

# El Portal Administrative Site Historic Resource Survey with Assessments and Recommendations

Yosemite National Park  
Resources Management and Science  
History, Architecture and Landscapes

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## Contents

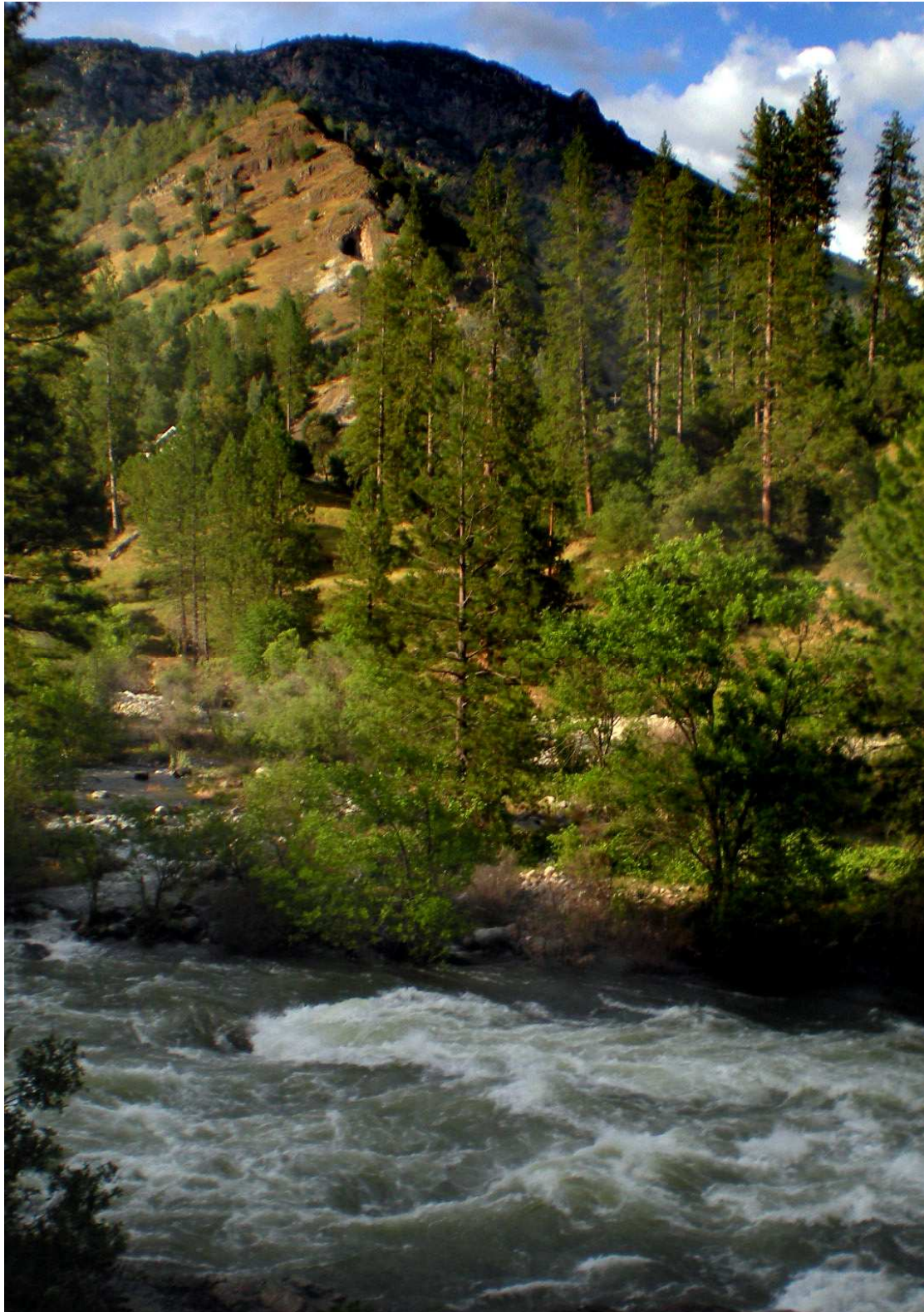
List of Figures .....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	5
DESCRIPTION OF SITE.....	7
SITE HISTORY .....	11
American Indian Occupation .....	11
European American Occupation .....	11
Early European American Occupation .....	11
Railroad.....	12
Tourism.....	17
Timber.....	20
Mining.....	22
National Park Service and Residential.....	25
Land Acquisition by the National Park Service .....	30
CHRONOLOGY .....	35
EXISTING CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	41
European American Occupation .....	41
James Hennessey's Ranch.....	41
Railroad.....	42
Bagby Stationhouse, Water Tanks and Turntable .....	42
Hetch Hetchy Railroad Engine No.6 .....	44
Yosemite Valley Railroad Caboose No. 15.....	44
Yosemite Valley Railroad Employee Residences .....	45
Standard Oil Structures .....	45
Railroad Remnants.....	47
Tourism.....	48
Proposed El Portal Hotel and Motor Lodge Historic District .....	48
Del Portal Hotel.....	50
Foresta Road.....	50
Mining .....	51
Proposed National Lead Company Historic District .....	51
El Portal Mines and Ruins.....	54
Rancheria Flat.....	54
Other Areas .....	59
Warehouse/Administrative Building .....	59
Yosemite Wastewater Treatment Facility .....	60
Sand and Gravel Quarry.....	60

## List of Figures

Figure 1- View north across the Merced River towards the Murchison House and Barium Mine .....	4
Figure 2- Map and prominent place names of the El Portal Administrative Site. ....	6
Figure 3 - Detailed map of the eastern portion of the El Portal Administrative Site (NPS 2011) .....	9
Figure 4 - Detailed map of the western portion of the El Portal Administrative Site (NPS 2011) .....	10
Figure 5 – Rustic railroad station elevation drawing (Burgess 2007).....	13
Figure 6 - El Portal train station with shed in background, circa 1924 (Burgess 2007) .....	13
Figure 7 - Mining Claim map of El Portal, 1914 (NPS eTIC).....	14
Figure 8 - Diagram plans of El Portal railroad yards (Burgess 2007).....	16
Figure 9 - Foresta Road was part of the "Triangle Road" for auto-touring (HABS 1991, CA-117).....	19
Figure 10 - El Portal Incline, views from across the river towards the south (Burgess 2007).....	21
Figure 11 - Aerial photograph of north Barium Mine and mill site at center and the south side mine below. Rancheria Flat site to the west (left) of the north side mine and mill (NPS 1958) .....	22
Figure 12 - Remains of old tungsten mill (NPS 2011) .....	24
Figure 13- View of Murchison House complex 2011 (NPS 2011).....	24
Figure 14 - Site of former recreational housing on Sierra National Forest site (NPS, 2011) .....	26
Figure 15 - Upper El Portal homes on former Stanislaus National Forest land (NPS 2011) .....	26
Figure 16 - View of complete Mission 66 homes in Rancheria Flat (NPS 1961).....	28
Figure 17 - Original plan for the Transportation Museum (NPS 1966).....	29
Figure 18 - View of cafe/restaurant and the temporary location of the Shay Locomotive (NPS 1963) .....	30
Figure 19 – Detail of Yosemite National Park land status map, 1986 (NPS 1986).....	31
Figure 20 – Abbieville and Hennessey Ranch site with fruit tree locations in red (NPS 2011) .....	41
Figure 21 – Bagby Train Station, now Yosemite Conservancy offices (NPS 2011) .....	42
Figure 22 - El Portal showing eligible sites for the National Register in pink, and existing sites in red (NPS 2011) ..	43
Figure 23 - View of Hetch Hetchy Railroad Engine No. 6 (Shay Engine) in foreground, with Caboose behind it and Bagby Water Tanks to the left (NPS 2011) .....	43
Figure 24 - Yosemite Valley Railroad Employee house, middle (NPS 2011).....	44
Figure 25 - Yosemite Valley Railroad Employee house, east (NPS 2011).....	44
Figure 26 - Standard Oil offices, now Vegetation and Ecological Restoration offices (NPS 2011).....	45
Figure 27 - Existing bulk oil storage tanks likely built 1945, south of Foresta Road, the former railroad grade (NPS 2011).....	46
Figure 28 - Former El Portal Hotel, now Yosemite Institute offices and dormitory (NPS 2011).....	48
Figure 29 - Former motor inn guest rooms, now NPS seasonal housing (NPS 2011).....	49
Figure 30 - Former coffeehouse, now the El Portal Market (NPS 2011).....	50
Figure 31 - Former National Lead Company houses, now NPS housing (NPS 2011) .....	51
Figure 32 - Former Murchison house (NPS 2011) .....	52
Figure 33 - Assay Office, Murchison Complex (NPS 2011).....	53
Figure 34 - Site of former Barium Mine mill, view across river from Murchison House (NPS 2011) .....	53
Figure 35 - Diagram of Rancheria Flat showing structures determined eligible for the National Register in pink (NPS 2011).....	55
Figure 36 - Rancheria Flat, modern housing in foreground, Mission 66 homes in middle ground and 1980s housing in background (NPS 2011) .....	56
Figure 37 - El Portal old schoolhouse today lays vacant (NPS 2010) .....	58
Figure 38 - Administrative/Warehouse Complex in Railroad Flat (NPS 2011) .....	59
Figure 39 - Wastewater treatment plant (NPS 2011).....	60







**Figure 1- View north across the Merced River towards the Murchison House and Barium Mine.**

# INTRODUCTION

This Historic Resource Survey of the El Portal administrative site is intended to inform the planning efforts for the Merced River Wild and Scenic River Plan, but also provide a historically based framework for future efforts to preserve our cultural heritage. This report identifies historic resources within the district and suggests future actions for preservation that could include and determining if a property is eligible to be listed to the National Register of Historic Places (National Register), nominations to the National Register, or creating management plans that acknowledge and retain the historic resources of the administrative site. Some historic resources such as the El Portal Hotel easily fit into criteria for the National Register of Historic Places have already been determine eligible; while other resources are identified and other recommendations are made in the final section of this report. The collection of culturally significant buildings, sites and structures within the El Portal site should be preserved and maintained, but there are a variety of pathways to accomplish this.

The El Portal administrative area was identified by the federal government in 1958 as an appropriate location to build needed housing, administrative facilities and visitor services and remove some of these unwanted facilities from Yosemite Valley. Since that time, laws and policies of the National Park Service have changed, requiring more sensitive consideration of resources and public input as directed by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), among many others. The National Park Service was directed in 1987, under the Wild and Scenic River Act (WSRA), to protect and enhance the distinctly unique and outstandingly remarkable values of the Merced River as it flows through the park and the adjacent El Portal administrative site.

Two previous reports discussed some of the historic resources in the El Portal administrative site, but focus mainly on the town center of El Portal: the *El Portal Administrative Site Determination of Eligibility* by Harlan Unrau in 1998; and the *Cultural Landscape Inventory, Old El Portal, Level 1*, by NewFields in 2005. These reports, along with the *Historic Resource Study of Yosemite National Park* by Linda Greene are principle sources for this document. This report, however, describes the historic resources within the entire administrative site, not only the town center, and relies on numerous other resources, including archival park documents. The cultural significance of the El Portal site is difficult to distill into a single cultural landscape. Its cultural resources have come from the American Indians that have lived here and continue to; the commercial companies that provided goods and services; the government agencies that have overseen and built on the land; and all the individuals that made it happen.

The historical significance of each site is more easily understood in one of seven historic contexts: American Indian occupation; European American occupation; railroad; tourism; mining; timber; and residential and National Park Service. These contexts are not independent, but overlap and can run concurrent with one another. A summary of the past and present land ownership of the administrative site provides additional detail and insight into the history and how this land has been used since the nineteenth century.

Although the El Portal area can be easily overlooked when compared to the scenic grandeur of Yosemite Valley, there are many qualities, scenic and otherwise, and resources, cultural and natural, that makes the El Portal area an attractive place, and warrant cautious and informed action regarding resource management.

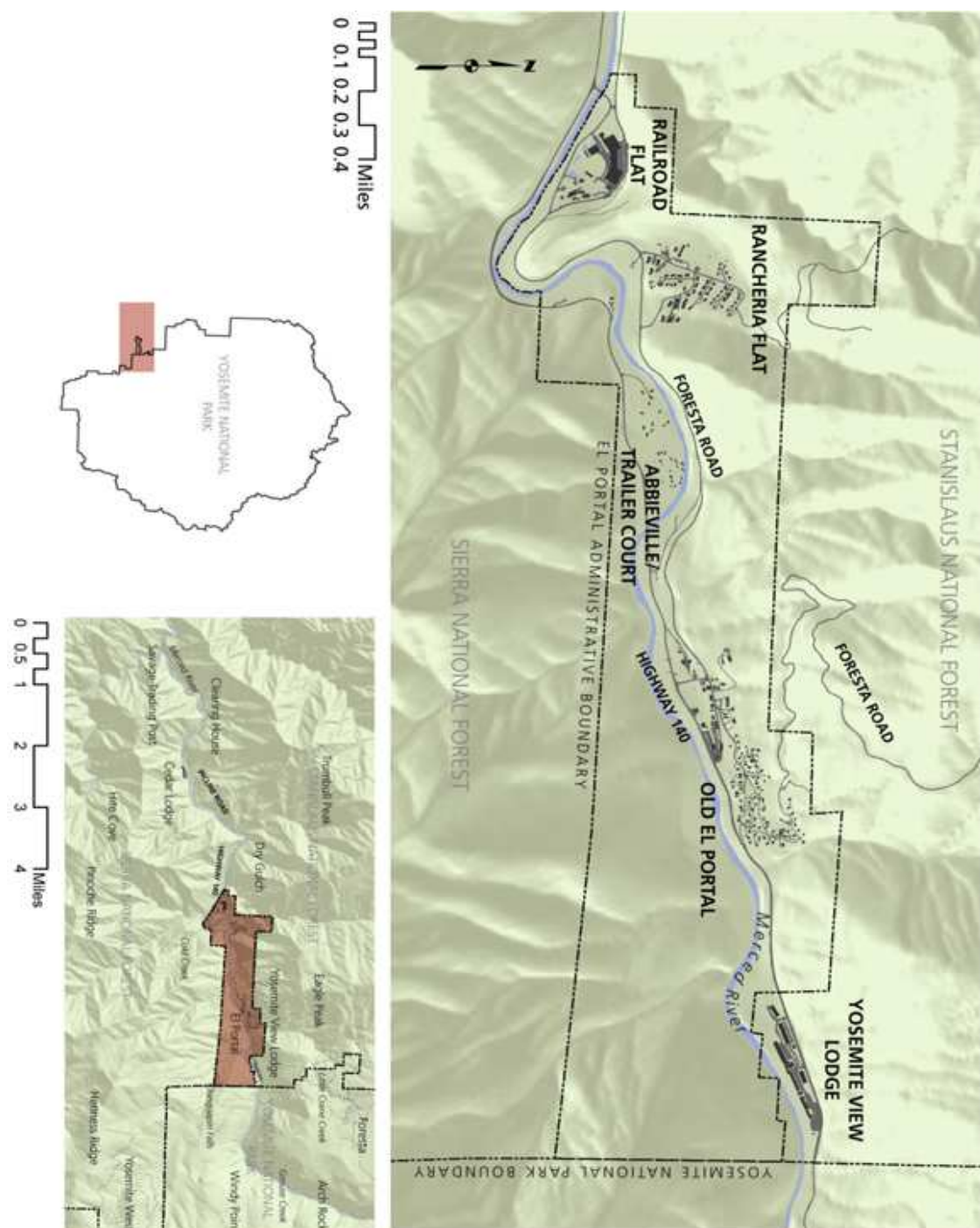


Figure 2- Map and prominent place names of the El Portal Administrative Site.



## DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The Merced River descends through a high, narrow granite canyon as it leaves the open valley of Yosemite. The canyon opens up about eight miles away from, and about 2,000 feet below, Yosemite Valley. It enters the El Portal site at a series of terraces just above the river, surrounded by the high, forested slopes. The El Portal area provides large, flat areas along the Merced River that are in limited supply, and have attracted people for thousands of years. In addition, its lower elevation provides a more habitable climate in winters; and its convenient proximity to trade routes across the Sierra Nevada, and cooler, higher elevations in summer (Figure 2).

These were some of the main reasons that the federal government purchased most of the land for an administrative site in 1958 from the El Portal Mining Company. The administrative site of Yosemite National Park contains about 1,200 acres abutting the park's western boundary, west of the Arch Rock Entrance Station. The area is adjacent to, but not included in, the national park boundaries. Public Law 85-922, enacted on September 2, 1958 authorized the creation of

*...an administrative site in the El Portal area adjacent to Yosemite National Park, in order that utilities, facilities, and services required in the operation and administration of Yosemite National Park may be located on such site outside the park... and these lands ...would not become a part of... nor be subject to the laws and regulations governing said park, but the Secretary of the Interior shall have supervision, management, and control of the area and shall make and publish such rules and regulations as he may deem necessary and proper for its use and management.*

The ownership and rights to the site were acquired from a variety of sources beginning with a purchase for most of the site within a few months of the law being passed, up to the most recent action in 1974. A ten acre parcel within the boundary of the administrative site continues to be privately owned, but all other land within the boundary is owned by the federal government.

From the time the land was acquired, the National Park Service has considered many plans and concepts for the El Portal area. Some of these plans have spurred actions to identify and preserve cultural resources of El Portal. The El Portal site is already included in the National Register of Historic Places as an archeological district due to the significant quantity and quality of sites and their importance in informing us about past people and cultures. Buildings like the railroad employee residences, the Murchison house and others have been determined eligible for the National Register. Places must meet one of four criteria to be eligible to be listed on the National Register:

- Criterion A is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to our broad pattern in history;
- Criterion B is associated with significant historical figures;
- Criterion C is embodies distinctive characteristics of type, period, or method of construction that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic value;
- Criterion D is has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in history or pre-history.

