

Yosemite Valley in mid-Summer

The waterfalls in Yosemite Valley are dramatic and impressive this summer. The winter snowfall was heavy and runoff from the back country snowpack is huge. More water brings more people who drive more cars, which create more traffic congestion. Try finding a parking space.

The Yosemite Valley Plan has reduced the parking spaces in the Valley in hopes of reducing auto traffic and encouraging visitors to use buses. The plan doesn't seem to be working. Here is what I ran into on a Monday in late July hoping to show my three grandkids at least an overview of the treasures of Yosemite National Park.



Yosemite Falls

- As early as 9:30 AM there were only a few parking spaces left at Bridalveil Fall.
- There is no parking lot available for Yosemite Falls, only parking on the loop road shoulder and that is limited.
- The parking lot across the loop road is signed for Yosemite Lodge guests only. The lot was full anyhow.
- To find a parking space visitors drive around in circles until they spot a car pulling out and then double park and wait to pounce on the parking space. That holds true for the Yosemite Village parking lot.

- Get a bite of lunch at Curry Village? Forget it. We never ate lunch. Both the paved parking lot and the overflow dirt parking area were full, just an endless stream of cars going around in circles looking for tail lights that will signal a car backing out of a space.



Half Dome from Glacier Point

My plan was to park somewhere, grab the free shuttle bus that circles the valley, get off at Happy Isle where the 210 mile John Muir trail begins (or ends depending on direction of travel) and hike with the grandkids to Vernal Falls. That never happened though the shuttle buses all appeared half empty. We simply wasted hours driving in circles. By early afternoon the college girls in their Smokey Bear hats and yellow vests were directing traffic at the intersections.

Last resort, late afternoon, visit Glacier Point. From the valley floor at 4000 ft elevation to Glacier Point at 7200 ft elevation it is 30 miles by road (4.2 miles by trail). Glacier Point is just one of many places to get a panoramic view of Yosemite Valley like the top of Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, Half Dome, Clouds Rest, but Glacier Point is the only one reachable by car. To reach the others requires strong legs and good hiking boots. And wouldn't you know the parking at Glacier Point was congested too, though some spaces were available.



The views from Glacier Point are stunning and worth the day of frustration. You can look vertically down into the valley 3000 feet below or swivel your gaze clockwise past North Dome to the far distant Cathedral Peak to Clouds Rest, to the dominance of Half Dome to the entire Merced River spilling over Nevada Falls to the Clarks Range and the spine of the sierras disappearing beyond the horizon. Regardless of circumstances I consider that a visit to Yosemite Valley presents a visual experience found nowhere else. Still I won't attempt it again in the summer unless I am hiking to one of those panoramic view points and only if I get a real early start.

There are three entrances to the Valley from the west and Tioga Pass from the east. If I were appointed head of the National Park Service the first thing I would do is limit the cars during peak traffic months in the summer. When the car count hits the limit, drop the gates, and send the rest of the visitors in on buses.

Half Dome & Nevada Falls from Glacier Point

Agree or disagree, email me or comment on my facebook page.