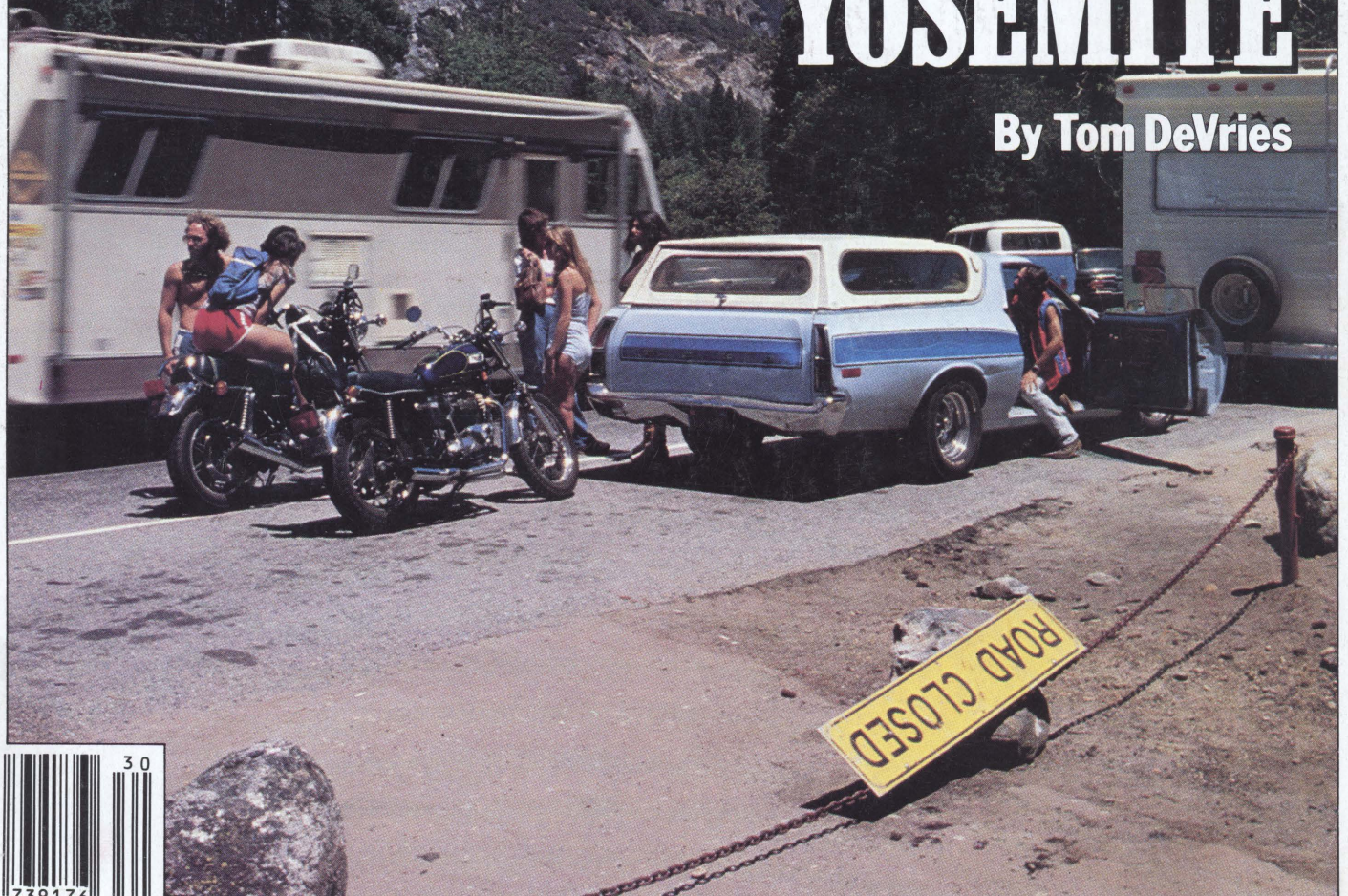


Love and Real Estate, by Lawrence S. Dietz
Rating the New Pasta Machines, by Carol Field

NEW WEST

**WE
CAN SAVE
YOSEMITE**

By Tom DeVries



How to Save Yosemite



A Personal Plan

SOMETIME DURING the last ten years the federal government and the National Park Service seem to have given up on Yosemite National Park, the way some people