Some of these properties can be nominated for listing in the National Register. Other properties will require updates to nominations or determinations of eligibility, while some need to be re-nominated to remain in the National Register. Still other may not have enough historic integrity of characteristics to be nominated, but those characteristics that remain can still help tell the story of the El Portal site. To date, the following properties have been identified and either listed in, or determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Status</i>
The El Portal Archeological District	listed on August 1, 1978
El Portal Schoolhouse	listed February 1, 2011
Bagby Stationhouse, Water Tanks and Turntable	listed on April 13, 1979 (moved 1984)
Hetch Hetchy Railroad Engine No.6	listed on January 30, 1978 (moved 1984)
Yosemite Valley Railroad Caboose No. 15	listed on May 22, 1978 (moved 1984)
Track Bus No. 19	listed on May 22, 1978 (moved out of Yosemite and currently at Railtown 1897 California State Park)
El Portal Hotel	determined eligible and concurred on by California State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), 1999
Three railroad employee houses	determined eligible and concurred on by SHPO, 1999
Murchison house and offices	determined eligible and concurred on by SHPO, 1999
Three National Lead Company employee houses	determined eligible and concurred on by SHPO, 1999
Old El Portal Store	determined eligible and concurred on by SHPO, 1999, no longer extant, removed by owner in 2006
Old El Portal Market	determined eligible and concurred on by SHPO, 1999, no longer extant, destroyed by fire in 2008

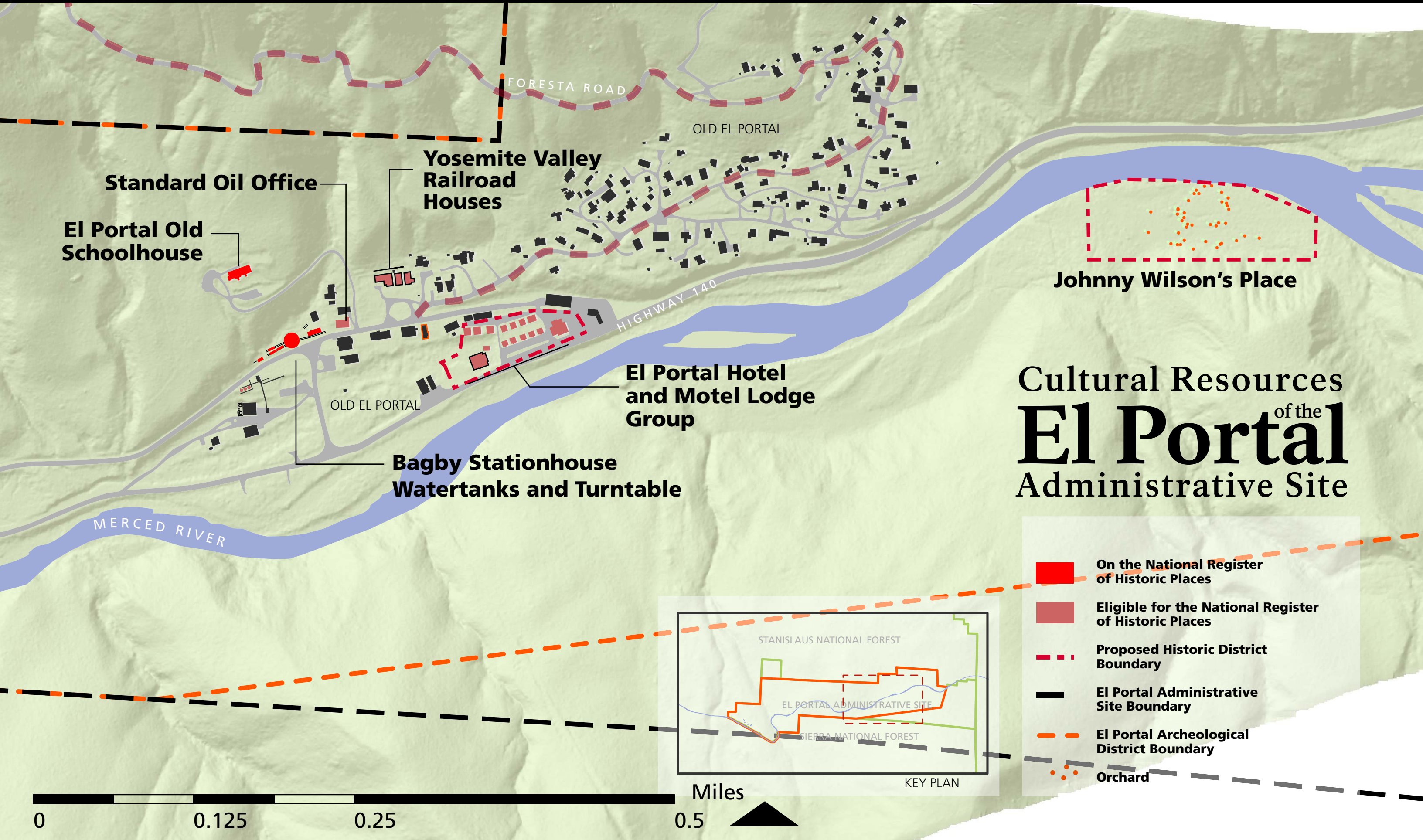
In addition, the following properties are likely eligible and nominations to the National Register or determinations of eligibility should be made under criteria A and/or D:

- El Portal Hotel and Motor Inn Historic District including the hotel (already determined eligible), with the addition of motor cabins and coffee shop;
- Foresta Road is a historic route but the integrity relative to specific historic periods requires a more thorough investigation;
- Rancheria Mission 66 Historic District; and
- Standard Oil office and bulk fuel storage.

Finally, some sites continue to have historic value and should be managed accordingly, although their eligibility for the National Register is less certain. Some could be eligible under criterion D, for the potential archeological information for historic development; but each of these sites have cultural and historic qualities that should be further investigated, preserved and managed accordingly:

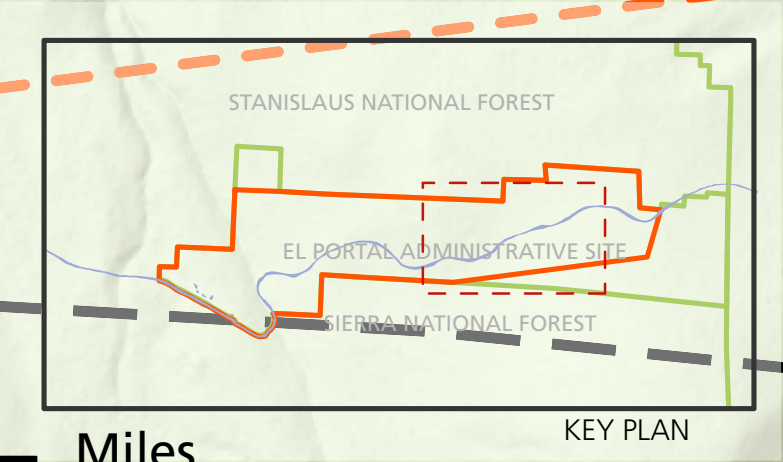
- Hotel Del Portal site, could be eligible under criterion D;
- Hennessey Ranch orchard; and
- The barium mines excavations.

The sites will be discussed more thoroughly within the historic contexts, and specific recommendations are discussed in the Existing Conditions and Recommendations. See Figures 3 and 4 for detailed maps with locations and recommended historic districts.



Cultural Resources  
of the  
**El Portal**  
Administrative Site

- On the National Register of Historic Places
- Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- Proposed Historic District Boundary
- El Portal Administrative Site Boundary
- El Portal Archeological District Boundary
- Orchard







# Cultural Resources of the El Portal Administrative Site

**Mission 66  
Residential District**

**Barium Mine  
Complex**







**National Lead Company  
Houses**

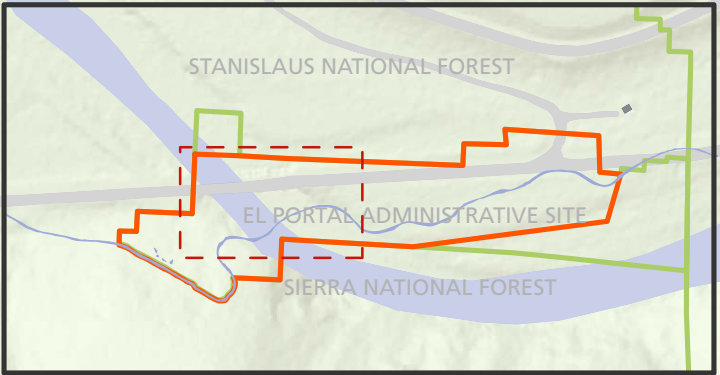
**Murchison House  
Complex**

**Hennessey Ranch and Orchard**

ABBIEVILLE

RANCHERIA FLAT

-  On the National Register of Historic Places
-  Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
-  Proposed Historic District Boundary
-  El Portal Administrative Site Boundary
-  El Portal Archeological District Boundary
-  Orchard



KEY PLAN





## **SITE HISTORY**

### **American Indian Occupation**

The El Portal area has been occupied for millennia. Archeological evidence demonstrates use of this canyon perhaps as far back as 8,000 – 9,500 years ago (Hull 1999). The archeological representations of this land use are protected under, and documented in the El Portal Archeological District national register nomination. The district encompasses village remnants such as mortar rocks, rockshelters, midden and trash deposits, housepits, and burial areas. American Indian people continue to live in the vicinity, and indeed were a strong presence in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, park-associated American Indian tribes, groups and individuals continue to have strong historical and contemporary ties to El Portal lands and resources. Addressing specific American Indian archeological and ethnographic resources is outside the scope of this Historic Resource Study, however these resources are addressed in other NPS documents.

### **European American Occupation**

#### **Early European American Occupation**

The first documented European American to enter the El Portal area was James Savage, who established a trading post several miles below El Portal about 1849-50 where the South Fork of the Merced joins the main channel. Early in 1850, the post was attacked, and he followed the attackers up the Merced River, but turned back when the terrain became more treacherous, before catching up to the assailants.

According to the description of Lafayette H. Bunnell, it is likely that Savage came into the El Portal area in his pursuit, possibly reaching the present boundary of Yosemite National Park, where the canyon deepens and the talus increases (Unrau 1998). Other area settlements had been attacked and the following year Savage commanded the Mariposa Battalion and pursued American Indians into the Yosemite Valley.

The search for gold was bringing many into the area at this time. There were likely other European-Americans before the Mariposa Battalion that had seen Yosemite prior to Savage. Two years before, William Abrams described the valley he saw in his diary after a bear hunt with a friend. Abrams worked for Savage, so Savage could have known of its existence before 1851 (Perlot 1985). One of the better documented area gold seekers is a Belgian, Jean-Nicholas Perlot, who arrived in Monterey in 1851. He published his adventures that included travels into the valley, mining for gold and the customs of the American Indians that led him to gold on the South Fork of the Merced and who were already mining it themselves (Perlot 1985).

The gold on the South Fork of the Merced River was known to many, but John R. Hite claimed the Hite's Cove Mine in 1861. The mine is south of El Portal on the other side of what became known as Henness Ridge, named after James Hennessey (Unrau 1998). James Hennessey briefly worked at the Hite's Cove Mine and the Irishman began the earliest ranch in the El Portal area in the early 1870s, on the south bank of the Merced, where the trailer park currently is. His house included guest accommodations for travelers going to see the Valley. He is one of the early promoters of tourism into Yosemite and petitioned the county to rebuild a river crossing across the Merced River and a road from Mariposa (Shoup 1998). The ranch had berries, grapes, a vegetable garden, and an orchard of fruit trees (some still exist). He transported his goods to as far away as Bodie on the east side of the Sierra Nevada, and attempted to improve the trail from his ranch to the Mann brothers' trail that ran from Wawona to Yosemite Valley. Use of his Henness Ridge trail diminished with the opening of the Coulterville Road and the Big Oak Flat Road in 1874, and the Wawona Road in 1875. His plans for his tourist rooms, farm and trail never succeeded as he hoped and he returned to San Francisco after the ranch was foreclosed on in 1887 by

John Hite. Today, besides some of the orchard, there are stone remnants and the graves of his mother and an unknown traveler at the site of his ranch. The farm was acquired by A. H. Ward in 1889 (Unrau 1998) who became a prominent figure in the development and promotion of El Portal.

A. H. Ward promoted the development of a wagon road from Mariposa to Yosemite Valley through El Portal, although this road failed to become reality. He also participated in the formation of the Yosemite Valley Railroad Company, established in 1902, and the Merced River Electric Company in 1904 (Unrau 1998). In an interview in the Merced County Sun, Ward credits himself with naming El Portal:

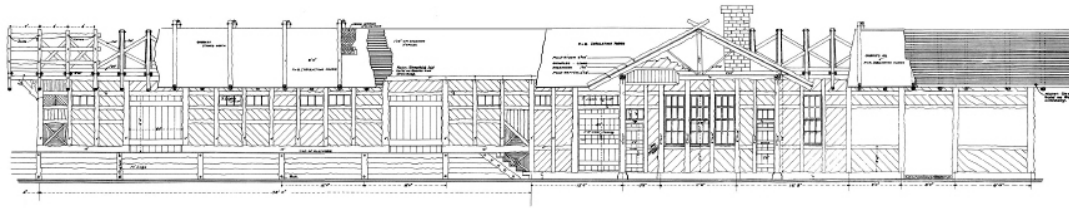
*...at the back of my place which I had always called my gateway, and which were really the entrance to the canyon, and I went to Mr. Forbes of the Baron-Forbes of Mexico, for many years official court reporter in San Francisco, and told him of my gateway and asked what would be an appropriate Spanish name. 'El Portal, the entrance,' he said (Merced County Sun, February 14, 1916).*

Leonidas Whorton arrived about 1865 and also started working in the Hite's Cove Mine. In 1879, Whorton was listed as the locator of the "Potosi Mine, a quartz vein, located on the north side of the main Merced River, opposite the lower end of Hennessey's Ranch." Whorton was also listed as the locator of the Southside mining claim; a quartz claim located "150 yards below the Hennessey Garden on the south side of the Merced River." The descriptions of both mining claims suggest that they were located where the barium mines were later established. By 1885 Whorton's holdings included most of the land in what is now the town of El Portal. After his death in 1887, A. H. Ward also acquired his land in El Portal, around the same time Ward bought the Hennessey Ranch (Unrau 1998).

## **Railroad**

Nathaniel C. Ray, superintendent of the Merced Gold Mining Company at Coulterville, proposed construction of a railroad from the San Joaquin Valley to Yosemite Valley and interested the aforementioned A. H. Ward and two Oakland financiers, John S. Drum and Thomas Prather, in the project. These men incorporated the Yosemite Valley Railroad Company on December 18, 1902. Ward, Drum, Prather, and Ray attempted for the next three years to secure the right-of-way for the railroad directly up the Merced River Canyon through Yosemite National Park lands to Yosemite Valley. The YVRR was never able to secure a right-of-way inside the park, and prior to 1905, this included El Portal. The western park boundary prior to 1905 was about nine miles further west than the current boundary, and after it was redrawn, the Department of the Interior granted permission for the railroad to build to the western boundary of the park, now about a mile east of El Portal. The department reserved the right to reassess the lease rate of \$1,000 a year in future years and also required the company to permit use of its equipment and right-of-way for transport of such persons, firms, or corporations as the Secretary of the Interior might designate. The railroad brought greater tourism and industry to El Portal and changed the landscape permanently (Unrau 1998).

Workers laid the last rail on April 25, 1907 and the first train from Merced arrived at El Portal on May 15, 1907. The railroad was an easier and faster route to Yosemite Valley compared to the long, arduous trips by stages from Coulterville, Big Oak Flat and Mariposa. Although it had not acquired the right-of-way, the YVRR spent \$73,260 building a wagon road from El Portal to the Coulterville Road, which then led to Yosemite Valley. This was the precursor to the El Portal Road that ran through Arch Rock (Unrau 1998). D. K. Stoddard, a Merced stagecoach operator, moved his business to El Portal and carried train passengers into the valley under a five-year contract.



**Figure 5 – Rustic railroad station elevation drawing (Burgess 2007)**

The railroad built a rustic station in 1909 at El Portal (Figure 5 and 6), located immediately north of the present-day Motor Inn cabins, and was characterized by stick and bark paneling similar to Camp Curry (NPS1987b). The railroad bought Stoddard's stage line in 1911 and began using auto stages on a limited basis in 1912. After Secretary of the Interior Lane granted the Yosemite Transportation Company permission to use autos inside the park, the first auto stage run from El Portal to the valley took place in November 1913. By the spring of 1914, the company had added three new auto stages (NPS1987b). An inventory of the Yosemite Valley Railroad Company holdings in 1916 included six steam locomotives, 193 freight cars, 5 passenger cars, 4 work cars, and one Pierce-Arrow rail auto (Unrau 1998).

The company constructed a complex of buildings to the east of the Hotel Del Portal (discussed in the next section) in the vicinity of present-day Eagle Peak Road and Crane Creek Roads at the east end of old El Portal. A 1914 mining claim map (Figure 7) shows these buildings. The largest two buildings included an upper stable, marked as "Shed" on the map, for the stage and freight wagon horses, and a lower building, labeled "Garage," provided space for the stages; a paint shop; workshops and an office. The blacksmith shop was located a short distance above the Shed. A boarding house was located a short distance above the stables on the upper road (present-day Foresta Road) and further up the hill they had a rooming house. The YVRR also built four employee houses in 1908 and nine west and north of the station. They were



**Figure 6 - El Portal train station with shed in background, circa 1924 (Burgess 2007)**



built as one-story, two-bedroom, frame buildings with covered front porches extending their full width. Three of the houses still exist, across from the current community hall. A large covered train shed, 125 feet in length was constructed next to the station in 1921. About this time, the train turntable at El Portal was abandoned and trains were reversed on a “Y” spur track at what is now known as Railroad Flat, in the vicinity of the present sewage treatment plant. Trains would pull into the spur and reverse the remaining miles into El Portal (Unrau 1998).

