



Oral History of Yosemite

What is an oral history?

Oral history can be defined as the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information based on the personal experiences and opinions of a speaker. It often takes the form of eye-witness evidence about past events, but can include folklore, myths and songs, and stories passed down over the years by word of mouth. While it is an invaluable way of preserving the knowledge and understanding of older people, it can also involve interviewing younger generations. More recently, the use of video recording techniques has expanded the realm of oral history beyond verbal forms of communication and into the realm of gesture.

What oral history projects is Yosemite National Park working on?

Because Yosemite is so rich in history and tradition, Yosemite is currently working on 5 different oral history projects with different focuses. They are as follows:

1. *I Remember Yosemite* is a multi-year oral history project to capture the stories of people who have helped shape, and whose lives have been shaped by, one of the nation's most iconic national parks. The goal of the project is to enhance and enrich the historical understanding of Yosemite National Park with information that could not otherwise be found in the documentary record and to create a high-quality audio-visual oral history collection for use by researchers and future interpretive functions such as museum exhibits, programs, and podcasts. While initial interviews for the project will focus on former and current National Park Service (NPS) employees, the scope of the project will also include concession employees, spouses and children of employees, long-time park residents, and members of neighboring communities—in other words, those individuals who have had a significant, and often long-term, connection to the park. The project explores such themes as work, technological change, evolution of park management, environmental change, and the development of community life in the park.
2. *American Indian Land Use in the Tuolumne River Watershed, Yosemite National Park* is a collaborative effort with the American Indians determined to have cultural association with the Tuolumne River watershed to identify cultural values and management concerns within the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River. It entails the researching of existing records and archives, and conducting interviews with individuals, groups, and tribal members.

What oral history projects is the park working on? continued

3. *Traditional Use Study, Southern Yosemite National Park* begins with a brief review of recent ethnographic data (information collected by observation and interviews and documented in reports) to serve as a background to approach knowledgeable individuals from park-associated American Indian tribes, including members of both federally recognized and unrecognized tribes. Interviews will be conducted with individuals who have knowledge of genealogy, oral or folk history, place names and associated stories, legends, plant and animal resources, religious practices, and other past or present uses of the park.
4. *Hennes Ridge Traditional Land Use Study* is a coordinated effort by the North Fork Mono Rancheria, Picayune Rancheria of Chukchansi Indians, and the American Indian Council of Mariposa County to document American Indian land use at Hennes Ridge in Yosemite National Park. The study will include document research and oral history. Hennes Ridge is being studied for consideration as a possible location for an Environmental Education Campus. Yosemite Institute and Yosemite National Park are preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The American Indian land use study will support the EIS studies.
5. *Indian Cultural Center*. In support of the Indian Cultural Center project, archeology investigations are being conducted in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Indian Cultural Center is planned to be situated in the location of the American Indian Village site, Wahhoga, west of Camp 4 in Yosemite Valley. Wahhoga was populated by American Indians until the village was removed in 1969. To guide historic era archeological investigations, research will include document review and oral history of living village descendants.

Public Participation

Public participation is essential for the success of this and all other park projects. Here are some ways to stay involved in the park:

- **Attend a National Park Service public open house** to talk with project specialists. Visit the park's planning website (listed below) for upcoming dates.
- **Add your name to the park's planning list** and receive the *Planning Update* newsletter as well as other planning-related notices. You can also submit your email address to receive the park's periodic electronic newsletter.
- **Additionally, you can submit comments with your thoughts about this topic or any other project in the park by any of the following means:**
 - Mail:** Superintendent
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389
 - Phone:** 209/379-1365; **Fax:** 209/379-1294
 - E- mail:** Yose_Planning@nps.gov
- **Visit online:** www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/planning.htm to find out about plans and projects or www.nps.gov/yose/naturescience/index.htm to find out about science & nature in Yosemite National Park.