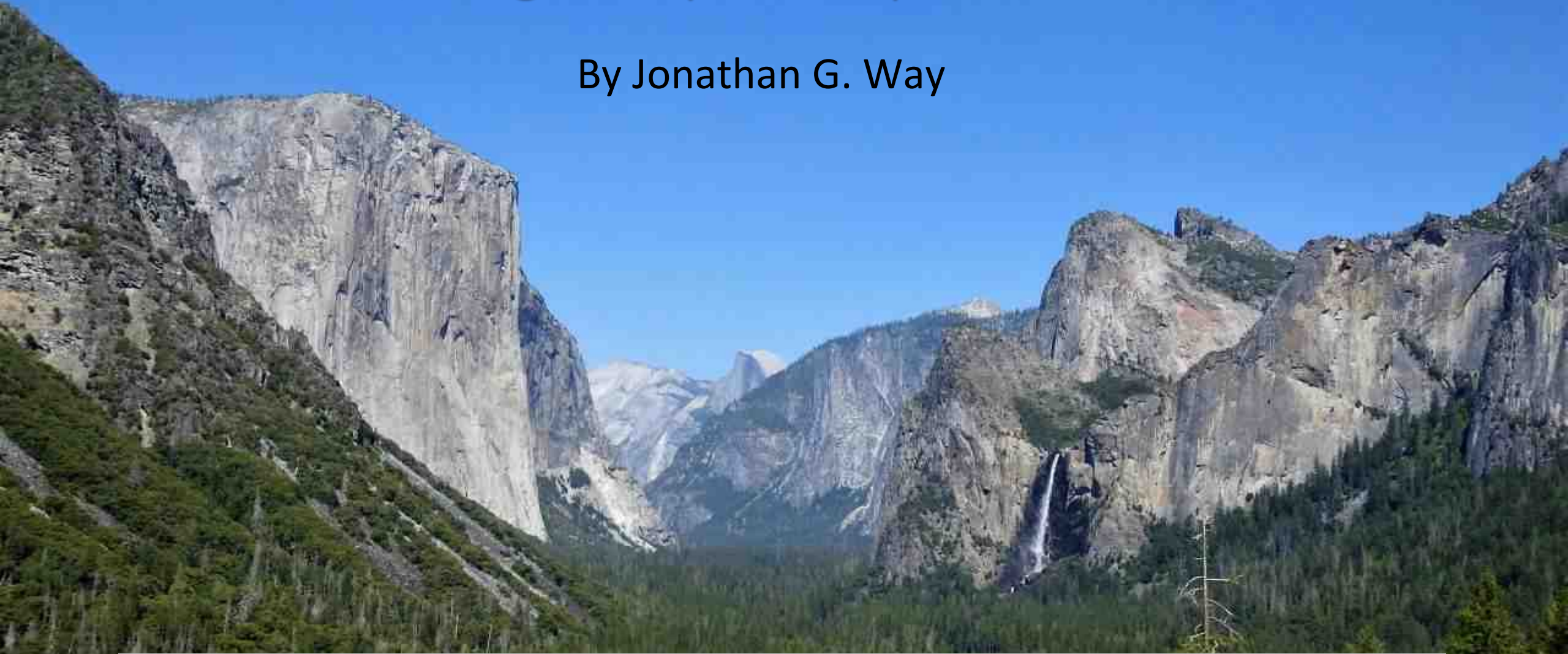


California National Parks: Yosemite, Kings Canyon, Sequoia, and Pinnacles

By Jonathan G. Way



E-book

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- Previous books by Jonathan Way (most recent is on the bottom):
 - Way, J. G. 2007 (2014, revised edition). [Suburban Howls: Tracking the Eastern Coyote in Urban Massachusetts](#). Dog Ear Publishing, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. 340 pages.
 - Way, J. G. 2013. My Yellowstone Experience: A Photographic and Informative Journey to a Week in the Great Park. Eastern Coyote Research, Cape Cod, Massachusetts. 152 pages. URL: <http://www.myyellowstoneexperience.org/bookproject/>
 - Way, J. G. 2020 (Revised, 2021). Northeastern U.S. National Parks: What Is and What Could Be. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 312 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/NortheasternUSNationalParks/>
 - Way, J.G. 2020 (Revised, 2021). The Trip of a Lifetime: A Pictorial Diary of My Journey Out West. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 561 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/TheTripOfALifetime/>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Coywolf: Eastern Coyote Genetics, Ecology, Management, and Politics. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 277 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/CoywolfBook>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Christmas in Yellowstone: A Dream Come True. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 208 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/ChristmasInYellowstone>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Mud, I mean April, in Yellowstone: Nature's Transition from Winter to Spring. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 330 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/MudIMeanAprilInYellowstone>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Yellowstone Wildlife during Summer. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 467 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/YellowstoneWildlifeDuringSummer>.
 - Way, J.G. 2022. A Yellowstone Summer with the Junction Butte Wolf Pack. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 481 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/YellowstoneSummerWithJunctionButteWolfPack>.
 - Way, J.G. 2022. Yellowstone in Winter: The Recovering Wolves of the Northern Range. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 394 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/YellowstoneInWinter>.
 - Way, J.G. 2022. Backpacking the Iconic Pemigewasset Wilderness. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 255 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/BackpackingIconicPemigewassetWilderness>.
 - Way, J.G. 2024. A Beary Special April in Yellowstone. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 596 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/BearySpecialAprilInYellowstone>.
 - Way, J.G. 2024. Late Summer in Yellowstone National Park. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 583 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoterresearch.com/LateSummerInYellowstone>.

Pay it Forward

Dear Reader,

This book depicts my California adventure to popular national parks, including Yosemite, Kings Canyon, Sequoia, and Pinnacles. This was a trip defined by scenery and trees, with wildlife sprinkled in. However, some of the wildlife was unique, as you will read. This tome depicts hundreds of images from this unique part of the country.

To increase access for all people, rich or poor, majority or minority, I am offering this e-book for free to anyone in the world who wants to read it. I share with you, the reader, my experience exploring the national parks in central California as well as some other areas in a photographic journey intended to awe the reader. If you enjoy it, all I ask in return is that you *pay it forward* by sharing and please consider a donation of \$10.00 to support my research and education efforts, as well as supporting the book's Open Access format. That is about the price of one movie ticket, and you get to own this book, and all of its pictures, forever. If you do not want to donate from [my website](#), you are welcome to email me and I will gladly provide you with a physical postal address: jon@easterncoyoteresearch.com or easterncoyoteresearch@yahoo.com.

Thanks in advance!

Jon Way



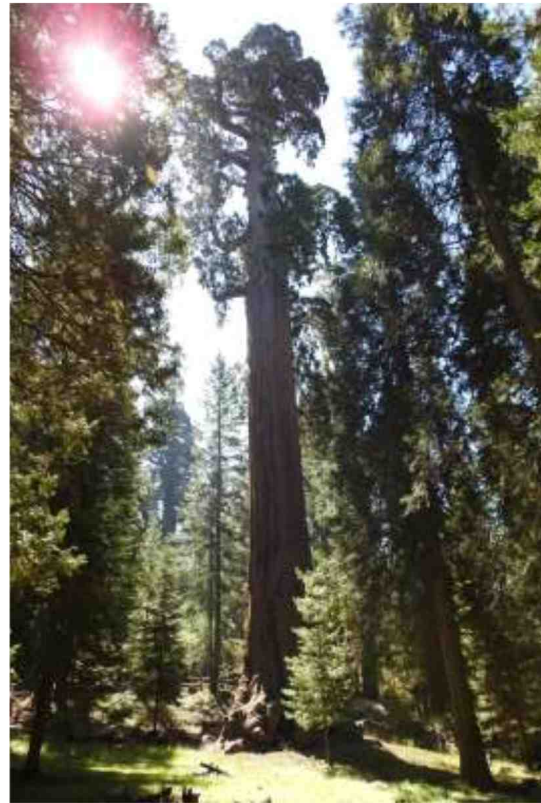
Upper
Yosemite Fall.



Half Dome.



General Grant Sequoia Tree.



Mule
deer



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Preface

This is a unique venture for me. My previous books (see page 2) involve areas where I have spent much time and therefore know many intimate details of those locations. That background knowledge has helped me create storylines, and with the pictures from those places, I have been able to craft readable, picture-based manuscripts with some substance.

This book is the polar opposite. I had never been to central California prior to this 9 day trip from June 22-30, 2024 (arriving home on the morning of July 1). Furthermore, Steve Cifuni, my friend and frequent travel companion who went on the expedition with me, planned the majority of the adventure. That meant that I didn't do the pre-planning that I am used to and therefore knew a lot less about those parks than most places I travel to. Every day involved a steep learning curve, which involved going to new places and discovering those areas, before packing up and moving to a new location. We only had our tent in the same place for two consecutive nights on two different occasions. In this book, I researched some of the places we went to after we returned. I provide links to some of that information to flesh out the storyline herein.

For this trip, we spent 3 nights and 4 days in and around Yosemite National Park. After a shower and rest night in Fresno, CA (in 104° temps!), we spent 1 night and 2 days in Kings Canyon National Park (including the surrounding Sequoia National Forest/Monument), then 1 night and 2 days in the adjoining Sequoia National Park. We then drove west and spent technically 3 different days (it was effectively two, however) and 2 nights in Pinnacles National Park before finishing the last day along the coast of Route 1, including visiting the Monterey Bay and Big Sur areas, prior to our 9:30 PM PT red-eye flight which left us getting back to Massachusetts on the morning of July 1. The number of days adds up to be more than 9 because park days overlapped where we would finish a given park in the morning and drive to our next one later that day, so we were often in two different parks on the same day.

Because of the nature of us camping and going to new areas, I do not have a list of acknowledgments like I do in my other books. Steve and I had mentally and verbally planned this trip for a few years and finally made it happen in 2024. He continues to be instrumental in keeping me motivated to visit all the places that we have been fortunate to visit in the past decade plus, and the expedition was a result of our collective efforts.

This trip unofficially started for me the day before, on June 21st, as I was up in Boston celebrating my beloved Boston Celtics banner #18 with friends: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161894113945016>. After the parade, I headed to Steve's family's house in Revere, Massachusetts and hung out there until the following morning. I left my vehicle there, like I do on all my other trips. We were driven to Logan Airport at ~5:30 AM by his father prior to our 7:00 AM flight.

After arriving in San Francisco, we basically winged the rest of the trip knowing where we had to get to every few days. Little did we know that we would have very spotty, and in some cases terrible, cell reception for much of the trip. In fact, we relied on Wi-Fi at a couple of buildings for about half of our attempted daily email, text, and Facebook checks. The limited cellular access affected even our GPS navigation in a few areas. Fortunately, Steve downloaded some maps to his phone prior to the trip which helped us in some remote area.

In term of logistics, Steve has had a Delta credit card for many years (formerly, I did too). This allows us to have a checked bag up to 70 pounds. For the last few Yellowstone trips, we have been bringing most of our food with us and only going to grocery stores for perishable items like fresh fruit/veggies and bread. This has saved us a ton of time (and money) to be able to head straight to the parks and take more pictures, among other things. I brought my camp stove with me, and after purchasing camp fuel before arriving in Yosemite, many of my meals were canned which made it easy to heat up and eat anywhere we were. My luggage was a full 20 pounds less on the return trip once I ate most of that food!

One thing that is similar to my past books, however, was the number of pictures I took in a limited number of days. That gave me the impetuosity to create this picture account, even though I know far less about the area. The images alone tell much of the story and the adventure of traveling to these places. I feel that I would be remiss to not publish this tome after taking 1,429 images with my Nikon P-900 camera: 505 in Yosemite, 227 in Kings Canyon, 236 in Sequoia, 306 in Pinnacles, and 155 along the coast including Monterey Bay and Big Sur. The vast majority of images are original pictures, but a few from each park (I would estimate about 30 total) of them are cropped and formatted for color/light and are renamed from the original file. I also took about 200 pictures with my iPhone. The exact count was difficult to quantify because Steve air dropped me many images, including some from my Nikon camera (like of the condor) because he first downloaded them to his device.

The following Facebook posts related to this expedition were made during (and after) this trip. While in the parks for the first three posts, I mostly used cell phone pictures. For the last two posts, I was at home and used mostly my camera pics:

June 25, Yosemite pics: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161904185970016>

June 27, Sequoia Park focus: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161908419245016>

June 29, Pinnacle Park focus: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161912592650016>

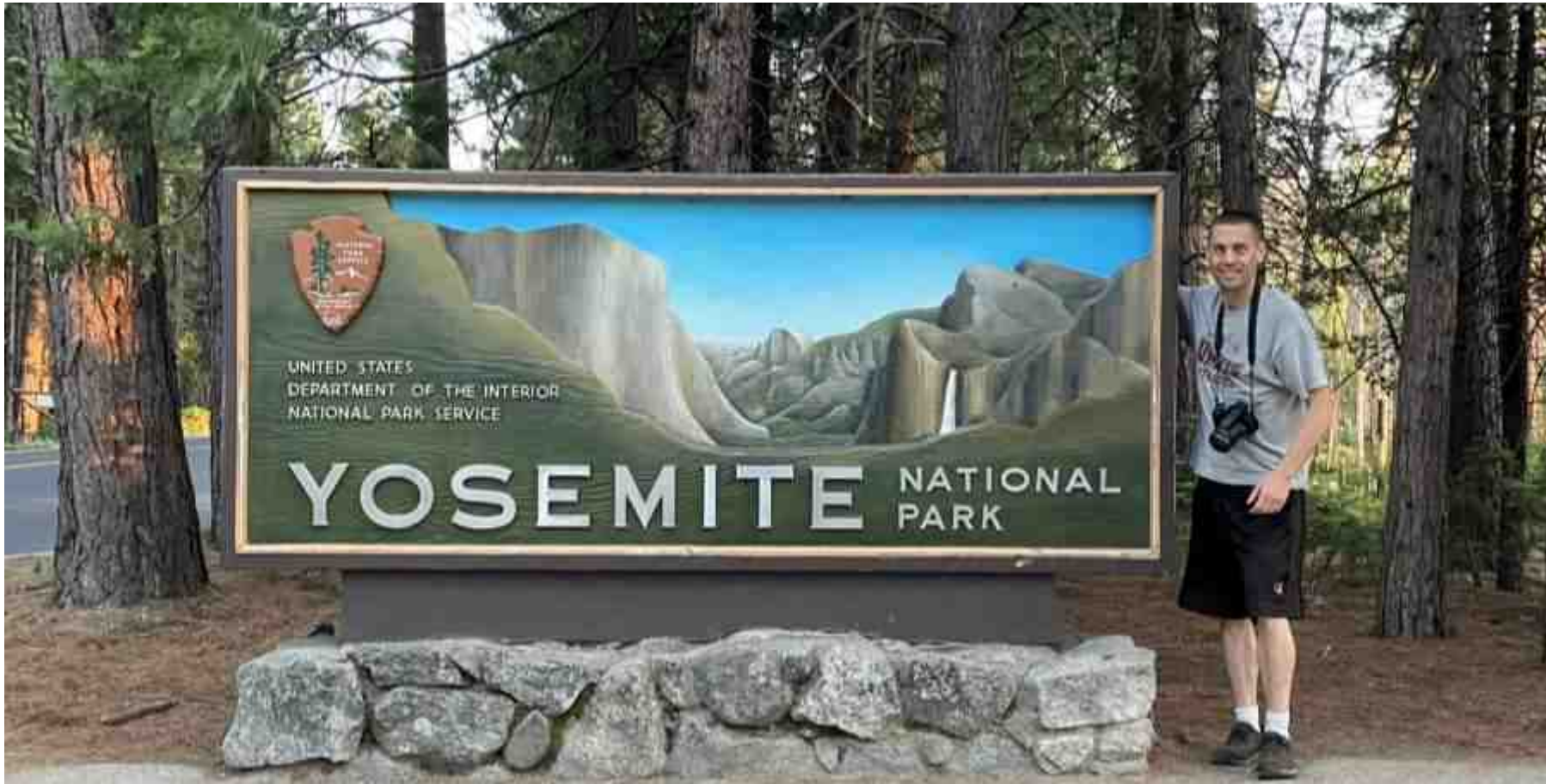
July 2, Condor focus from Pinnacle: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161919685430016>

July 6, Sea otter and sea lion focus: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161928655955016>

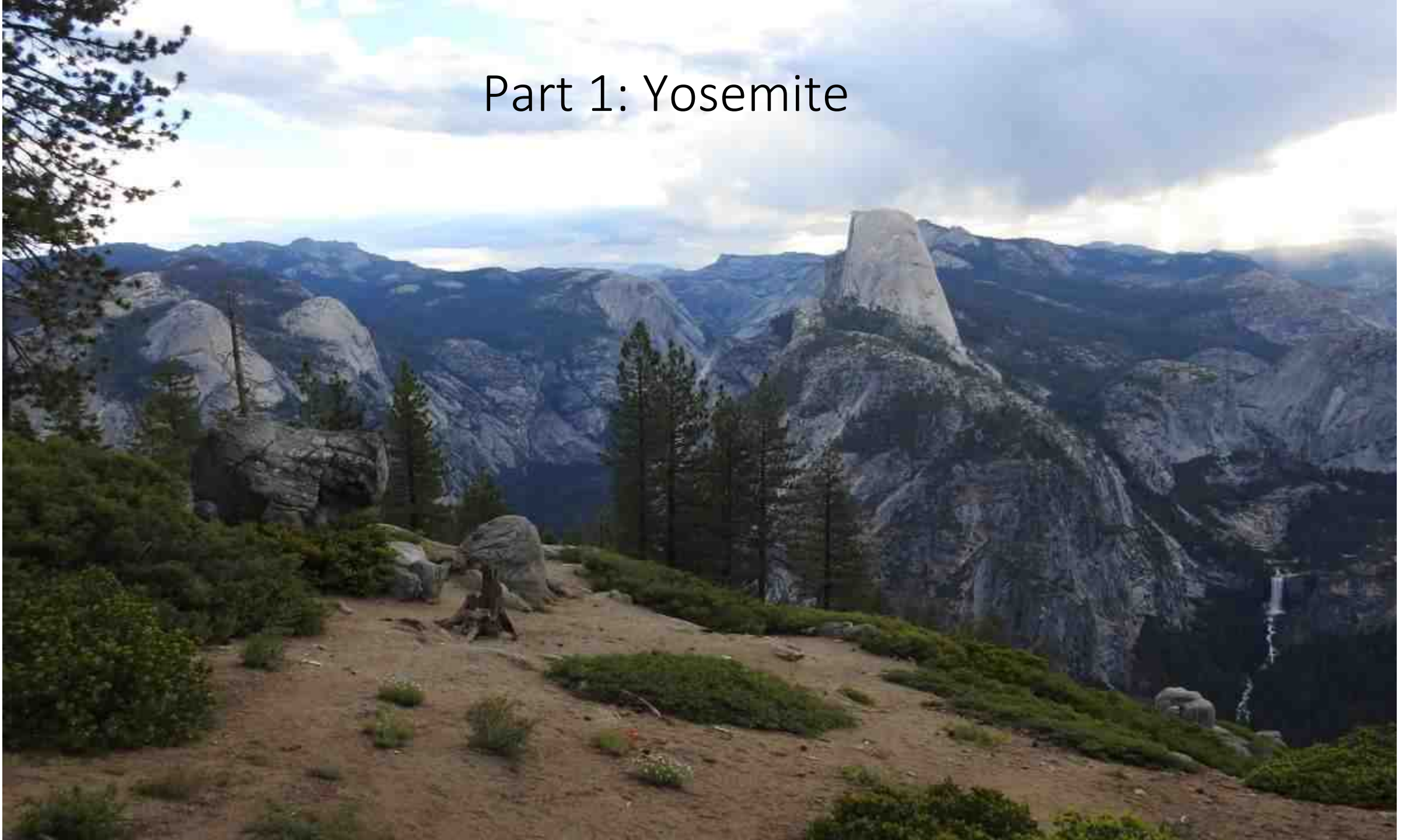
In this e-book, I detail this 9 day adventure from start to finish in complete but in much greater detail than those previous sources. I use 1,452 photographs herein, including some maps, my Nikon P-900 camera (mostly), my iPhone, and Steve's iPhone. I also took 18 pages of journal notes that helped me flesh out this story. Ken Smith of Camp Oot-Oot, Maine, copy-edited the text to make it more professional. I greatly appreciate his valuable input! Also, the National Park Service provided useful maps that I use in many chapters to help direct readers to important locations that I visited.

I hope you enjoy the read and can donate to support my research which will help keep these e-books in Open Access format. Please see the *Pay it Forward* page at the beginning of this document if you want to support my work. Thank you!

Now, come along and see what this unique part of the country looks like.



Part 1: Yosemite



Yosemite Here We Come!

One of the obvious positives of my many previous trips to Yellowstone National Park (see page 2) is having a detailed knowledge of that place. There, I see an amazing variety of large mammalian wildlife that is unmatched in North America. However, my love of visiting Yellowstone has prevented me from exploring new areas. Steve and I decided to change that in 2024 by visiting central California shortly after the academic year ended at the high school I teach at. I was excited to visit a new area of the country that I had never been to before.

Our flight left Boston just before 8:00 AM on Saturday June 22, 2024. It was a pleasant, but cool 65° in San Francisco when we landed around 11:30 AM PT. It took us a while to take the tram to Hertz Rental Car. Once there, we selected a Kia Soul for our vehicle. There were a few electric cars in the lot where we chose our vehicle. They tempted us, but not knowing the area, let alone charging stations, we decided against an electric (and, of course, we later found many charging stations in the parks which mostly appeared to be free).

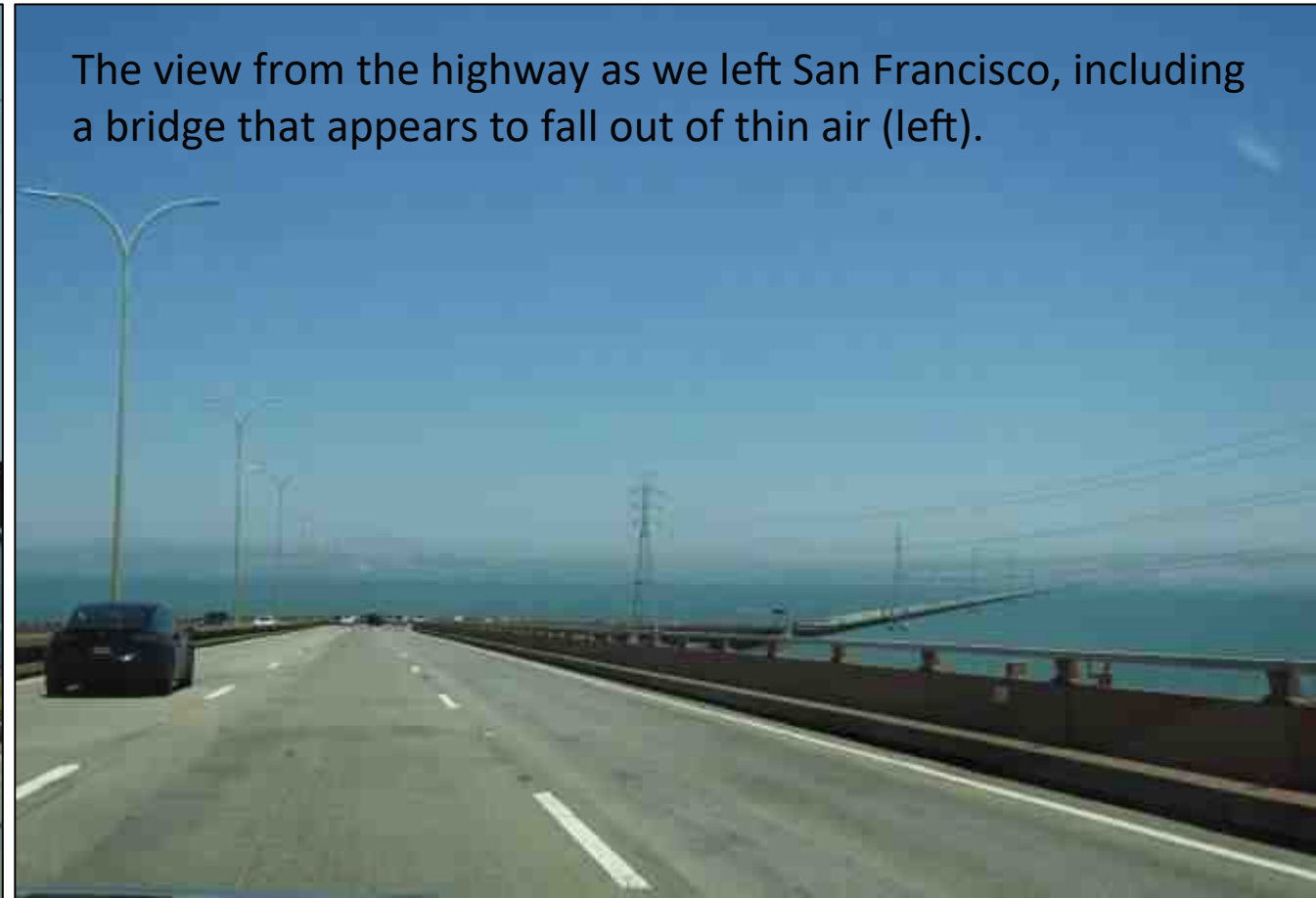
It was about a four hour drive to Yosemite from the airport. There wasn't a super direct route to get there until we reached Route 120. We took 120 east until arriving in the park. As we drove, we noticed the temperature spiking and reaching 100-102° as we drove east. I couldn't believe the difference from the coast to further inland, but California is famous for those different climates relatively close together. It was in the low 100s for the last 2-2.5 hour of the trip.

It was still very warm when we arrived in Stanislaus National Forest. We stayed in the small Sweet Water Campground on the first night. We set up our tent and camp items between 5:15-5:45 in 95° heat. We also organized the car, as we would be living out of it for the next week and a half. Afterwards, we drove the final ~10 miles on Route 120 to arrive in Yosemite in the early evening. We took the Tioga Road to the northern part of the park, going about 20 miles to the Yosemite Creek picnic area where I had chili and 2 chicken hot dogs (I ate this package of hot dogs over the first 3 days of the trip without refrigeration!).

It was a nice drive and was a good foreshadowing of where we were going the following morning. We saw a pretty Steller's jay on a road-killed animal on the side of the road at about 8,000 foot elevation. Then, I had a quick sighting of a mule deer buck in a meadow at the western part of the Tioga Road at dusk.

It was a lot of driving each way – about 35-40 miles – and we got back to the campsite at 8:30 PM PT, which was 11:30 PM biological time for us. It was a long and fulfilling day. Back at camp just as it got dark, I spent about 45 minutes on the picnic table processing the 67 pictures that I managed to take on this day.

I didn't sleep well. I rarely do the first night of tent camping. There was traffic on Route 120 for much of the night, and some people woke me up as they were talking around 1 AM. Plus, I could hear many small animals scurrying around the tent. This would be a pattern for most of the trip where I would be lying in my sleeping bag for 7-8 hours but would only sleep for about 4-5 of them. The kicker on this evening was the brilliantly shining full moon, which lit up the entire campground most of the night.



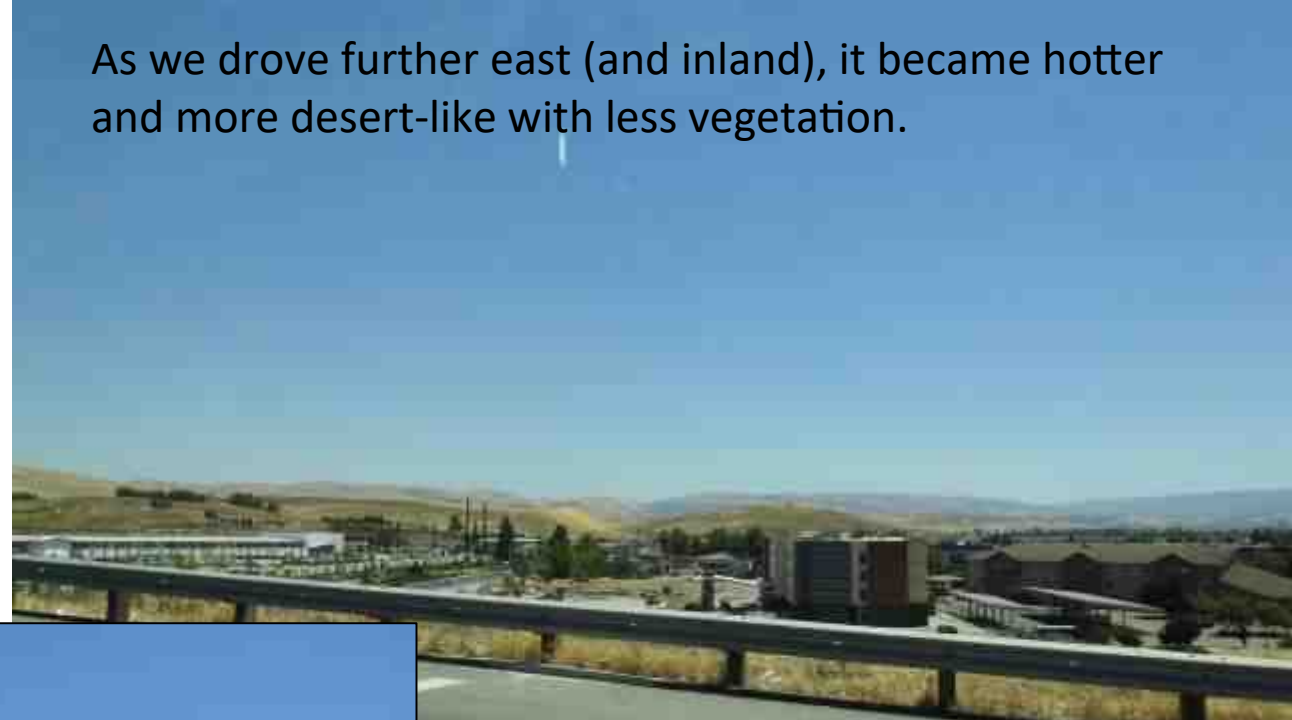
The view from the highway as we left San Francisco, including a bridge that appears to fall out of thin air (left).



The drive quickly turned to lots of grass and spread-out trees, which is characteristic of the Mediterranean, chaparral biome habitat that dominates central California.

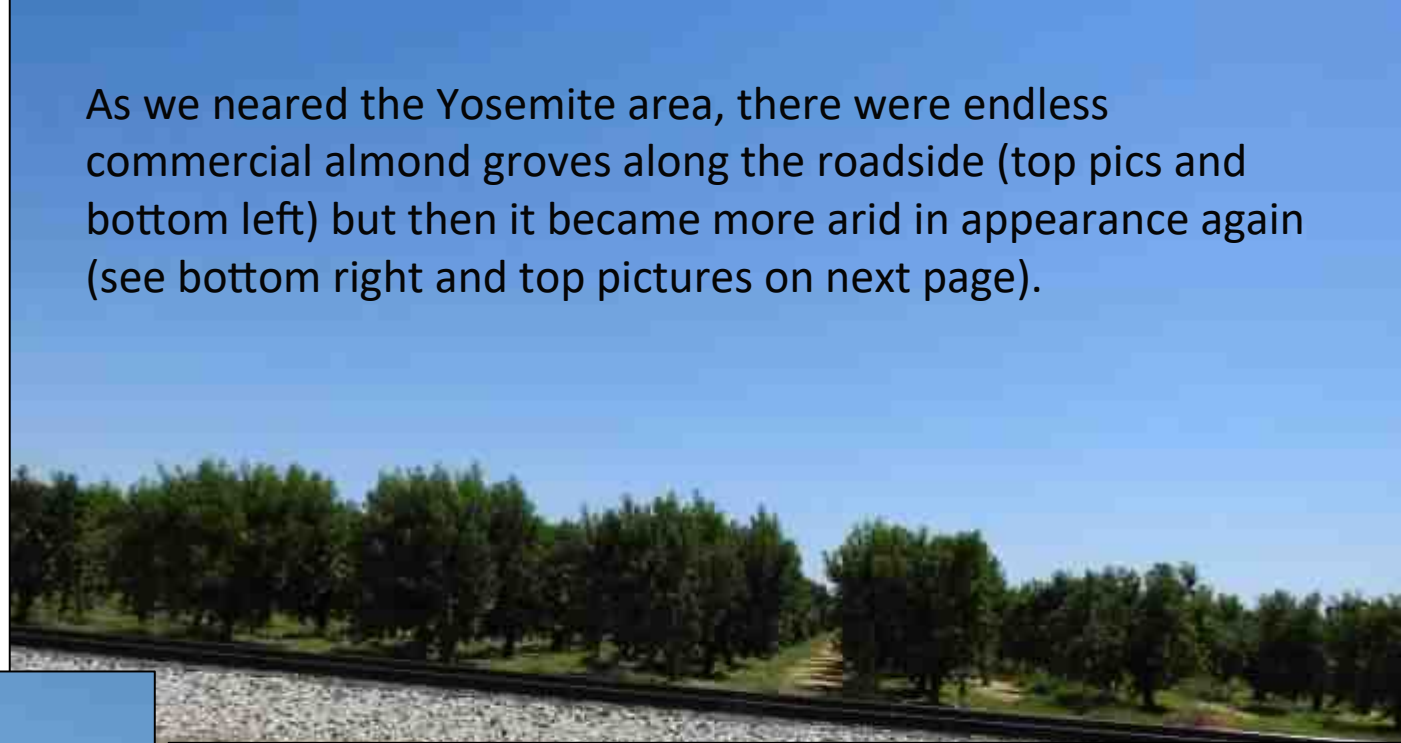


As we drove further east (and inland), it became hotter and more desert-like with less vegetation.





As we neared the Yosemite area, there were endless commercial almond groves along the roadside (top pics and bottom left) but then it became more arid in appearance again (see bottom right and top pictures on next page).





It was sweltering in the high 90s when we stopped at Don Pedro Lake off Route 120 in the Stanislaus National Forest.





Don Pedro Lake.



As we approached the small town of Groveland (bottom right and next page) and the national forest (left), the vegetation became greener. Groveland was the last town on Route 120 before Yosemite.





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Rim of the World vista, Stanislaus National Forest.



Sweet Water Campground (site #10) in Stanislaus National Forest.



Tall trees just inside Yosemite National Park on our first evening in California.

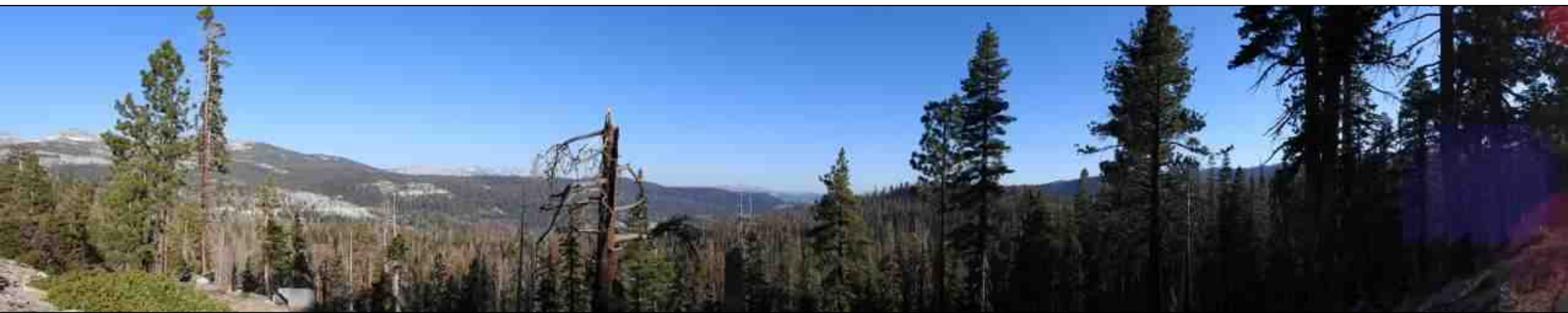




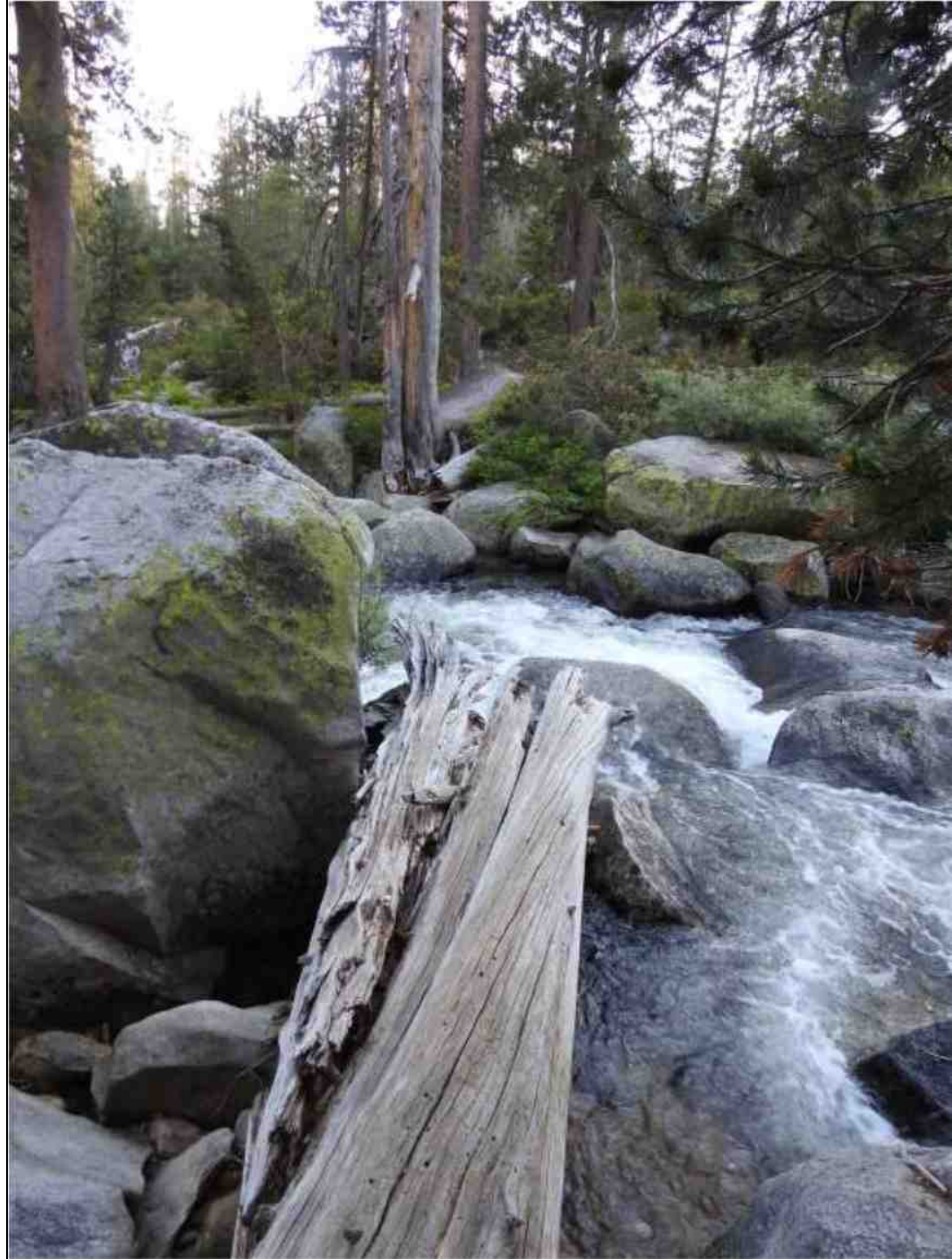
Trees and view from the Tioga Road as we gained elevation.

Next two pages: Viewpoint of the high elevation country from Tioga Road.

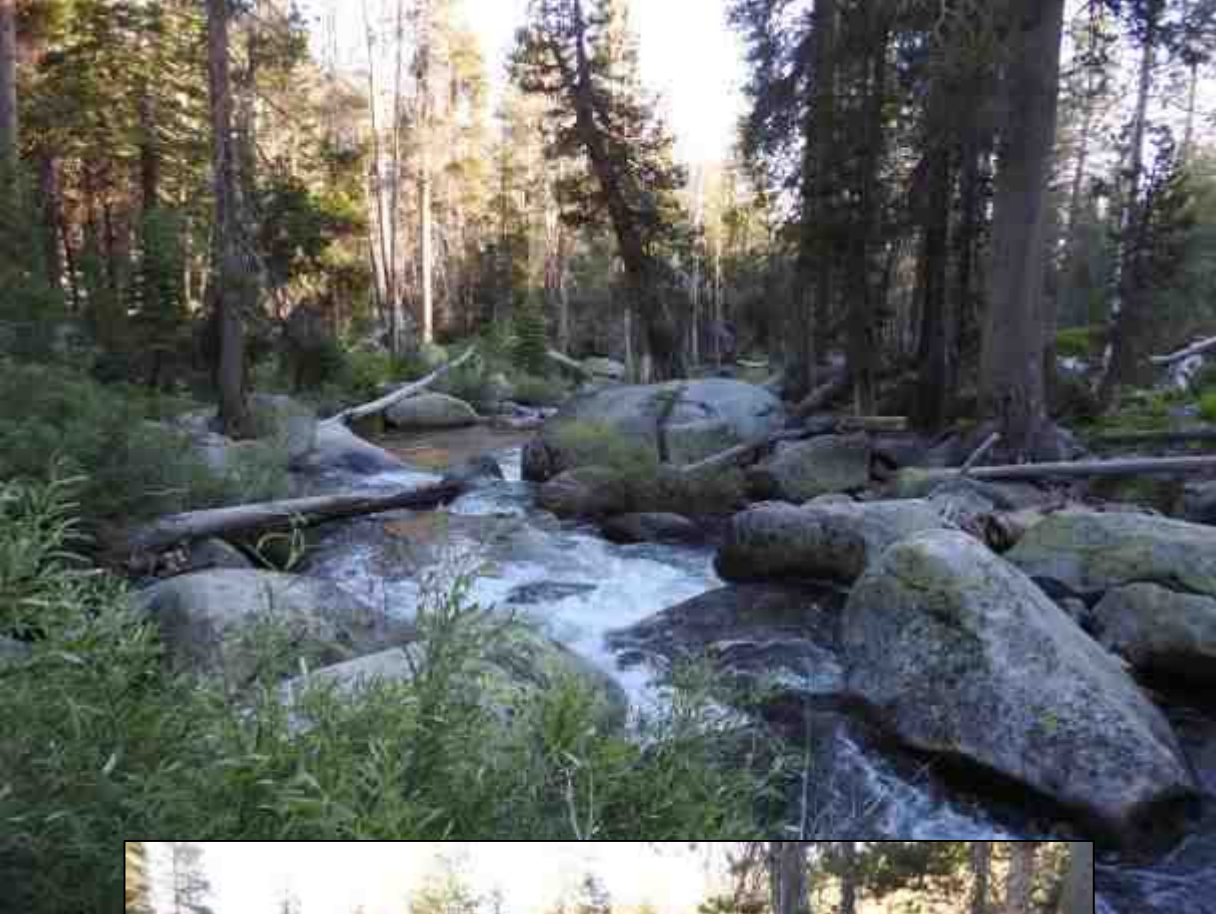








Yosemite Creek at the picnic area.



Yosemite Creek was a quiet and pleasant place to cook dinner, where I used my stove for the first time on this trip. I took the picture on the bottom left *after* putting my cooking gear away.

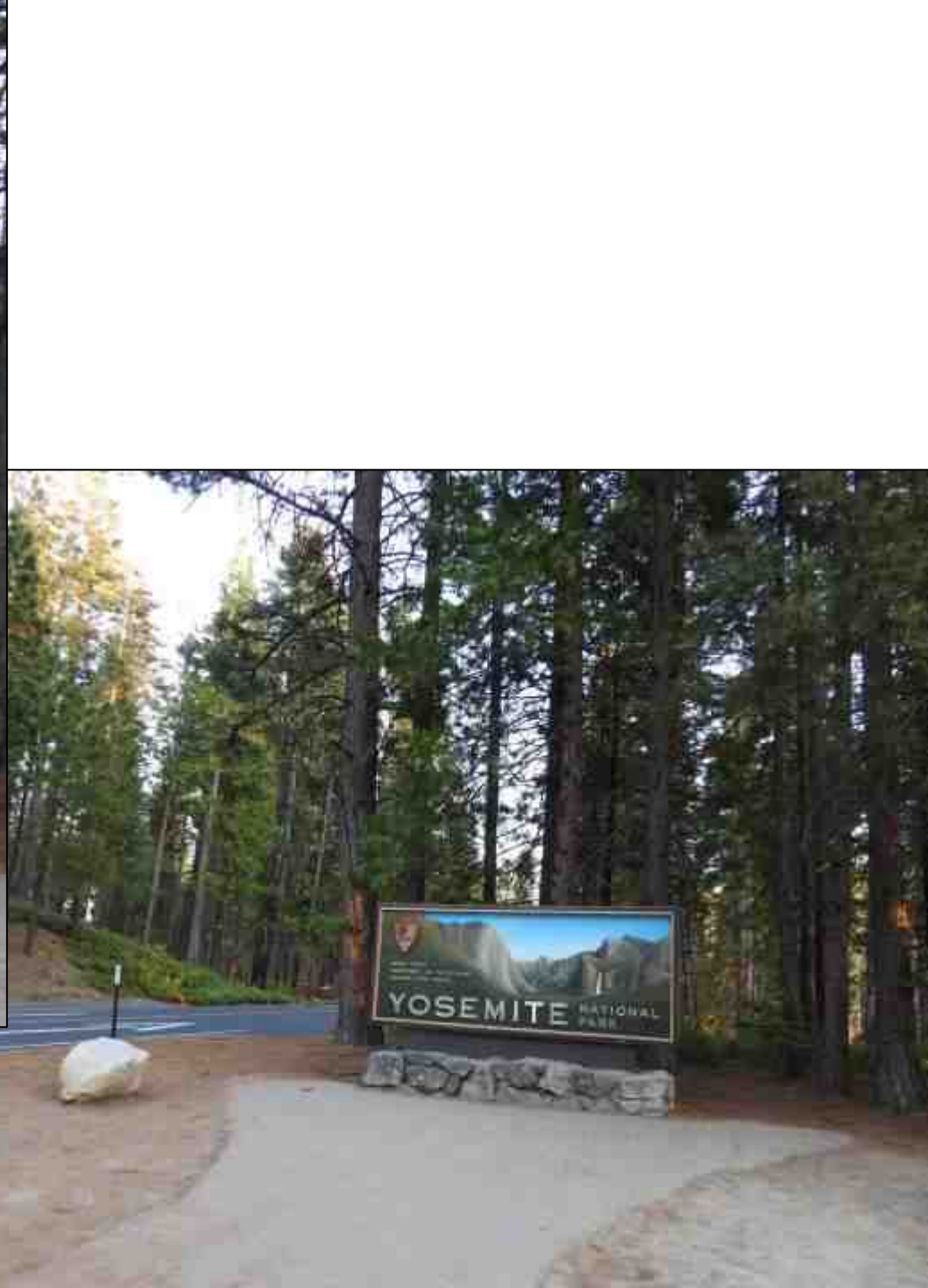
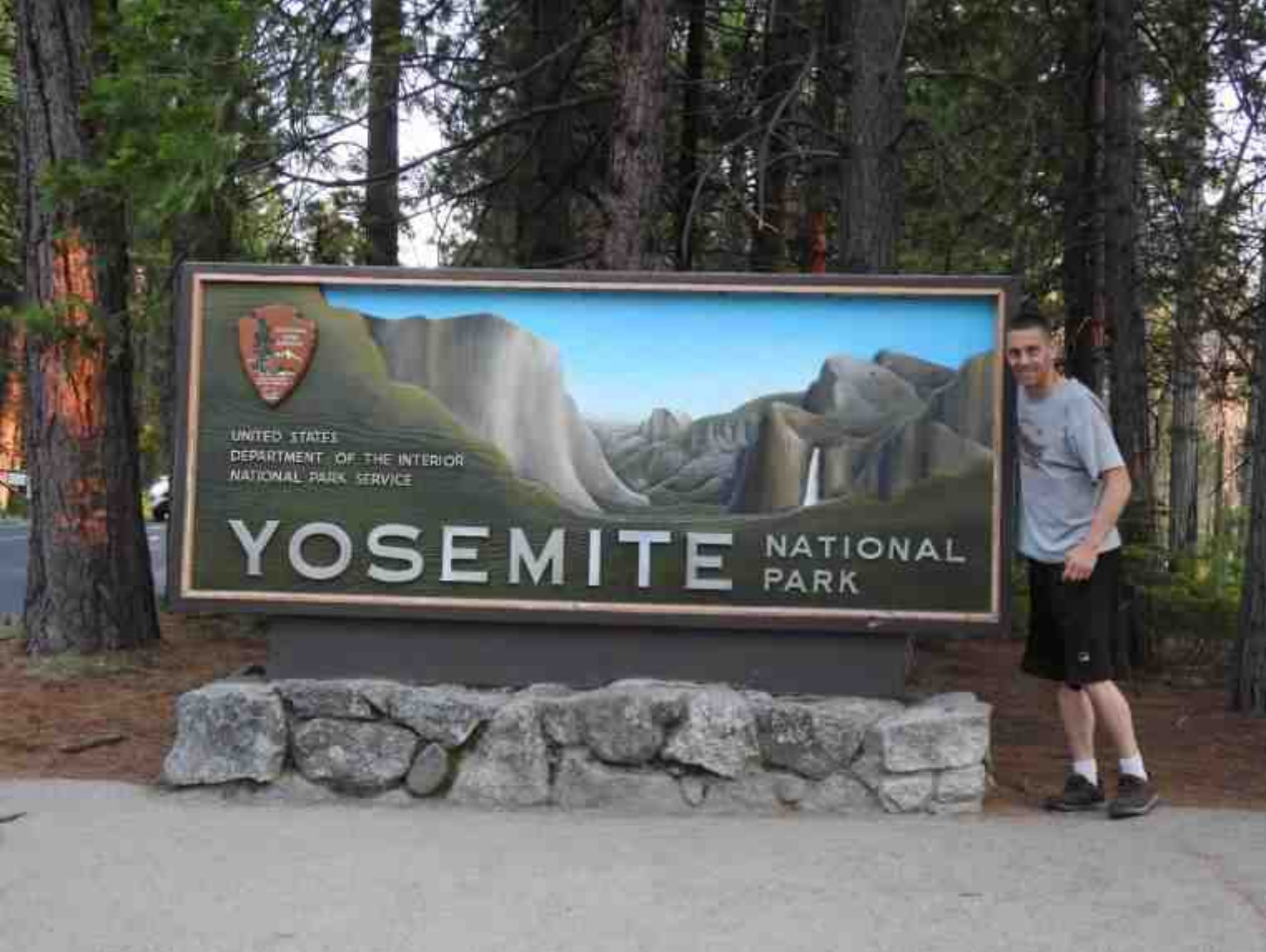




Left: A cool rock wall above (north of) Tioga Road.

Right: Speeding Kills Bears. These signs were put up in 17 different spots throughout the park, representing the locations and number of bears hit and killed by vehicles in Yosemite in the past year.





Sunset (bottom right is zoomed in) in Stanislaus National Forest.



Tioga Road, Mono Lake, then on to Yosemite Valley

Sunday, June 23rd, 2024 started out nice and cool at 55° at dawn. With a quiet campground, as just a few people were awake, I took a short ramble on a trail behind my campsite. I first captured some nice images of the full moon that awoke me at night with such a bright shine. I went about a quarter mile, including past some water tanks, before reaching a paved road. There was a bizarre living compound below a steep, hilly section of the road and next to the Middle Fork of the Tuolumne River. For a rural area, I couldn't believe all the concentrated residences there.

I followed the paved road west until I reached Route 120 about a half mile west of the campground. There was a sign for 'City of San Jose Camps', which was also bizarre because San Jose wasn't anywhere near there, being about a three-hour drive away! I guessed it was some sort of inner-city camp or retreat location for kids that live in urban areas, and when I got home, [I discovered it seemed to be just that](#), which provides a great opportunity for underserved children.

I got back to the campground a little before 6 AM after a 1.5-2.0 mile, unexpected, and slightly odd hike. Wanting to get going, we quickly packed up and were on the road for Yosemite right at 6:00. We headed back to the Tioga Road. Shortly into that long stretch, we parked and hiked the Tuolumne Grove Loop, which was just under a three mile round trip. There were some amazing sequoia trees there. It was my first time seeing what is among the world's oldest living organisms, some being 2,000 years old. They were stunning to see in person. It was incredible how big they were. There were also some big Douglas firs and sugar pines with huge pinecones.

We finished hiking the Tuolumne Grove around 8:00 without bumping into many people, which was nice for a crowded national park. We then took Tioga Road east all 40+ miles to out of the park, through Lee Vining Valley and to Mono Lake. We made many scenic stops along the way, taking pictures and doing some short walks to scenic overlooks, such as at Olmsted Point which offered a great view to the south, including my first view of Half Dome.

During our eastward travels earlier in the morning, we made a mental note of locations we missed, knowing we would come back and visit them, like the visitor center and Tuolumne Meadows. Along the way, we saw 5 southern Sierra marmots, which are a type of yellow-bellied marmot, in different spots but all high in elevation, such as the one at Olmsted Point. All marmots were observed in the morning as we drove east, and interestingly, I didn't see any later in the day when we were traveling back to the west.



The moon was bright all night from the 22nd to 23rd of June. At dawn, I was able to capture some good images from the campground.







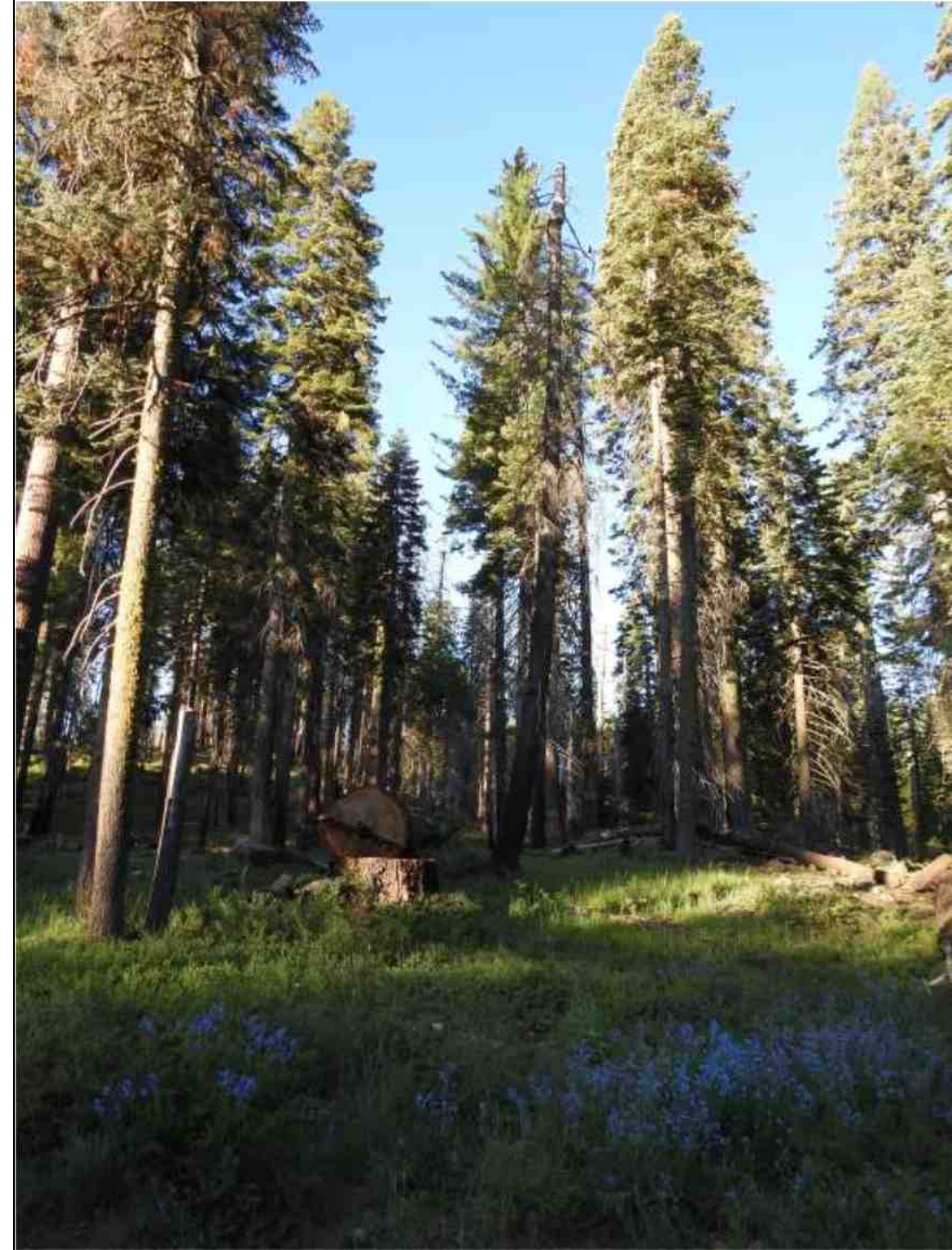


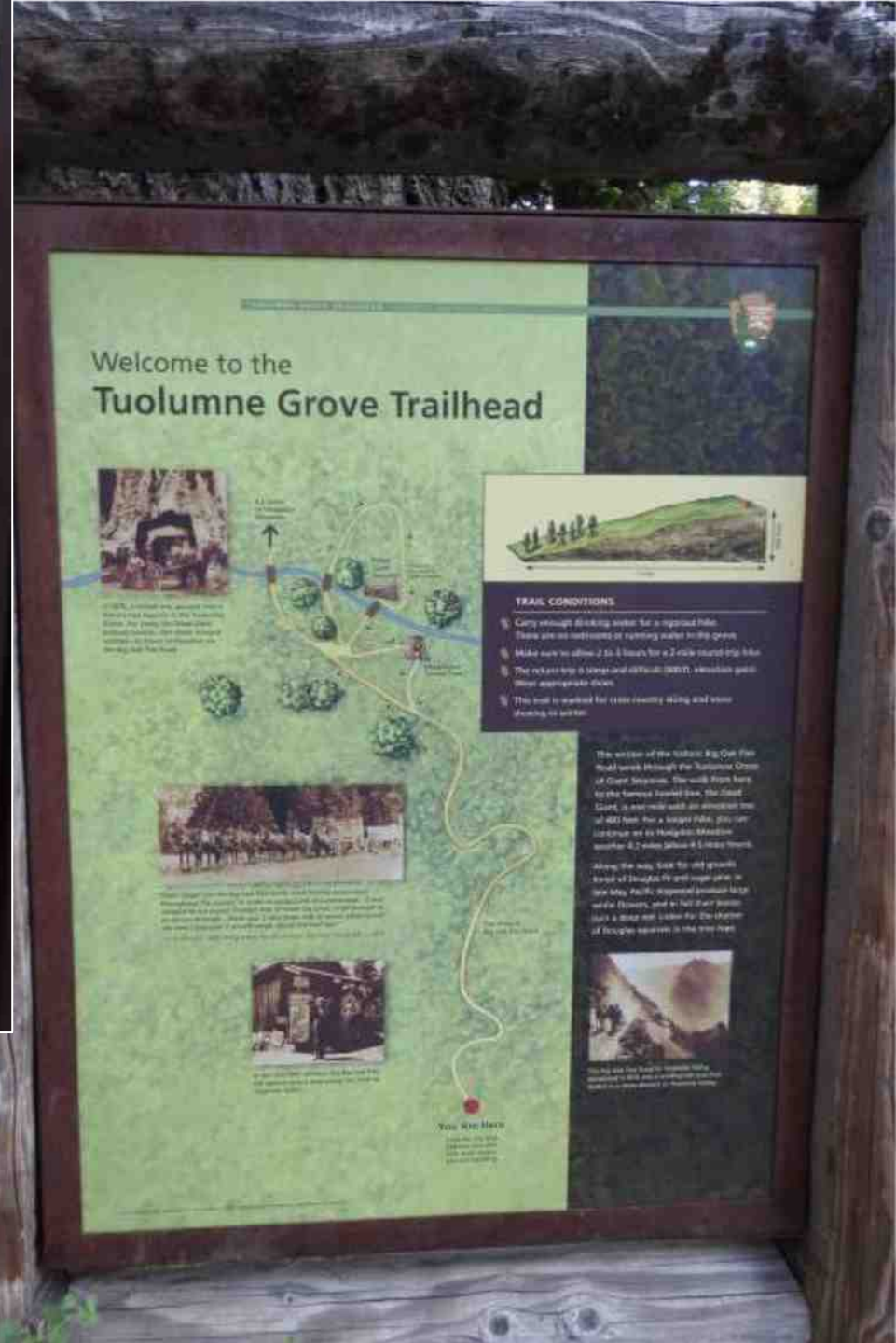
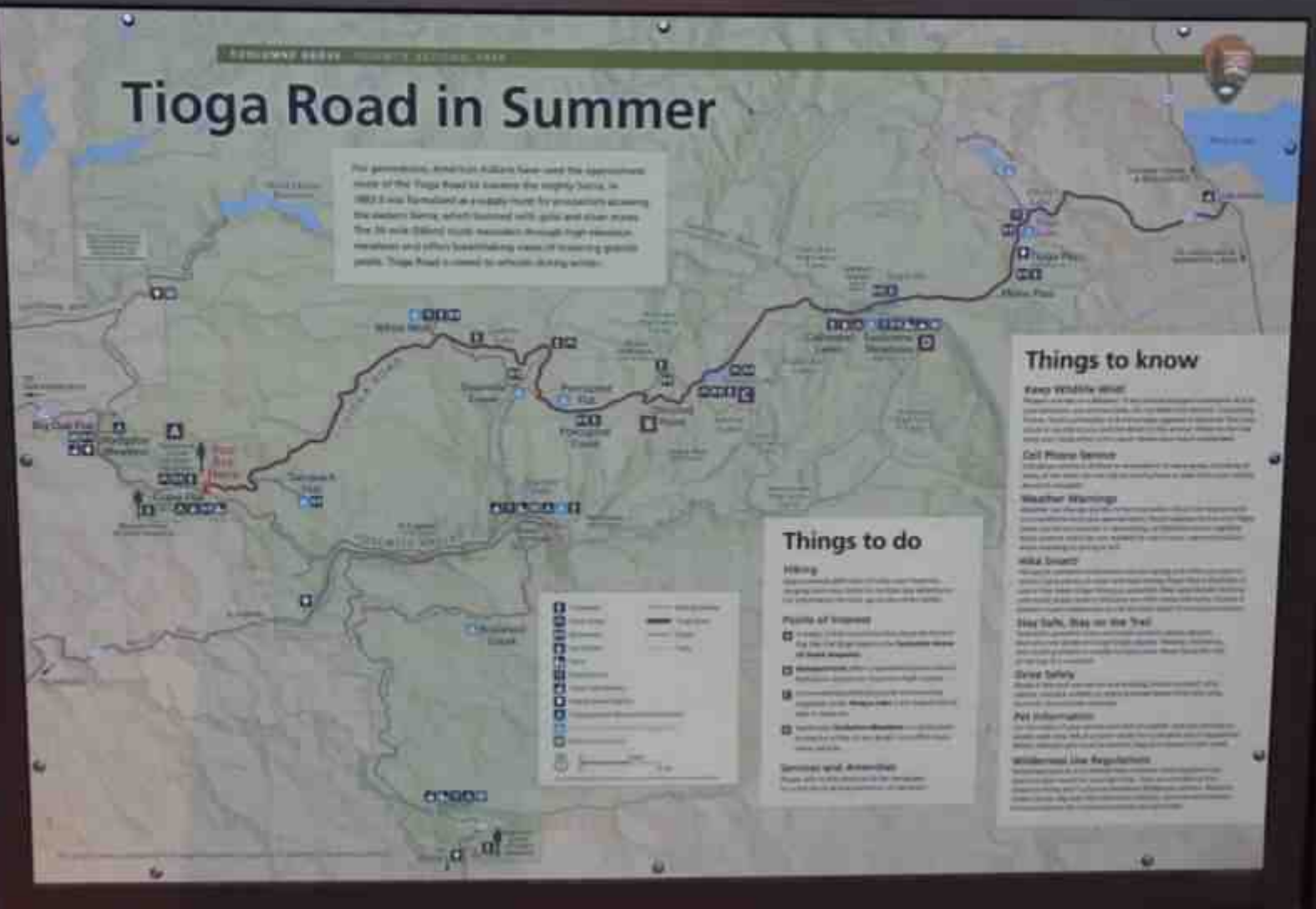
Water tank behind the campground (upper left). View of the San Jose Camp Road sign off Route 120 (bottom right), west of the Sweetwater Campground, which I returned to slightly after dawn (bottom left).





The Big Oak Flat Entrance station to Yosemite along Route 120 at dawn (left), and some tall trees as we approached the Tuolumne Grove on the Tioga Road (right; also see next few pages).



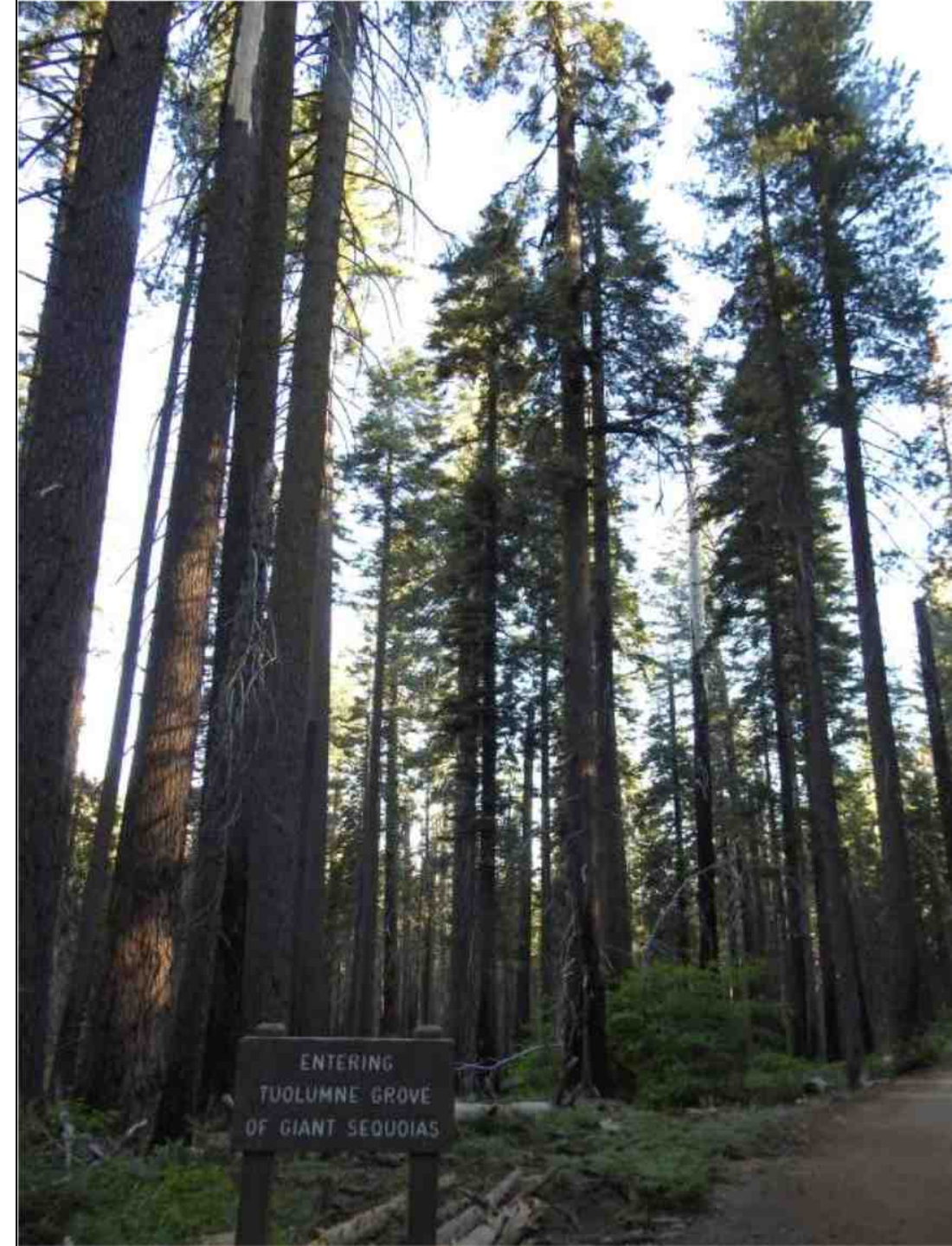
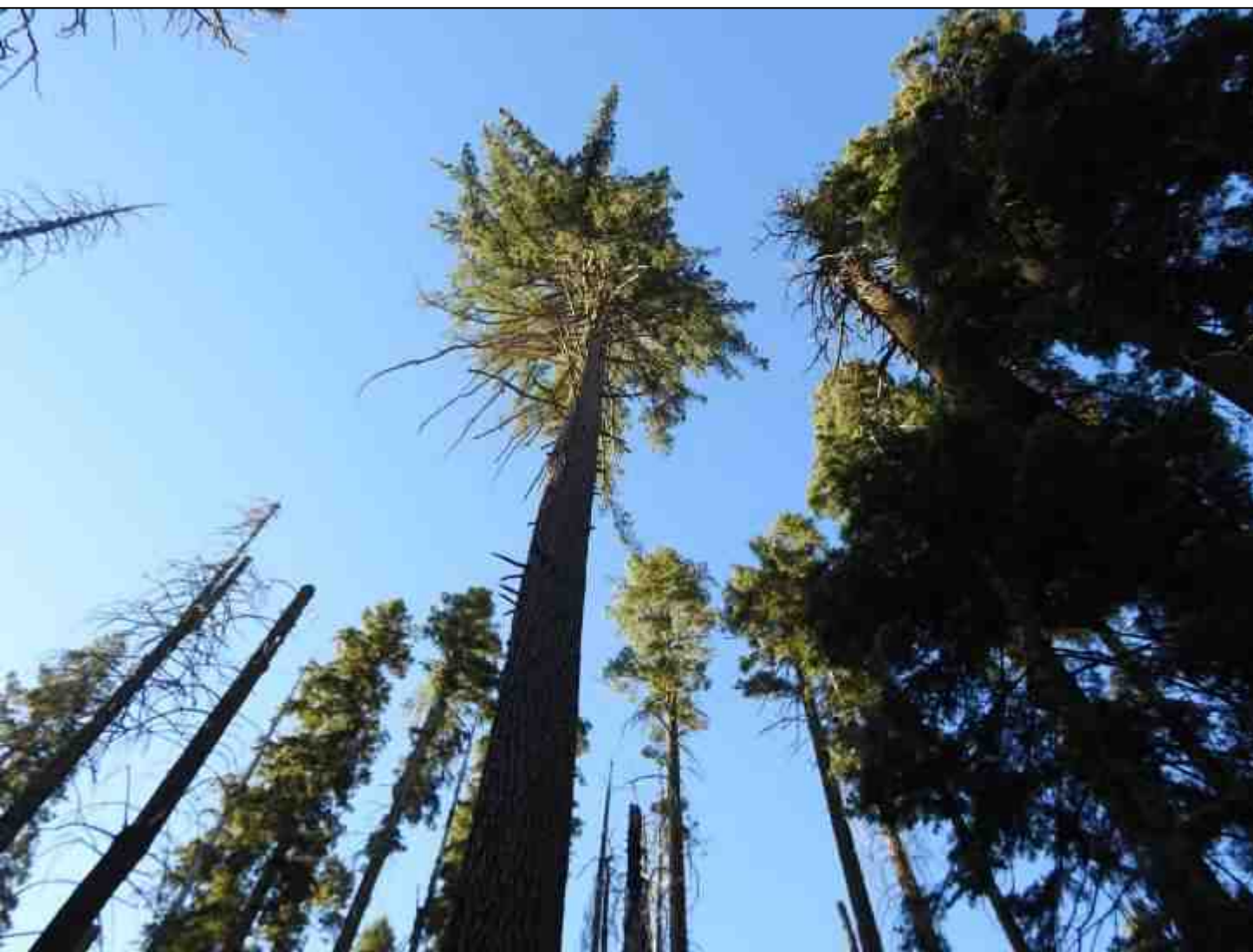


Maps of Tioga Road in the northern part of Yosemite (left), and of the Tuolumne Grove at the western/beginning part of the Tioga Road (right). Note Mono Lake at the far upper right section of the Tioga Road map (left). That is as far east as we drove on this day.



Tall trees along the Tuolumne Grove Trail (left). Huge pinecones (right) are produced by sugar pines, a new species of tree for me. Next page: Steve in the foreground gives perspective to how big those trees were.







The only way to fully appreciate the size of sequoia trees is to take pictures with known objects, like humans, in the same frame (left). This behemoth towered to almost 300 feet in height (right).





Taking pictures in pano mode, while using either my cell phone or Nikon P-900 (left and right pics) was one way to get the entire tree in a frame. However, one couldn't get a full appreciation for the sheer size of sequoias via image alone; see the small size of the sign at the bottom of the right picture. That sign read, 'Please Stay Out', in an attempt to keep people off the roots at the base of these trees.







