

YOSEMITE WATERFALLS,

GRANDER THAN EVER



A FLY-IN PHOTOGRAPHIC EXPEDITION

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BY ANNA KARELIS

Leaps freely from the cliffs, sways and sings in the wind, clad in gauzy, sun-sifted spray, half falling, half floating, kissing and splashing notes and thunder-like detonations,” wrote John Muir, one of the first explorers and naturalists to traverse Yosemite National Park. Perhaps the most influential conservationist to survey this California wilderness, Muir conveyed his passionate insights into this glorious iconic valley.

Renowned throughout the world for its majestic waterfalls, sheer granite cliffs, wildflower meadows and giant sequoias, the picturesque park was a natural draw for the 20 Flying Adventures travelers who set out to explore it on a Fly-In photographic expedition, accompanied by two marvelous photographers. FA’s very own Michael Higgins (SpectacularPhotography.com), who has photographed every cover shot of Flying Adventures for the past 17 years along with a plethora of breathtaking photos alongside oodles of articles, and Yosemite’s Nancy Robbins (RobbinsPhotography.com), a professional who has lived in the park for more than 10 years taking spectacular images and learning which spots are best to photograph at which time of day for the best lighting and angles, led the way.

The experience was truly an amateur photographer’s dream, and an extra-special treat to spend time exploring a national treasure with a local expert on all its nooks and crannies. Even for those with no photographic inclinations, Robbins was able to point them to the “picture-perfect” spot. Furthering our delight, the most knowledgeable tour guide, Glen Bennik of Discover Yosemite Tours (DiscoverYosemite.com or 559.642.4400), kept the FA group mesmerized with his deep knowledge of the region. Add to that the comforts of the tour bus; not having to drive was a huge benefit and the best way to see the valley. He gave the budding photographers

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL HIGGINS

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One of the world's tallest, the waterfall consists of three tiers for a combined drop of 2,425 feet.

all the history, details, geology, folklore and facts of Mother Nature's sights. Record snowfall in the Sierras this year caused Yosemite's iconic waterfalls, streams and rivers to swell in monumental proportions, creating even more-spectacular visions than usual. The best time to visit the valley for thundering falls is spring, especially late May and early June.

First stop, **Mariposa Grove** to view the Giant Sequoias. Known as the "Kings of the Conifers," these towering titans have trunks wider than 25 feet and can live longer than 2,000 years. While Robbins and Higgins were teaching the group how to photograph at the perfect angle and giving tips on taking pictures in the shade, Bennik was educating everyone on the facts of these mammoth timbers, explaining how they drink 3,000 to 4,000 gallons of water each day through roots that are just 6 to 8 feet below the surface, but stretch out more than 100 yards.

Next view was **Bridalveil Fall**. Towering at 620 feet, it is one of the few falls that flows year round. Bridalveil is famous for its mist, which floats in the breeze to resemble – what else – a bridal veil. The trail to reach the waterfall is a great short hike for such an up-close look at the roaring water cascading down at rapid force. Opposite Bridalveil Fall are the rigid granite cliffs of **El Capitan**, the largest granite monolith in the world. At almost 3,000 vertical feet of rock, skilled mountain climbers from around the world take on the challenge of ascending these sheer cliffs. Take your binoculars because during peak season, as many as 50 climbers might be scaling the walls. Flowing off the cliffs of El Cap is the awe-inspiring **Ribbon Falls**, said to be among the highest single-drop waterfalls in the U.S. at a mere 1,612 feet of surging water.

One of the many highlights of the journey was a stop at the stunning **Yosemite Falls**. One of the world's tallest, the waterfall consists of three tiers for a combined drop of 2,425 feet. This is one