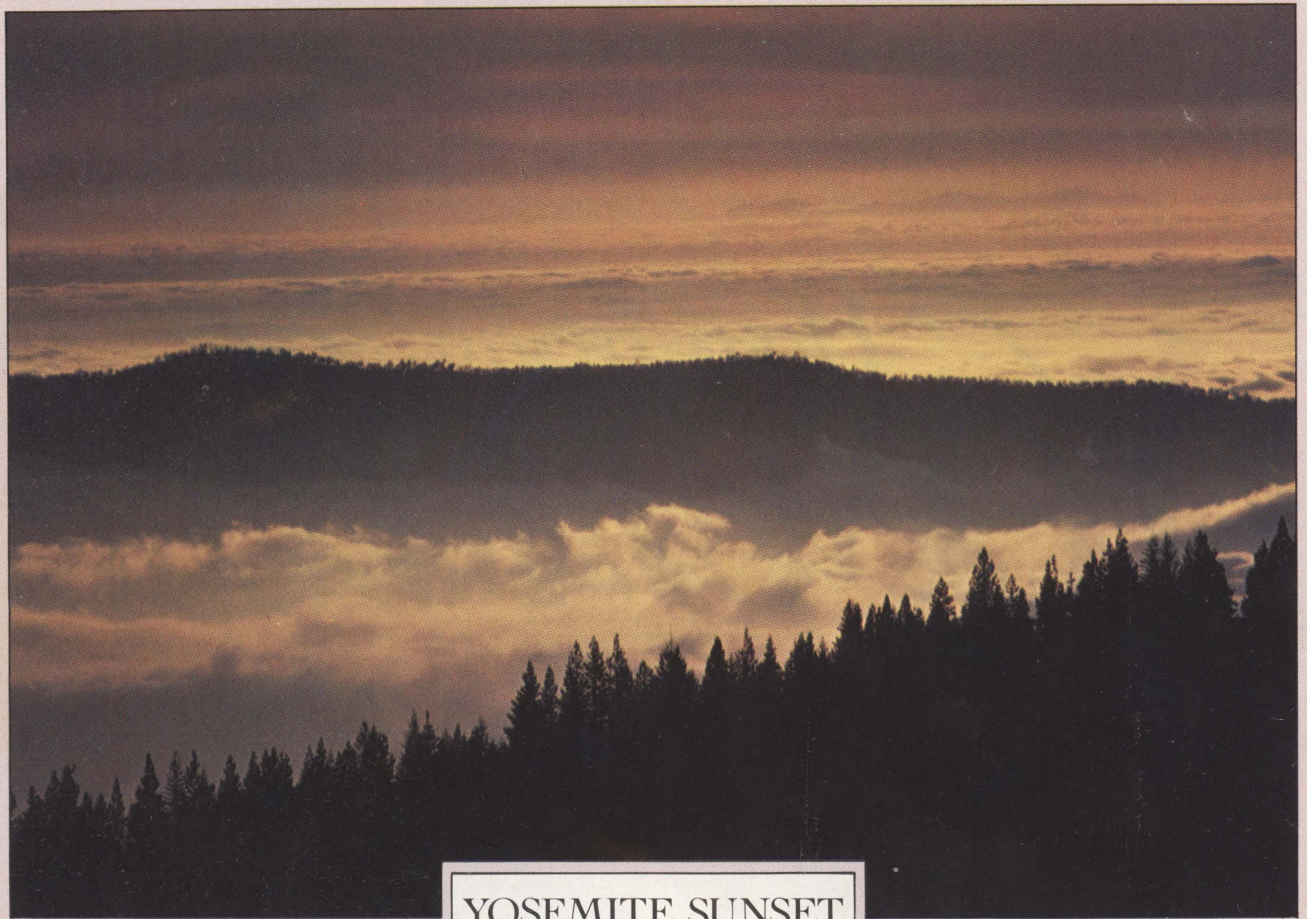
have given up on the postal service or teenagers. The government doesn't know what to do about Yosemite and hardly has the energy to think about it anymore. The claims on Yosemite—from nature lovers and hikers, from hang gliders and climbers, from businesspeople, politicians and snowmobilers, and from MCA Inc., the conglomerate that owns most of the commercial facilities in the park—are overwhelming and contradictory. And so is the pressure from the millions of visitors each year, hordes so great that there must be a forest of signs begging them not to feed the bears, not to take souvenir pinecones, not to pick the flowers, not to leave the established trails, on and on. There must be ranger cops equipped with handcuffs and pistols and backed by detectives and a jail.

By Tom DeVries

There must be giant parking lots, and even then there are people parked in the meadows and on the shoulders of the highways leading into the park.

Desperate to deal with the situation, the park service spent a million bucks and twelve years on a master plan that was to be Yosemite's salvation but turns out to suit hardly anybody, including many of those who put it together.

The final, we-really-mean-it-this-time revelation of the plan back before Christmas was symbolic of the way things have gone. A good-size sample of media, including network TV, tramped up to Yosemite for a round of wine and cheese, cocktails, dinner and press conferences. At these events important people stood before microphones and said things, but there was *actually no plan*. It wasn't ready. Then the important people stood on the running board of a tractor and watched it tear up some asphalt, a gesture intended to show a commit-



YOSEMITE SUNSET

ment to deurbanize Yosemite Valley and to provide pictures for TV and the papers. Then the little busted-up section of paving in the middle of that huge parking lot was refilled with gravel, covered with leaves and allowed to sit there for another six months.

At the press party the then director of the park service estimated that the plan might cost \$100 million and take ten years to execute. Privately ranger-administrators said it would never be realized and would cost 400 million of today's dollars if it were.

There is now a new director of the park service, the third in five years, and yet another revision of the plan, said to be directed at "deurbanizing Yosemite" and to be similar to one originally drafted in 1978.

Back in 1974 there was a draft of a master plan for Yosemite that was iced because it turned out to have been exclusively a collaboration between the bureaucrats of the government and of the conglomerate concessionaire. Really tacky it was. I have a copy of that plan, and, I'm sorry to say, it looks and sounds pretty much like the spiffy new one. The government guys have carefully marked the 1974 draft with a great big rubber stamp that says REJECTED.

And they have gone through the whole process again, this time preserving their integrity, but at the expense of their vi-

It may be said that the proposals here are not practical. Well, I say that God and nature were not practical when Yosemite was created; it never was, and never will be, a sensible place.



