

# Understand Yosemite, Sequoia & Kings Canyon

## **THE PARKS TODAY ..... 198**

Visitation has rocketed as the US economic recession drags on. Can the parks be loved too much?

## **HISTORY .....200**

Read about who and what has shaped the parks, from the Ahwahneechee to John Muir to Yosemite's General Management Plan.

## **GEOLOGY.....208**

Mountains don't just pop up overnight, you know. Find out about how the Sierra Nevada range has formed and shifted.

## **WILDLIFE..... 213**

Get the lowdown on giant sequoias, ever-grazing black bears, dazzling wildflowers and those hungry yellow-bellied marmots.

## **CONSERVING THE PARKS ..... 219**

A primer on the Sierra Nevada's water wars, preserving its forests and meadows, and the problem of air pollution.



## visitors per sq mile



# The Parks Today

## California Dreaming

The economic recession has created an upswing in domestic tourism, with Americans taking shorter vacations and staying closer to home. After ebbing to a low of 3.4 million in 2005, Yosemite's visitation numbers have risen steadily, getting closer to reaching the all-time 4.2 million peak of 1996. Visitation at Sequoia & Kings Canyon has been inching up too.

And those folks aren't just circling the sights and calling it a day. In both parks, the number of backcountry hiking permits has also increased, spiking in 2008. In a time of federal and California state budget cuts, parks and other public lands soldier on, trying to do more with less, and many of the surrounding national forests and state parks have had to reduce their services.

## The Balancing Act

The parks continue to dance the tricky footwork of facilitating preservation while accommodating tourism. Yosemite, especially Yosemite Valley, still teeters on the edge of being loved to pieces, with little movement towards the conservation goals outlined in its 1980 General Management Plan or the 2000 Yosemite Valley Plan. Many Yosemite Valley visitors decide to forgo their cars and whiz around by shuttle or bicycle, but Yosemite's planners occasionally hatch some head-scratching schemes to enhance the visitor experience, like cutting down Valley trees to open up scenic views.

Still, Yosemite has taken a few more recent steps to cut back the impact of visitors. One new project is restoration of the area surrounding Tenaya Lake, rerouting people around sensitive habitats. The number of incidents between humans and bears has decreased significantly over the last decade, due to increased education and ranger outreach. But the boldest

» Highest point of Yosemite: Mt Lyell (13,114ft)

» Highest point of Sequoia: Mt Whitney (14,505ft)

## Top Books

- » **An Uncertain Path: A Search for the Future of National Parks** (Bill Tweed, 2010) A retired Sequoia park planner hikes and ponders park management in an era of climate change.
- » **Yosemite in Time: Ice Ages, Tree Clocks, Ghost Rivers** (2005)

A coffee-table photo essay on Yosemite's iconic views, past and present.

- » **Off the Wall: Death in Yosemite** (Michael Ghiglieri & Butch Farabee, 2007) A cautionary compendium of fatalities and daring search and rescue operations.

## On Film

- » **The National Parks: America's Best Idea** (2009) Documentary series on US park history.
- » **Star Trek V: The Final Frontier** (1989) Captain Kirk does El Capitan.
- » **The Eiger Sanction** (1975) Clint Eastwood *really* climbs.