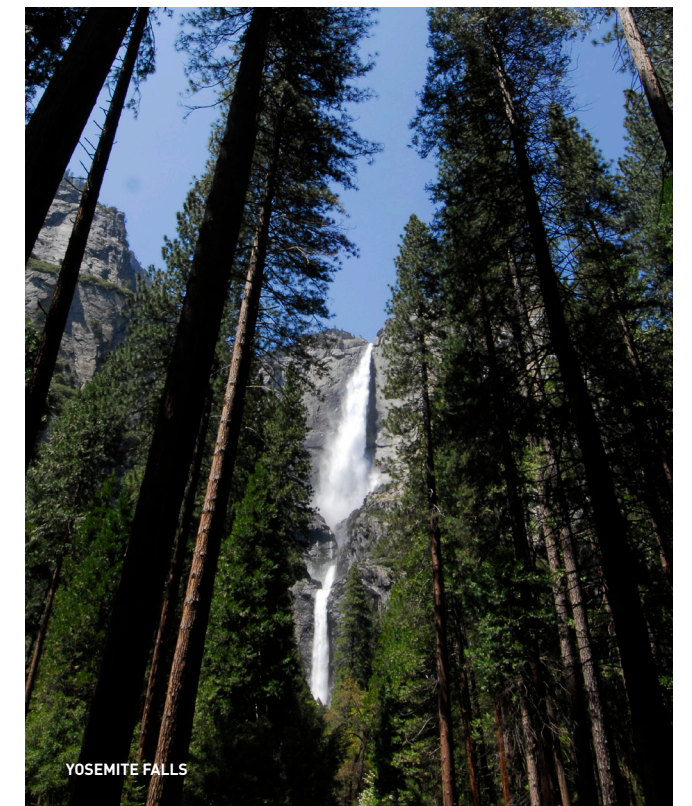
EL CAPITAN / MERCED RIVER



BRIDALVEIL FALL
PHOTO BY NANCY ROBBINS



EL CAPITAN MEADOW
CATHEDRAL ROCKS SPIRES



YOSEMITE FALLS

YOSEMITE WATERFALLS



A LITTLE TASTE OF MADERA WINE COUNTRY

➡ CRU WINE COMPANY

Known for its dessert wine and ports dating back to the 1930s, Madera now has nine wineries. The Adventurers stopped by two and enjoyed tasting a few vintages at the locals' favorite places. The first stop was CRU Wine Company, a charming winery with amazing art. Guests particularly enjoyed tasting the Pinot Noir, Chardonnays and Cabernets. Just a short walk away is Madera's famous Valley Pistachio (ValleyPistachio.com or 559.674.0020), known for its nuts and dried fruits. Some of the Adventurers' favorites were Jalapeño Pistachios, Chili Lemon Almonds and Pangos (pineapple infused mangos).

559.673.6372 • CruWineCompany.com

➡ APPELLATION CALIFORNIA

The second stop was at Appellation California, a tasting room started by a fourth-generation wine-grape-growing family to showcase the wines of their region. With 25 different wines to taste, Appellation's owner shared his special abode, a refurbished 1928 Spanish colonial tucked into the middle of a 200-acre vineyard, surrounded by majestic Valley Oak trees. This is a perfect place to host an event, as family members showed FA guests their Madera down-home hospitality, serving dinner and dessert – all paired with plenty of local wine.

559.674.WINE • ApCalWine.com

of Robbins' favorite places to photograph her special "moonbow," or lunar rainbow. During full-moon evenings, she has captured images of perfect night rainbows, which are created by colorful prisms reflecting off the moon instead of the sun.

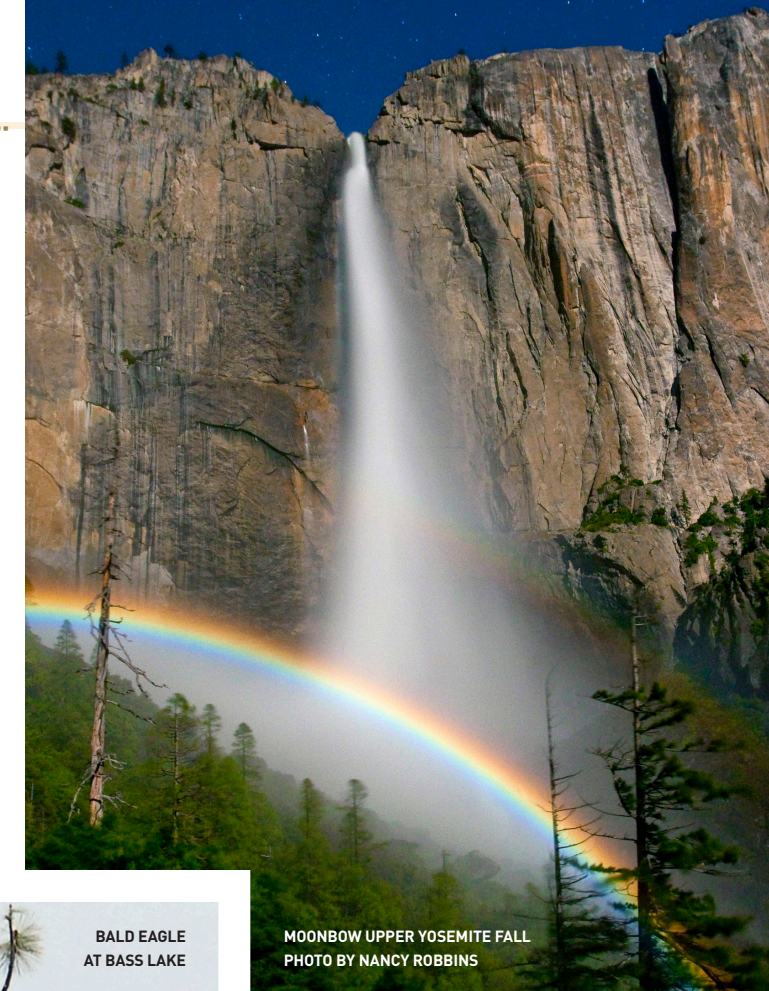
"I love shooting under the full moon. It is something completely unique, and scouting diverse places at different times creates fabulous photographs," commented Robbins.