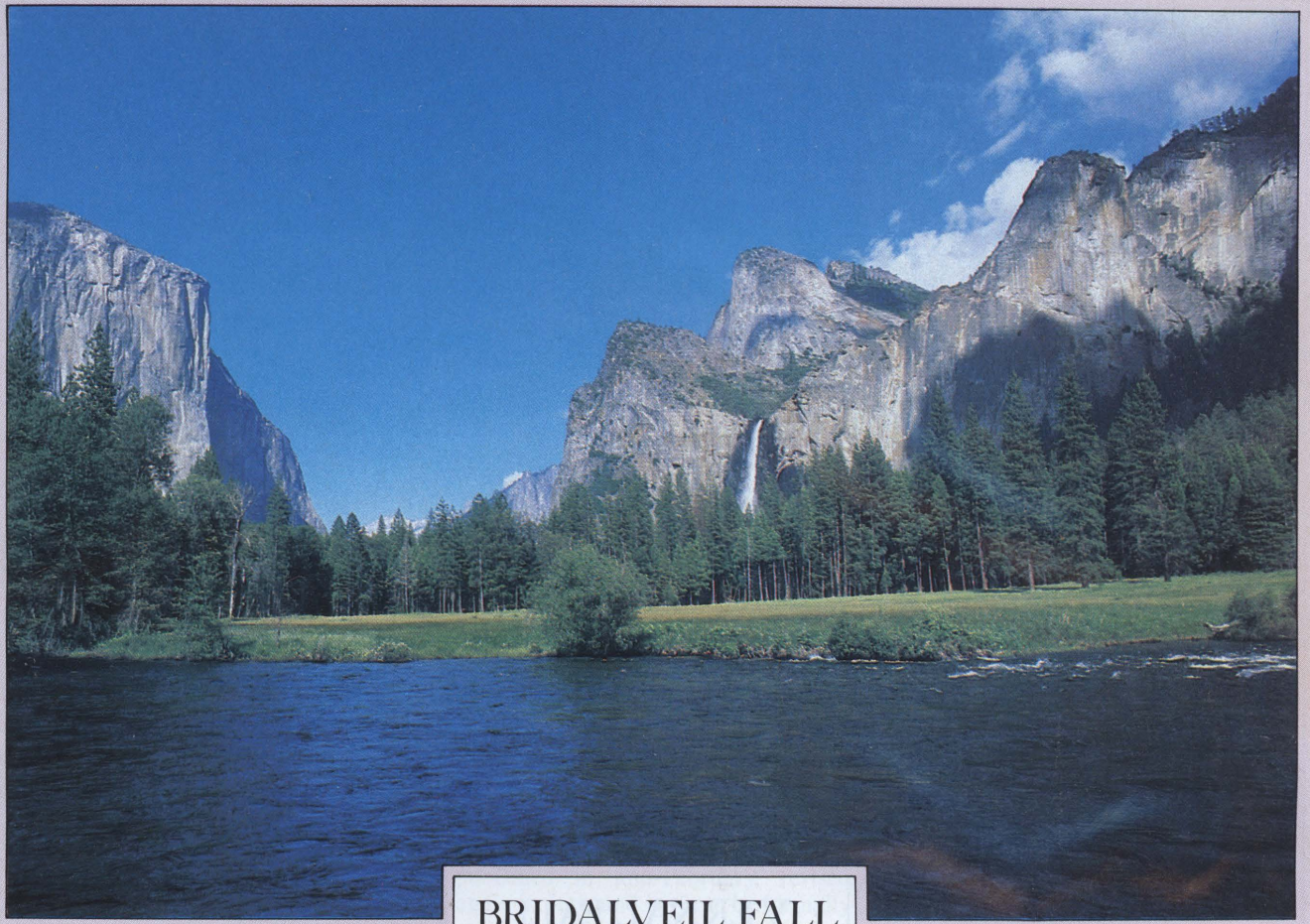
sion. They are going through the motions of finally publishing a plan that isn't "master" and that they will quite likely ignore in years to come. It bravely bans snowmobiles but utterly fails to cope with cars, which number 10,000 on some days. It forthrightly orders the tiny ice rink at Curry Village dismantled but leaves intact the tawdry, third-rate downhill ski area at Badger Pass. It fails to ensure the dismantling of the large commercial and residential settlement in Yosemite Valley.

It's a five-inch pile of documents that cost \$1 million and does not fundamentally intervene in Yosemite's decline.

The general management plan is a conversation between bureaus and agencies, a document largely written to gain formal approval as it moves through in and out boxes. It has the smack of having been to a lot of meetings. It is a plan that fails to make us dream and consequently has no point.

Well, it won't do. I say the compromises come soon enough, so we should start with a dream. I say get the old REJECTED stamp out again. That's what I say.

The master plan that follows is an outline of my dream. I can't say that I appreciate the place any more than the first-time visitor from Downey, but for the last seven or eight years I have lived just outside the park, and it is my experience that it is the community of park people—locals, rangers, old-timers, resident climbers—that is most aware of the woozy skid in Yosemite's physical and psychic well-being. I think most of us want others to see Yosemite . . . and to love it. We know it is not supposed to be a museum with nice velvet ropes to keep us away from the antiques. But the valley in particular has become a circus. It shouldn't be a museum, but it's not Fisherman's Wharf either. It may be said that the proposals here are not practical. Well,



BRIDALVEIL FALL

I would say that God and nature were not practical when Yosemite was created; it never was, and never will be, a sensible place.

GET RID OF THE CARS

IT WAS THE CAR that brought democracy to Yosemite, making it accessible to lots of people who learned to love the place, and it will finally be the car that destroys it, bringing smog, noise and too many people, most of them on slam-bang visits. In 1953 the rangers found that the average visitor to the park spent nearly two and a half days there. Now, when everything, most particularly cars, is faster, the average stay is just half what it was. We have learned to treat one of God's most extraordinary creations with the same love and care we devote to buying and eating a Burger Treat and fries.

