



# SIERRA CLUB

## TEHIPITE CHAPTER

### A Brief History and Geography of the Sierra Club

The Sierra Club was founded in 1892, with John Muir elected as its first President. Headquartered in Oakland, the Club has 64 chapters nationwide. There is one chapter per state, except for California, which has fourteen chapters ranging from 1,200 to roughly 25,000 members. Our Tehipite (tuh-HIP-pit-tee) Chapter covers four inland Central California counties: Fresno, Madera, Merced and Mariposa, partly in the San Joaquin Valley and partly in the Sierra Nevada mountains and foothills, with approximately 1,700 members. The Chapter was created in 1953 when members fought against the logging of old-growth forest in Kings Canyon, where a 3,600-foot rock formation, Tehipite Dome, lies in the remote backcountry. One member, George Whitmore, who joined in 1954 and was a member of our Executive Committee until his passing in 2021, was a member of the 1957 first ascent party of El Capitan in Yosemite Valley.

The Club, founded by longtime Yosemite Valley resident John Muir, gained popularity as people became educated about the destruction wrought by the timber industry. Historically, the Club's focus was Yosemite National Park, and by the 1920s, caravans of more than 100 autos took weekend trips to the Valley from San Francisco. The Club's strategy has been to get people into the outdoors to appreciate the awe-inspiring wonders of Nature — such as the iconic giant sequoia trees and Yosemite Valley's walls of rock — in the hope that they would return home to join the Club and lobby elected officials to protect these jewels.

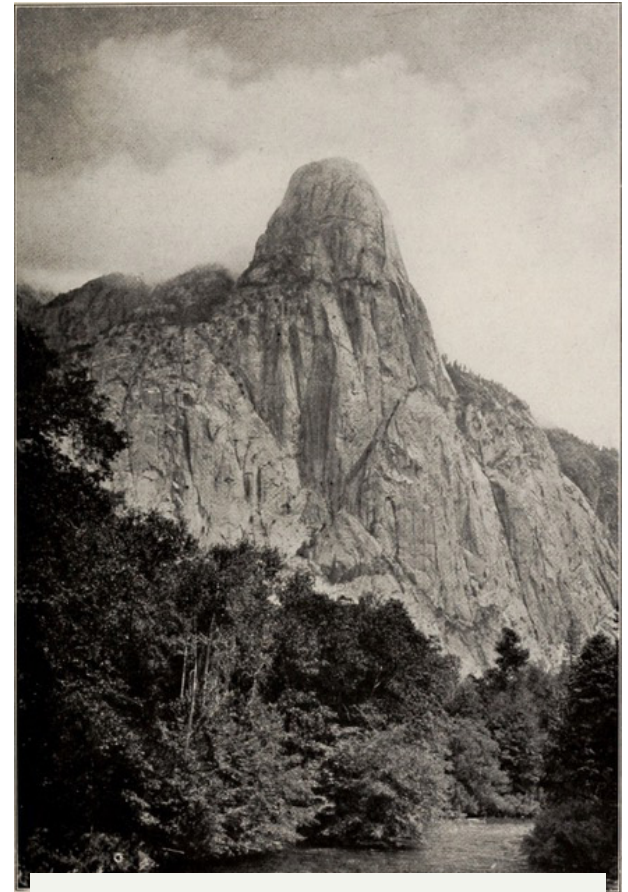
Starting in the 1870s, our present scientific understanding of ecology did not yet exist. Industries dedicated to the extraction of natural resources — timber, steel, oil, and minerals — held tremendous power. Fueled by an economic boom following the Civil War, railroads opened up tracts of formerly inaccessible land. They enabled logging, settlement of the West, and

the slaughter of the Great Plains buffalo for their hides. Driven by a Republican majority in Congress and a Supreme Court which saw its role as to protect unfettered Capitalism and the exploitation of Nature for profit.

Ancient forests were leveled, first in the upper Midwest in the 1870s and, beginning in the 1890s, in the Pacific Northwest. Meanwhile, Natives who inhabited these landscapes were judged as impediments to progress and, citing Manifest Destiny ("God's will") white settlers killed or dispossessed the Natives of their lands. At the urging of John Muir, Yosemite Valley was added to the National Park in 1905. Within five years, the U.S. Army had driven out its Native inhabitants, demolished two villages, and burned a third to the ground. Native peoples — who understand how to live in harmony with the natural world — were erased — their presence incompatible with the Western concepts of "progress" and Wilderness.

Organized opposition to this wanton destruction of old-growth forests began during the Progressive era, 1900-1914, when President Theodore Roosevelt viewed the elimination of the forests as a violation of the Creation. The largest iconic giant sequoias were named (the General Grant tree, for example) and preserved for future generations. The Antiquities Act of 1906 enabled the President to protect lands from exploitation without Congressional legislation. At the same time, National Forests were conceptualized as forest reserves — logging would now be spread out over decades rather than all at once — which gained the support of Wall Street.

Today, with an understanding of ecosystems, we have moved beyond thinking of forests as "tree farms" to recognize that all living things are part of the web of life. When a single giant sequoia tree dies, it decomposes on the forest floor, providing a home to millions of insects. Dead tree snags provide 'apartments' for various animal species. The black-backed woodpecker needs fire-killed trees to nest in, cavities which are subsequently adopted by numerous other animal species. Mycorrhizal



Tehipite Dome (1920)  
Kings Canyon National Park

fungi form a web in forest soil, serving as a communications network between trees.

Unfortunately, the timber industry and its Congressional allies still threaten our forests with logging, forests whose biomass is essential for absorbing CO2 and mitigating climate change. The Sierra Club is dedicated to utilizing the best available science, as well as lawsuits, legislation, and grassroots organizing, to counter these destructive activities and protect our wild and natural areas of America. Also, the Club now recognize the important contributions of our Native tribes and their rich cultures, which still exist on the landscape, actively working to live in harmony with Nature. We're all in this together.

To learn more about, or volunteer with, our Sierra Club campaigns to protect clean air and water, wetlands, and endangered species, in the San Joaquin Valley as well as the Sierra mountains, contact Gary at 559-790-3495 or [garylaskylaw@gmail.com](mailto:garylaskylaw@gmail.com).

Welcome back from our summer hiatus with an IN-PERSON meeting:

Thursday, September 19 at 7:00 PM  
Woodward Park Library  
944 E. Perrin Ave, Fresno

Our guest speaker will be Deanna Lynn Wulff, Executive Director and founder of Unite the Parks. Deanna will present on the *Range of Light National Monument: The Future of Recreation, Restoration & Rejuvenation in the Southern Sierra Nevada*.

Learn about this decade-long campaign to protect 1.4 million acres of federal land lying between Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks. Much work and much love went into this proposal, and a lot of struggle.

Unite the Parks works to protect the Southern Sierra Nevada and serve people and wildlife in the region. Deanna has been hiking in the Sierra Nevada since she was six years old, has been a ranger and river guide, and has a life-long love and appreciation for the beauty of the Range of Light, which continues to inspire her to this day. She is the author of the *Girl's Guide to Getting Lost: Hard Hikes for Wild Women*, and the Range of Light National Monument Act.

If you'd like more specific information about Unite the Parks visit their website, at [www.unithetheparks.org/the-range-of-light-national-monument](http://www.unithetheparks.org/the-range-of-light-national-monument)

Email Karen Hammer at [ecuagirl45@yahoo.com](mailto:ecuagirl45@yahoo.com) if you have any questions.

Hope to see you there!