The bark and wood of sequoia trees is so strong and rot resistant that they can avoid decomposing for decades, if not longer (left), while live trees (right) along the sequoia grove survive for many centuries.





A large sugar pine in the middle images (top pics); one can see the large pinecones when zoomed in. Below: Fallen Giant Sequoia.

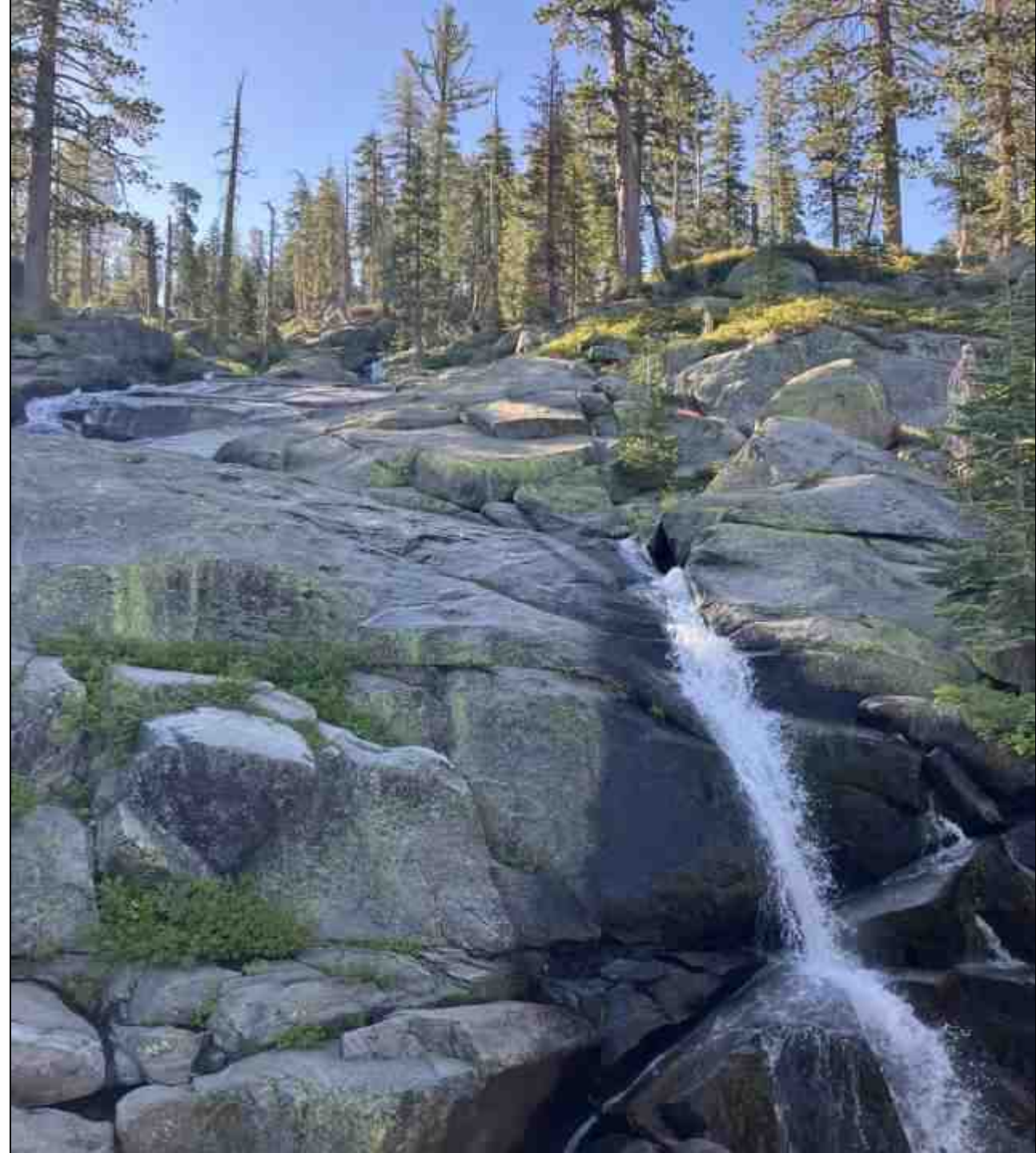


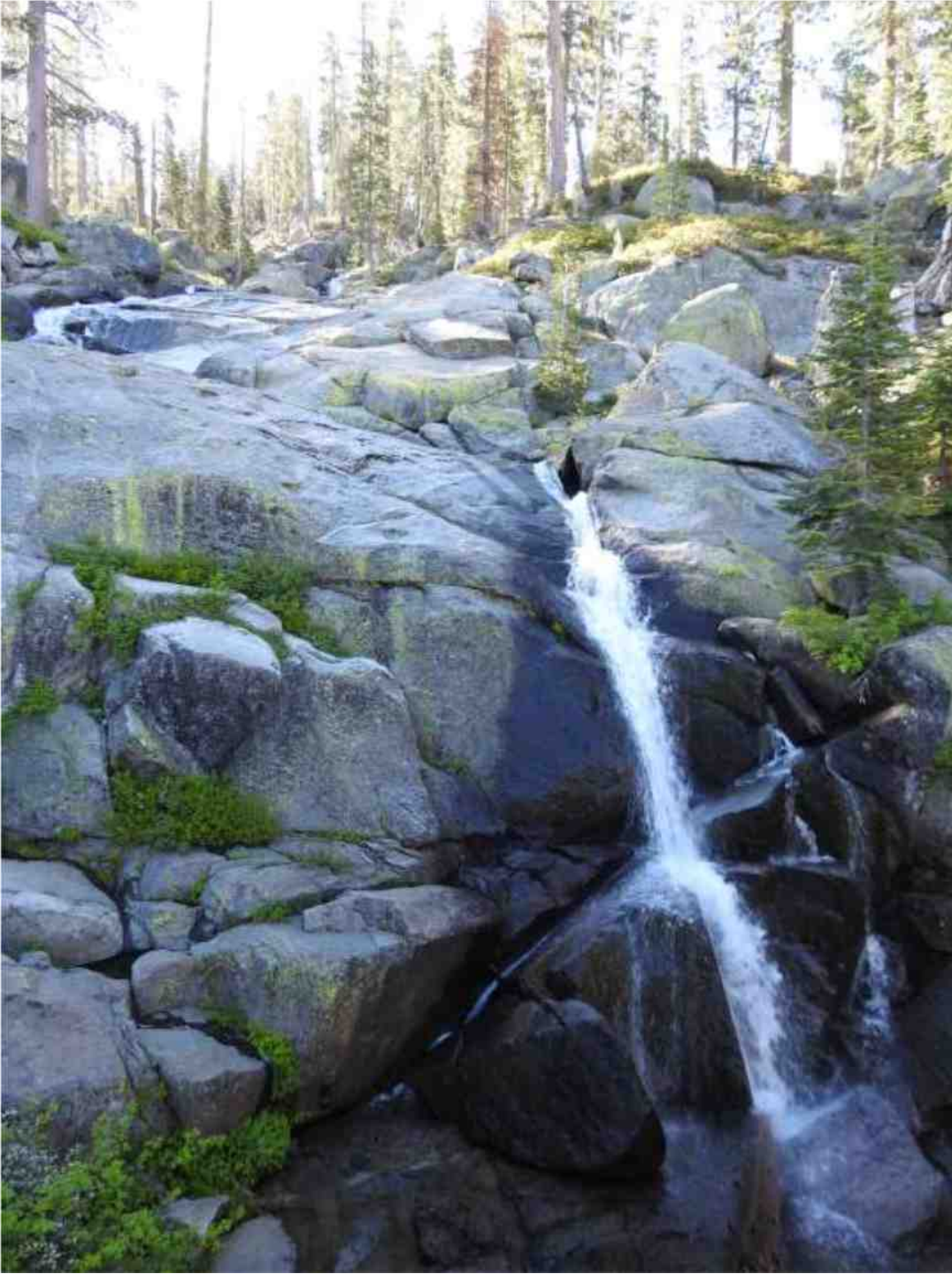


One doesn't get a full appreciation for the size of this dead sequoia stump until seeing Steve positioned at the entrance of 'Dead Giant Tunnel Tree'.

Next page:
Some cell phone pictures of Tunnel Tree and a waterfall next to the park road.







A waterfall on the south side of the park road off a tributary to the South Fork of the Tuolumne River.

Marmot up in high elevation habitat off the Tioga Road.





Views from the Tioga Road.





These beautiful vistas were from a pullout just before Olmsted Point.



This open, rocky area was the scene immediately before we turned right (south) into Olmsted Point.





Wide view (left) and closer view (right) of Half Dome (the tallest one) and surrounding mountains.

Next four pages: View of Half Dome and surrounding area from a short hike past Olmsted Point to an overlook about a quarter mile from the parking lot.







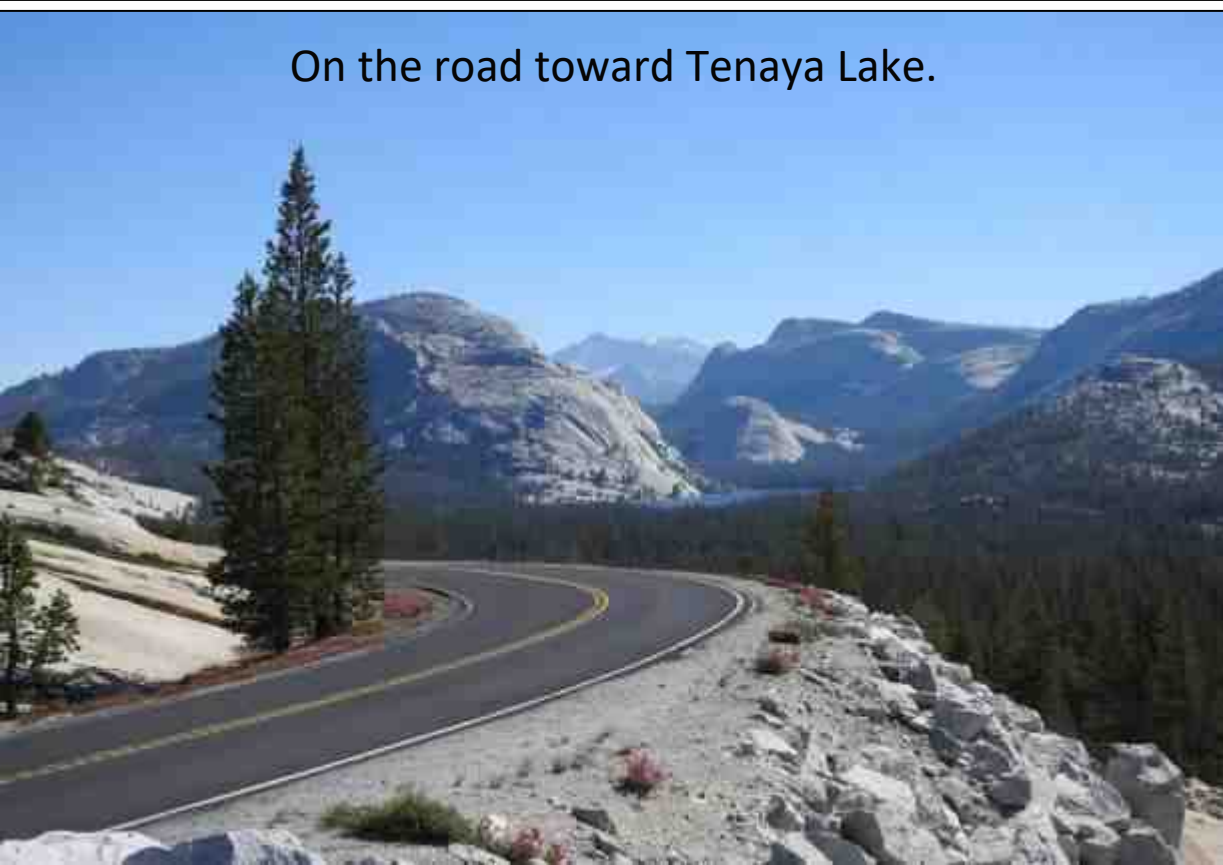
I always like including cell phone pictures here (and on the next page) as they have a slightly different appearance than images from my Nikon P-900 camera. I often find that they capture sharper landscape scenes (but are no match to zoomed-in images of wildlife with my Nikon).







On the road toward Tenaya Lake.





Tenaya Lake

There were many 'domes' along the Tioga Road. We had breakfast in a very non-scenic area in the hot sun next to Lembert Dome at the east end of Tuolumne Meadows. A [dome in geology](#) is a feature where a circular part of the Earth's surface has been pushed upward, tilting the pre-existing layers of earth away from the center. Essentially it is a rocky, rounded looking hill or small mountain.

Mono Lake was a beautifully scenic area about a dozen miles outside of the northeast part of Yosemite. It was the furthest east we went before retracing our path back to the west. We began our westward travels from Mono Lake around noon and waited in 15-20 minutes of traffic when we reached the park entry gate. One must have a reservation during peak times and dates in Yosemite, so that greatly slows cars from entering the park. Our campground reservation was all we needed to have park access on those dates.

After visiting the Tuolumne Visitor Center in the park at 12:30 PM, we stopped to view Tuolumne Meadows and spotted 4 mule deer bucks grazing in the middle of the large, open, grassy area. Three were close together and a fourth was just north of them. One of them bedded down while another ran ~200 meters to the west and then stopped; I never saw what caused the male to run. I also spotted a fifth buck at the north edge of the woods about a quarter mile east-northeast of the original four. While *only deer*, it was a pretty cool mid-day sighting. At the visitor center I learned that there were no elk in the park, and besides deer, an elusive population of [bighorn sheep](#) is the only other ungulate species that inhabits the park.

After watching the deer, we didn't make many other stops, as we wanted to get to Yosemite Valley in the central part of the park where our campsite would be for the next two nights. It was a long hot drive once we descended to lower elevations with 90-95 degree heat in the valley. As we reached Yosemite Valley, I had my first views of El Capitan, Half Dome (from different angles), Bridalveil Fall, and Upper Yosemite Fall. We went to a few different viewpoints to see these features, as you will see in the pictures.

After taking many images, we drove to the far eastern part of Yosemite Valley and to the Upper Pines Campground, site #88. We arrived there at 4:20 PM. I couldn't believe the number of people, tents, and bikes there. But it wasn't too loud given it was the afternoon. Half Dome was right above our campsite, and ravens were constantly calling at the campground, no doubt finding scraps of food all over the area. I had also heard them earlier from many places along the Tioga Road as well.



Tuolumne Peak (left) with rock climbers (bottom right). I would have preferred to have seen bighorn sheep, but those unique humans would have to do on this day.



Next page: Tuolumne River off the Tioga Road (top and bottom left) and Dana Meadows (bottom right).





Dana Fork and Meadows. This area reminded me a lot of the Beartooth Mountain Range northeast of the northeastern part of Yellowstone National Park.



Dana Meadows.





Tioga Lake from just outside the northeastern part of the park at the Tioga Pass Entrance.





Glacier and Ellery Lake, as viewed from the car and just before Lee Vining Valley.



Next page: Lee Vining Valley. Notice the road cutting across the middle of the mountain in all the pictures.





The glaciers above Lee Vining Canyon (top left) quickly turned to green hills (bottom right) as we descended in elevation and approached Mono Lake (bottom left).





The Mono Basin Visitor Center (top left) had a very cool mural painting of a mountain lion chasing a bighorn sheep (bottom right) with some swallow nests up by the roof (bottom left).



Mono Lake.





I believe these
are violet-
green swallows
with an adult
(right) feeding
a chick (left).





Left: This was almost a great picture of a violet-green swallow adult (far left) returning to feed a chick in the nest.

Next page: Lee Vining Valley, as viewed from driving west back toward Yosemite National Park.







Tuolumne Meadows with grazing mule deer bucks (bottom left and see arrow for their location in bottom right picture).









Tuolumne Meadows and Lemberg Dome (see arrow), near where we had breakfast earlier in the day.





As we descended in elevation once leaving the Tioga Road for Yosemite Valley, it became much warmer and the vegetation greener (left). The first view of Yosemite Valley and Half Dome (right, see arrow).





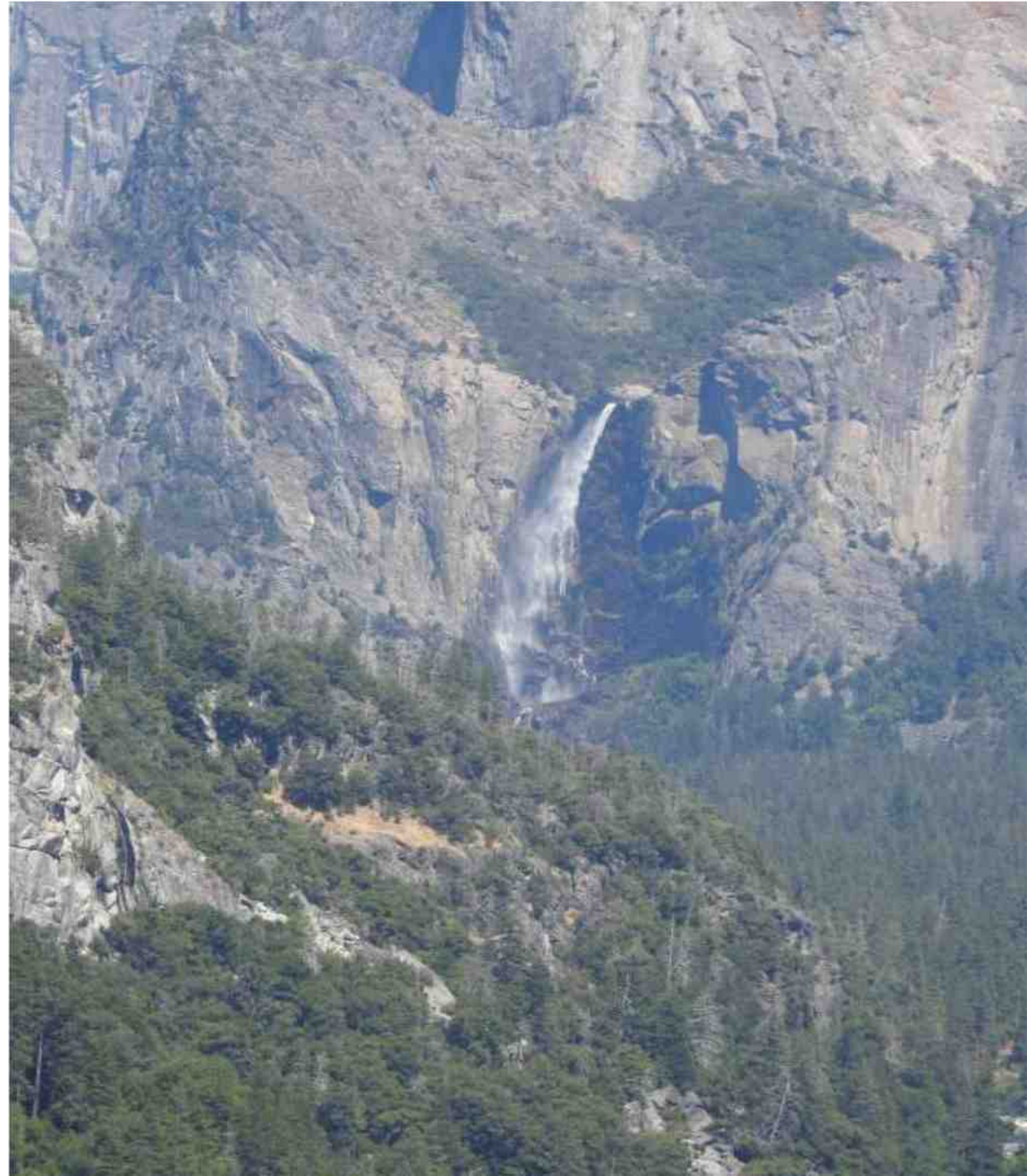
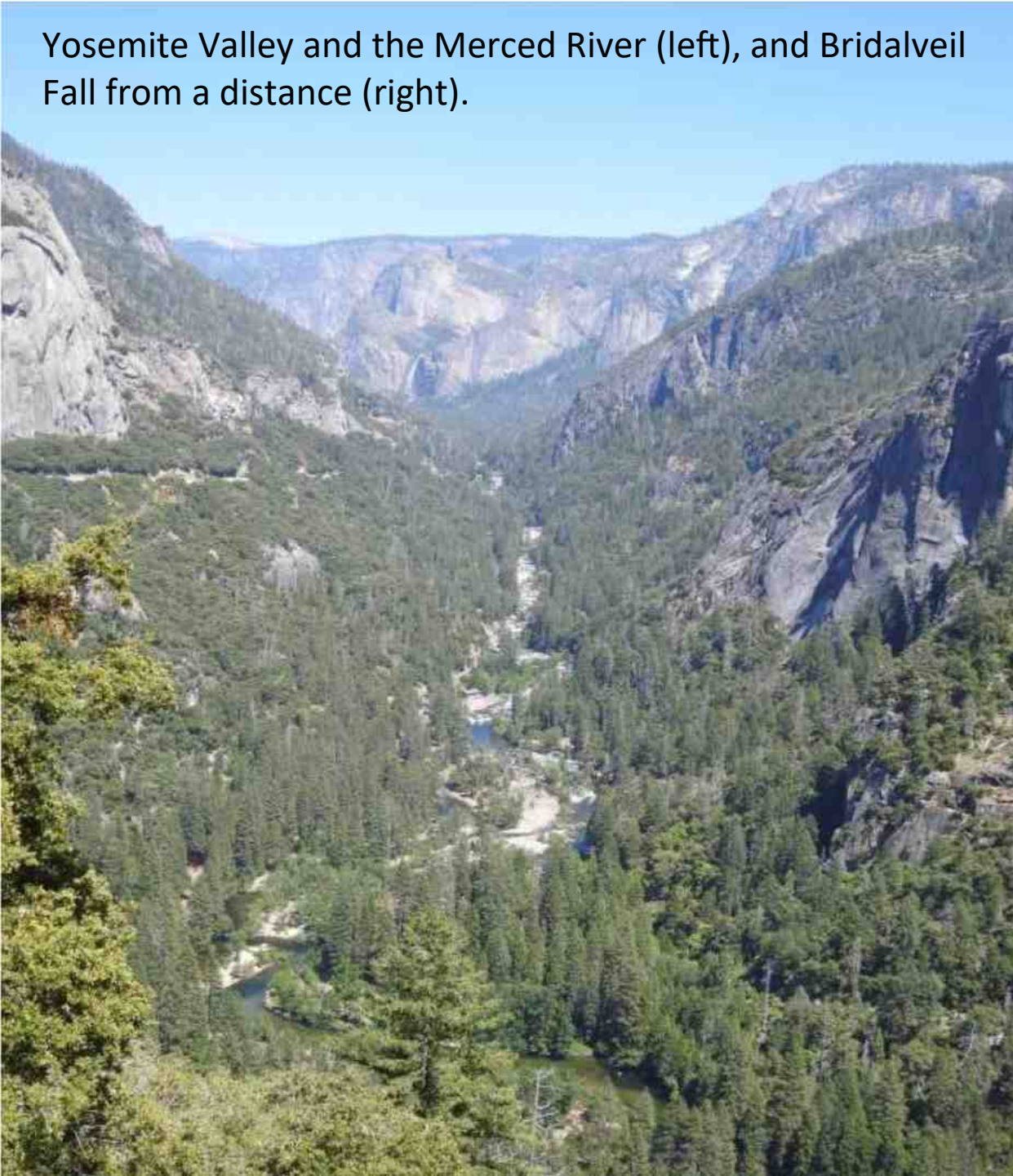
A tunnel on Big Oaks Flat Road.

Next page: Cell phone pics of the second tunnel.





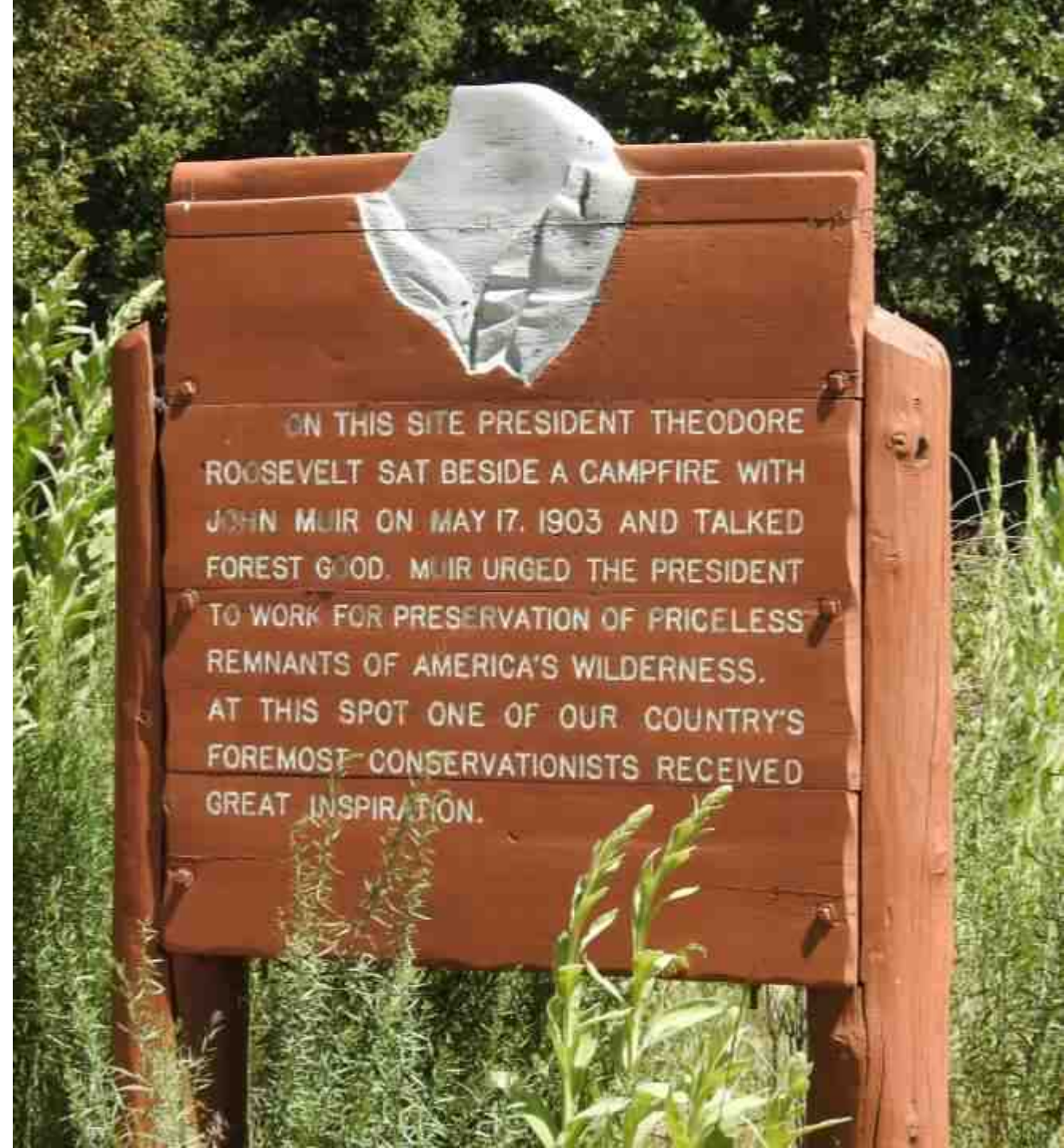
Yosemite Valley and the Merced River (left), and Bridalveil Fall from a distance (right).





Left: Bridalveil Fall from the beginning (west end) of Yosemite Valley.

Right: A memorial to friends, Teddy Roosevelt and John Muir, for their dedication to preserve land and create national parks.



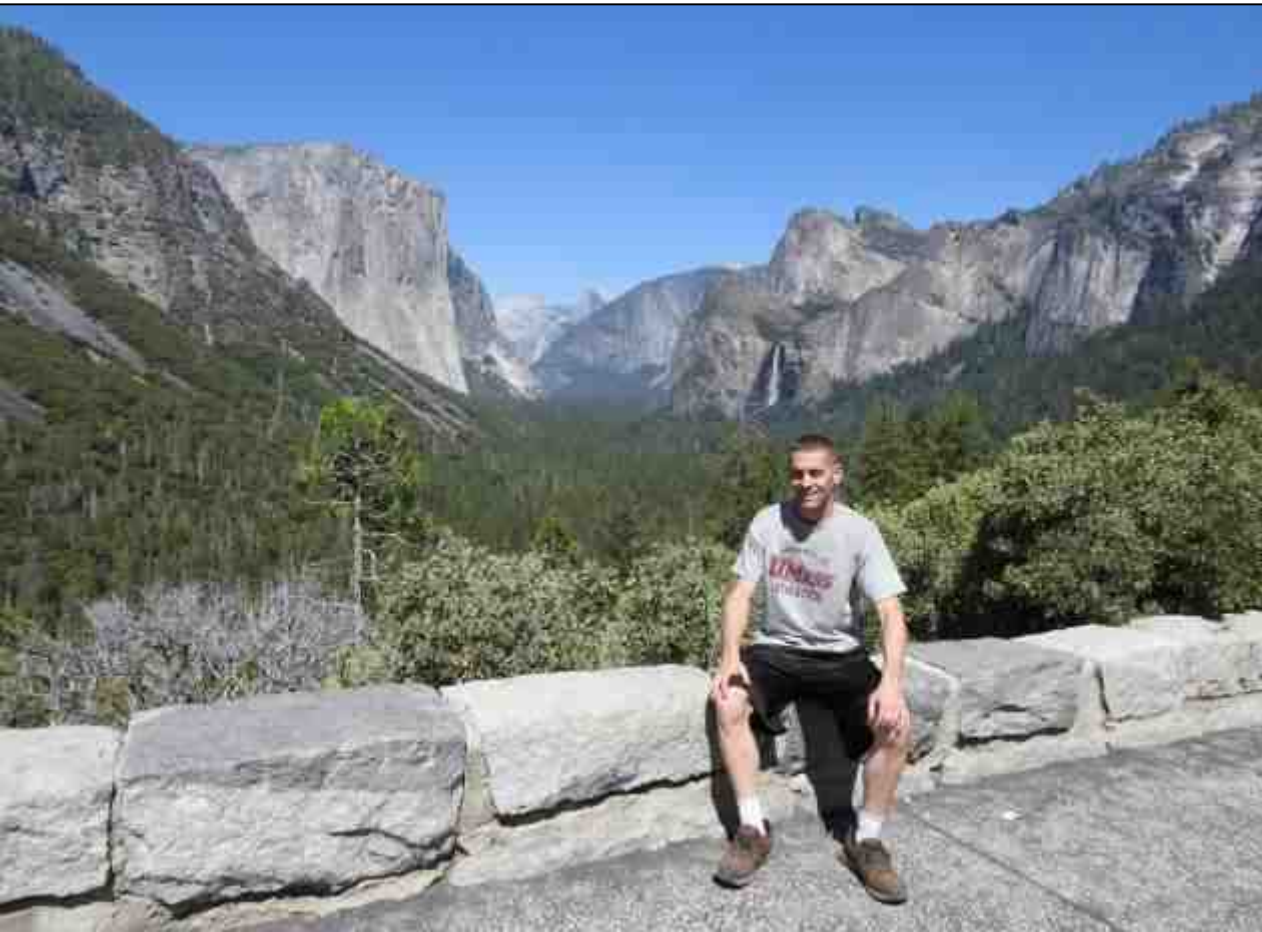


Left: View of El Capitan (left), Half Dome (middle), and Bridalveil Falls (right, and see right picture) from 'Tunnel View' on the Wawona Road.

Next page: Cell phone pics of the same scenes.











Last view of Yosemite Valley from 'Tunnel View' for the day (right). It would be another two days before we went back to, and then past, the Wawona Tunnel to head to Glacier Point and the southern part of the park (left).

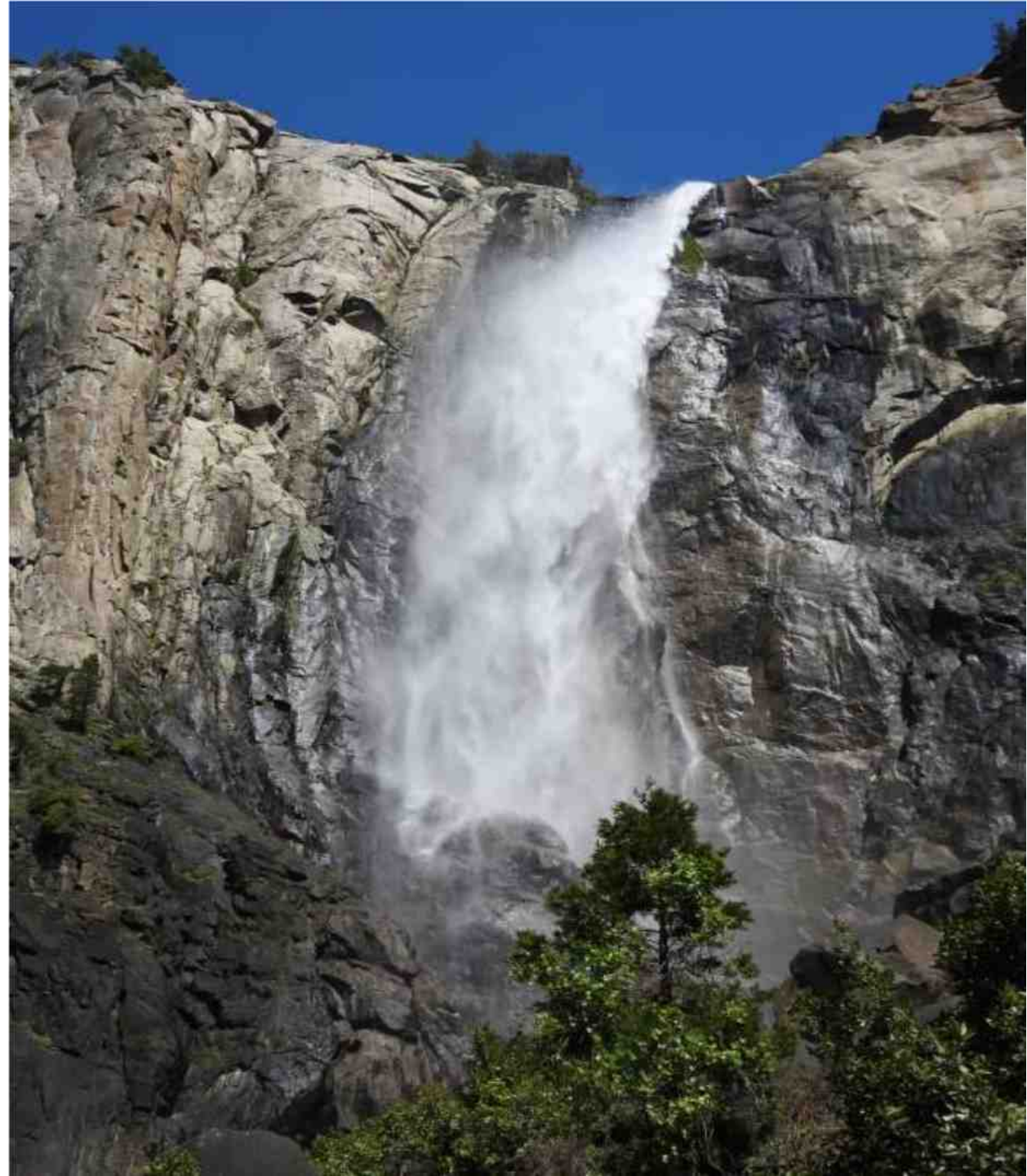


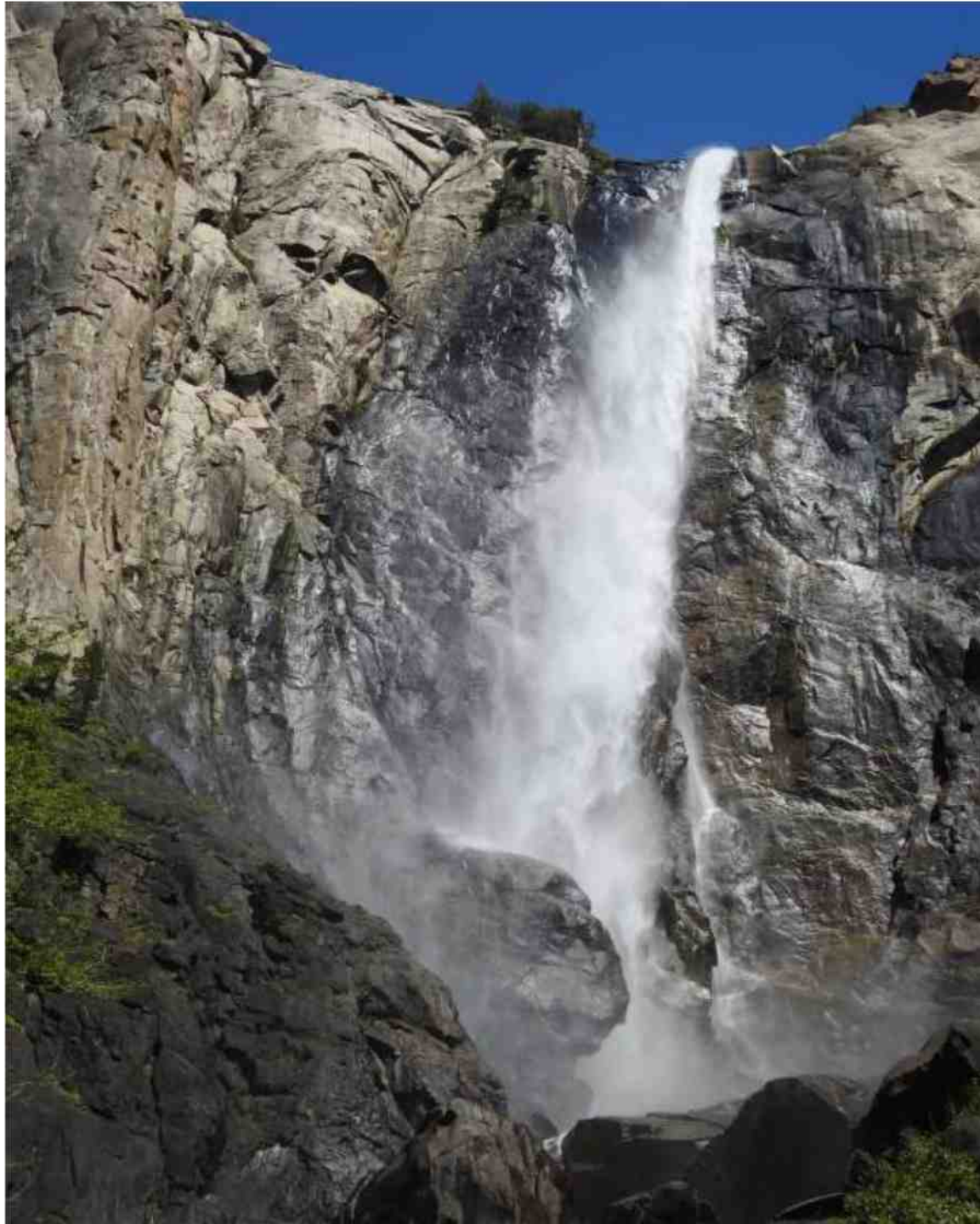
Next two pages: Bridalveil Fall from the parking lot to view the waterfall up close. The second page are cell phone pictures.





Next two pages: Different views and angles of Bridalveil Fall from just under it. I could literally feel the mist of the water from there.





Different angles of El Capitan from Yosemite Valley.





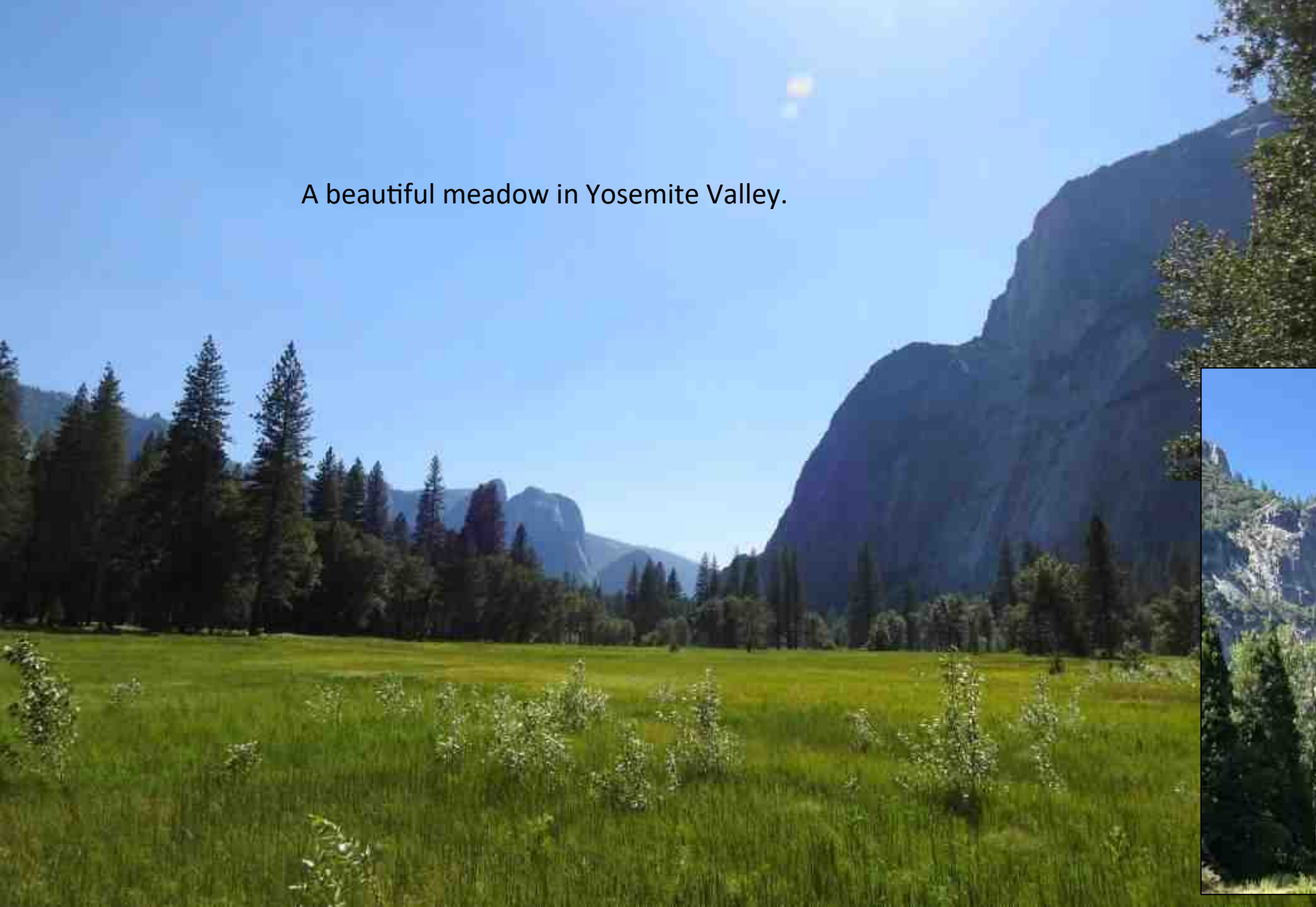


El Capitan (left) and Three Brothers (right), which are just to the right (east) of El Capitan. Shortly thereafter, I had my first view of Upper Yosemite Fall (below left and next page).





A beautiful meadow in Yosemite Valley.



Upper Yosemite Fall from a distance (left) and then zoomed in (right).





This and next page: Upper Pines Campground. Our site was #88 by the silver Kia to the right (top pic) or left (bottom).



After setting up camp, I went through my pictures. I had taken 164 on this day and cropped 5 more for a combined 169 count. I went through most of the images, then cooked dinner. Shortly after eating, and feeling the effects of the heat, I walked to the Merced River and took a dip in the cold, fast flowing water body. I then returned and finished processing my pictures at 7:30 PM. While time consuming, I am always happy to go through that day's photos. I can usually name them easily, because I just took the pictures that day and remembered exactly where I was. Plus, I wouldn't have to do it later, like when I got home from the trip.

Upon finishing the pictures near dusk, I took another short walk and saw a mule deer doe near the outhouse three tent sites away from us. She was grazing; I would end up seeing her multiple times in the next couple of days. Of course, she was in tall grass out of good view when I brought my camera over to photograph her, yet she was in full view earlier when I walked to the restroom.

After passing by the doe, I explored about a half mile away, in a populated area called [Curry Village](#). I initially knew nothing of the area and couldn't believe how many cars and people were there, as well as hundreds of raised yurt-like canvas tents. It was literally like a mini-city amid the wilderness. The first thing I wondered was how people got all their stuff to the tents given how much walking there was to get anywhere around there. I had a really good time discovering places like Curry Village.

I walked back to the Upper Pines Campground at dusk after hiking a good mile and a half. I took a few pictures of Half Dome at last light. I went to bed relatively early, and used ear plugs for the first time while sleeping. It was necessary given how many people were at the campground, with many chatty adults up well past 10:00 PM.



Half Dome from Upper Pines campsite #88.





A lousy view of the mule deer doe once I had my camera in hand (left). The Merced River was swift and cold (right) but provided good relief from the heat once I went under the water.





Half Dome from behind Merced River at the Upper Pines Campground entrance area. It appears to glow from the setting sun. Next page: A cell phone pic exemplifies this.



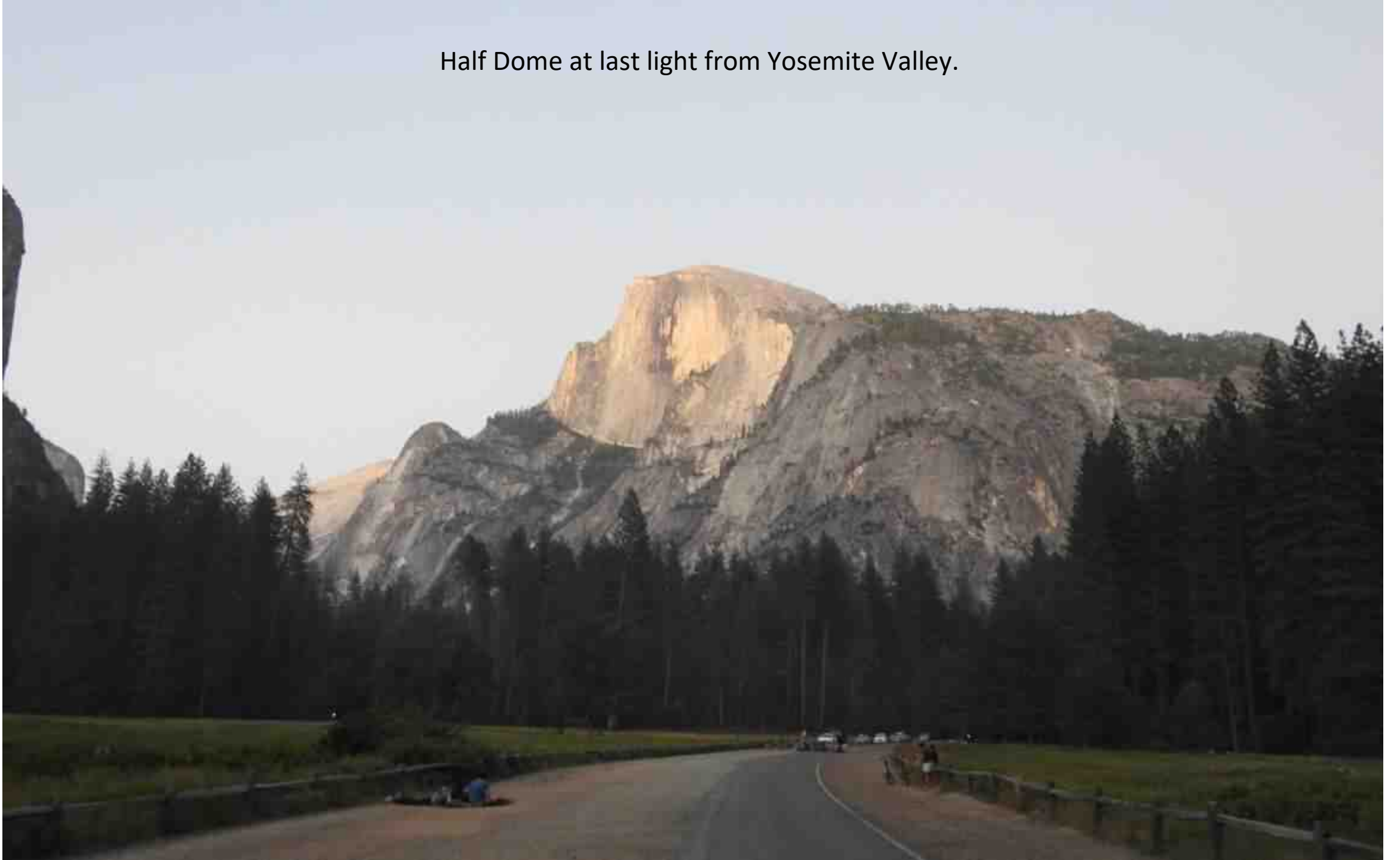




The Merced River viewed to the west past the Lower Pines Campground (left). Tall ponderosa pines (right) near Curry Village.



Half Dome at last light from Yosemite Valley.





Yosemite Falls Trail

I didn't sleep great going into the early morning of June 24th. I woke up twice to go the bathroom which is unlike me, then was woken up at 3:30 AM by people taking down their tent. I assumed they were climbing one of the mountains like El Capitan or Half Dome and needed to be there early in the morning. By 5 AM the ravens were starting to call in the trees above us, so I got up then at very first light.

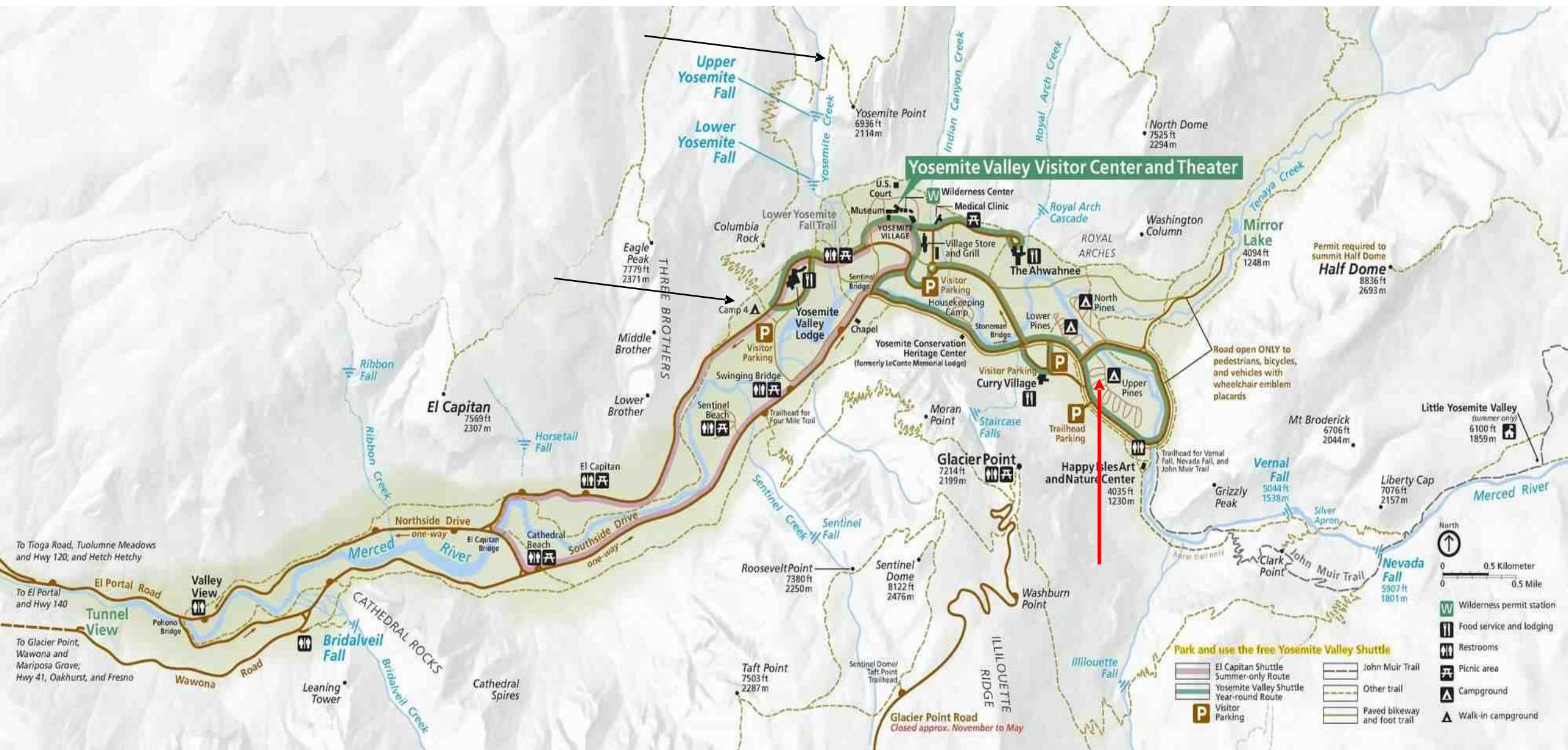
We first drove through the valley from east to west, which is about a 7 mile one-way drive. I saw a mule deer doe in a field close to Curry Village and our campground. She was grazing on grass under the watchful eye of Half Dome. Three deer were then spotted in the El Capitan picnic area: a doe and two bucks. Interestingly, both bucks had their heads in grills. They were clearly licking the grease and charcoal. I assumed they obtained more nutrients and minerals for their growing antlers than actual calories. The doe had no desire to do that and hung out around the open forests near the picnic tables. It was fascinating to watch.

I was able to get some sunrise pics at Valley View at the very western part of the valley before we headed back east to complete a loop. At 7:10 AM, we parked in the lot by Camp 4, which was also near Valley Lodge. [Camp 4](#) is a tent only primitive campground near El Capitan. I assume a lot of climbers use that site. It is only \$10 a night per person, which is cheaper than the campsites that we stayed at. I packed two water bottles, snacks, camera, field notebook, and the Yosemite map into my backpack.

We hiked the Yosemite Falls Trail and accessed it by walking through Camp 4. The trail was steep and strenuous, especially in two long stretches. I didn't realize until nearly finishing the hike, but you don't actually see the smaller Lower Fall, just the much larger – and more famous – Upper Fall. I initially wrongly thought our first sighting was of the Lower Fall. I saw and heard many ravens, some Steller's Jays, big Belding's ground squirrels, and a few lizards, including skinks and fence lizards.

The trail offered tremendous up-close views of the Upper Fall from both underneath it and from the side as one climbed up parallel to the famous waterfall. At 9:15 AM, I arrived at the top of the trail where Upper Fall careens over the cliff. I was shocked that there wasn't a view from above. One was too close and there was no perspective to be able to see it from above while looking down on it. However, the view of the valley was fabulous, and it was a beautiful day. By design, we climbed before the heat of the day took its toll on later hikers.

Yosemite Valley map. The arrows represents where we camped in the Upper Pines Campground (red arrow facing up on right side) and the Yosemite Fall Trail (two black arrows in the middle of the map).





Location of mule deer doe
(upper left, see arrow)
sighted in Yosemite Valley at
dawn with Half Dome in the
distance.



Two different bucks (left pictures vs. right pic) licking and eating grill remains at El Capitan picnic area. They are no doubt getting valuable minerals from the charcoal and leftover food residue.





Mule deer buck #2 at the grill.



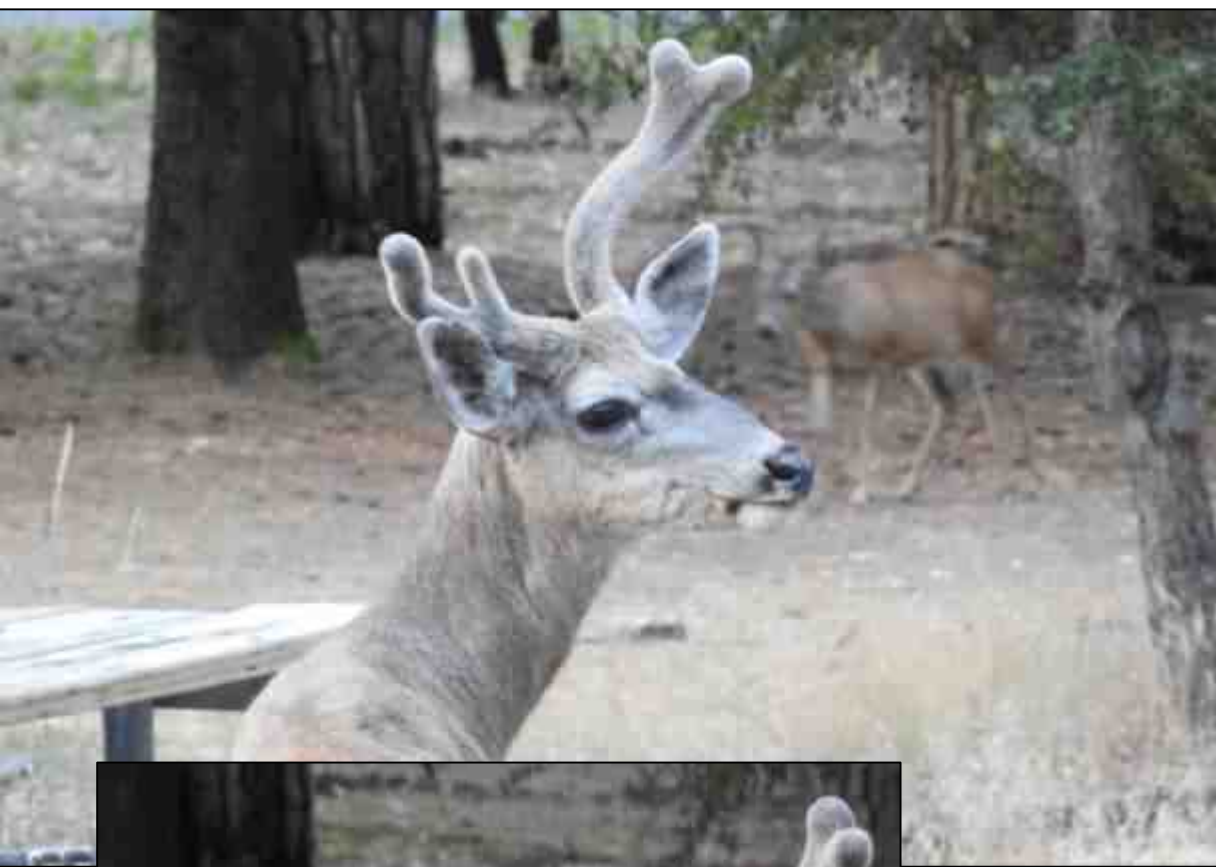


This mule deer doe (left) was near and just behind the two bucks. Right: A view of El Capitan, with bear boxes to store food at the edge of the road.





Mule deer buck and doe (upper left pic; see arrow for the doe) in the picnic area, with a closer view of the other, second buck (lower left) and the doe (right).



The first buck had an unusual antler growth pattern with his left rack much longer than the right side.

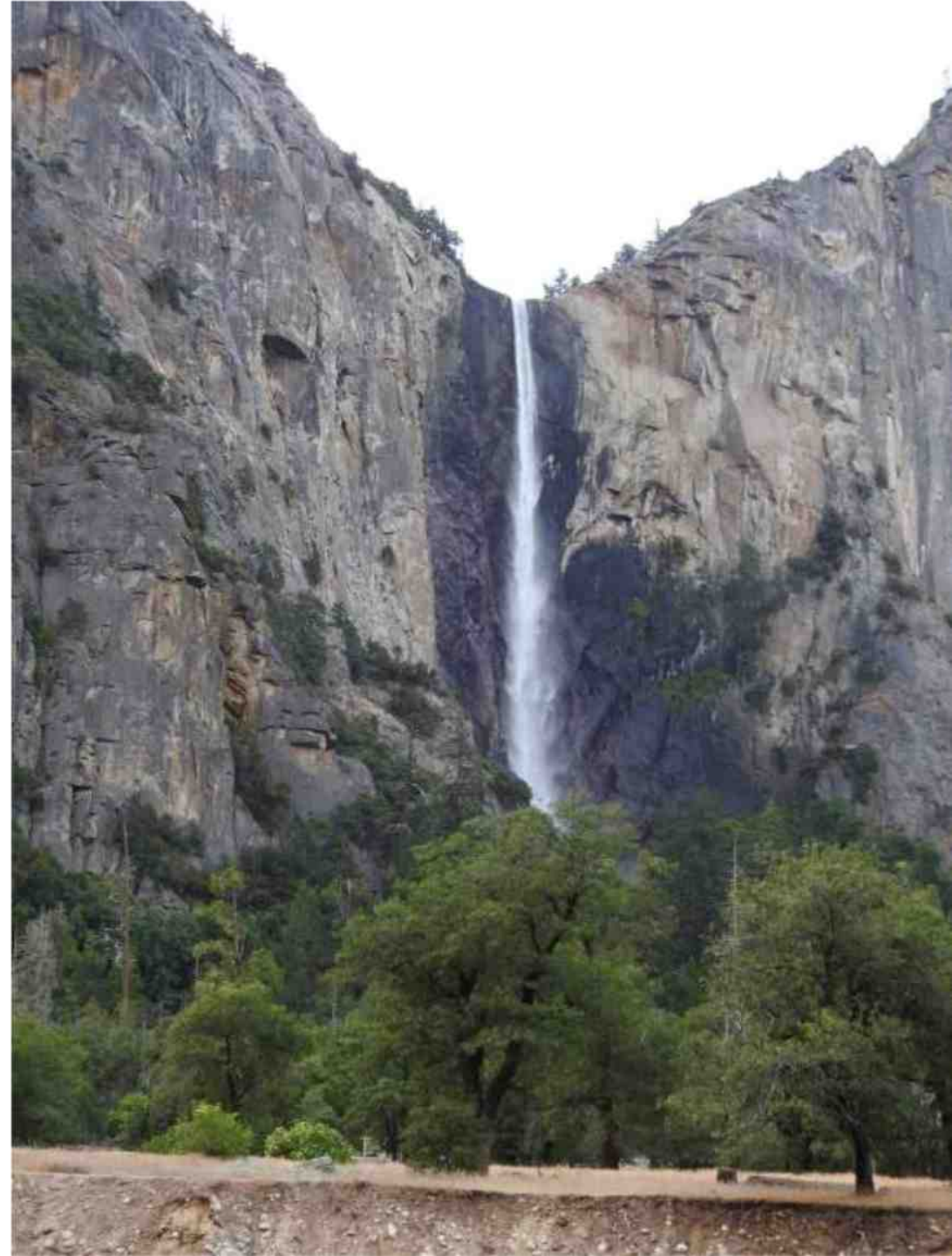


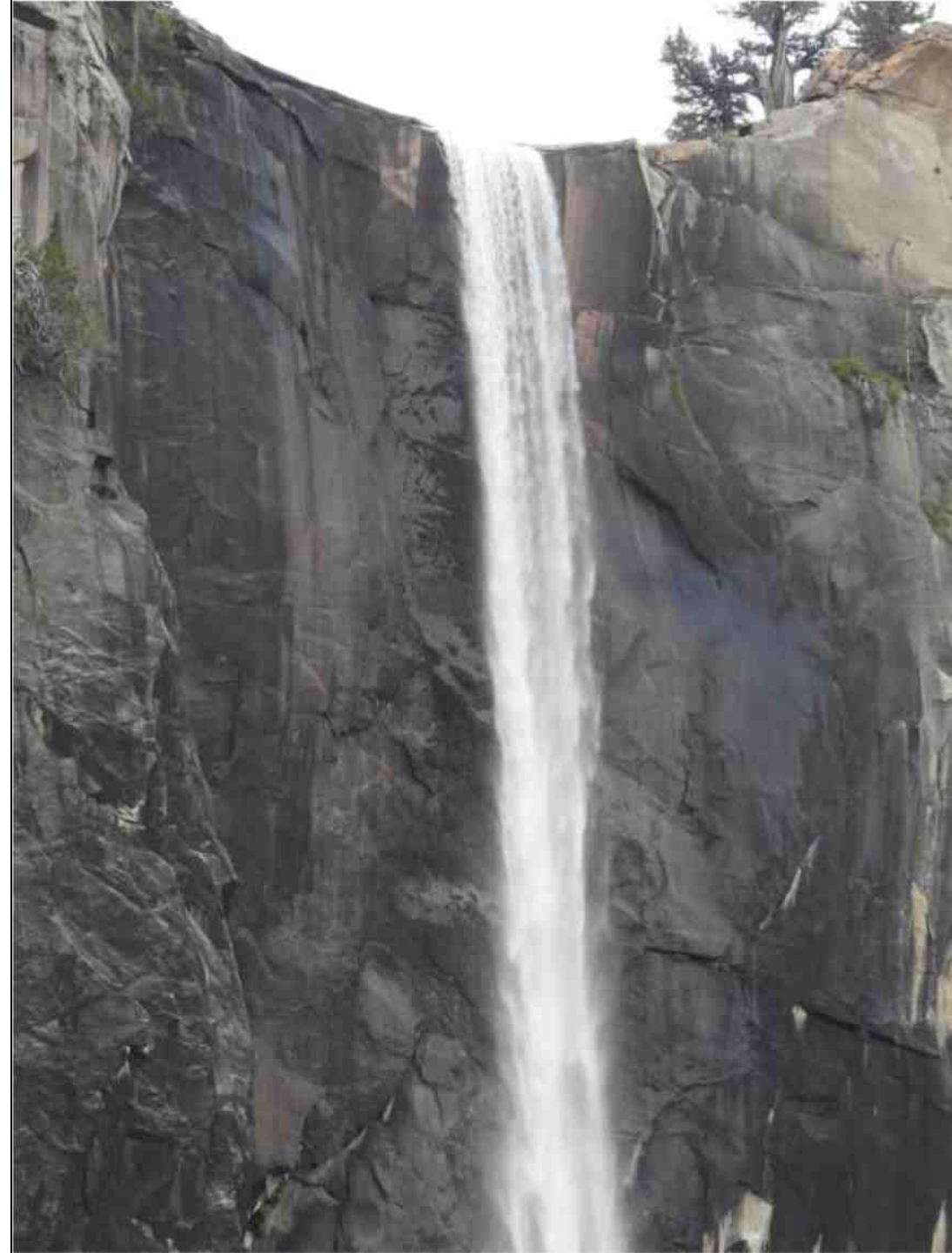


Last views of the deer before we left the campground.



Bridalveil Fall from a unique angle across the Merced River and low in the valley (also see next page).







Half Dome and surrounding area from Valley View at sunrise.







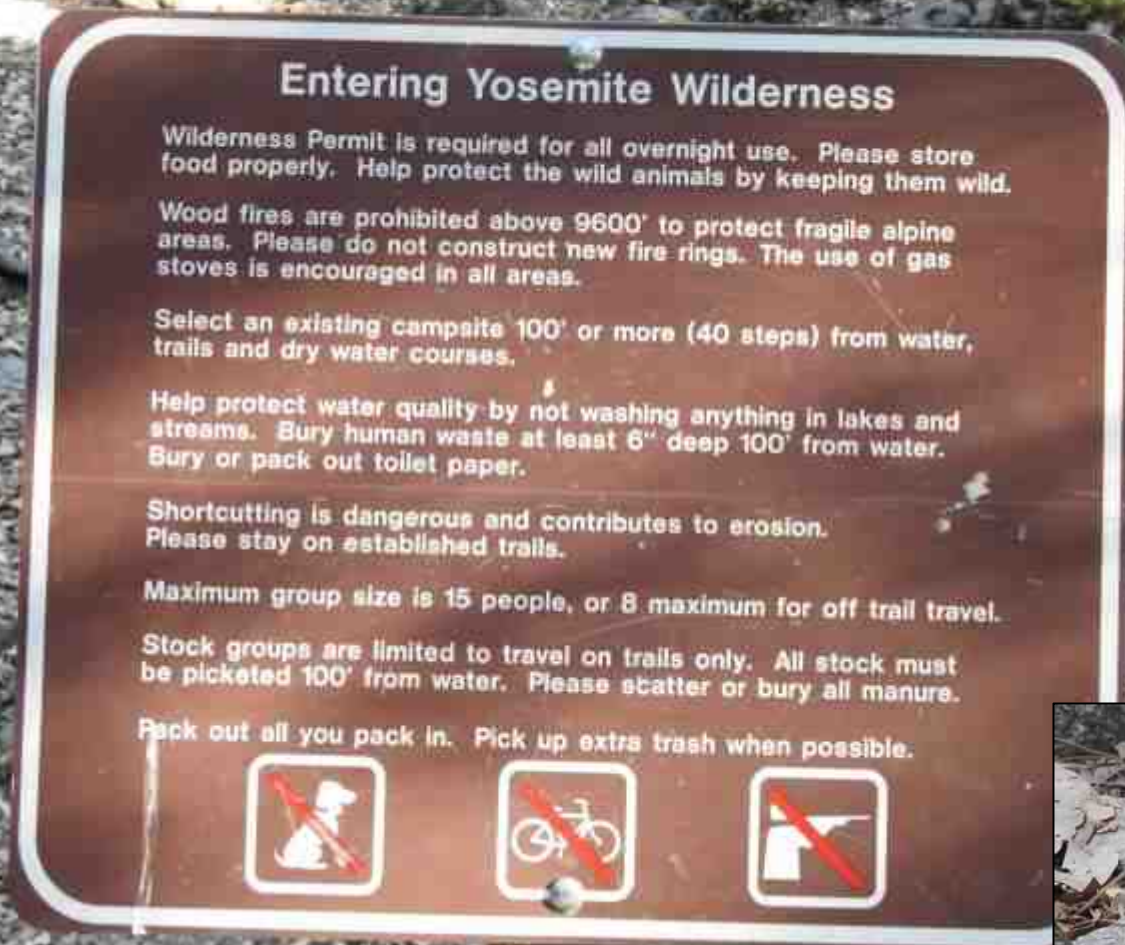
These cell phone pics from Valley View are sharper and the surrounding valley is in better focus than the previous two pages from my Nikon P-900 camera.





Raven at the start of the Yosemite Falls Trail.





Steller's Jay (upper right) and Belding's ground squirrel (lower right two pics).

Next page: View from early in the hike.





I believe that is a Sierra alligator lizard (left) as it looked sort of skink-like in appearance. I was relatively high on the trail as my next picture (below right) was of Yosemite Valley from about mid-way up.

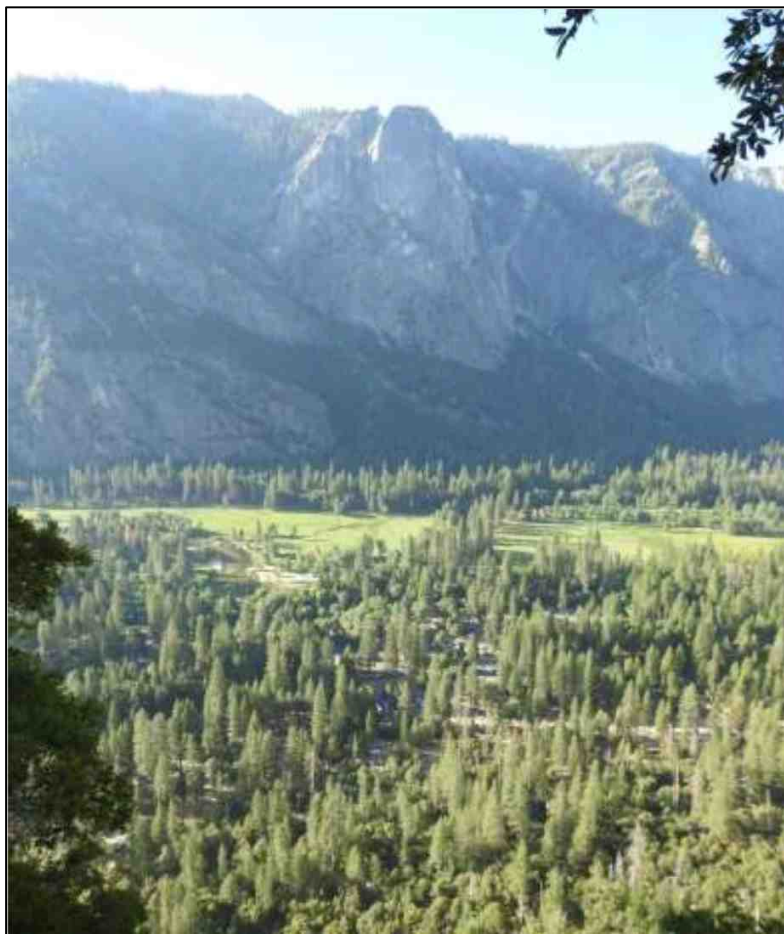






El Capitan rock face (left) with more of the mountain and the valley (right). Another squirrel (lower left).