In a recent survey, congestion and noise were the problems visitors complained about most. More than two-thirds of the citizens interviewed said they felt crowded in the park, in parking lots, on shuttle buses, at the bus stops, in the stores and restaurants. Large majorities—most of them Californians, believe it or not—said they would *walk* up to five miles to picnic, camp or look at a beautiful view alone.

The new government plan cops out on

Flowers can't grow on the banks of the Merced. Raccoons beg for Fritos in the post office parking lot, and the jays don't even fly away when you sit down near the fast food joint.



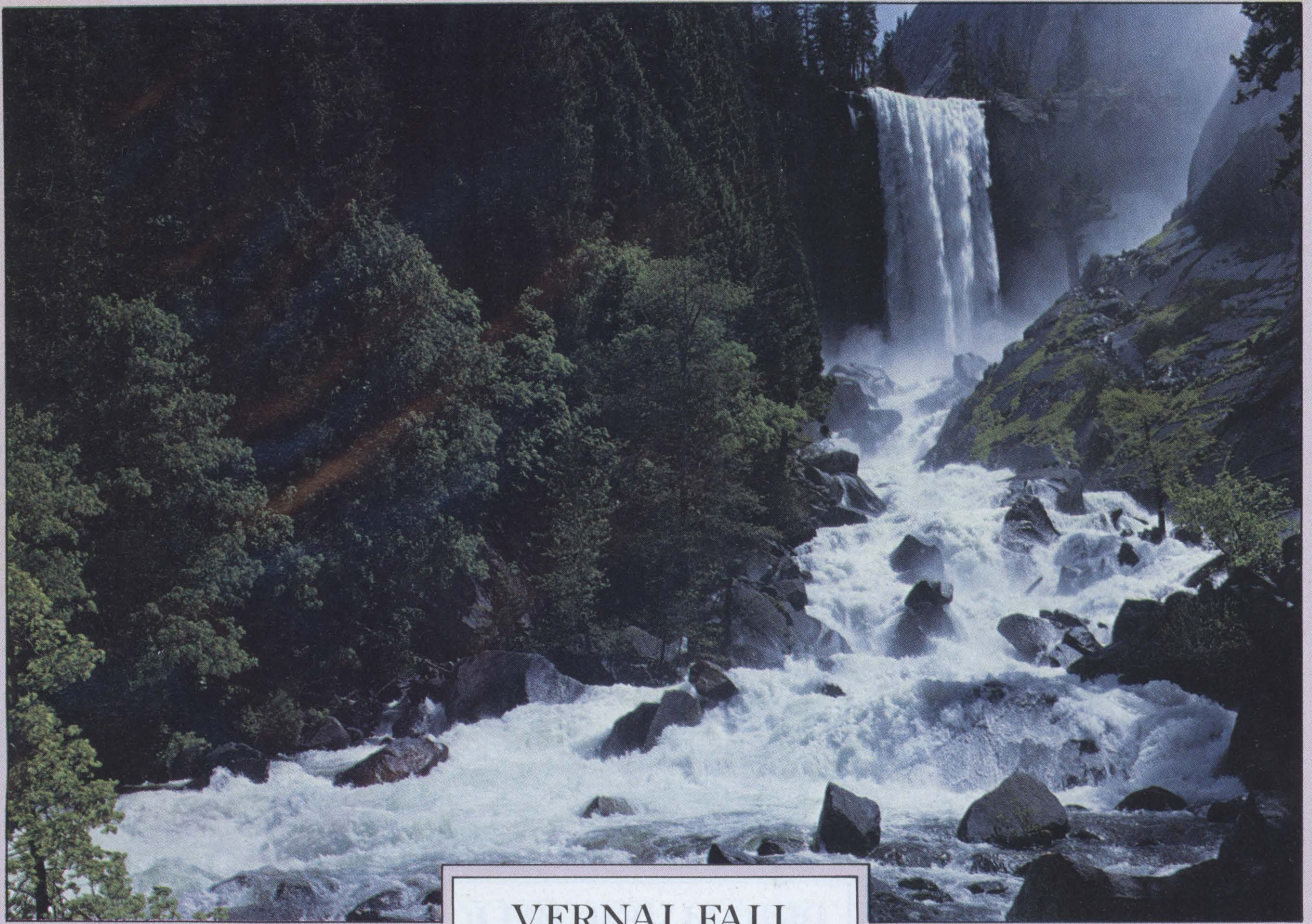
the car problem because as yet there is no solution that doesn't involve simply trading noisy private cars for smelly public buses and shifting parking lots around. What was promised instead was a study conducted jointly with the Department of Transportation, while 1.5 million cars and 5,000 buses a year flood in and the valley suffers measurable air pollution.

The problem is that the park service is trying to deal with the car problem when the cars have already arrived at Yosemite.

ite. They should be thinking instead about the moment when people sit down in their living rooms to plan their trips. We need to make it attractive to get to the park some other way and expensive and awkward to drive. Such public transportation as there is now requires frequent changes and is quite expensive. (I have seen foreign tourists take cabs to Yosemite from Fresno at a fare of about \$100. It's the only way to make the trip off-season if you don't drive yourself.)

To begin with, we have to charge like hell to bring a private car into Yosemite with fewer than four people in it. In the words of a park bureaucrat who worked on the present plan, "We have to return to the mentality of how people used to get here. People used to pack a bag when they left home. It went on the train in Oakland and was transferred to the stagecoach and so on. Now they pack their cars." What we have to do is pack for Yosemite as we pack for Europe or for backpacking. Things that can't be carried that way should be rented or loaned in the park.

