



SIERRA CLUB

TEHIPITE CHAPTER

My Epiphany, Thanks to a Rodent

BY LES MARSDEN

A chipmunk. Just a tiny striped rodent near the 1962 north shore of a still-extant Mirror Lake. And a five-year-old kid, transfixed by this real-life Alvin. Like much of the fauna of Yosemite Valley – this little guy’s fear of humans was overcome by its greater drive for food, which those big human things usually shared. And on the ground, eye to eye with this nearly-tame little Mariposa Chipmunk: that was the moment my environmental passion was born. As well as my love affair with Yosemite National Park.

Years later, at 22, Diane and I left Fresno for Los Angeles, returning in 1985 to be married in the Park. But even when my profession pulled us further away to life in Manhattan and London, the woods, the falls, still beckoned. But after an onstage accident abruptly ended my acting career at age 42 while starring in a play, we retired, yearning to be as close to Yosemite as possible. And so in 2001 we picked up our lives, and that of our four-year-old son, happily moving to our “forever” home in Mariposa County’s Jerseydale at 4,000 feet — with the same features and wildlife of Yosemite Valley’s floor. And within view of the tops of that Valley’s monoliths, miles distant.

But now our park is threatened, as are all US National Parks — and this very nation itself. A tin-pot bully pulled the plug on hiring seasonal AND permanent employees at a time when Yosemite is already woefully understaffed and has suffered decades of underfunding. The new Interior Secretary is an anti-environmentalist. Yosemite’s Superintendent Cicely Muldoon — whose goal of developing a much-needed reservations system for the park at a time when it’s being literally loved to death — has retired. There’ll be NO upper management in the park save the recently appointed, Acting Deputy Superintendent.

Trump’s yet-to-be-appointed puppet-head of the National Park Service will follow his glaring, destructive modus: wildly unqualified sycophants with demonstrated antagonism directed against the federal government. Trump’s confirmed Interior Secretary is a former two-term Republican North Dakota governor, Doug Burgum. A venture capitalist billionaire real estate developer. Pro-Big Oil. Land? Use it, baby — “improve” it, pave over it, suck it dry. Perfect

for Trump’s edict to sell off Federal lands (including precious National Parks and Monuments) and develop them. But this privatizing of OUR public lands — will see only millionaire mega-mansions for the one-percenters who MUST have beautiful places for their vacation compounds. Screw the working families.

The stated goal of President Musk and his 78-year-old stooge sidekick IS to Make America Great Again. But they aspire to the Gilded Age of unfettered robber-barons, that 19th-century glory period of rampant greed, corruption and the transformation of our democracy into one controlled by the overlords of our economic system. Industrial corporations and mega-millionaires.

Ironically, our first Republican President, Abraham Lincoln, foretold the future: if this great American experiment would fail, it would be **due to an internal enemy**. In his January 27, 1838 address in the Illinois capitol, the 28-year-old lawyer warned:

“...All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined . . . with a Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years. At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad . . . we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.”



First a party, and now a national government has been held hostage by this dangerous pied piper of fascism, this child-tyrant run amok as he demolishes his predecessors’ carefully crafted preservations of America’s greatest idea — OUR NATIONAL PARKS — now on the chopping block of history. I fear for our own progeny yet to come, those who may never experience the eye-opening awe of Nature, the scent of firs, the roar of falls, the quiet beauty of Tuolumne Meadows in late autumn, a park uncluttered and without idling cars hunting for spaces, the high country’s clean air and water — our descendants may never be existentially awakened by a small rodent on a Mirror Lake shore still habitable to Mariposa Chipmunks — tiny creatures who possess far more wisdom in their tiny brains than that now found in the Oval Office.

A Walker’s Companion: A Central Sierra Trail Guide

A Walker’s Companion was first printed in 1999. It has since been reprinted three times. Most recently, the book is titled The Hikers’s Guide to the Central Sierra. This presentation will include the story of the book’s origin and include anecdotes from the author’s wonderful, adventure filled days in the Central Sierra. Book illustrations were created by Andy Goodman, and botanical information was contributed by Master Gardener Pam Elam Geisel Plemmons.