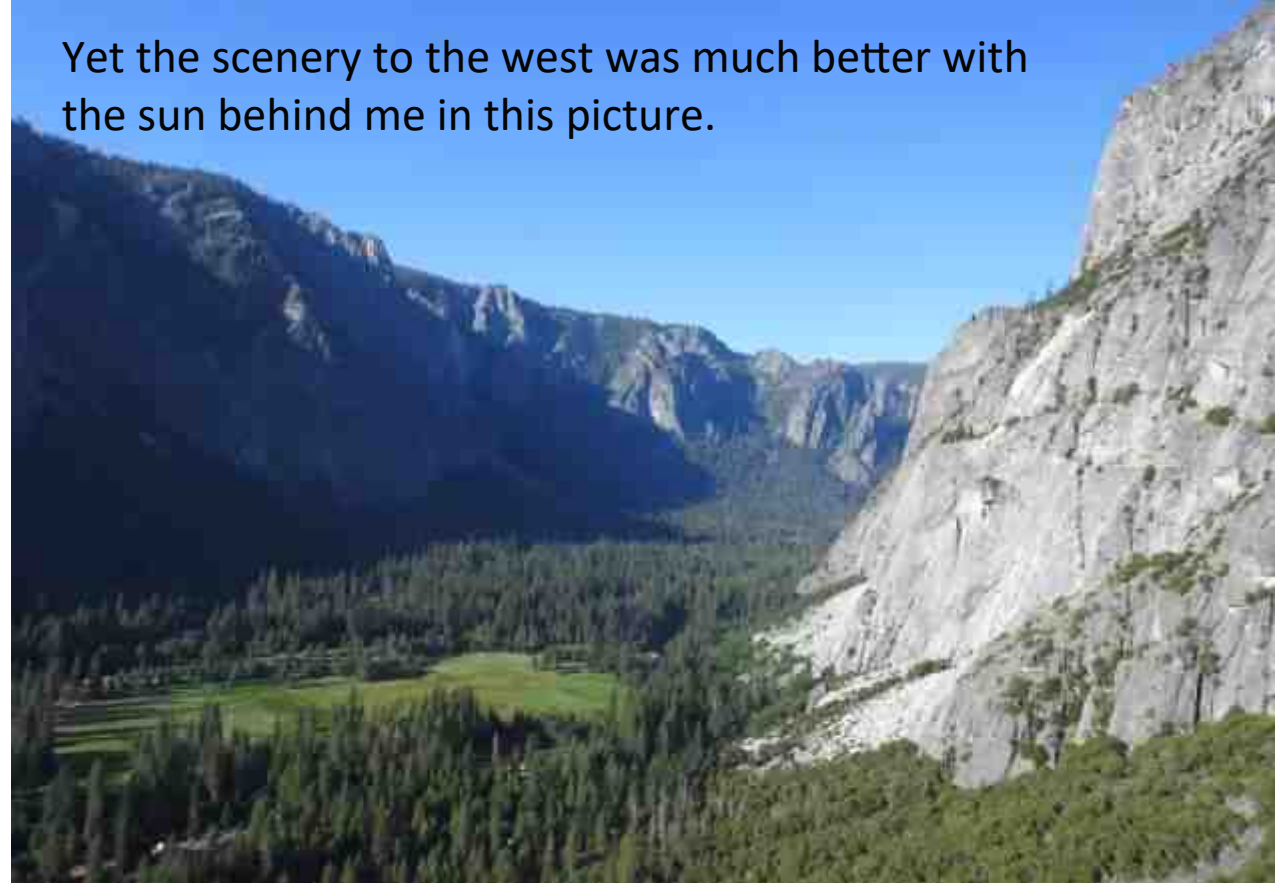




As one can see, the view to the east (with Half Dome) was tough in the early morning sun.



Yet the scenery to the west was much better with the sun behind me in this picture.





Cell phone pics of Yosemite Valley.

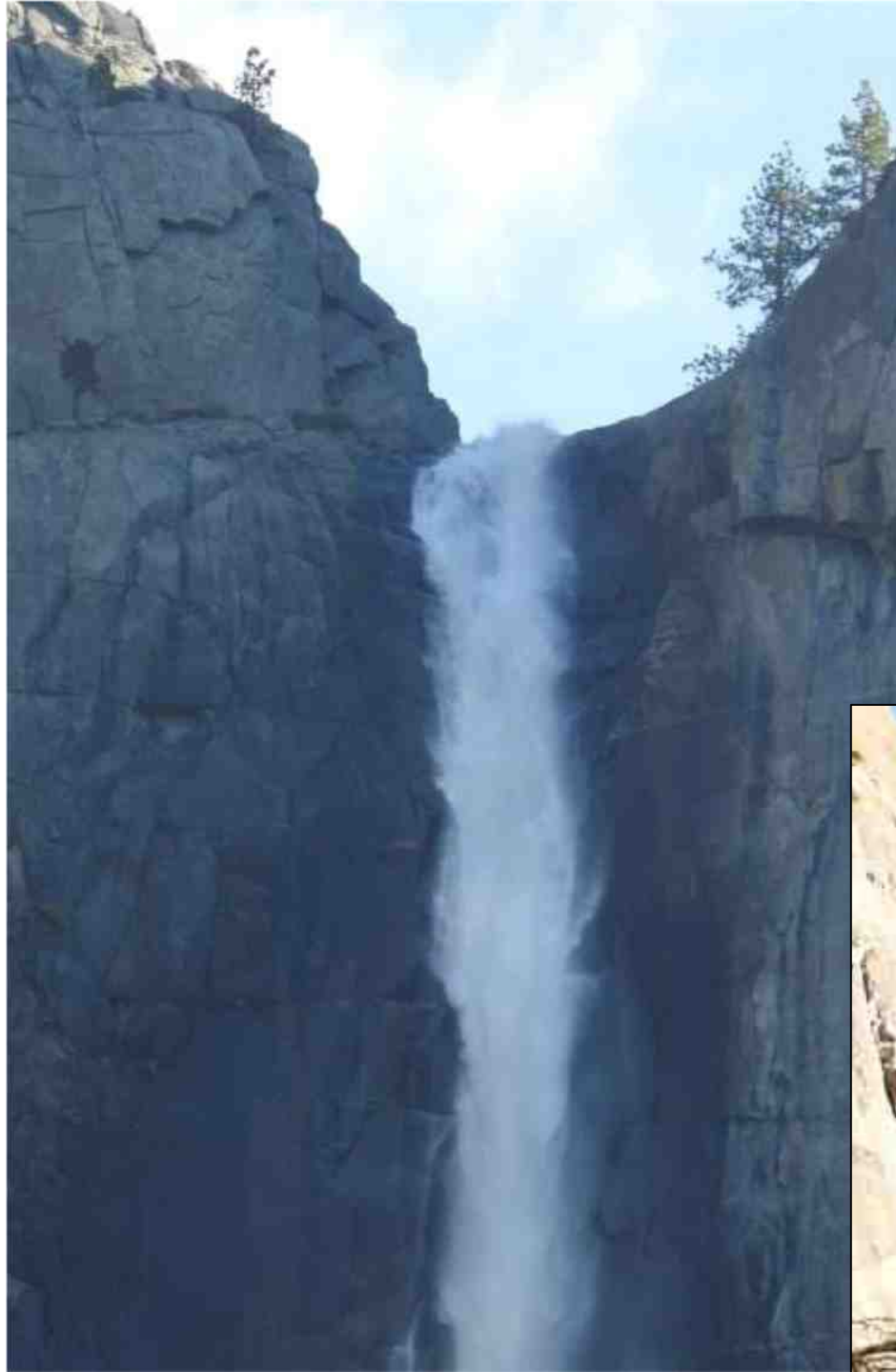


Sierra fence lizard.



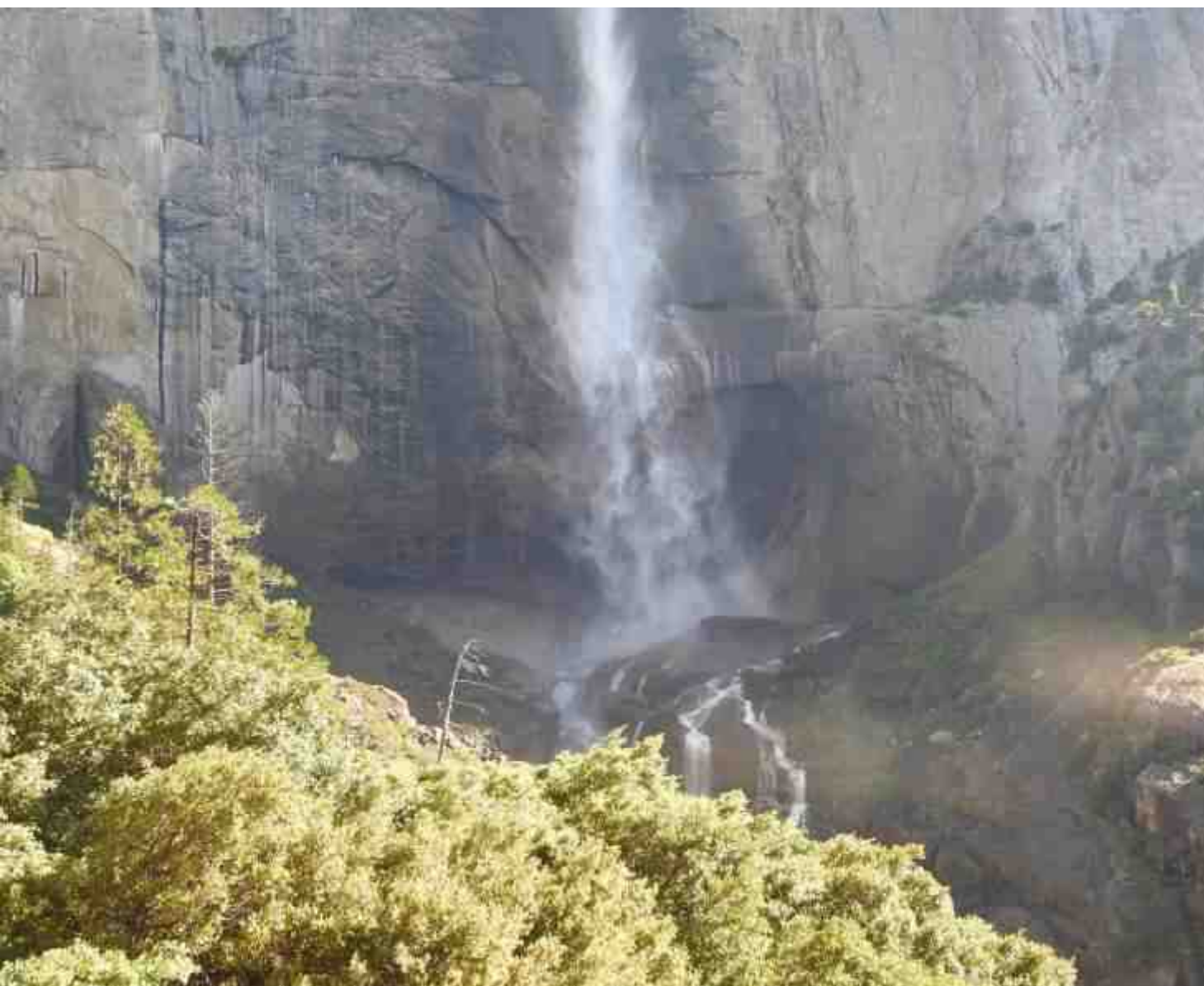


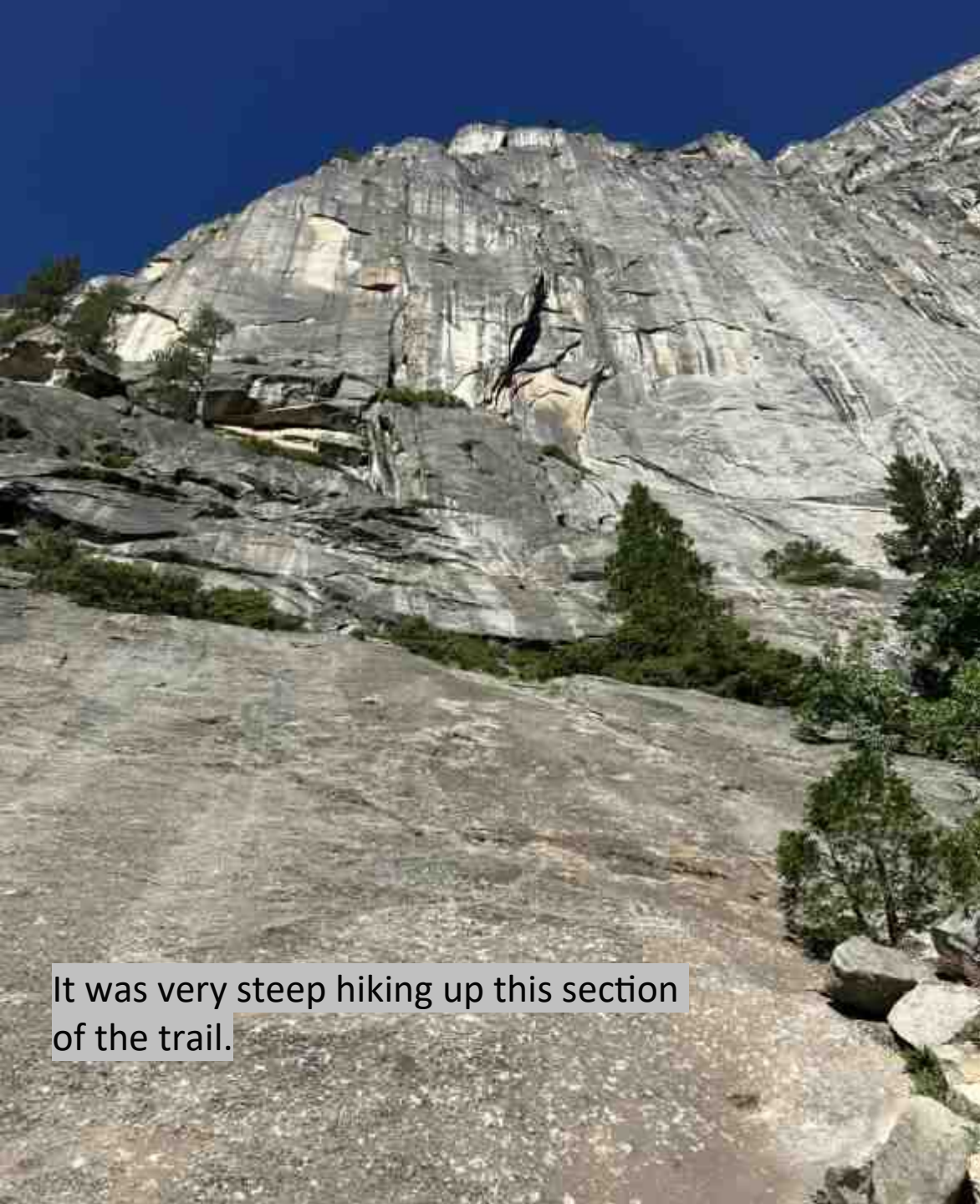
Different views of Upper Fall
on the hike up the trail (also
see next four pages).











It was very steep hiking up this section of the trail.

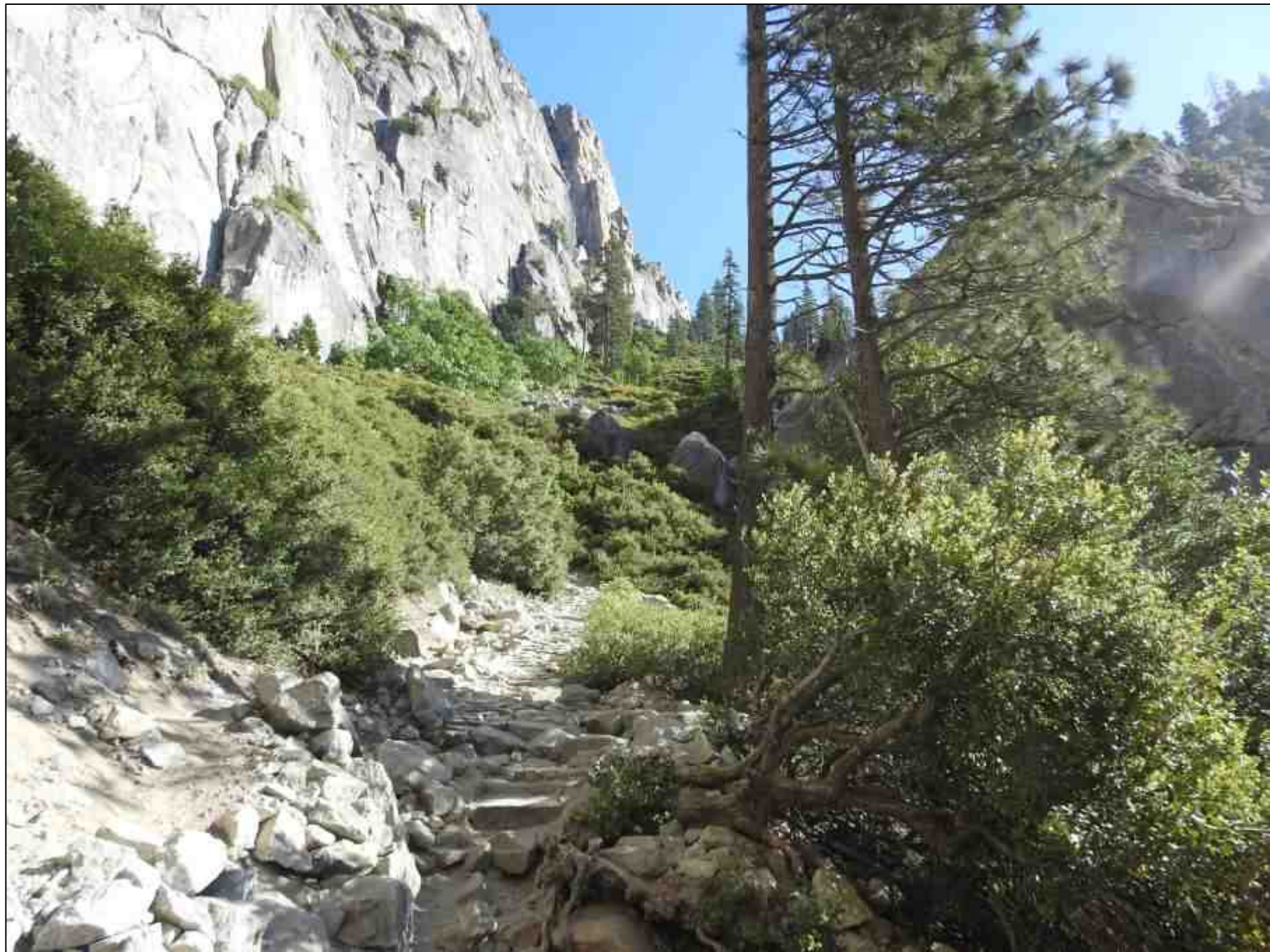


Sierra fence lizard.





Views from the trail on the hike up.





These metal signs were unique and different than the usual wooden hiking posts I see in just about every other park or forest.

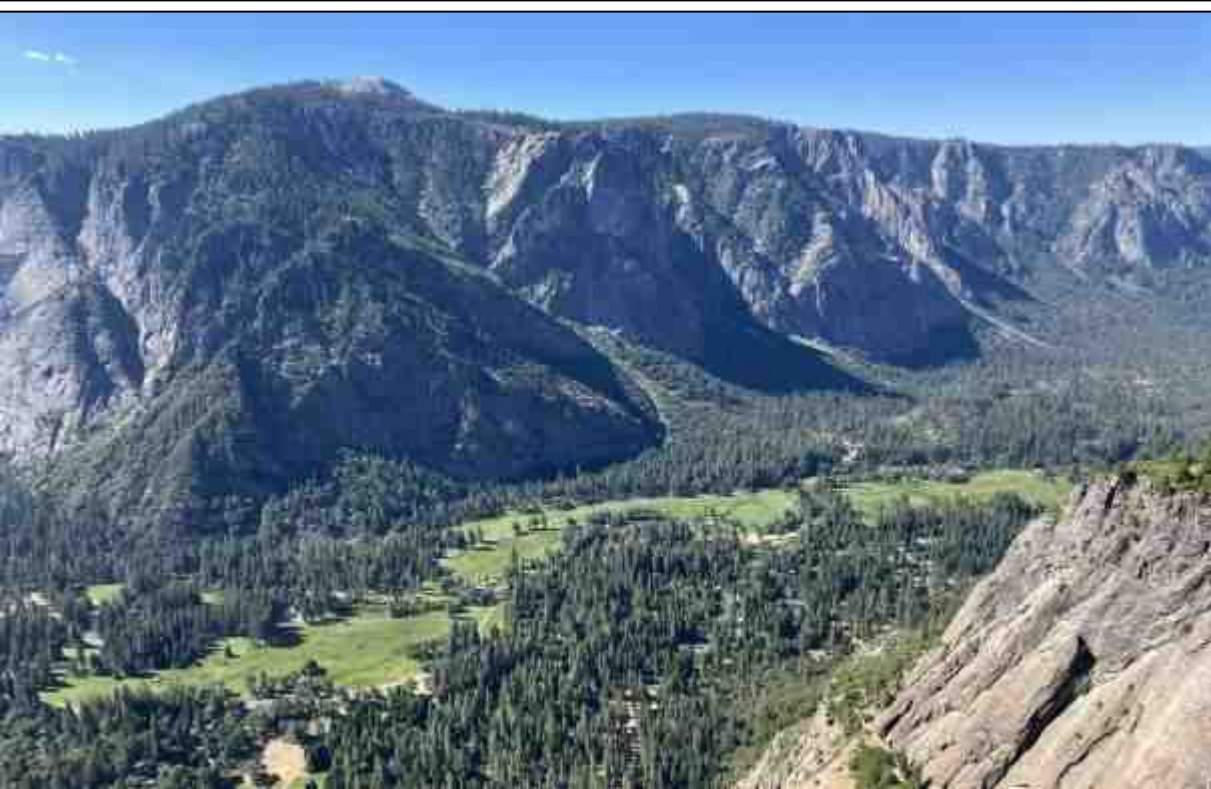




Yosemite Valley from Falls Overlook. The left picture shows the eastern end, while the right image depicts the western side of the famous valley.









Stone steps and a metal railing leads to the Falls Overlook. Above the actual Upper Fall is a very scenic stretch of Yosemite Creek with small waterfalls. In the background, you can just make out the wooden bridge that crosses over Yosemite Creek to get to Yosemite Point (see arrow).





Different angles of the same two places as the previous page.



A really cool view of the steep descent to Upper Fall Overlook and the valley below. It was obviously necessary to stay behind the guardrail as there was sheer cliff edge on the other side. Upper Fall is just to the left of this picture; see next page.





As one can see from these pictures (also see next page), it is difficult to get anything but a glimpse of Upper Fall from any angle from the overlook.







It took Steve longer to reach the top of Upper Fall, so I relaxed and enjoyed the scenery for about a half hour before he arrived. I was talking with a mother and her 17 year old daughter from Switzerland. The girl went to school in Los Angeles. They both were long distance athletes and joined us on a spur trail up to Yosemite Point which was about a mile above Upper Fall. It offered an even better view of Yosemite Valley. It also allowed us to discover a nice swimming area in Yosemite Creek above the falls, which was fantastic as the sun made it legitimately hot by that point. We all dipped in the water. I instantly cooled down. I also brought water purification tablets, which are most commonly used on multi-day backpacking trips instead of a water filter. I filled up an empty water bottle and was glad I did because I drank all of that before getting back to the car. Normally, I don't need that much water and can wait until I return to the car to chug more, but on this day, I drank three full bottles of water and had more immediately after I got back down to civilization.

We split with the small family at the beginning of the Yosemite Point Trail as they were doing another 6+ miles round trip hike to Eagle Peak and back. I was impressed given that most people didn't even go past the Upper Fall trail.

The views of Upper Fall were really good on the way down, and not just because the hiking was easier going downhill. The light was also much better and there was much less contrast and better light shining on the water and surrounding rocks. Naturally, I took yet more pictures of the famous waterfall.

I got back to the car around 1:45 PM, 20 minutes before Steve. I went to a dining hall at Valley Lodge and filled up a water bottle and quickly rehydrated, then waited at the car. It was a great hike, being a little over 9 miles. I saw lots (>50) of lizards. Most seemed to be skinks, but I hadn't studied the different species before doing the hike. Many were also the common fence lizards.

At 2:25 PM, we returned to the El Capitan picnic area. The deer were long gone as there were many people there. It was also uncomfortably hot, even as I just sat on the picnic table which was in the sun. Nevertheless, my staple lunch, peanut butter and jelly, tasted good.

We didn't get back to the campsite until 3:45 PM. From there, I immediately walked to Curry Village, which was the location of the nearest bus stop. There was construction by the campground and that eliminated all the local bus stops, and forced me to walk the half mile plus to Curry. I was in a mild rush because I wanted to get to the visitor center a couple of miles away and there was no car parking there. Plus, it closed at 5:00, so I didn't have a lot of time.

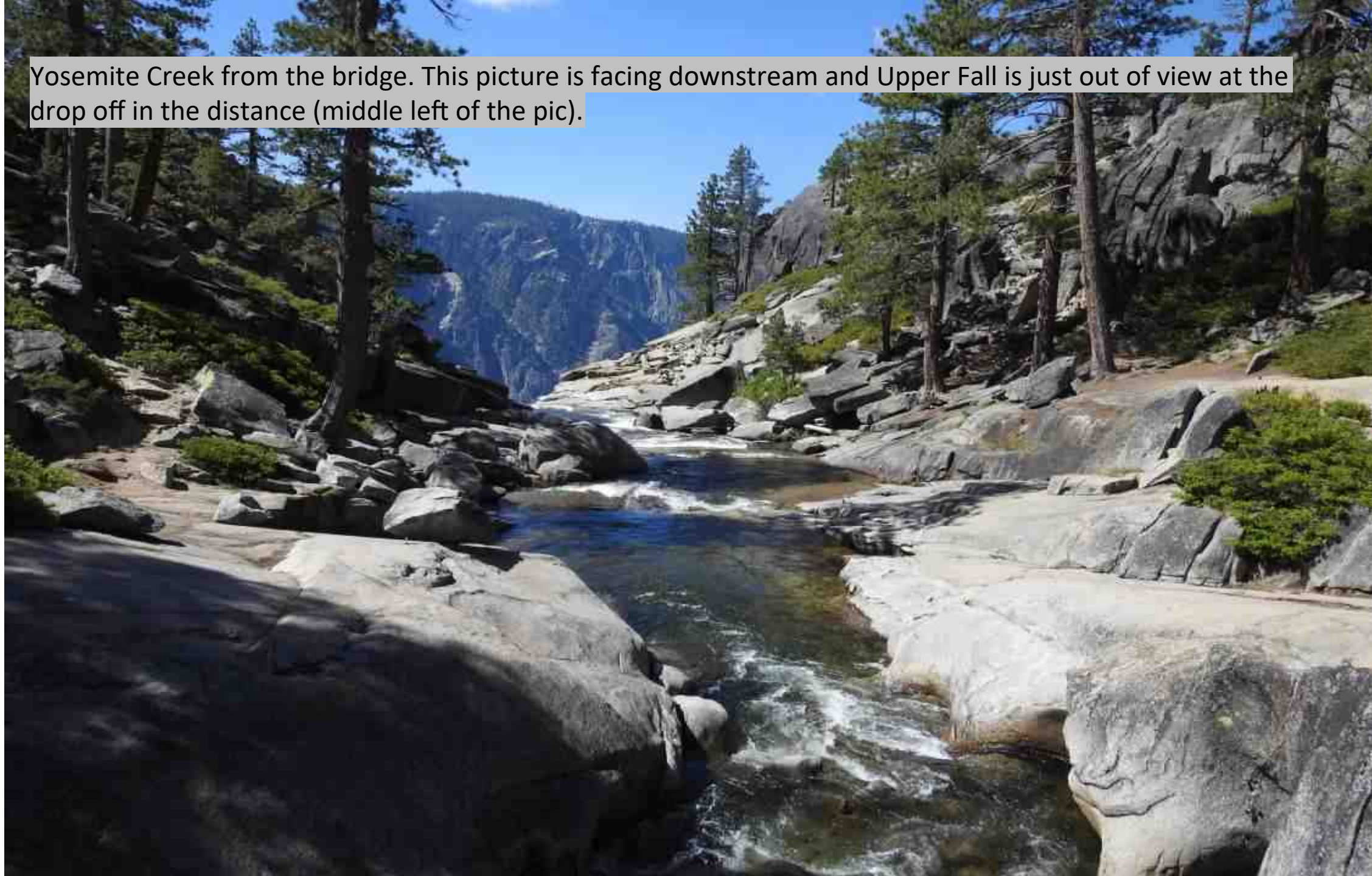


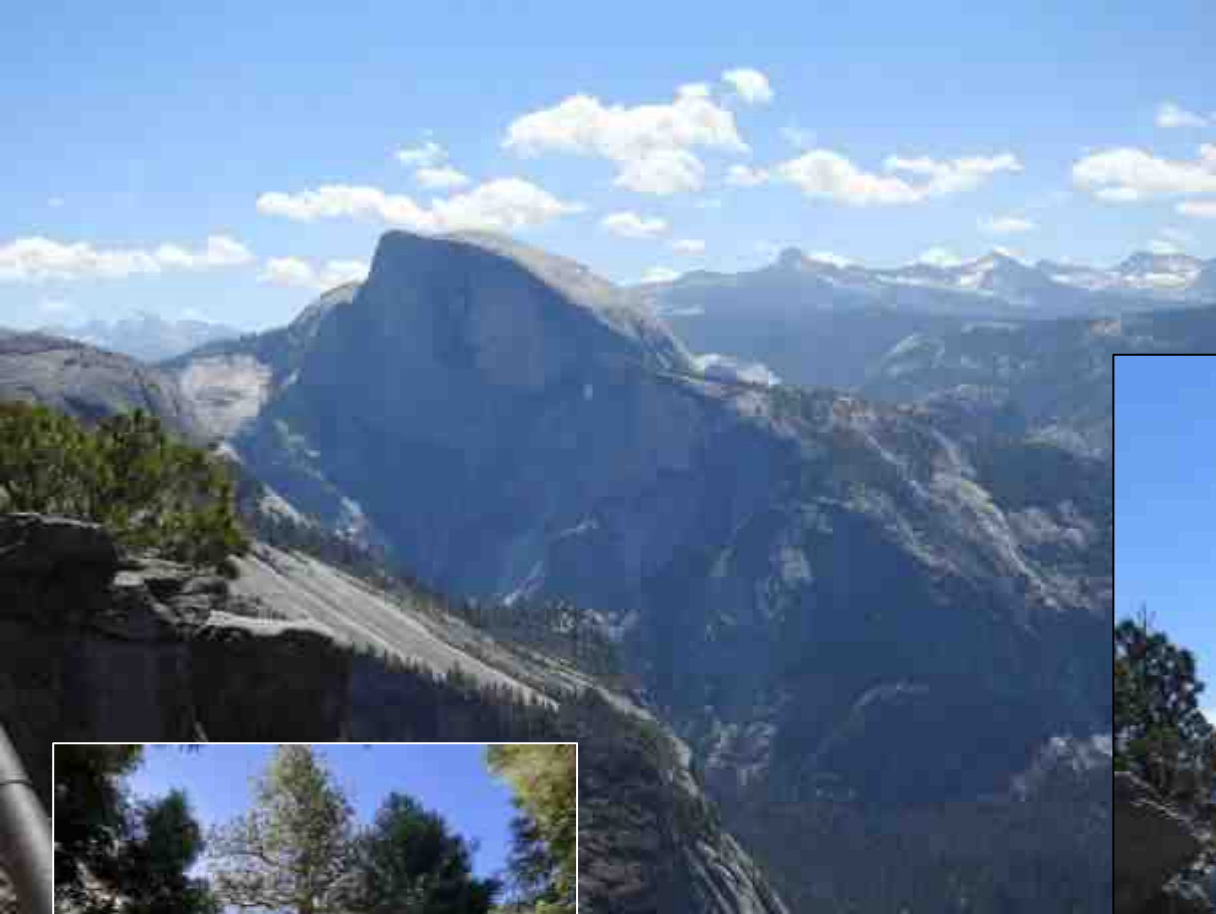
The bridge over Yosemite Creek (left), which was upstream of the falls. This picture (right) shows a small swimming area north of the bridge.





Yosemite Creek from the bridge. This picture is facing downstream and Upper Fall is just out of view at the drop off in the distance (middle left of the pic).





Half Dome from Yosemite Point (upper left). Steve is taking a selfie with the surrounding valley and mountains in the background (right). Tall trees on the hike to Yosemite Point (lower left).





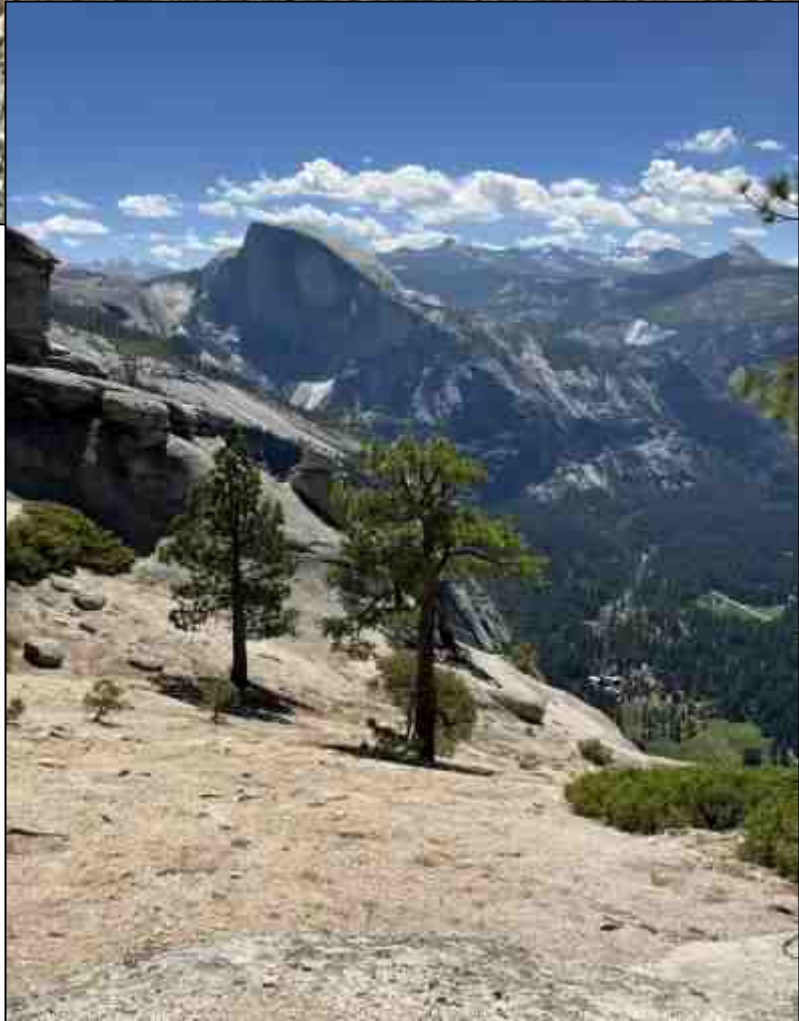
This and next page: Different views from Yosemite Point.







Sierra alligator lizard at a spur viewpoint near Yosemite Point (bottom).





Cell phone pics of Yosemite Creek.





Yosemite Creek, where we took a swim in the water (left) and the brink of Upper Fall on the hike down the mountain (right). The sun and light were much better for photographs on the hike down due to the time of the day (also see next seven pages).

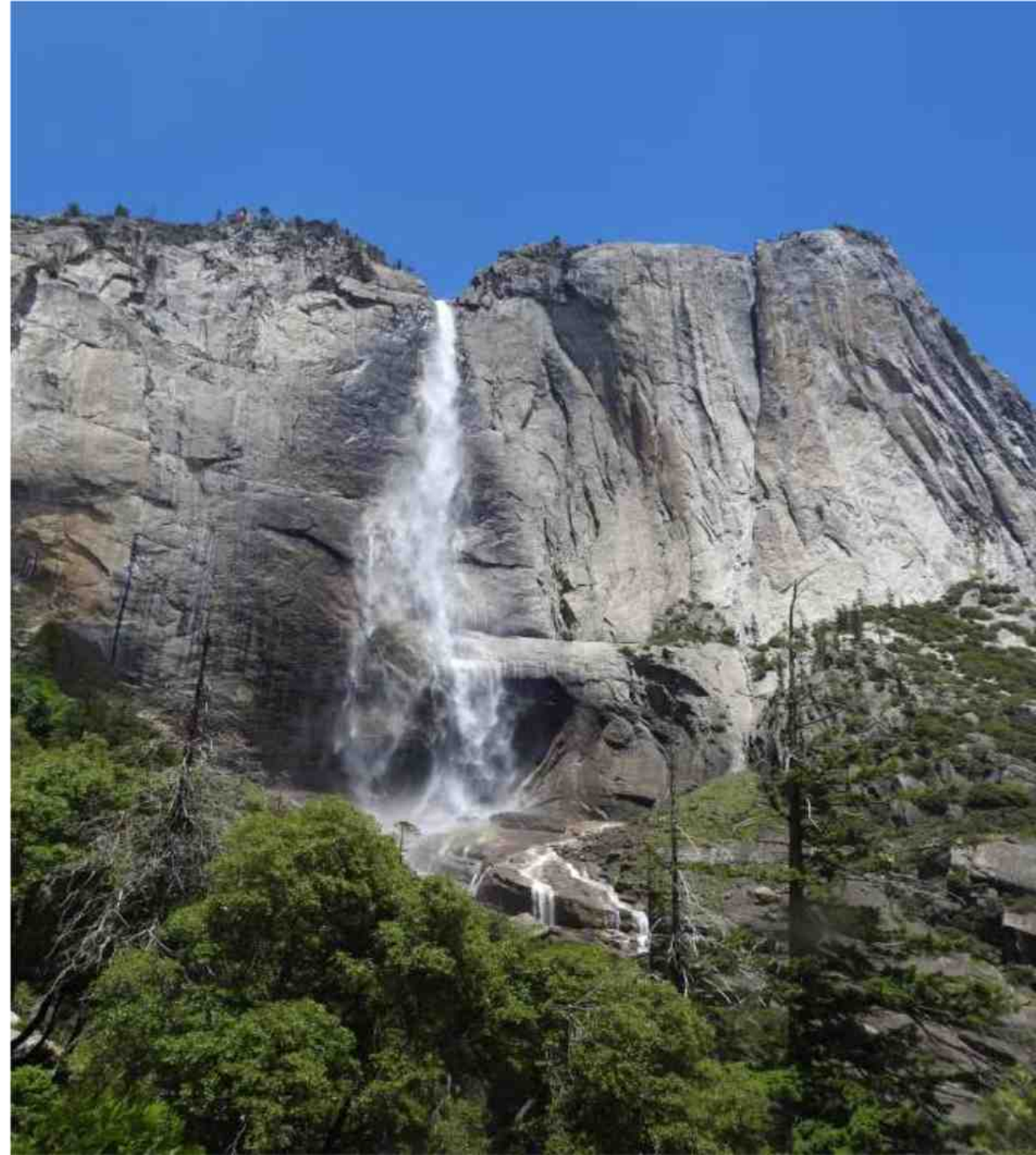








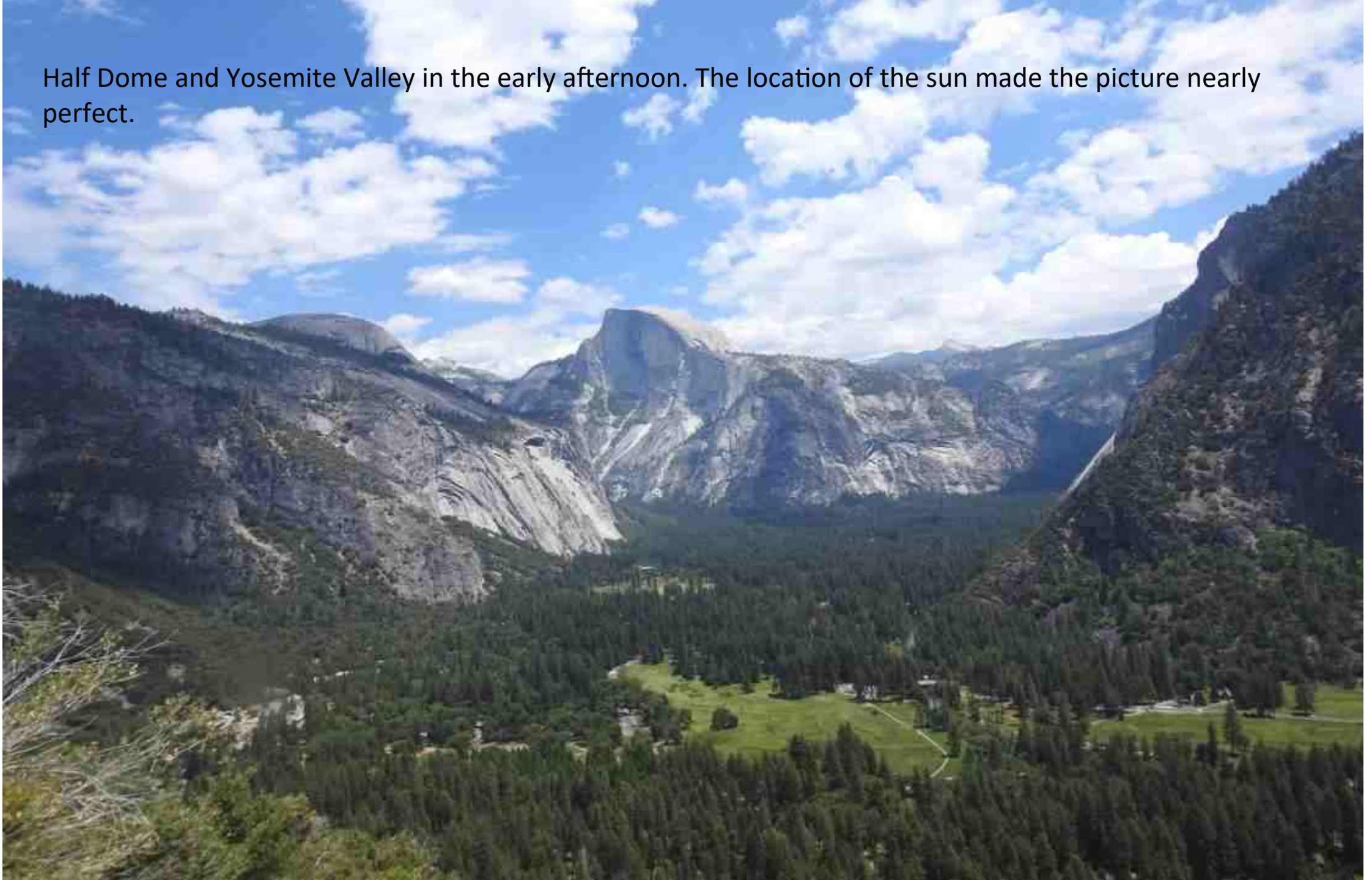




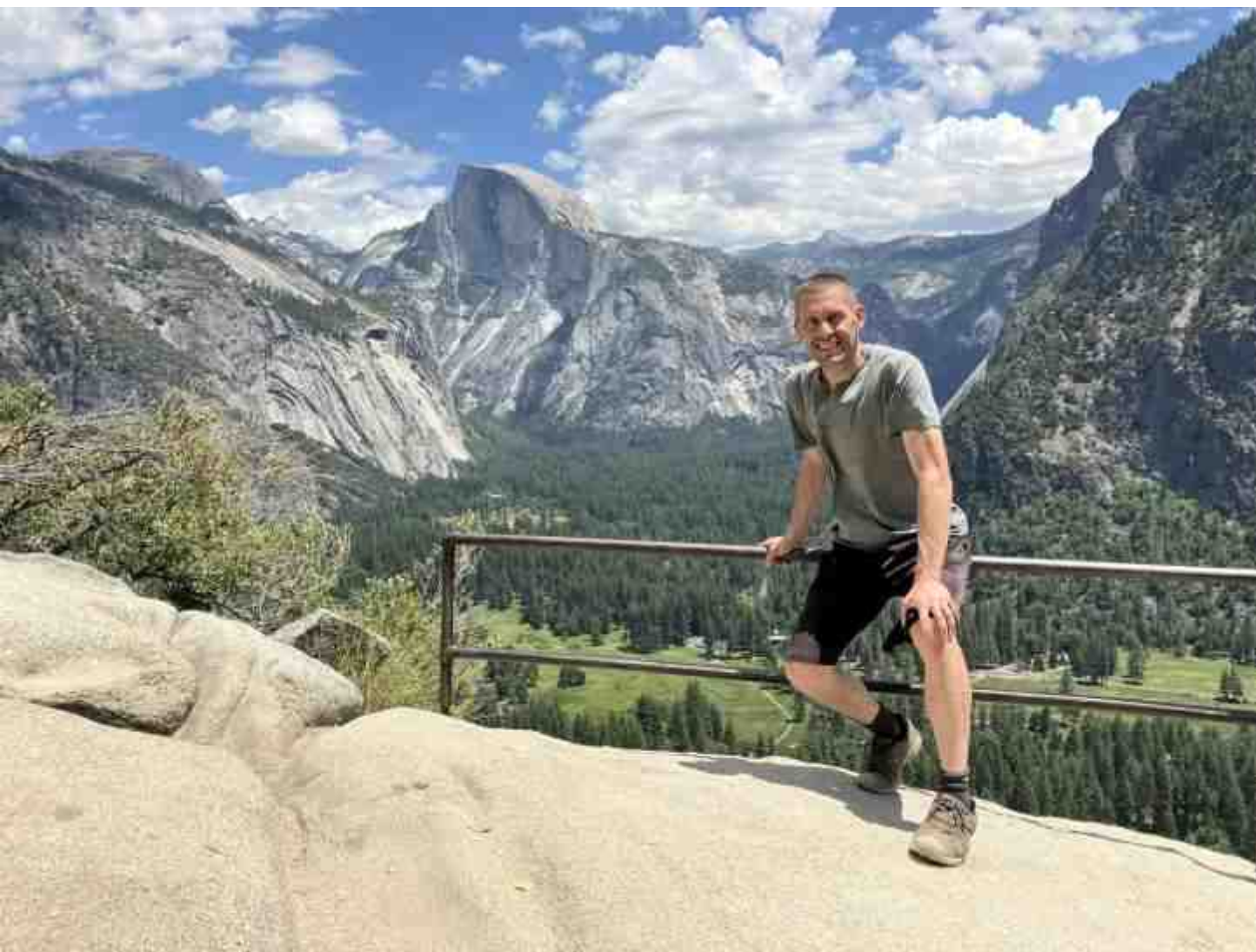




Half Dome and Yosemite Valley in the early afternoon. The location of the sun made the picture nearly perfect.







I didn't realize until arriving that the visitor center was just a small information center with a few gift items for sale. I like the nature exhibits and information that is typical of visitor centers. Luckily, employees informed me that there was a separate building called the Exploration Center, which had what I was looking for. I found it about a block away and indeed it had many nature-based wildlife exhibits with taxidermied animals that live in the park, as well as exhibits on volcanic formations, glaciers, and mountain climbing.

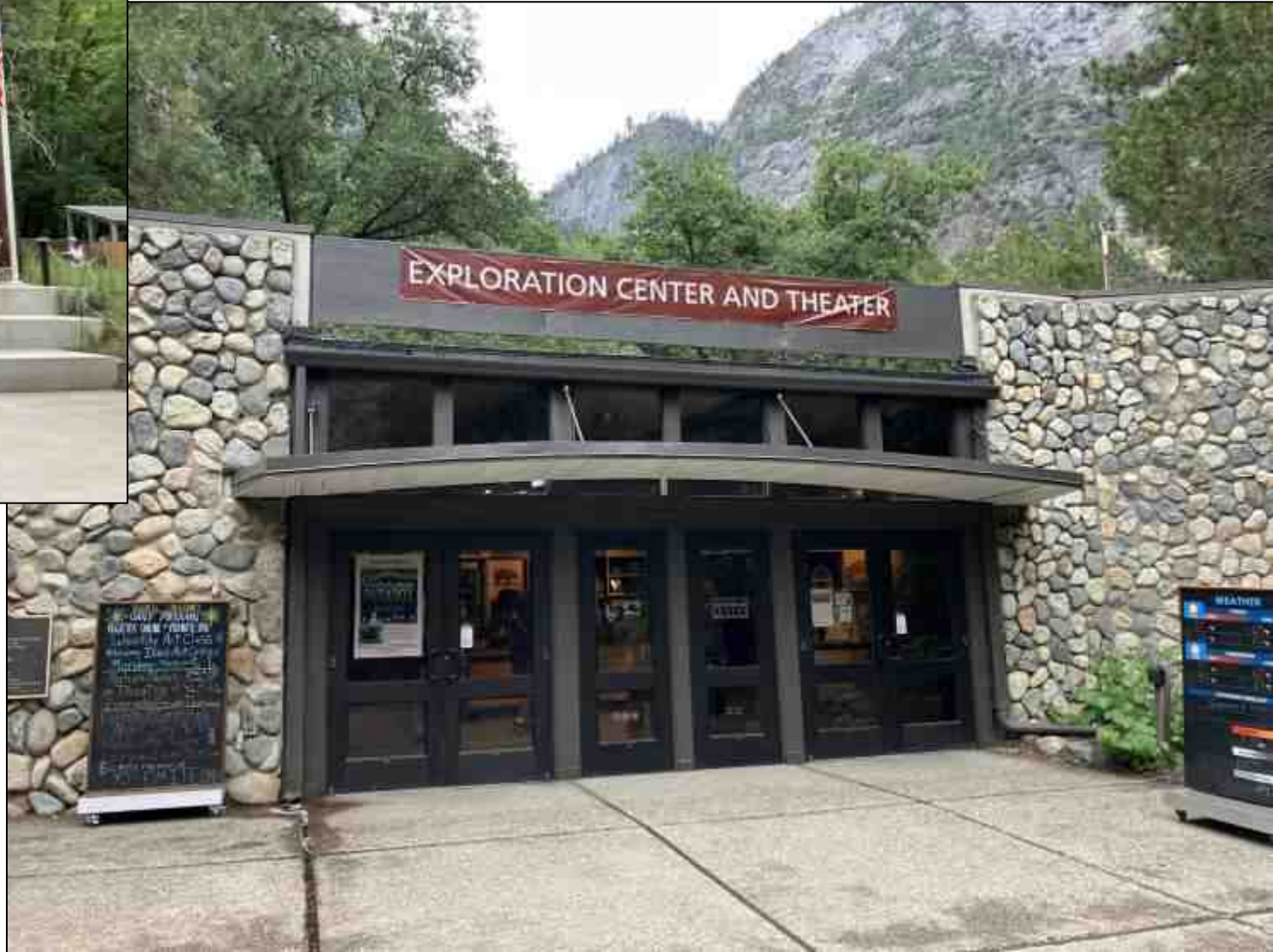
On the way back to the campground, I got mixed up and ended up taking the Green Line bus all around the valley to the west end. It was frustrating as I circled the entire stretch of Yosemite Valley before finally heading east and back to the campground. I could've walked the about 1.5 miles or so quicker than the time it took on the bus. The roads aren't linear in the valley however, so it is easy to get mixed up your first couple of days there. For my troubles, I did see a doe deer on the road between Curry Village and the campground as I walked back.

I took it easy that evening and made dinner from about 6-6:30 and then worked on pictures for the rest of the evening, retiring around 9:00. I brought an inverter with me, and it was paying dividends as it charged my computer and camera when the car was in accessory mode. I usually charged the computer in the evening with the car parked and turned off, while I often charged the camera when I wasn't using it while we were driving. I was also backing up my pictures on the camera's SD drive, separate from the folder that stores current pictures (i.e., before I name and modify them).

It was slightly quieter that night, but people were still up, so I spent over an hour just lying in my sleeping bag in the tent trying to fall asleep, which didn't happen until well after 10:00 PM. I had been so active up to that point, that just being off my throbbing feet and resting was equivalent to a normal person's sleep.



The Visitor Center (left), which was really just an information/welcome center for tourists, and the Exploration Center (right), which was what I was expecting the visitor center to be. It had cool nature-based exhibits.



Next page: A mule deer doe was in a small meadow next to the road as I walked back from the bus at Curry Village to the Upper Pines Campground.



Glacier Point, Mariposa Grove, then to Fresno

I was up and about at 4:50 AM on June 25, 2004. This was our last day in Yosemite, and we had a busy day ahead as we were going to the southern part of the park, including Glacier Point. We hadn't been to that area of the park yet.

As I walked to the bathroom, I heard the usual ravens in the trees, but it was too dark to attempt to obtain pictures of them. I saw a Steller's Jay on a picnic table a couple of campsites away from mine. We quietly packed up while the majority of the people were still asleep in the campground, and we departed at 5:30 AM. I spotted 4 mule deer grazing close together near the road by the village, which is a little over a mile away from the campsite area. There were two does, a bigger buck, and a smaller buck. No fawns were seen. It was an interesting group for sure, but we didn't stop as we had already seen deer and they were not in a great area to pull over.

We drove directly to the western end of the valley and past Valley View, taking Wawona Road. Our first stop was at Tunnel View where we obtained some dawn images of Yosemite Valley. We then continued south and hustled to get to Glacier Point early in the morning to avoid traffic. I spotted 1, 2, then 1 mule deer off the road. We didn't stop for them; in fact, Steve only saw one of those deer.

I was mighty impressed with Washburn Point just before we got to Glacier Point. It gave a beautiful view of Vernal and Nevada Falls which was a short distance from the campground we just left. We ran out of time to do that hike as we were elsewhere, but I was told the view of the falls is very good and worth the hike at some point.

From Glacier Point, you can see both Lower and Upper Yosemite Falls. It was quite impressive; however, the sun was really tough from 7:00-7:30 AM when we were there. There was a ton of glare which affected picture quality, so we both took plenty of pictures. I then went to the car and heated up water to have breakfast. I had my usual 2.5 packets of oatmeal, chopped banana, raisins, and a scoop of peanut butter mixed in. I summarized my notes to take up some more time.





The campground at first light.





Half Dome and surrounding mountains with Bridalveil Fall on the right, at dawn from Tunnel View on the Wawona Road.

Next page: A cell phone pic at dawn really brings out the landscape's features.







Tunnel on Wawona Road with a raven in the parking lot.





Views along the Wawona Road on the way south to Glacier Point Road (also see next page).





Views from Glacier Point Road (also see next page).







Half Dome, Vernal (in the foreground) and Nevada Falls (right-most waterfall) from Washburn Point.



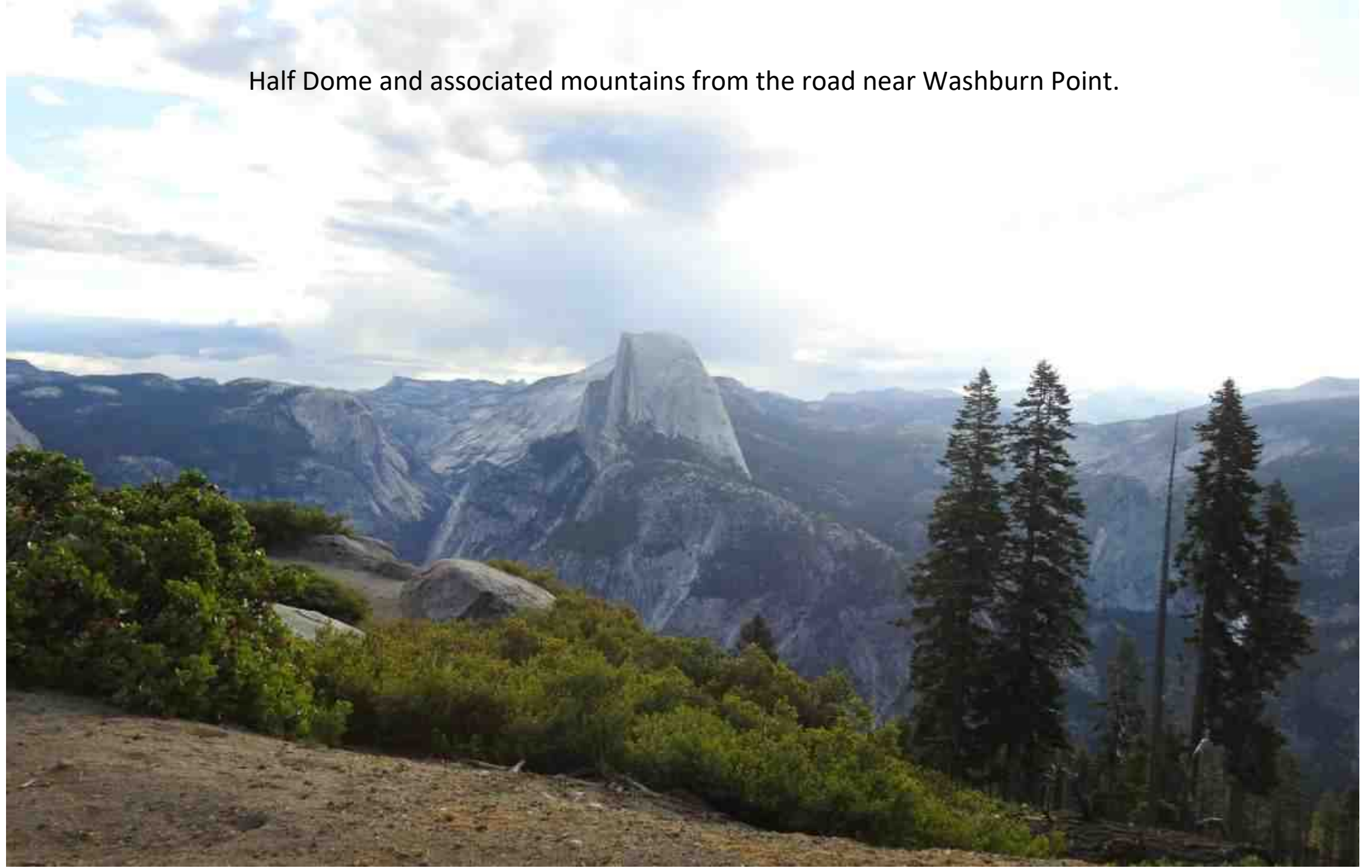




Vernal (left) and Nevada Falls (right), both super zoomed in, from Washburn Point.



Half Dome and associated mountains from the road near Washburn Point.





Unexpectedly, I came across a wedding taking place at Glacier Point (upper left), as the sun shined in my face while viewing Half Dome (right), with a ground squirrel foraging on the cement (lower left). It was likely consuming minerals.



Cool view of the trails at Glacier Point (right) and an overlook building (left).

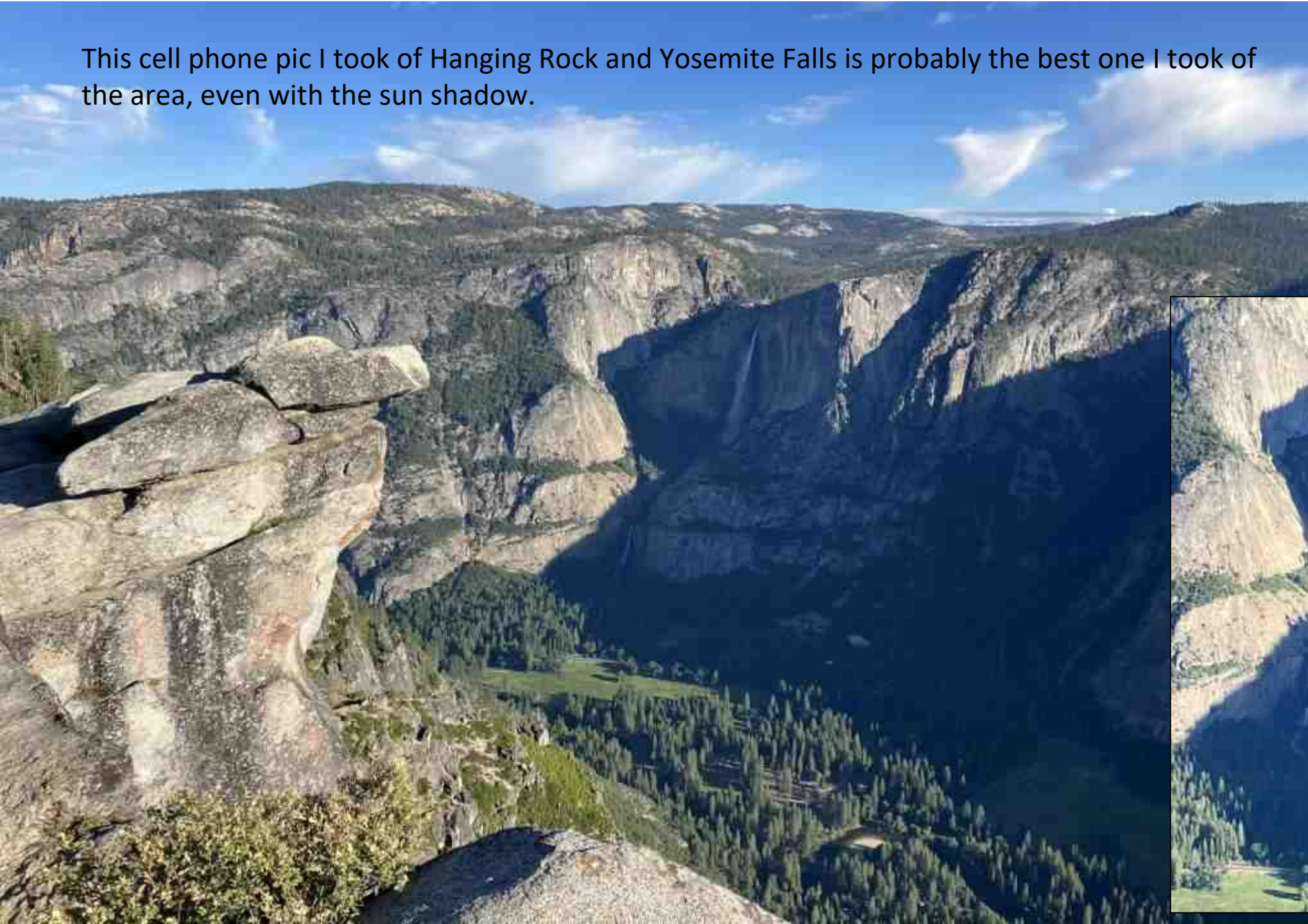




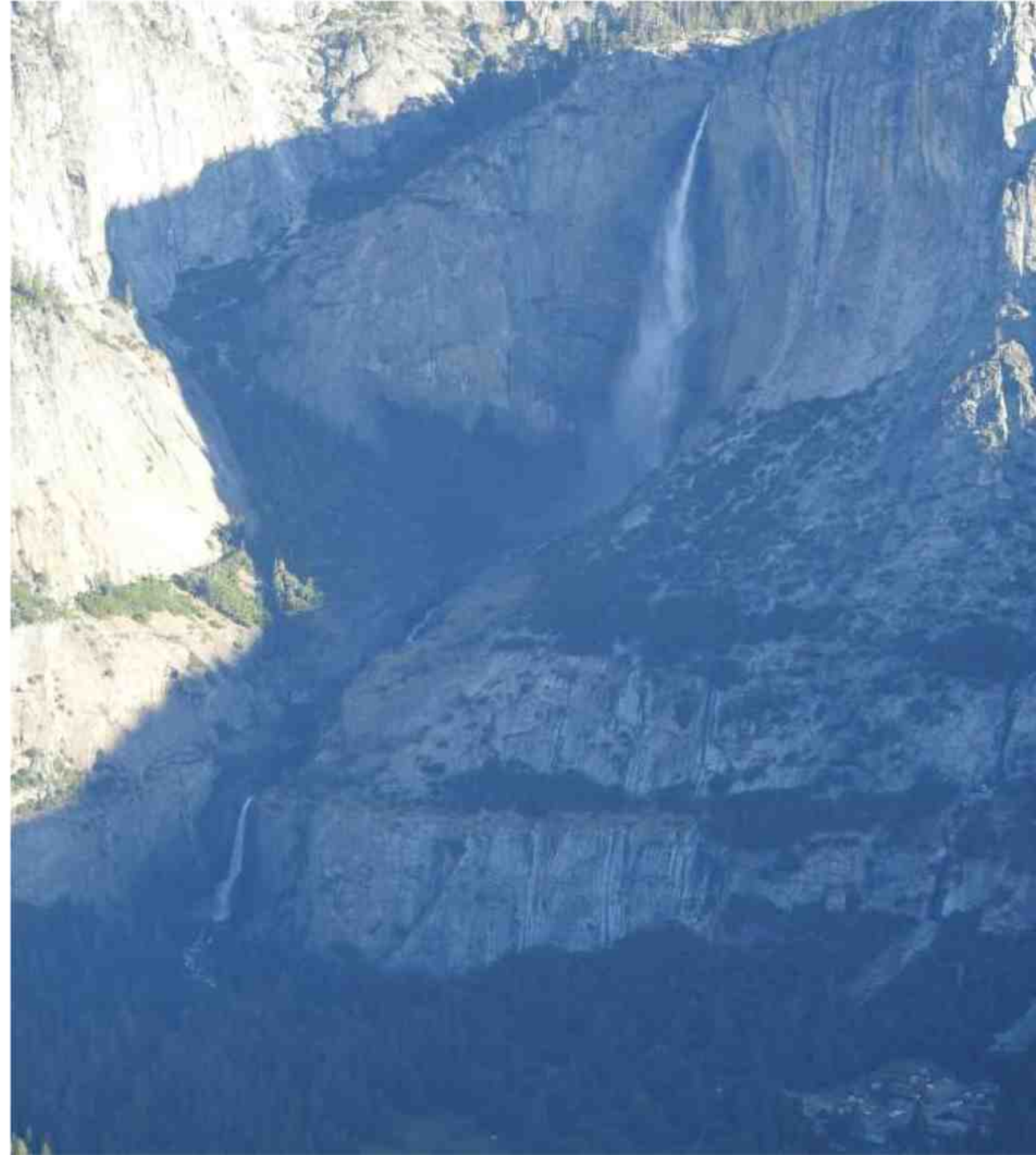
While Half Dome was in the sun as I panned northeast (upper left), Yosemite Falls was covered in shadows to the northwest (right and lower left). Notice the ‘famous’ Hanging Rock on the middle-left side of the right picture. It is now closed, but in former times there are [well known pictures of people standing on the ledge](#).



This cell phone pic I took of Hanging Rock and Yosemite Falls is probably the best one I took of the area, even with the sun shadow.



Yosemite Falls, both Upper and Lower (see arrow).

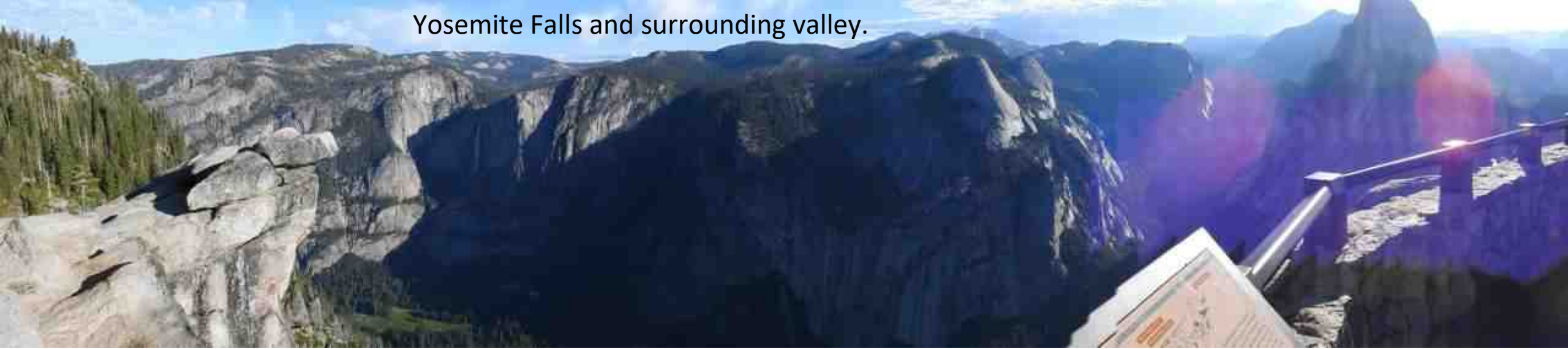




Cell phone
pictures of
me and
Yosemite
Falls.



Yosemite Falls and surrounding valley.



Yosemite Valley (left) and Ahwahnee Hotel (right).





At 8:38 AM, I walked back to the end of Glacier Point which was about a third of a mile from the car. The shadows were a little better, but the light still wasn't great. Unfortunately, we would have had to have waited until the afternoon to get good sunlight, similar to when we hiked down the Yosemite Falls Trail the previous day. We knew we didn't have time to do that, but I also thought to keep that in mind for future trips. Nevertheless, the scenery was spectacular from up there, sun shadows or not.

Leaving Glacier Point, we then drove south a short distance, parked in a lot, and hiked 1.1 miles out to Taft Point. This area offered additional fantastic views of Yosemite Valley, including to a rock ledge like the famous (and fenced) one at Glacier Point. We ended up hiking about 2.5 miles total as there were a few spur trails off the main path.

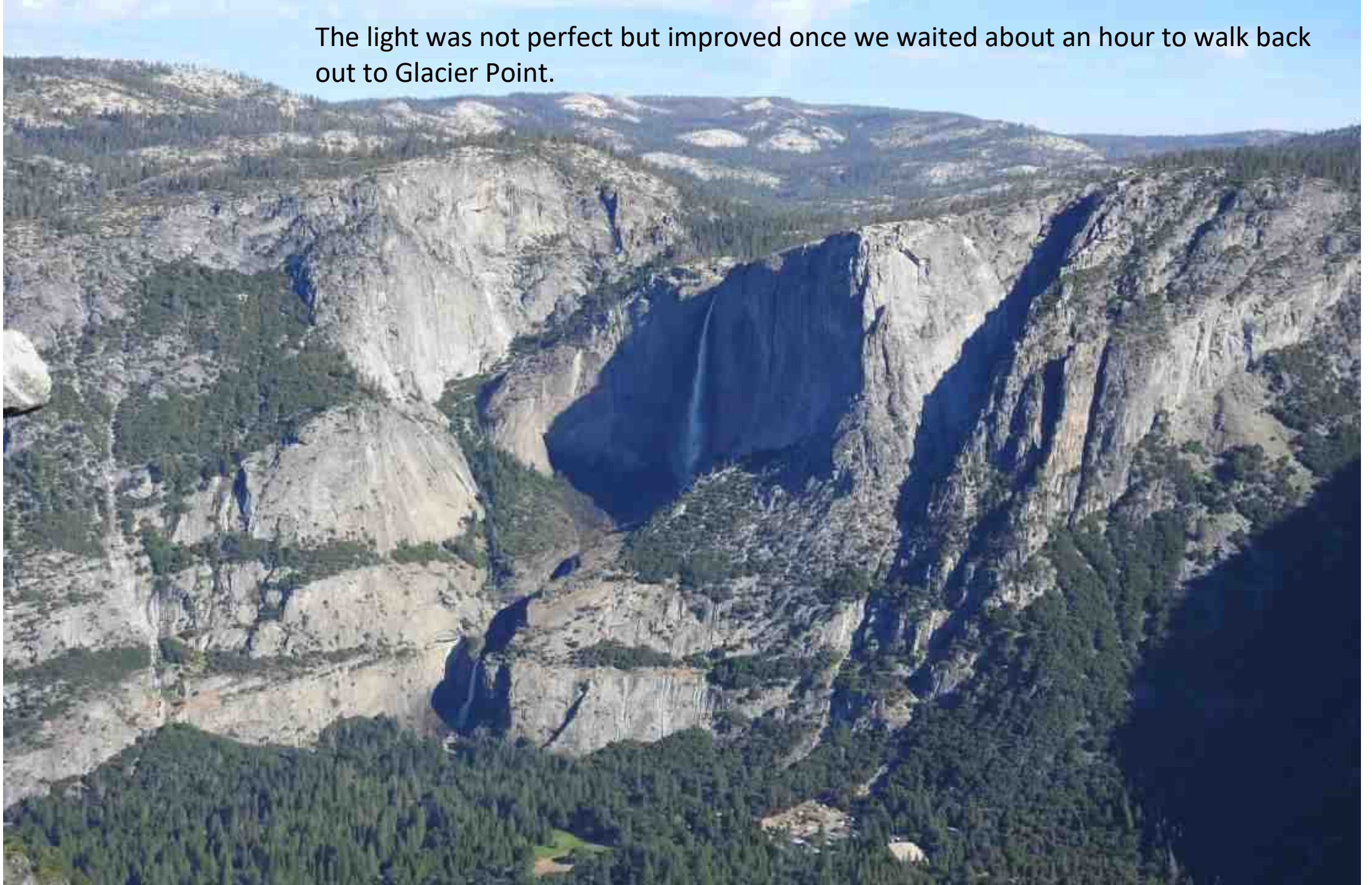
After that hike, we then drove back to Wawona Road and took a left to go to the southern part of Yosemite, parking at the Mariposa Grove. From the lot, we took a shuttle for the last few miles to get to the giant sequoia grove. It was 85-90°, so very hot, at noon when we started. There were miles upon miles of trails. We did a fairly long 4.5 mile loop to Clothespin Tree via Big Trees Loop and Mariposa Grove Trail. We came back via the Perimeter Trail and then the northern part of the Grizzly Giant Loop. It would have been nice to get to Wawona Point, but we just didn't have the time or energy on this sweltering day.