The Yosemite bus schedule needs to be revised so that there are good connections with Amtrak in Merced. The winter schedule now misses the nice trains from the San Francisco Bay Area by four and a half hours. Buses should be run from the Bay Area directly to the park during heavy travel periods, and they should be



VERNAL FALL

pleasant and a bargain.

The Yosemite Valley Railroad should be restored. From Merced to El Portal there is still the remnant of the track bed. Some of it has been flooded by Lake McClure, an irrigation reservoir, and some of the trestles are collapsed, but much of the right of way still exists for a train ride we could brag about to the Swiss. It would cost a lot of money, but transit planners say it is feasible.

The money could come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is currently overflowing with bucks from a share in offshore oil lease money. The park service now spends its share trying to buy new parks and get rid of the few people who still own land surrounded by parks, a terrible burden to people who should be left alone and a waste of cash. The idea of spending oil company money to sandbag the automobile in Yosemite is pure poetry.

When the cars are finally out of Yosemite, everybody will gain. Among other things, nobody would have to be at the wheel of an automobile when he hit the park. The view from the mouth of the Wawona Tunnel is so incredible that it's not safe to be driving, and the series of sights from the valley floor beginning west of El Capitan isn't bad either. Driving when you could be looking is like doing a crossword puzzle during sex: One or the other is going to suffer.

Yosemite should not be a horizontally integrated business empire under the supposedly watchful eyes of big labor and the government. It didn't work in Detroit and it won't here.



CLOSE DOWN THE TOWN OF YOSEMITE

MOST PARK bureaucrats still live in Yosemite Valley, and the barber shop, nineteen booze outlets, the dentist's office, the jail and courtroom, the dormitories, the warehouses, most offices and every last square foot of retail sales space are still there. For years the park service has intended to move at least its

offices to El Portal, a tiny old town just outside the park.

At the strange announcement ceremony before Christmas, the director of the park service, Bill Whalen, said he'd just had this great idea of moving most of the management and administrative facilities in Yosemite Valley to Wawona, a spot at the south end of the park, over a 6,000 foot ridge from the valley, from which the park service has been trying to remove people and development for years. Whalen said he got this astounding idea during a car ride—St. Paul on the road to Emmaus. Whalen, for a variety of reasons, was later fired, and Wawona is out again. Planners are looking at shifting offices, shops and homes to El Portal, a community of around 600 people with almost no flat ground, and loaded, the local Indian community says, with undisturbed archaeological sites. El Portal, largely owned since the fifties by the park service, is actually a sensible alternative to a Yosemite Valley full of offices and warehouses.

The new park superintendent, Robert Binnewies, moved there when he took over. It was a nice gesture, but unfortunately there is not yet housing for the many more to follow, and the traditional family-oriented community was initially appalled when the park service began moving trailers into the area for offices. The effect on the local school, narrow

roads and tiny commercial establishments of doubling or tripling the population is feared by the local residents.

Recent reports suggest that MCA officials may finally agree to move some of their operations outside the park, but generally they have resisted moving to El Portal and have not attended community meetings in which the town's future is being discussed.

The park service should move the residents out of the valley, in spite of the predictable resistance from politically well-connected MCA, which may use its clout in Congress to stay where it is.

GIVE PARTS OF THE PARK SABBATICALS

THE FAMOUS PARK is the size of a middling California county, nearly 1,200 square miles, but it is known for just the several hundred acres of Yosemite Valley. Stuffing the better part of 2.5 million citizens into one small valley, most of them in six months of the twelve, year after year, is destructive to the place and diminishes the experience. Flowers can't grow along the banks of the Merced. Raccoons beg for Fritos in the post office parking lot, and the jays don't even fly away when you sit down near the fast food joint.

Although the valley is the most congested, even the backcountry has suffered. Thousands of Vibram soles tromp just a few of the same weary trails. Studies of backcountry use say that a third, and some years half, of the hikers use just ten of Yosemite's 53 backcountry zones, while others are virtually empty.

The solution is to divide the park into sections and then close them to visitors for periods of time. Let the grass come back over the trails and the bears go along for a year or two without Mountain House scrambled eggs or Wyler's Aid. Let the fish have a season or two to recover their numbers.

In the meantime, if every year you go camping in Tuolumne, you've done it since the kids were babies, find a new place. Discover the Minarets Wilderness just south of the park or the almost empty breathtaking miles north of Hetch Hetchy. It's what the people who know the park do. They just smile indulgently when they see people setting off on a trail cut deep from those who went before.

During the sabbatical the only overnight use would be by the crews of volunteers and park employees cleaning and rebuilding. Nobody would be allowed to drive into the recovering areas, and day hiking would not be encouraged.

Imagine the occasion when Yosemite Valley is reopened, emptied of garages, beauty parlors, tennis courts and banks, refreshed and recovered.

MAKE SOME NEW SUPERSTARS

YOSEMITE DOESN'T need promotion. It's already a superstar park. Not one single picture of Half Dome or Yosemite Falls needs to be printed, circulated, posted or shown for commercial or political purposes. Commercials can be filmed elsewhere. Brochures and Japanese travel agencies can emphasize other scenic wonders, and millions of people will still visit Yosemite. The tourist hotels and government campgrounds are already jammed, and will always be jammed, from Memorial Day to Labor Day as well as most other holidays. What besides greed and habit justifies spreading the message further? You might as well advertise dollar bills.