Next it was off to see the rugged grandeur of the **Half Dome**, a radiant crystal rock that appears to have been sliced in half like an apple and stands 4,737 feet. Hikers can climb to the top using a cable system that was erected in 1919 on a 16.5-mile round-trip trail. The cable hike is the most significant day-hike in the valley, taking an average of 10-14 hours. Up for the challenge? Pack comfortable hiking boots, lots of water and get an early start. With 900 feet of cascading falls (you will see both **Vernal** and **Nevada Falls**) and a bird's-eye, panoramic view of the valley, it is worth every blister on your toes. Permits are now required to hike the cable section of the trail. For permit information go to YosemiteHikes.com or Recreation.gov. The vertical northwest face is another route taking an average of 2-4 days and considered a classic climb around the world.

The last waterfall view was from a different angle and one of Robbins' favorite to show the group: **Bridalveil Fall** from the top of Tunnel View. During the late afternoon a natural rainbow reflects off the waterfall with vibrant colors dancing off the mist of rumbling foam. Photographers were lined up with all types of cameras to



GRIZZLY GIANT
MARIPOSA GROVE



MOONBOW UPPER YOSEMITE FALL
PHOTO BY NANCY ROBBINS



BALD EAGLE
AT BASS LAKE

FA FACTOID
George Anderson was the first person to reach the summit of Half Dome in 1875. It was declared "perfectly inaccessible" in 1865.



BASS LAKE



OVERLOOKING BASS LAKE

YOSEMITE WATERFALLS




shoot the jaw-dropping allure of the falls.

The FA travelers were ready to take a little reprieve from the expedition and relax in the serene setting at the Pines Resort, located on the edge of **Bass Lake** (BassLake.com or 559.642.3121). A tranquil haven tucked away in the Sierra National Forest just 14 miles from Yosemite, it is the perfect getaway to unwind and enjoy nature. Guests filled their spare time with spa treatments, boat rides, lunch across the lake at Miller's Landing Grill & Marina (known for its goliath hamburgers; MillersLanding.com or 559.642.3633), eagle sightings and hikes. Each had their own lakeside suite with a fireplace for those chilly nights, and balconies from which to take in the fresh mountain air and view sunsets over the

crowned ridges of Ponderosa Pine trees. A must for foodies is Ducey's on the Lake. Guests enjoyed their fabulous breakfasts, delectable desserts and, of course, a few night caps.

This was a photographic adventure to remember for a lifetime. Yosemite is truly a place of splendor, where one might wonder how a camera can capture such magnificent sights. Higgins and Robbins showed adventurers how photographs bring beauty to both the eyes and soul. It is true that a picture captures a thousand words.

To join Flying Adventures on the next Fly-In, email a note to FlyIn@Flying-Adventures.com. Further information about Yosemite can be found through the Yosemite Sierra Visitors Bureau at YosemiteThisYear.com or 559.683.4636. 



AIRPORT

✈ MADERA MUNICIPAL AIRPORT

Aviators flew into the Madera Municipal Airport (MAE) and had special treatment at the Madera Jet Center, a full-service FBO. There are lots of amenities at the jet center including a beautiful new hanger (18,000 square feet), WiFi, lounge, courtesy shuttle/car, a shower, both 100LL and Jet-A, plus a super-friendly staff. 559.675.1400
MaderaJetCenter.com

ALL ABOARD!

✈ A TRAIN LOVER'S PARADISE!

Ride the rails at the Yosemite Mountain Sugar Pine Railroad. The 3-foot narrow gauge railway operates two steam locomotives that journey through the Sierra Mountains on a four-mile loop where logs were hauled back in the day. The 1928 Shay steam locomotive was the largest ever constructed, holding 3,420 gallons of water and weighing 84 tons. A ride on the railroad's 1913 Shay is also an experience to remember. FA guests got a first-hand look at the trains with the owners and rode in the front engine, blowing the whistle and watching the process of fire stoking. The evening ended with dinner, a gold panning tour, and history from the second-generation family that helped rebuild the historic route in 1961. The route was originally operated by a logging company back in 1874.

Reservations: 559.683.7273 or ymspr.com