At 2:20 PM, we drove to the visitor center in Wawona. We had unknowingly driven by it on our way to Mariposa Grove, so we retraced our route about five miles back to the north where we had lunch and toured the building, which was a small information area. It had a good, new sequoia tree magnet which I bought. There was also a nearby history center that was essentially a walking tour of what looked like an old Wild West town. We walked around that area before going to the visitor center.

We were finished with everything at 3:36 PM, so we then drove out of the south entrance of the park and went straight to Fresno where we spent the night in a cheap hotel in a crummy part of town. It was a sweltering 106 degrees when we arrived. I was not used to the extreme heat or the lady who asked me for drugs in the hotel parking lots, then snacks when I said no to the drugs. She went to other hotel guests once I walked away. I then proceeded to bring my luggage into the hotel room just to make sure the car didn't look like an attractive vehicle to break into. It was a pain with all our stuff, but worth it to avoid a potential major headache.

I mostly worked on pictures and email that evening, but I did find a place called the Red Onion that had shakes. I was craving ice cream with high calories and fat, so the 'Boston Shake' fit the bill. Ironically, I have never heard of that in Massachusetts where I live.

The light was not perfect but improved once we waited about an hour to walk back out to Glacier Point.



View of Half Dome (right) with people looking at the scenic area (left).





Half Dome area (left) and Yosemite Valley (right) from Glacier Point.





View of Upper (left) and Lower (right) Yosemite Falls. The Upper Fall is much larger in size, being 1,430 feet compared to 320 feet for Lower. Overall, Yosemite Falls is [2,425 feet when combining the two with the middle cascades.](#)





A good perspective of Half Dome and Vernal and Nevada Falls from Glacier Point.





Liberty Cap is the dome to the immediate left of Nevada Fall.





The start of the Taft Point Trail.

Next page: The trail started out open (see this page), then went through a cool, dark forest (see next page).







Sierra fence lizard.



This tree along the trail was very large. Notice the person in the background.





The trail stayed forested until coming out to near Taft Point (in the background of the right picture).





The habitat was Mediterranean-like with open, rocky areas and spaced-out trees at Taft Point. It was very pretty and distinct looking (also see next page).





Yosemite Falls in the middle of the right picture from Taft Point (left).



Rock fissure near Taft Point (left). Chaparral habitat on the right.





A different, very thin rock fissure (left) and a vertical drop to Yosemite Valley. I held my breath when taking this picture even though I wasn't in any immediate danger.

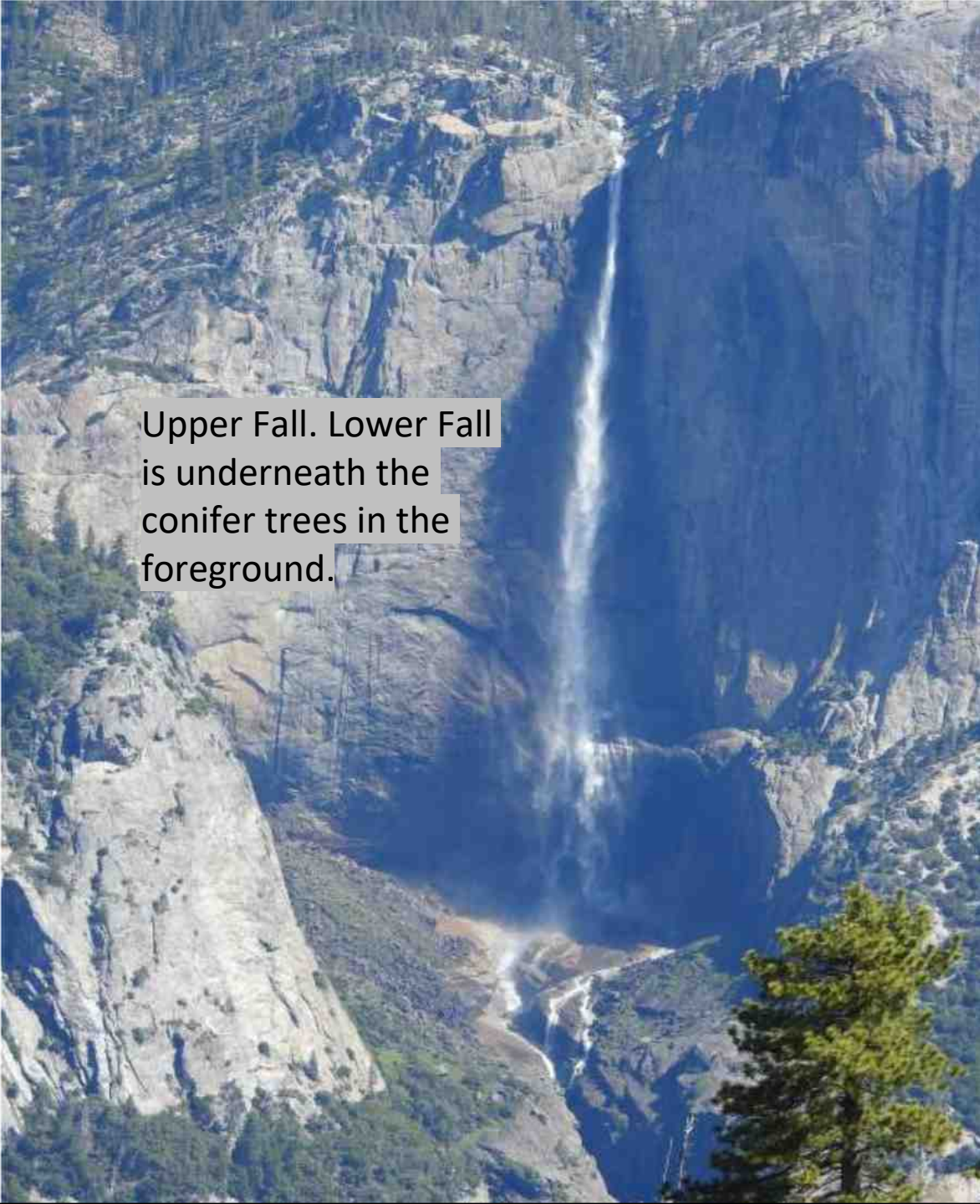




Notice the people standing on the overhanging rock on the left. El Capitan is the concave bowl-like structure on the right above Yosemite Valley. There were no railings on that rock because it was in the backcountry where structures aren't maintained. There was a metal railing where I took this picture at the 'official' Taft Point (see next page, bottom picture).







Upper Fall. Lower Fall
is underneath the
conifer trees in the
foreground.



Upper Fall and
Lower Fall (see
arrow) from Taft
Point.



Very neat, large boulder at the edge of Taft Point.

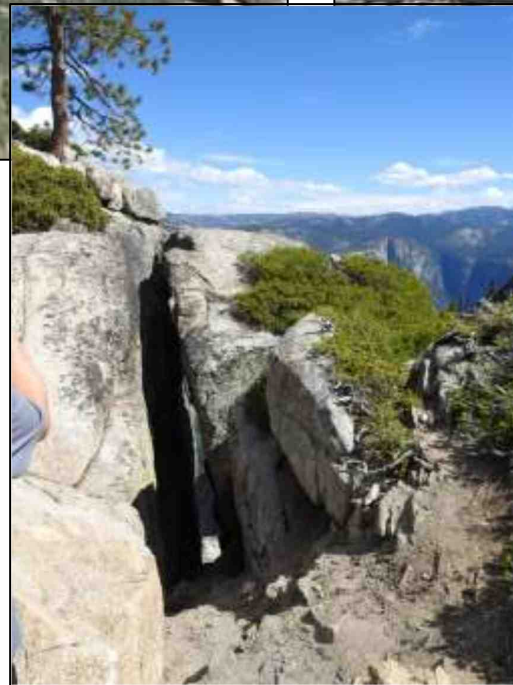




I took these pictures from near the boulder on the previous page. It was further west and offered a better view of Yosemite Falls, both Upper and Lower (left). El Capitan is prominent from there (right, center of frame).







I was so impressed how trees, mostly conifers, grew in such steep, rocky areas.



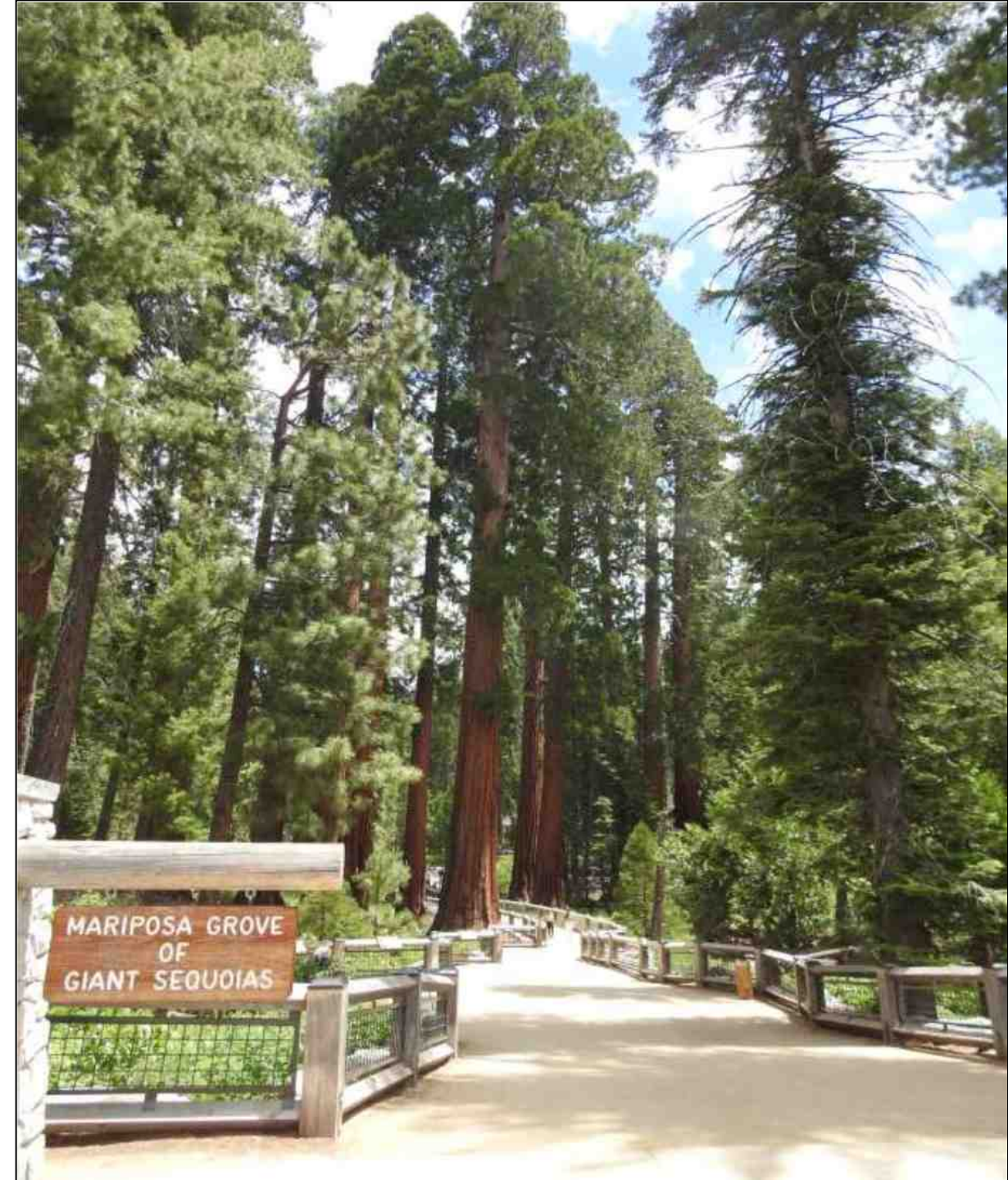
Leaving the Mediterranean habitat (left) and entering the forest (right). Notice how small the people appear in the background.

Next page: One last view of the forest on the Taft Point Trail and then a couple of images from the drive down to the Mariposa Grove.



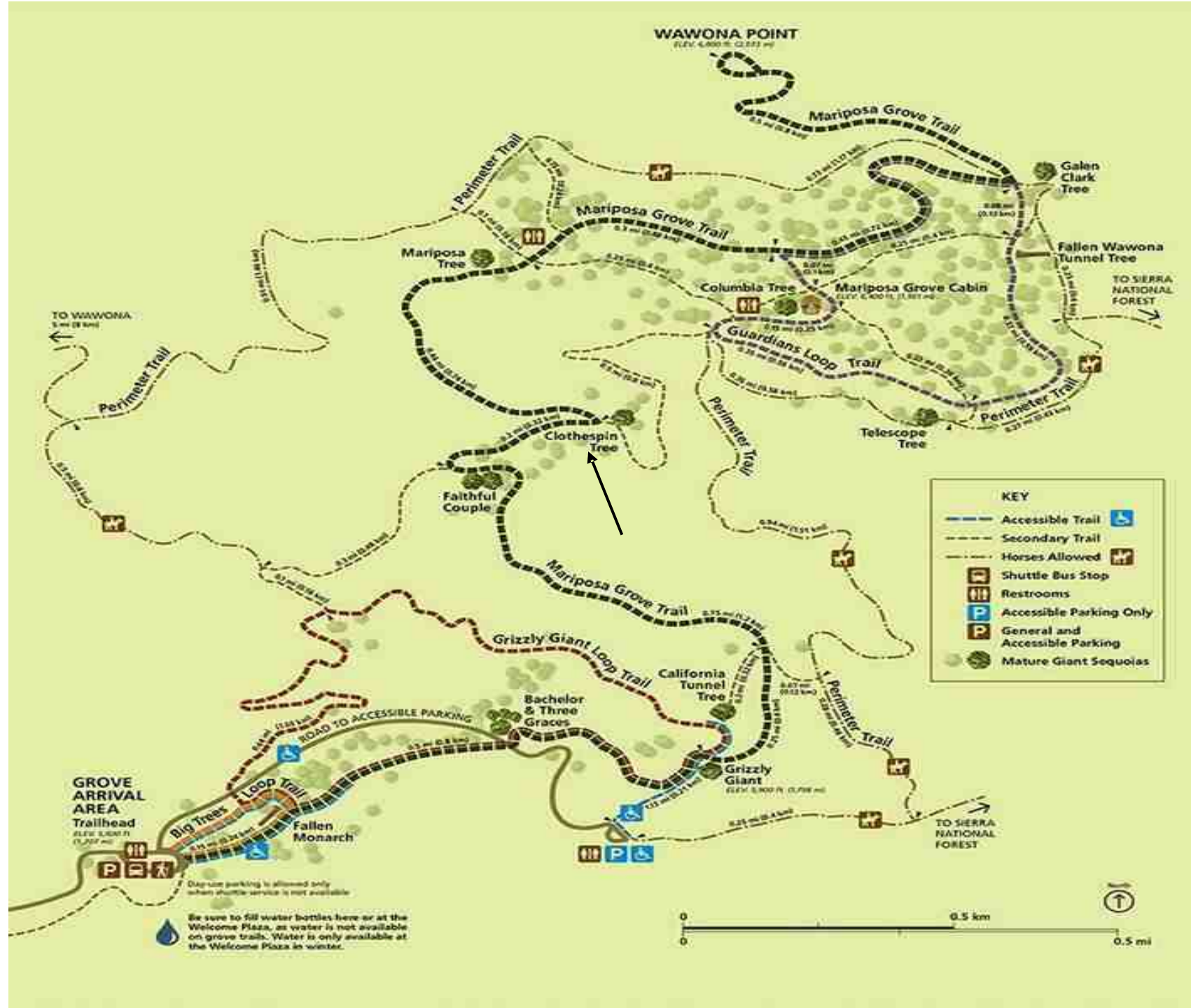






Map of the trails at Mariposa Grove. We entered via bus at the lower left part of the map and hiked to the Clothespin Tree in the central part of the map (see arrow). We then turned around, skipping the Wawona Point area. Lack of time to see every single feature prevented us from doing the entire trail system.

Next three pages: Good perspectives of how big the sequoia trees are compared to the people.









People next to the roots of the Fallen Monarch.



The Bachelor and Three Graces. The base of these trees were so impressively wide.

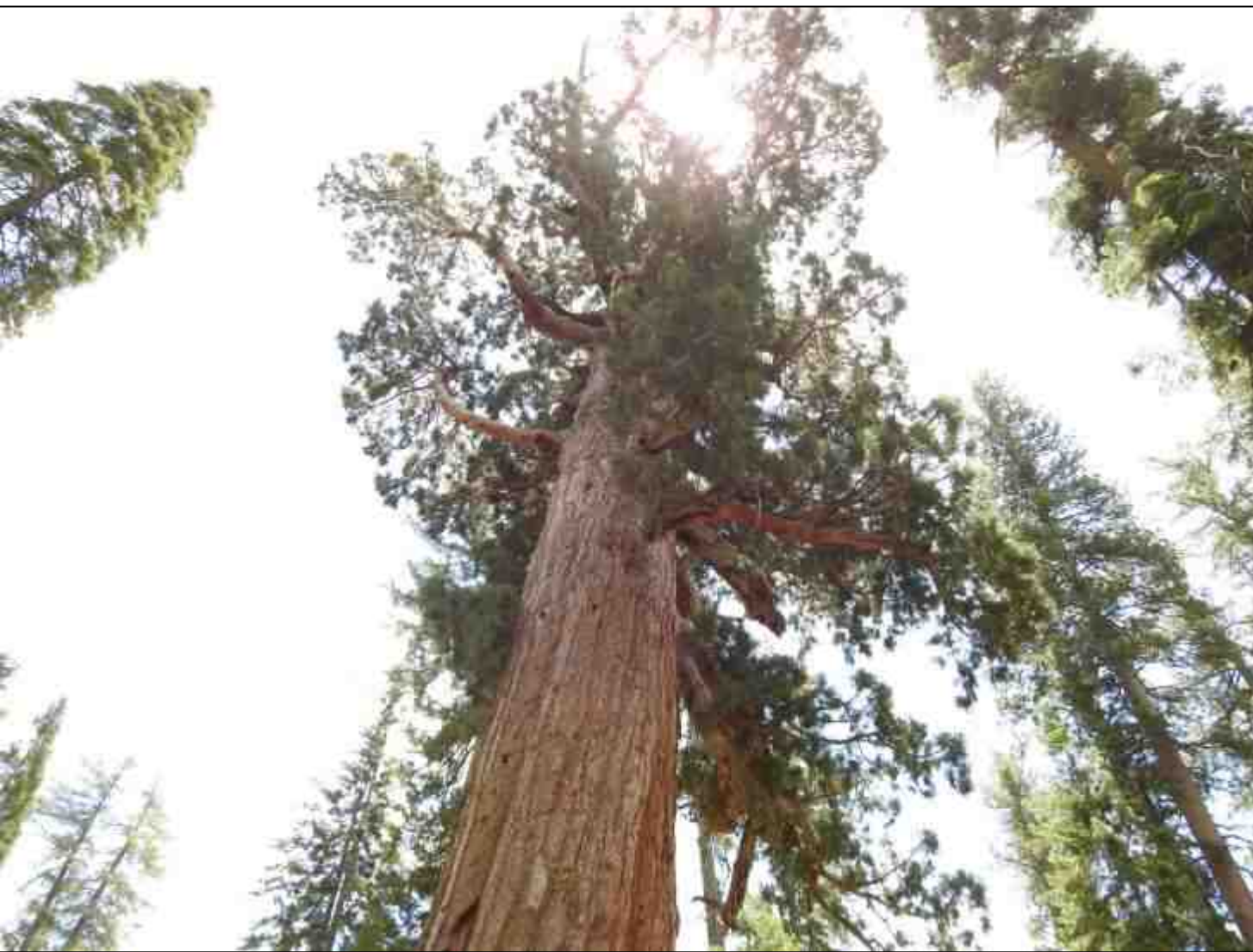


Approaching Grizzly Giant, an enormous sequoia.





Closeups of Grizzly Giant.

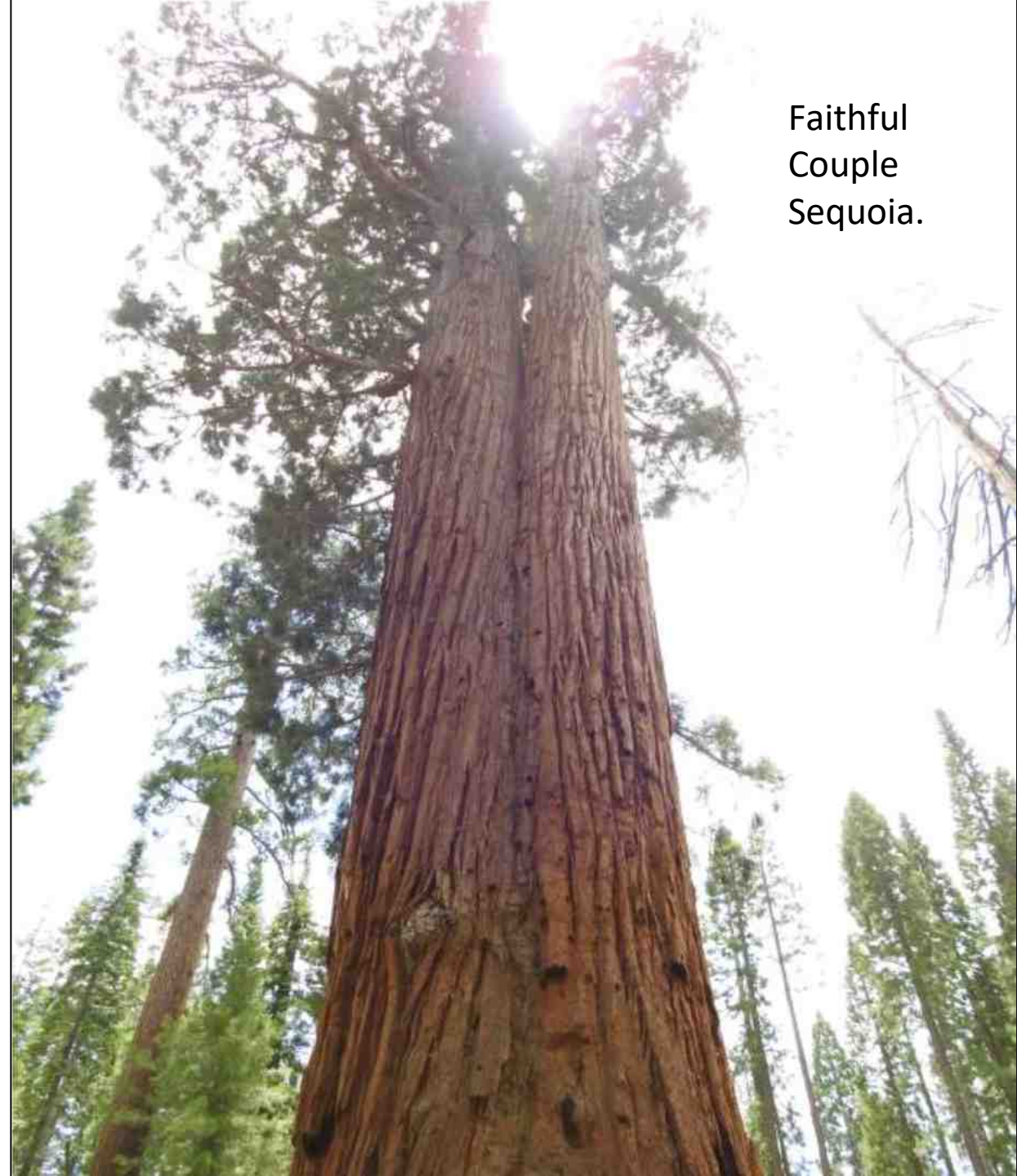




California Tunnel tree, both from a distance (left, notice a couple of people on the right side of the tree) and up-close (right).



Next page: Me in front of Faithful Couple.



Faithful
Couple
Sequoia.



Me next to a
road-side
sequoia (left)
amongst a tall
grove of them
(right).



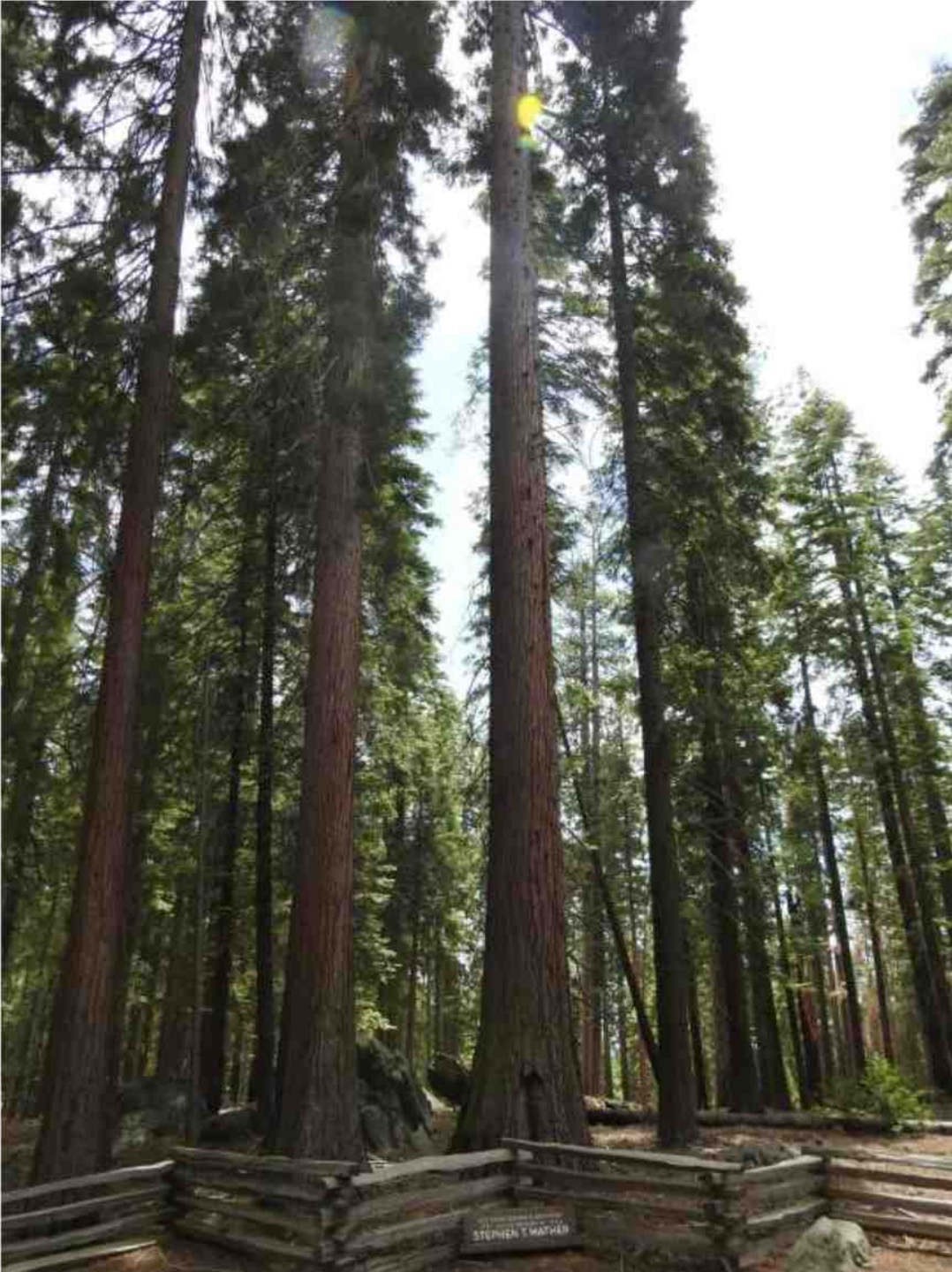
Clothespin Tree was the furthest we hiked on the trail.





Clothesline
Tree on the
right.







Tall trees
along the
Perimeter
Trail.





Cell phone
(left) and
regular
camera
picture
(right) of the
same tall
sequoia
along the
Grizzly Giant
Loop.





Left: Notice the charred bark above me. Sequoia trees have thick bark and are adapted to fires.

Right: View from the park shuttle (bus) on the way down the windy road.





One more view of the park shuttle road (left) and then the booths at the South Entrance Road (right).



Part of the History Center.



When I finished the Yosemite folder, I had taken 505 pictures from the first 3.5 days of the trip using my Nikon P-900 camera. I also took another roughly 100 images of the park with my cell phone. These combined images, of course, are the basis of Part 1 of this e-book.

When I was working on naming the picture files and getting up to speed on my notes in the hotel, I took a few minutes to reflect on Yosemite since we had just finished that part of the trip. I didn't point these facts out earlier for space and clarity, but a few things surprised me about one of the crown jewels of the park service.

- 1) There was an 'unbelievable' lack of signs both on roads and at pullouts. It was almost like you had to know where you already were in many locations. For instance, there was one sign to turn to Glacier Point, but when we actually got to the intersection it was easy to go by the actual turn. Additionally, there were many hairpin turns that weren't marked. As we took those turns, I was thinking of how awful it must be driving that road at night.
- 2) The wayside exhibits were very poor overall. Many were old and worn out, especially on Tioga Road. Some of the information placards were so faded that they were impossible to read. Others were missing or blank on a stand that formerly held those waysides. I couldn't believe a park with the stature of Yosemite had such poor or non-existing exhibits. There were also only a few wayside exhibits that were truly informative, like providing a map of the area and labels of what we were looking at, like the names of mountains and land features like rivers in an area. Apparently, I take Yellowstone's abundance of informative exhibits for granted when I'm there.

This Mediterranean, chaparral habitat with lots of golden grass and spaced-out trees was the most prevalent vegetative type on our drive to Fresno.





It became more arid and desert-like as we neared Fresno, which was smoking hot!





Cruising through downtown
Fresno on my way to the
Red Onion for a shake.



Part 2: Kings Canyon

A Busy Day in Kings Canyon

It cooled down to 75° overnight which was pleasant to wake up to at 5:00 AM in Fresno. We quickly packed up and left the hotel and went to a nearby grocery store, as we each needed a few items like bread and fruit. We also got gas off Route 180 before heading east to Kings Canyon National Park (NP). Unfortunately, a section of Route 180 was closed, so we were detoured off the road and did what seemed like endless circles before rejoining the interstate almost an hour later. I am pretty good with directions, but never would have been able to do that windy drive without GPS. Steve was driving and I must have said four times, “I feel like we are driving in circles, how are we ever going to get back to Route 180?”. Well, we did, eventually.

While on the detour, at 7:19 AM, I briefly saw a coyote trotting in tall grass off Sand Creek Road in what looked like private land. It was in the chaparral habitat that I had grown accustomed to at this point in the trip. It was a brief sighting as it trotted through a field, and I didn't take any pictures of it. Ironically, this would be the only coyote I saw all trip, even though this one was far from a national park. I also saw 2 female and 5-6 juvenile wild turkeys in a similar habitat not that far from the coyote sighting.

Once back on Route 180E, we reached Sequoia National Forest, which is also called Sequoia National Monument in most sections of that federal land. Essentially it is the same place with two names near Kings Canyon. The [monument was established to better protect the sequoia trees](#) within the national forest, which allows logging in some areas. After driving through the monument, we reached Kings Canyon NP. We first went to the visitor center to obtain information, then to General Grant Grove. We saw the General Grant Tree, which is [the 2nd to 3rd largest tree in the world](#), and many other huge trees in this forest. I couldn't get over the size of them; they were incredible to experience. I also had the fortune of seeing a mule deer browsing on bushes near a sequoia, so I was able to get pictures of the ungulate next to the huge tree for perspective.

After hiking around the sequoia grove, we drove east on Kings Canyon Scenic Byway. It was very windy and quite hot as we reached lower elevations. There were some great views of the surrounding landscape. We stopped at a picnic area, which also appeared to be a free camping area called Convict Flat. It was within the national forest/monument. It was a warm, Mediterranean climate in much of the national forest, with chaparral habitat. Always located on the coast, [this biome is characterized by hot and dry summers with wetter and mild winters](#).

An overview of where we drove the past couple of days from the south part of Yosemite, down Route 41 to Fresno, then east on 180 to Kings Canyon. Once in Kings Canyon, you go in and out of the park, alternating some of the drive with going through national forest/monument lands.



Chaparral habitat off Sand Creek Road. The coyote was observed very close to the bottom right picture, but I failed to get a picture of it.

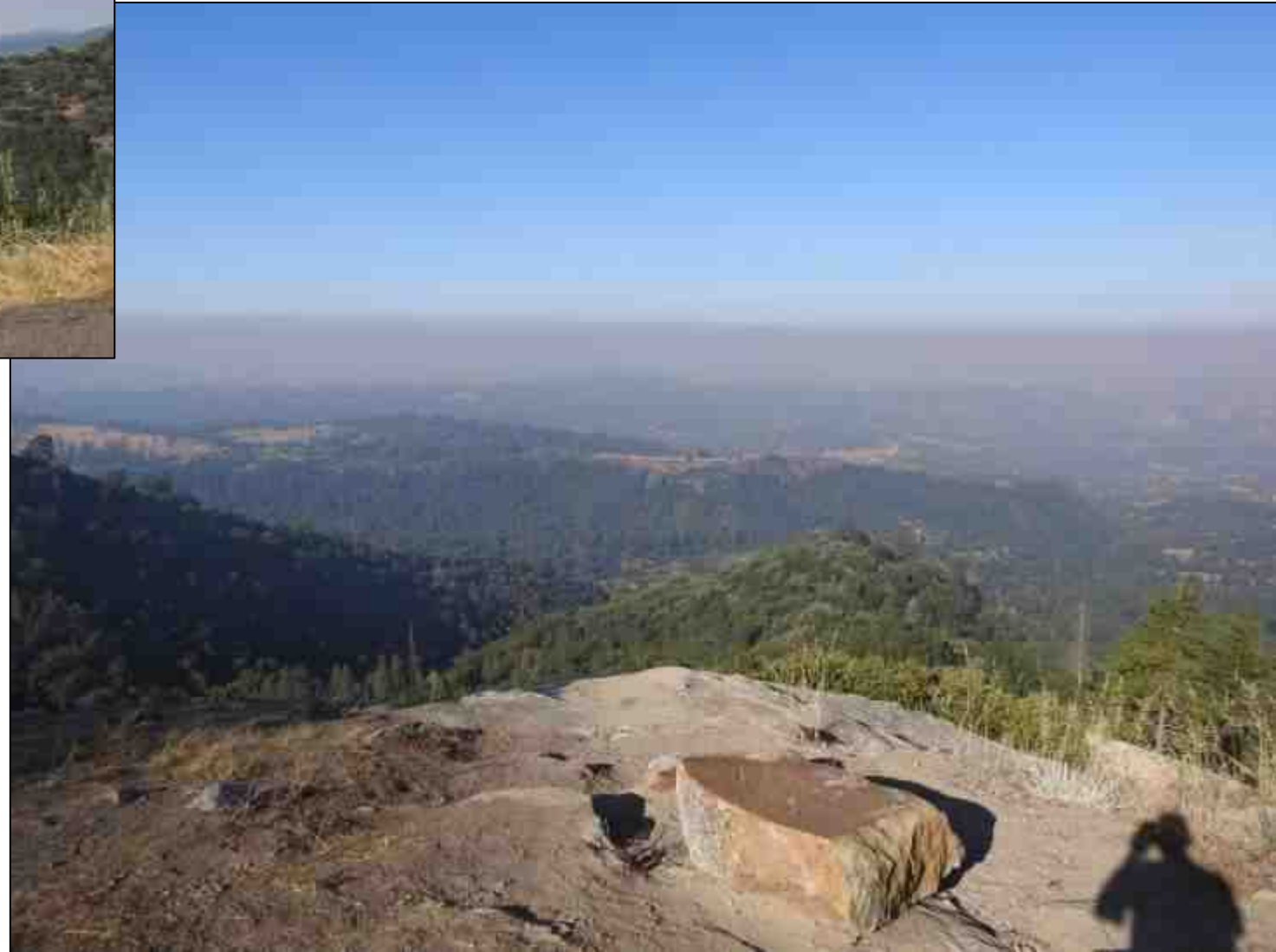




As we approached Giant Sequoia National Monument/Sequoia National Forest, it went from a chaparral dominated habitat (upper left) to a more forested one (see next few pages).



Notice the smoke-line forming on the horizon. This area was the very beginning of the national forest/monument, but I wasn't exactly sure if that view was within or outside of that boundary.

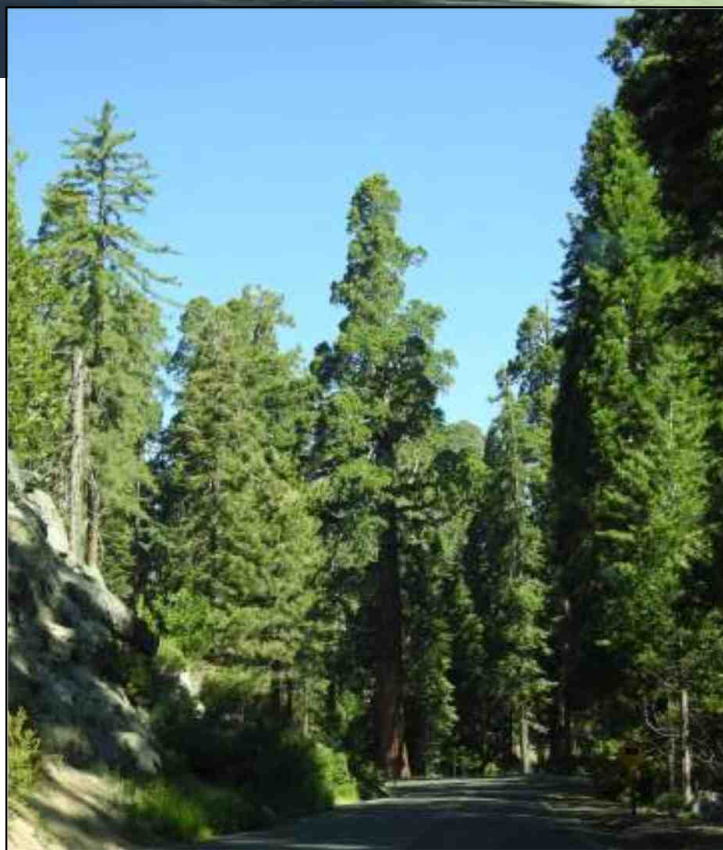


It didn't take long for big trees to appear once we entered the national monument, and then the national park (next page).





Kings Canyon NP
Entrance Station (top
left and bottom right)
with big trees
surrounding the area
(bottom left and right).





General Grant Grove. The camper RV provides a good perspective as to the size of these sequoia trees.

Next page:
Another perspective picture.









Notice the person on the walkway at the bottom of the left picture. One can guess just how big the base of this sequoia is (right).







“Fallen Monarch”, not to be confused with a dead tree in Yosemite with the same name.







This 'Tunnel Tree' had natural openings at its base. It was likely caused by fire, yet the tree was still alive (right). On my return hike I saw a person (illegally) inside the base of the tree.





General Grant Tree shining in the background (left) and on the right.

Next five pages: More images of the General Grant Tree, the 2nd or 3rd largest tree in the world, depending on [the source](#) and how it is measured.











The General Grant Tree

The General Grant Tree's massive trunk makes it the third largest tree in the world, by volume. And at 45 feet (14 m) in diameter at ground level, it is the world's widest-known sapwood. But it is not nearly the oldest. In fact, it's a few years younger than the oldest-known sequoia.

Location, not age, is the key to a sequoia's size. In places with the best combination of moisture, sunlight, and nutrients, they sometimes achieve record-in-size prime locations. Apparently conditions here are ideal, considering how quickly the General Grant Tree has grown so large.

Statistics	
Volume	Height
46,000 cubic feet (1,300 cubic meters)	285 feet (87 meters)
Age	Weight
1,700 years old	1,200 tons (1,100 metric tons)
Circumference	
102 feet (31 meters)	
Diameter	
45 feet (14 meters)	
Largest Branch	
4.5 feet (1.4 meters)	
Fruit Branches	
100 feet (30 meters)	

From the world's largest redwood grove, Sequoia National Park, California.

Fun Facts

The trunk of the General Grant Tree has a diameter of 45 feet (14 m) at ground level. It is the widest-known sapwood in the world.

The General Grant Tree is the third largest tree in the world by volume. It is also the widest-known sapwood in the world.

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It is the widest-known sapwood in the world.



Notice the people (see arrows). They appear to be the size of ants!



After returning to the parking area, I hiked back into the grove to complete one trail I hadn't hiked yet. There, I saw a mule deer right next to an unnamed sequoia (see two next pages).









After leaving the General Grant Sequoia Grove (left), we got back onto the Kings Canyon Scenic Byway (right and next page).





A closer view of the drive from Kings Canyon Visitor Center (General Grant Grove is close to there on the west side of the road) up to Junction View to Convict Flat Campground (the caves were near there) then east to Cedar Grove Visitor Center. The road ends right at Muir Rock, and the only access beyond that point is via backcountry hiking. Unfortunately, we didn't have time to do a long (8-10 mile) hike in the area. One of my regrets of the trip was not getting deeper into that wilderness.





Views from
Junction View
Overlook,
which is on the
Kings Canyon
Scenic Byway in
Sequoia
National Forest
between the
two sections of
Kings Canyon
National Park.



My only cell phone picture of the area. Notice the road on the right side and the Kings River in the middle.





South and Middle Forks of Kings River, with the road (Kings Canyon Scenic Byway) on the right picture, from Junction View Overlook.

Next page: Another view from Junction View Overlook (top pic) and then two views from the scenic byway of Mediterranean chaparral habitat as we went downhill into a warmer climate.









South Branch of Kings River. This waterbody paralleled Kings Canyon Scenic Byway for many miles (also see the next two pages).







At 12:30 PM, we saw a sign for Boyden Cavern. It turned out to be a guided hike to an extensive cave system. We paid the \$17 per person to do the roughly hour long tour, which is required (i.e., you can't go in on your own). It was really cool and elaborate, being pitch dark inside as there were no added lights (which there were throughout but were turned off once to demonstrate how dark it would be). I wish I remembered half of what our knowledgeable tour guide discussed, so I could recite that information back in this e-book, but pictures will have to suffice. With over 30 people on the walk, Steve and I positioned ourselves in the front. When the tour was over, we left first and got back to the car at least 10 minutes before anyone else.

Next, we drove to the Cedar Grove Visitor Center when we got back into Kings Canyon NP. There were nearby forest fires, and the smoke was now very noticeable, appearing almost like an early morning fog in the afternoon sky. As the day wore on, the smoke got lower and lower, reaching the valleys by the evening.

We then drove to Roads End, which is the end of the road system in Kings Canyon. There, we hiked to Zumwalt Meadow. We came back on the park road to complete the 2.3 mile loop. It wasn't quite the wilderness hike that I wished to do but given a packed day that started in the city of Fresno, it was nice to get back in the woods.

We also hiked to Roaring River Falls, which was an easy 0.4 miles out and back. There was a good view of a waterfall, as was Grizzly Falls, which we did afterwards. Grizzly Falls was only 100 meters from the parking lot, so was a quick out and back jaunt. Afterwards, we drove west and left Kings Canyon NP and re-entered national forest land. It was really smoky and difficult to view the landscape from overlooks, such as Junction View, which were clear in the morning.

It was in the 90s during much of the afternoon, so I was pooped by the late afternoon. We arrived at Hume Lake campsite #13 at 5:18 PM after a long day. I cooked pasta and sauce and added some 'sweaty' non-refrigerated cheese to the meal. I was hungry and had 3 bowls of pasta (Note: Steve eats different meals, so we eat separately on these trips).

I took a refreshing swim around 6:15 in Hume Lake. It was very nice and surprisingly warm. Dips in rivers and ponds/lakes are necessary as actual showers, except in Fresno, are hard to come by.

I took 174 pictures on this day, the most yet on this trip! I worked on them for about two hours and then went to bed pretty early, around 8:40 PM at dusk. It was a quiet campground, even with a good amount of people there. Quiet that is, until we were woken up in the middle of the night by a surprising creature (see beginning of the next chapter for more on this).



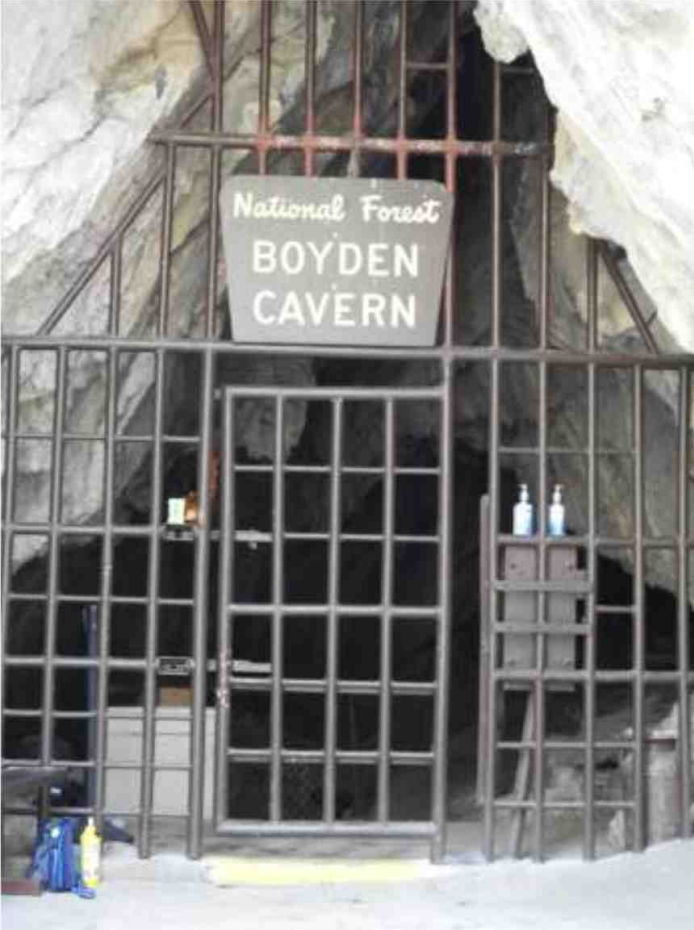
Boyden Cavern. See map on the next page for its location (look for the arrow on the top right of the map) within the road system.







Views from the walk up to Boyden Cavern, an elaborate cave system in the surrounding mountains. [The short but steep hike to the cave](#) also features breathtaking views of Kings Canyon, the deepest river-cut canyon in the United States.



This and next several pages:
Views from inside Boyden
Cavern. Once inside the cave,
flash from my camera and
artificial lights installed by the
forest service were used to
obtain these pictures.





According to [this article](#), Boyden Cave or Boyden Cavern is located in the deepest river cut canyon of the United States, the 8,200-foot (2,500 m) deep Kings Canyon. More information can be [found here](#).

The tour includes the Pancake Room, a [stalactite](#) group called the Upside Down City, and a [flowstone](#) formation called Mother Nature's Wedding Cake. In the Bat Grotto, bats spend summer days sleeping. The Drapery Room contains [curtains](#), [soda straws](#) and [helictites](#). The tour ends at a small subterranean stream. 0.63 miles (1.01 km) of the cave have been mapped.



Our guide discussing many of the features of Boyden Cavern. We were in a large, living room sized area of the cave system.

Next page: Cool, sheet-like structures made of calcium carbonate on the ceiling of the cave.





[The cave](#) is a timeless environment of stalagmites, stalactites and beautiful flowstone, pendant, and shield formations.





[According to the U.S. Forest Service](#), the enduring structures, formed over 100,000 years, conjure images of icicles, wedding cakes, snow-laden trees, crystal waterfalls, an upside-down city, a stack of pancakes, the cave bear, and more.





This natural stream (bottom pic) varies tremendously in its volume content throughout the year. While it can be calf to knee deep in the spring, it can dry up by late summer. Here it was about ankle deep.





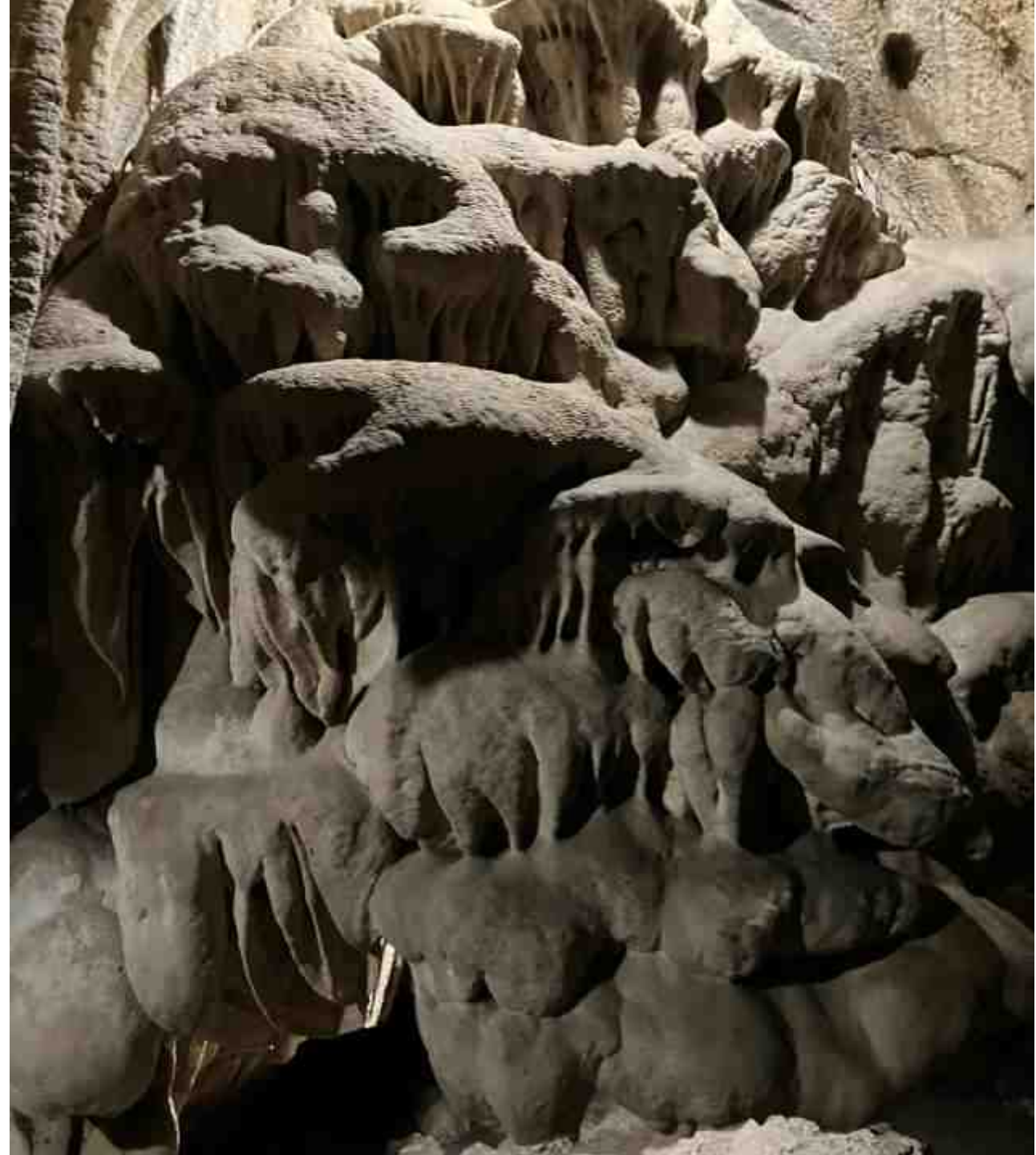
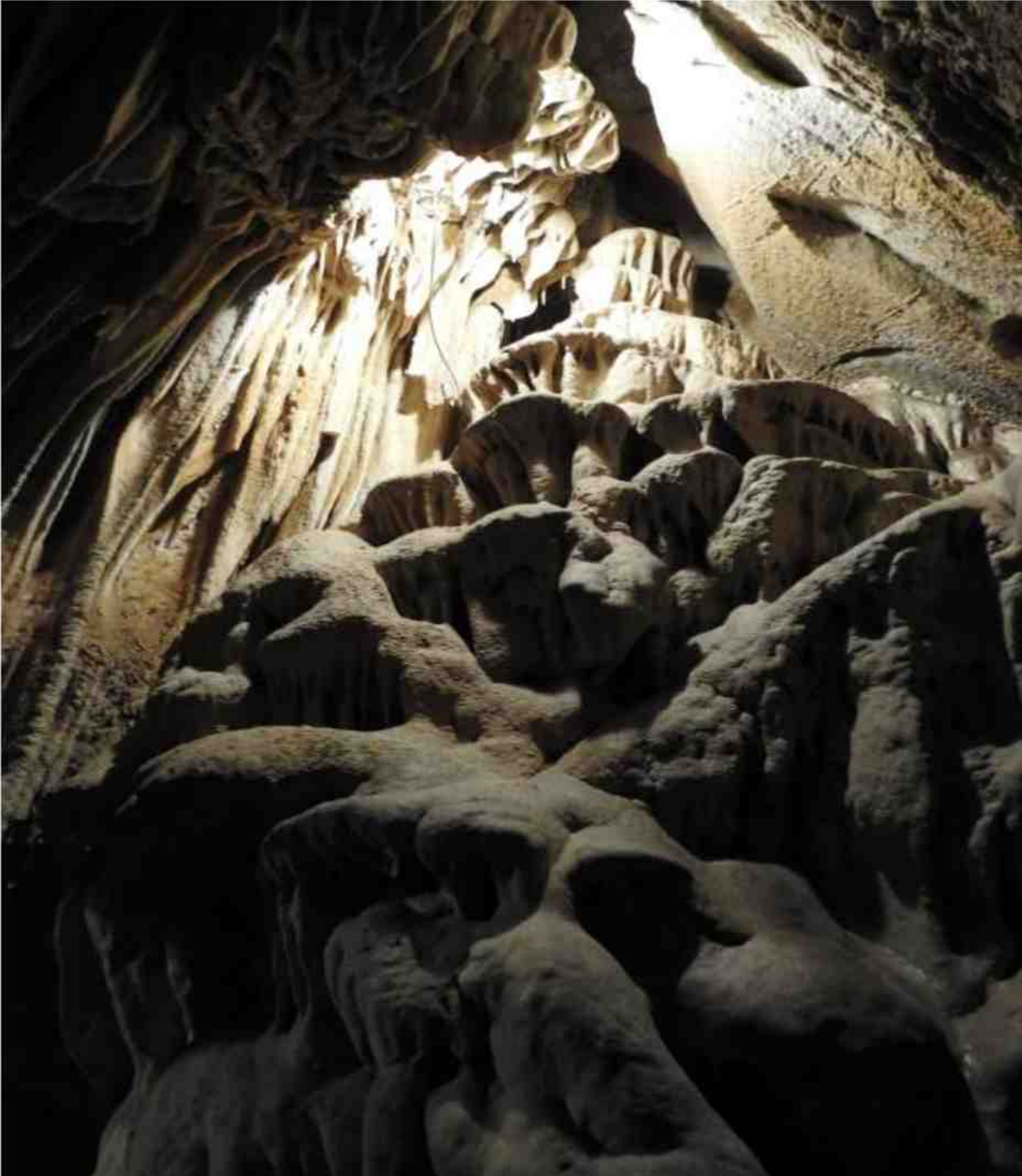




Below right: 'Boyden Cavern Christmas Tree' (also see next page).



Top: The bluish appearance in Boyden Cavern is a result of [a thick layer of marble that lies within the Boyden Cave Roof Pendant](#). This blue-gray marble is exposed in other areas, including the parking area for Boyden Cavern and in the channel of the South Fork of the Kings River in the vicinity of the bridge.





'Curtains' hanging in Boyden Cavern.





Left: Boyden Cave white room and creek on the bottom.

Right: South Branch of Kings River alongside the road.

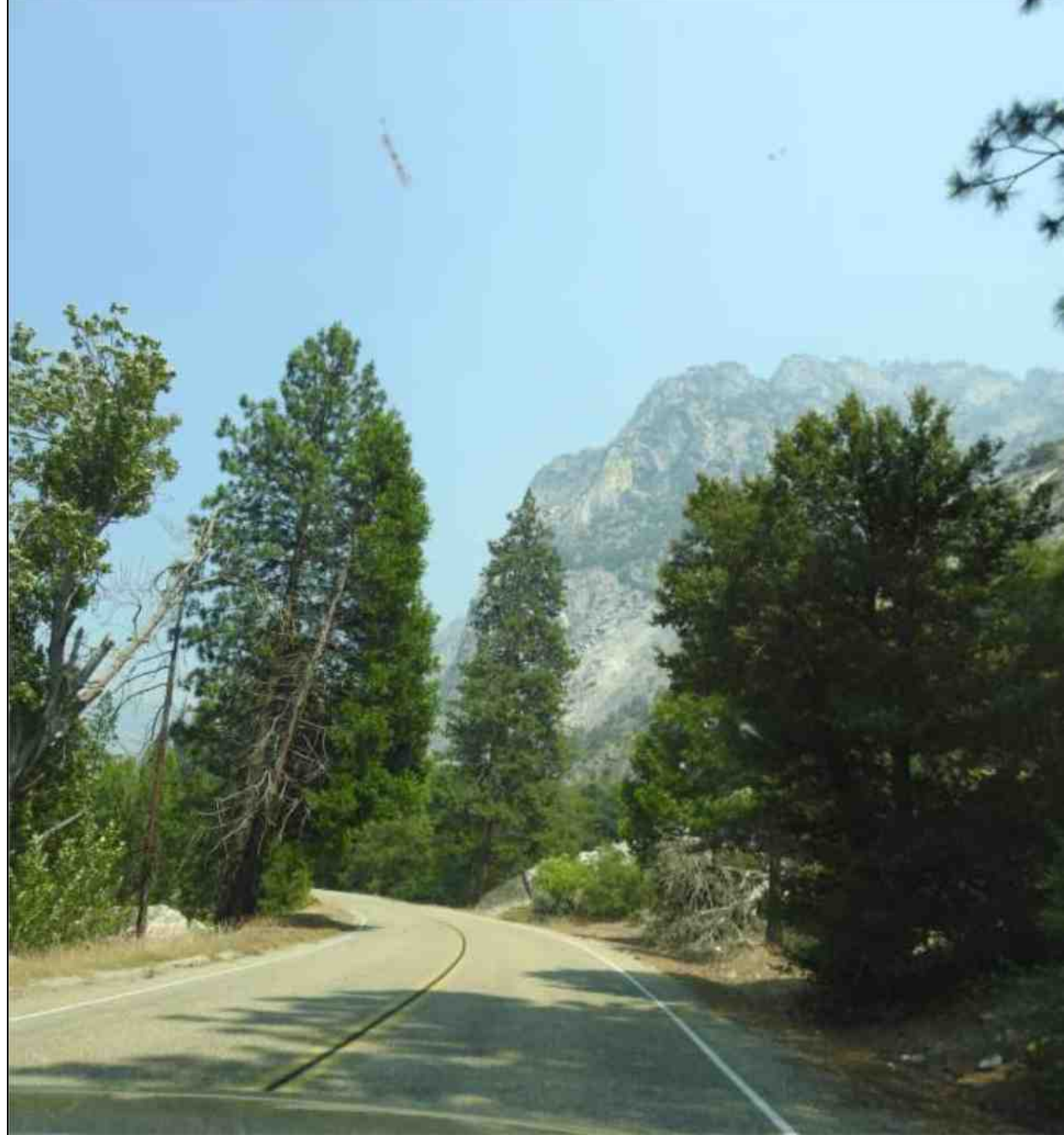




More views of the South Branch of Kings River alongside the road on our way back into Kings Canyon National Park (below left).

Next page: Views from along the park road around the Cedar Grove area of the national park.







Views from around the 'Roads End' area where the park road stops, and wilderness hiking begins. Notice the smoke in the air, which makes the photos appear hazy.



Muir Rock at the Roads End section of the park.



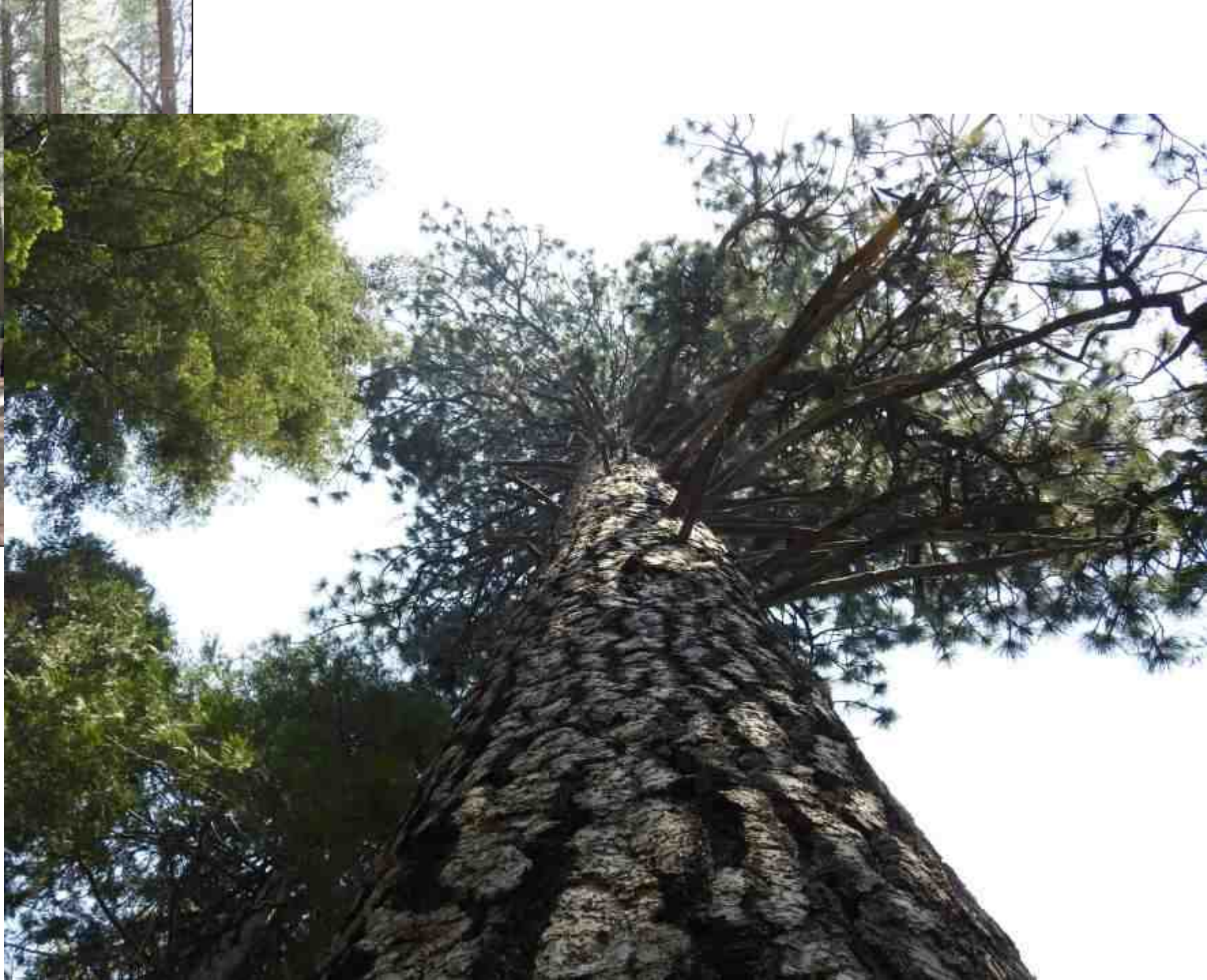
Muir Rock and South Fork of Kings River.





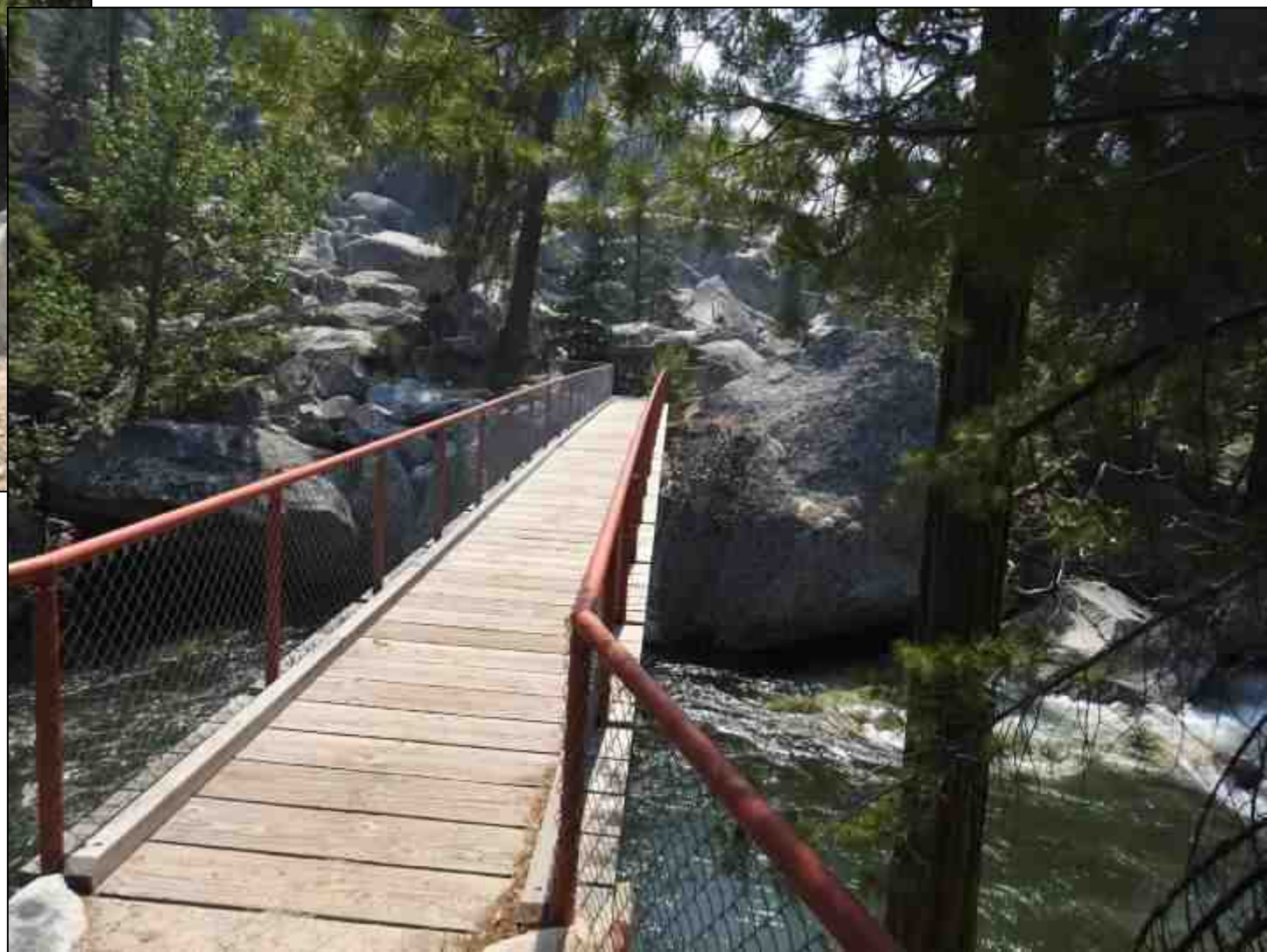
Left: We hiked to Zumwalt Meadow from the Roads End parking lot.

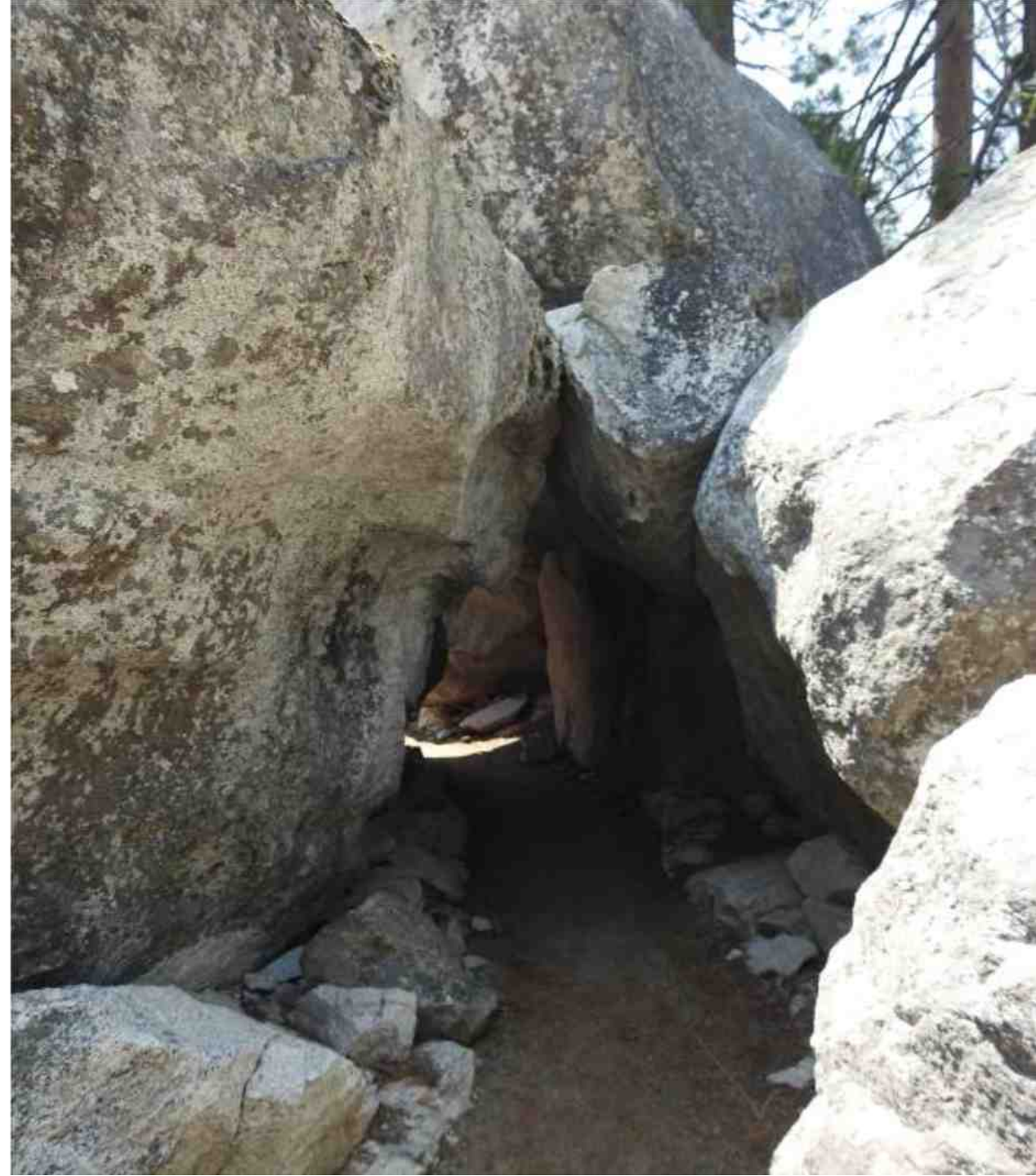
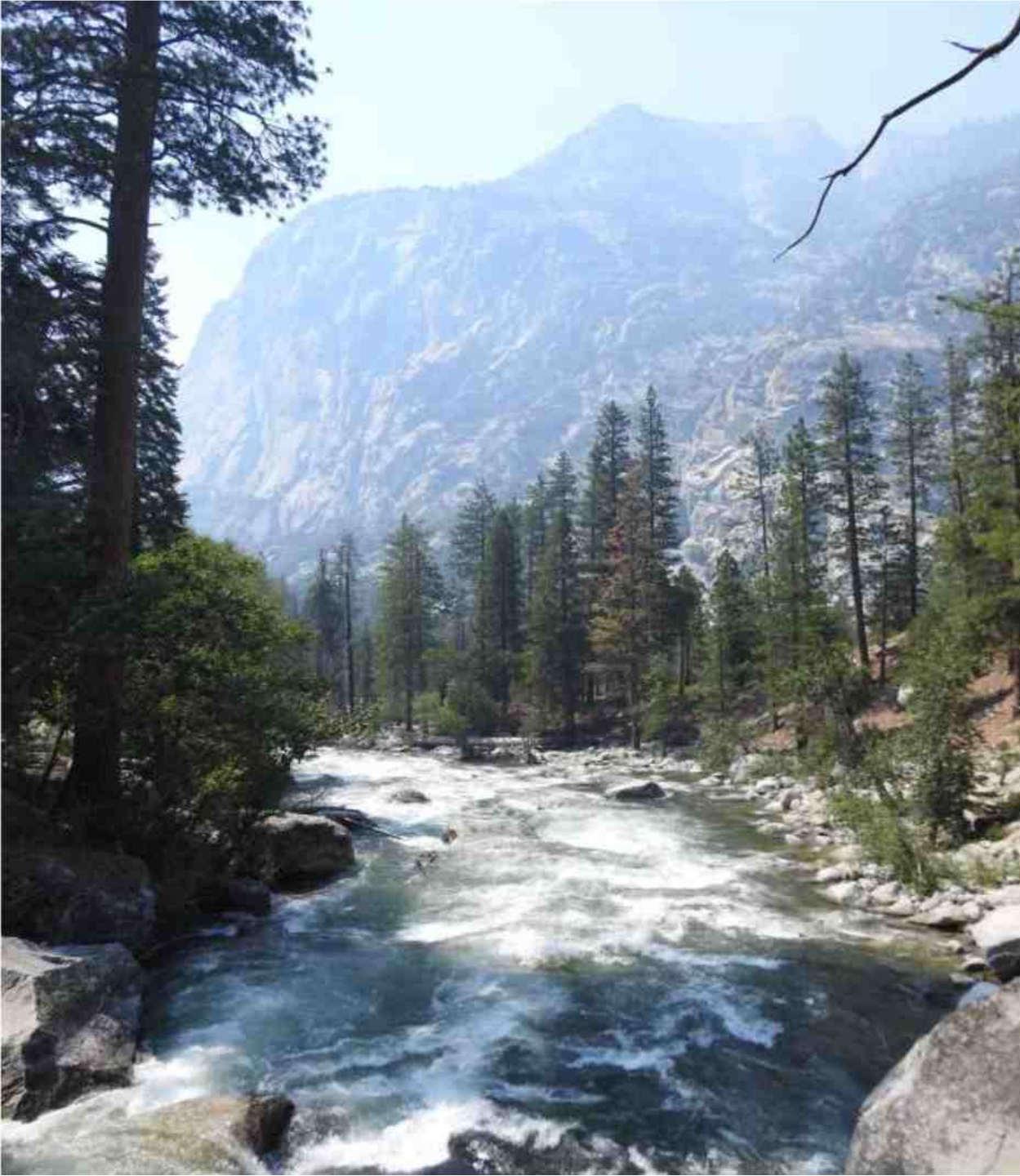
Right: A tall ponderosa pine, as viewed from the base of the tree.