The director of the National Park Service has visited Yosemite repeatedly, each

THE OFFICIAL PLAN

HERE ARE the highlights of the National Park Service revised general management plan for Yosemite National Park, which was announced in November, published in mid-February, revised again in June and is yet to be formally published. Comments may be sent to the superintendent, Yosemite National Park, Calif. 95389.

- Add slightly to those areas of the park officially designated as wilderness.
- Shift government and concession administrative offices and maintenance operations to the edge of the park, surrounding communities or beyond. Move several hundred employees and families out of Yosemite Valley.
- Finance the necessary new buildings in El Portal and Wawona through the private, nonprofit Yosemite Institute, in addition to government funds.
- Spend about \$1.5 million for a new park headquarters in El Portal, some restoration of scenic areas, roadwork and removal of a handful of facilities in the valley, including one golf course, tennis courts, two gas stations and several of the valley's 1,300 buildings.
- Study feasibility of expanding public transportation inside the park.
- Reduce slightly the number of overnight facilities in the park.

Final legal approval of the plan will come only after publication of a final environmental impact statement toward the end of the summer. Information on the general management plan is now available in public libraries throughout California and from offices of the National Park Service in San Francisco and Los Angeles. —**T. D.**

time generating newspaper and sometimes big-time television coverage. Directors should go somewhere else, extol the virtues of, say, Sequoia-Kings Canyon, a magnificent park 100 miles to the south that is larger than Yosemite and gets a fraction of the onslaught Yosemite does. Besides, the fishing is better.

When MCA was buying into Yosemite a few years ago, they naturally thought of the movie possibilities, that being a large piece of the rest of their business. So they came up with a television series (invented by the creators of *Adam 12* and *Emergency*) about heroic park rangers, and they moved a crew of 90 into Yosemite Valley to shoot a kind of woodsy-cute ranger-cop show. The park service bought the whole package. The movie people brought in a hired bear, bought scripts from genuine rangers, built a set indoors at Curry Village and parked their bus decorated with a big sign that said VISIT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS on the side. It was nonsense and exploitation. Fortunately it was also so bad that only a few segments ever ran.

My proposal: Turn the extraordinary attention now focused on Yosemite elsewhere. Stop the use of Half Dome and El Capitan for commercials and send the film crews somewhere else.

