

LEVELED Book • V

Yosemite and the Badge



Written by Rusty Fischer
Illustrated by Stephen Marchesi

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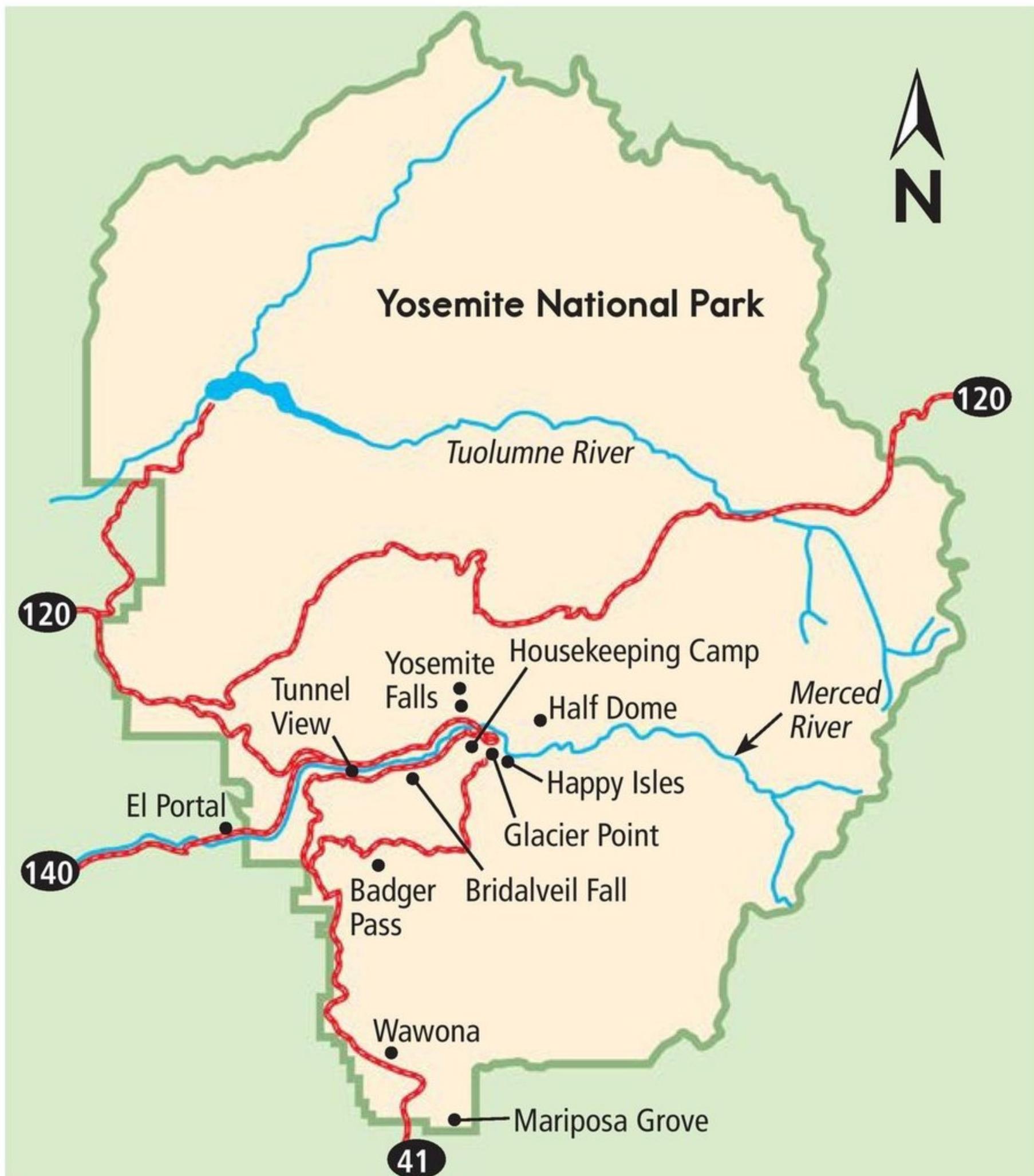