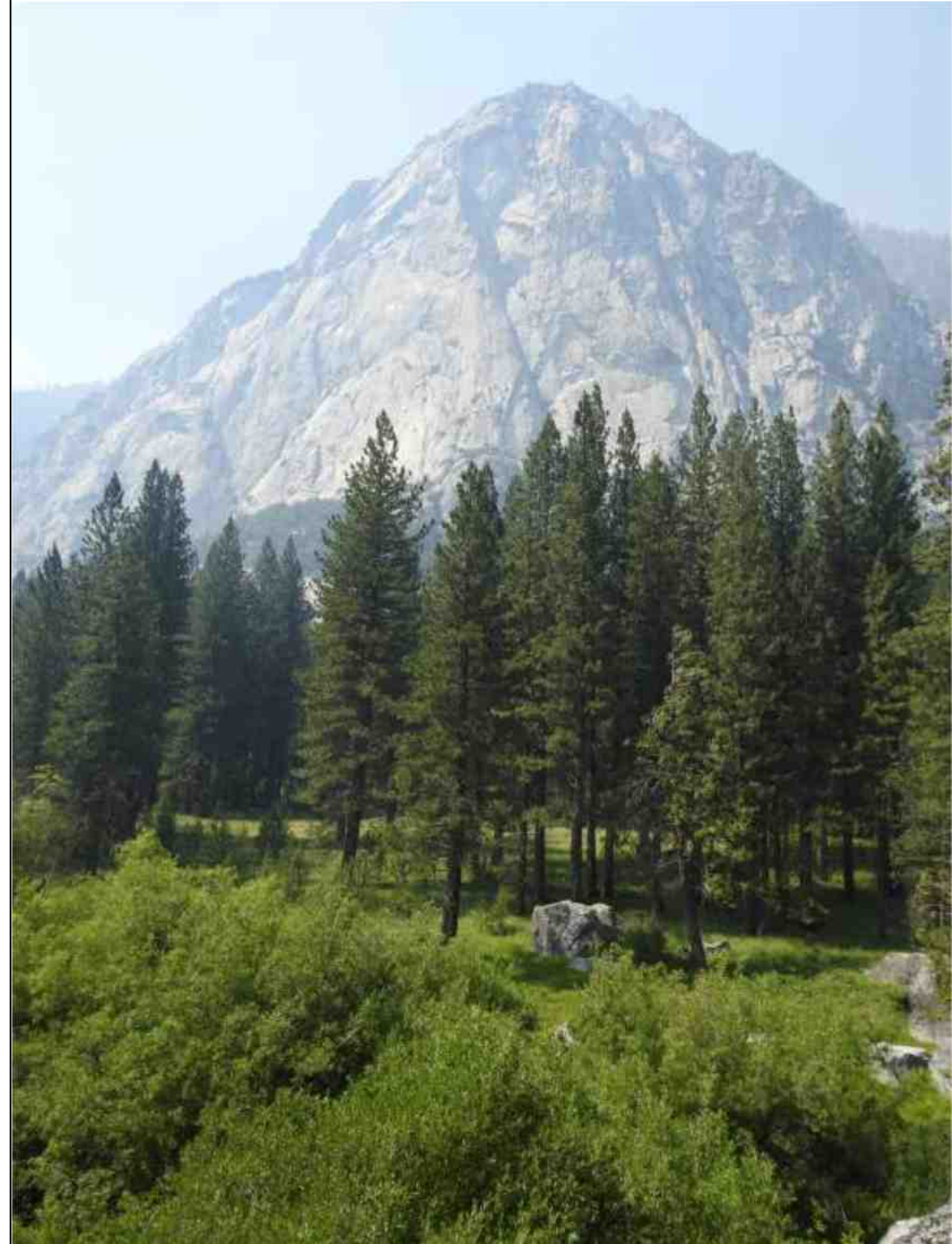


The haze in the sky is from nearby forest fires and it became more apparent as the afternoon wore on (bottom left). This area is shown from the bridge that crosses over the Kings River (top left and bottom right).





Boulders along the trail (left) at Zumwalt Meadow (right).



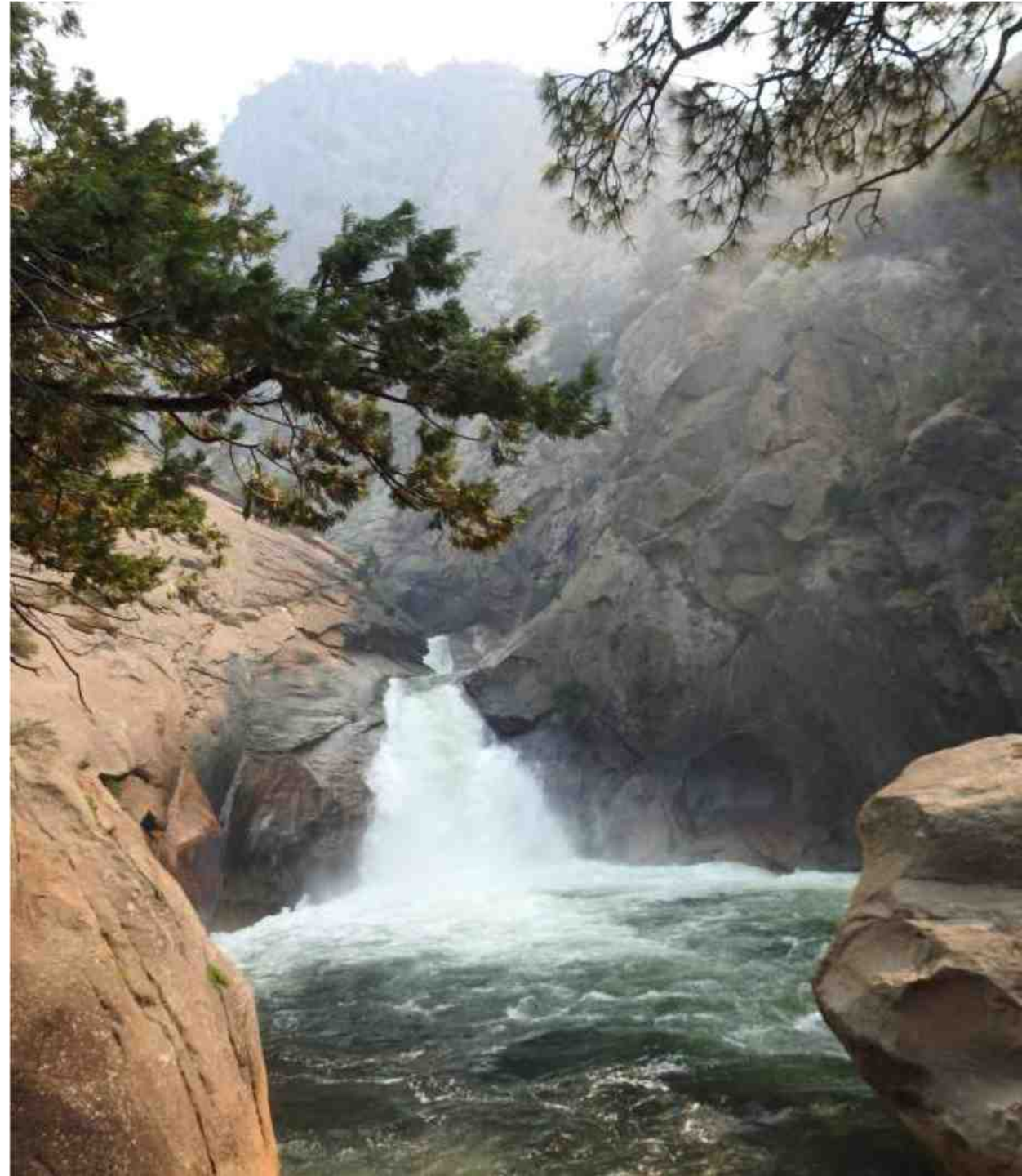




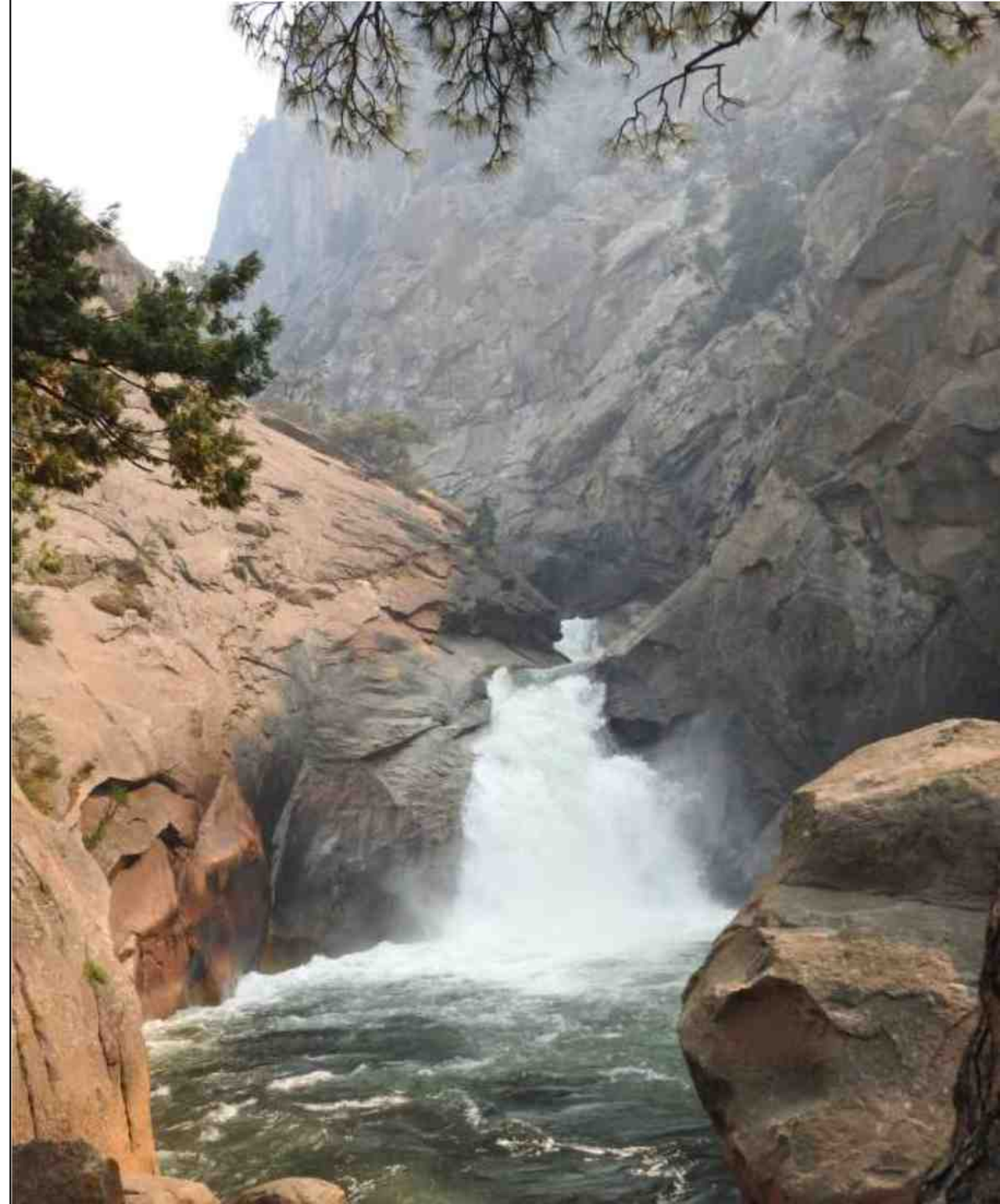
After hiking west to Zumwalt Meadows from Roads End, we continued west until reaching the parking lot from the other trailhead. We then hiked back to Roads End on the street. There, we encountered a large, dead snake. I believe it was a common garter snake despite its large size (next page).

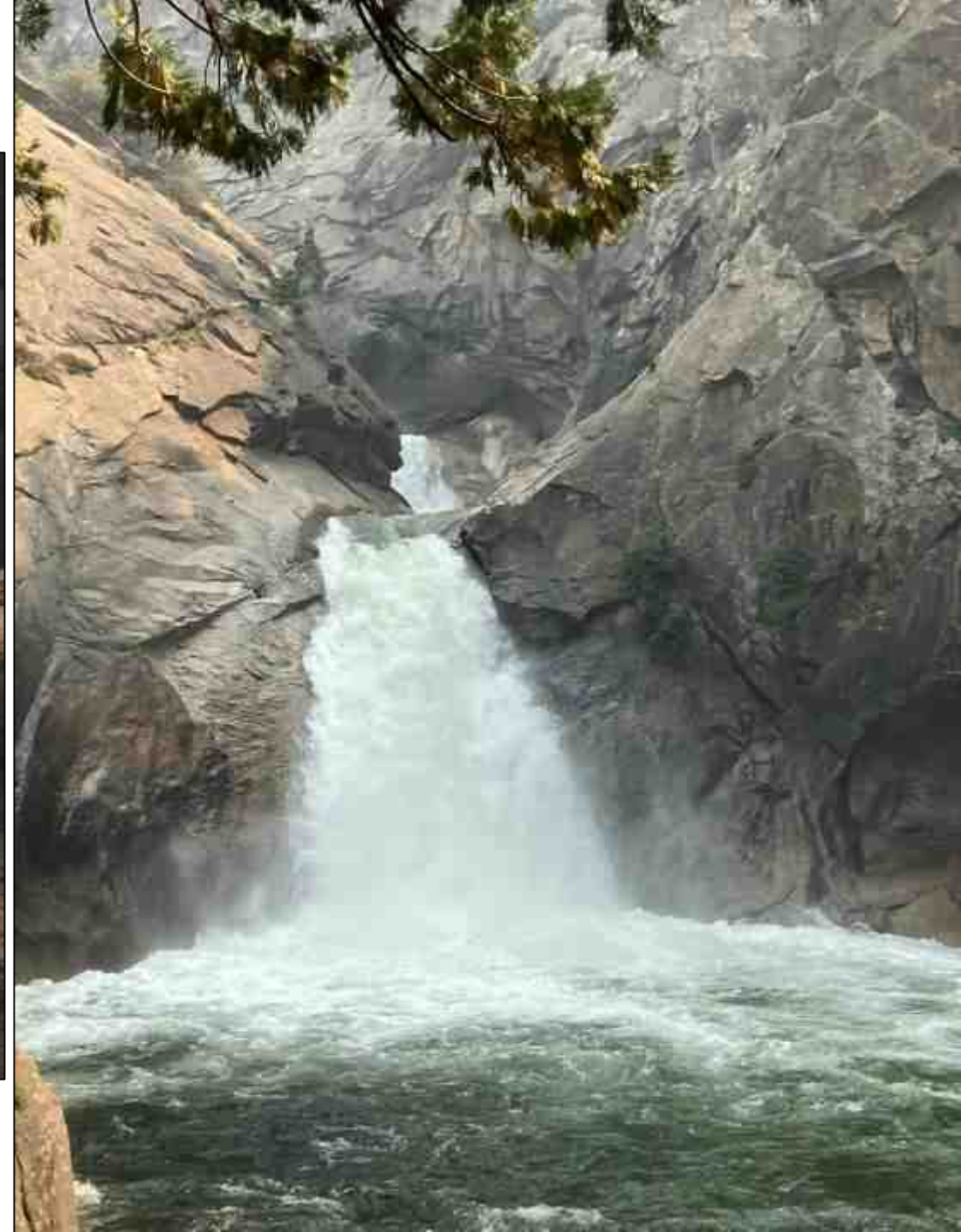






Different perspectives at Roaring River Falls.

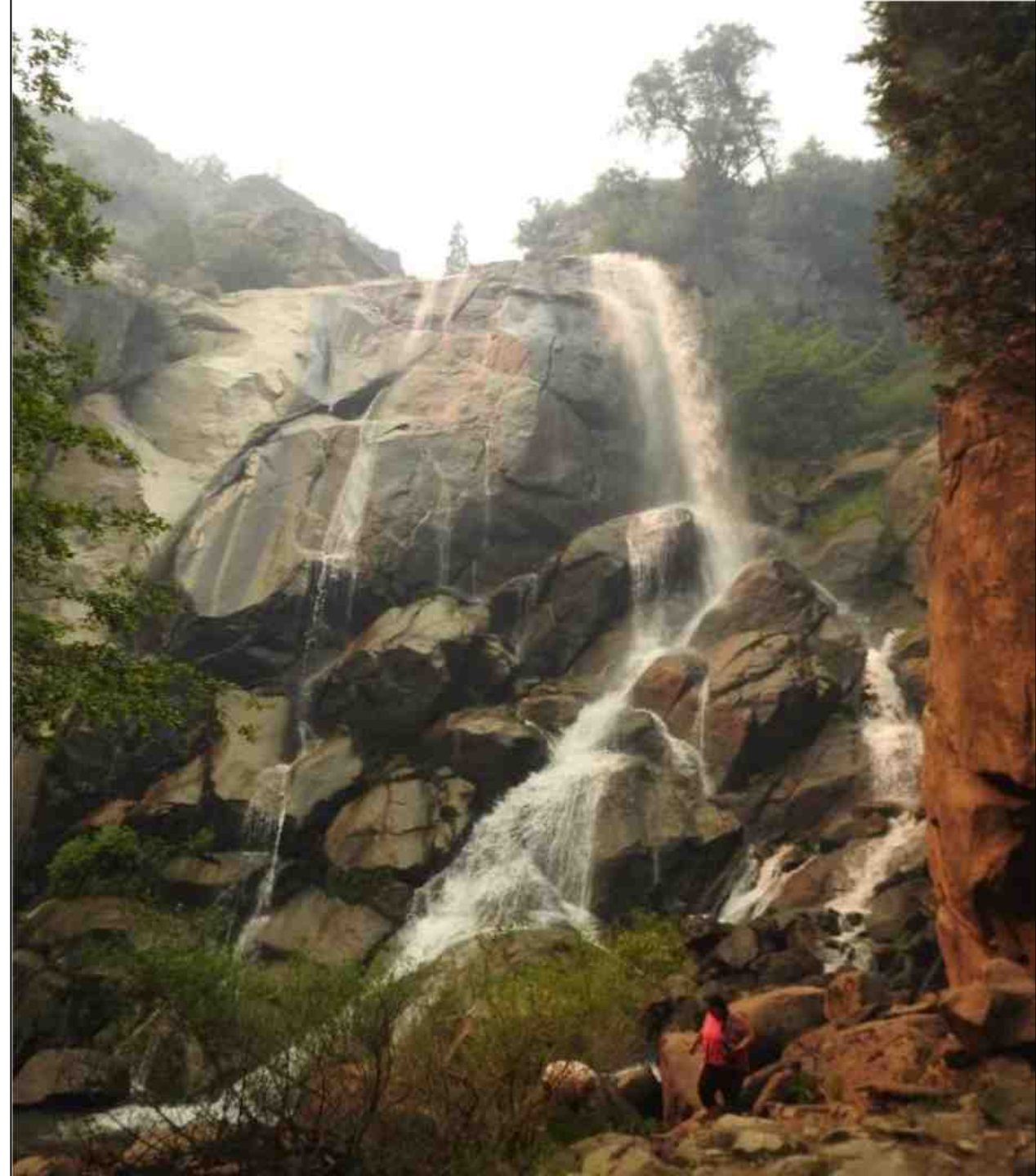




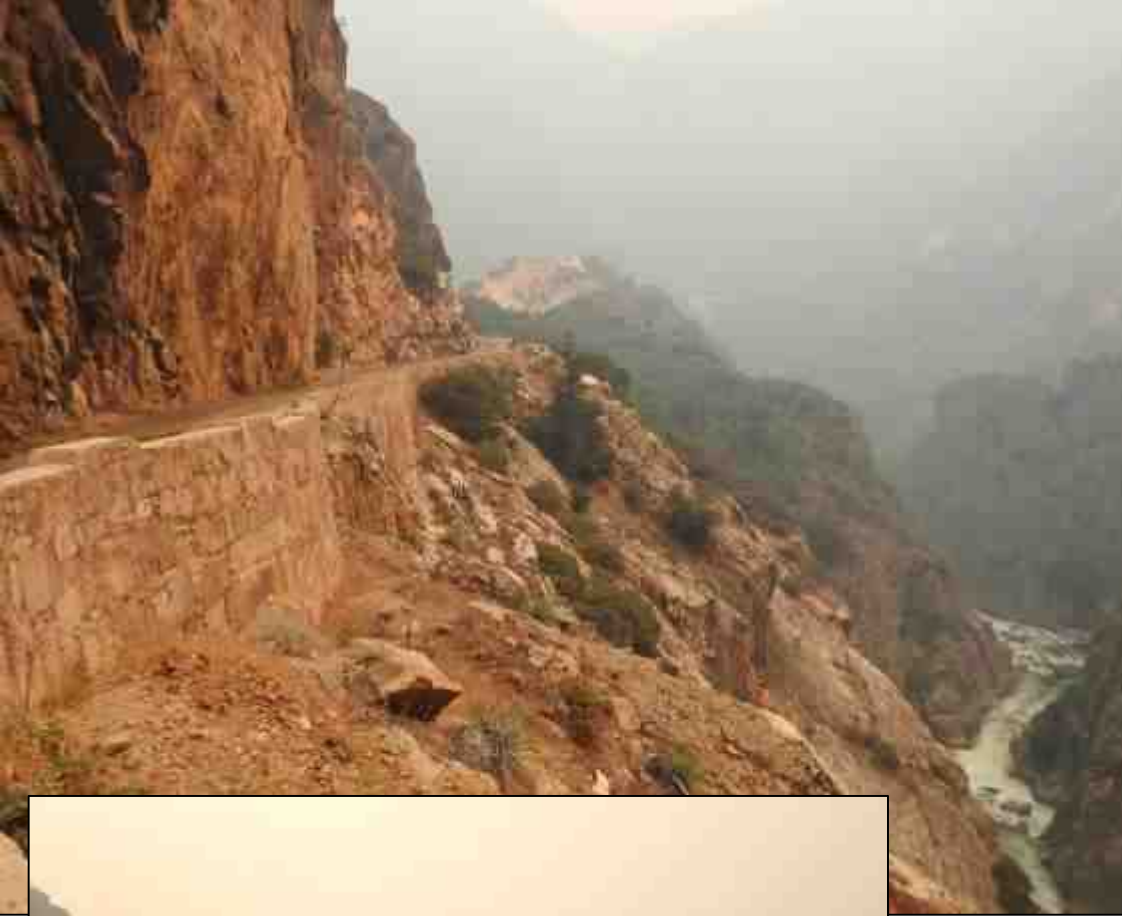
Grizzly Falls.

Next page: Cell phone pic (left) and regular Nikon camera photo (right) of the falls.





As the day wore on, the smoke increased to the point where it was difficult to see into the valleys.





A long waterfall off of the park road. We were back in the national forest/monument at this point.





Cool, desert-like yucca plants. They are the plants with the long stalks (top arrow), which are flowers coming out of the bottom of the plant with long leaves (bottom arrow).



We stayed at Hume Lake Campground, which was within the national forest/monument. The setting sun was bright red due to the forest fires (also see next page).







Caterwauls, Sequoias, and leaving Kings Canyon

At 2:25 AM, in the early morning of June 27th, I was awoken to the shine of a bright red moon. Up after ~5.5 hours of sleep, I figured I would relieve myself, so I went into a nearby wooded area, then to the car to grab my camera. I took a few shots of the beautiful celestial body that was influenced by the nearby forest fires, similar to the sun from the previous evening. I put the camera back into the car for safekeeping, then went back into my comfortable sleeping bag. The temperature got down to 51°F, so it was pleasantly cool after a hot few days.

Just over an hour later, at 3:40 AM PT, I was awoken to a loud, bizarre sound! It took me a minute to identify the call, but I realized, after 1-2 long minutes of listening, that it was a cat caterwauling. I had never heard that before. It was crazy as it was just above our campsite and appeared to be circling the area. There would be a loud call followed by a whistle like call. After hearing it a couple of times, I realized it was a cub calling to its mother, who then responded with the loud, raspy caterwaul. I thought it was a mountain lion and was probably the only one who would be super excited by that. I have never seen one in the wild, so I quietly stood at the base of the tent with the fly open and looked onto the campground road. With the bright moon, I could see enough in the dark to spot the shadows of the cats if they traveled by.

Unfortunately, that never happened as the cats moved away from our site and went downhill toward Hume Lake. Because my camera was in the car, I didn't get the calls on video but Steve, who was sleeping in his hammock about 50 feet away from me, recorded it as a 'Voice Memo' on his iPhone. He missed recording the sound when the cat was super close and loud, but got the next sequence soon after as it was walking away. He sent the file to me, and I then forwarded it to Ken Smith of [Camp Oot-Oot, Maine](#), who kindly converted it to an .mp4 file so I could share it on Facebook. Now, anyone can [click here and listen to the call](#).

To fast forward a little bit here – later in the morning when we had limited cell reception at the Lodgepole Visitor Center in Sequoia NP, Steve YouTubed a bunch of calls and determined it was 'just' a bobcat, and not a cougar call. I was somewhat disappointed and a bit surprised at how loud a ~20 pound cat could be. It was quite an experience, nonetheless.

Not too long after that ordeal, I woke back up at 5:00 and packed up my belongings. We left the campground at 5:35 AM at dawn. As we headed south on Hume Lake Road, I spotted a mule deer doe on the side of the road.

After about 10 miles we got to the intersection of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. We took a right to head northwest back into Kings Canyon to hike the Big Stump Loop. On the way, we witnessed a few small brush fires that were active, controlled burns. The park was trying to reduce fuel (i.e., wood) near the park roads. It was an eerie and unsettling feeling to drive so close to active flames.



The moon was a bright orange-yellow color, similar to the glow of the sun from the previous evening. The nearby forest fires were messing with these celestial bodies.



Wildlife pictures at dawn, such of this mule deer doe on Hume Lake Road, are often blurry and grainy due to the low light.





It was quite smokey at the border between the two parks (left). We went back into Kings Canyon and hiked there before leaving to enter Sequoia National Park for the next couple of days.





The early morning sun had the same orange hue to it as it did the previous evening. From a distance, the sun looked like the moon (also see next page).





It was odd to drive by actively burning, even if mostly smoldering, fires just off the side of the park roads.



We soon arrived at the Big Stump Loop within a nice picnic and bathroom area. The trail ended up being 1.8 miles, further than I expected it was going to be since I didn't do any pre-planning for this excursion. It was sad but fascinating to see the huge stumps just off the trails, casualties of the logging industry before the area became a national park. There were some large, well-known examples which I detail in the following pictures in this chapter. I also saw 2 mule deer early into the hike as they ran away ~200 meters behind the bathroom area where the trail began.

We returned to the car and picnic area at 7:45 AM. I heated up water and had a delicious breakfast of 3 packets of oatmeal (two of maple brown & sugar and one of apples & cinnamon), raisins, half a banana chopped into small pieces, and a large spoonful of peanut butter in my bowl, along with a packet of hot chocolate. Some things taste so much better while camping compared to at home. The location was a very nice, well developed picnic area with few people there given the relatively early time of the day.

At 8:15 AM, we were packed up and headed to Kings Canyon Visitor Center to use their WiFi. To do this we had to drive about three miles north near the General Grant Grove from the previous day, only to soon turn around and head back south. But it was worth it as we barely had cell reception the entire previous day, including nothing at Hume Lake. Within about a half hour, I was able to get caught up on my email and happenings going on with friends and family.

At 8:45 AM, we headed south which involved going through national forest land to get to Sequoia National Park (NP). On the way, we got stuck in traffic for ~25 minutes as the main road was blocked. Crews were cutting trees in the national forest and early into Sequoia NP. There were also additional controlled burns taking place in that area, with most activity happening around Hume Road and the park entrance area of Kings Canyon. In fact, there was so much fire activity that while sitting around the picnic table at the Hume Lake Campground the previous evening, little bits of white ash were falling on me as I worked on pictures.

At around 9:10 AM, we were able to finally get through the bottleneck and head into the park where we would have a great couple of days exploring this new area. Firefighters were indeed busy working next to the road as we traveled past them.



Tall sequoia on the Big Stump Trail (right). Many of these amazing giant sequoia trees are over 250 feet tall.





The base of the big sequoia shown on the previous page had experienced fire many times in its past. I am in the photo below (right), which illustrates just how massive these trees are.







It's incredible to think that the base of these stumps are roughly ten feet tall!





When there is enough sun, sequoias can actually grow quite quickly (left), but it takes them centuries to reach their full volume.





A fallen sequoia that appeared to have shattered upon impact. I can only guess how loud the noise was when that giant hit the ground.





A meadow along Big Stump Trail (top left). Steve next to another former giant (bottom right). It really is sad to know that humanity cut these 1,000+ year old trees down without a thought as to their ecological and aesthetic value.



Mark Twain Stump (also see Steve by the other side of this stump on the bottom left of the previous page).



Next page: The Big Stump Trail crossed the park road near the entry booth to Kings Canyon, which we came through the previous day. It felt like three days of real time because we had done so much in the past 24 hours. There were some tall trees right there (right).







road near

This 'Sawed Sequoia' was still alive despite the damage it obtained decades ago (also see next page).







The spur trail to 'Sawed Tree' had active fire activity with much smoldering occurring.





A nice cluster of young sequoias growing up together in a patch (left) near a culvert tunnel that took hikers under the park road and back to the parking lot (right). This injured, young chipmunk was found inside the bathrooms at the parking lot. The custodian put it behind the restroom hoping it would revive itself. It didn't appear that it was going to, but I didn't stick around long enough to find out.



Scenic view on the
Generals Highway
on our way to
Sequoia National
Park.





Part 3: Sequoia

Notice me at the bottom of the picture to the right. This is one of my favorite pics of the trip, as it so accurately depicts how small humans are compared to these giants.



General Sherman Tree and Giant Forest Grove

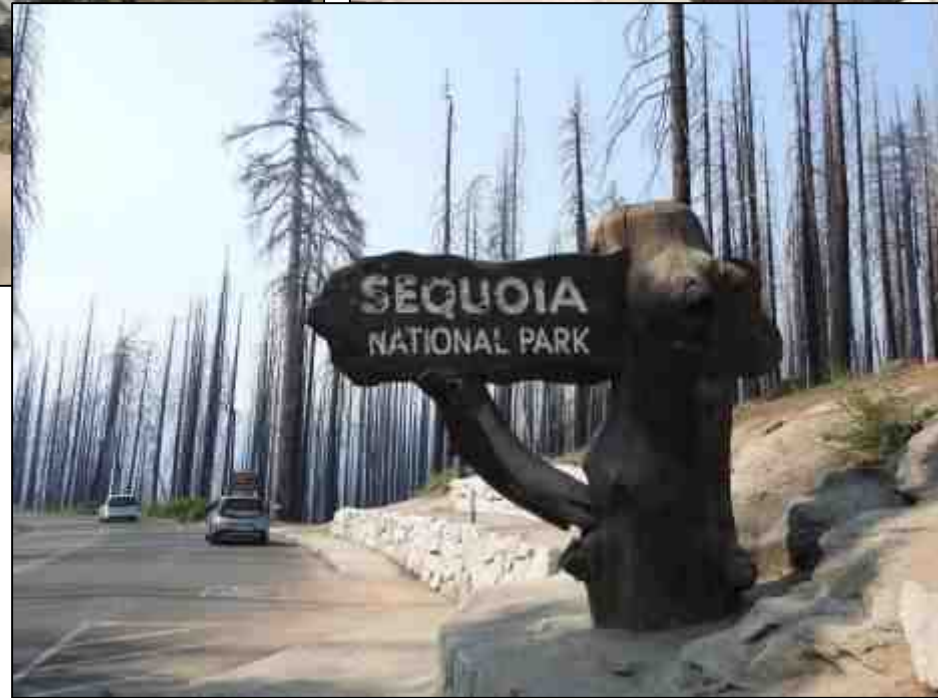
After waiting in about 25 minutes of traffic due to fire suppression activities by firefighters while leaving Kings Canyon, we entered Sequoia National Park at around 9:15 AM on June 27th, 2024. We drove through the park for about a half hour, stopping a few times for scenic views, including at Lost Grove, that featured big sequoia trees right off the road. We arrived at the Lodgepole Visitor Center at ~9:45 AM and stayed there for over a half hour. Then, we went to the parking lot for the General Sherman Tree at ~11 AM, which is the world's largest tree in terms of volume (note: there are other trees that are taller).

It was only about a half mile walk to get to that tree. However, the General Sherman Tree is in the Giant Forest Grove, which has miles of trails. We hiked 5-6 miles, covering the central and south-central portion of the big grove, including the Sherman Tree, Alta, Congress, Huckleberry, and Circle Meadow Trails. It was a spectacular area and was so impressive to get into the backcountry once we left the populated area around the General Sherman Tree. There were so many huge trees and, after taking well over 100 pictures, I actually walked through some groves and just enjoyed the experience without feeling the need to take a photo and document every single large tree I saw. It was warm out as we hiked during the middle of the day, finishing at 1:54 PM. I remember getting back to the car and juggling a quart of water and enjoying 1.5 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

After that quick lunch, we then went to the Giant Forest Museum just a few miles down the road. It stressed the important role that fire plays in the life of giant sequoia trees. After that, we walked a short about quarter mile down to the Big Trees Trail and then hiked that 0.6 mile loop around a meadow. It was an easy, flat hike, yet was a beautiful area. It ended up being a little over a mile hike from parking lot to parking lot. Tall trees lined the meadow. It was most impressive.

A tall double tree at Lost Grove.



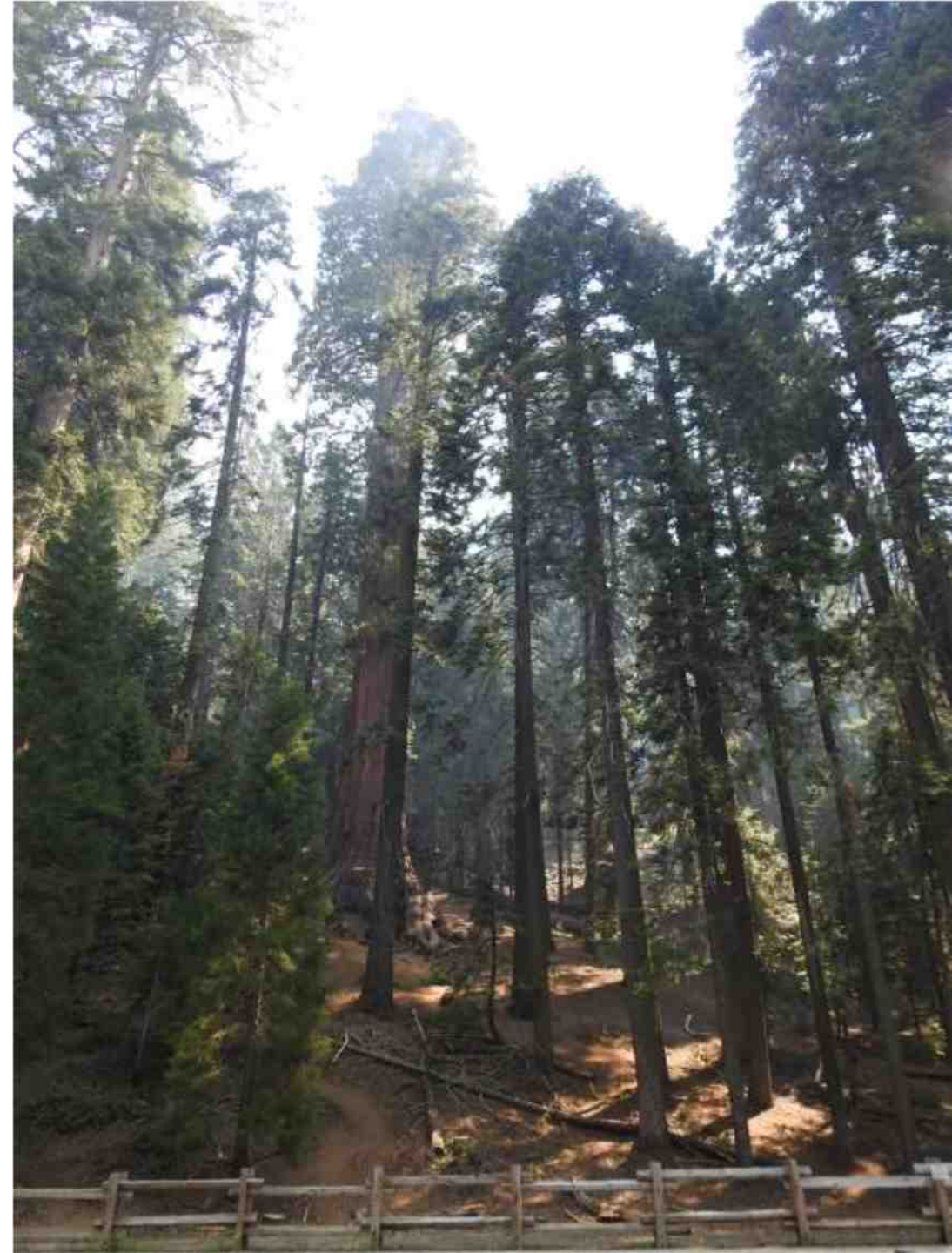


Entering Sequoia National Park from Sequoia National Forest.



Lost Grove was a beautiful cluster of sequoias right off the park road (right) close to the entrance of Sequoia (left).

Next page: A good perspective of the sequoias at Lost Grove with a car (left) and Steve (see arrow at right picture) as scale.







Standing next to these large sequoias shows just how big these guys really are.



Next page: Cell phone pictures of sequoias in Lost Grove. On the left picture, note Steve (see arrow) at the bottom of the trees.







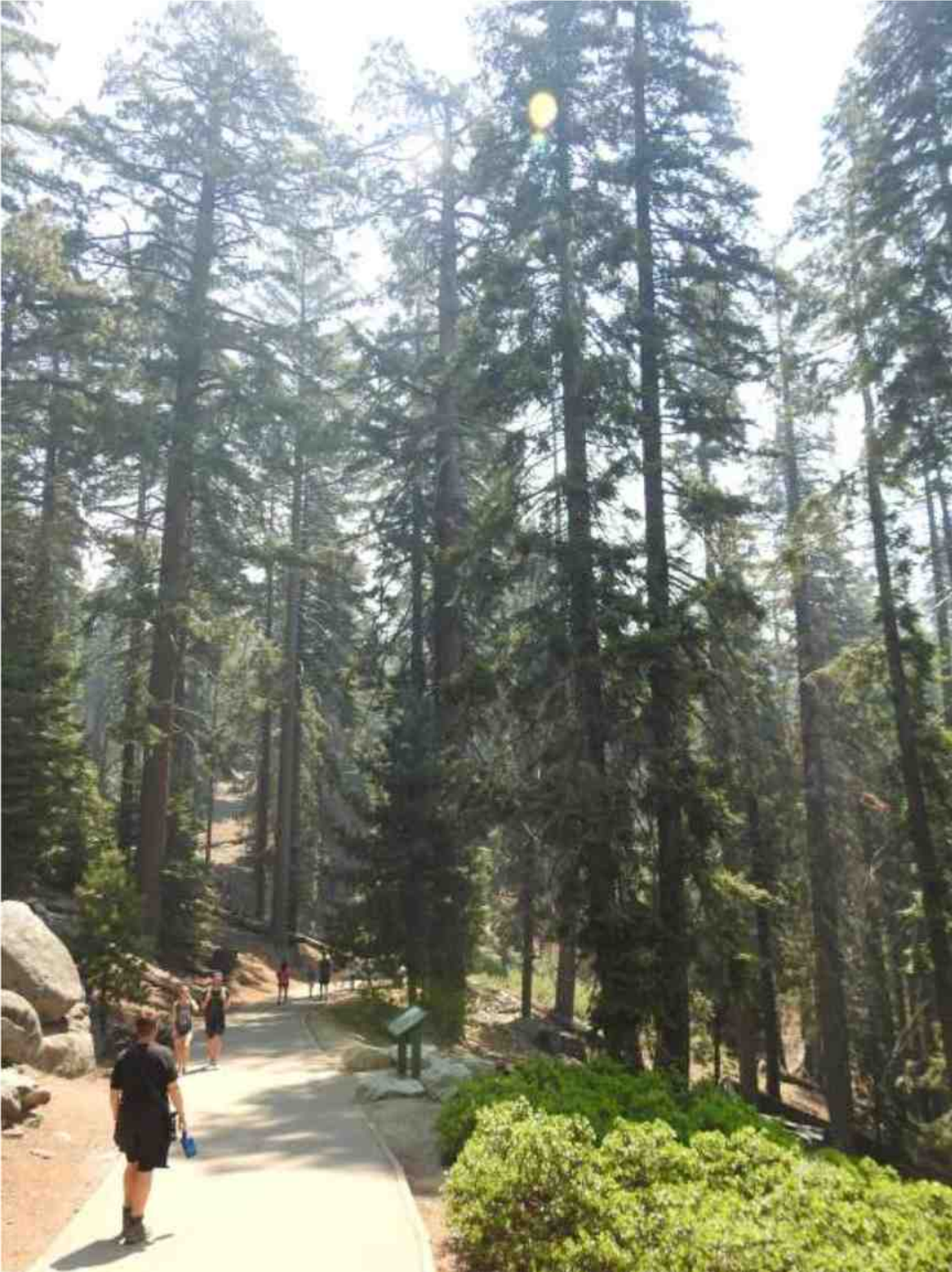
Burned trees viewed from the Generals Highway on our drive toward Lodgepole Visitor Center.





Random pictures of a stream off the Generals Highway (upper left) and a large beetle (I think a white-spotted sawyer) in the park lot of the General Sherman Parking Lot (right) in route to the Sherman Tree Trail (lower left).

Next page: Views along the Sherman Tree Trail, including of the General Sherman Tree in the distance.



General Sherman Tree (see arrows).



Map of Giant Forest with the General Sherman Tree at the top center of the picture (see arrow), and many of the trails we hiked in the middle of the picture.



The General Sherman Tree

The General Sherman Tree is the largest tree on Earth by volume. It is a giant sequoia (Sequoiadendron giganteum) and is located in the Giant Forest of Sequoia National Park, California.

Tree Species Comparison

Species	Height (ft)	Diameter (ft)	Volume (cu ft)
General Sherman Tree	275	148	1,484,000
Elmer's Redwood	255	102	1,024,000
Straw Hat Redwood	252	101	1,014,000
Washington Tree	242	100	1,004,000
Sierra Redwood	238	98	984,000
Shasta Redwood	225	95	954,000
Elmer's Redwood	215	92	924,000
Sierra Redwood	212	90	904,000
Shasta Redwood	208	88	884,000
Elmer's Redwood	205	85	854,000
Sierra Redwood	202	82	824,000
Shasta Redwood	198	80	804,000
Elmer's Redwood	195	78	784,000
Sierra Redwood	192	75	754,000
Shasta Redwood	188	72	724,000
Elmer's Redwood	185	70	704,000
Sierra Redwood	182	68	684,000
Shasta Redwood	178	65	654,000
Elmer's Redwood	175	62	624,000
Sierra Redwood	172	60	604,000
Shasta Redwood	168	58	584,000
Elmer's Redwood	165	55	554,000
Sierra Redwood	162	52	524,000
Shasta Redwood	158	50	504,000
Elmer's Redwood	155	48	484,000
Sierra Redwood	152	45	454,000
Shasta Redwood	148	42	424,000
Elmer's Redwood	145	40	404,000
Sierra Redwood	142	38	384,000
Shasta Redwood	138	35	354,000
Elmer's Redwood	135	32	324,000
Sierra Redwood	132	30	304,000
Shasta Redwood	128	28	284,000
Elmer's Redwood	125	25	254,000
Sierra Redwood	122	22	224,000
Shasta Redwood	118	20	204,000
Elmer's Redwood	115	18	184,000
Sierra Redwood	112	15	154,000
Shasta Redwood	108	12	124,000
Elmer's Redwood	105	10	104,000
Sierra Redwood	102	8	84,000
Shasta Redwood	98	5	54,000
Elmer's Redwood	95	3	34,000
Sierra Redwood	92	2	24,000
Shasta Redwood	88	1	14,000
Elmer's Redwood	85	0.5	0.54,000
Sierra Redwood	82	0.2	0.24,000
Shasta Redwood	78	0.1	0.14,000
Elmer's Redwood	75	0.05	0.054,000
Sierra Redwood	72	0.02	0.024,000
Shasta Redwood	68	0.01	0.014,000
Elmer's Redwood	65	0.005	0.0054,000
Sierra Redwood	62	0.002	0.0024,000
Shasta Redwood	58	0.001	0.0014,000
Elmer's Redwood	55	0.0005	0.00054,000
Sierra Redwood	52	0.0002	0.00024,000
Shasta Redwood	48	0.0001	0.00014,000
Elmer's Redwood	45	0.00005	0.000054,000
Sierra Redwood	42	0.00002	0.000024,000
Shasta Redwood	38	0.00001	0.000014,000
Elmer's Redwood	35	0.000005	0.0000054,000
Sierra Redwood	32	0.000002	0.0000024,000
Shasta Redwood	28	0.000001	0.0000014,000
Elmer's Redwood	25	0.0000005	0.00000054,000
Sierra Redwood	22	0.0000002	0.00000024,000
Shasta Redwood	20	0.0000001	0.00000014,000
Elmer's Redwood	18	0.00000005	0.000000054,000
Sierra Redwood	15	0.00000002	0.000000024,000
Shasta Redwood	12	0.00000001	0.000000014,000
Elmer's Redwood	10	0.000000005	0.0000000054,000
Sierra Redwood	8	0.000000002	0.0000000024,000
Shasta Redwood	5	0.000000001	0.0000000014,000
Elmer's Redwood	3	0.0000000005	0.00000000054,000
Sierra Redwood	2	0.0000000002	0.00000000024,000
Shasta Redwood	1	0.0000000001	0.00000000014,000
Elmer's Redwood	0		



Me at the base of a large, charred sequoia (right) near the General Sherman Tree (left and previous page).





A perspective of a few people next to the charred sequoia (right tree on left picture) from the previous page, along with a sister tree.

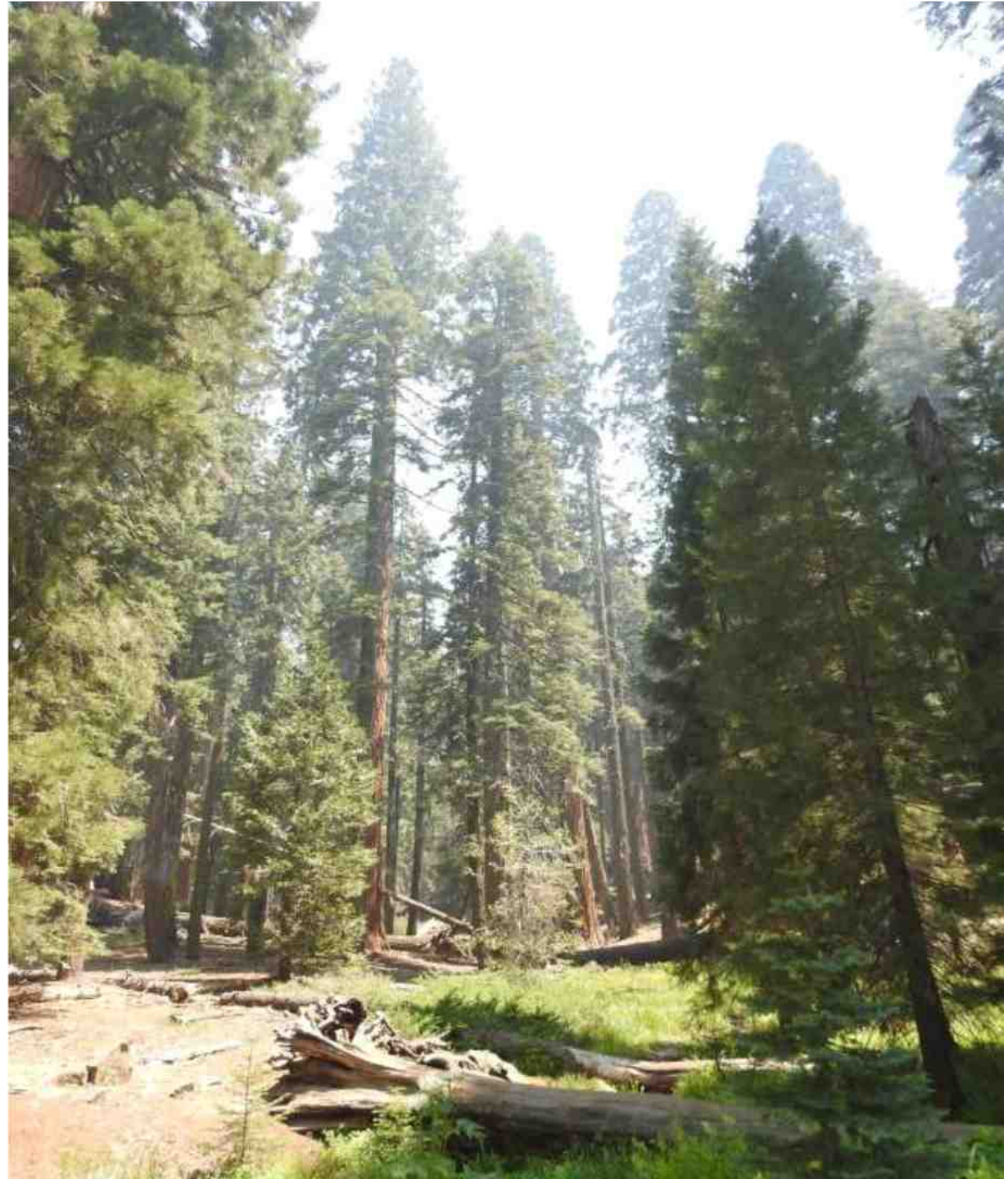


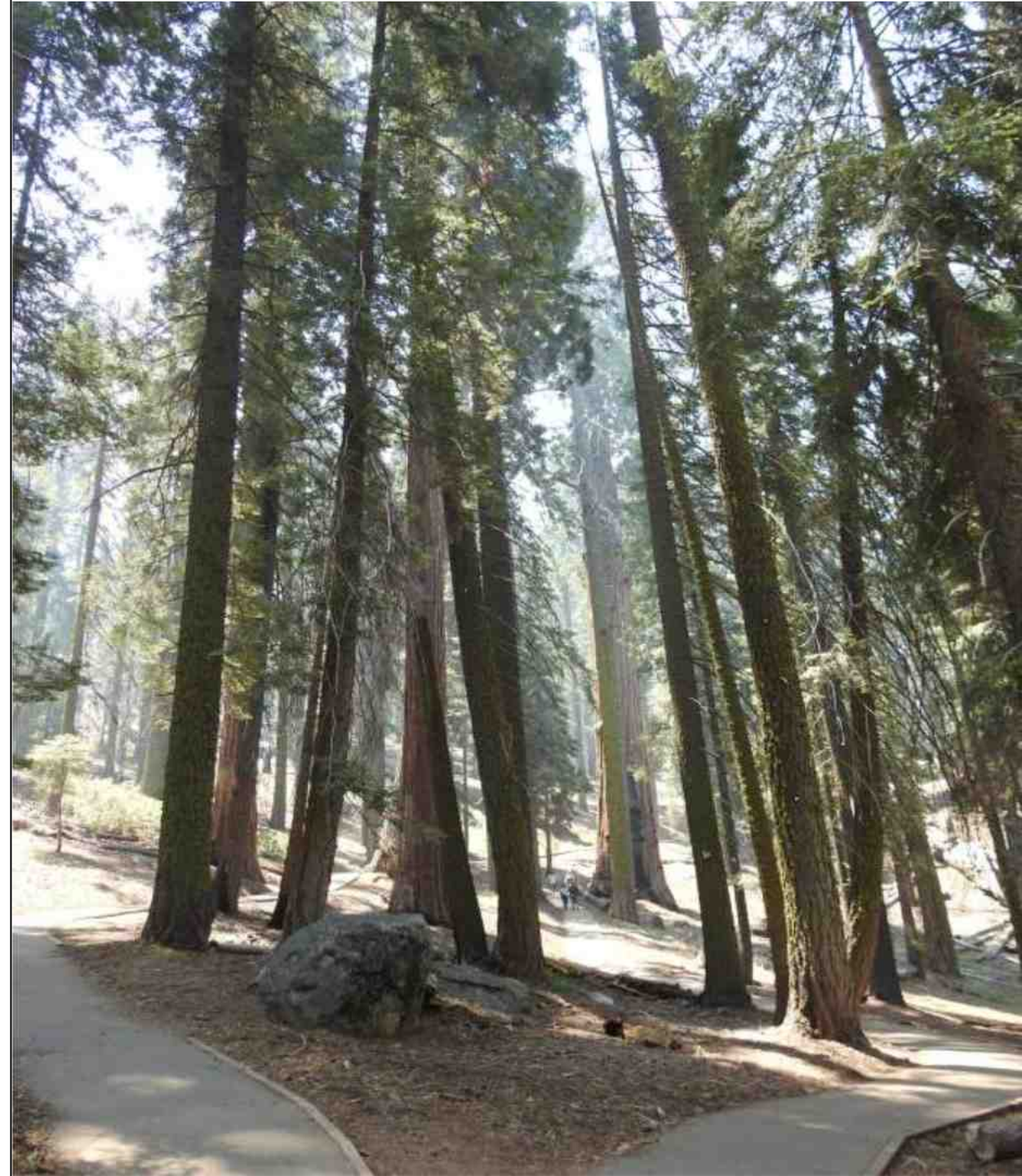


Cross section of large sequoia in the Giant Forest Stand (left), and a tunnel through a dead tree near the handicapped parking area at Giant Forest (right).



Next page: One last view of the General Sherman Tree (left, middle of picture), which I believe doesn't look as tall as the other trees due to the angle of the picture, and then some other sequoias while on the Giant Grove walk (right).







Some cool visuals of a huge fallen sequoia. Note the people toward the right of the tree.





Top: Steve at the tunnel through the fallen tree on the far left side of the tree of the previous page (Note the paved path on both pages).

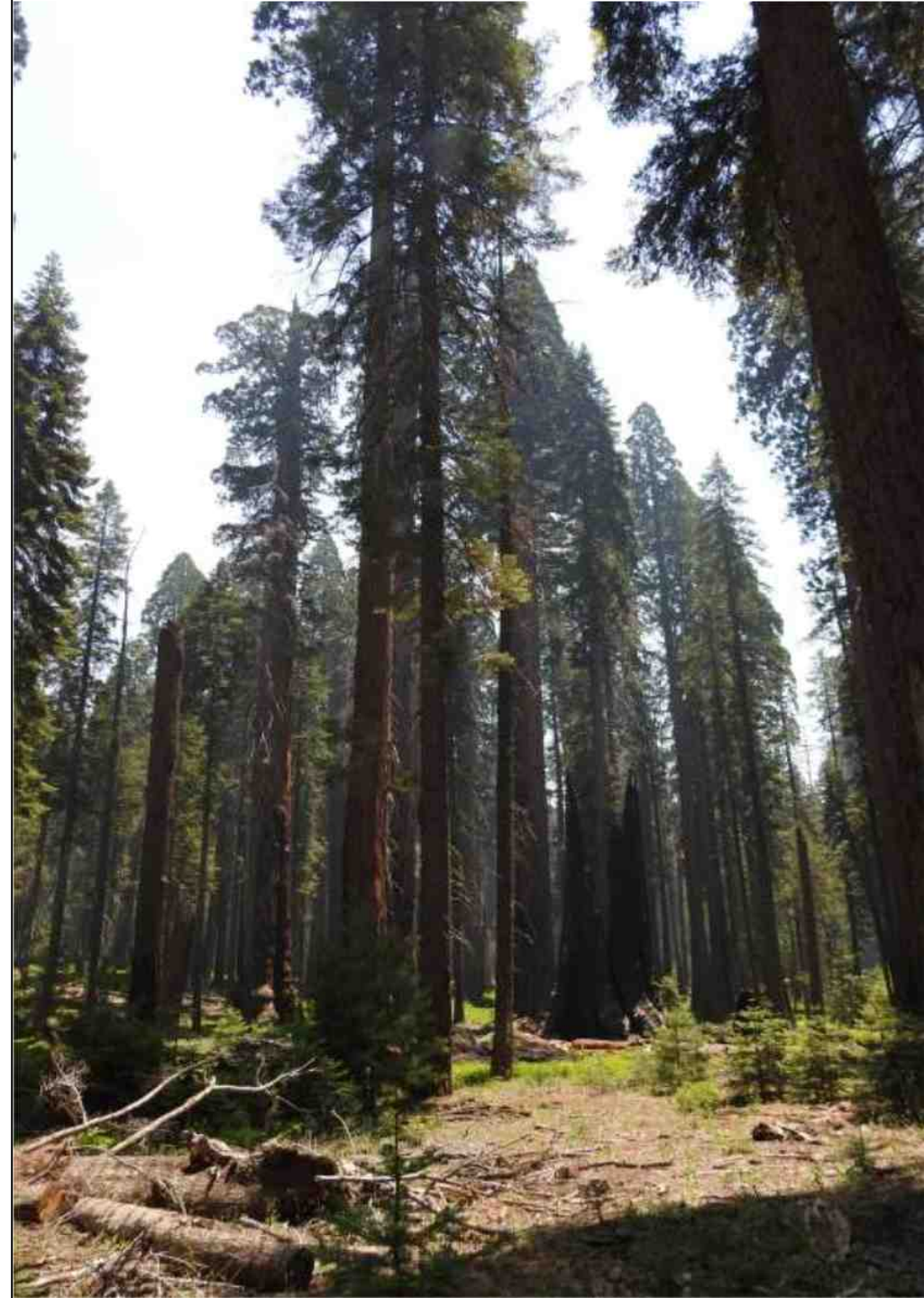
Perspective of people in the Giant Forest Grove at the base of the trees. There are random people on this page (bottom left) and the next page (left picture). I am in both right-sided pictures on the next page, including at the roots of a large tree (top right) and at the base of a fire charred and split tree (bottom right).





Once we got away from the area of the General Sherman Tree, there were a lot fewer people. Most of the trees were unnamed (see next 2 pages), while a few, such as the McKinley Tree (this page), were indeed named.









Bears Bathtub (top left and right). Sequoias growing in a lush, wet meadow, which provides good moisture for the tree's roots (bottom left and next page).

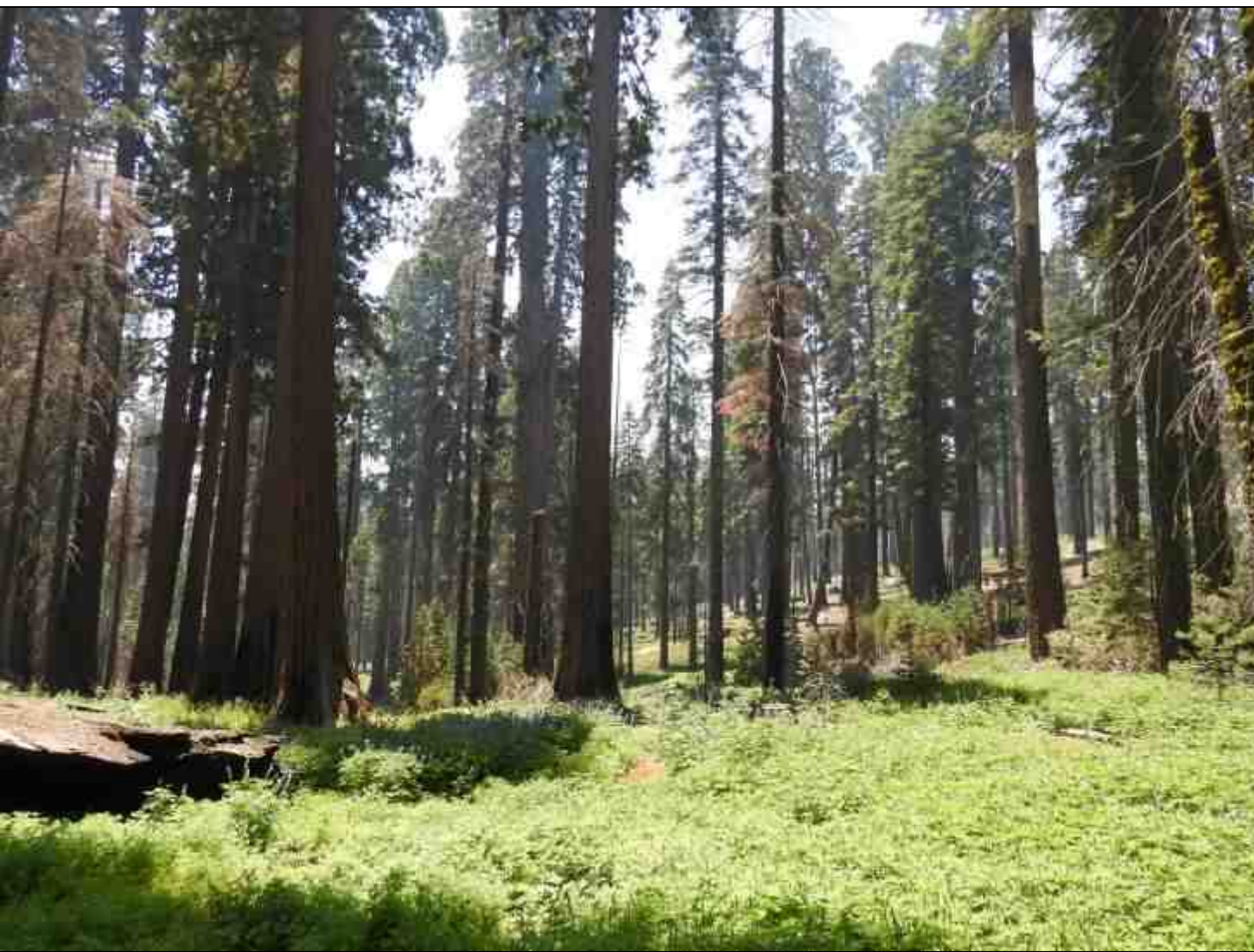






The 'Three Amigos' with my Nikon P900 camera (left) and my iPhone (right). Steve took the picture using my phone on the right. Notice me standing at the bottom for scale of how small I look compared to the trees. As a friend said, "Who shrunk the JW?!"







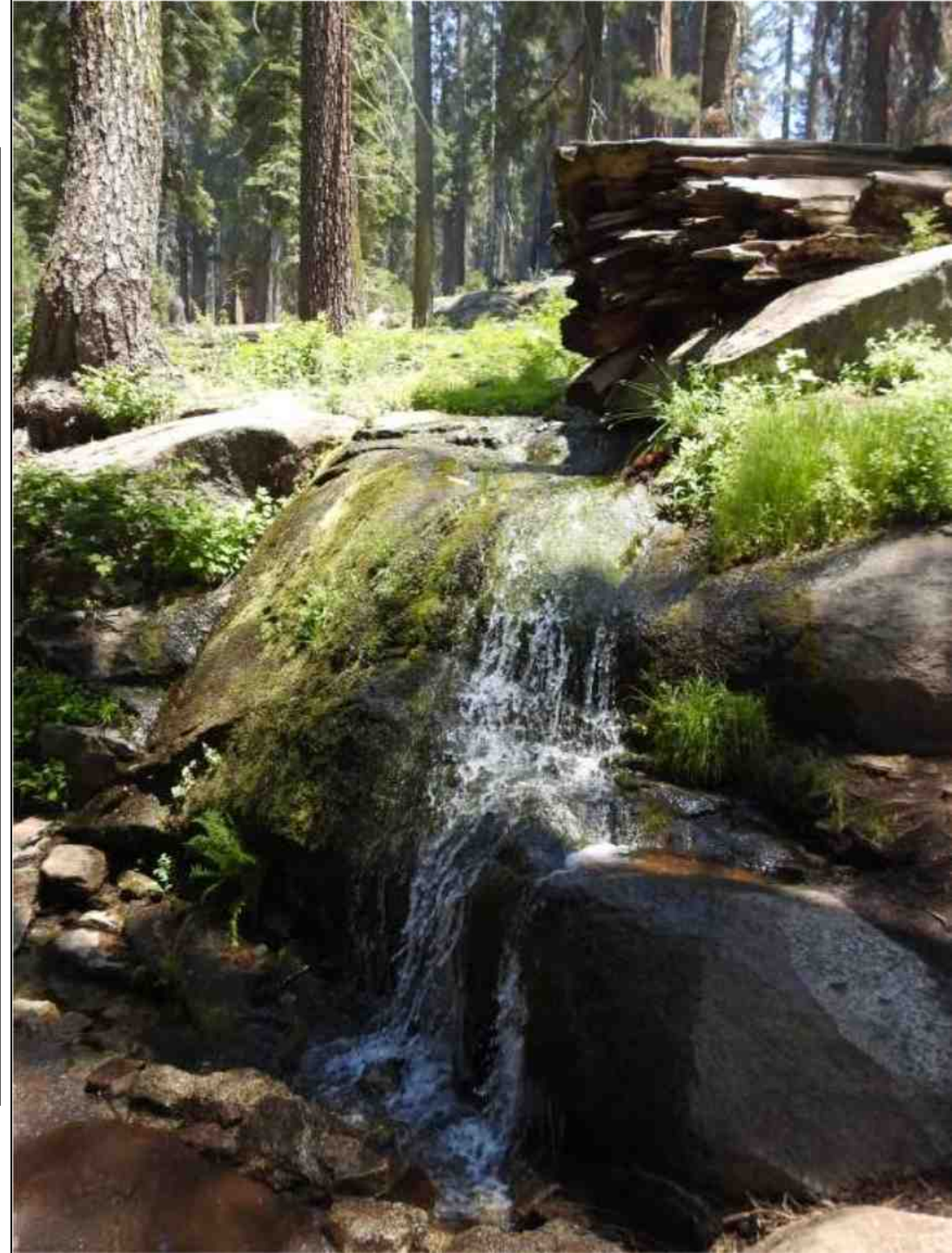
Some more huge sequoias with a person in between the two large trees on the right picture.



A person used to live in that small cabin in the middle of the Grove, while he let his cattle graze in the surrounding areas, including the meadows (right). This practice stopped when Sequoia National Park [bought it from Hale D. Tharp in 1916](#).



Features along the trail, including the tunnel in the fallen tree from earlier (left, see arrow) and a small waterfall (right).



Giant Forest
Museum and
Sentinel Tree
in the
foreground.





Tall
sequoias on
the walk
downhill to
the Big
Trees Trail
(right).

Next page:
Views from
the Big
Trees Trail.
The arrow
on the right
pic denotes
a person on
the path.

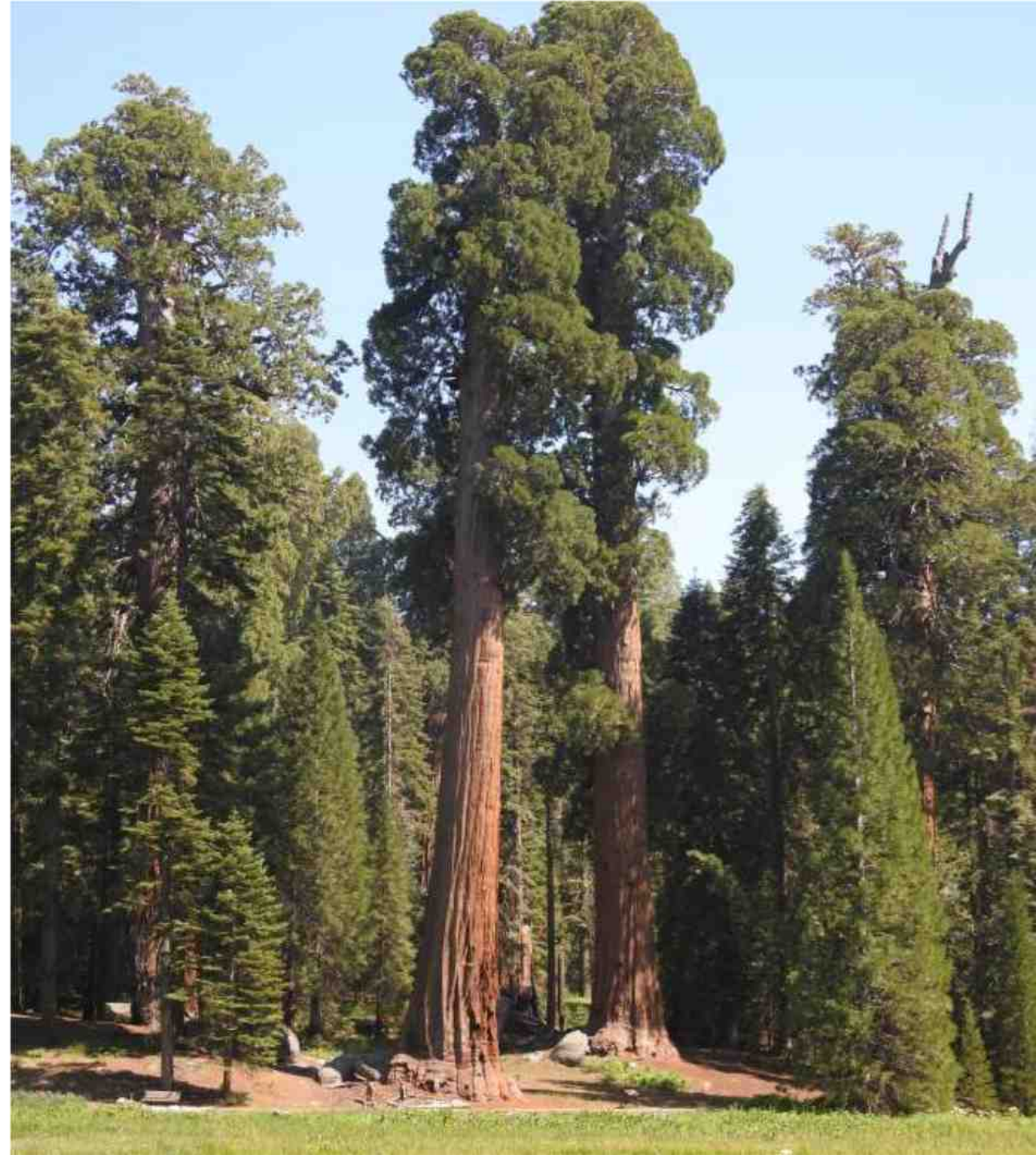






Meadow that surrounds the Big Trees Trail loop. The arrow points out a person on the trail.