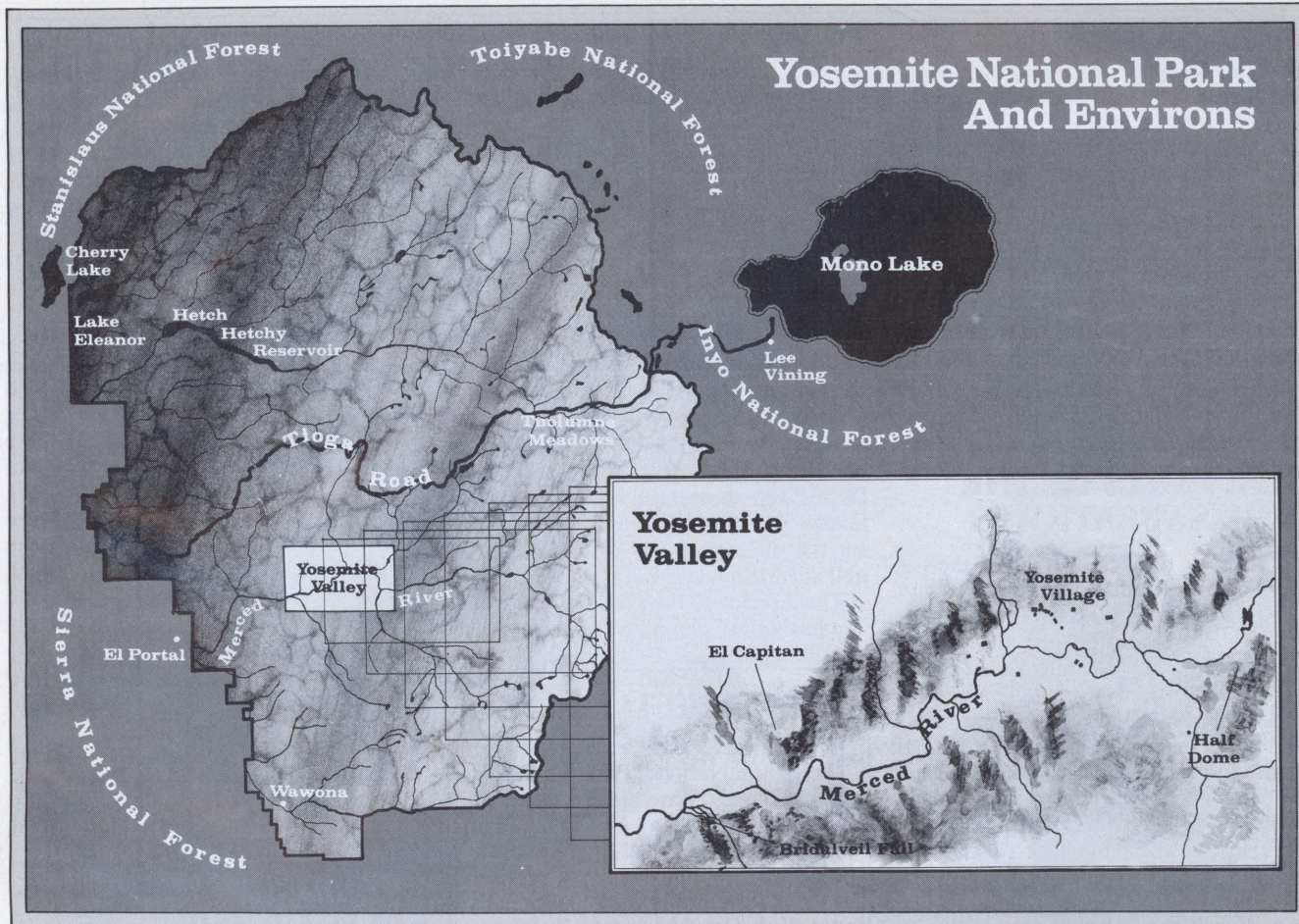
SPLIT UP THE CONCESSIONS

THE GOVERNMENT plan will eliminate some of the reminders of Gatlinburg, Tennessee, that seem to have become lodged in Yosemite, such as a curio shop that sells plastic Indian tomahawks, but it will preserve others, including a store offering 30 different kinds of salad dressing to citizens who are camping out in a forest.

The plan will 86 the car rental service, one of the two golf courses and the most offensive of the several gasoline stations.

But there will still be something wrong. The people who run the concessions for MCA are theoretically responsible to park service supervision, and that is said to have been tightened. Still, it was a U.S. senator (Metzenbaum from Ohio) and not the park service who revealed that the Company (as everyone calls it) was making million dollar-plus bookkeeping shifts to the parent corporation before they declared their regulated Yosemite profits.

Then, too, prices in the park are not exactly competitive. Recently *New West* had a letter from a reader, Richard Steckler of Walnut Creek. He said that he'd recently shopped in Yosemite Village where he saw signs that said prices charged there were comparable to those outside the park. He bought tofu for \$1.31 and later found it in Walnut Creek for 59 cents. He also picked up a



fishing rod for \$21 and a reel for \$29.95. These he later found at Consumers Distributing in Walnut Creek for a total of \$19. We double-checked and found that everything was as Mr. Steckler had said.

If there are to be three separate hotel facilities in Yosemite Valley, another in Wawona and still more in the high country, let them all compete. Ditto for the food stores, burger stands and sit-down restaurants. Yosemite does not have to be a horizontally integrated business empire with tourist cabins in the hands of a giant corporation and under the supposedly watchful eyes of a big international labor union and the U.S. government. It didn't work in Detroit and it won't work here.

DRAIN HETCH HETCHY VALLEY

IN THE BEST of all possible worlds, where money and practicality were not factors, one would opt for removing all development, acquiring the land, draining the reservoir and removing the dam." That's Ed Hardy talking, as hard a nose as you can find in the Yosemite business and the chief operating officer in the park for MCA. Even the tough guys seem to recognize that using one of the wonders of the earth as a tub to store water is a mortification.

So drain it and remove the dam. End the shame. Right the single greatest wrong in the history of California's screwing around with nature in the name of water resources. It is, Ed Hardy and all the other "serious planners" notwithstanding, possible and practical. If they can drain the Owens Valley, drill for oil in the Santa Barbara channel, dam the Stanislaus at New Melones, suck the water from 1,000 feet beneath the Central Valley and build a billion-dollar canal around the Sacramento delta, if they can do all that, how can they say it isn't practical to restore one of the most wonderful natural places in the world?

Southern Californians and people who moved to the state within the last month can be forgiven for not knowing about Hetch Hetchy. Anybody else hangs their head. The valley is northwest of Yosemite National Park and is the slightly smaller twin of Yosemite Valley itself. John Muir, the godfather of the national park, called Hetch Hetchy "a wonderfully exact counterpart of the Merced Yosemite, not only in its sublime rocks and waterfalls but in the gardens, groves and meadows of its flowery parklike floor." Nice, huh?

But in the time of President Wilson the growth-mongers and boosters of San Francisco got Congress to give the city Hetch Hetchy to dam and fill with water from the Tuolumne River. The water is used to generate electricity and then si-

phoned to the Bay Area for residential and commercial use. Part of the deal way back in 1913 was that San Francisco was supposed to sell the cheap electrical power to its citizens, something it has never done. They use a little for street lighting and trolley cars and sell the rest at bargain rates in Modesto and Turlock. The whole thing might be compared (to be really nasty) to priests leasing the cathedral out for a milk barn and then embezzling the income.

Here is what I propose instead: Build a replacement water storage facility downstream of Hetch Hetchy and outside Yosemite. There are several possibilities, including enlarging Don Pedro, the huge irrigation reservoir farther down the Tuolumne. Back when Hetch Hetchy was built they didn't have the equipment they do now. These days, even the managers of San Francisco's water system acknowledge that alternatives to a flooded Hetch Hetchy are possible. Let's ask the Corps of Engineers to help; maybe they'd like to do something the public can approve.

Some generating capacity would be lost, but some could be replaced with the new low-head equipment, and San Francisco would retain two smaller reservoirs at Cherry Lake and Lake Eleanor.

Here is what will happen. For the first couple of years Hetch Hetchy Valley will be a marshy flat, the Tuolumne River seeking a bed, rolling mildly in the loose

granite and thin mud. Grass seed will fall from the walls of the canyon, squirrels and other small mammals and birds will explore, carrying the seed of black oak and ponderosa and fir trees. In five years Hetch Hetchy Valley will be pretty, in twenty beautiful, and in our children's lifetimes only the careful observer will be able to tell what was done to it in 1913. A small plaque will note the day we regained our senses and pulled the plug.

The Hetch Hetchy Valley is about an hour closer to San Francisco than is Yosemite Valley. Had it not been dammed it would surely by now be full of gas stations and motels, as its twin is. It could remain pristine forever, a place to walk and wonder, to listen, a one-time-only chance to see the earth redecorate a masterpiece.