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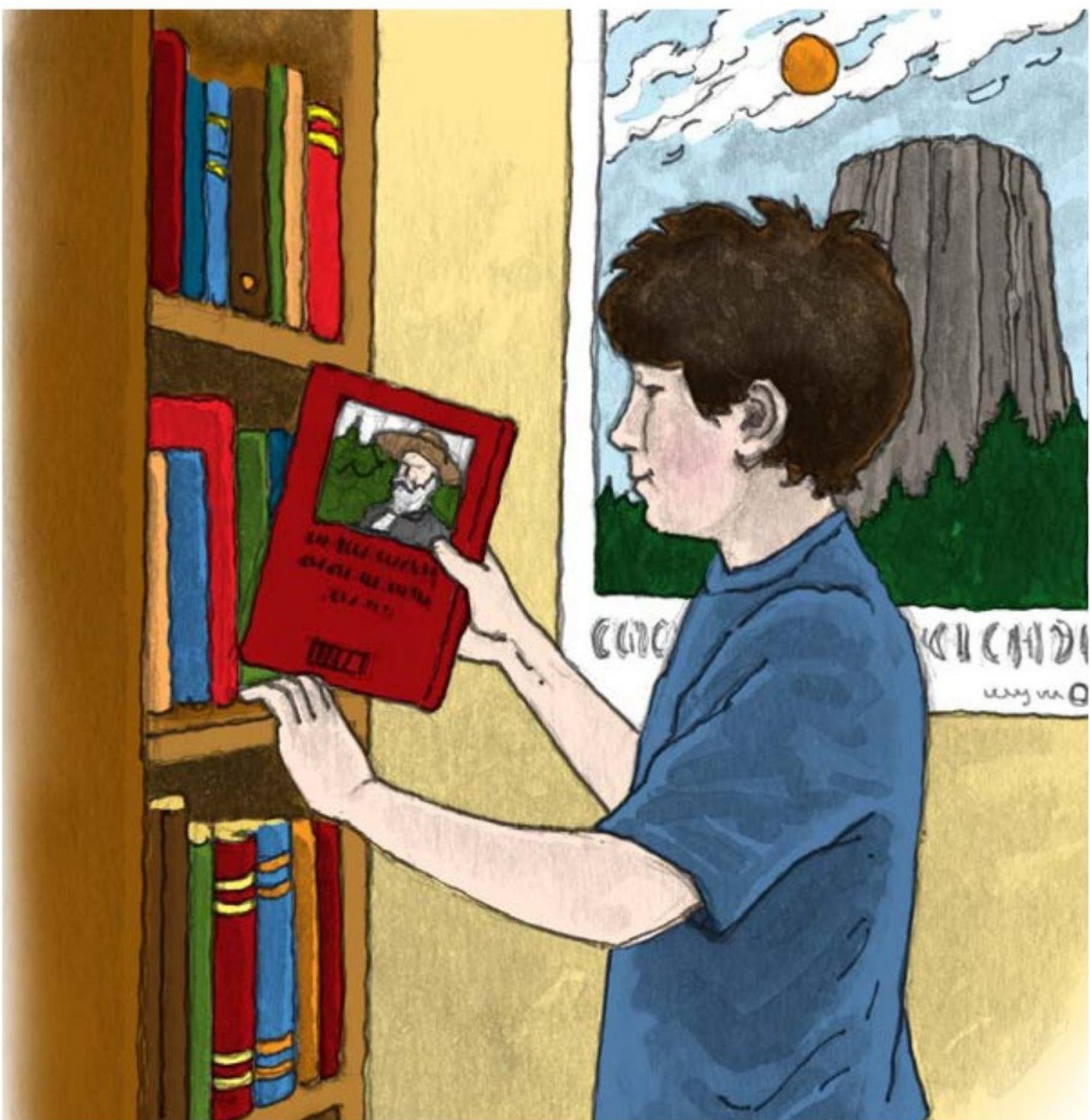