During 1923-26, construction of the Exchequer Dam east of Merced Falls by the Merced Irrigation District, and completion of the All-Year Highway from Merced to the west boundary of Yosemite National Park, had a significant impact on the operation of the Yosemite Valley Railroad. The dam required the relocation of 16.7 miles of rail line and the construction of five large bridges and four concrete-lined tunnels between Merced Falls and Detwiller at a cost of some \$5,000,000. The highway cut drastically into the business of the railroad as the Yosemite Transportation Company began offering bus trips from Merced at lower rates than the rail fare. By 1927, passenger revenue from the railroad had dropped 38 percent and it continued to decrease steadily, due to the onset of the depression and, later, by World War II. There was also a sudden reduction in shipping business when the Yosemite Lumber Company ended operations in 1927. This was the beginning of YVRR's economic decline, but the sudden increase in barium mining in 1929 helped stave off economic disaster for the railroad (Unrau 1998). Several disasters also contributed to the financial demise of the company: the burning of the main office in Merced in 1929; the widely-reported Yokum train wreck of 1930; and the flood of December 1937, which washed away bridges and destroyed some 30 miles of track, including portions of the highway in the El Portal area (Unrau 1998).

By October 1934, a group of bond holders incorporated the Yosemite Valley Railway Company as bankruptcy receivers, and in December 1935 the new company took over operation of the Yosemite Valley Railroad Company. Traffic improved when the Sugar Pine Lumber Company resumed its Merced Falls operation, and mail and tourist revenue rose with improving economic conditions. In 1940, however, the Sugar Pine Lumber Company sold its major holdings to the government and began closing out its timber operations. Regular mail service over the rail line was cancelled by the U.S. Navy in 1943. The Portland Cement Company, operating a mine at Emory several miles below El Portal, was disbanded in June 1944 (Johnston 1995). On August 31, 1944, the Yosemite Valley Railway trustees applied to the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) for permission to abandon the line, and that body approved the recommendation on February 28, 1945.

The Machine Tool and Equipment Company of New York took control of the railroad and its assets through bond purchases and announced its intention to scrap the line. Another disastrous flood on February 2, 1945, guaranteed the railroad's fate, and on June 28, 1945, the ICC formally approved final abandonment of the line. The last run to Merced occurred on August 24, 1945, and the rail line was sold for the bond holders on the steps of the San Francisco City Hall on September 7. The engine, cars, buildings, and other materials were disposed of by the Machine Tool Company, and the track and ties were removed under contract (Johnston 1995).

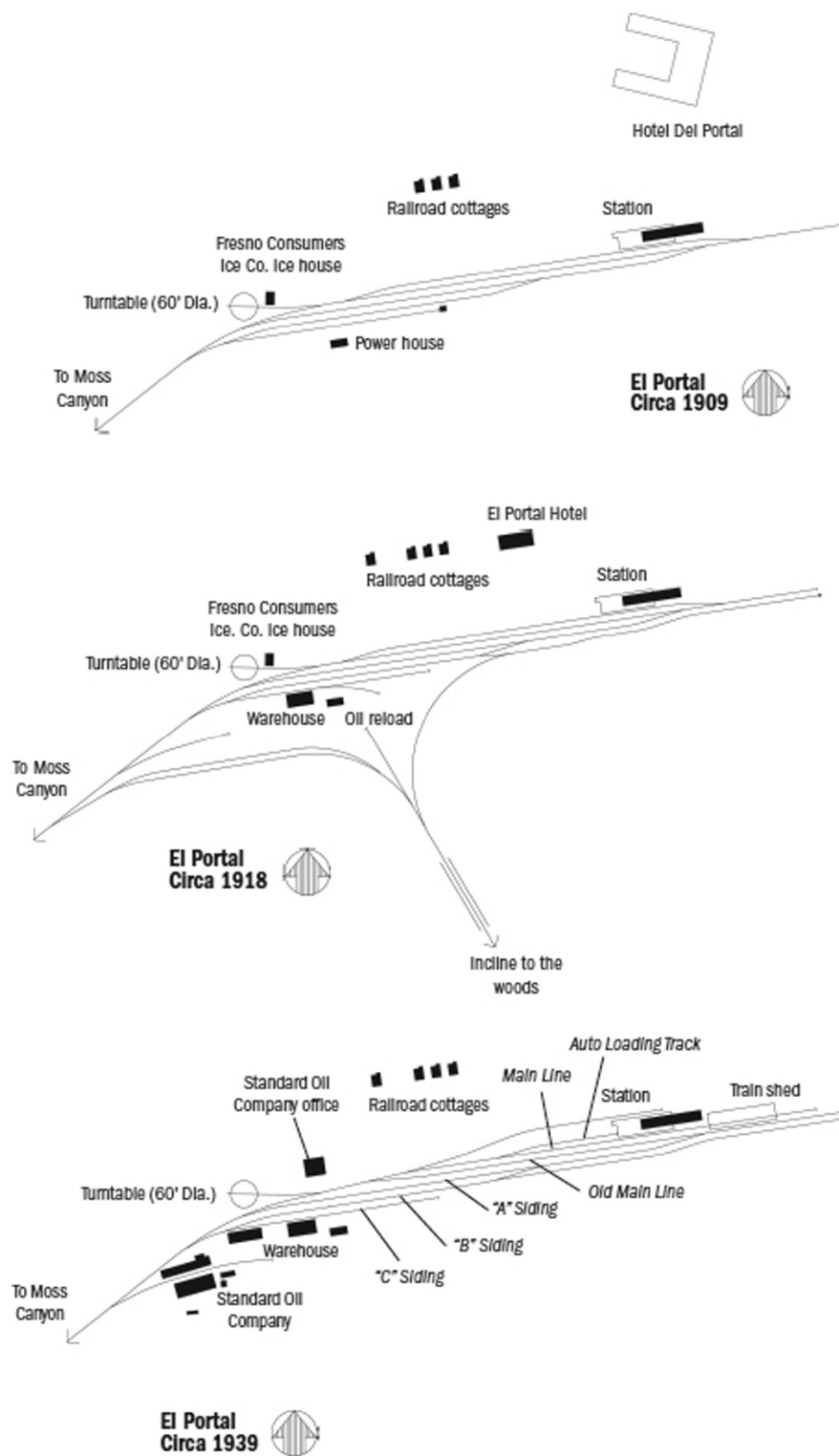


Figure 8 - Diagram plans of El Portal railroad yards (Burgess 2007)

## Tourism

As noted before, James Hennessey was likely the first to accommodate tourists at his ranch in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first hotel to serve tourists in El Portal was a tent camp that the Yosemite Valley Railroad established in 1907 north of the station. Two years later the YVRR built the grand Hotel Del Portal to cater to wealthy tourists who arrived at El Portal on the evening train. The Hotel Del Portal stood on land leased from A. H. Ward, one of the original partners in the YVRR. The luxurious four-story Hotel Del Portal was built a short walk north of the depot and east of the former tent hotel, and north of what is now Foresta Road between Buckeye Court and Rocky Road. The hotel contained a big lobby, an office, two dining rooms, a music room, a barber shop, a pool room, a bar, and a large kitchen on the ground floor. The upper floors held more than 100 guest rooms. A wide covered porch extended the length of the ground floor. The front faced south with a loading ramp where tourists boarded stages for the trip to Yosemite Valley. The hotel was U-shaped and had a patio with lawns, flowers, and a fountain in the middle with the open side to the north, and wings on the east and west. The two wings of the hotel, the same height as the front of the building, had gable roofs on the top floor (NPS1987b). Employees lived in tents, most a few hundred feet uphill from the hotel, except for the Chinese employees that worked and lived in the laundry, a few hundred feet downhill from the hotel (Unrau 1998).

An early description of the trip from Merced to El Portal and the accommodations at the Hotel Del Portal was intended to lure tourists to the Yosemite Valley Railroad. Although unmistakably worded to appeal to potential customers and increase business for the YVRR, the description paints a vivid picture of the town during this era.

*The railway then entering El Portal where the mountains sweep suddenly in, disputing the right of domain with rail and stream; and over a frowning buttress near the station. Chinquapin Falls shoots like a rift of silvery light, and whips its spray into the river 2,000 feet below. Alighting at El Portal the traveler sees, beside the snug little railway station, only the forest-covered hills, the swiftly flowing river and a shady trail leading away into the deep green hills; and following this he emerges on a sunny plateau one hundred feet above, on which stands Hotel del Portal, where the journey by stage to the Yosemite Valley begins. Apart from the interest attaching to this place because of being the starting point of the stages, it is an ideal spot for a vacation outing. Hotel del Portal is in all respects modern and first-class, equipped with hot and cold water, electric light, steam heat and every accessory for the comfort and convenience of guests. It is situated in a beautiful dell at the edge of a wide plateau which breaks into a steep hillside; its broad verandas look up to mountains piling on mountains until the serrated line is lost in the distance where loom the High Sierras. Below the roadway, which passes in front of the building, 'the merry, mad Merced' River races in noisy mirth down the sharp declivity.*

*... the opportunities for outdoor life, and the fishing and hunting, are unsurpassed. The river and its tributaries are alive with mountain trout, and deer and other have abound in the near-by forests. The hotel maintains large tennis courts and beautiful gardens; drives and trails for mountain climbing are invariably good and lead to rare scenic delights, picturesque spots and splendid views. But a short walking distance from the hotel and reached by an easy walk, is Crane Falls, one of the most charming of the many cascades of this region. A swinging bridge across the stream leads to the ruins of the oldest hotel in Mariposa County, a ghostly relic of old gold-mining days. Two Indian villages are located in the hills not more than half a mile away, and the villagers, though few in number are descendants of the Yosemite tribes (Lehmer 1912).*

It is not certain what hotel relic “across the creek” they are referring to if Crane Creek is the creek. It is possible they are referring to the Merced River and crossing to the old Hennessey Ranch. A considerably less romantic view was expressed by a state sanitary inspector who described the various amenities of El Portal to the California Board of Health in 1915. He mentions:

*The population during the winter months will probably not average more than one hundred people daily. During the summer months, however, thousands of tourists and others who visit Yosemite Valley by train pass through the town and as the automobile stages, rarely, if ever, enter the Valley at night practically all spend at least one night at the hotel.... The water supply for the town is obtained from Crane Creek... Cattle have access to the water in the creek innumerable places throughout the mountains.... All premises in the town, with the exception of the hotel and three or four of the cottages are provided with vault privies... in dilapidated and filthy condition. I was informed that the sewage from the hotel discharges directly into the Merced River at a point about two hundred yards above the Railway Station.... The sewage from the cottages having water flush toilets discharges into a dilapidated wooden cesspool, located on the bank of the river about one hundred feet from the water... discharges through a three inch pipe into a small stream of water and ultimately reaches the river. The waste water from the hotel laundry also discharges into this cesspool.*

*There is no general system for the collection of disposal of the garbage, rubbish, etc. In the majority of cases, however, it is deposited on the bank of the Merced River, which from the Railway Station to a point about a quarter of a mile below the same.... I was informed by Mr. F.A. Cline, manager of the hotel that the garbage and rubbish is removed daily, some of the garbage being used for hog feed and the remainder, with the rubbish, etc., being dumped on the bank of the Merced River... There are a number of cottages and tents located near the stable, which are occupied by employees of the Transportation Company. The grounds around the same are in places littered with garbage and rubbish.*

Tourism in El Portal, initiated by the YVRR, provided the impetus to construct a six -mile road connecting Foresta with El Portal in 1913. From Foresta, the road continued to the Merced and Tuolumne Groves, affording tourists traveling to Yosemite via the Merced River Canyon much easier access to these destinations. Referred to as the Triangle Route (Figure 9) because it led from El Portal at one corner to the Merced and Tuolumne groves at another, and to Yosemite Valley at the third, it passed through extremely scenic country, which made it a favorite with tourists. As an added thrill, autos could pass through the hollowed-out tunnel in the Dead Giant Tree in the Tuolumne Grove. From the Big Trees the route led to Yosemite Valley via the Big Oak Flat Road. After crossing the Merced River over El Capitan Bridge, autos could turn west and head back to El Portal (Greene 1987).

The introduction of the auto stage in 1913 had lessened the hotel's trade, enabling tourists to go directly from the train at El Portal to Yosemite Valley for the night. World War I further lessened the demand as people had less money to spend on trips and expensive accommodations. In addition, automobile use continued to increase, making it possible to bypass El Portal altogether. Capitalizing on the popularity of automobiles, the rail line developed a lucrative auto-ferry business as ramps were constructed in both Merced and El Portal (Bates et al 1981).

The Hotel Del Portal and the stage line between were leased to the Desmond Park Service Company, the park concessioner, in 1916. On October 1, 1917, the Desmond Park Service Company moved its general office staff and records to the Hotel Del Portal. On October 27, 1917, a fire, starting from a defective attic flue, destroyed the hotel and its contents. A less elaborate, two-story, 20-room structure, known as the El



**Figure 9 - Foresta Road was part of the "Triangle Road" for auto-touring (HABS 1991, CA-117)**

Portal Inn, was constructed to replace the hotel in April 1918. Located near the first tent accommodations, west of the Hotel Del Portal, it was operated by the Yosemite Terminal Company, a subsidiary of the Yosemite Valley Railroad. The Desmond Company had failed by this time. The two-story frame store built in 1909 next to the Hotel Del Portal was moved down the hill, adjacent to the new hotel, and reopened as a store (Unrau 1998). In July 1932, the El Portal Inn was destroyed by fire and the 1909 store was move a final time east of what is now the community center and later used as a post office and library before becoming a private residence. The two story store was demolished in 2006 by the building owner.

A long sought lower elevation road to Yosemite was finally realized when the final section of the All-Year Highway was completed from Briceburg eastward on July 31, 1926. The completion of this road had a major impact on how tourists traveled to Yosemite, on the railroad that once brought them, and on El Portal. Tourism in Yosemite thrived due to the construction of easier transportation routes, but the YVRR's business and profits declined.

A new motor hotel was completed by December 1932, after the El Portal Inn burned down, along the north side of California State Highway 140 to take better advantage of the growing number of automobile tourists. In 1948, a coffee shop, bar, and cabins were constructed near the hotel to accommodate the growing number of tourists. The main building, which remains, was a two-story hotel having 14 rooms, a lobby, and kitchen. The Yosemite Valley Railroad leased management of the hotel to Ben and Dolly Gardner, who operated the tourist accommodations until 1946 (Ben died in 1943). The El Portal Motor Inn, as it came to be called, was then managed by William and Adaline Brantley from 1946-64. Additional bungalows were constructed in 1950 and in 1955 to accommodate increasing auto tourists (NPS1987b). The hotel and cabins continue to be used for employee housing for a non-profit organization and the National Park Service.

A market was built approximately 200 feet to the west in 1934. It was built to support the community as well as the drivers using the highway. Its distinctive roof shape provided a prominent display for automobile tourists and pedestrians alike. It was destroyed by fire in 2008, and the site currently has a pair of mobile office trailers. The trailers are painted white with green roofs in deference to the form and style of the hotel nearby.

## **Timber**

In 1910 the Yosemite Lumber Company (YLC), run by F.M. Fenwick, was established to harvest timber in the El Portal area. It initially purchased about 10,000 acres of timberland between El Portal and Wawona, and constructed a sawmill and company town at Merced Falls. A 7,800-foot incline rail track was built just to the west of the present market in El Portal, and extended up to Henness Ridge on the south side of the Merced River. (Figure 10) The track then ran about 25 miles to the Wawona Road and on to Empire Meadow. The crest of the incline was 3,100 feet above the Merced River, and the maximum grade of the incline was 78 percent. A steam hoist at the peak of the incline powered the operation and could lower six car loads of logs in one hour, averaging 6,500 board feet of lumber per car. The first trainload of logs went to the Merced Falls mill on July 28, 1912 (Unrau 1998). Although there was little public complaint about the logging activities, the federal government swapped land with the YLC in 1917, to keep the activities less visible. Land around Wawona Road was swapped for land in less visible areas (Johnston 1995).

By 1923 the timber on the south side of the Merced River was becoming sparse, and the YLC began pulling up the steel tracks that fall. Two hundred men were used to relocate the track and equipment about 4 miles downriver to Incline on the north side of the river, a few miles west of the present administrative boundary. The operation was ready to go the following spring. Although not as steep, the north incline

required two segments of 8,300 feet and 1,600 feet in length, with maximum grades of 68% and 45%, respectively. The company abruptly ended operations in 1927, citing market conditions, but personal battles between the company and land owners was also a possibility (Johntson 1995).

The Sugar Pine Lumber Company took over operations, resumed logging and the Merced Falls mill in 1929. It did not last long and ceased operations in the El Portal area in 1931, due to the depression, and went out of business altogether by 1933. In 1935, the Yosemite Sugar Pine Lumber Company was formed, reopened the Merced Falls' mill, and resumed logging operations in the El Portal area once again. However, by 1937 the conservationist movement, spurred by an inspection in Yosemite by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes and Eleanor Roosevelt, began to voice objections to logging operations, and succeeded in persuading the federal government to buy back choice timber in the area. The Yosemite Sugar Pine Lumber Company exhausted the remaining timber supply and ceased logging operations in 1942 (Johnston 1995).