ENLARGE THE PARK TO INCLUDE MONO LAKE

WHEN THE LAST of the old Tioga Road was improved twenty years ago there was resistance from people who feared it would become a highway. No, no, the park service promised. We are opening "a sample of High Sierra wonderlands" to citizens. And they dynamited the rock at Olmsted Point and widened the roadbed and touched up the blacktop, and, by God, it is a modern high-speed highway. "It provides an opportunity," a ranger said with a wicked grin, "to study the effects of blasting on glaciated granite."

A survey completed a year ago and just released by the park service computer shows the Tioga Pass gate to Yosemite just above Mono to be the most heavily used of the four major park portals in the summer (it is blocked by snow many months of the year). Nearly half of the 2.5 million visitors each year come or go through Tioga and the tiny town of Lee Vining on the shores of Mono Lake. The survey shows, in addition, that drivers on some routes across the high country and through Tioga are spending less than three hours in Yosemite. "I'd be hard pressed," a ranger said, "to beat some of those times." The incredible road around Olmsted Point, past Tenaya Lake and through Tuolumne Meadows is being used as a sort of hot-dog rally route across the mountains. These are people on their way somewhere.

Some of them are going to Denver or Reno or the Mammoth Mountain ski area, but many of them are going to what they think of as an extension of Yosemite—the stark, scenic lands around Mono Lake. This land, which has ghost towns, hot springs, woodsy campgrounds, good fishing and wonderful pumice and obsidian mountains, is mostly under the

jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. This makes it hard to coordinate services—to direct, for example, campers being turned away from a crowded campground in Yosemite to another in the forest service lands fifteen miles away. It also makes it harder to control traffic.

What I am proposing is a simple bureaucratic transfer of the lands on the East Side from the forest service and the BLM to the park service. Then the park service could impose toll-road rates to cars using Yosemite as a pass-through.

As everyone must know, the water rights around Mono Lake belong to the city of Los Angeles, which draws on them for 16 percent of its water. To the dismay of the few residents of Lee Vining, diversions of fresh water bound for Mono have been so great that the lake is dropping almost two feet a year—a threat, they say, to the delicate ecology.

Placing the watershed and the lake in the trust of the park service will not necessarily save Mono Lake, but it might put the battle on some kind of equal footing. The bureaucrats of the National Park Service and those of the L.A. Department of Water and Power, in fact, are nicely matched.

GIVE THE PARK SPIRITUAL CURATORS

WHEN A theological seminary threatened to raze one of his homes for a dormitory, Frank Lloyd Wright said it proved you can't trust the church with anything beautiful. By now we must have learned the government can't be counted on, either. Yosemite has been in the care of the Miwok Indians, the army, the state of California, the National Park Service and a variety of commercial enterprises. The Indians are the only ones whose stewardship stands scrutiny. They had it for at least 4,000 years and kept it pretty nice.

There used to be an Indian village in the valley, but the last house burned in 1968, and only three families remain, they say, all employed by the park service. Two of these families can be traced to people who lived in Yosemite when the Spanish owned California and no white people had ever seen El Capitan, let alone leaped off it with a parachute.

In the current plan the Indians are to get a cultural center on the site of the old Indian village. They should get it, and they should also be encouraged to take responsibility for the spiritual health of the place on the bet that they have more perspective than the forest executives. "Much of this valley is sacred," says the Mariposa Indian council's Jay Johnson matter of factly. "It has been that way for

thousands of years. The land, the waterfalls, rocks. Indians have respect for them. The food came from the land and trees. We call it sacred, but, well, it's really just a strong feeling for it. When we see it our hearts beat faster."

THERE HAS BEEN an enormous amount of talk about the management plan for Yosemite; it is, as they say, controversial. This troubles the park service, which would prefer, naturally enough, to have everybody like them and to go about their business and ours without getting beat up. But it should be controversial, in the way politics and religion used to be. People should feel deeply and express themselves with passion on the subject.

Most of the emotion is coming from those hostile to park development, of course; whoever hears of nasty letters or articles in favor of noise, crowding and litter? The concessionaire and some of the park bureaucrats have responded by suggesting that the antidevelopment position is extremist and elitist, that these are the rude ravings of the arrogantly young and thoughtless. So while I was writing this plan I got to feeling bad about being an elitist. Gee, I said to a ranger I know, how can I suggest making it difficult to drive into the valley when lots of people will have trouble getting here as a consequence? The ranger thought I was a fool. "You've climbed Half Dome, right?" he said.

Right, at least by the easy backside route. "Well," he demanded, "do you believe everyone has a God-granted right to stand on the top of Half Dome? Do you believe we should put a road up there?"

No, I don't. And just because there have been unlimited rights for machines in Yosemite Valley for a generation, that doesn't mean it should continue that way. We can all learn from mistakes.

Furthermore, I do not believe the anti-development plans for Yosemite are particularly extreme. They are just precocious . . . like being against the war in Vietnam before the Tet offensive. I think my plan is a moderate plan, quite middle of the road, really. Ansel Adams and the Wilderness Society, for example, are proposing that virtually all valley development be removed—including Adams's own gallery. I'm for leaving some. I do not insist that the Glacier Point and Tioga roads be removed or that every single liquor outlet be closed, just, say, half of the nineteen. What is extreme is what the park has become, not the proposals for scaling back a little; what is elitist is the position of the people who are fighting to keep their low-rent bungalows in Yosemite Valley, not those of us who visit once in a while and are called Turkeys.

Save the One Yosemite Park. ■