, and traversing the greater part of the State from N.W. to S.E.—in parallelism at, an average distance of 180 miles, with the Pacific Coast.

The “Yo-som-e-te” Ridge is distant 120 miles Eastward from San Francisco in 38° latitude, and longitude 120° West from Greenwich.

By the great forces of nature this mountain pile Rocks, has been torn asunder, leaving a chasm 10 miles long—it’s course East & West, 3 miles wide in the centre, diminishing towards the extremities.

The bottom of this Cleft is known as the “Yo-som-e-et” Valley, 4000 feet above the level of the Sea, being shut in by gigantic yellow granite walls, from 2000 to 4500 feet high, every where precipitous, and generally perpendicular.—Through this valley courses, the main stream of the “Merced” River, which above and below this Ridge, makes its serpentine way through the deep, dark, gorges of mountains, which, are seldom reached by the sun-light—, the mammoth Trees in the Valley, dwindling in perspective from the summit of the rocks, to the size of ordinary shrubs, whilst within five miles radius, are cascades severally in height 2000, 940, 700, 600 and 350 feet—the entrance on the West opening to view a sheet of water 70 feet wide, rushing over the South wall of the Valley, a perpendicular height of 940 feet forming the Cascade, with floating mist, suffused with light, and shining, in all the varied hues of the Rainbow, which gives this Cascade its name—On the North side, and some $\frac{3}{4}$ mile distant, rises a projecting rock to the perpendicular height of 3090 feet, bearing the old Spanish name of “Capitan” or Commander in Chief, and further Eastward rises the Signal Rock, its peak towering upwards 2928 feet, then some 4 miles onward, are the Yo-sem-e-te falls, sometimes called the “Cholock” created by the leaping of a stream down a distance of 2063 feet in three falls, successively of about 300, 250, and 450 feet, described as resembling a “great sheet of white satin hanging over the cliff”—near by standing erect the Pyramid Rock 3200 feet high whilst at a distance advancing Eastward—three miles,—Lake Mirror opens to view, on the North side of which, rises the “North Dome Rock” 363 feet in height, confronted on the South by the giant granite of still statelier form, the South Dome, towering over all competitors to a height of

4481 feet. The myriads of dells, nooks, caverns, rocky-cliffs, forms of Pyramids, coves, spires, domes, Cathedrals, and castles, give an air of romance to these wild Alpine contortions every where unsurpassed as it is in stately sublimity and grandeur.

The “Big Oak Grove,” is the next great natural curiosity of the Pacific slope—being situated 20 miles from Yosemite Valley, 30 miles S. East of Mariposa and about 4500 high on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada.— It contains 427 Trees from 275 to 400 in height, and from 20 to 40 feet in diameter—the grove covering a tract half a mile wide, by $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile in length—

This mammoth Tree, being a cone-bearing evergreen, is of the Redwood genus, and known as the *Sequoia gigantea* having bark on the largest of them, of 18 inches thickness, with the peculiarity of bearing two different kinds of leaves.— The trees grown as near together as their gigantic trunks, and limbs will allow, and rising in perfect perpendicularity some 3 or 400 feet, reunite in one mingled mass of foliage, swung to & fro by the rushing wind, like the rolling of Ocean waves when agitated by the tempest—the largest of this species when hewn down, indicating an age, according to existing theory, in that respect, of from two to three thousand years.—

The proposition is now presented of a concession of these great natural objects the “Yo-sem-e-te” and “Big Oak Grove” to the State of California as places of public resort for health and recreation. The effect of climate upon National Character engaged the attention of that eminent man the Baron de Montesquieu in his Spirit of Laws, and subsequently of the philosophic Volney in his work on Egypt and Syria, dividing, at one time the public opinion of Europe upon the different theories of those distinguished writers, yet generally resulting in the admission of its decided influence.

Equally positive in its effects on communities, are such stupendous objects, and wonderful natural peculiarities, multiplied instances of which, and their effects, are to be found in the Hellenic and Latin Peninsulas.—

The premises in question, should never be dealt by the United States as disposable to persons nor ever suffered to pass into individual proprietorship— They should each be kept in their entirety, and as it is not the policy of the National government to take them in charge for special & beneficial purposes, such being the province more specially of a State, they should go, by free gift in perpetuity and inalienability to California, to be forever dedicated to the use of the public.—

In this age of utilitarianism, even though unhappily for us, agitated by domestic convulsion, the policy of Congress has been progressive in its liberality for noble ends, in distributing the public domain by donations for educational purposes facilitating intercommunication by rail ways, canals, in fact reaching & aiding all the leading, material, wants of rising communities—not the least within the range of Congressional Constitutional prerogative, is the object proposed by the Bill, an object indicating the wisdom of the distinguished statesmen who have thus far given it their countenance, and which, in the judgment of this Office, should receive the sanction of the popular Branch of Congress, as it has already received the favorable consideration of the Senate of the United States.

With great respect

Your {obedient} {servant}

James Edmunds

{Honorable} W. Higby, Commissioner
of {Committee} {Public} Lands,
{House} of {Representatives}

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Legislative Concession to the State of California of “Yo-som-e-te” Gorge, and the Big Oak Grove