Bookstore Treasure

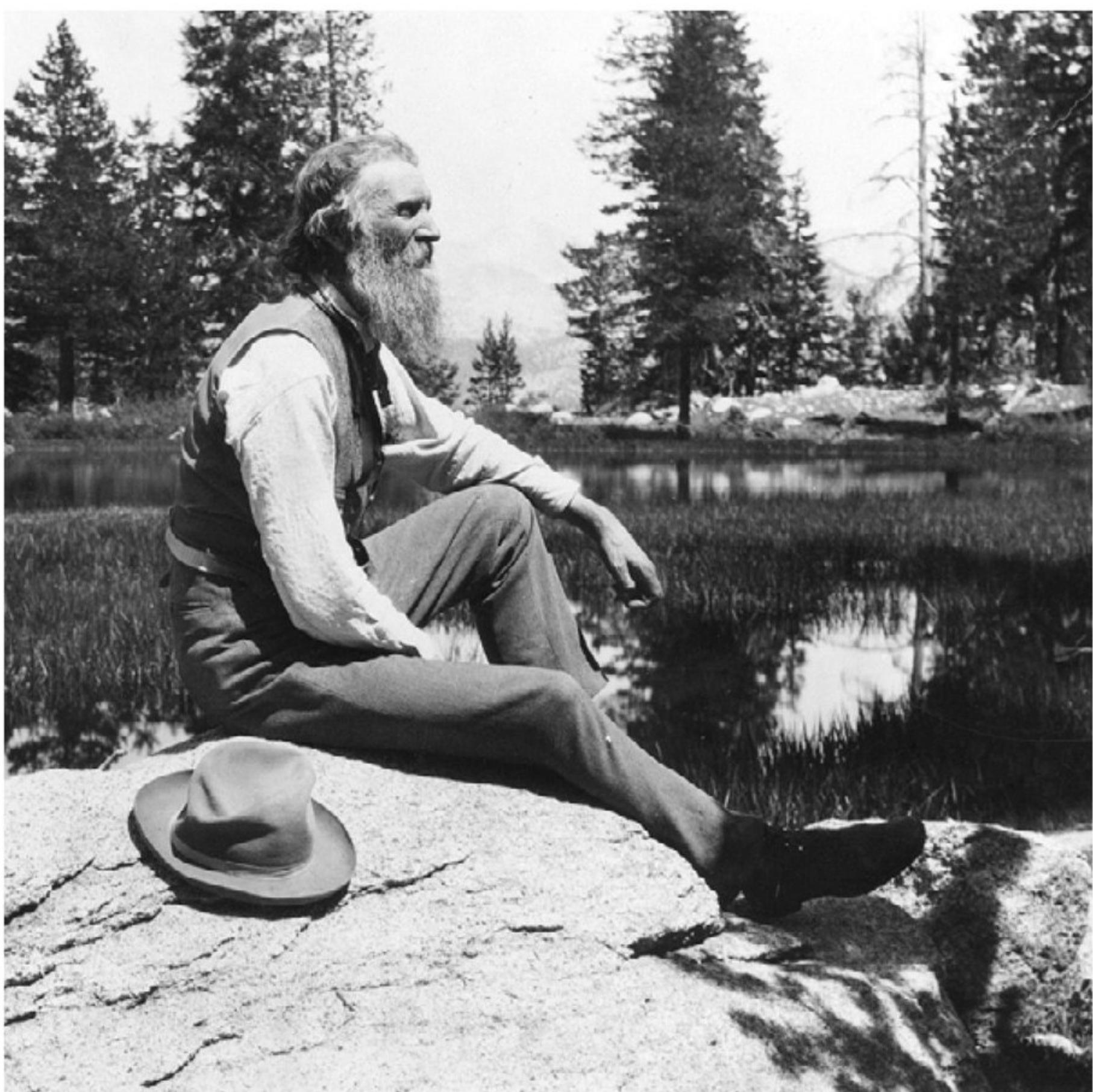
I watched Nana wind through the busy city streets with her favorite scarf wrapped tight. Her face was stern as she moved through the crowds of people with a book in her hand. Then she saw me, looking through the window down at her, and smiled. It turned out the book was for me. It was a Junior Ranger Handbook for Yosemite National Park, and before dinner I was halfway through it!

Although Nana hated bugs and trees and bushes and bears, she knew I loved the outdoors, and it meant a lot that she would find a book just for me.

After I finished the book, I put it on my shelf next to some other books by my favorite author, John Muir, the famous **conservationist** and **naturalist**. He did so much to conserve nature that some people call him the father of our national park system.



That night I could barely sleep. The activities in the Junior Ranger book kept running through my mind. It said that the more activities I did, the closer I would be to earning the official Junior Ranger badge. I wanted that badge. I thought how proud John Muir might have been to know that a kid could help preserve Yosemite years after he had written about the need for people to preserve it.



John Muir, a naturalist, geologist, and more, argued in the late 1800s that the natural beauty of Yosemite must be saved for future generations to see.



The next morning, I woke up early, pulled the new book off the shelf, and started to do the activities.