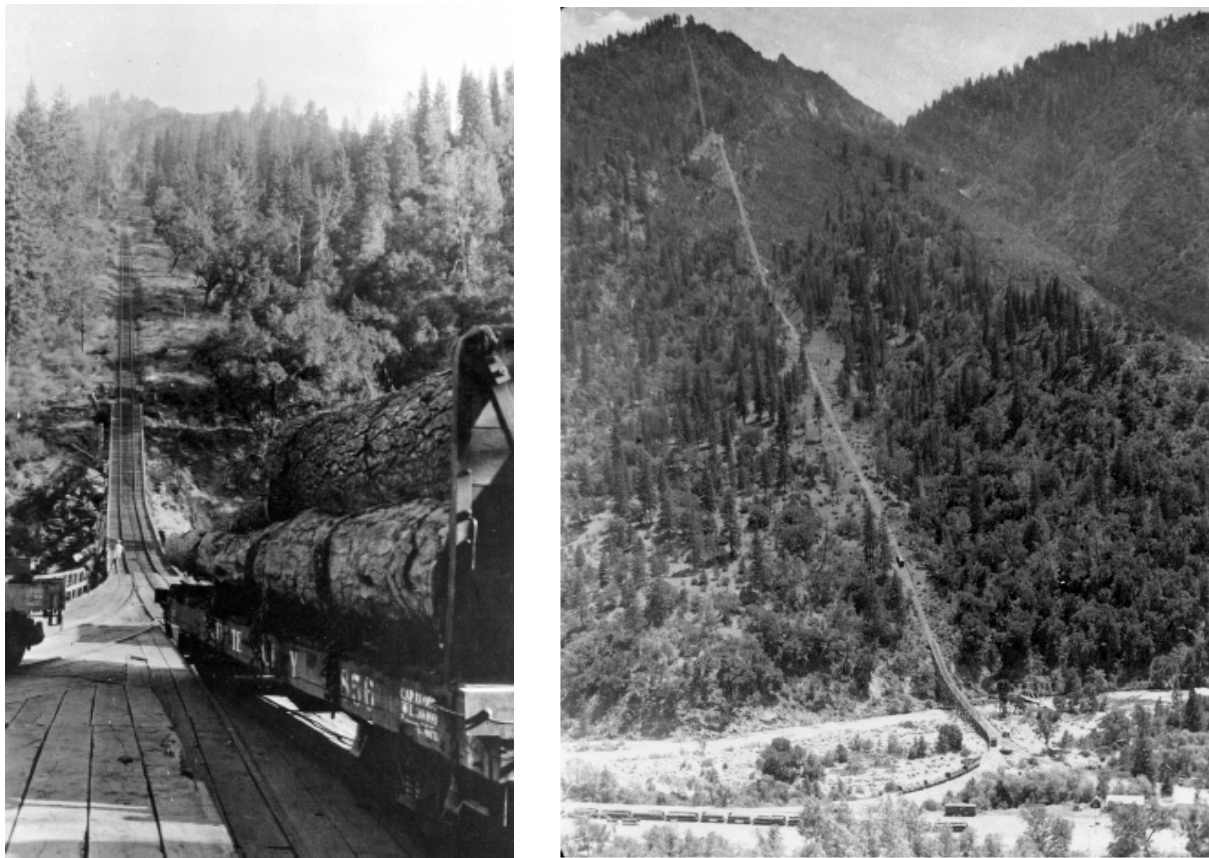


Figure 10 - El Portal Incline, views from across the river towards the south (Burgess 2007)

## Mining

The El Portal Mining Company began barium mining operations in 1910, after acquiring land from Ward that included the former Hennessey Ranch and the quartz veins that Leonidas Whorton had claimed on the north and south side of the Merced River. The Barbour Chemical Company operated the mine from 1914 to 1916. The operations were then sold to the Western Rock Company in 1916 and sold again in 1927 to the Yosemite Barium Company. The final company to operate the mine was the Baroid Sales Division of the National Lead Company, under the National Pigment Company (Unrau 1998). They began mining in 1929 and purchased the north mine and mill site, followed by the mine south of the river. Ore from the south side was transported to the mill on the north side on an aerial tram with buckets that each held about a half ton of ore (Law 1993). (Figure 11)

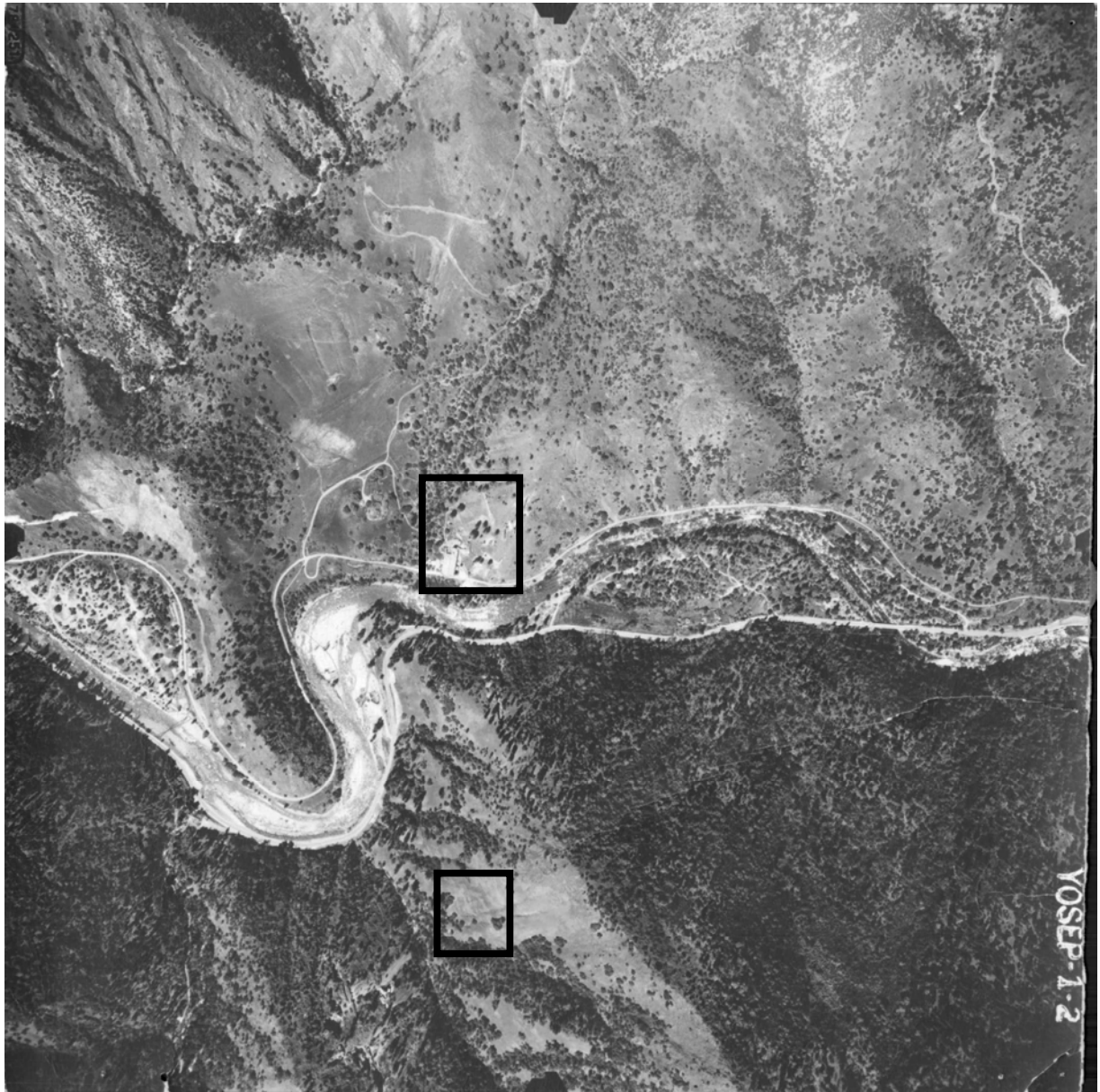


Figure 11 - Aerial photograph of north Barium Mine and mill site at center and the south side mine below. Rancheria Flat site to the west (left) of the north side mine and mill (NPS 1958)

Barite (barium sulphate) and witherite (barium carbonate) have several industrial uses. Witherite was used in paint pigments by the National Pigment Company under the “Dutch Boy” brand. Improvements in oil drills in 1928 required drills to be lubricated and shafts sealed to prevent gas seeping up the shafts and exploding on the surface. Barite was marketed as “Baroid” and added to mud to increase its weight and seal the drill shafts. These mines produced 60% of all barium in California between 1910 and 1948 and were the largest producer in the United States in 1916 with a peak year of production in 1944 (California Division of Mines and Geology 1966).

The National Lead Company built houses for some of its employees in 1929. The largest was for the superintendent, Earl H. Murchison, south of the river, on a small hill immediately north of present-day Highway 140, and west of the former Hennessey site. The building still exists and still referred to as the Murchison House. (Figure 13) It is a gabled white frame residence with a small garage (since modified) constructed next to the house, and a small white frame office building (still present) was constructed downhill from the superintendent's residence to serve the needs of mine management. A wooden footbridge was constructed across the Merced River below the Murchison House to provide access to the mill, but the bridge was destroyed by the flood of December 1937, leaving only some remnants of its abutments (Unrau 1998).

Another three houses were built on the north side of the river on a hill to the west of the mine, overlooking the mill (all three houses still exist). These were also built in 1929, for the mine foreman (the north house and largest of the three), for the accountant and office workers. The mine foremen's house (#705) was leased to Conrad Savage, the mine hoist operator, in 1938. He and his wife Emma continued to live in the house until his death in 1979, and Emma remained until her death in 1989 (Burnham 2011).

The mill was constructed on the north side of the river near where Foresta Road meets Barium Mine Road in Rancheria Flat. It was a large galvanized structure open on all four sides that covered an area of about 4,800 square feet. At the mill, the ore was sent through a series of crushers, processed and bagged for shipping. The mine continued to operate after the railroad ceased in 1945, but had to ship using trucks. This proved to be too expensive and the company ceased operations in El Portal in 1951 (Greene 1987). In 1960, the mill and aerial tram were razed and salvaged. The mine tailings were removed in the 1980s after a determination they were a hazard to the local water supply (NPS 1983).

Another two mills were built in 1952 and operated by the Incline Mining Company to process tungsten and some gold ore. These mills were located on the hill just above the present sewage treatment plant on Railroad Flat. The company produced and milled some ore at the plant, but halted in 1955 when floods washed out the mine roads. Low prices of tungsten forced the mills to close in 1964 (Greene 1987). The Park Service eventually condemned the mills in the 1970s and the structures were removed (NPS Landsnet 2011). The concrete foundations are still visible on the hillside. (Figure 12)





**Figure 12 - Remains of old tungsten mill (NPS 2011)**



**Figure 13- View of Murchison House complex 2011 (NPS 2011)**

## National Park Service and Residential

Despite the generally poor conditions previously described by the state health inspector, the town of El Portal continued to expand. El Portal was near the industrial center of the county and the National Park Service and park concessioner brought an influx of employees, even during the 1930s economic hardships (Greene 1987). Employees settled not just in El Portal, but also in areas like Abbieville, on the old Hennessey Ranch site, where several railroad and, later, mine employees built homes (NPS 1959). Some of these buildings were reportedly moved to El Portal from Abbieville after 1959 (Unrau 1998). American Indians continued to live in traditional areas, as well, and were frequently employed by the park and concessioners (NPS 1998a).

Many of the current residential structures in El Portal likely date from the 1920s and 1930s. (Figure 14) Construction materials for the homes were often scavenged from various sources. The historical records of Mariposa County indicate that some of the residences "used part of a hotel foundation for a patio," while "some have no concrete foundations." One house "has a basement ceiling formed by dynamite crates." More than one house in El Portal grew up around a tent, with canvas still intact inside the walls. Over time, second and sometimes third roofs were added (Law 1981).

In 1910, the first El Portal elementary school was established in a railroad-owned cabin uphill from the depot (Unrau 1998). In 1911-12, a one-room frame school with a large covered porch and a bell tower was constructed in upper El Portal on present Foresta Road (Greene 1987). A larger school was constructed in 1930 on a hill above the west end of town. Today, it is also referred to as the El Portal chapel. This building remains with only interior modifications and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2011. It served as the town's educational center until 1962, when the present school at Rancheria Flat was opened.

### *Recreational Housing*

Homes were also built in El Portal beginning in the late 1920s as part of a nationwide program of the Forest Service (USFS) that administered the properties immediately north and south of El Portal. In the 1920s and 1930s, nationwide, the USFS was implementing the recreational residence program in an effort to increase recreational use of the National Forests. The Stanislaus National Forest to the north of El Portal drew out a total of thirteen lots just above El Portal beginning in 1927 after the All-Weather Highway was completed and continuing to 1937. The Sierra National Forest to the south laid out six lots south of the highway (see appendices). (Figure 15) Many of the original houses from the recreational residence era on the former Stanislaus tracts remain (Unrau 1998), although none of the four homes built on the six Sierra lots remain.

The El Portal tracts differed from most of the other USFS recreation residence tracts because many of the residences were not used as vacation cabins, but were used as permanent housing for employees working for the National Park Service, the concessioner, the YVRR, or other local industries. The following account from Carl Salmi (son of John Salmi, a National Park Service bridge builder who built a house on Stanislaus Lot 9 circa 1931) describes life in one of these residences:

*After a year in El Portal, Dad began to build a wood frame house way up on the hill, not on railroad property. We were to spend two more years in the tent as the house went up. The hill land belonged to the Stanislaus National Forest, which was headquartered in Sonora, California. We had to pay a rent of \$15.00 a year for the special use permit. The permits presumably were for summer homes, but people lived there all year long, and the forest officials didn't care. However, we had to adhere to certain rules, to their code for construction. We had to*





**Figure 14 - Site of former recreational housing on Sierra National Forest site (NPS, 2011)**



**Figure 15 - Upper El Portal homes on former Stanislaus National Forest land (NPS 2011)**



*clear all brush within maybe 30 feet of the house, probably because there were so many forest fires at that time. I lived there 'til 1938 or 1939 (Salmi unknown date).*

There were actually few rules for construction on USFS lots, but some guidelines such as the structure should be “permanent, neat attractive, and in keeping with the natural surroundings” did apply (Bryant 1929). All building plans and additions were to be approved by the Forest Supervisor in Sonora. However Carl Salmi goes on to describe piecemeal improvements that he made to his house without consulting with the Forest Service. Similar improvements have been made to most of the historic homes in El Portal.

*The house consisted of just a kitchen with a bed in it where Dad slept, a separate bedroom, a service porch, and a porch under the roof that was later enclosed with wall and windows. At first there was just an outdoor john; then a lean-to bathroom was built off the service porch. Dad built a garage further up the hill from lumber salvaged from one of the buildings the contractor sold off after building the Wawona tunnel. (Salmi unknown date).*

### **National Park Service Administration**

After the YVRR disbanded in 1945, the El Portal Mining Company (a subsidiary of the National Lead Company) obtained title to the former railroad lands in El Portal (Unrau 1998). Most of El Portal was then owned by the El Portal Mining Company, except for the USFS portion. The next big shift in ownership would be in 1958 with the creation of the El Portal administrative site for the National Park Service. Public Law 85-9222 authorized the Secretary of Interior to acquire approximately 1,200 acres located in the El Portal area for use as an administrative site and to relocate some functions outside Yosemite Valley in order to preserve the extraordinary natural qualities of Yosemite National Park. The El Portal Mining Company sold the land and mining rights for \$300,000 and the USFS exchanged land within the present boundary for mining land outside the boundary.

At the time, the town was occupied by approximately 300 people. Community operations included the U.S. post office (in the old store), a county operated grade school (the old school), a community hall (built by Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1954) and a water system financed by assessments and owned by leaseholders. Business operations in the town included a Standard Oil Company bulk receiving and storage facility, a Standard Oil Company service station, the El Portal Market, a hotel, motel and cafe/bar. There were 71 residential leaseholders in the town on former El Portal Mining Company land, and this number included the Old Store (post office at that time) and the VFW community hall. The USFS land held an additional sixteen residential leases – twelve from Stanislaus and four from Sierra (Unrau 1998).

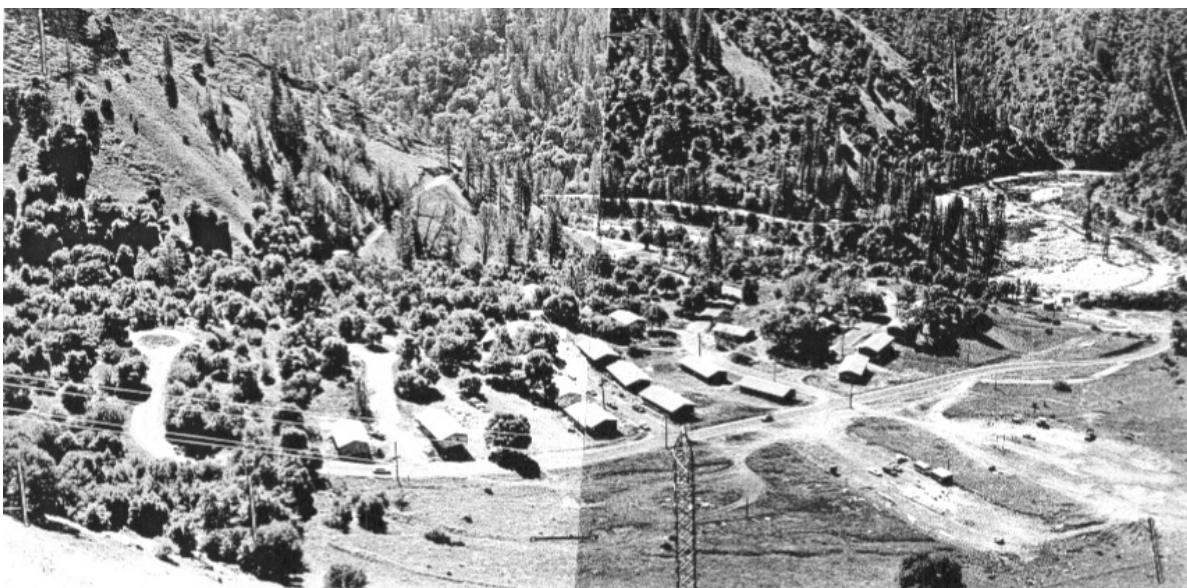
The inspection of the recently purchased property by park managers found that all El Portal residences had electricity and water connections, each had a septic tank and most had butane installations. The water system drew water from Crane Creek with a provision for drawing water from the Merced River in periods of low water. The town contained an unincorporated fire district possessing one fire truck (Unrau 1998). A separate water system for Rancheria and the mining operations came from Moss Creek, above Rancheria.

After the National Park Service acquired the land in El Portal, the agency began formalizing the handling of lease permits and identifying needed improvements. According to those new policies, residents must either have been leasing the land prior to the 1958 purchase, or they must be employed in some fashion by the park, concessioner, county, or public utilities or they must provide a necessary community service. The new guideline also explained that residents were free to make any internal changes to their home, but any external changes now need prior approval from the NPS. The water system was modernized and a

sewer system installed to eliminate the individual septic systems, and all residences were required to connect to the new systems.