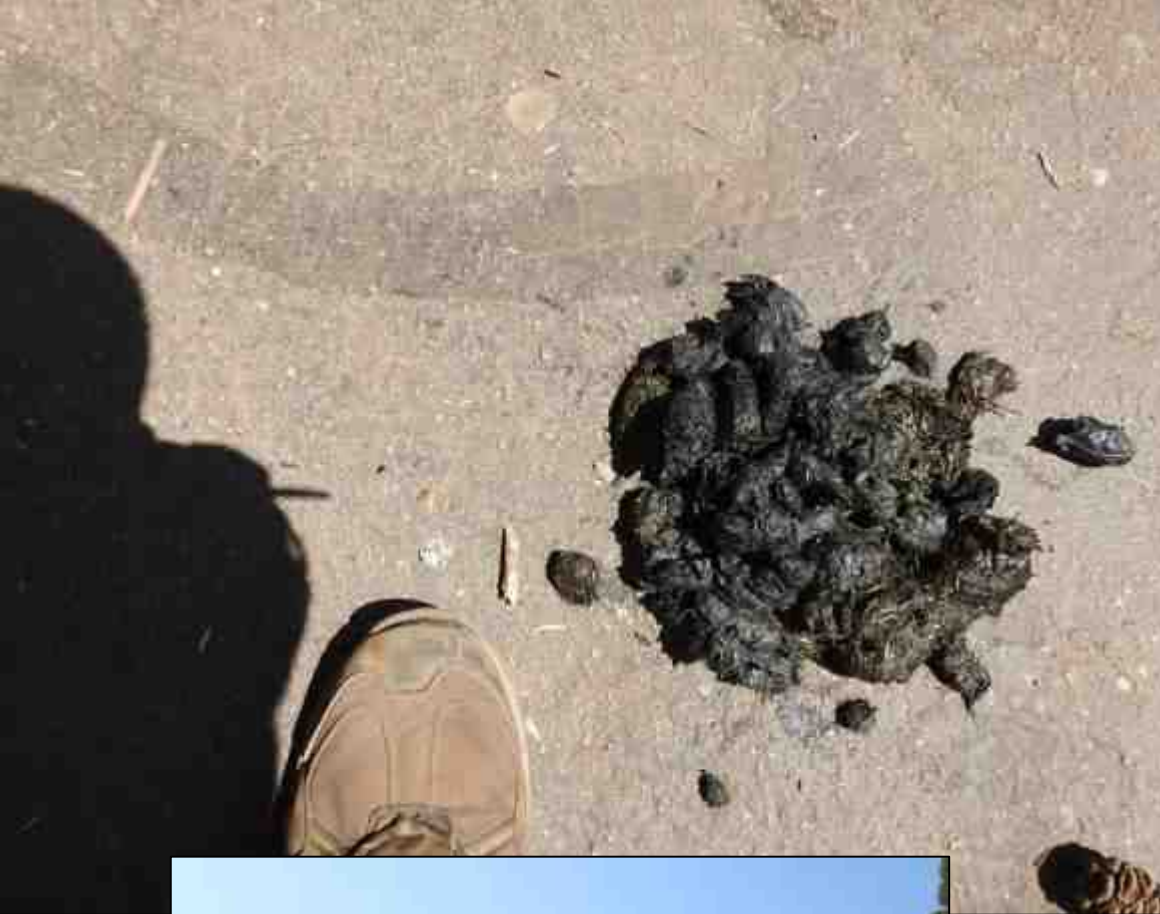
Next page: More pictures of people at the base of some trees on the Big Trees Trail to give perspective as to the sheer size of the sequoias.





A very full sequoia tree with branches near the ground (right) and some tall and slender, and likely young, trees on the left.





Fresh bear scat on the trail (left) near a boulder and sequoia that are attached to each other (right; and also see next page).

Next two pages: The last images from Big Trees Trail.







From 3:30 to 4:30 PM, we drove down the mountain heading to the southern part of the park. It had many hairpin turns with 10 MPH speed limit signs. With a slow car in front of us, it took a while to descend an amazing 6,000 feet as we had to brake the car many times around bends. But, overall, I couldn't believe how much elevation we went down in a relatively quick period. This was a very Mediterranean, chaparral biome. It was very warm, being in the 90s, once we reached the lower elevations. We drove past our campground to head to the Foothills Visitor Center before they closed at 5:00. It was a small place but had good exhibits and information, as well as free Wi-Fi which was very nice as there was no cell service in the valley or pretty much anywhere in Sequoia National Park.

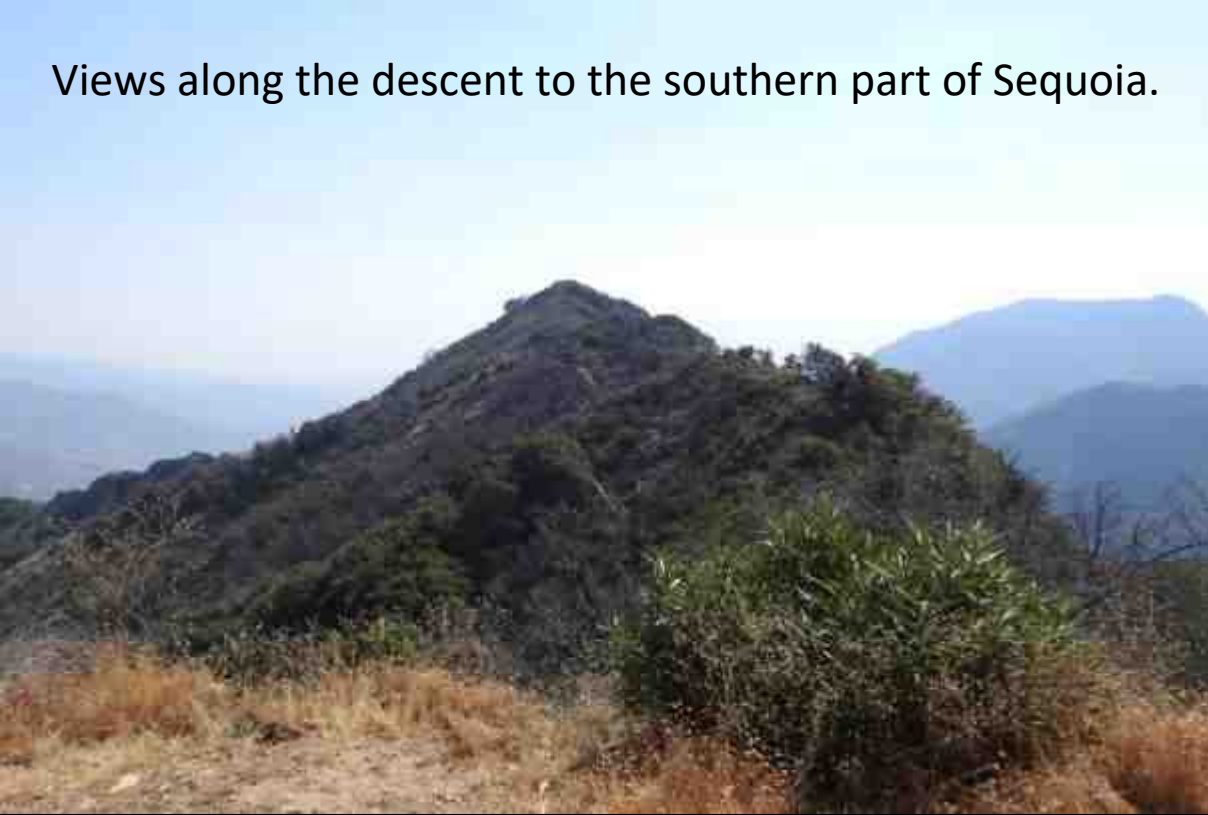
We left the visitor center and arrived at site #9 of the Potwisha Campground at 5:10 PM. It was located in a mesquite, chaparral setting. Above our campsite was, bizarrely, a canal with shallow non-running, stagnant water. We were in the back of the campground near the channel, but I couldn't figure out why it was there. I figured that it used to transport water in the valley but no longer does, for whatever reason. It did look like a really cool game trail, and I even found a park service trail-camera facing the edge of the canal. I imagined critters roaming that area, such as mountain lions.

I made dinner at the campsite at 5:15 PM. It was uncomfortably warm while cooking on the picnic table, so I ate in the shade several feet away. After eating, I then organized my pictures, which totaled about 170 for the day. Unfortunately, it was still hot and light out, so it was difficult to find a good place to work. I eventually found a slightly shaded area at the back of the site, as it was too light at the picnic table, and I could barely see the screen of my computer.

I finished organizing the new pictures at around 7:00 PM, then walked around the campground and up to the canal some more. Towards dark, I crossed the park road and hiked to the raging Kaweah River across the street from the campground. It was nice to poke around locally as the sun was setting. I went to bed at a reasonable time, around 9:00 PM.



Views along the descent to the southern part of Sequoia.





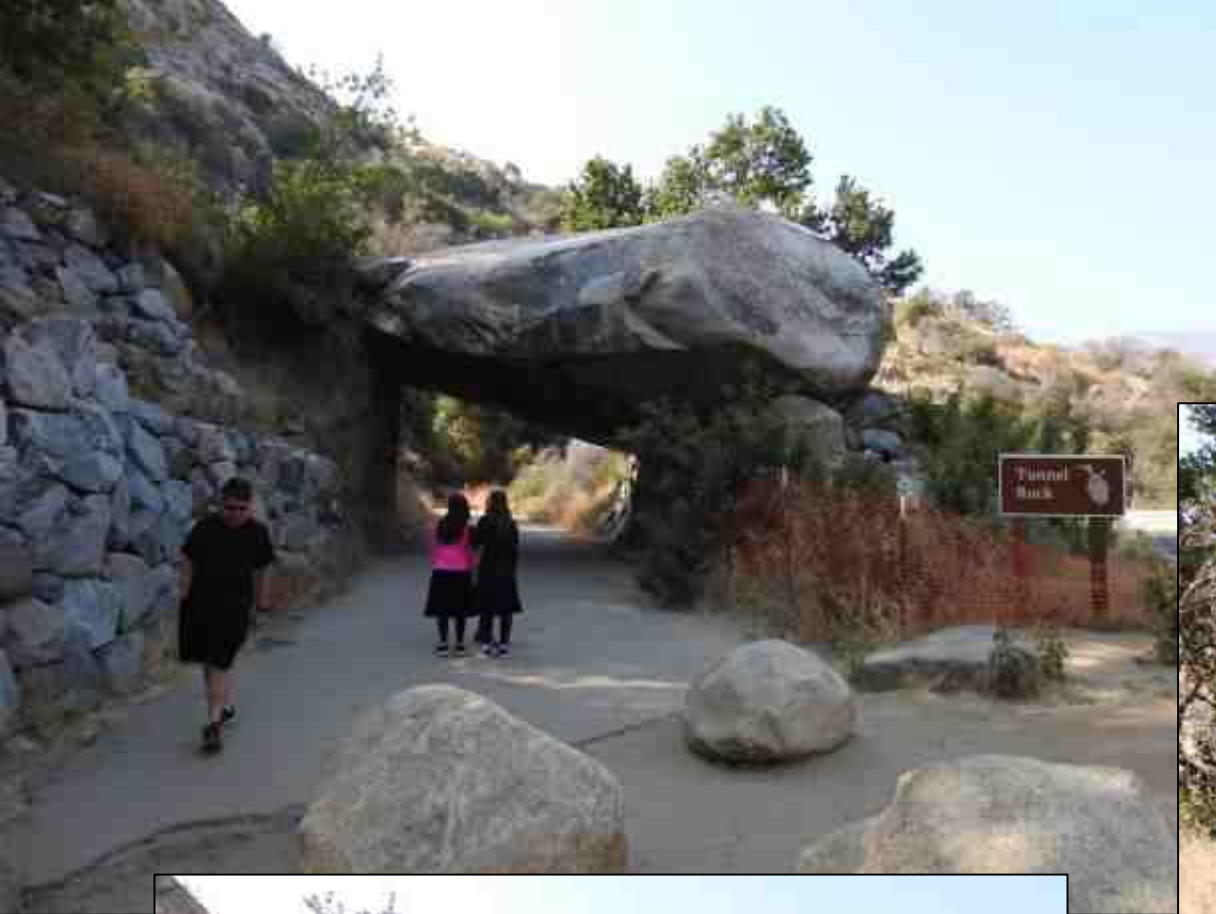
Notice the mesquite,
chaparral habitat
characteristics of the
lower elevations of this
ecotype in central
California.





Chaparral and the Kaweah River at the bottom center and right.





Tunnel Rock used to be part of the road system, but now it is a tourist attraction next to the main park road.





Potwisha Campground, site 9.



Views of the canal from above the campground (which can be seen at the far left of the top left picture). Notice the park service trail-cam on the bottom right of the bottom picture.

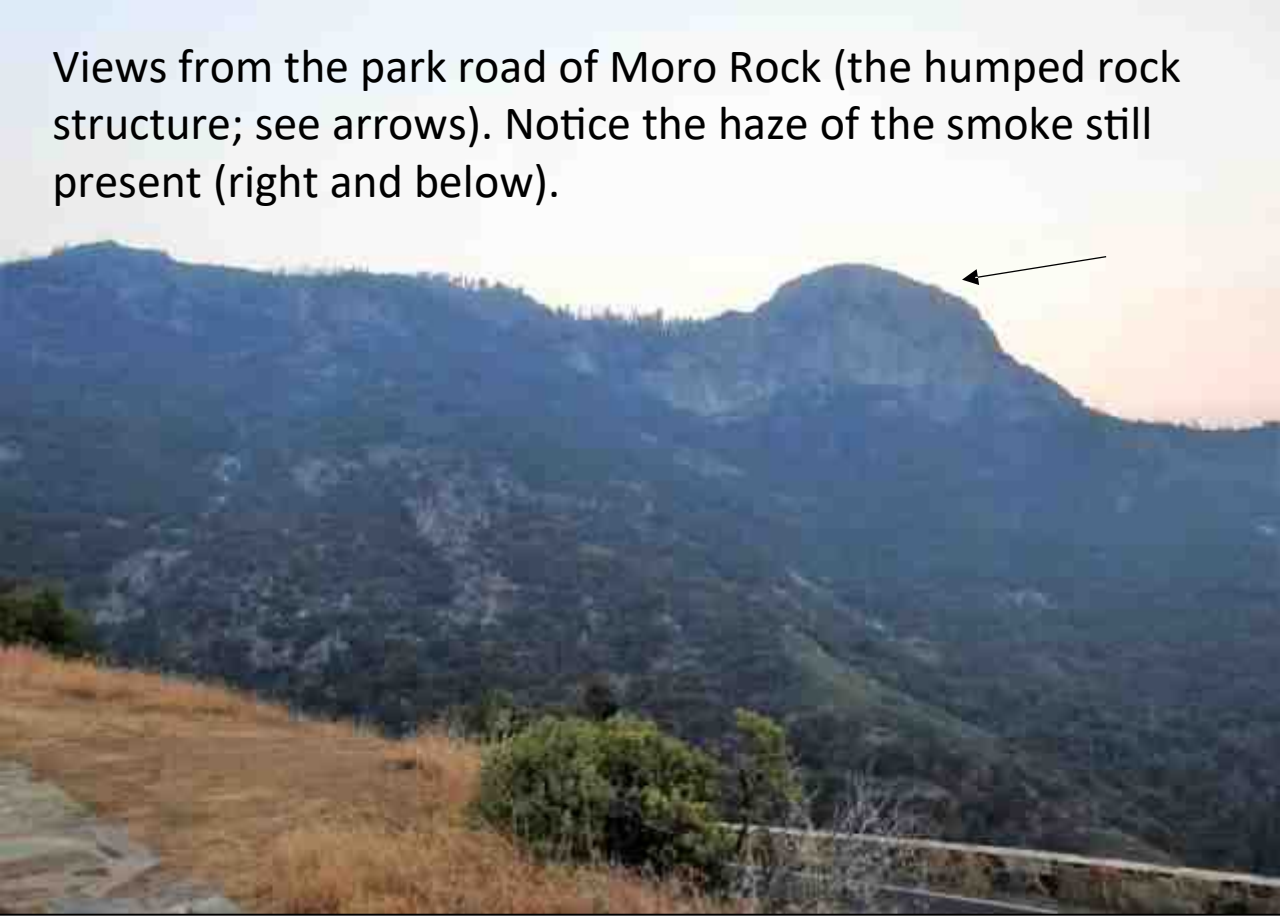
A Beary Interesting Wake-Up, and More Sequoias

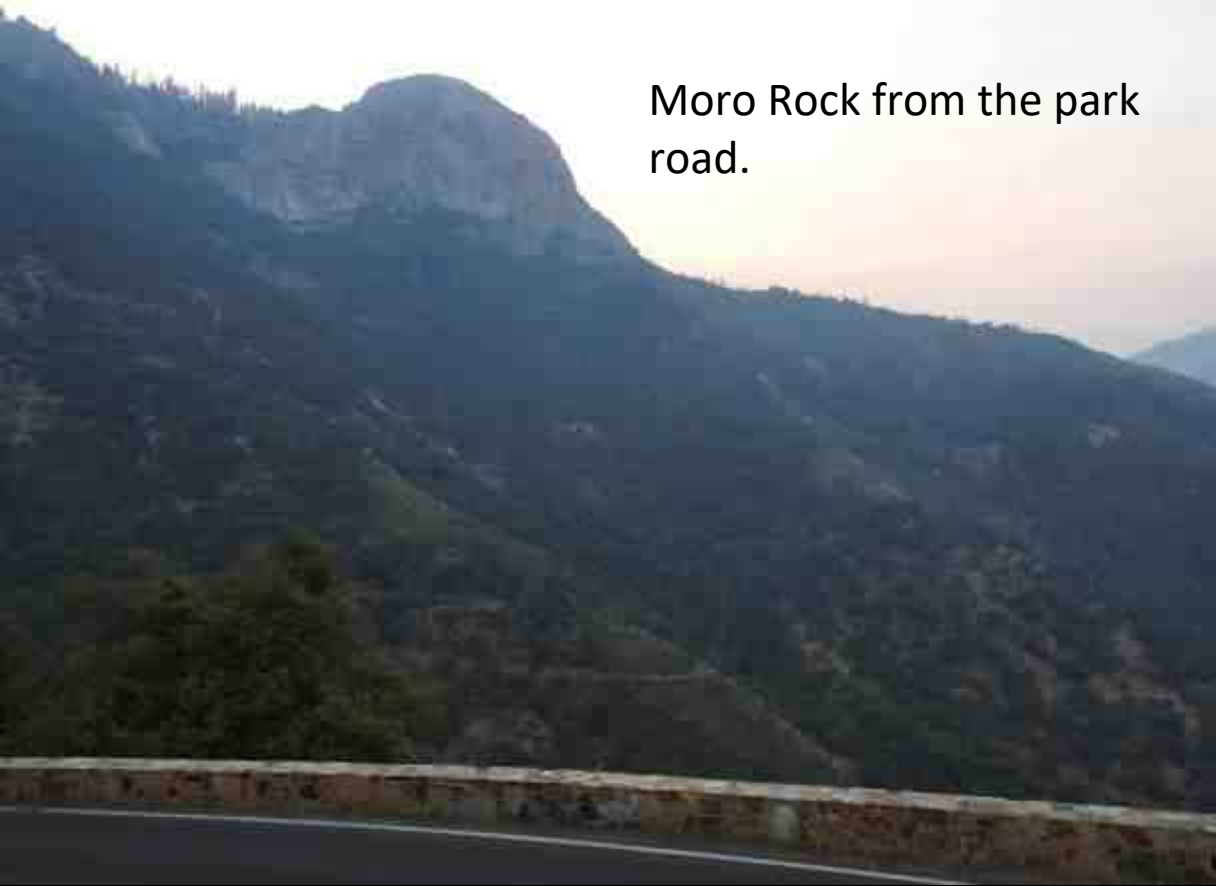
It stayed warm overnight, never dipping below the mid-60s. I don't know what was wrong with me, but I woke up twice to use the bathroom. The second time was around 4:00 AM. I returned to the tent and closed my eyes, and actually fell back to sleep. I say that because I remember hearing Steve wake up around 4:45 and walk down the road to the bathroom. I was still half asleep, but I heard something about five minutes later and assumed he was returning to the campsite. I looked up at the mesh part of the tent assuming he was going to wake me up, but instead, in the early morning predawn of 4:53 AM, there was a brownish colored black bear literally 6-8 inches from my head. The bear, I think a male, sniffed the tent, less than a foot from me, and then walked away. I immediately opened the zipper to the tent and watched him casually meander down the campground road in low light conditions, passing all of those unsuspecting campers. The bruin walked down the opposite direction we drove in with our car the previous evening. 'Wow!', I wrote in my notes. Steve was incredulous when I told him of that encounter, as he returned to the campsite just a couple minutes later.

We packed up the site at 5:00 and finally left Potwisha at 5:20. We then drove back up the mountain, from where we came the previous day, and then took the Crescent Meadow Road. We went through Tunnel Log in the process, which was a cool experience to drive through a sequoia tree. I got some great pictures of a young buck mule deer in the Moro Rock parking lot (which we will come back to later), and then another buck, which was much bigger, on the drive down to Crescent Meadow. This area is in the very southern part of the Giant Forest Grove. We hiked the Crescent Meadow Trail, and also went west on the Huckleberry Meadow Trail to Squatter's Cabin. We saw two female mule deer in Huckleberry Meadow. One looked like a young yearling, while the other looked like a very pregnant doe, which was odd because they usually give birth a month earlier. I got pictures of them both times, that is, while walking to Squatter's Cabin and then when returning from there. I finished the hike by visiting Tharp's Log, which was a home made inside of a fallen sequoia by an early settler. It was in pretty good shape, especially when considering that nobody had lived there for decades.

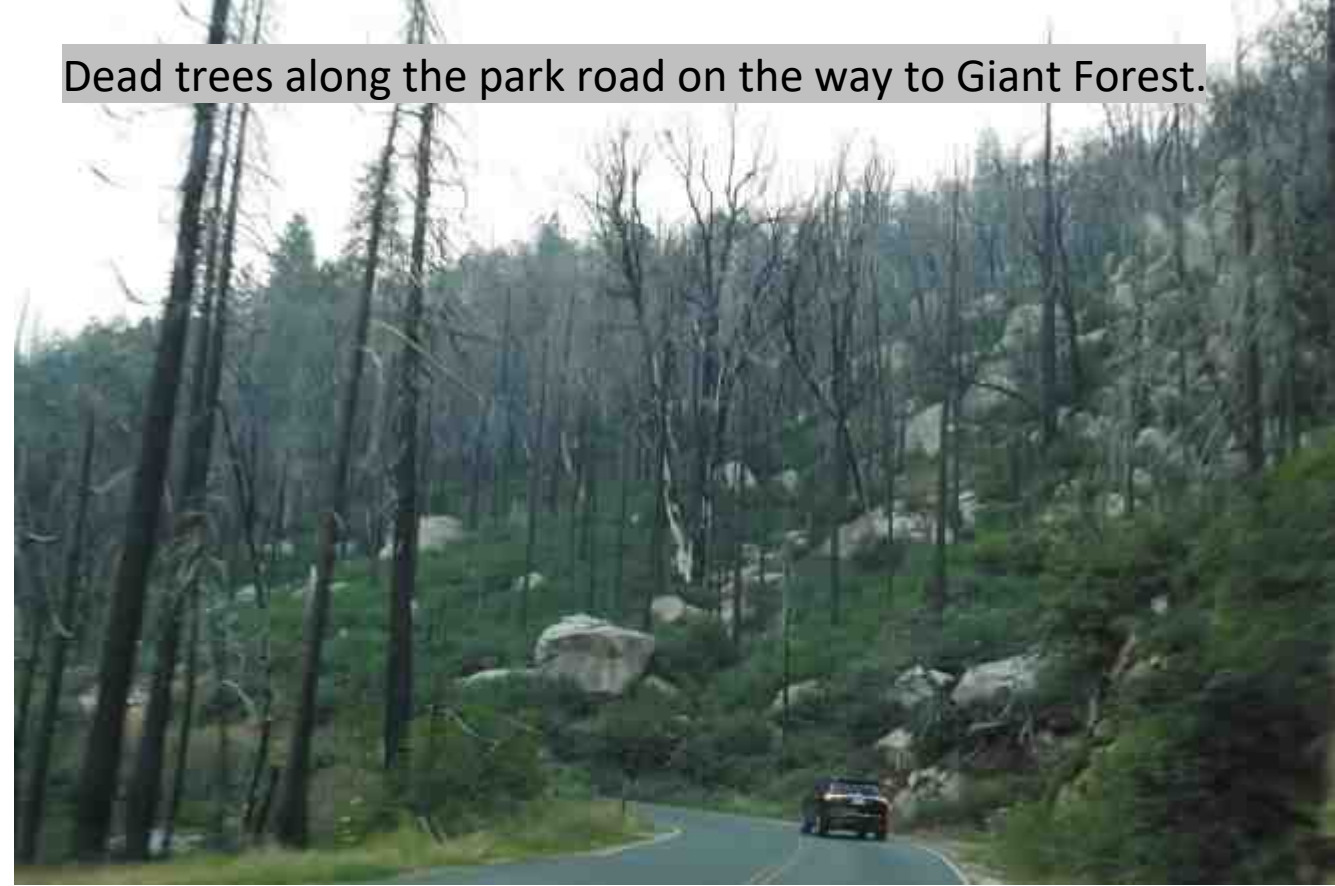
I returned to the car and parking lot before Steve did, so I boiled water for breakfast. He also used hot water for his morning meals, so heating up the water when I did ensured it would be ready when he returned. There was a big mule deer buck in velvet browsing and grazing nearby at the edge of the pavement. Multiple people walked up to within 10 feet of the large animal, yet he was hardly bothered.

Views from the park road of Moro Rock (the humped rock structure; see arrows). Notice the haze of the smoke still present (right and below).





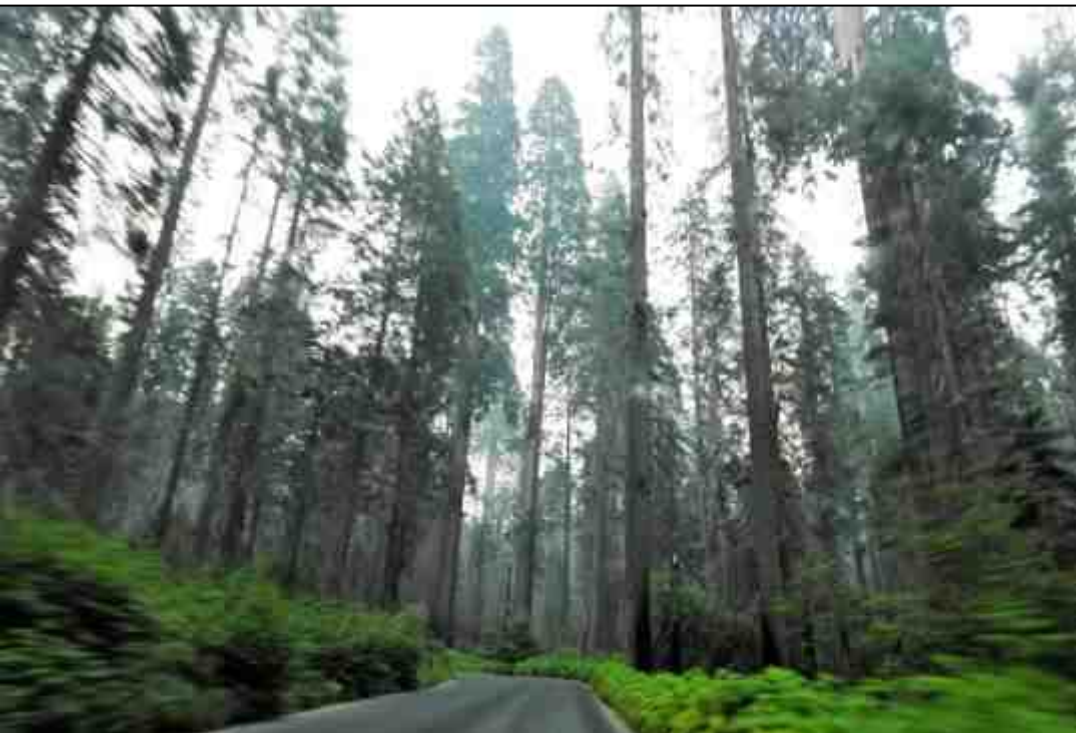
Moro Rock from the park road.



Dead trees along the park road on the way to Giant Forest.



View of the park road from below Moro Rock.



Entering a montane (slope) forest with the sequoias after driving through all the chaparral habitat (previous pages).





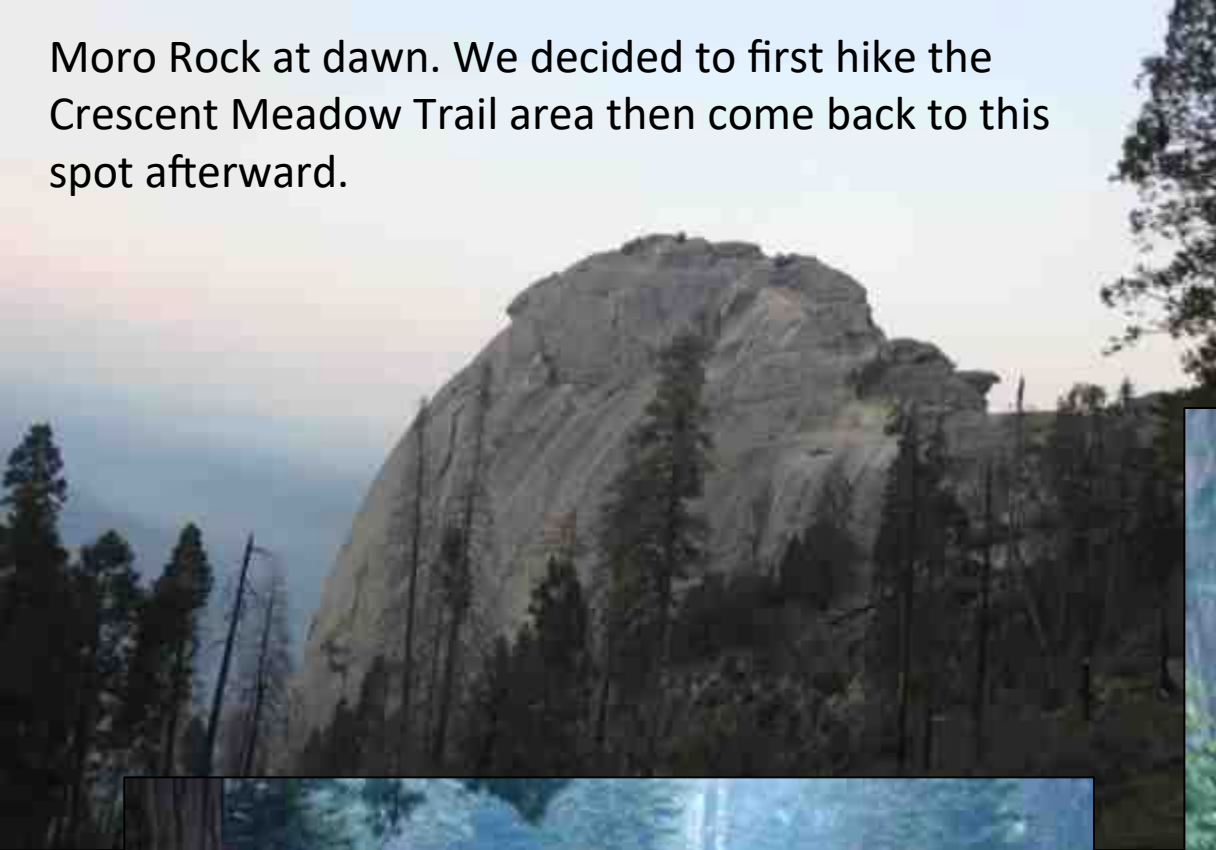
The '[Auto Log](#)', where cars used to park on a fallen sequoia (bottom pics) after driving through a live sequoia stand to get there (upper left).



The parking lot to hike Moro Rock (upper left) with a young mule deer buck (right), and a much less glorious picture of him next to the outhouse (below left; see arrow).



Moro Rock at dawn. We decided to first hike the Crescent Meadow Trail area then come back to this spot afterward.



A nice perspective of Tunnel Log with me reaching about 7'6" (left), and of our rental car next to some tall sequoias at a small parking lot at Tunnel Log (right).





A large mule deer buck (right and next page) was in this stand of sequoias (left).







Just before crossing the road (right), the mule deer buck stood under a large sequoia. This perspective shows how big the trees really are (left; see arrow).





There were plenty of signs, such as at the picnic area at Crescent Meadow, alerting people to clean up after themselves and properly store their food. While black bears are common in all three of the first parks in this book, the only one I saw was the one at the campground earlier this morning.



Views from the west side of the Crescent Meadow Trail (also see next page).







Huckleberry Meadow (upper left), where two deer were feeding on the lush grasses (bottom pictures).





Here, the mule deer doe appears to be going the bathroom.



Next page: A good perspective of the deer (see arrows) in the meadow with tall sequoias above them (left) and some tall, fire scarred sequoias near Squatter's Cabin (right).





Left: I have seen it spelled “Squatter’s Cabin” and “Squatters Cabin”. Zoom in to the sign for more information on the structure.

Right: Tall sequoias on the trail while I hiked back to the Crescent Meadow area.





The two deer were still feeding in Huckleberry Meadow when I returned about 20 minutes later. The doe (left deer) appeared pregnant, while the right deer seemed to be a yearling female.





Recently burned ground near Crescent Meadow (top left), with the aptly named Chimney Tree nearby (bottom left and right).



'Tharp's Log' is a cool feature, whereby an early settler built a house within the downed sequoia (also see bottom pictures on the next page).

Top picture on next page: Fern-lined forest floor on the north side of the Crescent Meadow Trail.

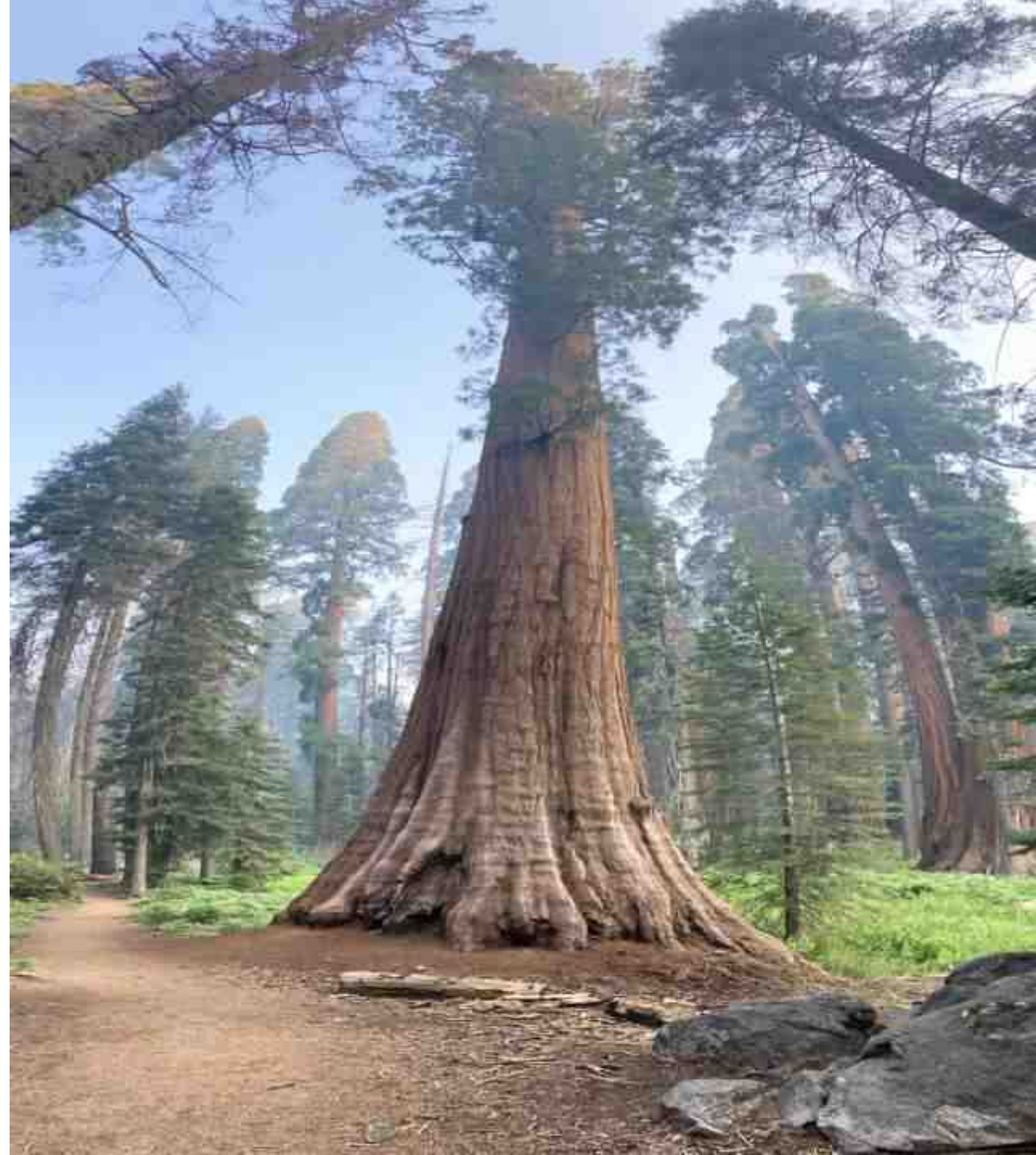






Lincoln Tree on the east side of the Crescent Meadow Trail.







View from the southern part of Crescent Meadow (top), which was close to the parking lot where this mule deer buck was hanging out (bottom pics).





There's nothing like watching wildlife while cooking breakfast (below left).

Next page: One more trip through Tunnel Log on our way back to Moro Rock.



At 8:32 AM, we went back to the Moro Rock parking lot and hiked the short but steep half mile rock structure. It started at the edge of the sequoia grove, and as you climbed up you could see chaparral to the south and sequoias to the north. I found the contrast in habitats striking. In fact, one of the most surprising things I noticed in Sequoia was how quickly we went from all chaparral vegetation on the southern, lower elevations of the park compared to the montane habitat with giant sequoias higher up. The vegetation literally changed within a half mile around a forested bend. It was quite prominent.

After taking pictures of the Moro Rock area, we then drove back down the mountain which took about a half hour with all the hairpin turns, even with less vehicle traffic than the previous evening. I kept noting in my journals and pictures how the chaparral vegetation dominated the southern part of the park.

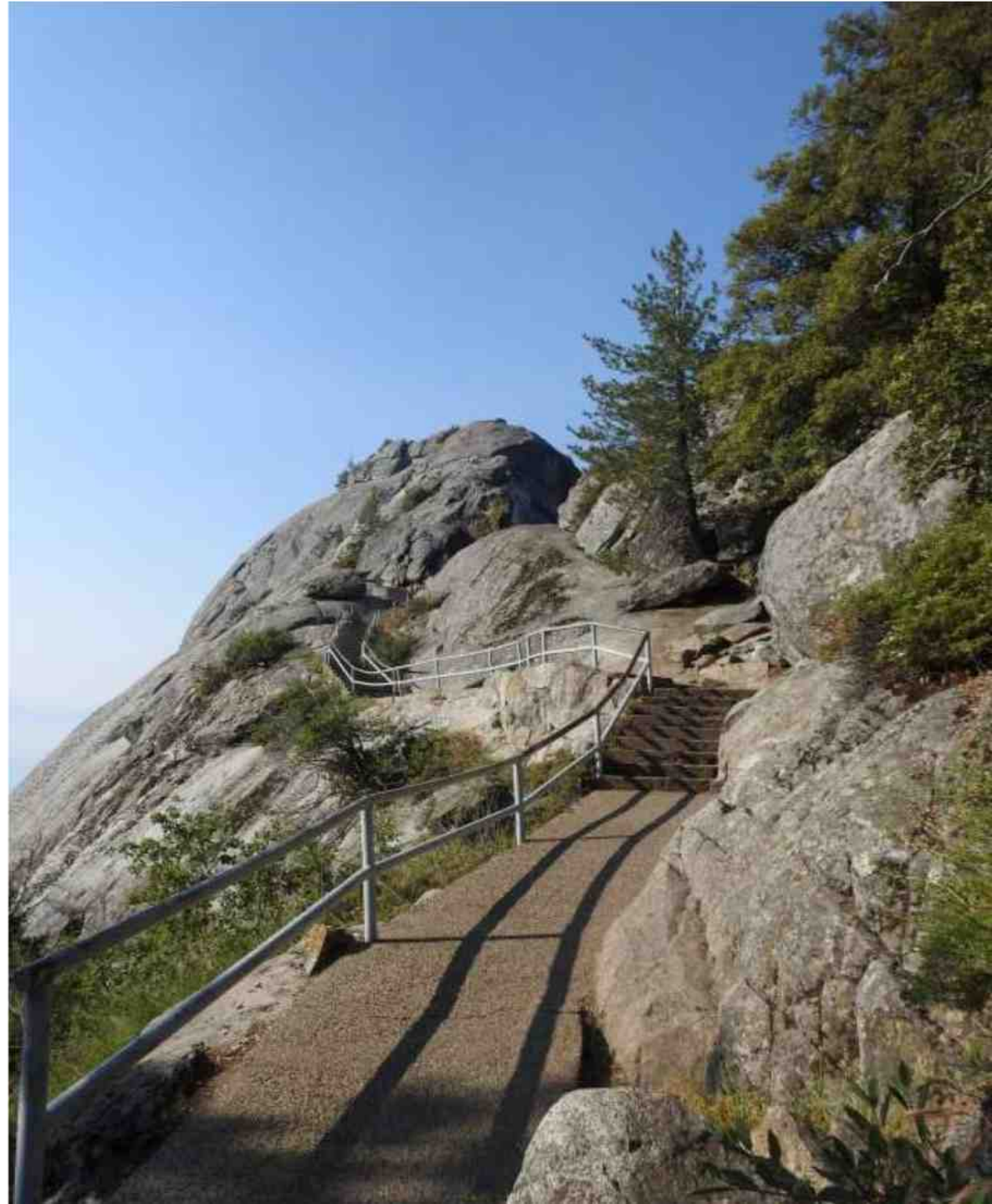
Before leaving Sequoia from ~10-10:40 AM, we used the free Wi-Fi in the Foothills Visitor Center, like the previous evening. It worked well and was nice to get caught up on email and news, especially since we knew it was going to be a long drive to our next destination, Pinnacles National Park.

A cell phone panorama from Moro Rock.





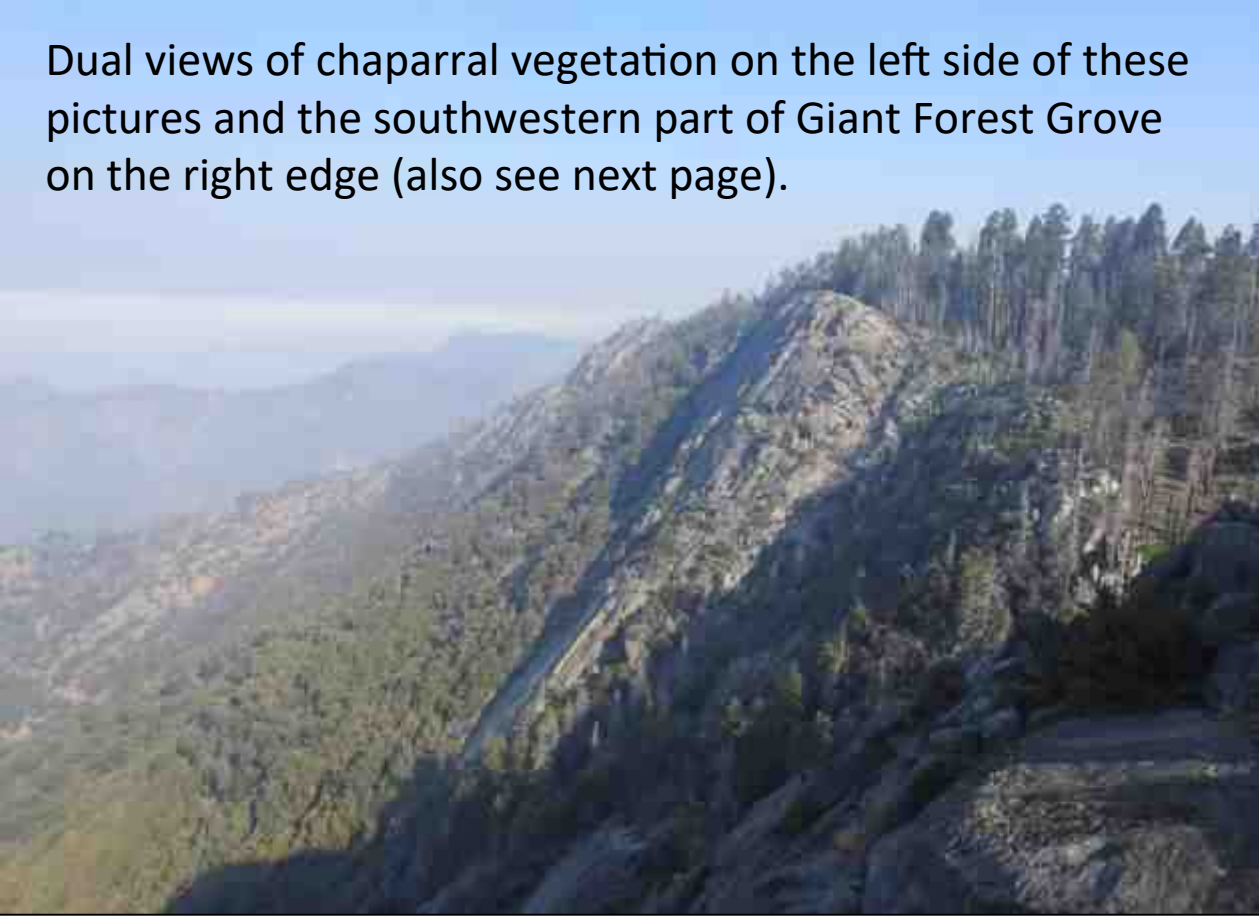
The start of the Moro Rock Trail.





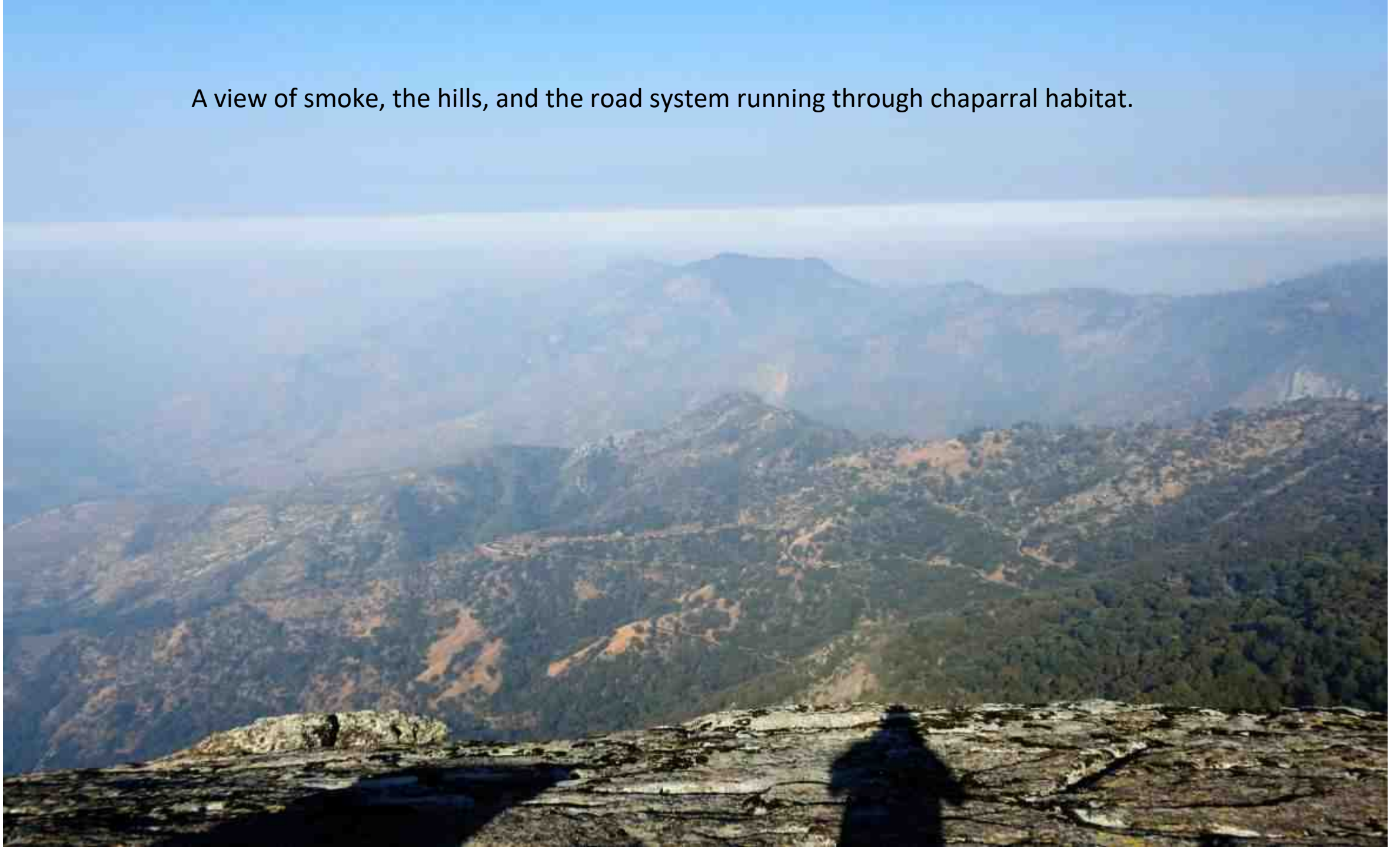
Smokey views from atop Moro Rock, including of chaparral vegetation in the southern part of the park (top pics) and the southern edge of Giant Forest Grove just to the north of Moro Rock.

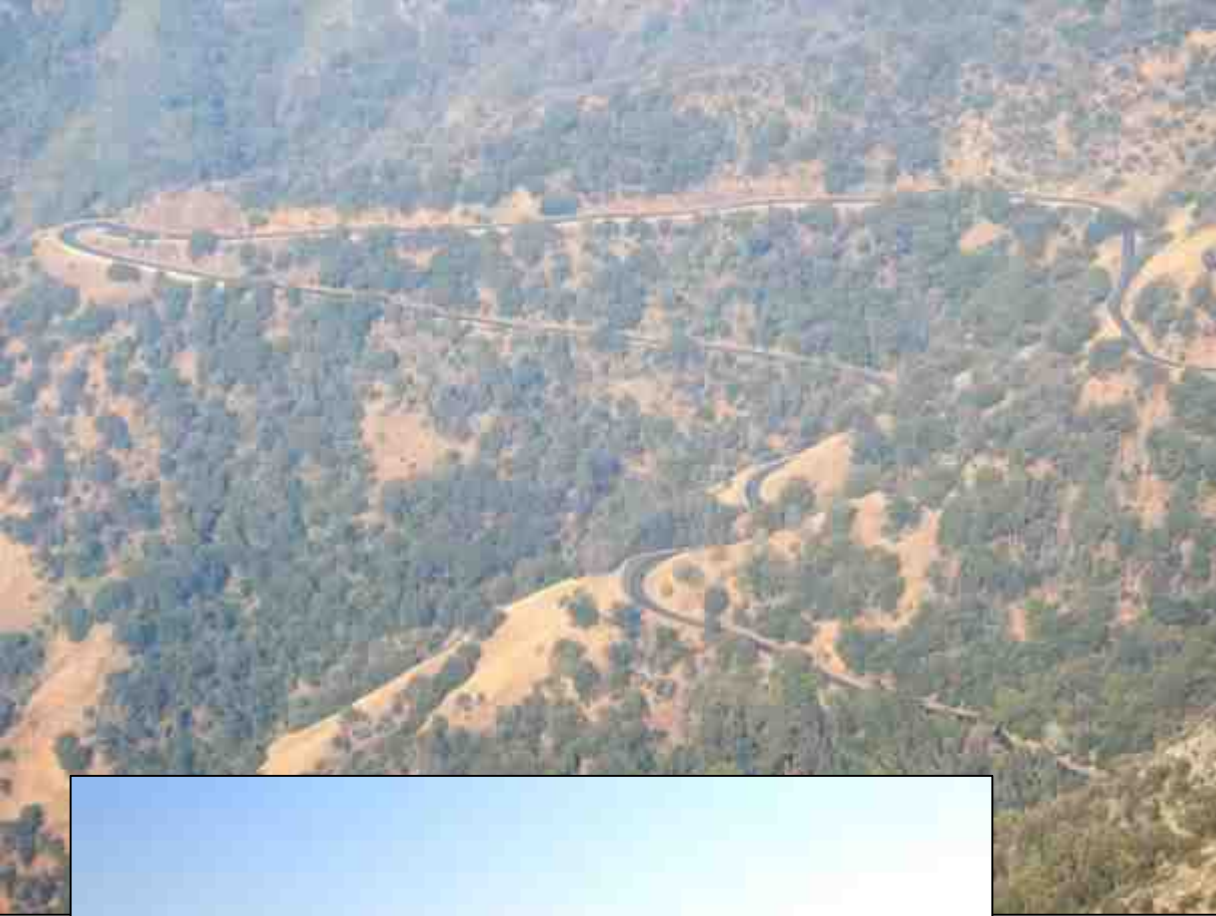
Dual views of chaparral vegetation on the left side of these pictures and the southwestern part of Giant Forest Grove on the right edge (also see next page).





A view of smoke, the hills, and the road system running through chaparral habitat.





While the road system was visible below to the west (upper left), the view to the east of Moro Rock was completely obscured by smoke (right) and continued right to the southeastern edge of Giant Forest Grove (lower left).

Next page: Three more views of the same general area.



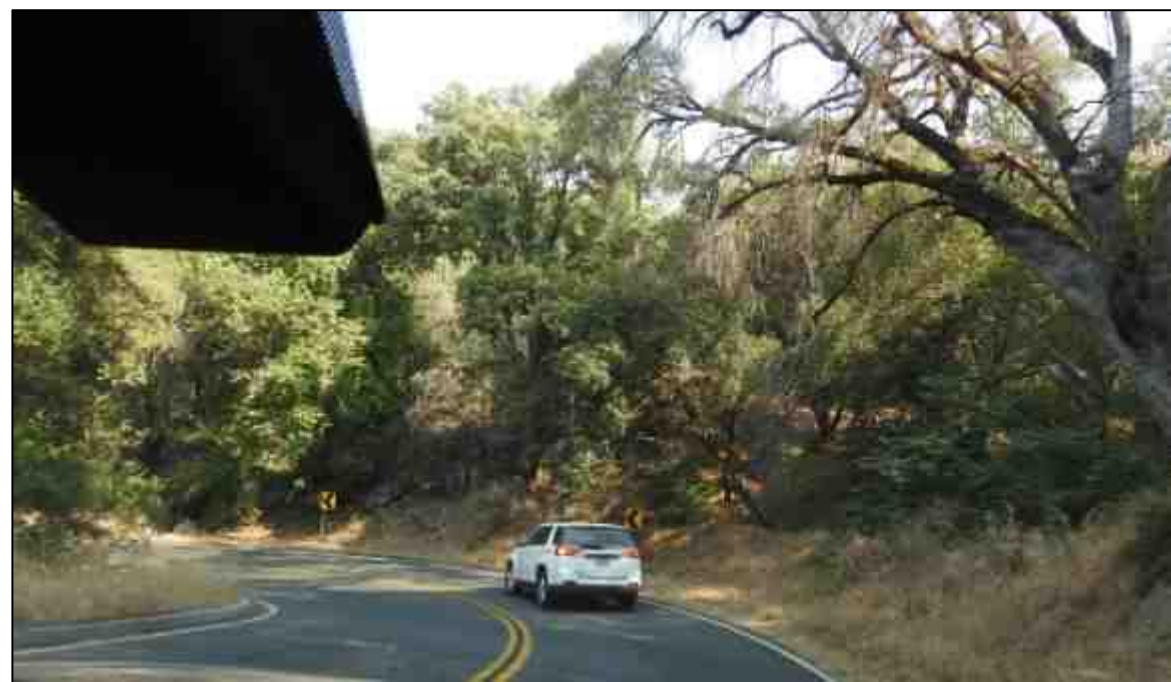




Cool rock formations on the descent down Moro Rock.

Next three pages: Some more views, similar to the previous day, of the descent down the park road to the southern part of Sequoia NP and the associated chaparral habitat.

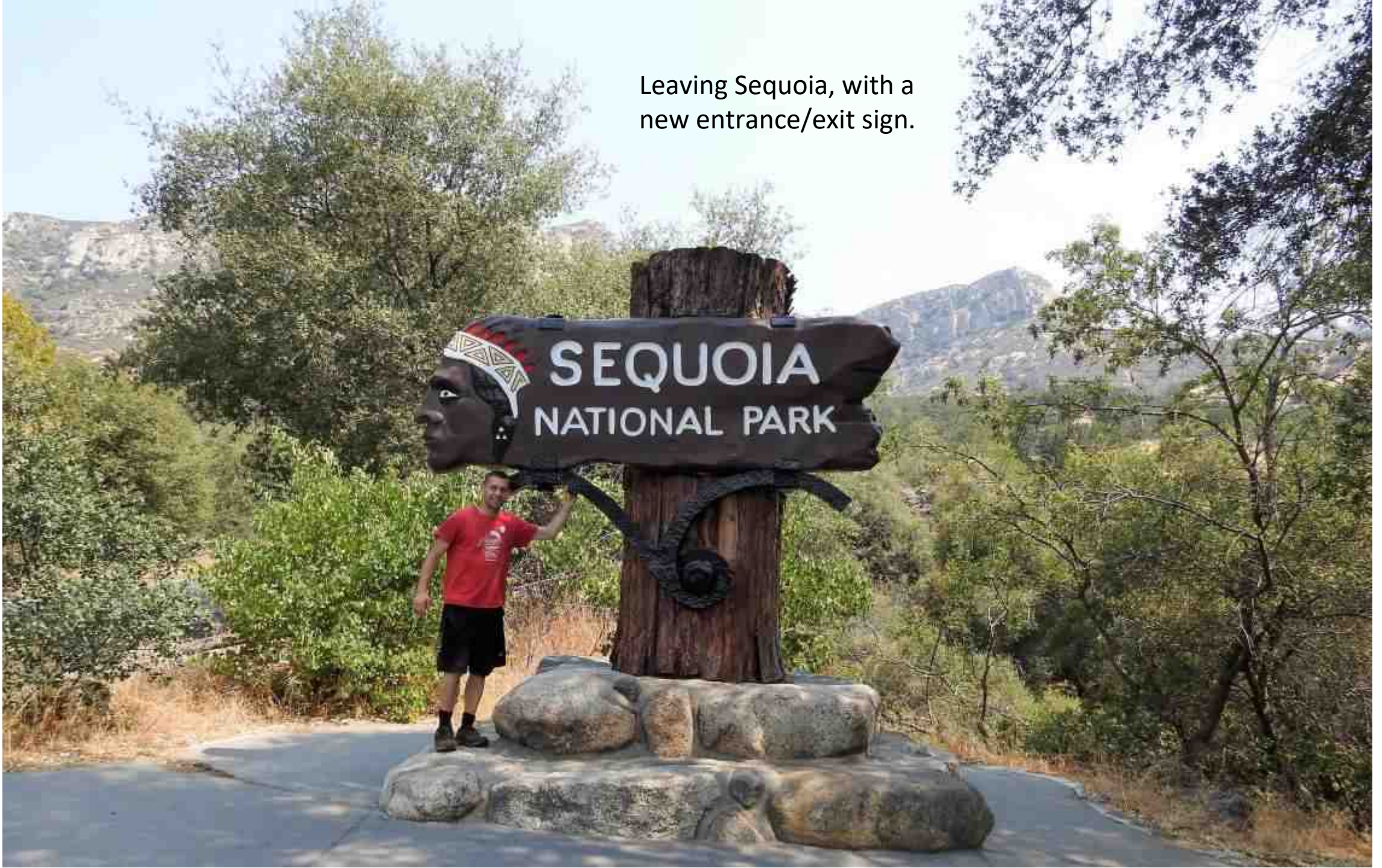








Leaving Sequoia, with a
new entrance/exit sign.



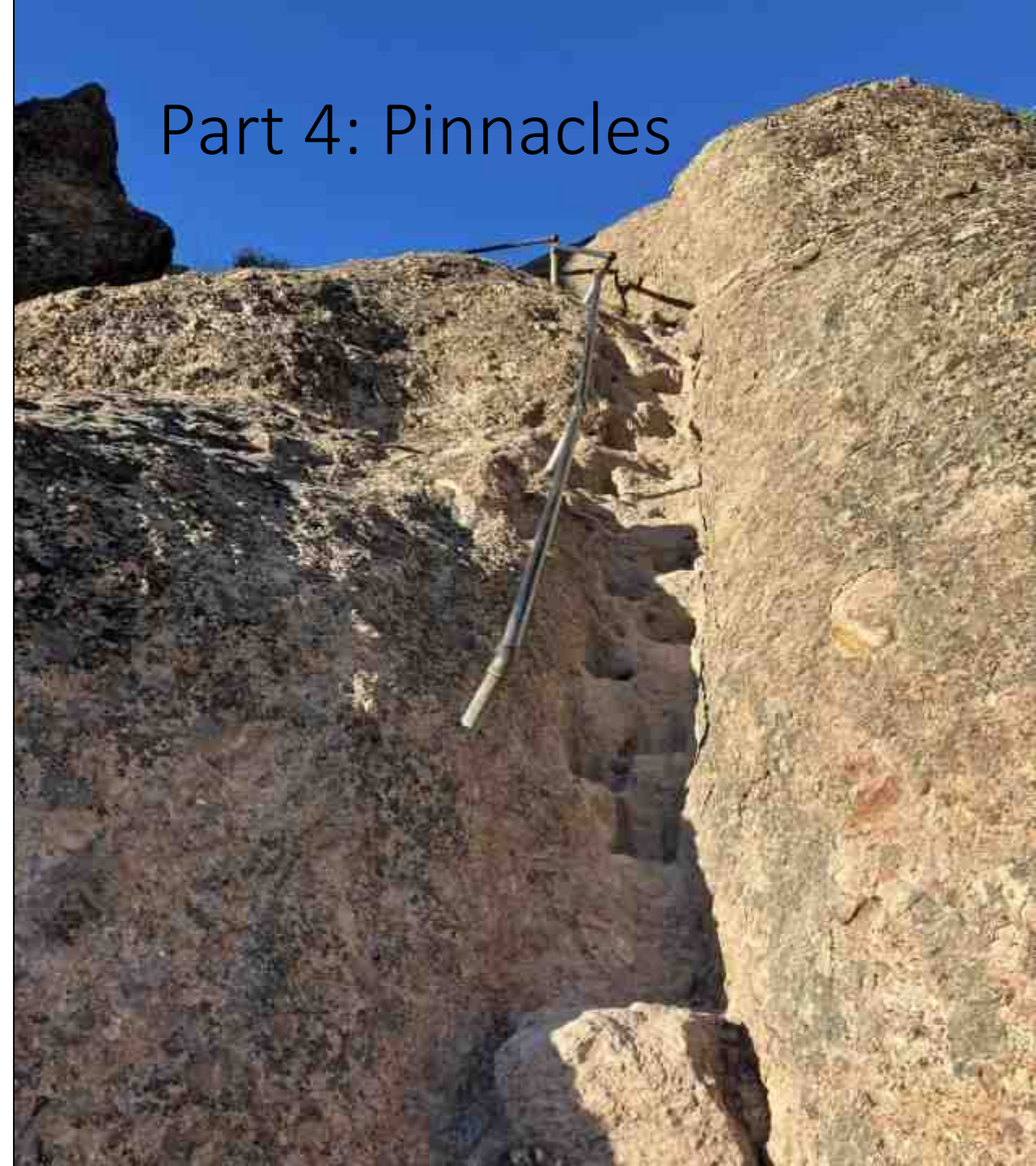


The Kaweah River paralleled the park road as we exited Sequoia.

Next page: Soon after exiting the park, and while taking Route 198 west, Kaweah Lake – a reservoir – was on the northern edge of road. It was a recreation area with a marina and numerous boats.







Part 4: Pinnacles

Arriving and Hiking in the High Peaks

To get to Pinnacles National Park, we left the boundaries of Sequoia by 11 AM and drove west on Route 198 for a few hours and then headed north on Route 25. It was over 90° throughout the drive, which was exhausting, even while in a car. We stopped in a small town called Coalinga for ridiculously expensive gas (my receipt reads \$5.049 a gallon), but found out that there weren't many other gas stations along the way to the park, so it was a good thing we fueled up when we did.

We arrived at the east side of the park at 2:30 PM. It went up to 95 degrees. The campground was just a couple of miles into the East Entrance Road once we were in the park, so we set up at site 6, then I went to the free pool. That was a terrific amenity in the heat. A pool is unique to have within a park, and my guess was it was put there to keep people in the area on hot days like this one. There were many people in the water too, which was surprisingly cool given how warm it was outside. They also had free showers, which I would use later that night after hiking.

After swimming, I took a break under a shaded picnic table by the general store and organized the 113 pictures that I took at Sequoia earlier in the day. It was nice to start fresh at Pinnacles once I cleared the camera's picture count. The general store also had Wi-Fi, which Steve and I both used as there was no cell reception in the area. On the walk from the campsite to the store, I saw a deer walk into the scorching woods. 'Most sane ungulates are bedded in this heat', I thought to myself.

At 5:30 PM, we headed to the far western part of the East Entrance Road to hike. I took some good pictures of a mule deer doe and her two fawns as well as a wild turkey hen and her six small poults. The two species were near each other across the street from the campground. Once at the Bear Gulch, we hiked the Condor Gulch Trail to the High Peaks Trail. Steve was tired from the heat, so he turned around and went back down Condor Gulch, while I continued onto the High Peaks Trail to the west. It was a fantastic trail with 4-5 steep sections that involved using metal railings and steps built into the boulders. I saw ~20 turkey vultures soaring overhead. Some even landed on the spiracle rocks overhead. It was very cool to see them so close.

I came down the High Peaks Trail to the Moses Spring Trail and paralleled the very western park of the park road for 0.3 miles while traveling east back to the Bear Gulch parking area. I arrived back to the car at 7:58 PM, close to dusk. We saw groups of 1 and 4 mule deer on the way back to the camp site. As I made a late dinner, I saw 12 California quail and a raccoon in the campground. The raccoon boldly walked to the trunk of the car before I semi-chased it away. The quail had a familiar, soothing call as they walked by my area.

I finally got to bed at ~11 PM after organizing pictures and taking a shower. It had cooled down nicely by then.

PINNACLES NATIONAL PARK

BALCONIES

HIGH PEAKS

BEAR GULCH

LITTLE PINNACLES

East Entrance

West Entrance

To King City
30 mi
48 km

Chaparral
Parking Area
1401 ft
427 m

Old Pinnacles
Parking Area

Pinnacles
Visitor Center
1000 ft
305 m

Pinnacles
Campground

West Visitor
Contact Station

Bear Gulch

Peaks View
Parking Area

Drivers note:
No roads cross
the park.

146

Alt. Elevation
2657 ft
810 m

HORSE
VALLEY

private property

LOPEZ CANYON

MICHAEL
CANYON

TRAG CANYON

North Wilderness Trail
1.2 mi
1.9 km

North Sky
Quartz Creek

Old Peak
Quartz Creek
1.2 mi
1.9 km

William Spring

Old Pinnacles Trail

Balconies
Cliffs Trail
2.2 mi
3.5 km

Balconies
Cave Trail

High Peaks
Trail

Blue Oak
Trail

Tunnel
Trail

Condor Gulch
Trail

Sycamore
Trail

Juniper
Canyon Trail

High Peaks Trail
Quartz and Natural sections

Scout Peak
2601 ft
794 m

High Peaks
Trail

Mass Spring
Raiding Area

Moses Spring
Trail

Rim Trail

Bear Gulch
Cave Trail

Bear Gulch
Reservoir

Old Peak Trail

South Wilderness Trail

Bears
Burroughs Road

Pinnacles
Pebbles

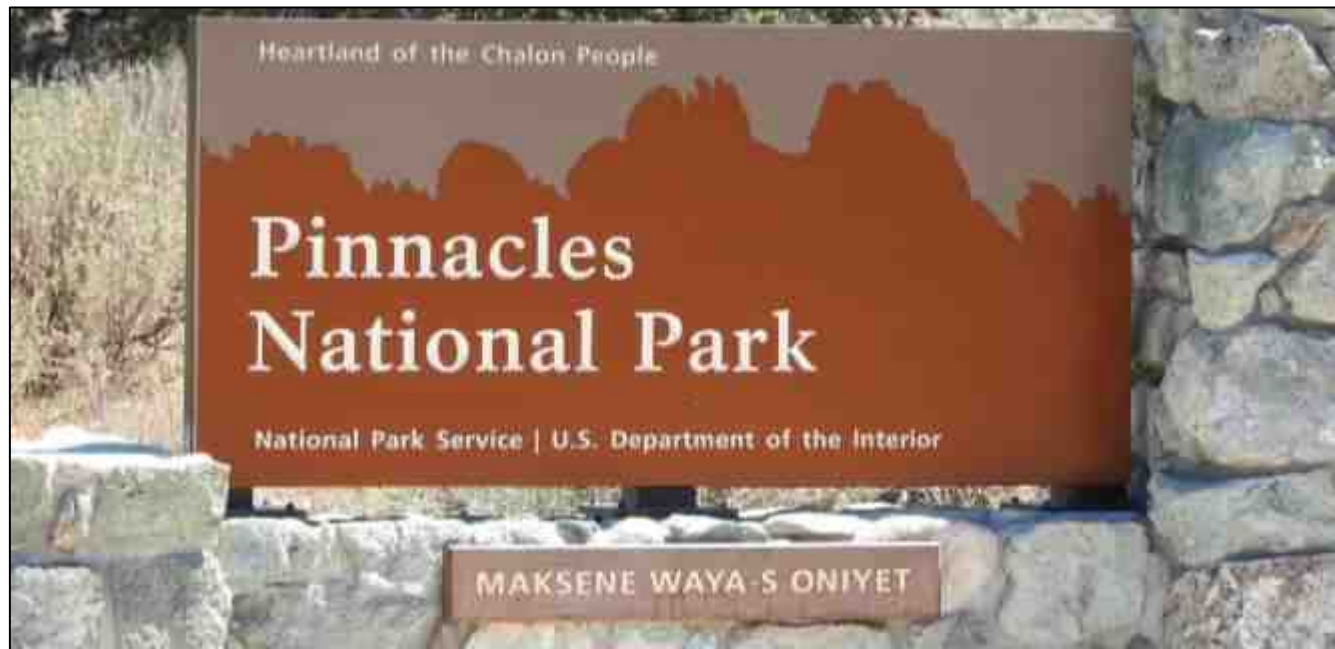
Bear Valley



Oil rigs in the golden grasses on the drive to Pinnacles.



This and next page: Golden grasses and spread-out trees dominated the three hour drive to Pinnacles National Park. This is classic chaparral, Mediterranean habitat.





East Entrance Station.



Mule deer doe and two fawns (left) and a wide view of the wild turkey family in the foreground and deer (see arrow) in the background (right).





The wild turkey poult is in front of the hen in the tall grass (top left) and then are more visible in shorter grass (bottom left).







Mule deer doe and two fawns.





The park was dominated by chaparral vegetation, including on the Condor Gulch Trail (also see next page).

Turkey vulture.