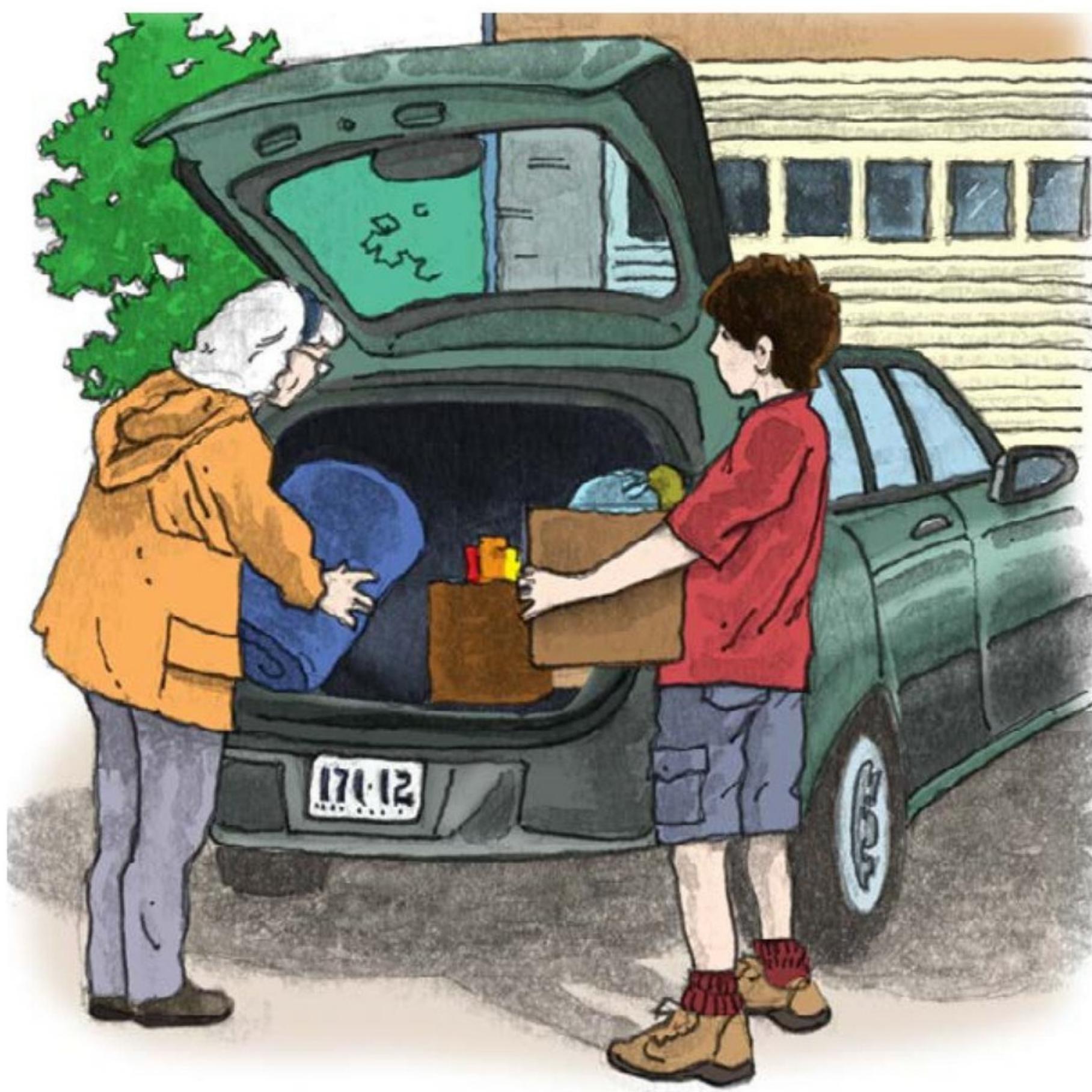
First, I did the word find; then, I drew a “Save the Bears” poster, which I presented to Nana. She smiled and said, “That’s nice.”

Then I asked her, “Nana, I really want the Junior Ranger badge, but to get it I have to go to Yosemite National Park and complete some more activities. Will you take me?”

Nana shook her head. “You know how I hate the outdoors.”

Then I think she saw the look of disappointment on my face because she said, "Well, you do have a birthday coming up. I was going to get you that stereo you wanted, but I guess if we watched our pennies and camped out, a trip to Yosemite wouldn't cost much more."

That weekend, Nana and I packed the car with a cooler of drinks and food, sleeping bags, pillows, and blankets. Although Nana was a real trooper about it all, I knew she would rather stay in a hotel than go camping.





A helicopter drops water on a fire near Yosemite in 2008.