During this time Yosemite National Park was grappling with overcrowding in Yosemite Valley and substandard housing for park and concessioner employees. One of the first priorities for the El Portal Administrative Site was to alleviate some of the housing pressures in Yosemite Valley. In 1961 the National Park Service began building housing in Rancheria Flat, west of El Portal as part of the Mission 66 initiative in the National Park Service. Mission 66 was undertaken in the 1950s to improve facilities in time for the NPS 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1966. It would also improve housing for employees by following post-war housing systems - using a series of standard designs and prefabricated construction methods to build detached single family homes (Carr 2007). The pressure to improve substandard housing was mainly due to the National Park Service Women's Organization (NPSWO). Many of the organization's concerns were expressed in the 1956 Women's Congress on Housing and were integrated into the standardized housing plans issued in 1957. The NPSWO surveyed housing in 1959 and found the National Park Service built 368 of the 1,000 units that were to be built over five years. The standard plans were again modified in 1960 after this survey (Carr 2007). In Yosemite National Park, 20 units using standard plans were constructed in Rancheria Flat in 1961 as a part of this program. (Figure 16) A new school and associated teacherages were built in Rancheria Flat in 1962 and managed by Mariposa County. Utility infrastructure for sewage, water, and electricity was completely upgraded for the entire administrative site. A trailer park for 62 trailers with utilities and a combination services building (restroom and laundry) was completed in 1960 across the river in Abbieville to provide additional housing. A new post office for El Portal was built in the town center in 1966.

The National Park Service also looked to utilize the administrative area in ways other than employee housing. In 1966 the reservoir levels for the Exchequer Dam were about to rise and the NPS relocated the YVRR Bagby Station, watertanks, and turntable 30 miles upriver to be part of a new transportation exhibit with the Hetch Hetchy Railroad Engine No. 6, the YVRR Caboose No. 15, and the Track bus No.19 behind the current gas station and market (Figure 17 and 18). A covered exhibit space was built in 1964 to protect some of the anticipated equipment. Although the train station, turntable and water tanks were first deposited here, they were never reconstructed in this location. Instead, the NPS moved and reconstructed them in their present location north of Foresta Road by 1984 (Rod Kennec 2011). The



**Figure 16 - View of complete Mission 66 homes in Rancheria Flat (NPS 1961)**

turntable is on base of the original turntable in El Portal and the engine and caboose were placed nearby. However Al Rose, the owner of Track Bus No. 19, was not happy about its placement in an out-of-the-way location, and he reclaimed the equipment before it was relocated. After Al's death, his widow donated the track bus to the Railtown 1897 State Historic Park in 1997 (Railtown 2011).

In 1975, the National Park Service converted the El Portal Hotel and adjacent cabins to employee housing. In 1980, the agency also installed mobile office units south of the post office to provide temporary office space for park administrative purposes. Finally, the agency converted the hotel itself to office and housing space for the Yosemite Institute later in the 1980s (Unrau 1998).

In its 1980 General Management Plan for Yosemite National Park, the NPS proposed substantial additional changes to El Portal, including increased housing and office space for both its own employees and also for the park's primary concessioner. The agency followed up on this plan with a 1981 document that provided a site plan for the administrative site with significant new development and redevelopment in El Portal (Bates et al 1981). About three years later the NPS signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Mariposa County authorizing the county to issue building permits for non-government buildings after these plans had been approved by the National Park Service. The following year, the agency issued a design manual with architectural guidelines for the village center (NPS 1985). In the same year the agency also assigned and surveyed lot lines for 88 parcels in El Portal (El Portal Village East) (see appendix).

This decade also began the start of the present river related planning effort. The Merced Canyon Committee was formed in 1984 to protect the Merced River and stop a hydroelectric dam just outside the park boundary (NPS 1985) and by 1987 the Merced River was designated a Wild and Scenic River. Many

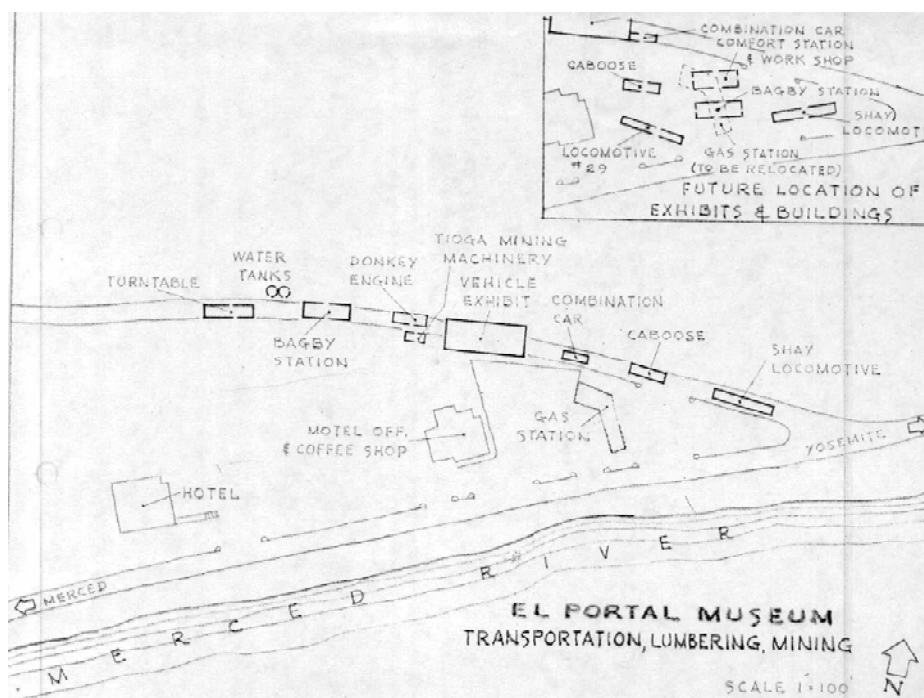


Figure 17 - Original plan for the Transportation Museum (NPS 1966)



**Figure 18 - View of cafe/restaurant and the temporary location of the Shay Locomotive (NPS 1963)**

of the previous planning efforts by NPS regarding El Portal would be put aside for the comprehensive river related planning. For better or worse the additional housing proposed in the hills above El Portal and the urban streetscapes envisioned for the village center of El Portal have not happened.

### **Land Acquisition by the National Park Service**

The past history of deeded land ownership in El Portal lends insight into how former land owners and managers saw and used their land, bringing to light information about past uses not otherwise obvious. The National Park Service (NPS) Land Resources Program Center identifies seven parcels within the administrative site's boundaries. The parcels represent a variety of ownership from fee-simple (owned by the NPS), used by NPS granted by agreement (from the Forest Service), and private. Most of the land for the site was purchased from the El Portal Mining Company, and some exchanged with the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service soon after the Department of the Interior was authorized to do so. The tract numbers refer to the National Park Service Land Resources Center's identification system shown in Figure 19.

#### ***Tract 21-131***

This is the tract purchased from the El Portal Mining Company in December 1, 1958. This is the first tract purchased for the administrative site and includes most of the town of El Portal. The purchase was for 972 acres and an additional 101 acres of unpatented land for \$301,284. The El Portal Mining Company had acquired the title in two parts; it obtained title to the lands of the Yosemite Valley Railway in the town of El Portal after the railroad was abandoned in 1945; and the remainder of the land was purchased from A.H. Ward in 1910. Ward had extensive mining and property interests in Mariposa County, including the former Hennessey Ranch (which he likely operated) and the former Leonidas Whorton Ranch, where

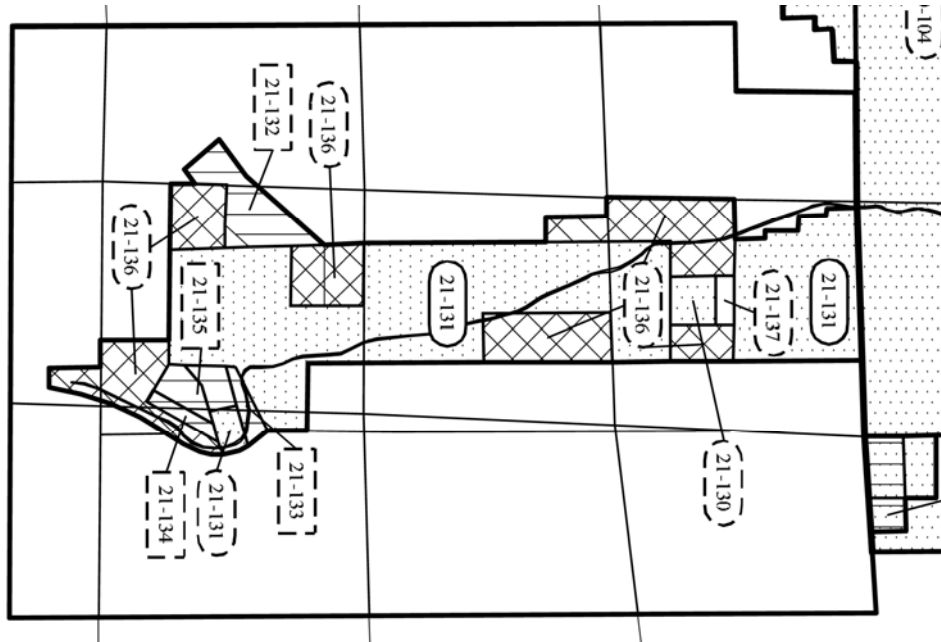


Figure 19 – Detail of Yosemite National Park land status map showing El Portal administrative site, 1986 (NPS 1986)

most of the town of El Portal now sits. A. H. Ward acquired the Hennessey property sometime after it was foreclosed on by John Hite, from Hennessey, on December 17, 1887. The property was described as 40 acres on the south bank of the Merced, 1 ½ miles below the mouth of Crane Creek. Leonidas Whorton discovered a quartz vein on the north side of the Merced opposite the Hennessey Ranch in 1879, and was granted 80 acres on the north bank of the Merced, just below the mouth of Crane Creek in 1885. He likely continued mining and filing claims in the area, until he was murdered in 1887. Ward acquired the majority of Whorton's property and interests after this (Unrau 1998).

When the NPS purchased the land in 1958, it agreed to honor existing leases and agreements by the El Portal Mining Company that had been given to individuals, other government agencies and businesses. The terms of these leases ranged from undetermined to month to month, with the majority being renewed annually. Some of this purchased land, 212 acres and 52 unpatented acres, was transferred to the control of the Forest Service in exchange for 376 acres in parcel 21-136.

A detailed description of the inventory on the El Portal Mining Land, and proposed exchange with the Forest Service, was sent on December 24, 1958 to the regional director from the superintendent. This report included descriptions of the leases and agreements. It describes 71 residences in the town of El Portal, two businesses on residential lots, six commercial leases, and seven rights-of way granted to utilities and other government agencies (see appendices). It also mentions the structures built by the National Lead Company in the Rancheria area, and a rifle range.

The two businesses on residential leases in El Portal identified in the 1958 report were leased to:

- D. D. Shepard, for the post office; and
- the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2971, for the community-owned hall.

The six business leases identified in the 1958 report were:

- an expired lease for the ceased mining operations of the Baroid Sales Division of the National Lead Company;

- an expired lease, but extended month to month, for the store and an upstairs apartment owned by W. A. Neubert;
- a current lease for 0.53 acres for the bulk storage of the Standard Oil Company of California;
- a current lease for the Standard Oil, Inc. gas station, operated by John Walliser;
- a current lease for a 2,400 sq. ft. concrete block building owned by William J. Leary; and
- a current lease for operating the El Portal Inn and Motor Court, restaurant and bar business, held by W. E. Brantley. The buildings for this operation were the hotel, 12 double cabins, a coffee shop and bar, garage, paintshop and library, and were owned by the El Portal Mining Company.

The rights of way were granted to:

- Pacific Gas and Electric for a 72K transmission line, but with apparently undefined terms;
- Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company, for an undefined period;
- A-1 Television and Radio Service (T. C. Wooten ) for the transmission lines to carry radio and television service, and a transmission center;
- El Portal Mining Company for a separate business that held the two wood tanks and a well for the town drinking water;
- a community owned and operated water distribution system;
- Mariposa County for the road from El Portal to Foresta (identified as the Davis Road) and the road to the grammar school; and
- The State of California for Highway 140 that passes through the land, amounting to 0.561 acres (for only the portion on the old mining company land).

Abbieville was also occupied by ten residences, and ancillary buildings and structures, owned by seven people. These residences did not have leases and were apparently initially built by mining employees with a verbal understanding from the National Lead Company. These structure owners were advised by the National Lead Company (the parent company of the El Portal Mining Company) to remove the buildings by March 31, 1958, but most residents ignored the directive. The buildings in Abbieville without leases consisted of:

- a residence and tool shed owned by Claude Cottrell;
- a residence, garage and tool shed owned by Victor Schelling;
- a residence garage and tool shed owned by Melvin Jurney;
- two residences, small house shed, tool shed, and trailer without wheels owned by Maggie King;
- a residence, garage and tool house owned by William Laux;
- a residence owned by Olie Auch;
- two residences, garage, tool shed and constructing wood shed owned by Lenual Barnett;
- a pump house and water pump owned by Laux, Auch and Barnett; and
- a steel water tank and a pump collectively owned by the residents of Abbieville.

The purchase of the land did not include the four houses built by the National Lead Company. A separate agreement for \$3,600 was signed on January 9, 1961 for all interests that included what is now referred to as the Murchison House, three employee homes on the north side of the river, their related structures, and water systems.

#### *Tract 21-136*

The NPS Land Resources Program Center identifies this tract as 404 acres. This was transferred from the Forest Service (both the Sierra and Stanislaus national forests), in exchange for land purchased from the

El Portal Mining Company. These lands also included leases granted by the Forest Service to individuals for summer homes and residences, businesses, and other government agencies. The leases were summarized on a table provided to the NPS on January 22, 1960. The terms of the leases varied between the forests with Sierra granting ten year terms, and were not transferrable, while the Stanislaus terms varied from eight to twenty years, with some for indeterminate periods.

The Merced River divides the forests, but jurisdiction of the Sierra National Forest did apparently extend north of the river along section lines. The Sierra National Forest leases were for four residences, two commercial operations, and two rights of way. The four listed residential leases occupied four of the six platted lots known as the Yosemite Valley Railroad Flat on the north bank of the Merced River, south of the tank storage, on either side of Highway 140. A plan drawn in 1949 shows an additional building on lot 1, as well, but no lease is listed, and no building on lot 6 ( see appendices).

The Sierra Forest residential leases had an annual fee of \$35, and all were to expire on June 30, 1960. These leases were held by: Tony Freitas on lot 4, Mrs. Warner Moon on lot 2, Mrs. Ethel Parker on lot 3, and Dean Shapherd on lot 5.

The commercial leases were held by:

- Standard Oil Company of California for the storage and warehouse in El Portal on 0.24 acres; and
- Mariposa Sand and Gravel for the aggregate batching plant and storage on 15 acres on the south side of the river, west of El Portal.

The Standard Oil lease was terminable, but had no defined time period or expiration, and the fee was \$50 per year. The aggregate lease expired on July 23, 1960 and was for \$25 per year.

Rights were granted to:

- Pacific Gas and Electric Company for an electric transmission line that was north and south of the river; and
- The State of California for construction and maintenance of Highway 140, 3 miles of which would be part of the exchange.

Stanislaus National Forest had leases for twelve summer homes and residence, and rights to six entities. The residences had an annual fee of \$60, and expired on or shortly before January 12, 1968. These homes were on thirteen lots above El Portal along the road to Foresta. Lots 1 through 6 were platted in July 1927, lots 7 through 11 were platted in July, 1931, and lots 12 and 13 platted after that. No lease is listed for lot 13. The individual leases were held by:

- Thomas and/ or Helen Rennels on lot 1,
- Charles and Lillis Webber on lot 2,
- B. Barry on lot 3,
- Mr. and Mrs. Ira Goss on lot 4,
- Francis Connett and Amos Neal on lot 5,
- Douglas Whiteside on lot 6,
- Charles Muel and Robert Boone on lot 7,
- W. A. Neubert on lot 8,
- Jack Vacca on lot 9,
- George and Marjerie Johnson on lot 10,
- Clifford Marston and Zella Agnes on lot 11, and.

- W. A. and Janet Neubert, Jr. on lot 12.

Rights were granted to:

- T. C. Wooten for a right of way for a television antennae and circuitry along 1.75 miles for \$50 per year;
- Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company for three rights of way for two telephones lines of 0.28 miles for \$5 per year and 9.26 miles for \$50 per year, and a service road;
- Pacific Gas and Electric for a transmission line right of way of 5.2 miles for \$30 per year; and
- Stanislaus National Forest for water rights.

#### *Tracts 21-133, 134 and 135*

The government needed to acquire the rights granted to mining interests, both patented and unpatented, that generally occupied the railroad flat area, where the administration buildings and sewage treatment plant currently sit. Accordingly, the NPS purchased the Maby Mill and Mine from the John Milanovich estate for \$200 on May 13, 1959, and most of the other rights in July, 1960 for \$200 each from groups of multiple owners. These included the Blue Spot Mill and Mine, the Blue Dipper Mill and Mine, the Blue Star Mill and Mine, and the Garnet Queen Mill and Mine. The acquisition of the remaining Gary Mill and Mine and the Donna Mill and Mine sites, above what is now the sewage treatment plant, become more involved. The mill was built to process tungsten ore in 1952 and the companies retained ownership in the structures and mineral rights until 1964. The NPS eventually went through legal action to force the owners to remove their property. It was condemned on December 2, 1974 and the owners were given two years to remove the mills.

#### *Tract 21-130*

This 19.99 acre tract was purchased by the NPS for \$2,998.50 from Gertrude and Harry Cruikshank on January 14, 1959. The land is south of the Merced River on Indian Creek below Chinquapin Falls. They had purchased the land from Jonny Wilson's three granddaughters who had divided the original 30 acres into two parcels shortly after inheriting the property in February, 1953, sixteen years after Johnny Wilson's death. Recorded on the deed given to the granddaughters in 1953, it was initially granted under the Dawes Act of 1887 (24 Statute 388, 389) (see Appendices). He was originally granted the 30 acres on February 17, 1917 and it is the only allotment of land to an American Indian in El Portal.