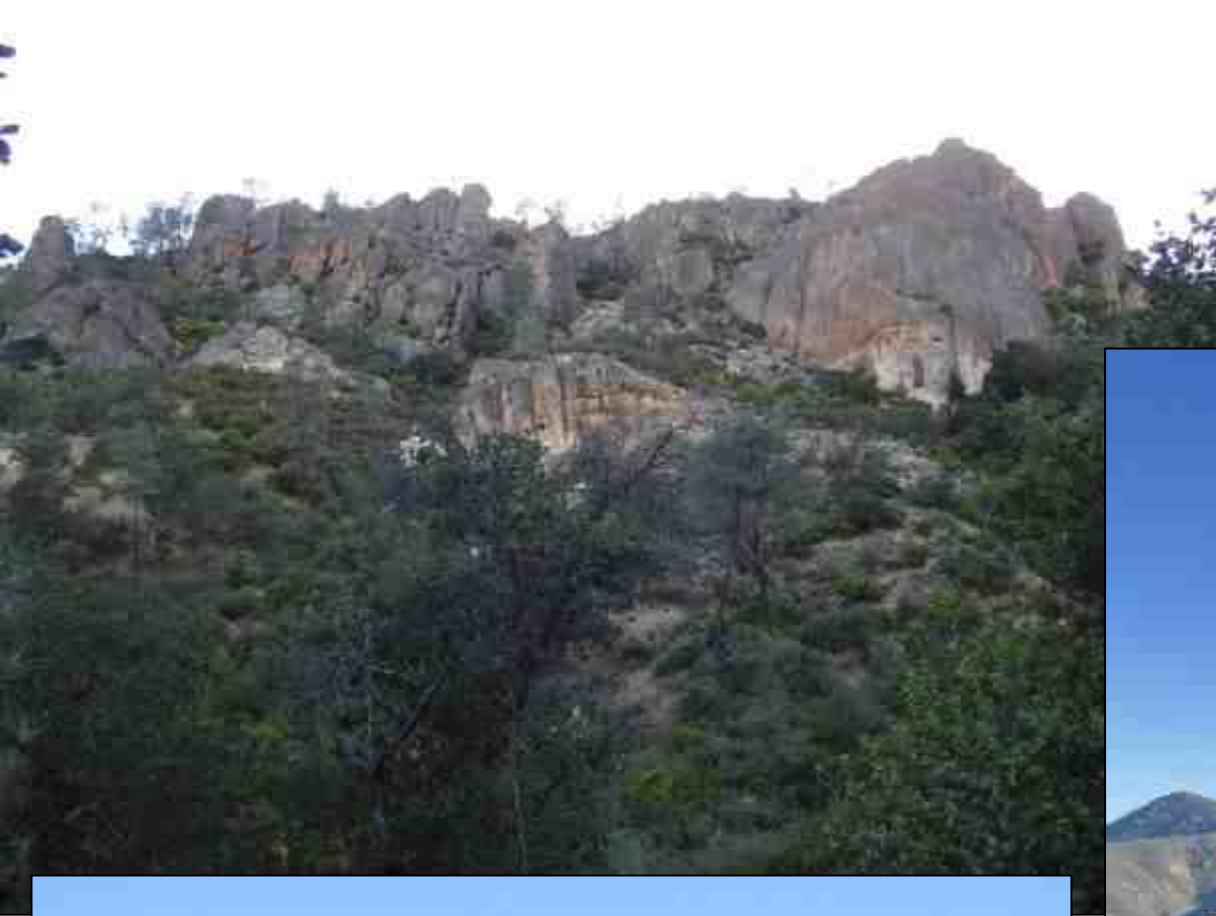


and then a





Hiking up to the jagged rocks (i.e., 'pinnacles') at the top of Condor Gulch. The [park's namesakes](#) are the [eroded](#) leftovers of the western half of an extinct [volcano](#) that has moved 200 miles (320 km) from its original location on the [San Andreas Fault](#), embedded in a portion of the California [Pacific Coast Ranges](#).



Pinnacles in Pinnacles National Park!

Next three pages: The view from atop the Condor Gulch Trail with most of the land being within the Hain Wilderness.



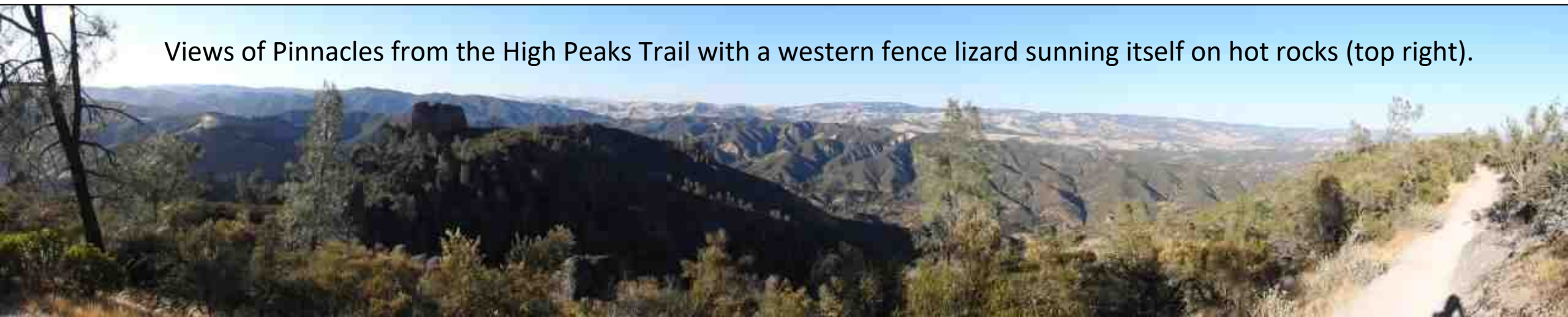


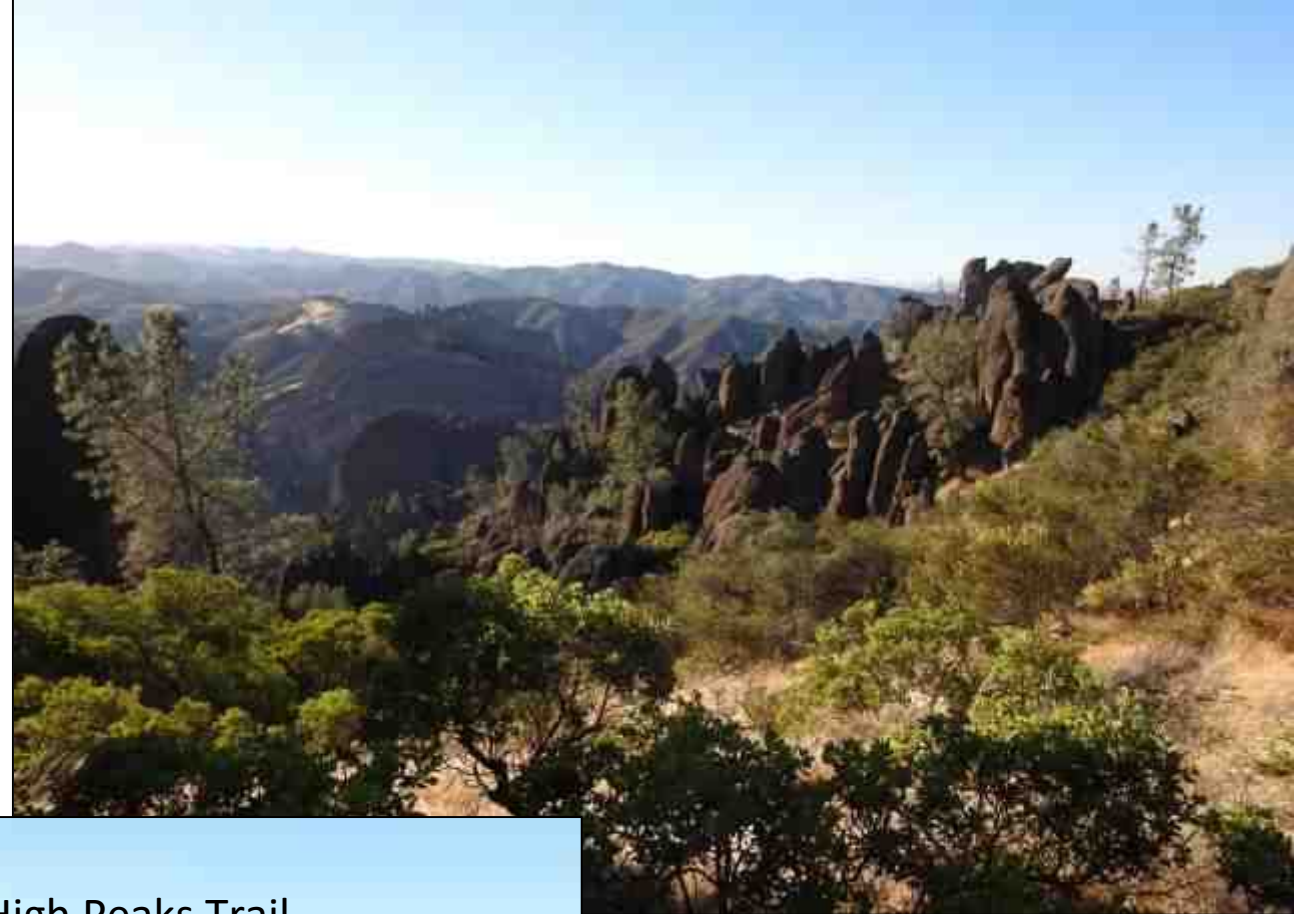
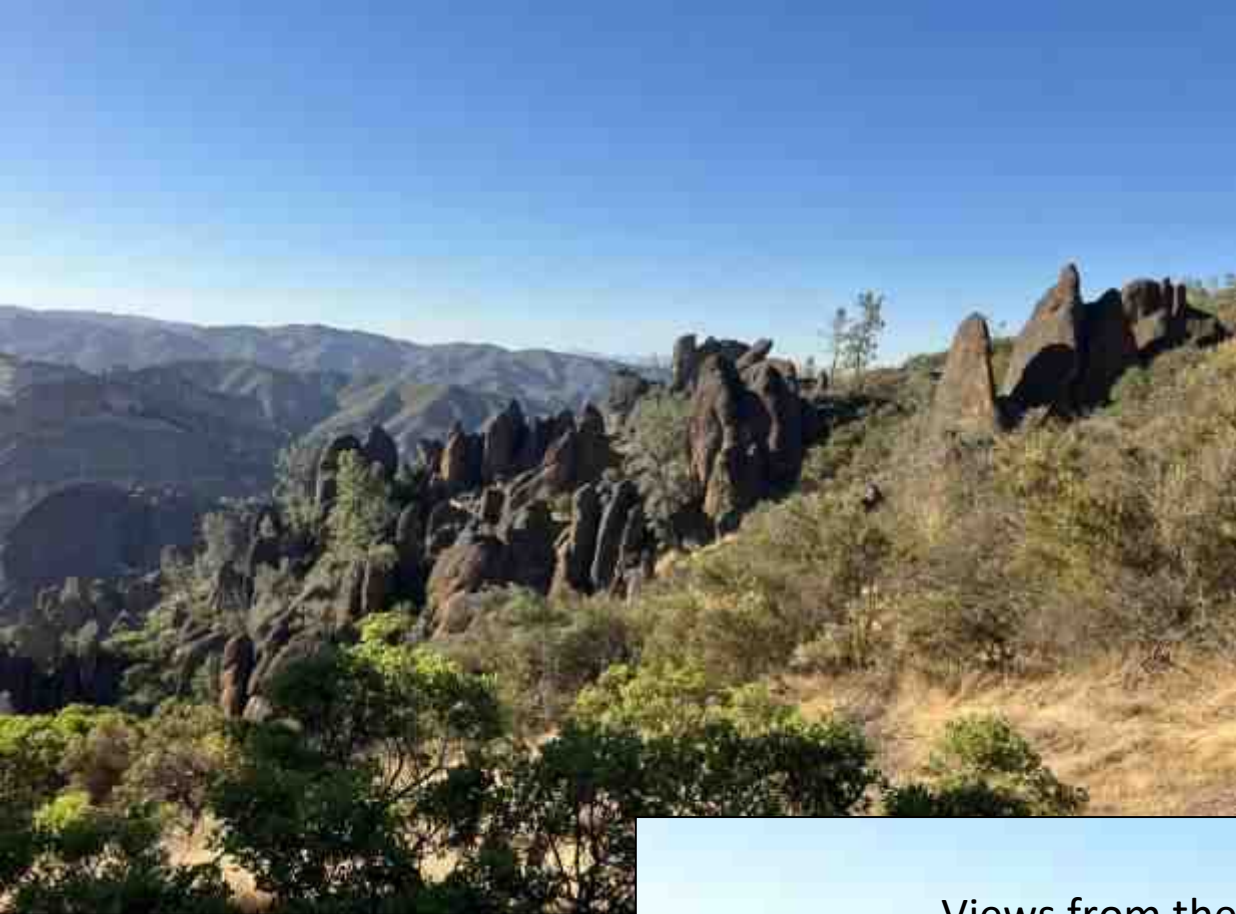




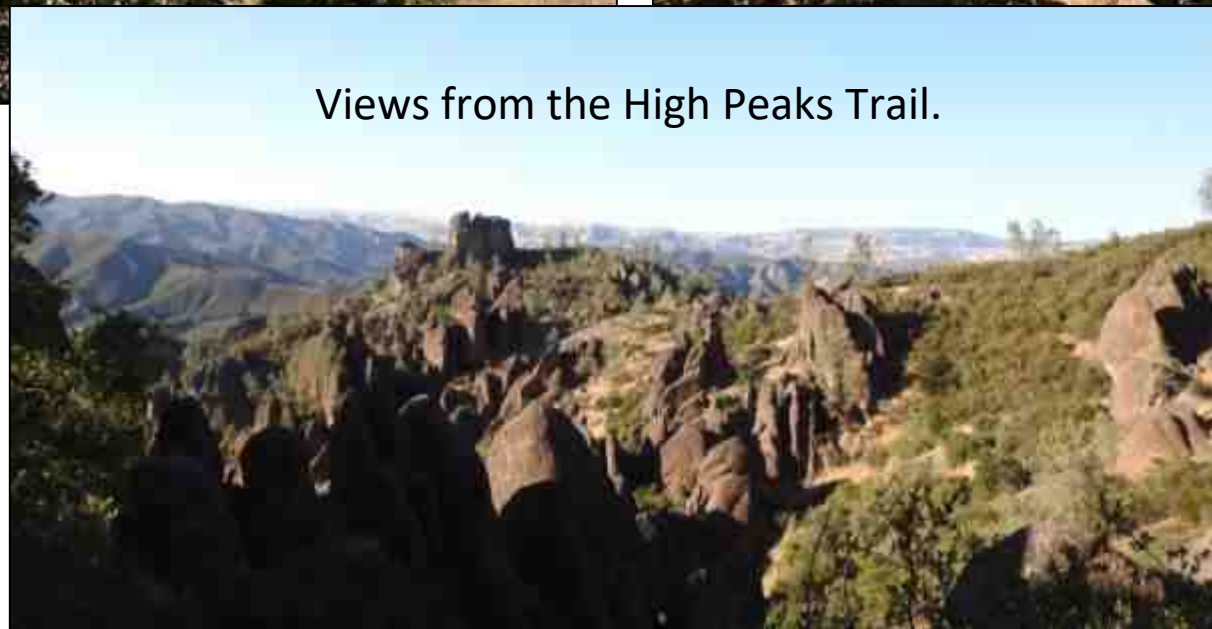


Views of Pinnacles from the High Peaks Trail with a western fence lizard sunning itself on hot rocks (top right).





Views from the High Peaks Trail.







Perhaps not surprising given the pinnacles in the immediate area, this stretch of trail was very rocky, with many boulders (right) and rock walls on or next to the trail (left).





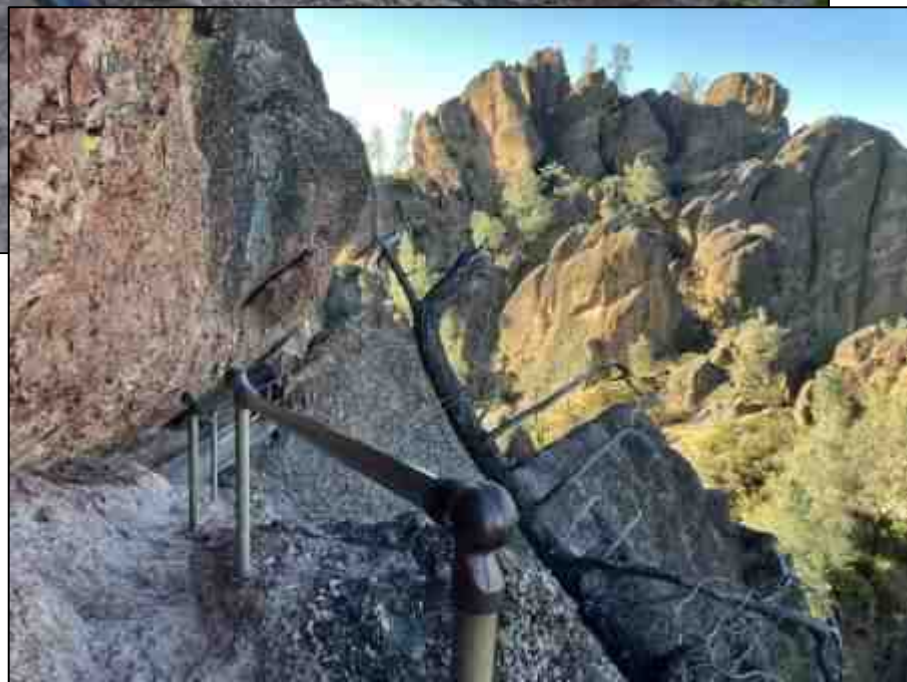
A kettle of turkey vultures riding the warming air currents in upward spirals (top left and right), amid the high pinnacles (bottom left).





The High Peaks Trail (left) became so steep that steps in the rock were created, and railings were installed on the trail (right; and see next two pages). I was quite impressed with the design and construction of this trail.



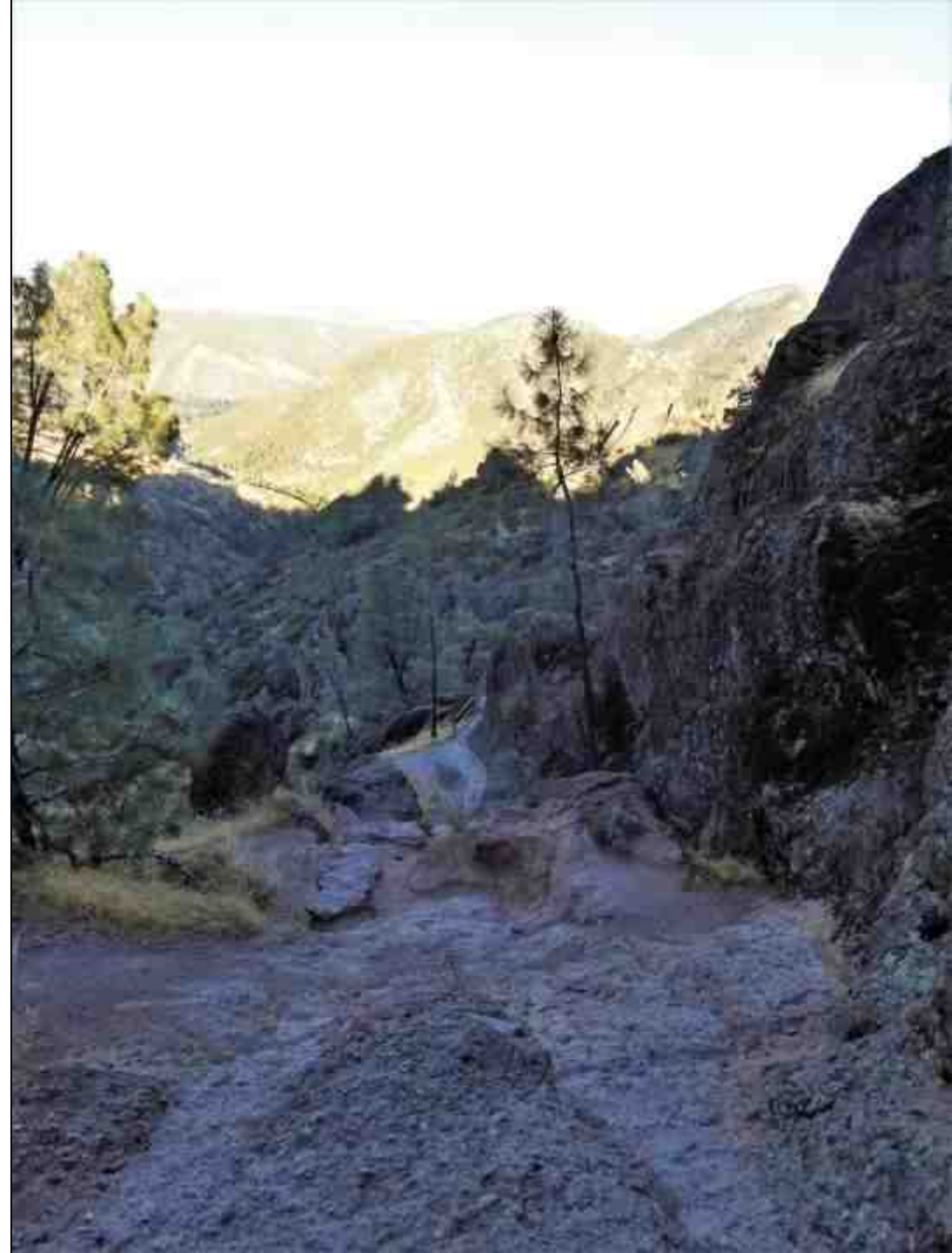




At dusk, some of the soaring vultures (left) eventually perched on rocks (top right) and in trees (see next page) in the pinnacles surrounding the High Peaks Trail (bottom right), which are relatively safe places for the birds to spend the night.

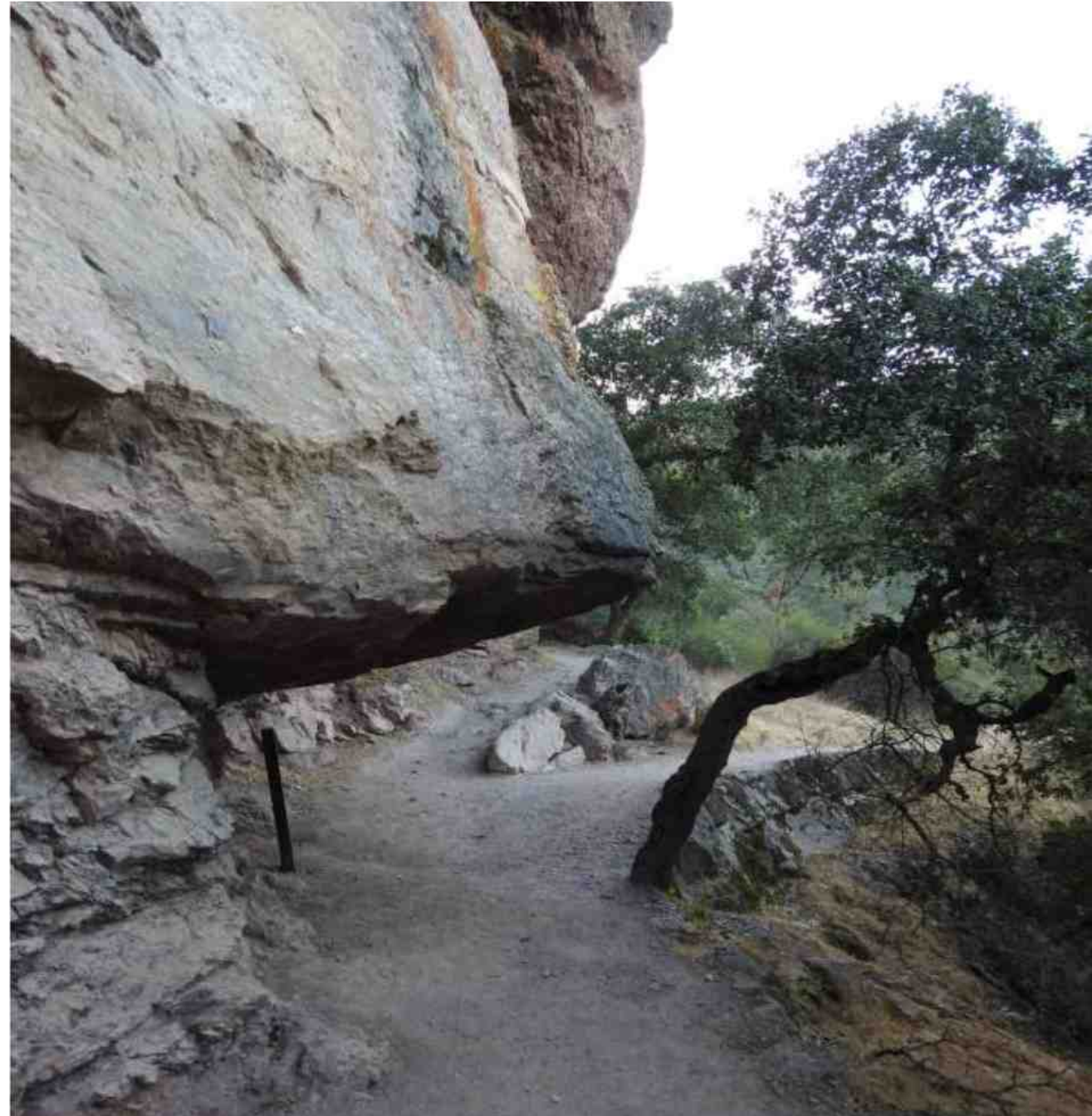






This and the next page nicely illustrates just how steep the area is.





I saw some cool rock structures on the descent of the High Peaks Trail, including a tunnel (left) and rock overhang (right).



As indicated by the shadows, dusk was fast approaching as I was descending the High Peaks Trail and finishing the hike (also see next page).



Potential cougar/mountain lion scat on the trail.



The different rock formations fascinated me (also see the left image on the next page).





California quail at the
campground at last light (also see
top left of next page).



Raccoon visiting our camp site at last light.



A Pinnacle Hike with Caves and Condors

It got surprisingly chilly overnight with temperatures dipping to 44-45 degrees to start June 29th, 2024. As I woke up, for some reason the first thing I thought of was that must be why the water in the pool was so chilly. Yes, the mind works in mysterious ways!

I walked to the area of the General Store and used Wi-Fi to check my email and Facebook messages. On the walk back, I saw a bunch more quail by the camp site, as well as two desert cottontails. I also saw a mule deer doe when I went to obtain a Wi-Fi signal. It was a lazy start for both of us, relatively speaking, compared to the rest of the trip; we didn't depart until 6:00.

We first drove to the Bear Gulch area from the previous night just to swing around looking for wildlife. As we approached the parking lot area, there was a downed oak tree. It covered the road, with a mule deer doe right there. She seemed to be inspecting the leaves, and was possibly eating them, but bolted when our car pulled up. The tree was a surprise given that we were there only about 10 hour beforehand, and all was fine when we drove back to the campground.

The downed tree would prevent cars from using the Bear Gulch area to start their hikes. Fortunately for us, we had planned all along to park at the Old Pinnacles area, which is the other fork off the East Entrance Road. On our way there, we briefly saw another deer but didn't stop for it given that we had seen plenty of 'mulies' all trip. In fact, it was essentially the only large animals I had seen, except for the bear at the tent at Sequoia and coyote on the way to Kings Canyon.

It was still cold, under 50 degrees, when we parked at Old Pinnacles Parking Area. I boiled water for breakfast, having my usual oatmeal, banana, and peanut butter scoop, along with a glass of hot chocolate. We both usually eat later in the morning, but given that we would be hiking all day, we needed calories in our system, so opted to eat before the hike. I also packed and brought along snacks and a sandwich for the hike, which we started at 6:45 AM.

I wore a light sweatshirt on the hike all the way to the Chaparral Parking Area on the West Entrance Road (which we never actually drove to during the trip, but were told it was about a two hour drive to get there). Until the sun came out, it was chilly. Indeed, there was a crazy difference in temperature from the evening through mid-morning compared to the heat of the day. We took the Old Pinnacles Trail to the Balconies Cave Trail to the Balconies Trail to get to the Chaparral Lot. Early in the hike, I got some great images of a mule deer doe and her fawn. There was also good scenery and lots of quail on the route. They can definitely get your heart beating fast if you don't see them in advance and they quickly flush in front of you.



California quail right by the campground.







Dawn at 'Peaks View' parking area.



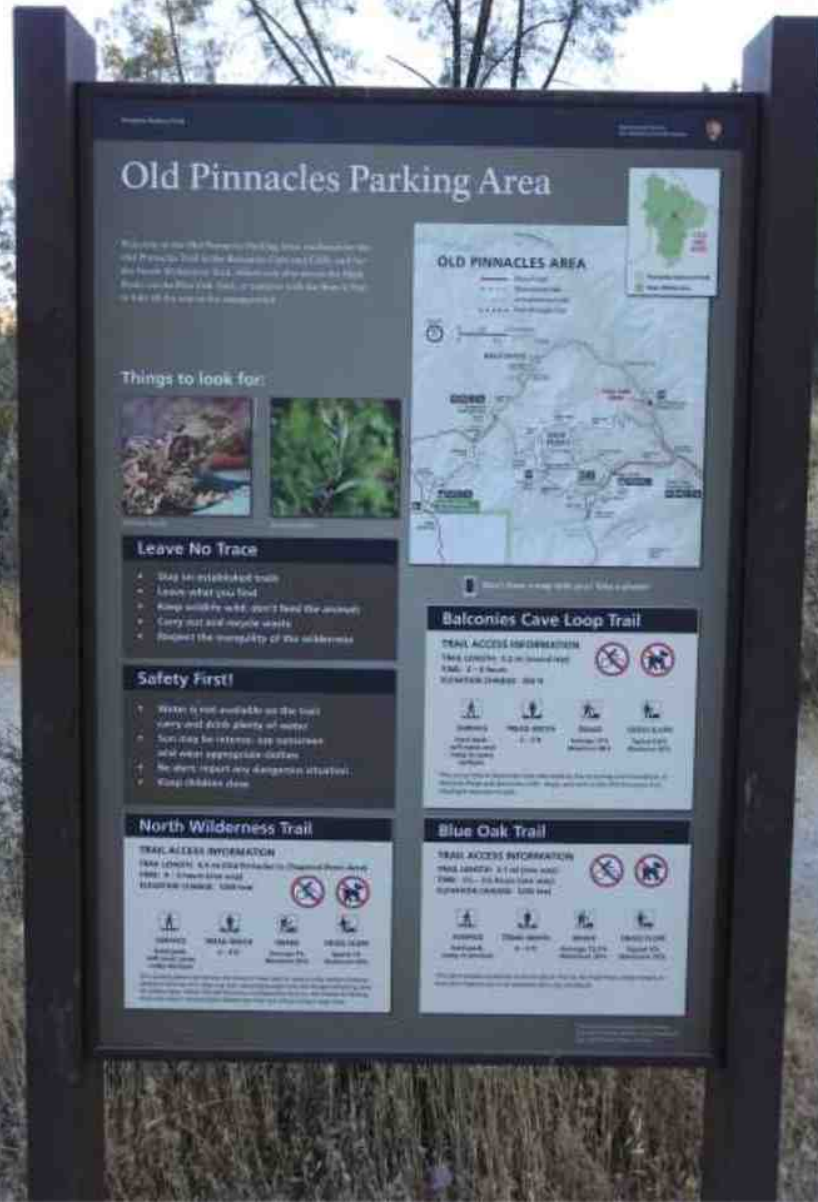
Next page: Downed tree near Bear Gulch. A mule deer doe was right in front of the tree, but ran off to the right (north) before I could obtain an image of her.



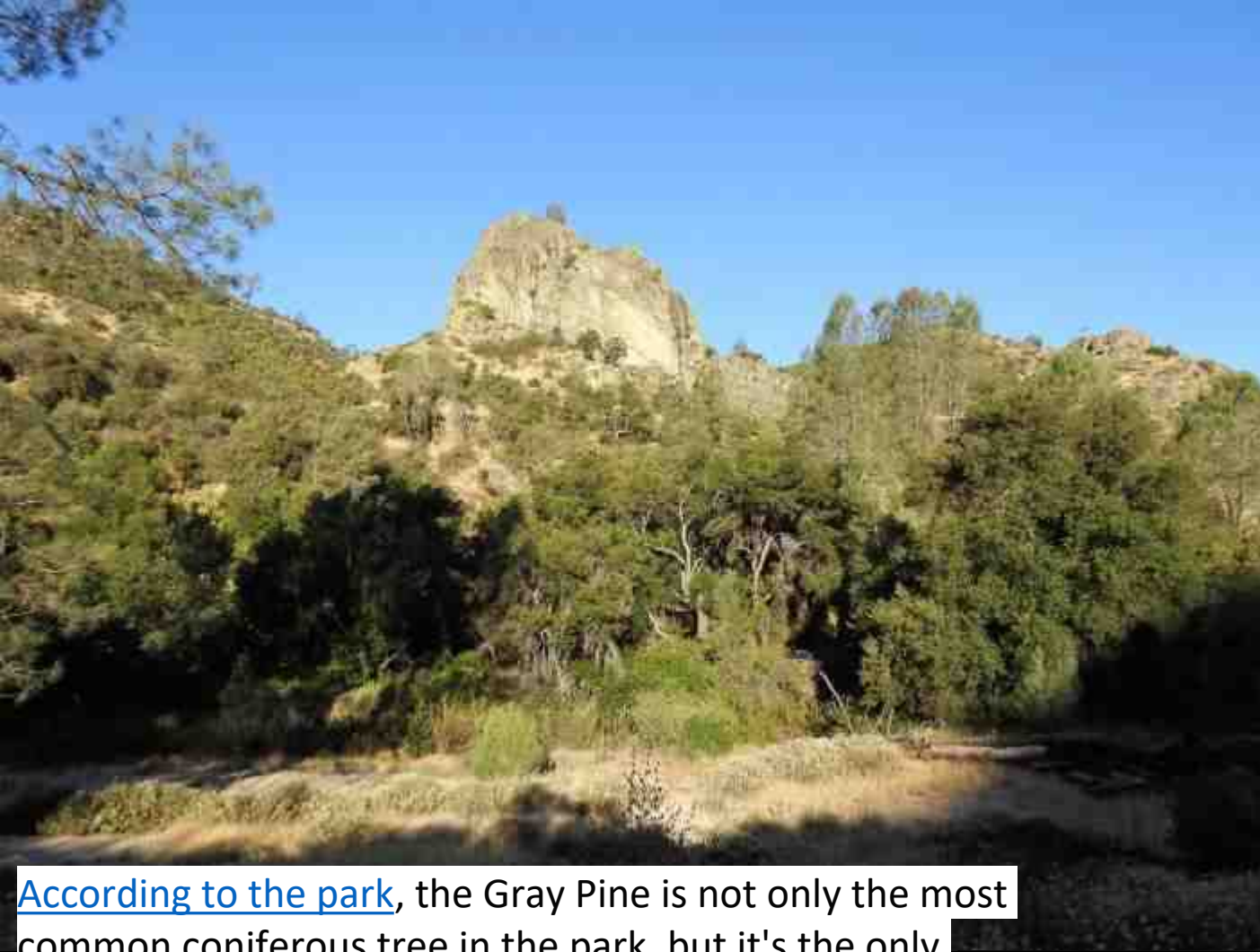


Desert cottontail.

This chaparral habitat was prevalent for most of the hike.



Huge pinecones from the gray pine, along with more scenery.



[According to the park](#), the Gray Pine is not only the most common coniferous tree in the park, but it's the only cone-bearing tree. Despite its slender trunk, Gray Pines produce spiny, sturdy pinecones that can grow shockingly large. The seeds from these pinecones were a staple food in the diets of the Chalone Native Americans. The trees also have relatively soft wood that makes them a favorite for the acorn-storing Acorn Woodpecker.





Good views as I hiked through a dense oak thicket on the Old Pinnacles Trail, as well as a meadow (bottom left) where I saw the two deer on the next three pages.



Mule deer doe and fawn.









Beautiful, relatively lush chaparral vegetation (left), along with a dried up river bed (bottom right) that had white algae present (bottom left).





Probable coyote scat (top left) with some cool rock scenes in the other two photographs. Canid scat is typically tapered, while cat scat is often unsegmented with blunt ends.



My favorite part of the first leg of this hike, which was a little over three miles from lot to lot, was the Balconies Cave Trail about two miles in. It was fantastic as it involved hiking through actual caves. I even needed to use a light in two places. It was awesome to do it as part of a hike on one's own, compared to the guided cave tour from earlier in the trip.

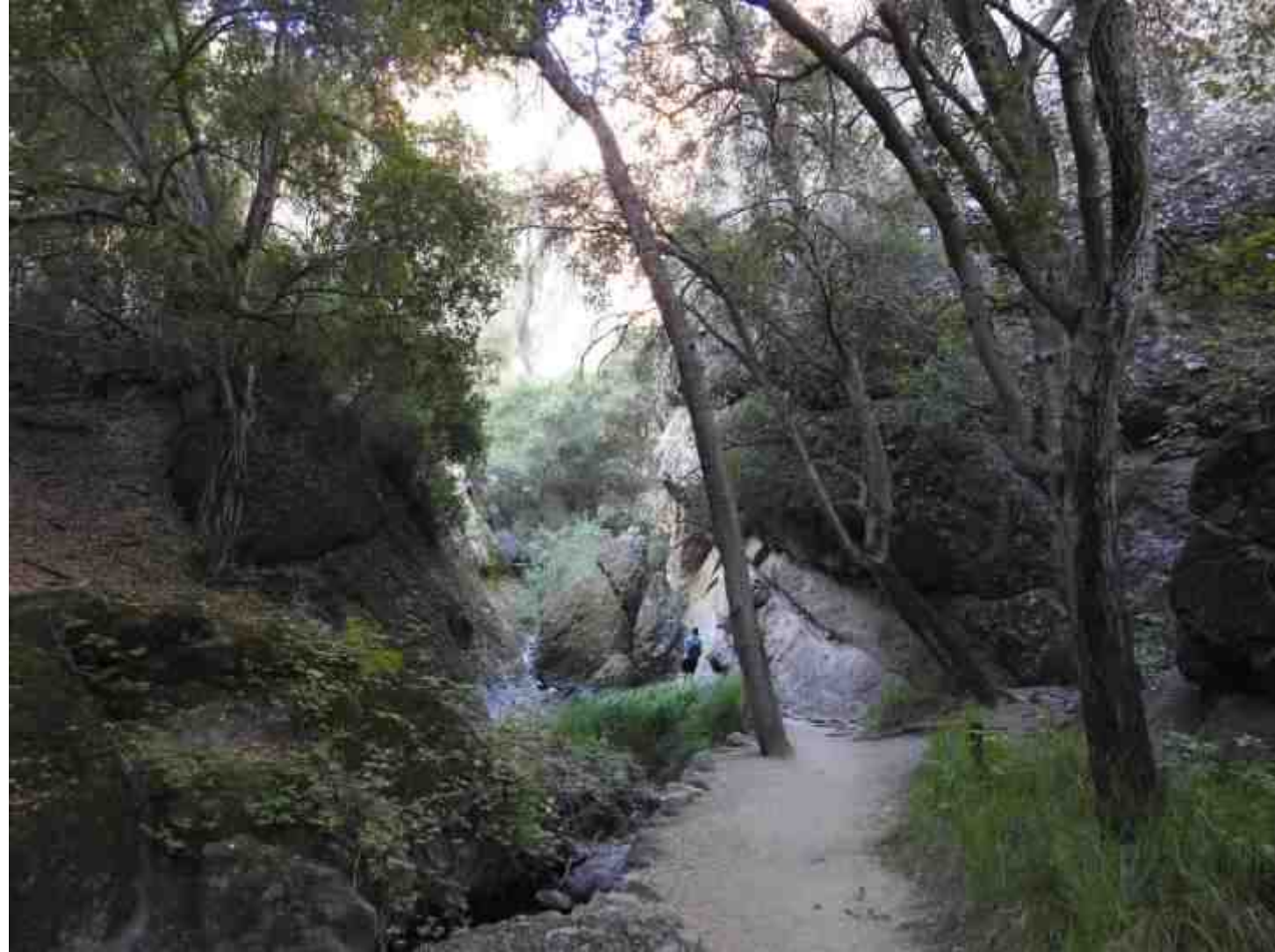
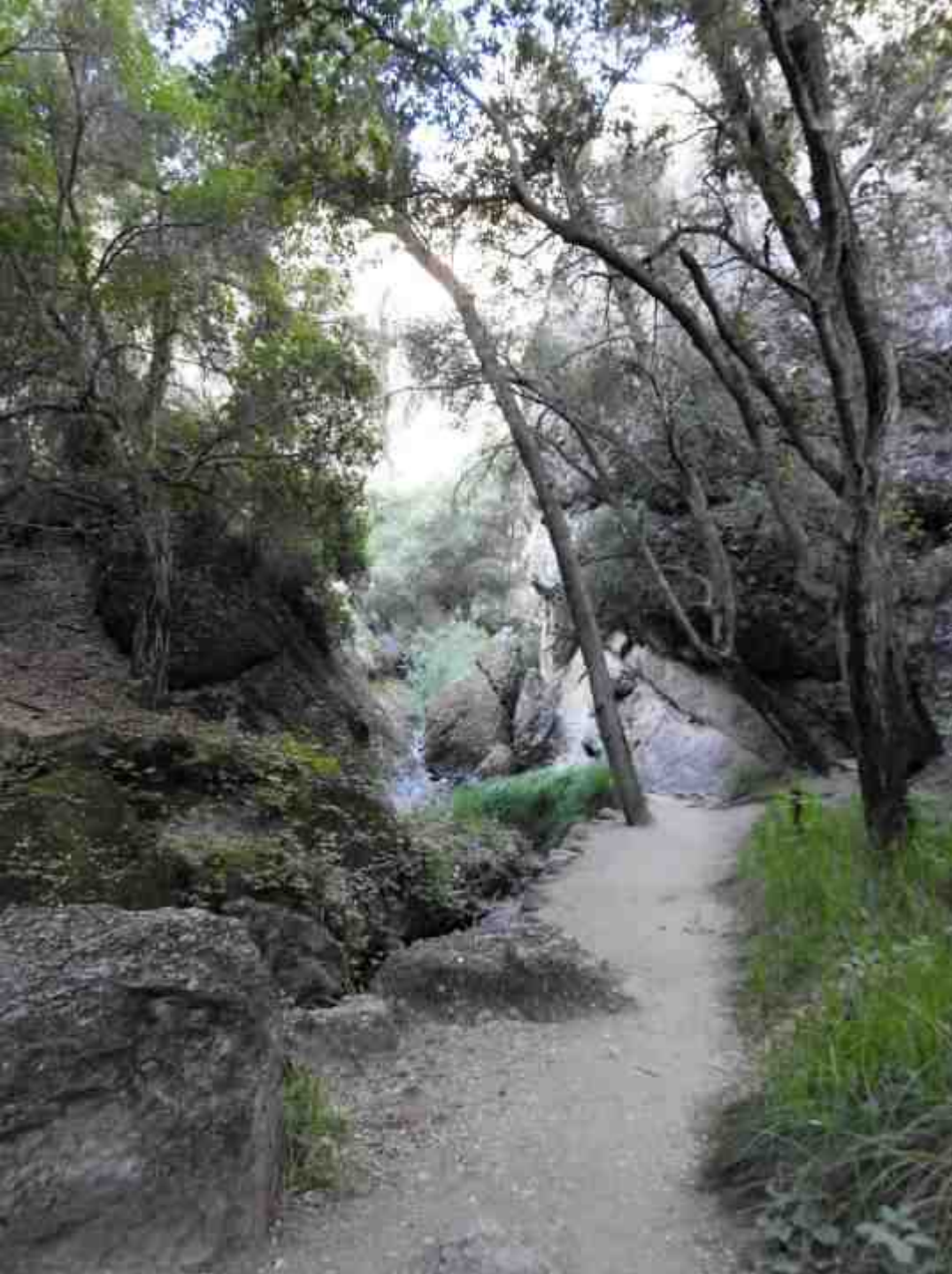
Once we reached the Chaparral Parking Area, Steve and I took a 15 minute break. I had a few snacks in the shade, then used the bathroom and filled up my water bottles after chugging one of them. It was a nice little area available to folks before they embarked on a hike. After resting, we picked up the Juniper Canyon Trail from the lot and hiked in a general eastward direction. I spotted a deer fawn in the thick brush. It was a good-sized fawn for still being in June, and it was alone. Steve completely missed it, as he was slightly behind me.

After 1.2 miles, we took the Tunnel Trail in some fairly steep country. This stretch had a neat human-made tunnel through the rock. In 0.6 miles, that brought us to the High Peaks Trail. At the end of the Tunnel Trail, I remember taking a right onto High Peaks not even thinking that anything was wrong. We went over the 4-5 steep sections with steps and railings which Steve experienced for the first time. However, after going about three-quarters of a mile, Steve looked at his Apple watch and said he thought we were going the wrong way. I was incredulous as I assumed we were on the right path, especially since I had done the trail the previous evening, barely 12 hours ago.

However, after looking at the map in detail, I saw that he was correct. We were heading toward Bear Gulch where the downed tree was. We were parked at the Old Pinnacles Parking Area and had to go the other way. Realizing our mistake, we backtracked for about 15 minutes. In some amazing fortune, when we were on the steep and narrow sections going back to head in the other direction, I noticed a condor in the sky. They are huge birds with 9-10 foot wingspans. In most areas, turkey vultures are big birds with their 5-6 foot wingspans. Compared to condors however, they look like medium-sized animals.

There were quite a few people up there and a bunch of us watched the condor riding the thermals in the sky. It was near turkey vultures and eventually perched on a rock ledge. I took as many pictures as I could and when I reviewed them back at the campground later that day, I saw that I actually photographed two condors. One had a 'Red #27' tag under both wings, and [I discovered](#) that it was a female labeled 1127. She was born April 1, 2022, so was a little over two years old at the time. The other bird had 'Green 26' tags both on top of and underneath its wings. This was another female but born earlier, on March 8, 2014, so she was over 10 years old. That condor was [nicknamed Little Stinker](#).

Some stunning oaks along the Balconies Cave Trail before reaching the cave system.

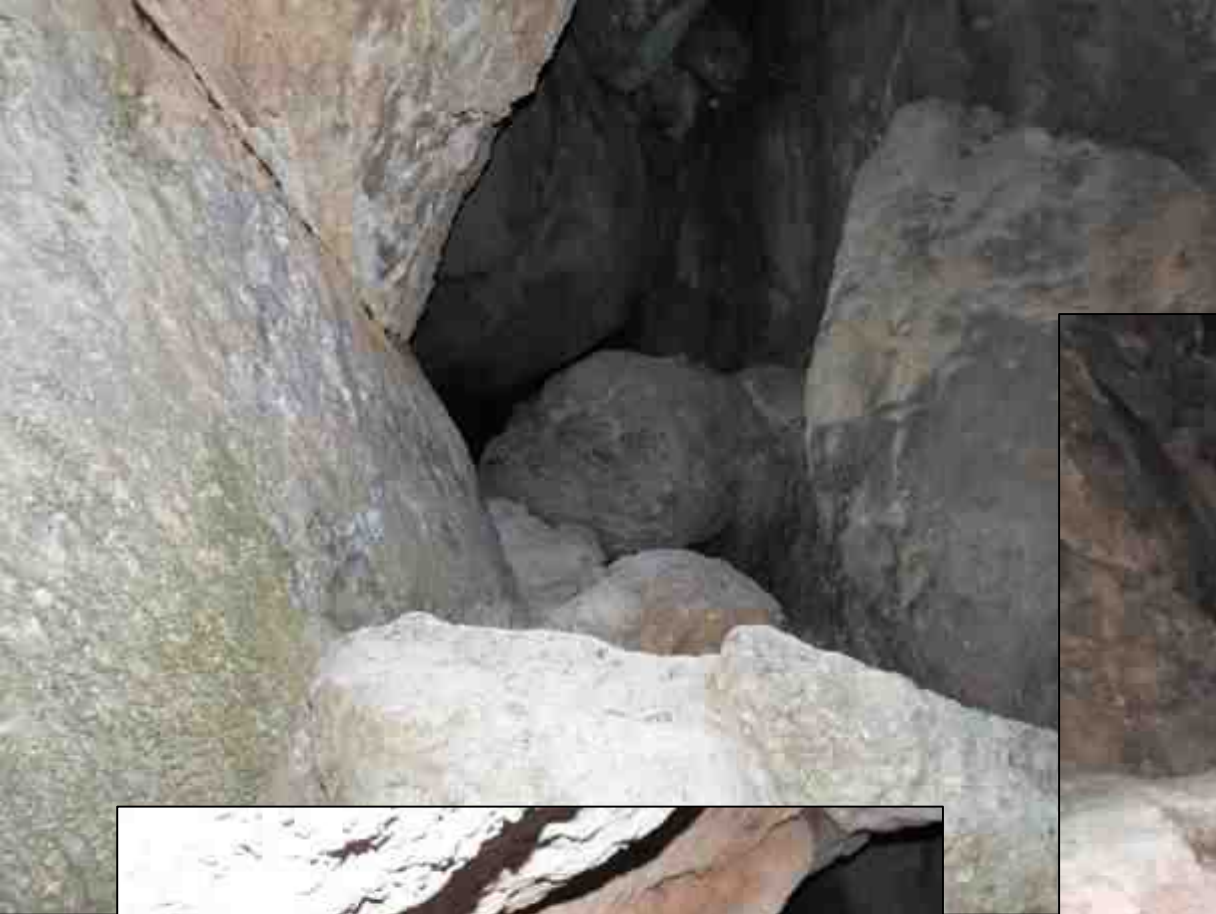




Approaching the caves. The door (bottom right) was open but could be shut and locked if the park service needed to keep people out of there.









Steve using his headlamp in a dark section of the cave (bottom right).

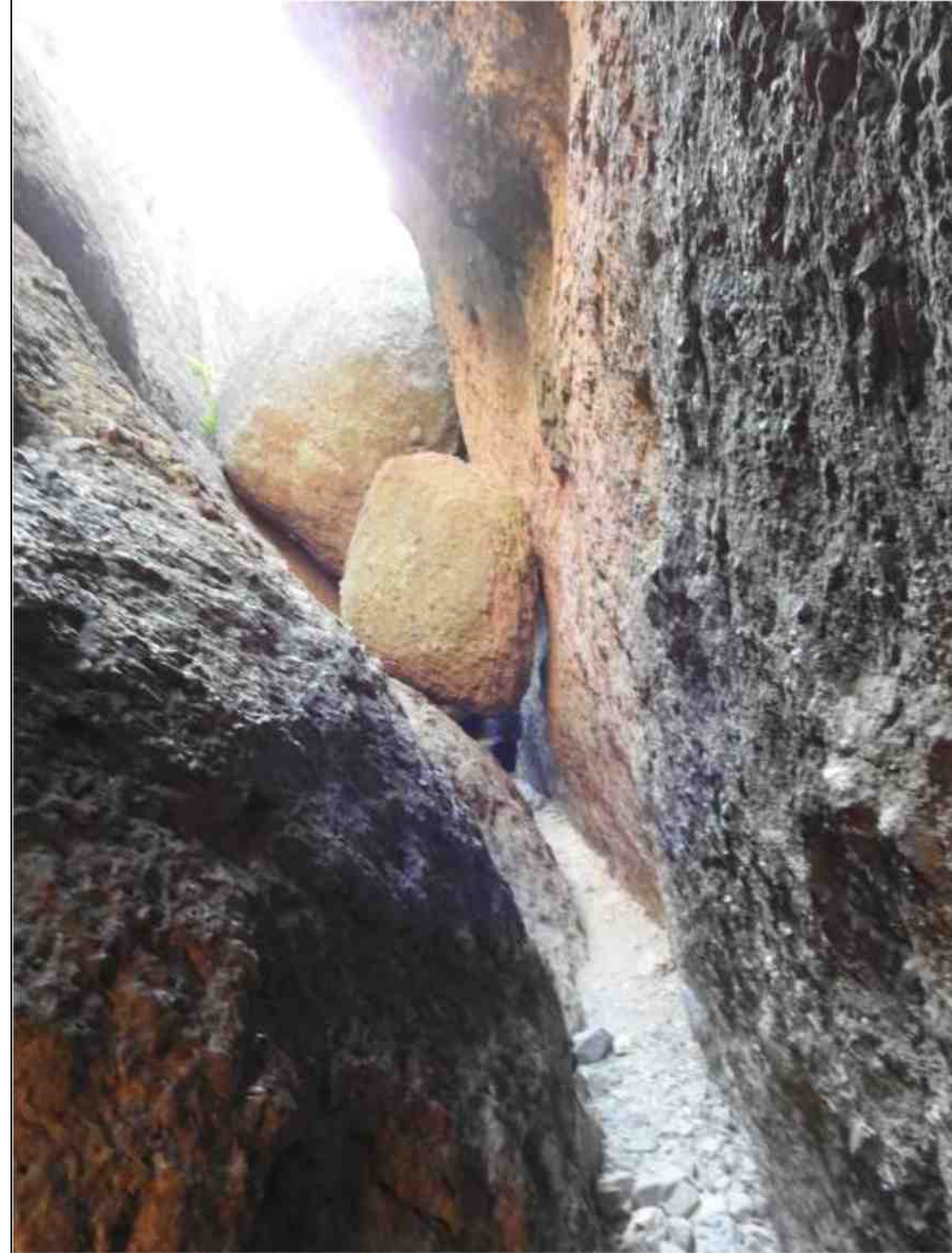


There were lots of big boulders and other rock structures, which created the air pockets to form the cave system.





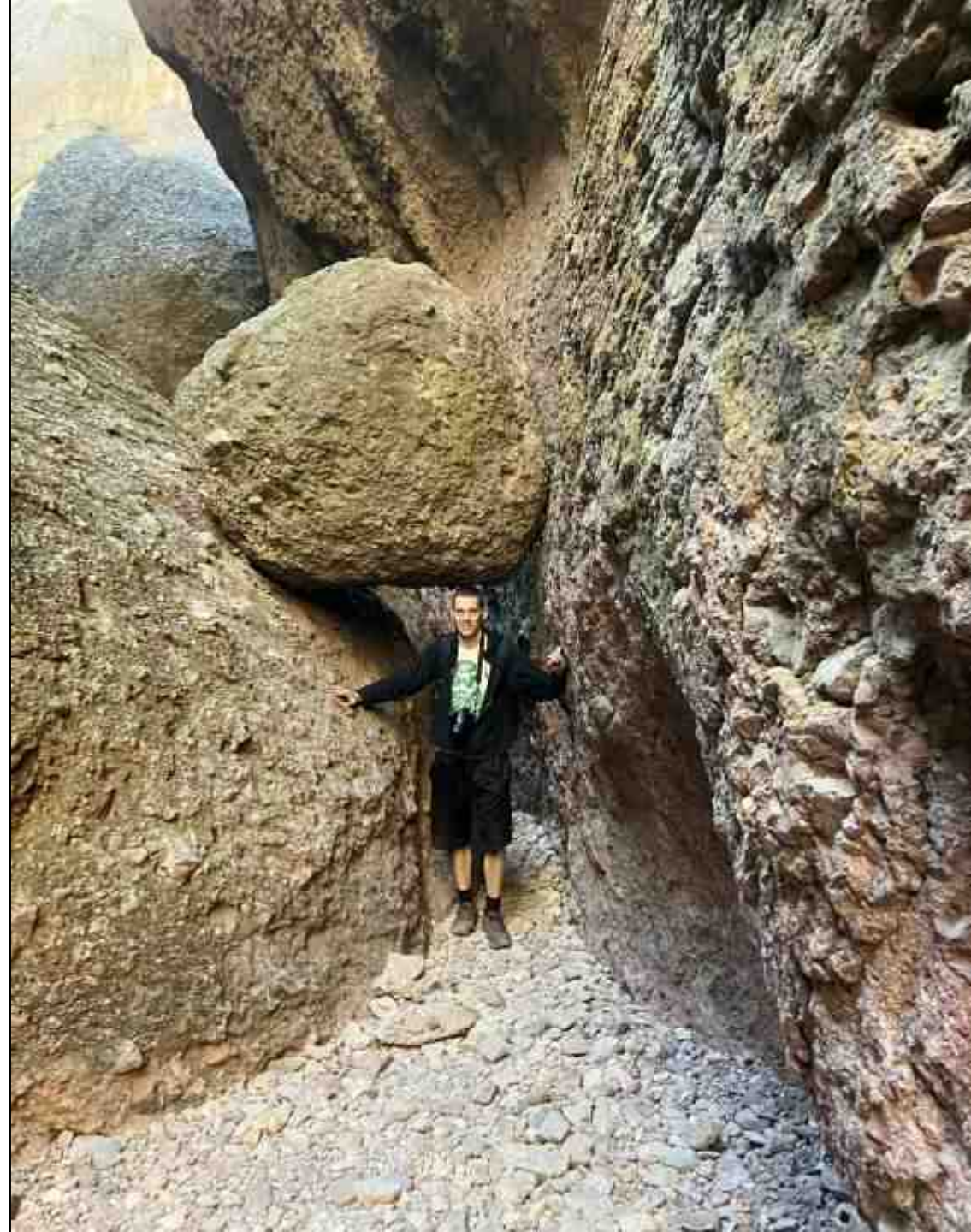
A section of the cave without me using a flash showing how dark part of it was (left), although it was more common for most of it to have some natural light seeping in (right and next page).

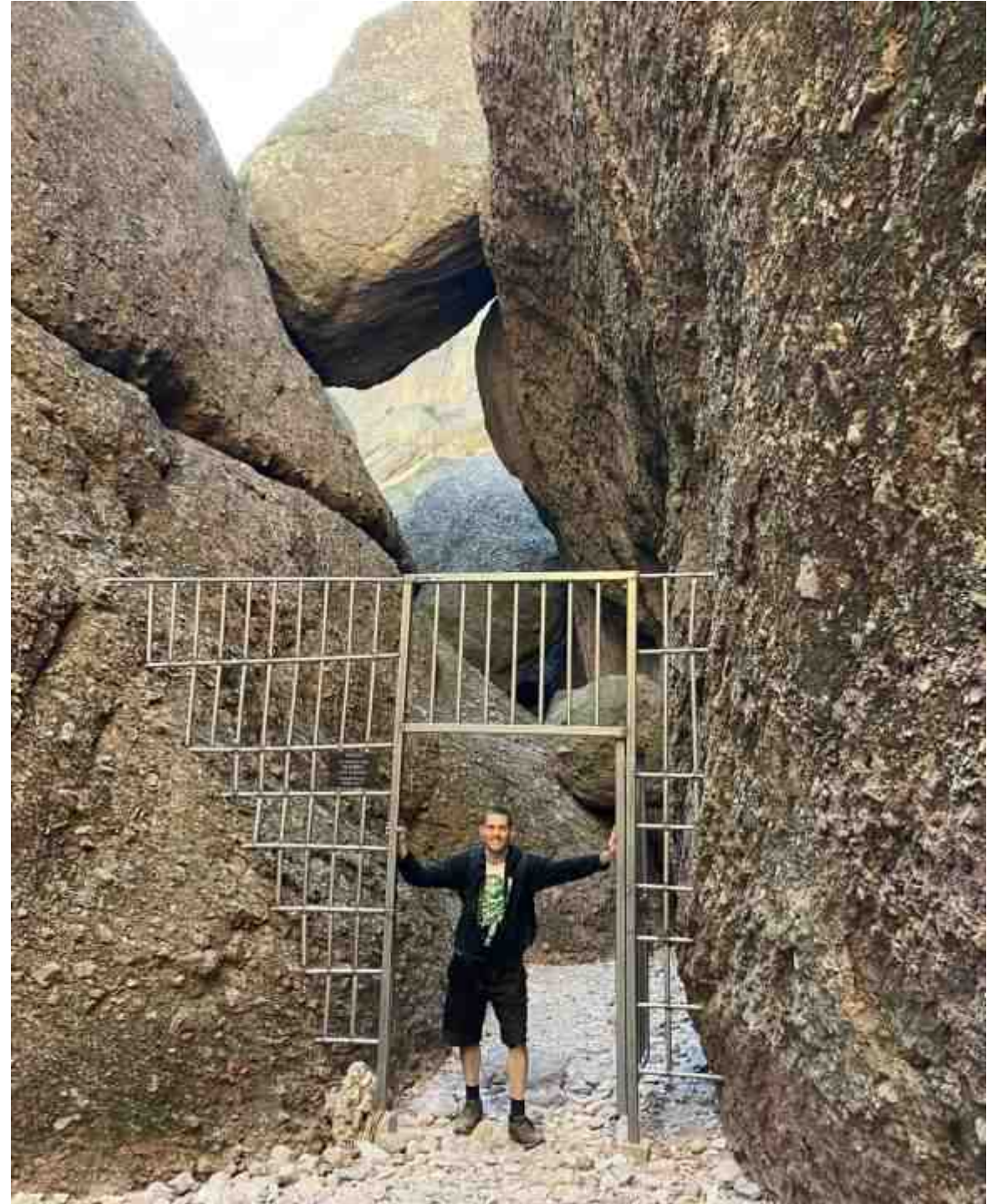


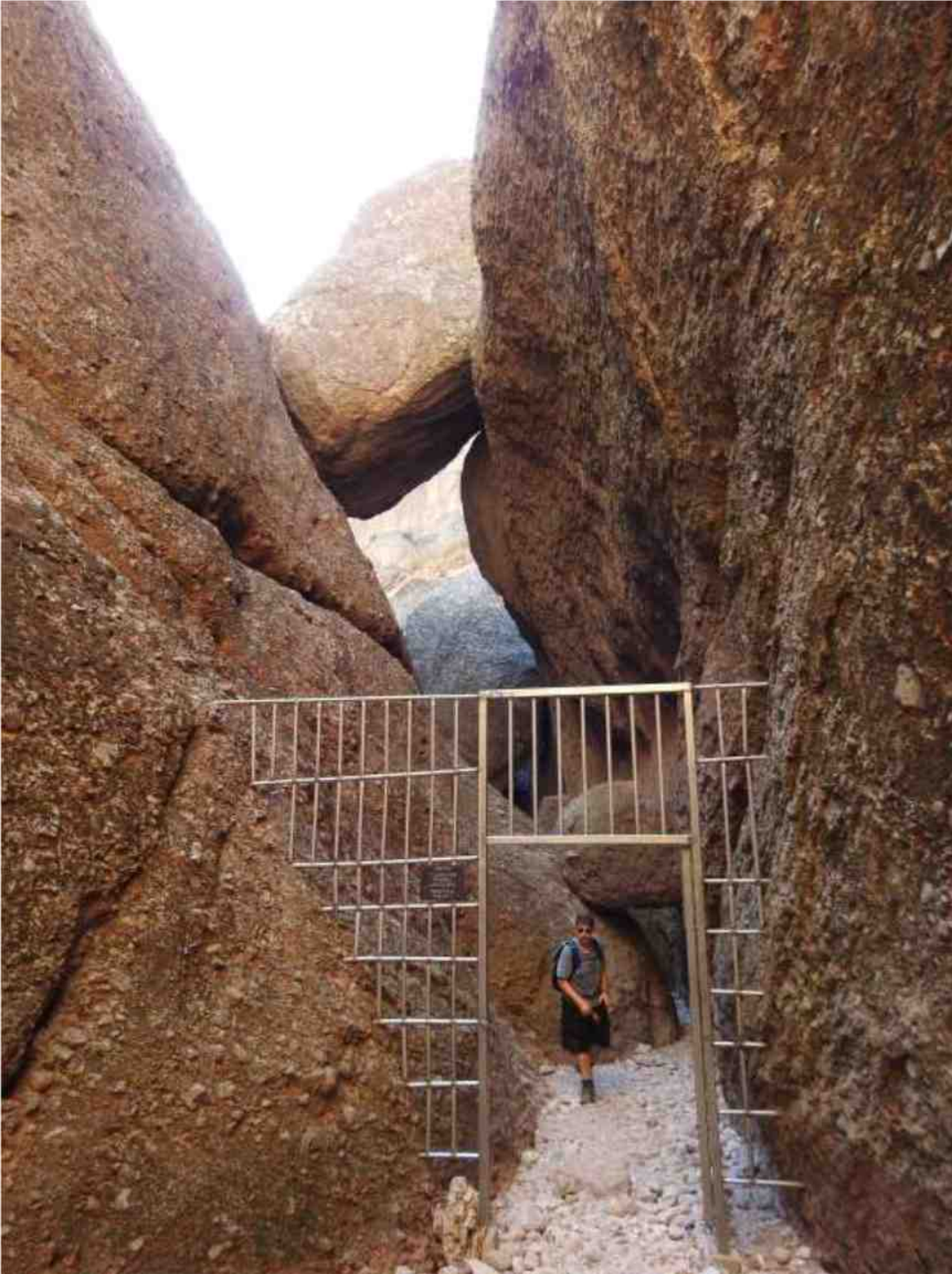




This and next page: Me exiting the cave on the Balcony Caves Trail.

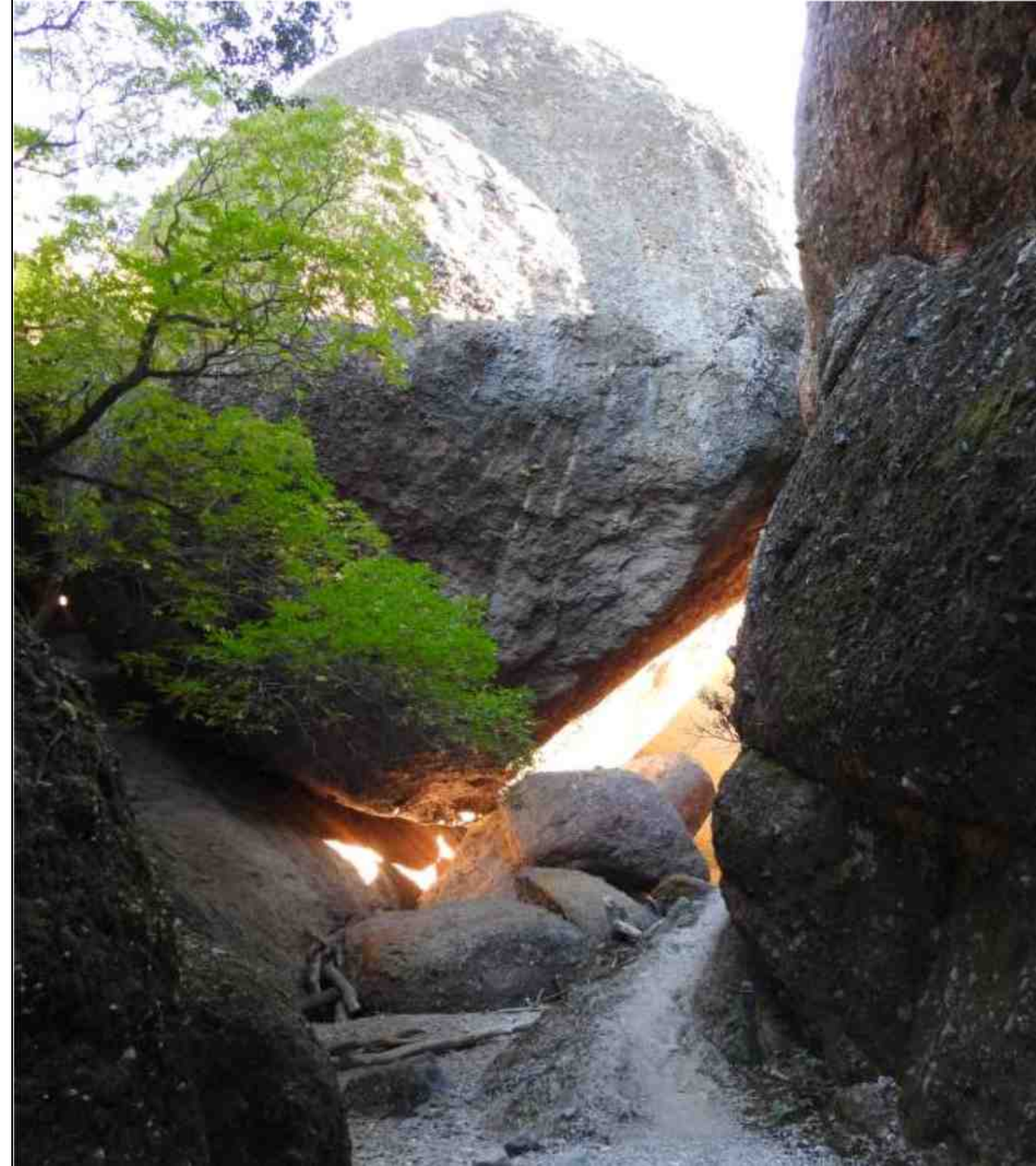






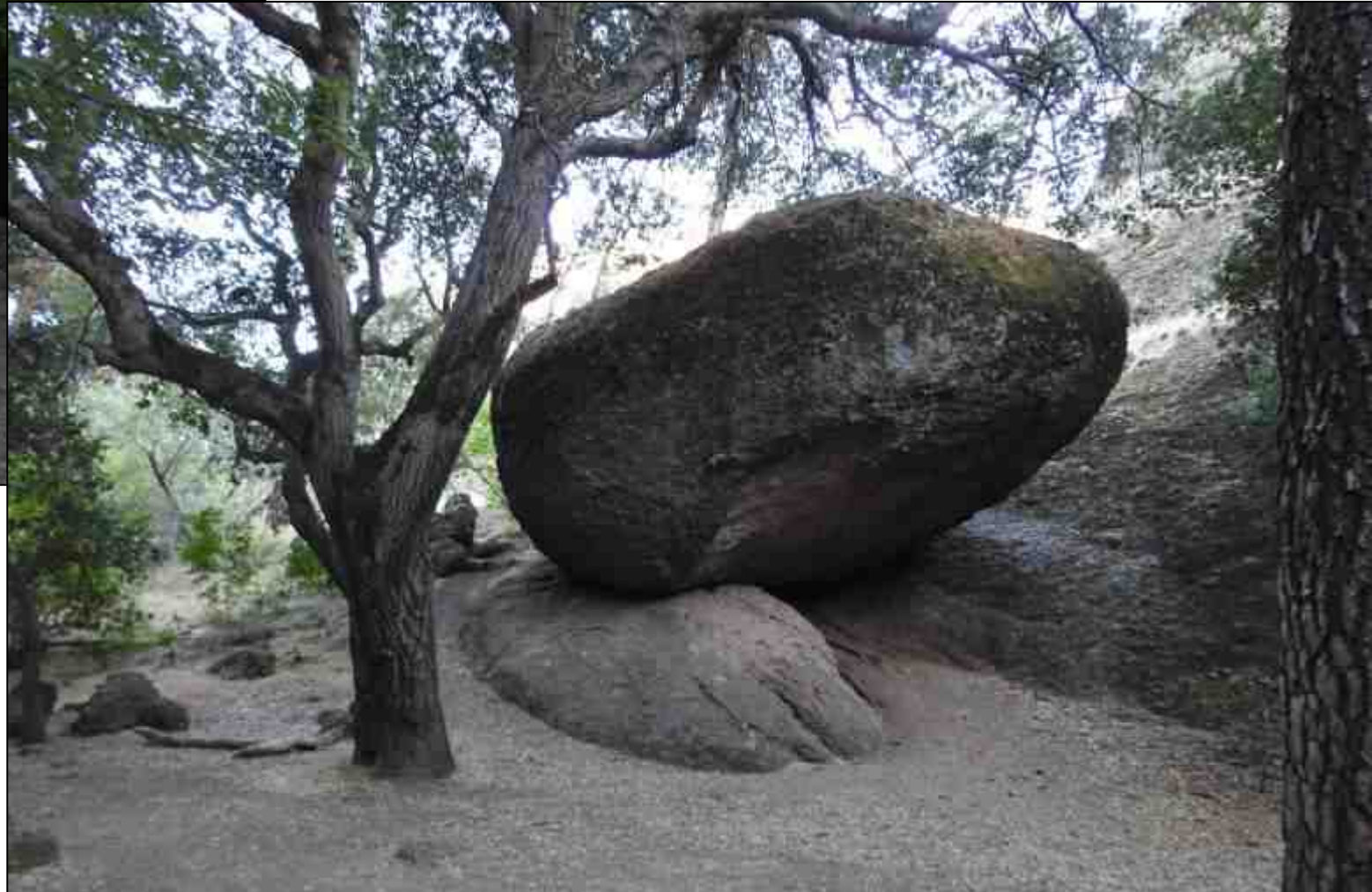
Steve exiting the cave system (left) with some amazing natural light in the background (right; also see the next page).







A secluded, sandy, canyon-like area immediately upon exiting the cave system.





Some sheer rock walls above the Balconies Cave Trail (left), with turkey vultures soaring nearby (right).

Next two pages: Views of the west end of the Balconies Trail near the Chaparral Picnic Area.