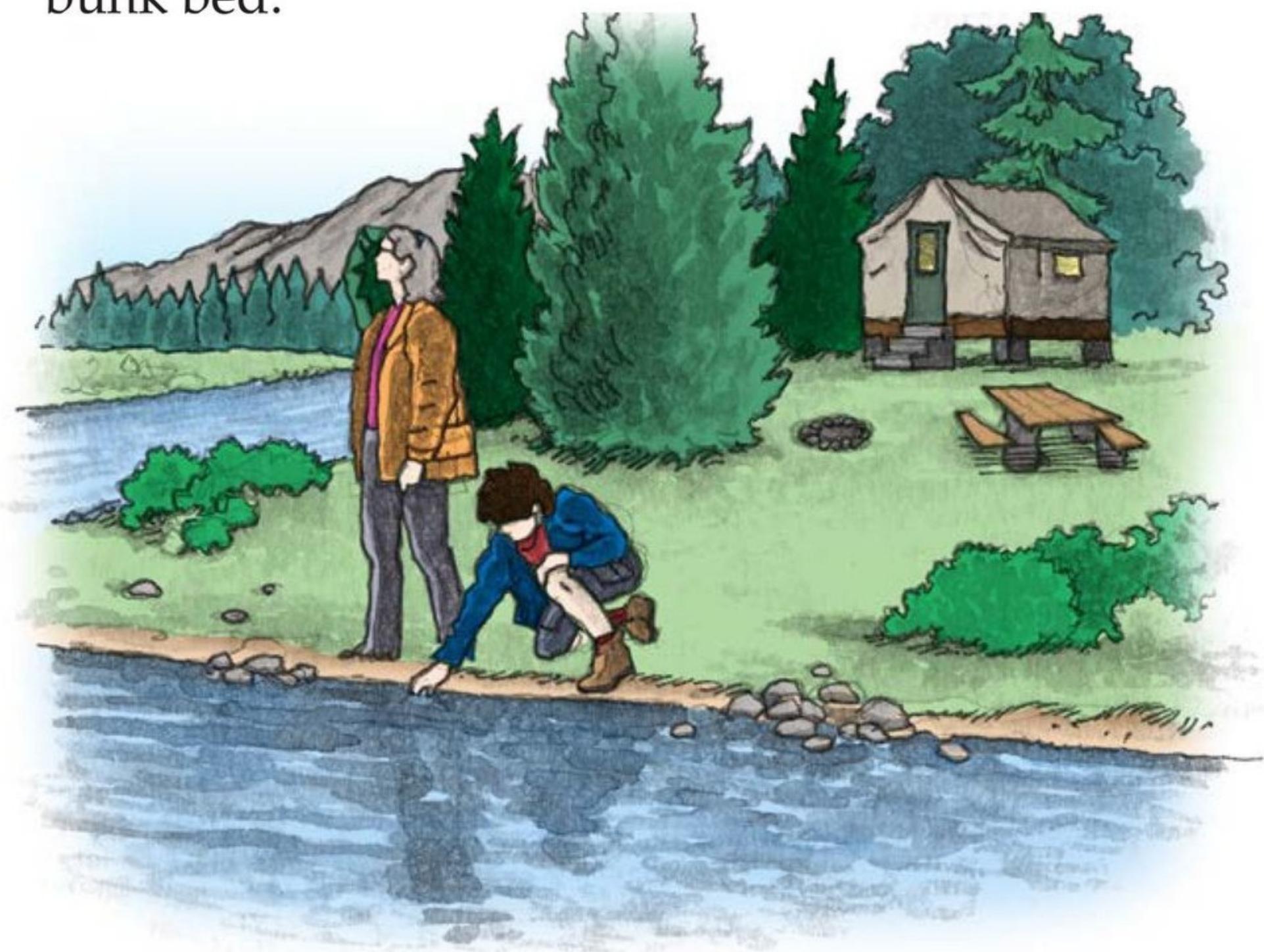
Over the River

About an hour before we arrived at the park, we had to take a long detour because of a fire on a hill. There was a lot of smoke, and I saw a helicopter drop water on the fire.

Finally, we drove into Yosemite National Park. Nana smirked as we wound through, admiring the **fauna** and the lush, green natural surroundings. “Maybe this trip won’t be so bad after all,” she said—though the frown on her face told a different story.

At Housekeeping Camp, we stopped at the ranger's office to pick out our campsite. I think Nana was getting into the trip because she asked more questions than I did. Eventually, a ranger showed us where our campsite was located on a map—beside Merced River. Despite her grumbling, Nana seemed pleased to have a view of a rushing river nearby. Our site was beautiful and the sound of water—a sound I never heard back in the city—was so close I could almost touch it. I wondered if it was the same view John Muir might have had years before.

Nana especially liked that we had a tent cabin rather than a plain tent and that we didn't have to sleep on the ground. Instead, the cabin had a bunk bed.





Nana and I built a campfire using some small kindling and newspaper she had brought along. We roasted hot dogs and covered them in mustard, and for dessert, we roasted marshmallows.

After dinner, Nana and I sat by the fire, planning the next day. I told her that I needed to get started on earning my Junior Ranger badge. Now that she was here, I think Nana wanted to help **preserve** Yosemite as much as I did!

The next morning, I looked through my Junior Ranger Handbook as Nana stretched what she called her “aching feet.” I thought it was pretty funny, since she walked miles every day in the city, but suddenly setting up camp and sleeping on a bunk bed had her feeling grouchy and sore.

As for myself, I needed to complete five activities to earn my badge, but the good news was that the word find and bear poster I did at home—luckily I’d brought them along—counted. That left only three more activities, and the badge would be mine!





Through the Woods

I asked Nana if she would help me, and she said she would. I hoped it would take her mind off her complaining.

Together we looked at the list of programs being offered in the daily camp newsletter, *Yosemite Today*. We found a Junior Ranger program being offered at 3:00 that afternoon at Happy Isles Nature Center.

With that settled, Nana helped me make a checklist: Word find? Check. Bear poster? Check. Happy Isles? Check. That left only two activities to do! I wasn't too worried about running out of choices because there were 14 activities listed in the handbook.

As Nana and I considered our many options, I wondered what John Muir might have picked because several of them seemed to be his specialty. Luckily, they looked like things I might be interested in doing as well.