#### *Tract 21-137*

This is the only privately held parcel within the administrative boundary. It is the remaining 10 acres from the original 30 acre allotment held by Wilson's granddaughters. One of the granddaughters, Marion Wilson Lucero, had the parcel that was "near the orchard, because she wanted to keep the land" (NPS 1998a). Indian Creek runs through the northeast corner of the property. In 1979 the current owner, Ray Green, acquired it through a tax sale after Mariposa County foreclosed upon it. A building permit was apparently granted to Ray Green by Mariposa County and a right-of-way was requested from Caltrans and the NPS in 1981. The property title was looked into regarding access rights by the National Park Service and the right-of-way was denied (see appendices).



## CHRONOLOGY

<i>Year</i>	<i>Major Event</i>	<i>Description</i>
c. 1849	Established	James Savage starts a trading post where the South Fork of the Merced meets the main channel
1850	Attacked	Savage's trading post is attacked and he follows attackers. Probably the first European American to enter the El Portal area.
c. 1850	Born	Johnny Wilson is likely born in Yosemite Valley or El Portal.
1861	Established	John Hite and wife claim Hites Cove Mine south of El Portal.
c. 1870	Established	James Hennessey establishes ranch and guest accommodations on south bank of Merced River.
1879	Established	Leonidas Whorton files for Potosi Mine on north side of Merced River and in 1887 as locator of Southside Mine, on south side of the river. Described as "quartz veins," the descriptions and locations indicate that they may have been barite deposits.
1885	Land acquisition	Leonidas Whorton acquires 80 acres in El Portal west of Crane Creek in present-day El Portal.
1887	Land transfer	James Hennessey's ranch foreclosed on by John Hite.
1887 to 1889	Land transfer	A.H. Ward acquires properties of James Hennessey (in what became Abbieville and the trailer park) and of Whorton (in what became El Portal).
1902	Established	Yosemite Valley Railroad incorporated by Nathan Ray, A. H. Ward, John Drum and Thomas Prather.
1905	Land transfer	Yosemite National Park's boundaries redrawn. Park boundary along Merced River moves about nine miles east, one mile east of El Portal.
1905	Begun	Survey work begins for construction of Yosemite Valley Railroad.
1907	Built	Yosemite Valley Railroad begins operation from Merced to El Portal, where a wagon road led up the Merced Canyon to intersect with the Coulterville Road.
1907	Built	First hotel to serve tourists in El Portal consists of tents, located northwest of the present-day intersection of Foresta Road and Rocky Road.
1907	Built	An icehouse is built and the Yosemite Valley Railroad added a refrigerator car to its line.

1908	Built	Four railroad employee houses built (three remaining) in El Portal town center.
1909	Built	Hotel Del Portal constructed northeast of El Portal station, east of the original tent structure. It had over 100 guest rooms.
1909	Built	El Portal train depot constructed near what is now the Motor Inn cabins.
1909	Built	The railroad company constructed a two-story frame store near the Hotel Del Portal replacing a tent store.
1910	Began	El Portal Mining Company begins barium mining.
1910	Established	Yosemite Lumber Company is created.
1910	Documented	C. H. Harriman visits Yosemite and documents numerous American Indian camps and villages along the Merced River, including El Portal. His findings are later published in 1917.
1910	Established	First El Portal school is established in a small Yosemite Valley Railroad building.
1912	Built	Second El Portal school is constructed in upper El Portal.
1912	Built	Incline track for Yosemite Lumber Company constructed on south side of the Merced River, first car load is shipped to Merced Falls.
1913	Began	Yosemite Transportation Company begins auto-stage service from El Portal to the valley, reducing the demand for overnight accommodations in El Portal.
1913	Built	A wagon road is built from Foresta to El Portal as part of the "Triangle Route" for auto touring (the current Foresta Road roughly follows the same route).
1914	Change in operations	Barbour Chemical Company takes over barite mining operations.
1915	Cease in operation	The two story frame store ceases to operate as a store and all of its contents are moved to the Hotel Del Portal as a cost savings measure.
1916	Purchased	Western Rock Company purchases barium mining operations from Barbour.
1917	Purchased	The Desmond Park Service Company begins to run the Hotel Del Portal and the Yosemite Transportation Company.
1917	Destroyed	The Hotel Del Portal is destroyed by fire October 27, 1917.
1918	Built	A smaller 20 room hotel, the El Portal Inn, is constructed to replace the Hotel Del Portal, located on the site of the original tent structure hotel.

1918	Relocated	The two story frame store is moved adjacent to the El Portal Inn to again serve as a store.
1923	Relocated	Yosemite Lumber Company dismantles incline track on south side and builds a new incline north of river and west of El Portal in 1924.
1926	Built	Exchequer Dam built, forcing the railroad to relocate tracks and build additional bridges and tunnels.
1926	Built	The All-Weather Highway from Mariposa to Yosemite is opened, allowing tourists to travel through the Merced Canyon in their personal vehicles.
1927	Established	The Stanislaus National Forest's El Portal Recreational Residence Tract is established. Lots 1-6 were initially laid out
1927	Built	Yosemite Portland Cement Company opens quarry for limestone at Emory, west of El Portal.
1927	Cease in operations	Yosemite Lumber Company ceases operations.
1927	Purchased	Yosemite Barium Company purchases barium mines.
1929	Purchased	Baroid Sales Division of the National Lead Company takes over barium mines in El Portal. A mine superintendent's residence (the Murchison House), three houses for mine administrators and a footbridge across the Merced are built.
1929	Resumes	Sugar Pine Lumber Company takes over operations from Yosemite Lumber Company.
1930	Built	Third schoolhouse built at the west end of town (also known as the chapel).
1931	Cease in operations	Sugar Pine Lumber Company ceases operations at the incline north of the river.
1931	Established	Lots 7-11 of the Stanislaus National Forest's El Portal Recreational Residence Tract were laid out.
1932	Destroyed	A fire destroys the El Portal Inn.
1932	Built	El Portal Motor Inn is built along the new All-Weather Highway.
1933	Cease in operations	Sugar Pine Lumber Company ceases all operations.
1934	Reorganized	The Yosemite Valley Railway Company formed to receive bankrupt Yosemite Valley Railroad Incorporated.
1934	Built	A new store is constructed just west of the Motor Inn.

1934	Moved	The old two story frame store is moved for the second time to east of the present Community Hall and ceases use as a store.
1935	Resumed	Yosemite Sugar Pine Lumber Company forms and logging operations restart at the incline on the north side of the river.
1937	Built	Lots 12 and 13 of the Stanislaus National Forest's El Portal Recreational Residence Tract were laid out. No more USFS lots were added to the tract after this date.
1937	Flood	Flood of December 11, 1937 wreaks havoc on El Portal, washing away bridges, portions of the highway, and thirty miles of Yosemite Valley Railroad track.
1942	Cease in operations	The Yosemite Sugar Pine Lumber Company ceases operations at the incline north of the river; this is the last use of the incline.
1944	Decline in operations	Last train of limestone from Emory to Merced.
1945	Abandoned	Last run of Yosemite Valley Railroad August 24. National Lead continues operations by trucking processed ore to Merced.
1945	Purchased	El Portal Mining Company obtains title to the former railroad lands in the town of El Portal.
1946	Change in use	The old two-story frame store is used as the El Portal post office.
1950	Flood	Major flood events in early winter washes out sections of the El Portal Road.
1951	Cease in operations	El Portal barium mines close permanently.
1952	Built	Ore mills at Railroad Flat built to process tungsten ore.
1958	Established	Congress establishes El Portal as Yosemite National Park's Administrative Site. The Department of the Interior acquires most of the land from the El Portal Mining Company and swapping land with USFS.
1960s	Relocated	Hetch Hetchy Railroad Engine No.6, Hetch Hetchy Railroad Track Bus No. 19, and Yosemite Valley Railroad Caboose No. 15 were relocated to the El Portal town center as part of a new transportation exhibit.
1961	Built	Twenty single-family houses built in Rancheria by NPS as part of Mission 66.
1962	Built	Fourth El Portal school is built at Rancheria Flat with two teacherages .

1964	Built	Covered area built behind former coffee shop and current market for transportation display.
1966	Relocated	The Yosemite Valley Railroad stationhouse, watertanks, and turntable from Bagby (30 miles west of El Portal) were relocated to El Portal intended to be additions to the transportation exhibit.
1967	Change in use	School in Old El Portal was converted to a chapel.
1967	Built	New post office was opened in the town center.
1967	Change in use	Two-story building (originally built as a store in 1909) becomes a library; ceases use as a post office.
1975	Change in use	El Portal Motor Inn and cabins are converted to use as employee housing and office space for NPS and Yosemite Institute .
1980	Completed	General Management Plan for Yosemite National Park is completed.
Late 1980s	Built	More National Park Service housing constructed at Rancheria Flat.
1984	Reconstructed	Yosemite Valley Railroad stationhouse, turntable and water tanks reconstructed at site of El Portal turntable. Engine and caboose relocated here.
1984	Proposed	Proposal to construct hydroelectric dam on the Merced River and divert water around El Portal
1987	Established	Merced River designated a Wild and Scenic River.
1997	Flood	100-year flood event. Massive damage to park infrastructure and resources occurred. Congress allots \$297 million to Yosemite National Park for flood recovery.
1998	Built	Final Phase of NPS administrative complex in El Portal completed.
2006	Destroyed	Building owner demolishes old store from 1909 without permits.
2008	Destroyed	Fire destroys El Portal Market on April 21 while being renovated.
2009	Established	New El Portal Market opens in former hotel coffee shop and bar.





## EXISTING CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many historic and cultural resources existing within the El Portal administrative site that are important to be preserved for future generations. Some sites within the boundary are eligible, or likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and moving forward on these sites should take place. Listing on the National Register is not a guarantee that the property will be preserved; rather it is a step in documenting a properties importance in history, noting the important characteristics that should be preserved, and that enough of those original characteristics remain (referred to as integrity) to reveal its history.

There are other sites of historic value that have little more than remnants, such as the Hotel Del Portal, but can still help illuminate the past. Some of these sites could be included in the El Portal Archeological District already on the National Register. There are also numerous other historic archeological sites such as dumps and other road alignments that could be considered contributing resources to some of the sites, but should be further investigated and documented. The route of preservation of these resources does not always need to be through nominations and listing. Some sites, such as the Barite Mine, have little character left of the original. Ultimately it is through informed and sensitive management that cultural resources are preserved.

### European American Occupation

#### James Hennessey's Ranch

This is an area with the earliest history of European American occupation. A few of Hennessey's fruit trees and some remnants of possible rock walls are all that remain. They are located on the south bank of the Merced at the west end of what is now the trailer court. The orchard sits near Highway 140, with other stone remnants to the west. The orchard once contained peach trees, but 66 apple, pear, and walnut trees remain. The NPS assessed the orchard in 2010 as part of the Orchard Management Guidelines and determined it was in fair to good condition (Figure 20).

Present houses in Abbieville and in the trailer court have not been individually assessed. They are privately owned structures with NPS permits to occupy the land. It is possible one or two of the homes at the west end may date to the 1930s, but many of the houses were moved to El Portal (Unrau 1998). The homes that existed at the time the NPS purchased the land were only located with on hand sketched plan (see appendices) and in general descriptions so it is difficult to make any specific recommendations based

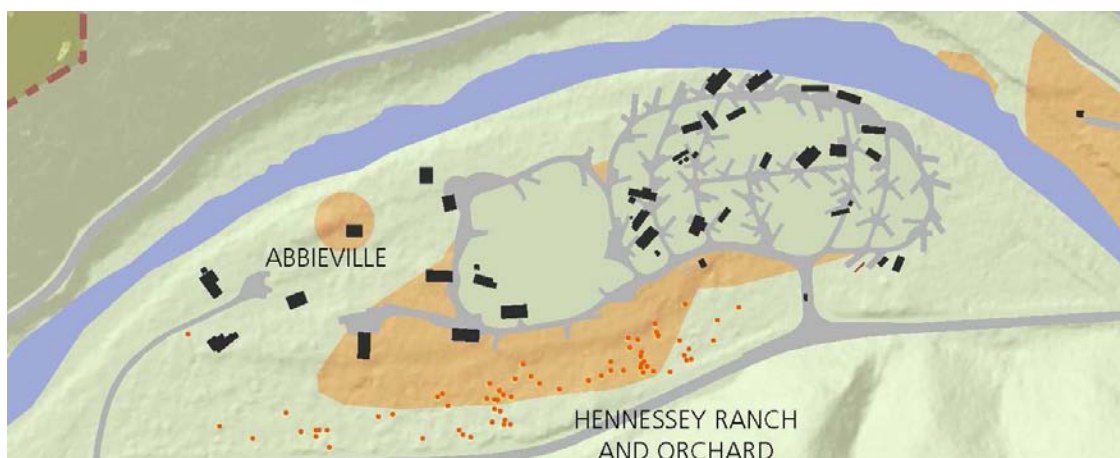


Figure 20 – Abbieville and Hennessey Ranch site with fruit tree locations in red (NPS 2011)

on that information. The trailer park is currently occupied by about thirty units. The laundry building (building 707) is still functional and maintained by NPS with little apparent change.

**Recommendation:** Remnants of a stone wall and the orchard are still present. Although not likely contributing resources or individually eligible to be included on the National Register, these historic remnants are cultural resources of an era that should be preserved in place to the extent practical. The orchard management plan recommends rehabilitation of the orchard with continued use as a garden.

The homes in Abbieville are not likely to be individually eligible to be listed on the National Register, and there is only a possibility one or two may have a tenuous connection to the mining due to proximity and occupation of the original builder, but none of these structures were built by the National Lead Company, as are the other mining structures proposed for nomination.

The trailer park and laundry building was built during the Mission 66 era. It is a development intended for transient structures and the remaining infrastructure of roads and the laundry building do not convey the broader story of the NPS providing improved housing through modern methods and means. The laundry building appears to have a high degree of integrity and shows good examples of a simple utilitarian construction, but it lacks any distinct qualities to warrant inclusion on the National Register by itself.

## Railroad

### Bagby Stationhouse, Water Tanks and Turntable

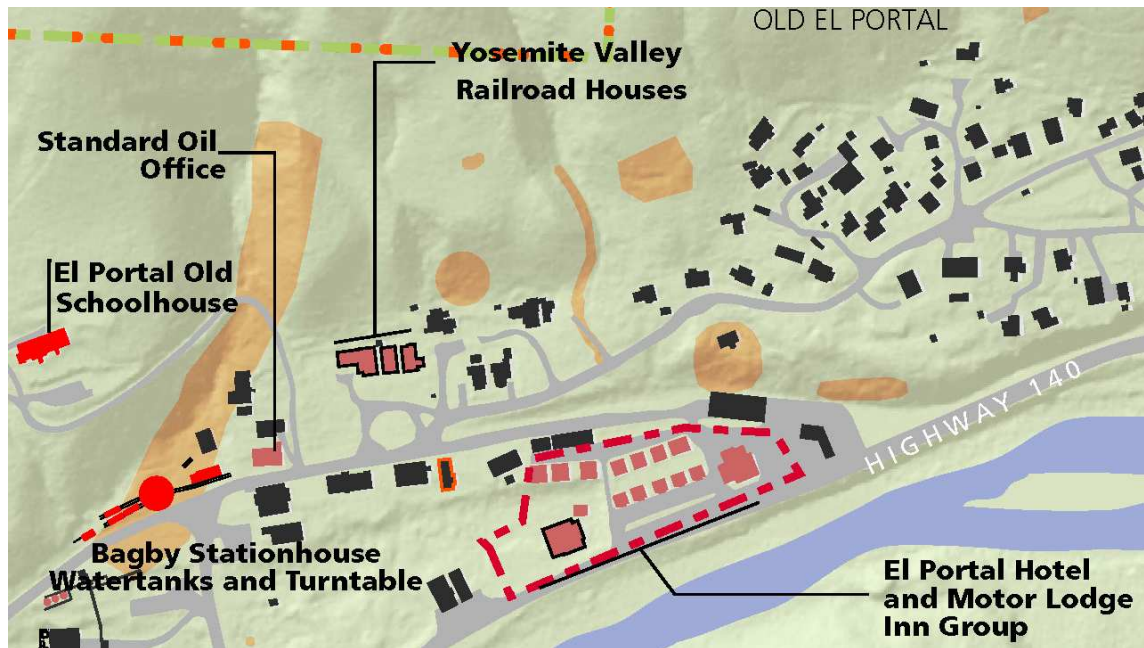
These structures and building were moved and reconstructed in their current location in 1984, after being relocated from Bagby to El Portal in 1966 (Figure 21 and 22). They were entered into National Register on April 13, 1979. They continue to be maintained by the National Park Service. Their status on the National Register will require re-nomination to remain because they were moved after being placed on the National Register, along with the other railroad equipment on display. Although these structures were



Figure 21 – Bagby Train Station, now Yosemite Conservancy offices (NPS 2011)



Figure 23 - El Portal showing eligible sites for the National Register in pink, and existing sites in red (NPS 2011)



originally moved from Bagby, (and placed on the National Register after the move) moved structures are eligible only if they meet additional criteria in the nomination process. The building and structures appear to still meet the additional criteria for moved property because they are the only remaining station and water tanks from the same railroad line, but a nomination should be done and submitted for concurrence. Re-nomination could have been avoided if the keeper of the National Register was notified before the move, but the additional information in a nomination form is needed after the action has taken place.

Recommendations: Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for the building and structures should be prepared to maintain their status.



Figure 22 - View of Hetch Hetchy Railroad Engine No. 6 (Shay Engine) in foreground, with Caboose behind it and Bagby Water Tanks to the left (NPS 2011)



### **Hetch Hetchy Railroad Engine No.6**

The Shay engine was entered into National Register on January 30, 1978. It was moved into its current location in 1984. As with the Bagby structures described above such, it requires re-nomination to remain on the National Register (Figure 22). This is true even for rolling stock that was always intended to move. Unlike the other railroad objects in El Portal, this engine is not from the railroad that came to El Portal, but from Hetch Hetchy. However, this rail line no longer exists either and this engine appears to still be eligible.