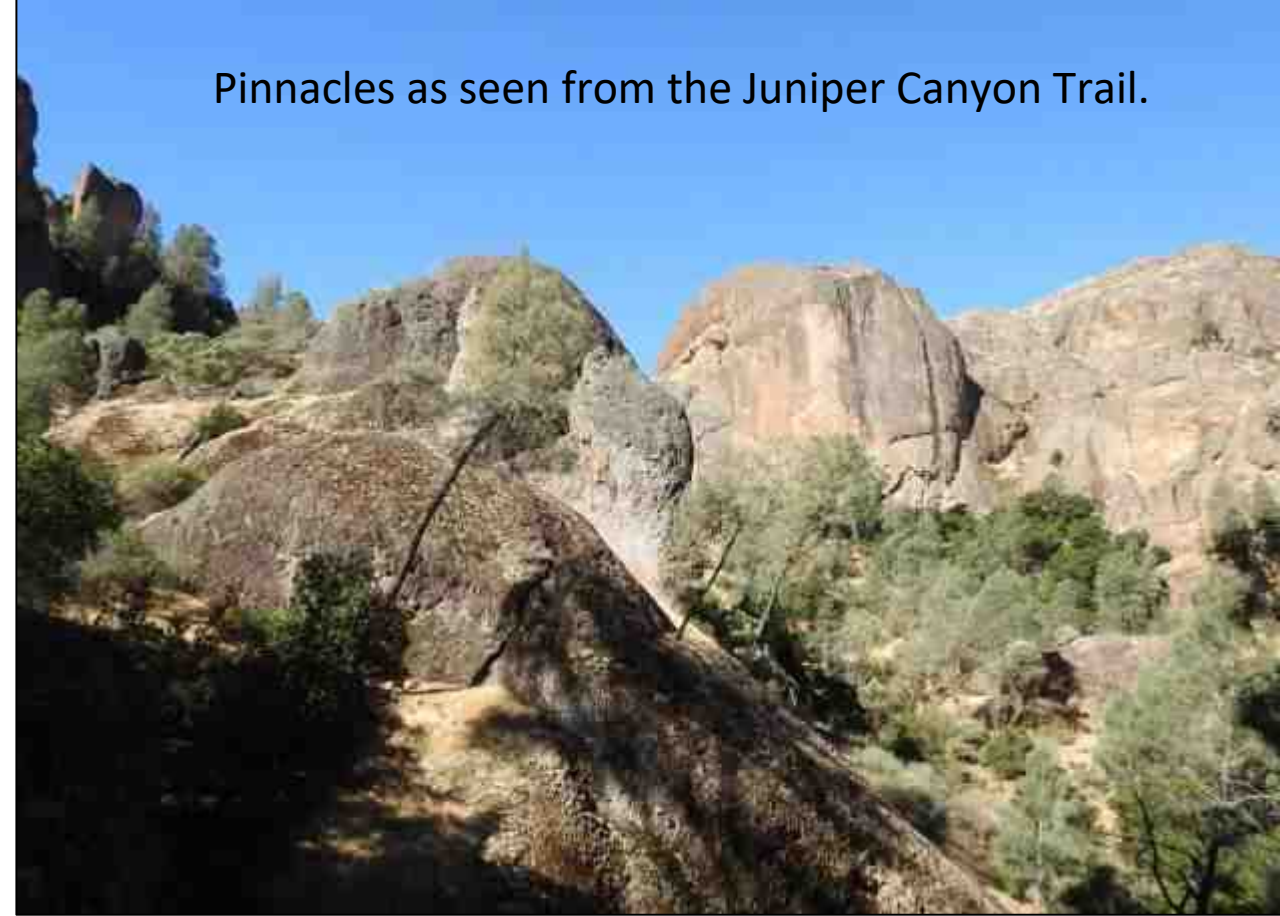






Start of the Juniper Canyon Trail (top left) with a western fence lizard on a wooden railing (bottom pics).





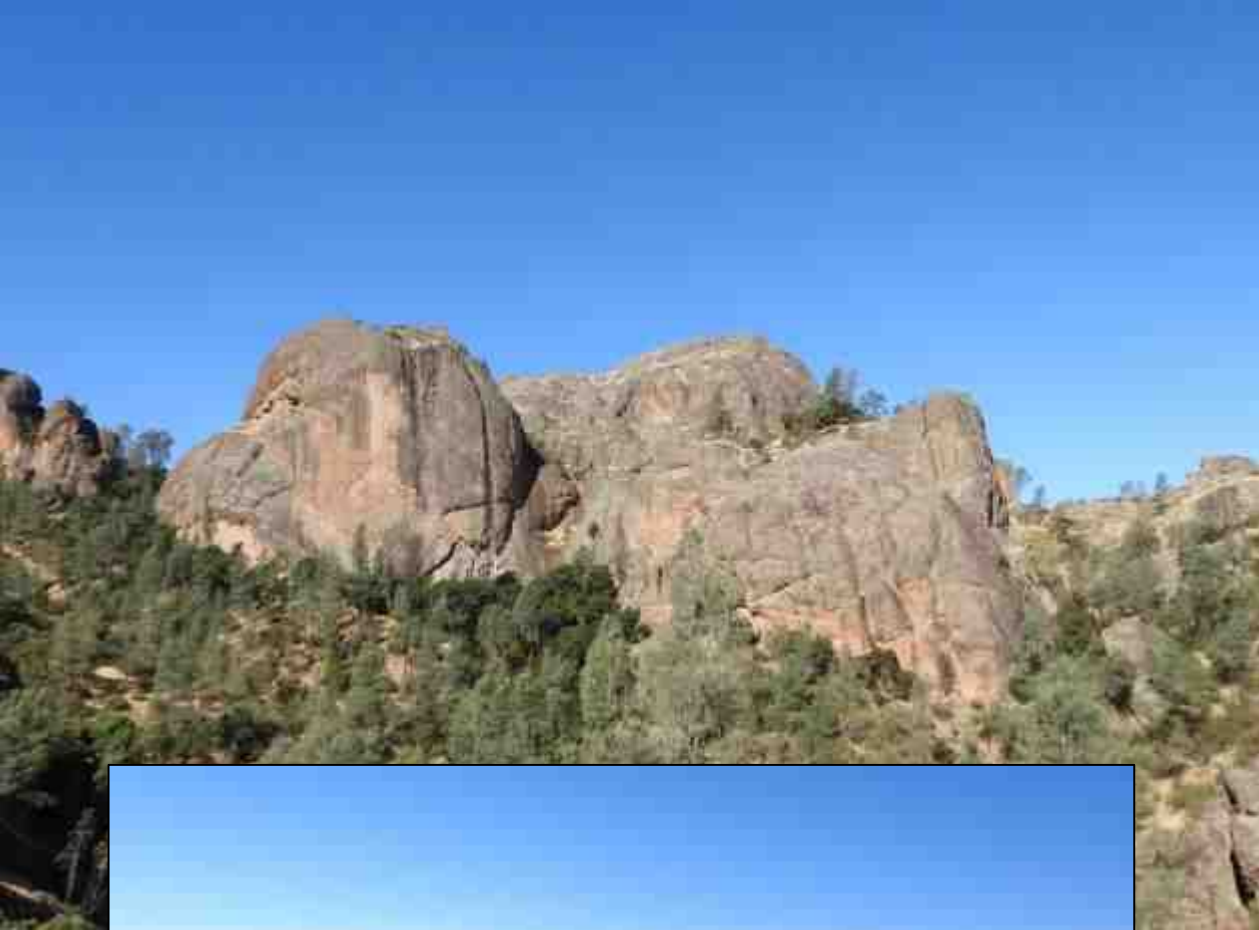
Pinnacles as seen from the Juniper Canyon Trail.





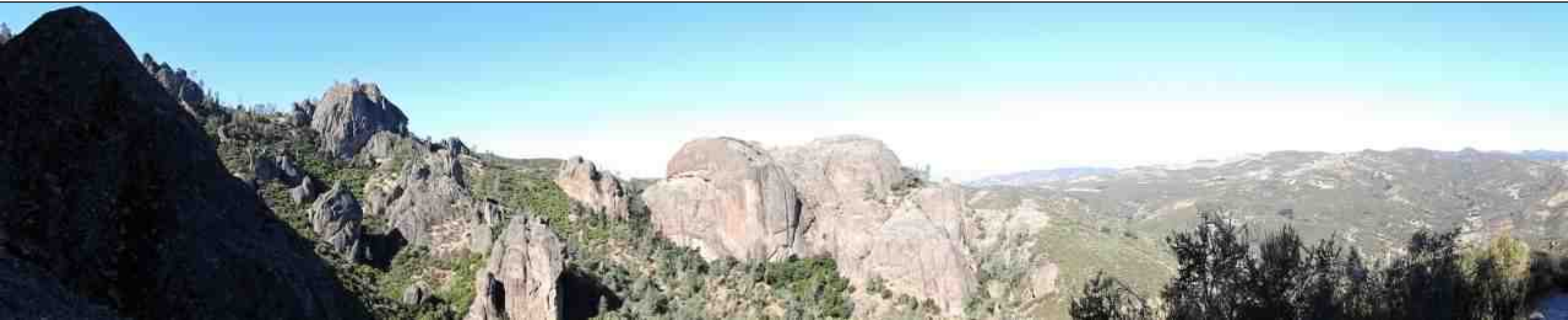
Views from along the Juniper Canyon Trail, including this California ground squirrel (top left).

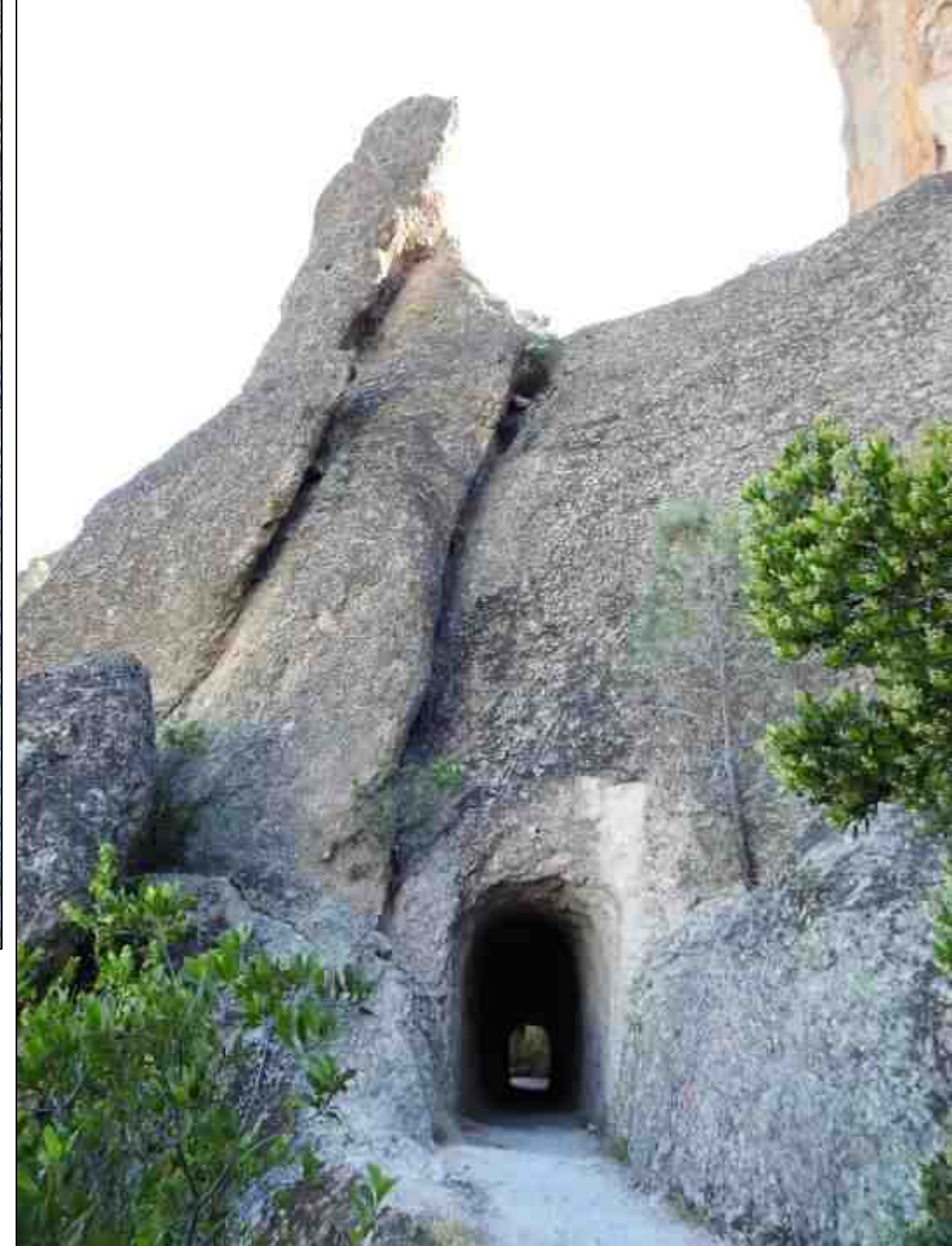
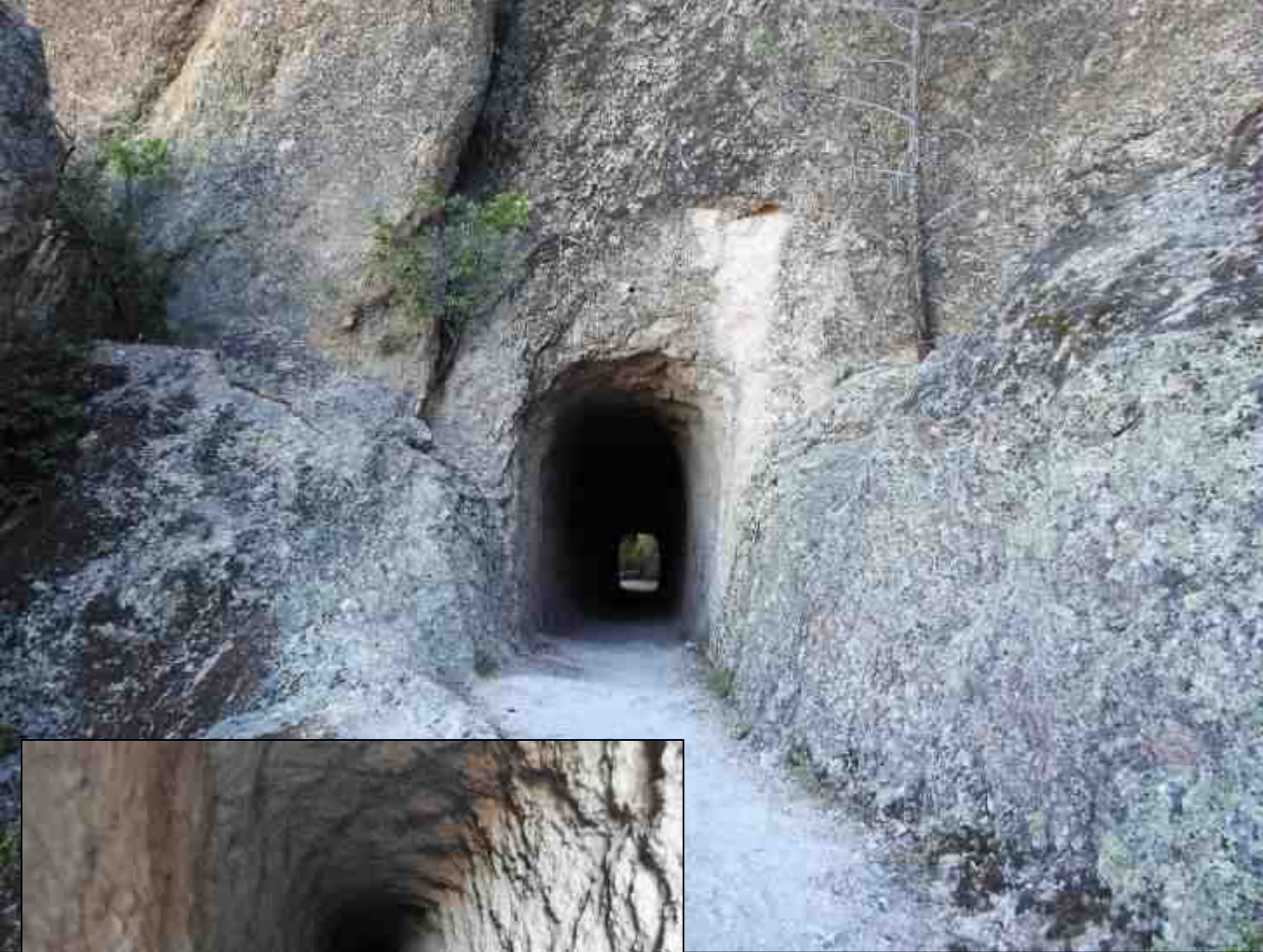




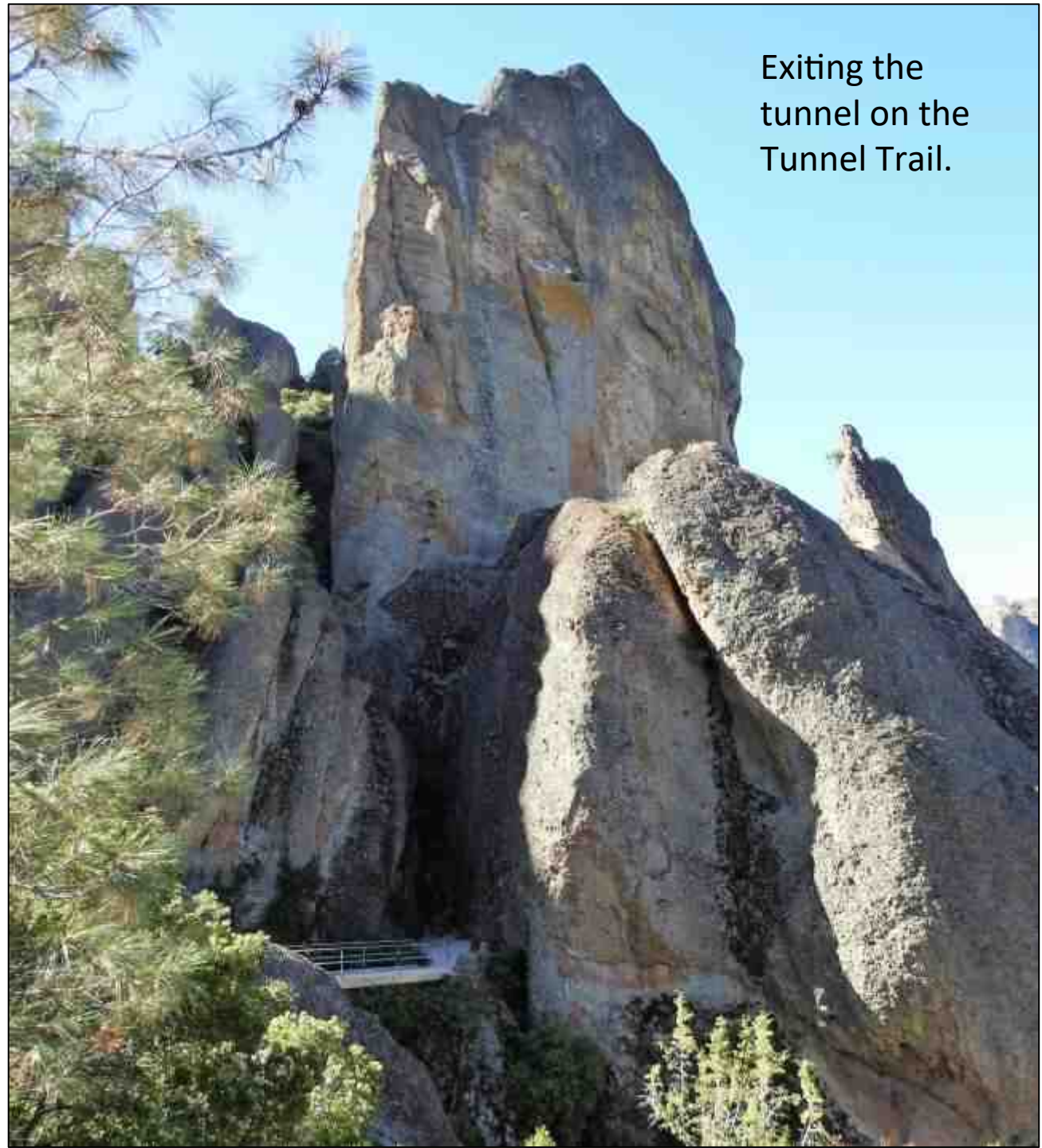
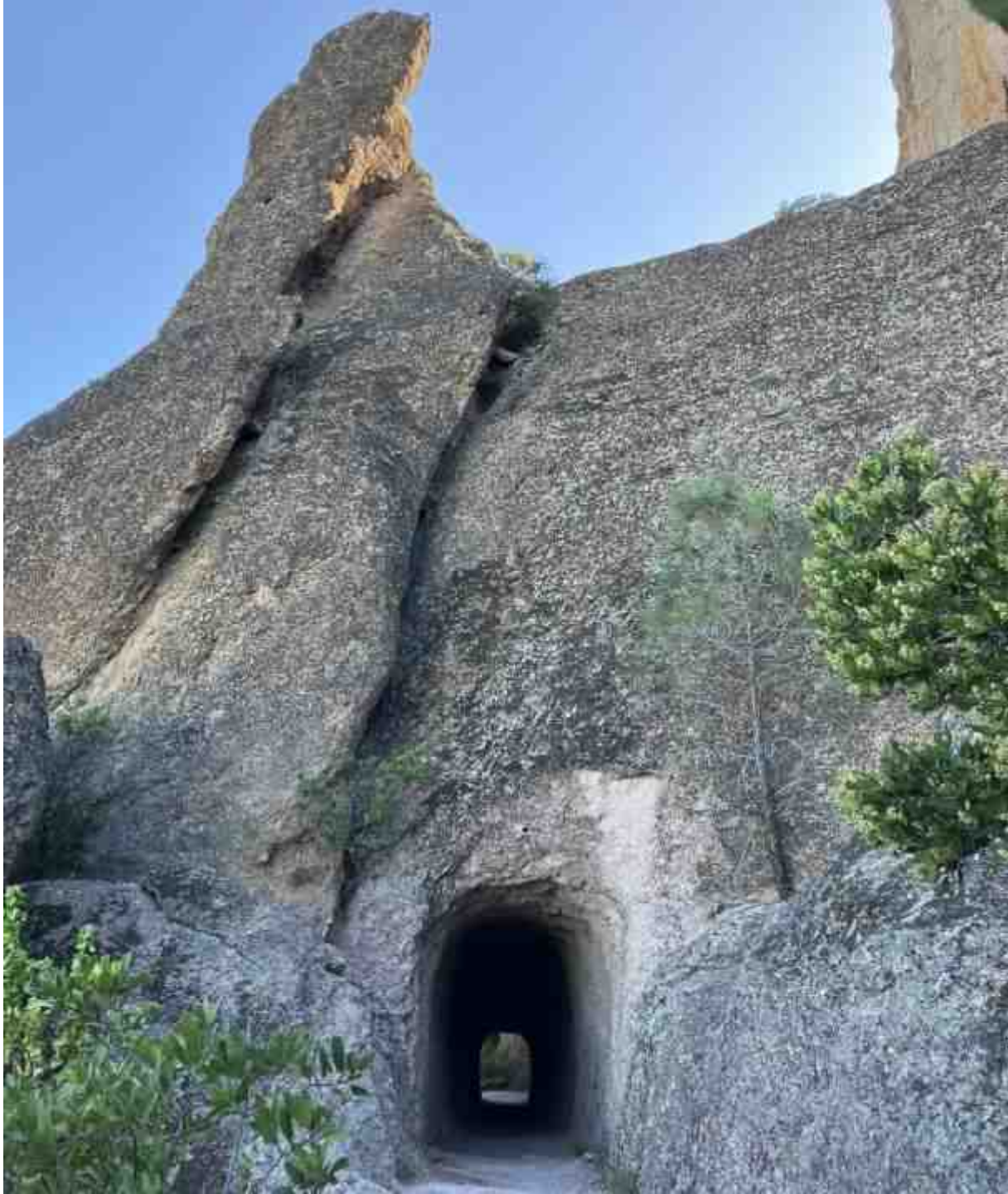
More pinnacles along the Juniper Canyon Trail (top pics), along with chaparral habitat and a view of the valley once the trail gained elevation near the Tunnel Trail.

Next page: Views from the intersection of the Juniper Canyon Trail and Tunnel Trail.





The human-made subterranean passage on Tunnel Trail was really cool to walk through. I was very impressed with the trail system at Pinnacles.



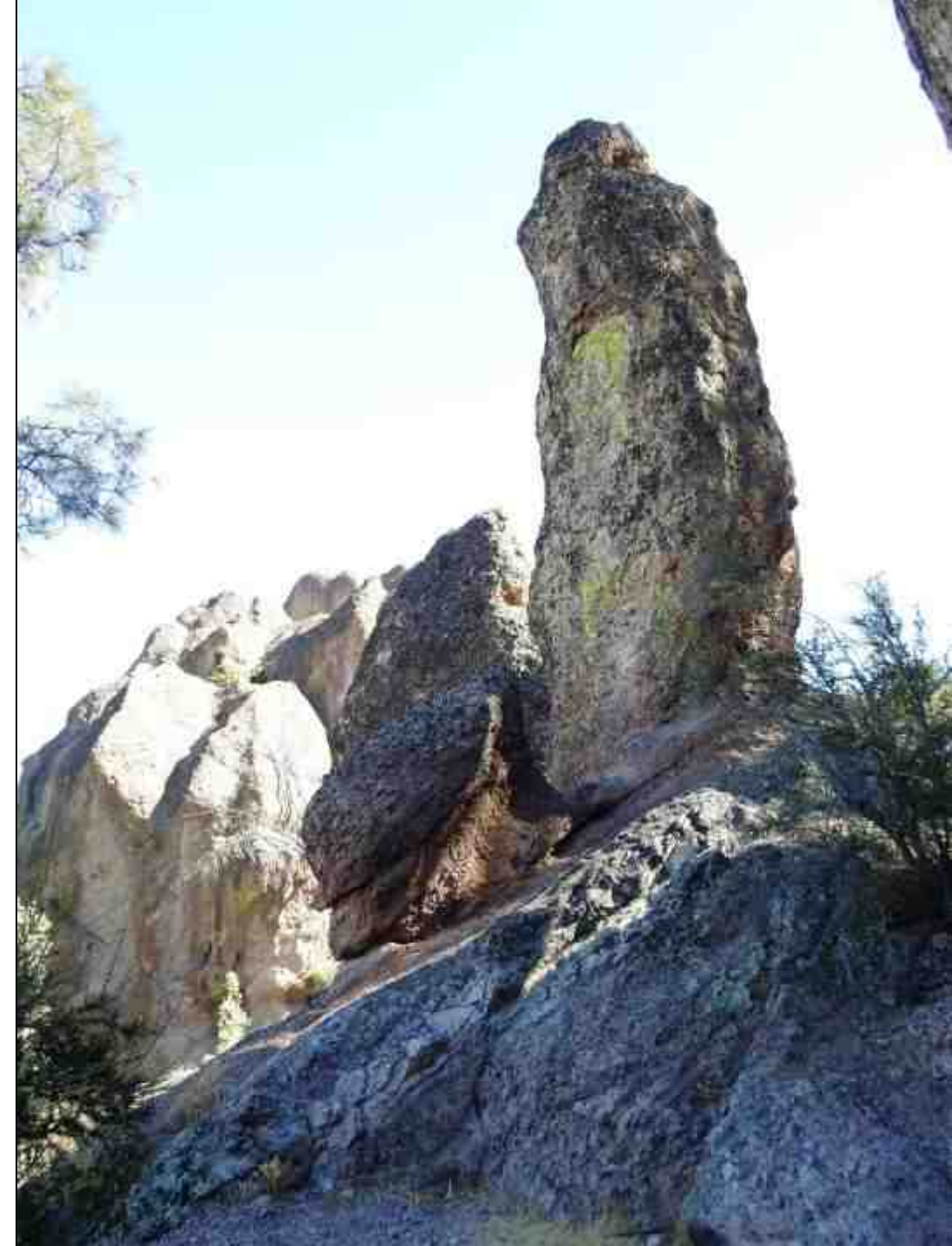
Exiting the
tunnel on the
Tunnel Trail.



The top of Tunnel Trail offered some spectacular views, including the Chaparral Parking Area (top right) and surrounding wilderness (left and bottom right).



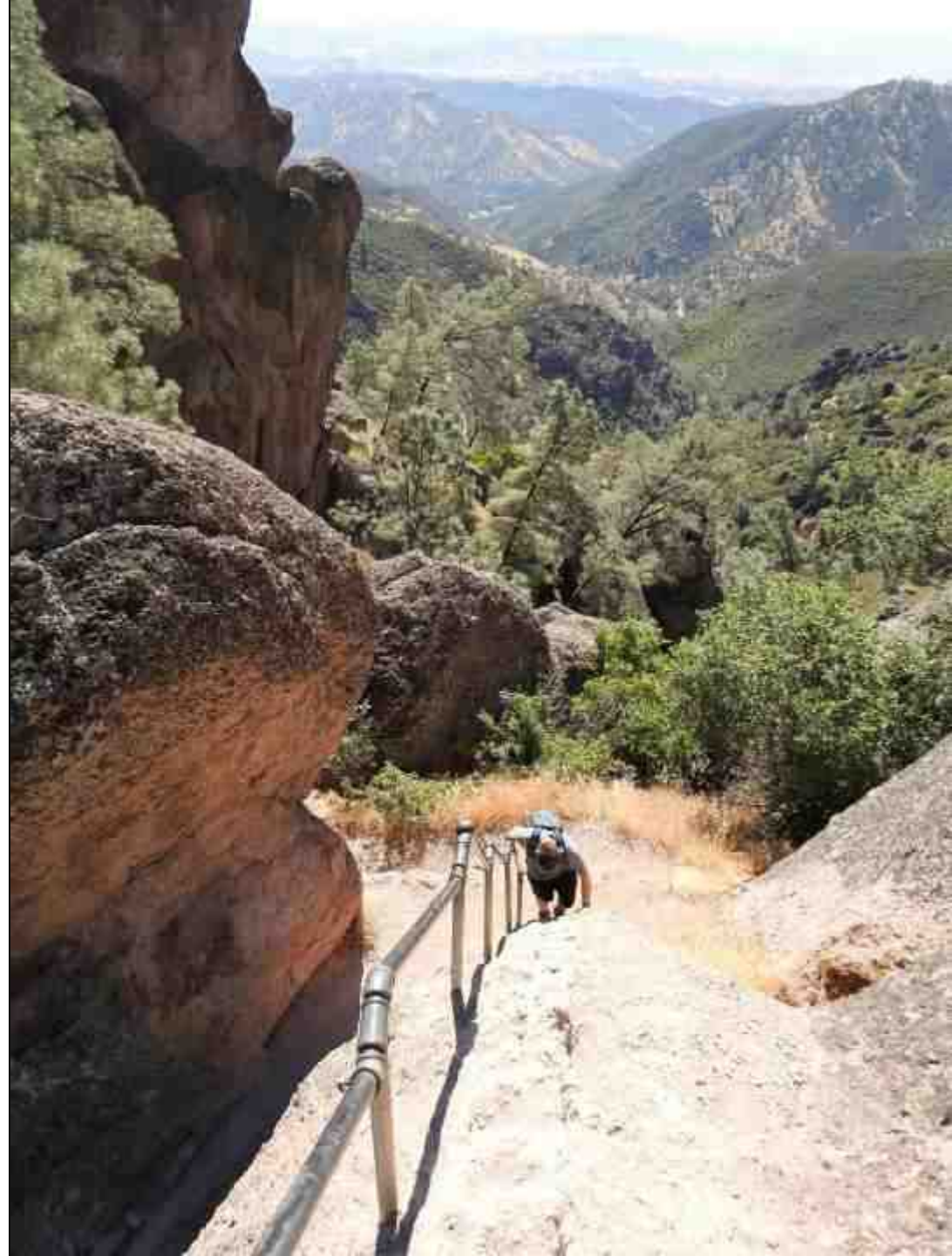
There were many
pinnacles on the
High Peaks Trail.





Entering the steep and narrow section of the High Peaks Trail. If you zoom in, you can see the trail in the middle of the upper left picture where the crack in the rock is (also see bottom left picture and the next page).





This and previous page: Steve hiking on the vertical, ladder stretch parts of the High Peaks Trail.



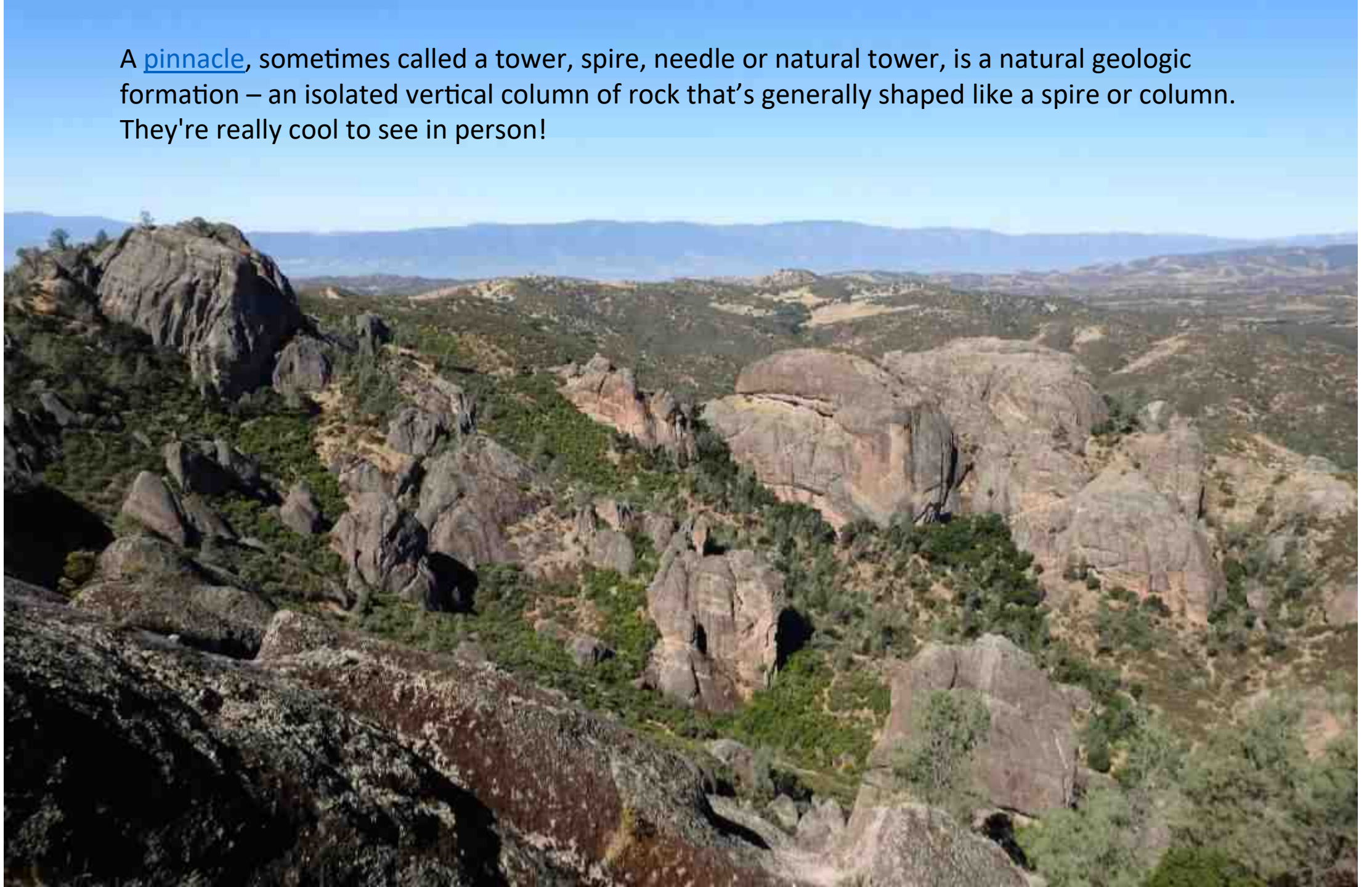


The precarious section of the High Peaks Trail also had beautiful views of pinnacles, including these two pictures I took using my Nikon P-900 camera (left) and iPhone (right). As mentioned previously, my iPhone takes noticeably good landscape pics, while the Nikon is good with just about everything, especially images requiring zoom, such as wildlife.



Next four pages: More 'pinnacle views' from the High Peaks Trail. Two pages from now is an iPhone picture, which is one of my favorite pictures from Pinnacles; the rest are from my Nikon P-900 camera.

A [pinnacle](#), sometimes called a tower, spire, needle or natural tower, is a natural geologic formation – an isolated vertical column of rock that's generally shaped like a spire or column. They're really cool to see in person!









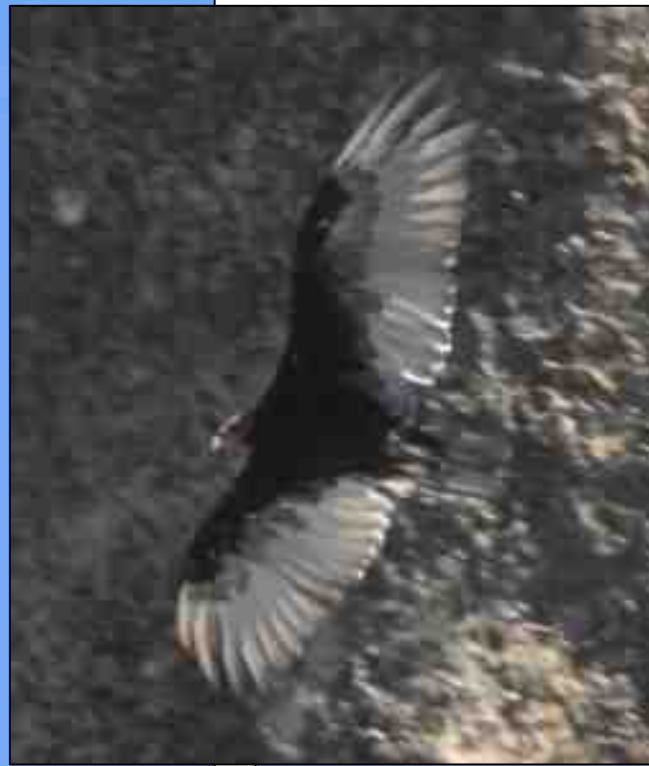


Western fence lizard (left) on High Peaks Trail. After seeing the reptile, I remember thinking that a picture of the three people (right and next page) would be a cool landscape image.



Little did I know, that right around the next bend I would see two California condors (see two pages from now).





California condors (left and right pictures with blue sky) are easily distinguishable from turkey vultures (inset middle image), as condors have white in the front part of their wings and black in the posterior. Turkey vultures are the exact opposite.

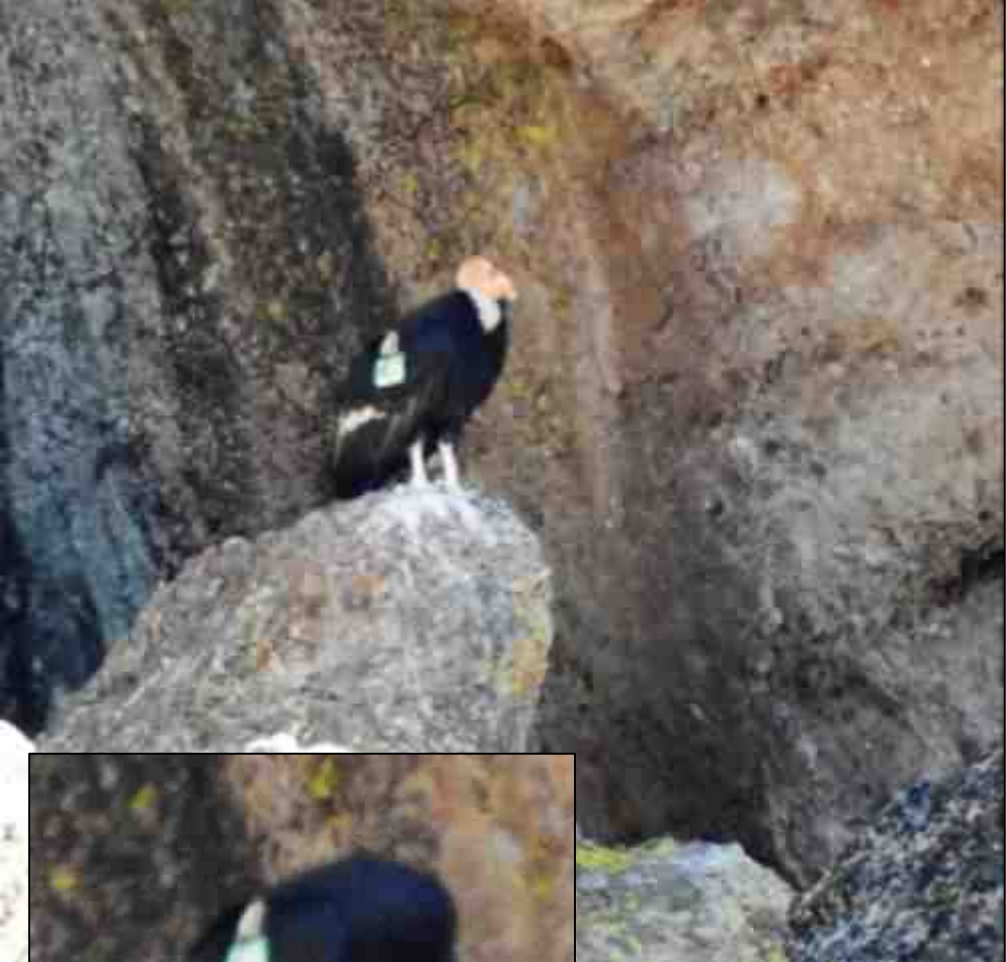
Notice the 'red #27' wing tags on this condor. See the text for more information on this bird.



Turkey vulture soaring above (left), and the general area of the condor sighting in the pinnacle section of the High Peaks Trail (right).



Next page: A second condor with 'green #26' wing tags. This one was perched in a cave-like area among cliffs. My camera, when zoomed in at its max X 83 optical zoom, had trouble obtaining a sharp focus.



When the 'green #26' condor left its perched area (top left and bottom right), it soared in the sky (bottom left). I was able to get some fantastic images of her (see next four pages).













I soon lost the condor in a rocky stretch as it flew further afield (left) in the general steep, rough area of the High Peaks area (right).



Next page: As I continued with the hike, I saw these turkey vultures on a pinnacle just around the corner of the trail. That area was definitely buzzard central!





It was pure luck that going the wrong way by accident led to us seeing two wild California condors. Given the route we would have taken, there is little chance we would have spotted them as we would have avoided most of that 'High Peaks' area. In another happenstance encounter, we met a woman in the parking lot of Roads End in Kings Canyon a couple of days earlier. We saw her again right near the condors when we were backtracking the High Peaks Trail back to the correct route. We talked for a while, noting the slim chance of seeing each other, especially since it only happened because we went the wrong way.

Once we got back to the Tunnel Trail junction taking the High Peaks Trail, we went right (northeast). After 0.7 miles, that led us eastward on the Blue Oak Trail, which we took back to the Old Pinnacles lot. It was a pretty trail as we descended. It also warmed up considerably that last hour and a half of the hike. In fact, we got back to the parking lot at about 12:15 PM and it was already 94°. The total hike was ~9.5 miles with the added distance on the High Peaks Trail.

There wasn't too much to do in the heat of the day, so from 12:30-1:15 we went back to the campground, used the Wi-Fi, and had lunch. We then went to the Bear Gulch Nature Center, as that fallen tree had recently been removed from the road. It was a small, but informative place. It wasn't quite the size of a typical visitor center, but they had some decent information on the wildlife and other natural features of the area.

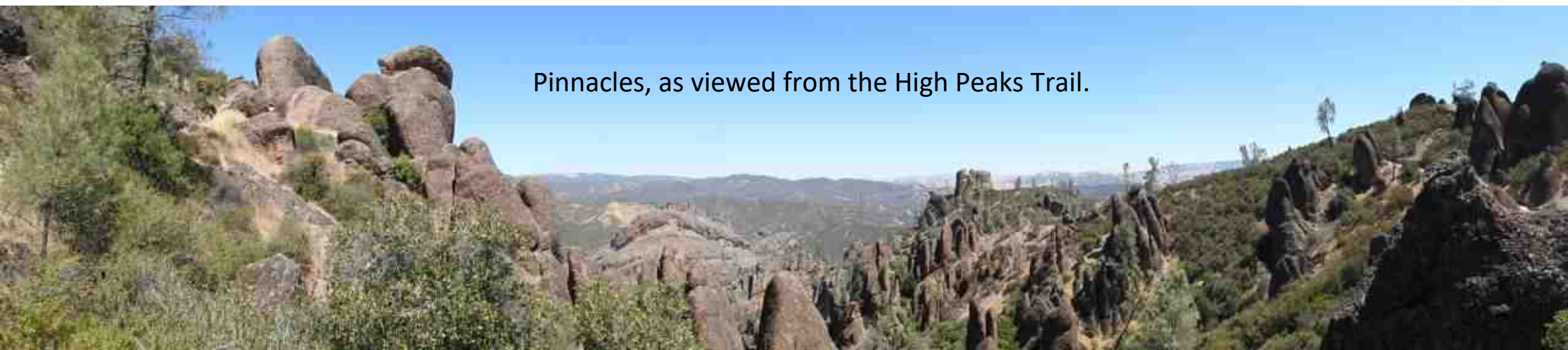
After leaving Bear Gulch, we went right back to the campground. I swam and relaxed in the pool for about half an hour. It was fantastic, in what was then 95° heat.

I started organizing my pictures in the shade on a picnic table by the General Store at 2:40 PM. That is when I discovered that there were two different condors. Steve and I were both a bit burnt out from the heat and being outside for the past 8 days. So, we opted to just relax by the pool and campsite until past 6:00. In fact, we went 2-3 hours without seeing each other at one point.

Once it cooled down and I cooked dinner, we drove the park roads until about 7:00. We saw 2 mule deer near the entry gate, 2 more by the campground, 5 turkeys in various locations, and then 3 more on the western stretch of the park roads.

When we got back to the General Store and I checked my email and Facebook messages one more time, I noticed and got good pictures of 2 more deer and 3 turkeys on the lawn of the campground store. They briefly interacted with each other, then the turkeys pecked their way to the west and onto the street while the deer continued grazing on the grass.

At last light, from about 8:40-8:56 PM, we took one more short drive on the park roads to look for wildlife. It was now down to a reasonable 72 degrees. We only saw 1 deer in the field just west of the campground. That was good enough for me, as this was our last night here, and we had to pack up and head west to the coast of California.



Pinnacles, as viewed from the High Peaks Trail.



The new stretch of the High Peaks Trail, past the Condor Gulch Trail, and heading east to the Blue Oak Trail (right, with Steve in the foreground).





Views, including pinnacles (top left), from the Blue Oak Trail. Probable cat (bobcat or cougar) scat on the trail (top right).



There was a lot of scat on the Blue Oak Trail. Probable coyote scat (top left) is tapered at the end, whereas likely wild feline scat (bottom right and previous page) is rounded and segmented at the end.



Savannah-like chaparral habitat along the Blue Oak Trail.





The canyon-like terrain (top left) led to the Old Pinnacles Parking Area (bottom and next page).





I saw this scrub jay; I believe it was a new bird for me. They are closely related to the common blue jay that I see and hear everyday back east.



Next page: Two deer and three turkeys foraging in front of the campground's general store.











California scrub jay back at the camp site (top right and next page), just after I saw these 3 wild turkeys at the campground entrance area.





Part 5

The California Coast: Monterey Bay and Big Sur, Then Off to the Airport

It was a nice and cool 52 degrees when I got up at 5 AM. After a quick bathroom trip, I packed up my belongings and took down the tent, then boiled water to eat breakfast nice and early. I had extra camp fuel remaining, so I emptied my fuel bottle by pouring it back into the original camp fuel canister which we stored in the car. I then left the bottle in the propane drop-off at the General Store, ensuring proper disposal (or, hopefully, someone claiming and using it).

We didn't leave Pinnacles until 6:12 AM, as I also did a quick email check using Wi-Fi at the General Store. I saw a deer by the bridge that we walked over to get to and from the campsite and the store. I then saw a small doe (possibly a yearling) closer to the store, along with 3 turkeys in the campground. I guessed they were the same trio from the previous evening, and I thought to myself, 'They are just regular inhabitants of the area'. Eventually the turkeys walked closely by the second deer.

Shortly after leaving the campground on the East Entrance Road, I spotted a black-tailed jackrabbit on the other side of the road. Steve stopped the car, and we were able to get some good photographs in the tall grass. We then drove out of the park, taking a left and heading north on Route 25. We eventually took Route 152 west to reach the coast.

Once we reached Route 1, we headed south and the first stop we took was at the town of Monterey Bay. It was early, before 8 AM, at this point, and we had plenty of time to explore since our flight wasn't until much later that night (at 9:30 PM). Our goal was to see the coast and maybe spot some sea otters or sea lions, so we used our intuition and just drove around the town, which stuck out on the map as a knob along the coast. We went counterclockwise until reaching a pier. As luck would have it, this pier was the Monterey Fish Co. Once we parked and walked to the far, ocean side of the store, we nearly immediately spotted sea otters in the water and heard, then saw, sea lions nearby. The sea lions were in a colony on a jetty about a quarter mile away, but some would swim up to and around the building. After a few minutes of watching them, I could tell that these creatures obtained food from the Fish Co. Whether that was from scraps discarded from the place or more direct feeding of fish or unwanted food, I never figured out because we left before they opened. In addition to the sea lions, I found 3 adult sea otters swimming in the bay near docked boats. One of them came very close to the pier, like a few of the sea lions did. Another had a baby on her stomach, and I took good pictures of the two of them together.



Leaving the campground on the last morning of the trip (top left). This deer was one of two that I saw on my short walk to the General Store area, so I could use Wi-Fi before we left. The other one was traveling with its bodyguards, three turkeys (see next page)!





There were 3 turkeys present here, but they were spread out, so I only captured two of them at the same time on camera.





Location of jackrabbit sightings (top left) in the golden grass at Pinnacles National Park. Their huge ears (bottom) are unmistakable and separate them from their cottontail cousins.







Views along Route 1 on the way south toward the town of Monterey Bay.





The pier that
we visited in
the town of
Monterey
Bay.





More views of the pier, along with sea lions on a jetty past the pier and fish market [to the north](#) (top right).





Sea lions hauled out on the rocks, along with a cormorant to their left (left picture).



Sea otters in the bay between the pier and the jetty where the sea lions were.





I didn't realize this sea otter had a baby until I zoomed in on them.



While this may seem like a romantic scene in a wilderness area, the otters went right by boats on their travels (top right), while the baby slept on mom.





These swimming sea lions were viewed from this location at the warehouse (top left), just 180° away.





Meanwhile, I walked to the other (west) side of the building and saw this sea otter swimming very close to the building (also see next two pages).









The sea lions were fun to watch in the water as they interacted with each other and moved at tremendous speeds. However, they were tough to photograph despite what these great images (and see next two pages) might otherwise indicate.









The Monterey Fish Co. (top left and see bottom picture of previous page). On the west side of the building, I found a dead, bloated sea lion that was just floating in the water near some boats (bottom right).





This sea otter either had an octopus or a sea urchin. I tend to think it was an octopus, despite urchins being more common food for them.



I was impressed how the sea otters and lions would both go underwater and seemingly disappear. Some would reappear soon after, while others would swim some distance and I didn't see them resurface. It was a really cool experience to locate these animals without any help, other than using our intuition to drive the coast and find a pier where we might see things.

As we continued the counterclockwise drive around the town of Monterey Bay, we found more otters, including 4-5 in kelp right near the Monterey Bay Aquarium (which was \$65 to enter; we didn't have all day to spend there to make it worth going in), another 10 off in the distance from a park on the side of the road at the west-central part of town, and another 3 in various places. Where there was kelp in the water, there were often otters.

After about 1.5-2 hours in town, we left Monterey Bay and got back on Route 1 South and drove to Big Sur. On the way, and I'm not exactly sure where, we saw 3 more otters off the main road in a small cove filled with kelp. We also saw coastal redwoods in a few places, including just off the main road, as well as in Big Sur State Park. These trees are the tallest in the world, even taller than giant sequoias, but their diameter is much smaller, so they have a much lower overall volume than sequoias.

We hiked a short trail from the lodge at Big Sur State Park at ~11:45 AM, and explored but didn't spend that much time there. I was able to photograph some tall redwoods, which was important to me after being in many sequoia groves on this trip. We did find their Nature Center too, and saw a stuffed mountain lion, which inhabit the park, as well as information on condors that use the area. I was like a little kid in a candy shop reading up on those two iconic species.

We drove Route 1 as far south as [McWay Falls in Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park](#). It was a beautiful waterfall reached via a short, ~0.3 mile walk to an overlook with the falls feeding into the ocean. There wasn't much information there, other than the path to the falls, but when I got back, I did [some research](#) and found out that, because it is capable of spilling right into the ocean, McWay Falls can be categorized as a "tidefalls," making it a rare attraction. McWay Falls gets its name from Christopher McWay, an early pioneer in Big Sur.

At about 1:30 PM, we started heading back to the north on Route 1. We stopped for pictures at a couple of scenic viewpoints, but much less than the way down there earlier in the day. We were both a bit burnt out from the stops and the cumulative effects of a long, even if very rewarding, trip.

We continued north, ending up at Shoreline Park, which was about a half hour drive south of the San Francisco Airport. We organized our bags, ate dinner, and relaxed until ~5:20 PM. We then got gas and drove to the airport. We arrived there just after 6:00 and had no lines to deal with, which was great. Our overnight flight to JFK Airport (in New York) wasn't until 9:30 PM, so I was able to organize the remainder of my pictures and name them. Including the four videos I took, and the cropped pictures which I renamed as new files, I took the following number of images using my Nikon P-900 camera: 505 in Yosemite, 227 in Kings Canyon, 236 in Sequoia, 306 in Pinnacles, and 155 in Monterey Bay and the Big Sur Coast on the last day of the trip, for a grand total of 1,429 images.

Traveling to all of the places that you read about in this book, we drove 1,355 miles in 'our' Kia Soul. Steve rented it, so he did all the driving. That was convenient in many places, as I was able to take extra pictures from the vehicle.

After taking the red-eye to New York, we had an almost four hour layover from 6 AM to 9:50. I passed out on the ground of a terminal, trying to get some shut eye during a long period with little sleep. We finally arrived in Boston at 11AM. After getting my belongings at Steve's house, I met my parents, who moved from Cape Cod, MA to southern New Hampshire earlier that year, at a restaurant in Saugus where they brought me my dog, Rescue. We got caught up on life for about 45 minutes before I drove home a little after 1 PM after a long, long trip. Hitting traffic at multiple places, including Boston, was exhausting, and made the usual 1.5 hour drive take over two. However, to make it better, I thought about all of the amazing things I had seen in the previous week and a half. Indeed, I hope this book brought many of those experiences to life.





Boats packed into the marina at the beginning of the pier (top left and previous page) while sea lions swam nearby to the north (right). The lions were difficult to follow as they would go underwater and reappear at a distance most of the time. Some seemed to disappear under the dock, which added to the frustration of monitoring them.







These would be my last views of sea lions on this trip (this page). However, I would see more sea otters as we drove south on Route 1 along the coast.

Next page: View from the main road in the town of Monterey Bay (top left), and a view of the ocean from the aquarium (bottom left).







A perspective of the ocean from the Monterey Bay Aquarium with the kelp 'forest' where I saw more otters (bottom left and next two pages).







I was amazed that I was now looking at my second group of sea otters in Monterey Bay. What a cool area, despite the many people that live on that crowded peninsula.





Downtown Monterey Bay (left) near the aquarium (right).

Next page: On the north side of the aquarium (viewed to the left of the otters in the previous pictures), was this really cool rock formation loaded with sea birds. The white rocks were no doubt stained that color from generations of bird poop.



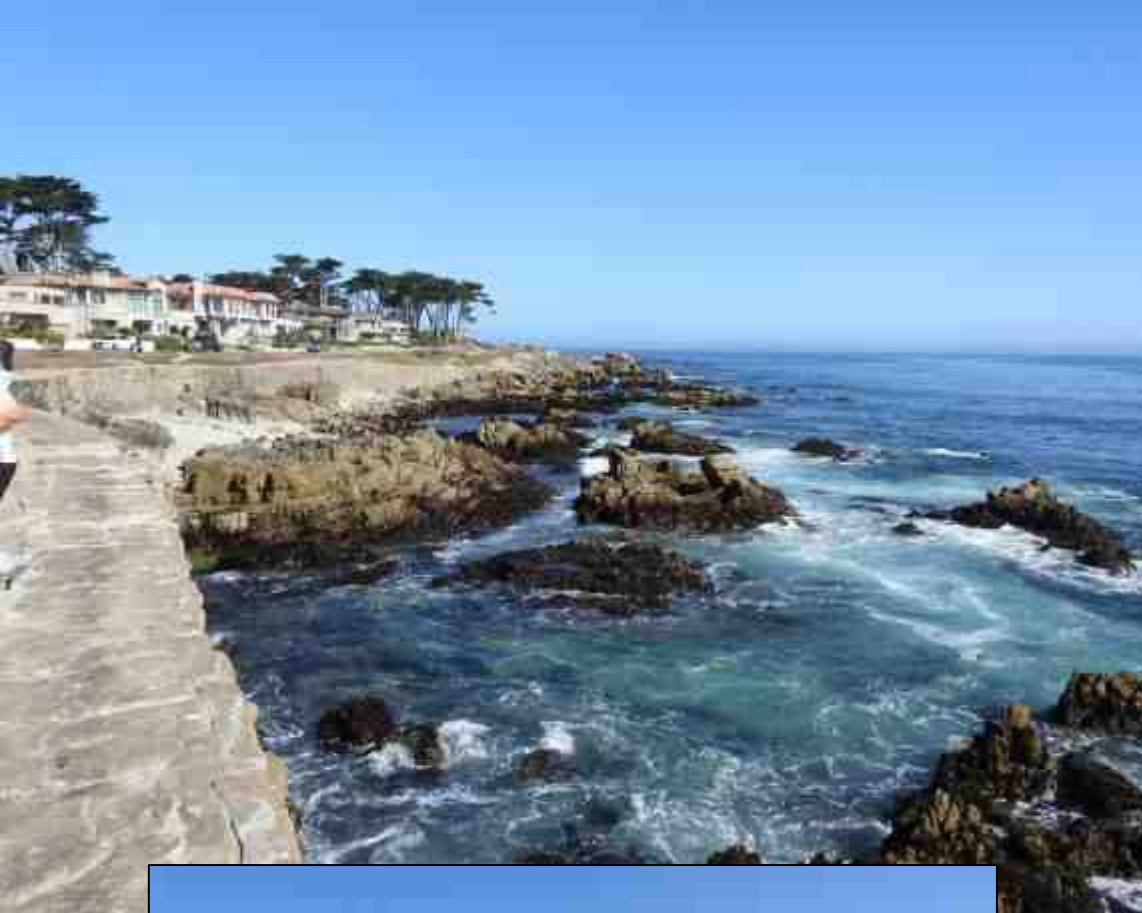




The vast majority of these birds appeared to be cormorants (also see next page).



Houses dotted the landscape next to the coast, even with this small park nearby (bottom left and see next page). I could only imagine how much houses cost there.





This tree was physically connecting the two houses (bottom left and top right).





Yet despite the mass of humanity just off the shore, I found a group of 10 otters in a raft in the kelp (arrow in bottom right pic indicates general location of the otters).







Further along on our Monterey Bay loop, I took a short walk on this beach (left and see next page) to photograph an amazing number of seabirds in flight (bottom right).







The drive along the California coast was beautiful. I was surprised how close high hills (or low mountains) were to the ocean (left side of left and bottom pictures; also see the next page).





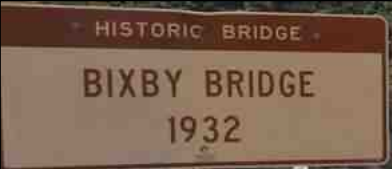
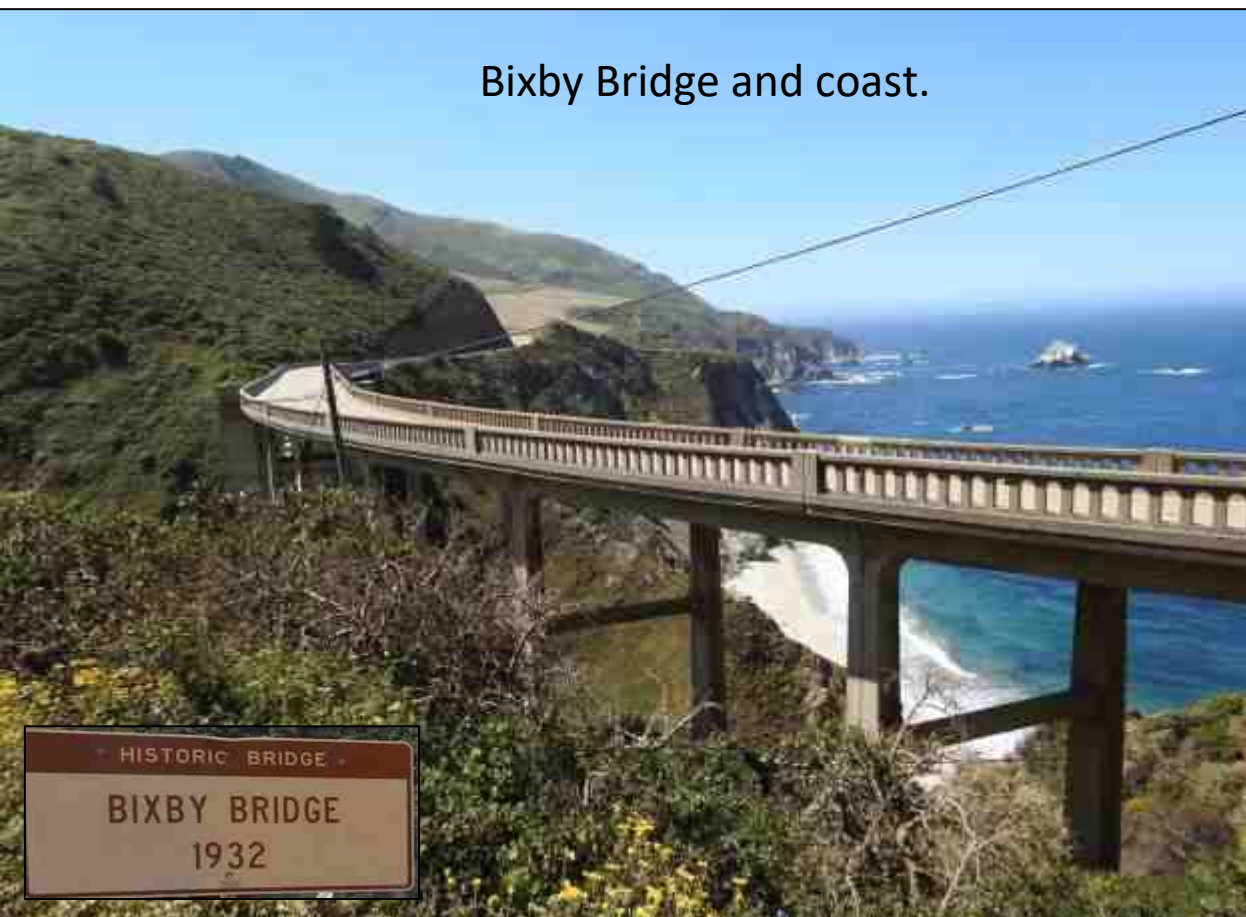


There was a small cove close to the road (center of top photo) where I saw three otters foraging in a small kelp bed somewhere in Big Sur (bottom and next page).





Bixby Bridge and coast.





I was surprised to see fields where cattle grazed along certain parts of the coast. I didn't actually spot that many cows, however.



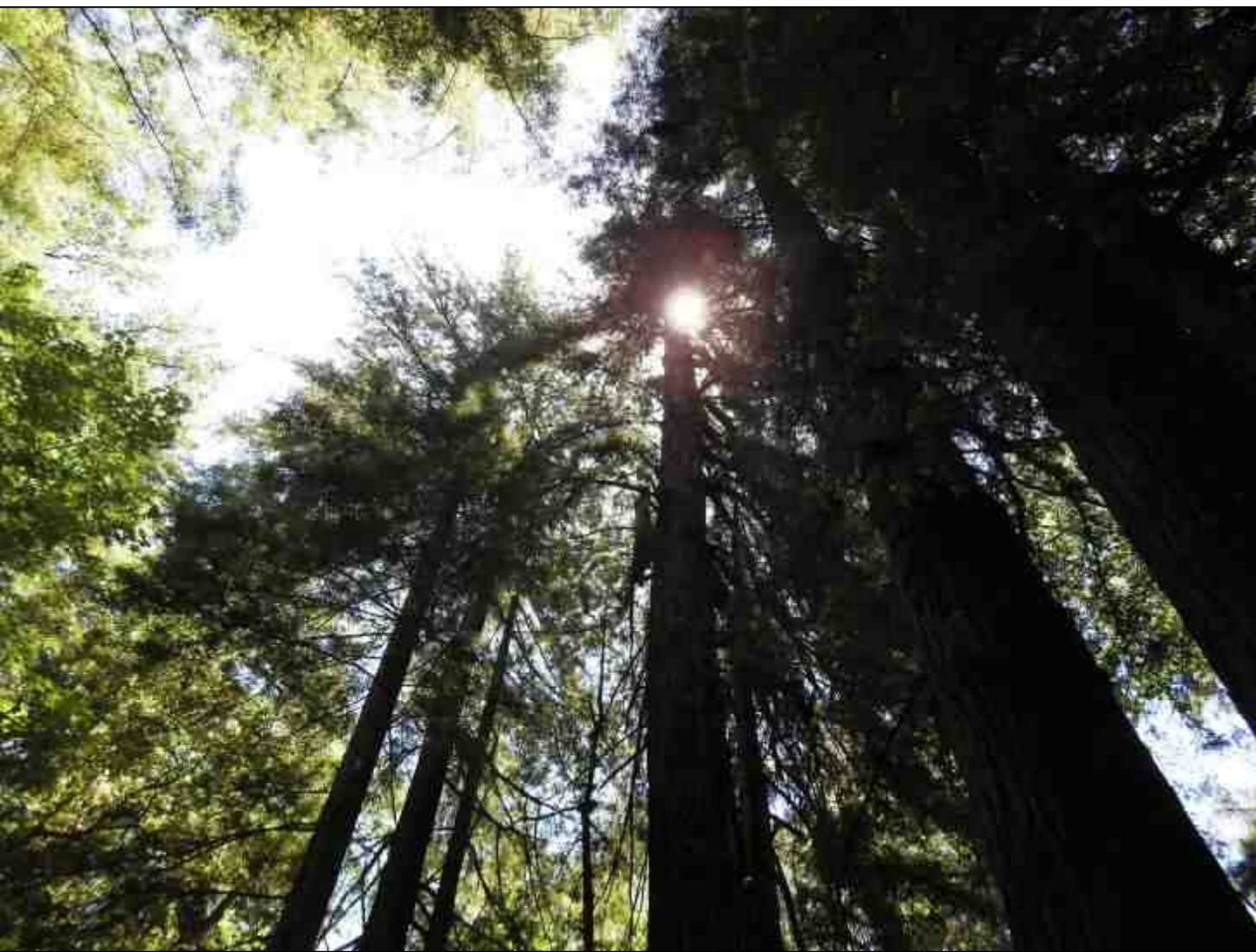






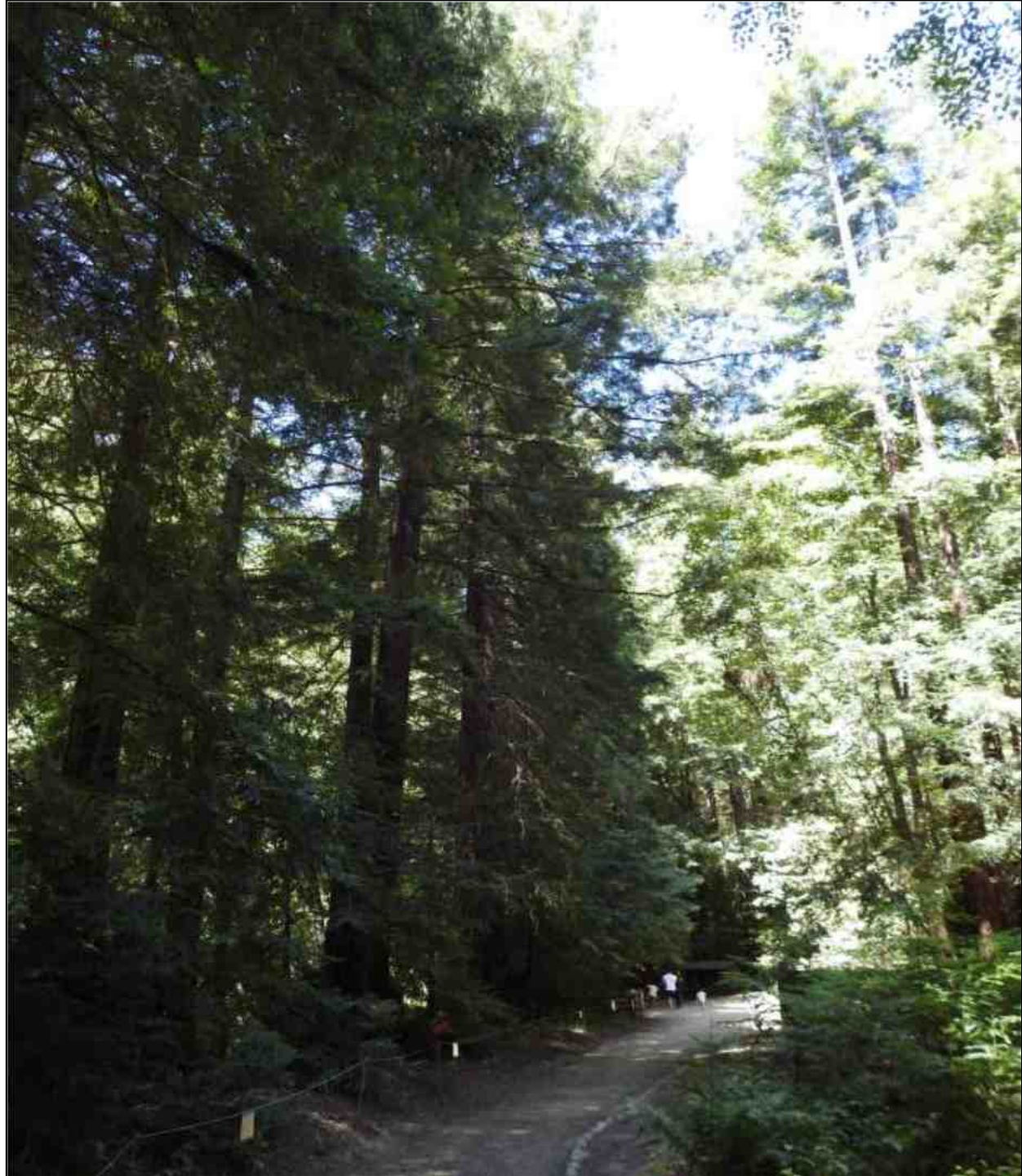
Coastal redwoods in Big Sur State Park (also see next five pages).













Redwoods with people as a good scale to illustrate their sheer size.

These photos do a good job of illustrating how steep the area is immediately next to the ocean in Big Sur.









Steep, hilly area near where we parked and hiked to McWay Falls (left). We took a tunnel under Route 1 (top right), which lead us to the falls (bottom).

Next page: Similar photos of McWay Falls, one with my Nikon P-900 camera (left) and the other with my iPhone (right).





McWay Falls is unique because the outlet of the waterfall flows directly into the ocean.









Images taken from the drive north on Route 1 on the way towards the airport. By this point, I was pretty burnt out from taking pictures of the coast, but more so from the past week and a half of activities which effectively had given me mental exhaustion. It was an amazing trip, however, and I hope this e-book is proof of that!

Epilogue: Me, Myself, and I

Upon returning home in early July 2024, Steve sent me a bunch of images that he took of me with his iPhone. He has really cool panoramic and 0.5X options on his newer model phone, which took even sharper images than mine. Instead of weaving all of them into the contents of this book in chronological order, I thought I would do something different here and have this last chapter show pictures where I was the subject in the various scenic areas. I arrange them sequentially here and label where each image was taken from. A special thanks goes to Steve Cifuni for sharing these images.



All pictures here taken in Tuolumne Grove, Yosemite National Park.



I hope you appreciate the sheer size and grandeur of sequoia trees. Tuolumne Grove, Yosemite National Park.





Massive roots of a dead sequoia tree in Tuolumne Grove. Many of the pictures in this chapter are of sequoias from the various groves that we visited on our trip, including in Yosemite (pictured here), Kings Canyon, and Sequoia National Parks..



Next page: Me at a huge, fallen sequoia tree in Tuolumne Grove.



Dead Giant Tunnel Tree in
Tuolumne Grove.





Views from the Yosemite Falls Trail in Yosemite National Park.

Glacier Point on a chilly morning in Yosemite National Park (also see left picture on next page). Yosemite Falls (left; both Upper and Lower) and Half Dome (right; center of pic) are in the background, respectively, of these images.





Mariposa
Grove in
Yosemite
National Park
(right and
next page).





Right: Steve and I in Mariposa Grove (also see next two pages).







This page: Large sequoias in Mariposa Grove, Yosemite National Park.



Mariposa Grove.



General Grant Tree in General Grant Grove, Kings Canyon National Park (middle and right pics). Note: I often wore T-shirts for two days to save on laundry; hence the same outfit as the previous day in Yosemite!



Pictures taken in the General Grant Grove, Kings Canyon National Park. A few trees were off park trails and roads, and the park allowed people to walk directly up to them while other, larger trees (like the General Sherman and General Grant sequoias) were blocked off to human access to prevent them from compacting their roots.





Boyden Cave
in Sequoia
National
Forest/
Monument,
off the Kings
Canyon
Scenic
Byway.





Big Stump Trail, Kings Canyon National Park.

Bottom right and next page: Mark Twain Stump, Big Stump Trail, Kings Canyon National Park.







General Sherman Tree
in the Giant Forest
Grove, Sequoia
National Park.



Giant Forest Grove, Sequoia National Park (also see next two pages).







Balconies Cave
Trail, Pinnacles
National Park.

I hope you enjoyed
the images in this
book and were able
to gain a new
appreciation for
some of our
national parks in
central California.
Until next time,
happy adventures!