This giant sequoia, called the California Tunnel Tree, had a tunnel cut into it for visitors to pass through.

Activity 7 was about the **giant sequoias**, which were by the Wawona Hotel, a place Nana wanted to visit. Activity 9 was about the Ahwahneechee Indians. That activity looked promising. For one thing, the Indian Village of Ahwahnee was very close to where we were camping, and for another thing, I'd always been interested in **Native Americans** and how they lived. The real clincher was that Nana seemed eager to tag along. After shaking hands on it, Nana and I decided we would begin by going there.

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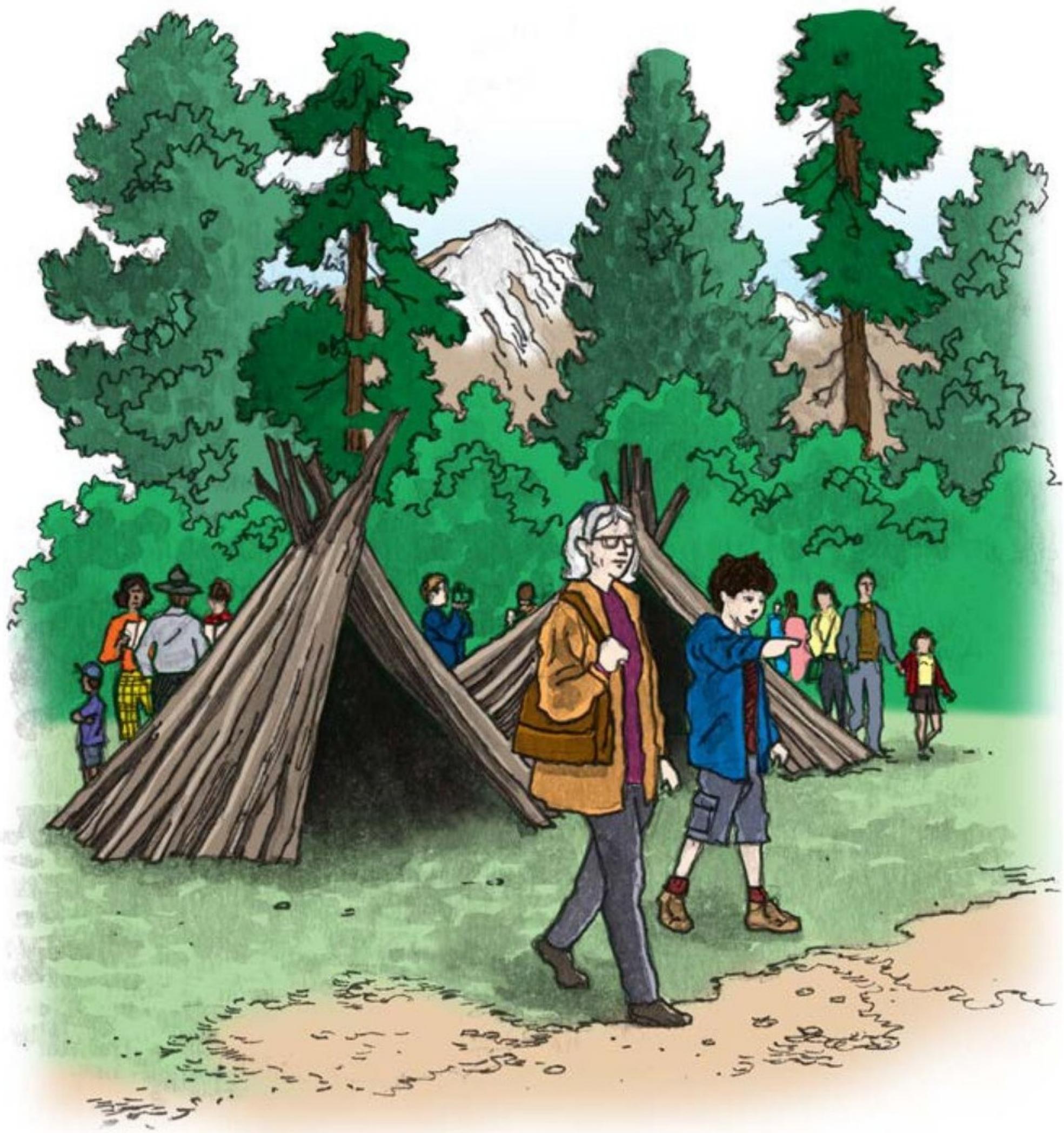
A building from the Indian village of Ahwahnee

We went to the Indian Village and took the self-guided tour. We learned a lot as we walked from displays to **replica** buildings.

The Indians called their valley *Ahwahnee*, which means “valley with the gaping mouth” and called themselves the *Ahwahneechee*, which means “dwellers in Ahwahnee.”

