

September 30, 2008    **Sequoia, King's Canyon, Yosemite Trip Report**

Originally I was going to do a very detailed report but realized how little I could put into words the impact this trip had on me. So here's the 100 page short version. Val will likely add her \$0.02 as well. If you want to know more just ask.

Photos are available on my Hiking Photo Site. For Sequoia and King's Canyon photos click [here](#). For Yosemite photos click [here](#).

- Kevin Heckeler

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September 13, 2008

Day one and our flight from Albany to Cincinnati to San Francisco went smoothly. We drove south along Hwy 1 along the Pacific Coast. Some of it was scenic, but overall I wasn't impressed. Was told later that the nicest section of road was south of where we were. Eventually we had to head west to a hotel in Fresno for our 2 hour drive into Sequoia/King's Canyon the next day.

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September 14, 2008

We arrived in Sequoia/King's Canyon around 9:30AM and immediately connected with a Ranger at the Visitor Center who was doing a guided hike in a section of forest called Redwood Canyon, which we had thought about doing anyway. She turned out to be a lot of fun to hike with and knew a lot about ecology, and had been a Ranger in several other National Parks. This was a nice 6 mile hike through many Sequoia groves. We also found the source of the smoke we had encountered all day on a neighboring ridge. Forest fires are pretty common and as we learned critical to the replenishment/natural recycling of the forest. The Sequoia trees also reproduce in rich, fire ravaged forests better than in dried out or overgrown forests.

Afterwards we drove down to King's Canyon and drove all the way to the meadow at the end. What an awesome place, with towering mountains and steep valleys. It was my first taste of a mountainous area that I consider truly "wild", with no access roads to its deepest parts. I hope to be fit enough to backpack parts of it someday.

This night (and next) we stayed in a cabin at Grant Grove.

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September 15, 2008

We woke early and drove to the "panoramic point" a few miles behind our cabin area. It was smoky and hazy but still made for a nice photo opportunity to get some perspective of the size of Kings Canyon and beyond.

We drove back down to see the Grant tree in the nearby Sequoia grove. It was a walk among the largest trees I've ever seen (the prior day's was the previous record). No photo does these things justice, and massive only begins to describe them.

After breakfast we went to the main part of Sequoia, hiked out to a Moro Rock for some more awesome views into King's Canyon, and went through some of the groves (including the one you can drive your car through). We descended down the back side of the park and took a long way around to get back into the park the same way we came in the day before. It's a very interesting area due to elevation change and the dramatic climate change that results. The drop from 6500 feet to 2000 feet you gain 15-20F in temperature, and huge trees turn to scrub brush and sand.

Once we arrived back to Grant Grove we decided to do an out-and-back walk along the ridge where the panoramic point is behind our cabin. The fire tower was closed but we got to experience a few burn zones and intimacy with the forest on a less travelled trail.

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September 16, 2008

Off to Yosemite, this meant going back through Fresno and then heading northeast for a few hours. We came in along Rt 120 which takes you through the valley into the park (past a huge landslide across 200 yards of the road that we detoured around), then headed north and east some more until we reached Tuolumne Meadows. I snapped several photos along the way of Half Dome and Tenaya Lake. Spectacular introduction to Yosemite. We even pulled off between the rain showers to hike a small dome along the road to get some 360 views.

Once at our tent cabin at the Tuolumne Lodge we decided to drive east and out of the park toward Lee Vining and Mono Lake. More spectacular views. All of this area is at 8500+ feet elevation and is considered "sub-alpine". The mountains were very bare and we were basically at tree line, without getting out of the car! The valley road we took to Mono Lake was pitted which indicated to me the thousand feet of rocks and boulders above and below the road were not necessarily guaranteed to stay there, an eery reality when traveling this area. Prior that same day we drove through an accident scene where a tree had come down, suddenly, on a passing car, causing it to flip end over end several times. later we found out from a park official that the people survived, but one had a "broken neck" as a result of the accident. Yikes!

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September 17, 2008

Day one of our rock climbing lessons in Tuolumne. Val and I wanted to start lead climbing and decided to use a referral from another climber we met weeks earlier at the Beer walls. Tim Martel (from New Hampshire) was our guide and turned out to be knowledgeable, fun, and an all around top notch person.