Recommendations: Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for the engine should be prepared to maintain its status.

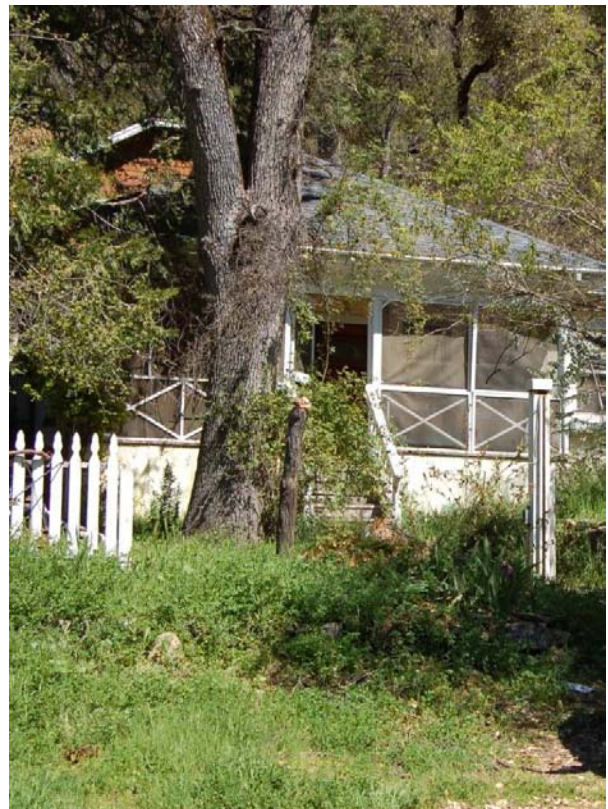
### **Yosemite Valley Railroad Caboose No. 15**

The caboose was entered into National Register on May 22, 1978 and was moved into its current location in 1984. As with the Bagby structures described above such, it requires re-nomination to remain on the National Register (Figure 23). This car has the most direct history with El Portal since it came to El Portal during its active use.

Recommendations: Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for the caboose should be prepared to maintain its status.



**Figure 24 - Yosemite Valley Railroad Employee house, middle (NPS 2011)**



**Figure 25 - Yosemite Valley Railroad Employee house, east (NPS 2011)**

## Yosemite Valley Railroad Employee Residences

Three houses constructed by the Yosemite Valley Railroad for employee residences in 1908-09 are located on the north side of the village center. These homes are currently privately owned with permits from the NPS to occupy the land. The three houses are similar: one story frame buildings with a front covered porch extending the full width of the building, two bedrooms, living room, pantry, kitchen, and a half porch in the back. The west end building has had a fireplace put in on the right side of house. The east building has had a room with fireplace added on the right side of the house and an addition was added (Figures 24 and 25). The three houses were determined eligible for listing in 1999 due to their association to the broader historic pattern. The western house was also determined to have sufficient integrity to be also important example of architecture for the period, too. The eastern house was also determined to have sufficient integrity, although an addition has since been added that has a negative impact on its status, although a formal determination has not been made.

Recommendation: At least one of properties has undergone a degree of change since determined eligible in 1999 and should be evaluated again and given to SHPO for concurrence. Two of the three houses are likely still eligible. If determined to be eligible, owners would have to be consulted and agree to have the buildings entered on the National Register.

## Standard Oil Structures

The Standard Oil offices are a simple pair of buildings on the hillside of El Portal. The two buildings sit on the north side of Foresta Road just opposite the Post Office. The lower office building is set back about 10' from the road with a raised planter at its base. Chapel Lane comes up along the east side of the buildings with a section of driveway branching past the lower building to the upper building. There is about 14' between the buildings with a small outdoor eating area. Southwest of these buildings is a fuel storage and transfer facility that continues to operate.



Figure 26 - Standard Oil offices, now Vegetation and Ecological Restoration offices (NPS 2011)



*Resources Management Office (Standard Oil Office)*  
*Structure No.: 786*

The main office (lower) building is a one and half story rectangular painted structure (Figure 26). It sits on a concrete wall foundation that has access through a door on its south side. The building is wood frame with a two part wood siding made of horizontal boards below vertical boards. The facades of the office are punctuated with large double hung windows on all sides. Each window is wood framed with a two-over-two layout. Simple 1x4 trim finishes the exterior detailing of the windows. The hipped roof is made of metal standing seam panels with air vents and a furnace stack. The fascia is an integrated gutter bordering the whole building. The northeast corner of the building is a small entry porch and a wood staircase. A small glazed sunroom/mudroom is attached to the northwest rear of the building.

*Resources Management Office 2 (Standard Oil Office Garage)*  
*Structure No.: 792*

The second (upper) building is a one story slab on grade, “L” shaped, painted structure. The building is partially built into the hill exposing the northern side only 4’ from the soffit edge. A concrete wall flanks most of the northern edge retaining most of the earth. The façade is framed with a varied assortment of metal casement, double hung and slider window types. There are four doors, all of which face the south façade. Three of them are standard wood doors and one is a large sliding glass door that is currently blocked by furniture and wood sawhorse. It has an exposed soffit with chamfered 2x4 rafter tails. The hipped roof is clad in asphalt shingles. A large condenser sits atop the roof on the northwest side.



Figure 27 - Existing bulk oil storage tanks likely built 1945, south of Foresta Road, the former railroad grade (NPS 2011)



### *Bulk fuel storage*

A modern telephone building and an operating bulk oil storage and transfer facility (elements of which may date back to the 1930s) are located on the south side of Foresta Road at the west edge of the village center area. It is also possible that the road that passes through the site is an early El Portal route that linked a few settlements on the river to the town center and over to Rancheria. Three large petroleum storage tanks lie parallel to the buildings below (Figure 28).

Recommendation: The best information available is the Standard Oil office was originally built in the 1930s and is potentially eligible for the National Register. This information is not in the park archives and a broader and more extensive search would be required. Further investigation should be done to determine when the buildings and associated fuel tank storage and transfer facility were built. A determination of eligibility should be undertaken to for all the buildings and structures associate with Standard Oil. If determined eligible, a Historic Structures Report and nomination should be done for the Standard Oil offices to better inform maintenance and future renovations.

The tanks and transfer facilities may not be a particularly popular focus of preservation because of their un-scenic and industrial qualities, but they are one of the few remaining continually functioning sites that reflect the industrial past of El Portal. The date of construction of the storage tanks is undetermined, but could overlap the final days of the railroad, and as such, would be the only extant remnant of the operating railroad and worthy of preservation. If the tanks and transfer facilities are determined eligible, this would not require they are preserved as they are. A determination of eligibility would mean the history of this site is acknowledged, and any future change would, hopefully, consider that history through preservation or documentation of a piece of El Portal's industrial past.

### **Railroad Remnants**

The influence of the railroad is seen throughout the administrative site in features such as Incline Road, Warehouse Service Road and Foresta Road to El Portal. The abandoned railroad bed needed little modification to create these roads, and these in turn, continue to influence present building patterns. Books such as *Trains to Yosemite* by Jack Burgess and *Railroads of Yosemite Valley* by Hank Johnston have been published on the Yosemite Valley Railroad and provide a wealth of information of the past. The only existing fragments of the railroad in El Portal are: the base of the turnstyle; the caboose that came to El Portal; and the modified excavations required for the rail bed.

The two incline tracks, one south of El Portal, and a later track on the north side of the river, were remarkable engineering accomplishments, but only a small portion of the south track was inside the boundary of the administrative site, and that area has been developed. There have been archeological studies describing logging and the associate tracks past Henness Ridge in *Historic Railroad Logging Study: Yosemite Lumber Company and Sugar Pine Lumber Co. Yosemite National Park Publication 3*.

Recommendations: Although important to the history of El Portal little direct connection remains to the railroad in the past. There is no more appropriate a place for the Transportation Museum than El Portal, because the history of the Yosemite Valley Railroad is important to El Portal, and there may not be any other accessible areas with any remaining structures left along the past route. What structures and objects are left, whether directly related to El Portal, or railroads in the area, should be preserved to the greatest extent possible. Actions for the Bagby Station and objects are described above. The influence of the rail bed location is still seen, but it likely modified along much of the route when the road was created. The former rail bed was previously investigated for archeology and recorded. No further actions at this time are suggested.



Figure 28 - Former El Portal Hotel, now Yosemite Institute offices and dormitory (NPS 2011)

## Tourism

### Proposed El Portal Hotel and Motor Lodge Historic District

After the fire of the El Portal Inn, businesses focused on the highway and moved nearer to attract the new automobile tourists. The hotel was taken over by the NPS in 1975. Today, the main building is used as offices and dormitory for the staff of the Yosemite Institute, an outdoor education non-profit organization, through special use permit with the NPS (Figure 29). The cabins are used for NPS employee housing.

*El Portal Hotel/Yosemite Institute Office/Dormitory*  
*Structure No: 762*

The El Portal Hotel was built on the north side of recently built State Highway 140 in 1932 to attract automobile traffic heading into and out of Yosemite National Park. Ben and Dolly Gardner built the hotel as a replacement to the third hotel that burned down.

The two and half story main building is rectangular in plan with a gambrel roof and shed dormers covered in green composite asphalt shingles. Its exterior measures roughly 66 × 61 feet. The southern entry of the building has a wood porch covered by a lean-to shed roof. The building is sheathed in wood clapboard painted white. The building has many six-over-six double-hung windows and has hopper windows at the gable ends. It is in fair condition, with many of the exterior windows needing repair. The interior and exterior have been altered for current uses. The biggest change to the site since the time of construction is the removal of the railroad behind the building, more parking, and the expansion of the pavement.



**Figure 29 - Former motor inn guest rooms, now NPS seasonal housing (NPS 2011)**

#### *Motor Lodge Inn Cabins*

*Structure No: 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776*

The Motor Lodge Inn Cabins were built as an extension to the El Portal Hotel. They were placed to the immediate east of the hotel in two rows and set back on the north side of State Highway 140. They were built after the railroad was removed in phases with the first completed in 1948; the second in 1950; and the final building (770) was built in 1955. They were built as small duplex cabin units catering to the new automobile tourist. Today they are used as seasonal housing for NPS staff with little apparent modifications. (Figure 29)

Units in the first row are 24 × 18 feet. They are rectangular in plan with simple gabled roofs and an open cross gabled end porches. They are wood framed with white horizontal siding. Each unit has six one-over-one double hung windows on three sides. Interiors are divided into two equal parts containing a small closet, kitchenette, and bathroom with shower. The second row of units varies in size: building units 771-774 measure 24 x 20 feet, units 775 and 776 measure 24 × 22 feet, and unit 770 measures 32 × 20 feet. They are similarly detailed as the first row of units. The later units have a simple shed porch roof, instead of the cross gable porch. All the units appear to retain a high degree of integrity and are in good condition.

#### *Coffee Shop/ El Portal Market*

*Structure No: 764*

The Coffee Shop and Bar was built as part of the expansion of the El Portal Hotel in 1948. It stands about 100 feet to the east of the last Motor Lodge cabin and directly north of Highway 140. The building went on to house a series of offices, shops and temporary housing before reopening as a grocery retail space in 2009 (Figure 31).

The wood framed structure is approximately 61 × 65 feet. It is covered in large plate glass windows on the south and east elevations. An intersecting gabled composite roof covers the majority of the structure,





**Figure 30 - Former coffeehouse, now the El Portal Market (NPS 2011)**

with a small shed roof over the coolers in back. A massive stone fireplace and chimney sits on the southeast corner of the building. The recent interior renovation in 2009 for the new market included interior finishes and renovated kitchen and bathroom equipment.

Recommendation: The main hotel building was determined eligible in 1999. A determination of eligibility to the National Register should be done for the proposed historic district that includes the El Portal Hotel, Motor Lodges and Market. They are closely related buildings and structures that embody the touristic development of El Portal and the transition from railroad to automobile. There appears to be good integrity on much of the site, particularly on the building exteriors. If determined to be eligible Historic Structure Reports for all structures and a Cultural Landscape Report should be written to better guide future use and maintenance.

### **Del Portal Hotel**

Remnants of foundations and possible fountain still exist and are buried under existing houses around Rocky Road above Foresta Road.

Recommendation: The hotel site should be considered to be included within the current El Portal Archeological District, or nominated separately with other properties of historic archeological value within El Portal. Work by residents or NPS in the area should require archeological monitoring.

### **Foresta Road**

Foresta Road, from the old railroad bed and to Foresta, follows the “Triangle Route” that was started in 1913 as an early effort to promote auto touring in the park. It is paved only within the residential area, and, beyond the boundaries of the administrative site, is an unimproved road with bridges that have not been evaluated, but could be historic. It is likely to be the original route. The American Indian route out of

El Portal to Yosemite Valley was up through Foresta (Bates 1981), but it is not know if this trail is reflected in the road, or associated at all.

Recommendations: A historic evaluation should be made to determine the integrity of the historic route, and a determination of eligibility as a Cultural Landscape prepared if there is sufficient integrity. This was not considered as part of this report since most of the route and all the bridges are outside the boundary of the administrative site. Within the boundaries the current road alignment appears to be unchanged when compared to historic maps (Figure 7).

## Mining

The remnants of highest integrity from the mining industry in El Portal are in the housing and office buildings of the former barium mine operation. The shafts and adits of the mines remain, but these alone are typically insufficient to convey it operating history (NPS 1997).

### Proposed National Lead Company Historic District

#### *National Lead Company Houses*

The three employee structures were built in 1929 to house workers from the barium mine situated just uphill. The houses are located on the east side of River View Road, south of Barium Mine Road. The northern house (705) laid in disrepair for many years with the threat of demolition. It was rehabilitated in 2009 after not being occupied for 20 years in part due to the demolition of the Old Store in El Portal and concern for the loss of historic resources in El Portal. The two remaining houses have been in continuous use and all three are all currently occupied. (Figure 32)

*9761 and 9759 River View Road  
Structure No: 703 and 704*

These one story wood framed structures are almost square in plan, measuring 33 × 28 feet. They both



Figure 31 - Former National Lead Company houses, now NPS housing (NPS 2011)



have concrete foundations, but originally sat on wood posts. The exterior walls are clad in thin 2" painted lap siding. A simple gabled roof is covered in composite shingles. Broad overhangs and a cross gabled open porch complete the simple detailing of the period. The buildings' porches and main entries face east towards the now removed mill; today, the services porches are the main entrances into the house due to the changes in road access. On the interior, the house is laid out in a simple four room layout. There is a small living space, a kitchen and two bedrooms, and a small bathroom. The houses are both in good condition.

*9757 River View Road  
Structure No: 705*

This house was occupied by Conrad Savage, a mine employee, from 1953 until his death in 1979. His widow Emma continued to occupy the house until 1989. It remained vacant until rehabilitated by the NPS in 2009. This one story wood framed structure measures 30 × 44 feet with a 9 foot open porch on the east end. The foundation is composed of river rock embedded in mortar. The exterior walls are similarly clad in white painted lap siding. The large gabled roof is finished in composite shingles. The interior is laid out with a living room, bathroom and kitchen on one side of the house and three bedrooms on the other side. The service porch acts as the main entry to the house. The house is in good condition.

*Murchison House Complex*

The Yosemite Research Center area is located on a knoll on the north side of Highway 140 overlooking the Merced River. A narrow road exits the highway and extends up the hill past a small historic National Lead Company assay office and laboratory building (which had been converted for National Park Service use) to a parking lot on the east side of a gabled white frame house. Known as the Murchison House, this structure has been used as office space for the Yosemite Research Center. It currently sits vacant due to a variety of problems such as: a failed septic system and difficulty in locating a new septic field; and poor road access. Both the Murchison House and the office building are in fair condition and retain their historic architectural appearance. A small structure that was originally constructed by the National Lead Company to serve as a garage (but modified by the NPS) is located below the Murchison House and adjacent to the parking lot.



**Figure 32 - Former Murchison house (NPS 2011)**

*Murchison House (old Yosemite Research Center)*  
*Structure No: EPB 700*

The Murchison House (Figure 33) was built in 1929 for Earl H. Murchison, the superintendent of the National Lead Company's barium mine operations. It sits highest on a knoll on the south side of the Merced River. It is a one story wood frame Craftsman like house with painted lap siding. A large composite shingle cross-gabled roof extends onto a south facing enclosed porch marked by four flared wood clad columns. It measures approximately 49 × 32 feet. Large double hung windows are located on all sides of the structure, with smaller banked ones in areas of infill. A large river stone fireplace anchors the west façade. (Figure 34) The building was modified in the late 1980s by enclosing the once expansive front porch. This addition used compatible siding and window materials. The original porch materials still exist beneath new finishes. The work is reversible.

*Storage/Garage*  
*Structure No: EPB 701*

This small 24 × 16 foot structure was built at the same time as the main house. It originally served as a garage for the house but currently is a small storage room. It is clad in white painted lap siding. The gabled roof has exposed rafter tails and is clad in wood shingles. It is in fair condition.

*Assay Office*  
*Structure No: EPB 70*

This small two story cabin lies at the approach of the driveway from Highway 140. It measures 14 x 23 feet with a small entry porch. It is clad in white lap siding and has a gabled roof with composite shingles. The siding has peeling paint. The building is in fair condition.

**Recommendation:** A determination of eligibility to be on the National Register should be done for a district that includes the Murchison House complex and three Lead Mining Houses. The six structures have already been determined eligible for the National Register in 1999 and modifications to most of the structures have occurred since that time. These are the remaining structures of the mining history in El Portal, and appear to retain a good deal of integrity. If determined eligible, Historic Structure Reports for each building and a Cultural Landscape Report should be done to inform future use and maintenance.



Figure 33 - Assay Office, Murchison Complex (NPS 2011)



Figure 34 - Site of former Barium Mine mill, view across river from Murchison House (NPS 2011)



## **El Portal Mines and Ruins**

### *North mine*

The adits and shafts are remains from the barium north mine (Unrau 1998). A 2010 mapping investigation led to the discovery of a remnant fallout shelter located within the north Barite Mine. A collapsed wooden platform and a variety of Civil Defense supplies remain. The pits, shafts, and tunnels are open and accessible, and although they have been fenced off. The site of the former mill at the intersection of Foresta Road and Barium Mine Road has been archeologically documented (CA-MRP-182/H) along with other related evidence of mining activity around Rancheria and El Portal.