During the cold winters, the Ahwahneechee traveled to the foothills where the climate was milder. In the spring, they returned to the **High Sierra** and Yosemite.

They found food that included leaves, stems, seeds, bulbs, and berries. Black oak acorns also made up a big part of their diet.



"I guess they didn't have fast food and pizza," I said as we learned more about their diet.

"No," Nana agreed, "but they sure had the right idea. I bet they had a lot less problems with their health than your old Nana does!"

After we finished the tour, Nana and I looked at my handbook again—only two activities to do before I got my badge!

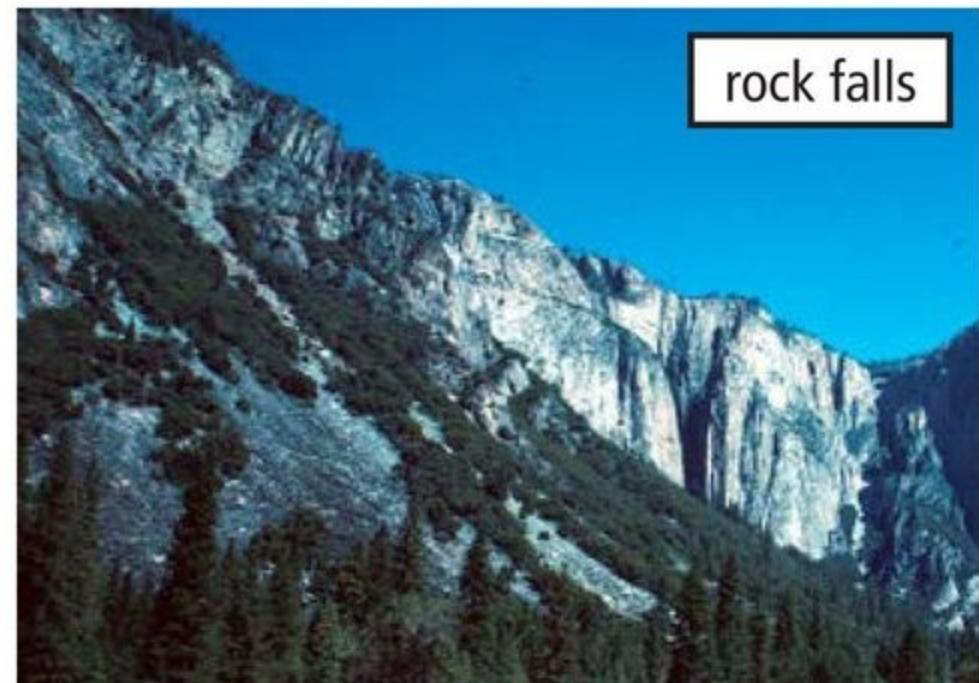
We took the shuttle to Happy Isles Nature Center, where there were four trails teaching about the area's four different environments: forest, river, talus, and fen.

A park ranger took us on the talus trail. We had no idea what "talus" was but soon found out that talus is made up of the rocks that pile up at the bottom of a cliff from rock falls.

Rock falls are often caused by roots that can grow through the cracks in rocks and cause them to break loose.

Earthquakes, rainstorms, and snowmelt also can cause rocks to split and tumble down mountainsides.

Wow! So many natural forces are responsible for changing Earth's surface.





The Wawona Hotel has been helping guests in Yosemite since the late 1870s.

To Grandmother's Hotel We Go

That evening, since Nana had been such a great sport, we decided to pack up our campsite and spend a night at the Wawona Hotel.

Not only would Nana get a good night's sleep and not wake up so cranky, we would be closer to the giant sequoias in the morning.

It was tough to leave the peaceful water, but the hotel turned out to be equally stunning. There were six white buildings with wide porches and **verandas** with vines growing on them and a fountain of flowing water in the center of the courtyard. It was quite a contrast to where we stayed the night before.

After breakfast, we packed the car and headed to the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees. Once there, I would complete my last activity by wandering among the giant sequoias.

We took the shuttle to the Mariposa Grove, and from there, we took the tram ride to see and hear about the “Big Trees.”

The Ahwahneechee’s word for big trees was “wah-wo-nah.” We learned that there are almost 500 giant sequoias and some of them have been alive for almost 2,000 years.

The tram stopped at the Grizzly Giant, which is estimated to be about 1,800 years old, just over 200 feet tall, and has a trunk with a diameter of nearly 30 feet.

It was so amazing to look up, ant-like, at the base of these towering, magnificent trees. Even Nana couldn’t help but gaze, ever upward, as the trees disappeared into the hazy thick clouds above.





On the way out of Yosemite, I handed my book to a Ranger so that she could sign-off on the activities I completed. She, in turn, handed me a trash bag. She said that my last task was to collect a bag of trash because rangers always leave a place better than they had found it.