We started by reviewing some anchoring and protection placement basics. He then led a 2 pitch climb on a long 1 pitch wall, just so we could see how it all interrelates. It was a ton of fun and we ended the day with more anchor building scenarios which I found invaluable since it's the only time you can really start to apply the knowledge when your life doesn't depend on it.

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September 18, 2008

Day two of our rock climbing lessons in Tuolumne (Day three was scheduled for a few days later, in the main Yosemite Valley). This time we did 2 routes on Lembert Dome, one a slabby 2 pitch 5.8 route up a well travelled and polished crack, and the other a 4 pitch route that was mixed 5.6 and 5.7 over a variety of obstacles. The first climb was easily the hardest I had ever successfully completed. It was just low enough angle that my shoes would stick to the rock most of the time, but it worked on my trust in my shoes immensely which pays off in the climbing on Day 3. The second climb was just a ton of fun and was well within my abilities. From this day Val and I gained experience following and cleaning routes, as well as being able to check out some interesting and creative uses of anchoring and directionals.

Once done with Tim we left for Curry Village in the main valley. Another spectacle pictures don't come close to capturing! When entering you get a few teases, then BAM! El Capitan, which I never gave much thought before, is standing proudly before you. The thing towers over the valley like you cannot imagine and in its shadow I immediately felt why it was such a coveted climbing destination.

This night in Curry Village was a last minute decision, so we ended up in a tent cabin where a bunch of younger teenagers were staying. They were quite loud and poorly supervised, but thankfully we had our ear plugs and salvaged a good night's sleep. The buffet at Curry Village is quite good, for what it's worth...

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September 19, 2008

The next 3 days were set aside to be what we were - Tourons.

Val was recovering from a knee injury so many of our previous, more strenuous hiking plans were reduced to multiple shorter day trips or longer drives to roadside vistas. While we can't pound our chests for hiking Half Dome, we did get to see a lot of the main valley.

The first stop was Glacier Point, located on the cliffs above Curry Village offering excellent views of most of the main valley.

Next was a hike up Sentinel Dome, then down and around on a relatively unused section of trail over to Taft Point, a more heavily travelled destination. This brought us closer for some great views of El Capitan towering at 3,000' from across the valley.

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September 20, 2008

An early start got us to breakfast and on the trail by 8AM. We headed up 1000' to a lookout near lower Yosemite Falls (which does not run past July most years and was bone dry while we were there).

At 11:30AM my friend Scott from Los Angeles arrived and we set off on a long and fun bike ride through the park that had us window shopping in the main village and easily accessing the many herd paths for hiking through the valley's many meadows. Later that night we watched stars from a nearby boardwalk that went through a large meadow.

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September 21, 2008

We decided that anything we would want to hike with Scott wasn't going to compare with what we experienced two days prior, so back to Glacier Point and Taft Point. He needed to be on the bus headed back to LA by 5PM, so we only added a side trip to the Tuolumne Grove where they have a few Sequoia trees, which Scott had never seen in person. Val did a separate hike along the base of El Capitan.

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September 22, 2008

We packed and headed out for our last full day in Yosemite. This was the 3rd rock climbing day and our guide had something special for us. Well, it was a pile of crap. The Manure Pile to be exact. He lead and we followed a 5.8 route with the harder variations for 6 pitches. Truly exhausting but more fun than anything I've ever done outdoors. In those 600+ feet climbing I got to experience every type of rock, crack in rock, and use every foot/hand hold I know. I did 2 weeks, at our usual pace, of rock climbing in about 4 hours. Plenty of photos from this day.

But all good things must come to an end, and after a long chat by the cars we wished Tim well and started our 4+ hour car ride back to San Francisco. Aside from a speeding ticket outside of Oakland (wish me luck fighting that from 3,000 miles away lol) it was an uneventful and only occasionally scenic ride. We were so happy to find a Starbucks. REAL coffee!

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September 23, 2008

Flight home was uneventful. Did manage to get a few photos of the Rockies, next year's destination.