After a short time, picking up the candy and gum wrappers that tourists sadly leave behind, I returned to the Ranger's station.

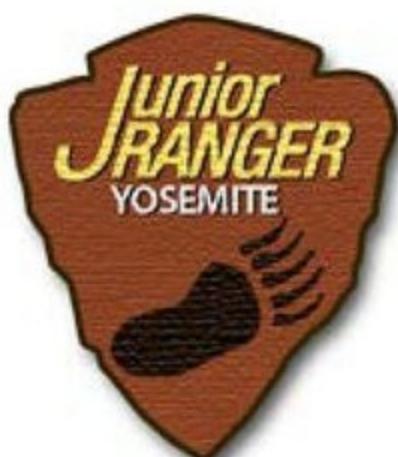
She thanked me and then had me recite the **Junior Ranger oath**.



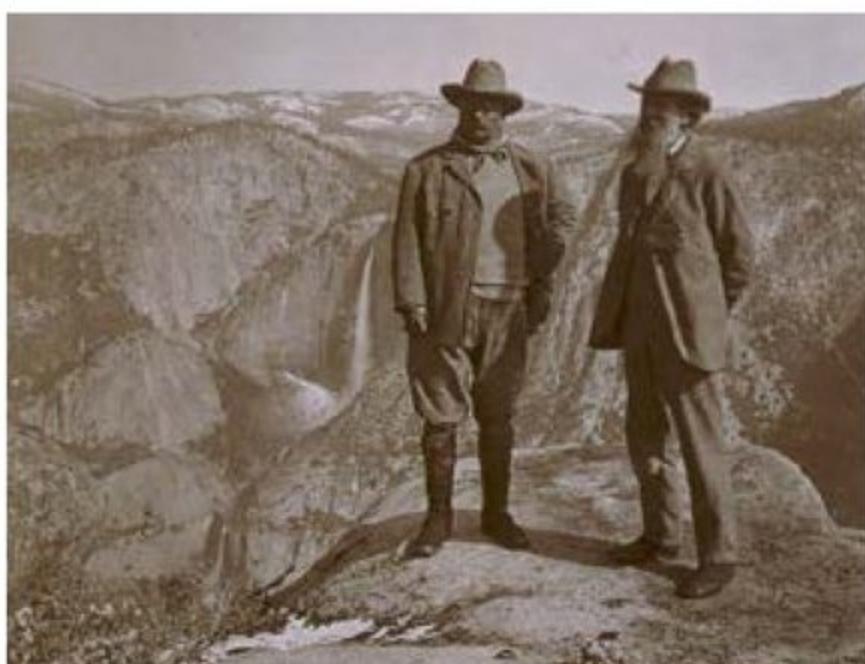
The Patch, One of Many

I said proudly, "As a Yosemite Junior Ranger, I promise to do all that I can to help protect the animals, birds, trees, flowers and other living things, the scenery, and the other special qualities and places in Yosemite National Park. I will continue to learn about the nature and the history of the park even after I leave Yosemite."

The park ranger signed my handbook and handed me my first Junior Ranger patch. The patch was so cool—brown and shaped like an arrowhead with a big bear paw right underneath the words "Junior Ranger Yosemite." I was so proud, and Nana gave me a big smile.



During the long drive back through Yosemite National Park, Nana and I stopped many more times to take photos. We were both sad to leave, even Nana, but to cheer me up Nana handed me a long list of national parks where I could earn more Junior Ranger patches. She said I needed to decide where we—that's right, “we”—could drive next summer and then to circle the ones I wanted to visit. There are so many. How will I ever choose? I asked Nana to help, and she was more than happy to do so. I think she has finally gotten over the fear of the outdoors. John Muir would be proud of both of us.



Cathedral Rocks (left) loom over Yosemite Valley. Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir in 1906 (top) and visitors in 1902 (right) stand on Glacier Point.

Glossary

conservationist	one who works to protect the environment (p. 5)
fauna	animals of a particular region (p. 9)
fen	a low, flat, swampy area (p. 17)
giant sequoias	very tall evergreen trees with massive trunks that are usually reddish in color (p. 14)
High Sierra	the Sierra Nevada mountain range of eastern California, which runs through Yosemite National Park (p. 15)
Native Americans	people who lived in the Americas before Europeans arrived, sometimes called “Indians” (p. 14)
naturalist	someone who studies nature and the history of nature (p. 5)
oath	a formal promise (p. 21)
preserve	to maintain or keep in an unchanged condition (p. 11)
replica	a copy or reproduction of something (p. 15)
verandas	large porches attached to buildings (p. 19)

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Front Cover: Merced River (foreground), Upper Yosemite Falls (background)

Title: page: Campers on the Merced River beach near Housekeeping Camp

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