Recommendations: According to the NPS bulletin *Guidelines for Identifying, Evaluating and Registering Historic Mining Sites*, the historic value of preserving mining sites comes from a visitor's ability to see and understand how a mine operated. The tracks, mills, and tramways are an important part of the story of mining. Unfortunately, these artifacts have been salvaged over the years since the mines closed. However, the mine itself exists and could be preserved and interpreted for posterity.

### *South mine*

The south mine is outside the administrative site on USFS land, in the hills southwest of the Murchison House. The present conditions at the South Barium claim are of complete abandonment. The machinery at the pumphouse was mostly removed except for parts of the 610 cu. ft. Ingersoll-Rand compressor and Sullivan Drill sharpener. Rails, piping, drill bits and shafts, ore cars, metal plates, cables, timbers and spikes lay scattered downslope of the workings. The concrete footing for the house, tram and towers are still in place. A collapsed tram tower is found on the ridge line across Pigeon Gulch from the mine.

Recommendations: There are more artifacts and evidence of mining at this site than at the North Mine, but it is likely not enough to tell a complete story. This property is noted because it is integrally linked to any interpretation of the North Mine and mining in the El Portal site, but is outside of the administrative site. The Forest Service has documented the mine because of its potential for hazardous discharge.

### *Tungsten Mill*

Remains of the tungsten mills are still visible above the sewage treatment plant, but little else remains. This particular structure was the last of the mills, and only used for a brief period.

Recommendations: Unless there is a compelling reason to remove the foundations, what is left should remain. This mill, however, is of little value historically at this time.

## **Residential and National Park Service**

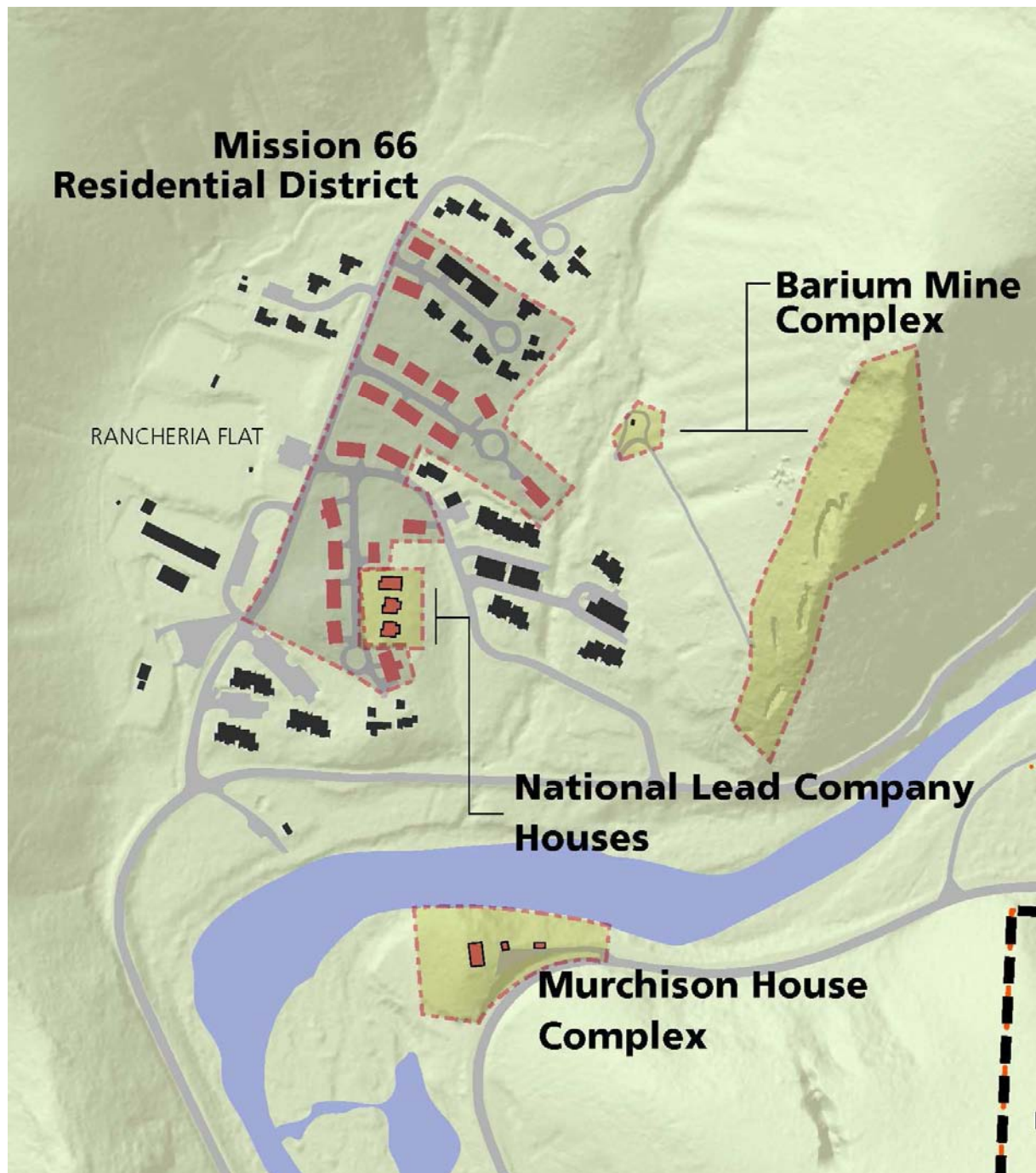
### **Rancheria Flat**

The Rancheria Flat area is located on the bluffs on the north side of the Merced River just above Foresta Road. The area consists of NPS-constructed apartments, townhouses, and single family residences for park employees, as well as a school, tennis courts, and sports field that were all built during the 1960s-90s. The area features modern paved streets and utility systems and gives the appearance of a modern residential community. Remnants of an abandoned sewage treatment plant are located south of the intersection of Foresta and Rancheria Flats roads. (Figure 36)

Although the majority of the buildings in the Rancheria Flat area have been constructed since the early 1980s, the area features three historic National Lead Company white frame houses and 19 of the 20 original Mission 66 residences.

### **Proposed Mission 66 Rancheria Flat Historic Residential District**

In the 1950s and 1960s, the NPS undertook a nationwide effort to upgrade and provide increased visitor service facilities for the millions of automobile tourists then arriving at the parks. To provide for the needs of the new employees it needed, the agency also improved park infrastructure and employee housing nationwide. Housing construction followed post-war housing conventions, using a series of standard designs and prefabricated construction methods to build detached single family homes. (Carr 2007)



**Figure 35 - Diagram of Rancheria Flat showing structures determined eligible for the National Register in pink (NPS 2011)**

Developments at El Portal exemplified this program. Visitation rapidly increased after World War II, with NPS appropriations remaining flat for many years. Visitor facilities became dilapidated and employee housing was inadequate for the demand. One of the first directives, then, for the NPS after acquiring the El Portal site was to create a new residential area. Consequently, in fall and spring 1960/1961, the agency constructed twenty new homes at Rancheria Flat. Such construction marked the changed of El Portal from a mining/lumber/tourist town to Yosemite's administrative government center.

#### *Residential Structures*

*Structure No: 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727*

Nineteen of the original 20 remain. One was removed in the 1990s when apartment structures were built on Barium Mine Road. The buildings are typical Mission 66 houses from standard building plans. Designed by the Branch of Architecture of the NPS, they are one and half story structures built on concrete walls and wood piers. Originally the piers were left exposed, but were ultimately covered in 7" redwood boards and painted soon after. The rectangular floor plan measures approximately 27 feet by 53 feet (67 if there is a garage). Large expanses of aluminum double hung windows cover each side of the house. The exterior walls are clad in white painted stucco. Simple composite shingle gabled roofs span lengthwise over the rectangular plan, supported by pre-fabricated king post nail-glued roof trusses. The roof has large overhangs, providing some shade from the hot summer El Portal sun.

Inside, each three or four bedroom house has a simple floor plan (sometimes for two levels depending on the site), with a large open living/dining room space and attached kitchen. Extending away from the



**Figure 36 - Rancheria Flat, modern housing in foreground, Mission 66 homes in middle ground and 1980s housing in background (NPS 2011)**

kitchen is a hallway with small bedrooms (3 or 4) off both sides, as well as one or two simple bathrooms. The modestly finished surfaces include tongue and groove wood flooring, painted gypsum walls and basic wood trim. They are cooled by a forced air conditioning unit and heated by both a furnace and wood stove.

The houses are laid out on a simple arterial road (Rancheria Flat Road) with smaller roads ending at cul-de-sacs. The houses are set back from the road and spaced fairly wide from each other. Large oak trees and other pine trees complete the landscape around them.

These homes have been continually occupied by NPS employees since they were built. Although some modifications have occurred, there is likely a good deal of integrity in the structures. The areas to the north, south and east have been built up with additional homes and apartment buildings. The newer development generally appears to follow the original layout of the roads.

These houses have a particularly strong connection to Mission 66 because of the use of standardized housing plans and modern construction methods to provide efficient, utilitarian housing. They are also part of a specific national initiative to build 1,000 employee housing units and improve living conditions for rangers across the country.

Recommendation: A determination of eligibility to the National Register for the proposed district should be done. If eligible Historic Structure Reports and a Cultural Landscape Plan should be completed to inform future use and maintenance.

#### *Town of El Portal*

According to the Mariposa County Historic Sites Survey (Law 1981), the buildings in "old El Portal" comprise some 85 structures built after 1905. They "are largely one story bungalows which have been added onto over time with a variety of materials and styles that is somewhat breathtaking." The records state that "taken in themselves, the houses of Old El Portal are sometimes quaint, sometimes ramshackle; but it is definitely an area with distinct charm." Some structures and portions thereof remain in their original condition while most have been subjected to structural additions and improvements as well as changes to surrounding roads and utilities (Unrau 1998). The former recreational residence era homes on Stanislaus Forest lots 1 through 13 have many of the original houses (Unrau 1998). Many of the remaining current residential structures in El Portal date from the 1920s and 1930s, although most have been modernized or remodeled. The sizes and conditions of the residences vary widely, ranging from old structures in generally poor condition to large, relatively new homes with modern amenities. Some have been moved to their present locations from various places such as along Crane Creek and the former Hennessey ranch (Unrau 1998).

The number of residential special use permits in El Portal has remained fairly consistent since the NPS took over management of the El Portal site ( 87) to the present (85). Of those present in 1958, four homes originally on Sierra National Forest land are gone, and the number in Abbieville has dropped from eight in 1958 to three today. Privately owned structures are difficult to access due to the effort and time involved in obtaining permission from each owner, even if such property sits on government land. The sporadic and poorly documented remodeling of structures only compounds this problem. There is certainly a great deal of appealing character in the town of El Portal. The layout and relationship of the homes to the land is evident and likely reflects an evolution from the days of simple tents and cabins erected where the land was most conducive for building structures. The result of this is seen in how the position of a house relates more to the contours of the land it sits on, rather than to the road or neighboring structures.



Recommendations: It is uncertain whether the residential area of El Portal is eligible for the National Register as district. A determination would require historic integrity for the majority of homes and need the assistance and cooperation of a most of home owners. If El Portal is found eligible, it would still require a majority of the owners to agree to be listed. The character seen in the community is valued by many, and can be preserved in the future without listing on the National Register.

The National Park Service now employs a Real Estate Officer who will likely bring more order and structure to how Yosemite manages building and improvements to residential areas such as El Portal in the future. Community consultation could begin to identify the important community characteristics meriting future preservation. Whether this site is ultimately nominated for the National Register or not, community involvement and cooperation would be principle elements to preserve resources.

*Old El Portal Schoolhouse*  
*Structure No.: 8847*

The El Portal Old Schoolhouse is located on a steep contoured terrain within the area of “Old El Portal.” The single-story, woodframe Craftsman/Bungalow building was constructed in 1930. The building was later expanded in 1938 with an east addition and has undergone interior modifications after being converted to a chapel in 1969. Most alterations, both on the interior and exterior, have been additive in nature, leaving a majority of the historic fabric in place. The building is rectangular in plan, punctuated only on its south façade by two porches. A three-bay, cross-gable main porch is located on the original 1930’s portion of the building; while a secondary smaller porch, also with a cross-gable roof, is joined to the later east addition. The main porch has a prominent wooden staircase leading to the building’s elevated entrance. Exterior woodframe walls are supported by a board-formed concrete foundation and are finished with wood, round-edge drop, clapboard siding, which continues down all facades near grade. Architectural details and building materials used during the construction of the schoolhouse are in keeping with the local El Portal vernacular building style of the late 1920s and 1930s (National Register Nomination 2011).

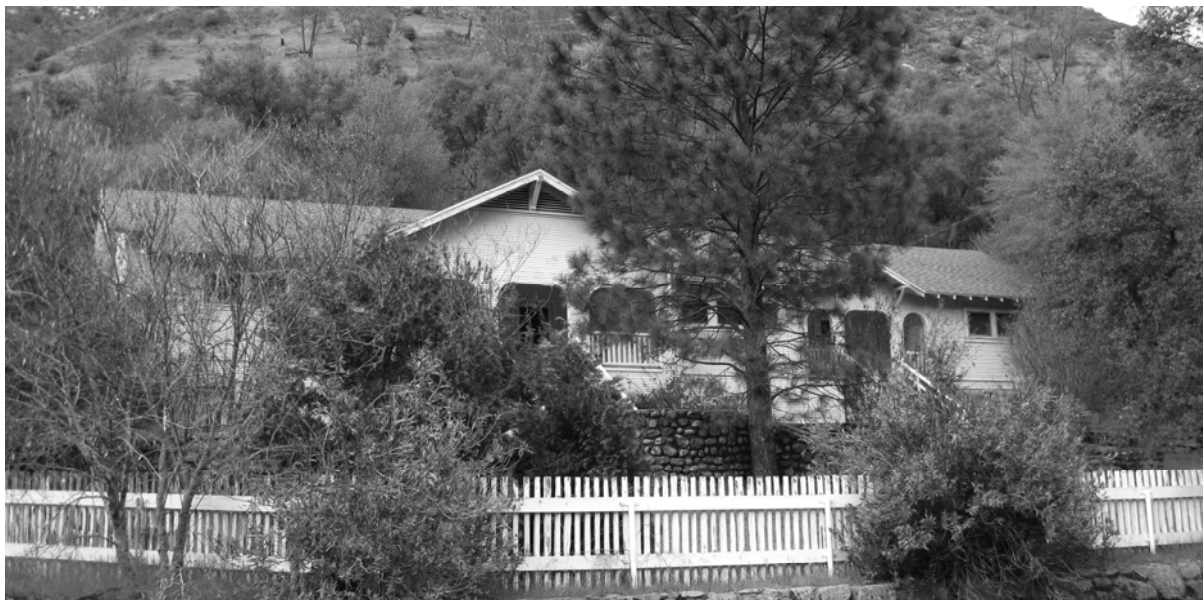


Figure 37 - El Portal old schoolhouse today lays vacant (NPS 2010)

A Historic Structures Report and nomination were completed for the Old School House. The California State Preservation Officer concurred and the building was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in February 2011. It is currently not in use and is in generally good condition, although beginning to show the lack of regular maintenance. (Figure 37)

Recommendation: As recommended in the HSR, NPS should consider rehabilitating the building to meet current needs of the community.

## Other Areas

Railroad Flat is the westernmost developed area in the administrative site. It is reached by exiting Highway 140 at Foresta Road, which crosses the Merced River over a modern road bridge (built in 1960), then following the river generally eastward toward the Rancheria Flat area. Spur Road branches off of Foresta Road just north of the bridge and extends around the west and north sides of the maintenance/warehouse facility (constructed during the 1990s) and the sewage treatment plant (completed in 1976 and substantially upgraded since). The site also contains a solid waste transfer station and settling ponds associated with the sewage treatment facility. The roads are the only apparent trace of the Yosemite Valley Railroad “Y” that was once located in this area. Remnants and debris associated with the tungsten mill are still seen behind a wall on the north side of Spur Road across from the sewage treatment plant (Unrau 1998).

### Warehouse/Administrative Building

The NPS constructed the warehouse/administrative office complex in five phases between 1994 and 2005. The complex houses the park’s main warehouse supply center, machine shops, carpentry shops, administrative offices, and resources management and science offices. The two story concrete and steel building measures over 500 by 100 feet and has an area of over 150,000 sq ft. The battered concrete exterior is stained to match the wastewater plant and blend with the surrounding landscape. In 2005, an annex to the main structure was built to house the NPS Resources Management and Science division. (Figure 38)



Figure 38 - Administrative/Warehouse Complex in Railroad Flat (NPS 2011)

## Yosemite Wastewater Treatment Facility

The Yosemite Wastewater Treatment Plant was built between 1974 and 1977. It was built to replace the smaller treatment plant located at the base of Rancheria Flat. Upgraded in 1989 and 1997, the plant today handles the wastewater for both El Portal and Yosemite Valley (almost two million gallons of wastewater daily). The complex consists of a low two story central office building flanked by four large hexagonal concrete tanks and a four square aeration tanks. They are joined by support structures to the west and a series of percolation ponds to the south and east. The concrete is stained a reddish tan to blend with the surrounding landscape. (Figure 39)

## Sand and Gravel Quarry

A sand and gravel quarry is located along the north side of Highway 140 to the east of Railroad Flat and south of the Merced River across from Rancheria Flat. No known cultural resources likely remain at this highly disturbed site. A concrete footing is present within the far northeast end of the riverbank. It is presumed to be a mining incline foundation footing, but no site assessments have been done.

Recommendation: Currently, all of these structures and activities are non-historic and are actively used for park functions and administration. Both prehistoric and historic archeological sites around these structures exist. Continued use must be with the awareness of the known and the potential for future discovery of cultural resources in the site.

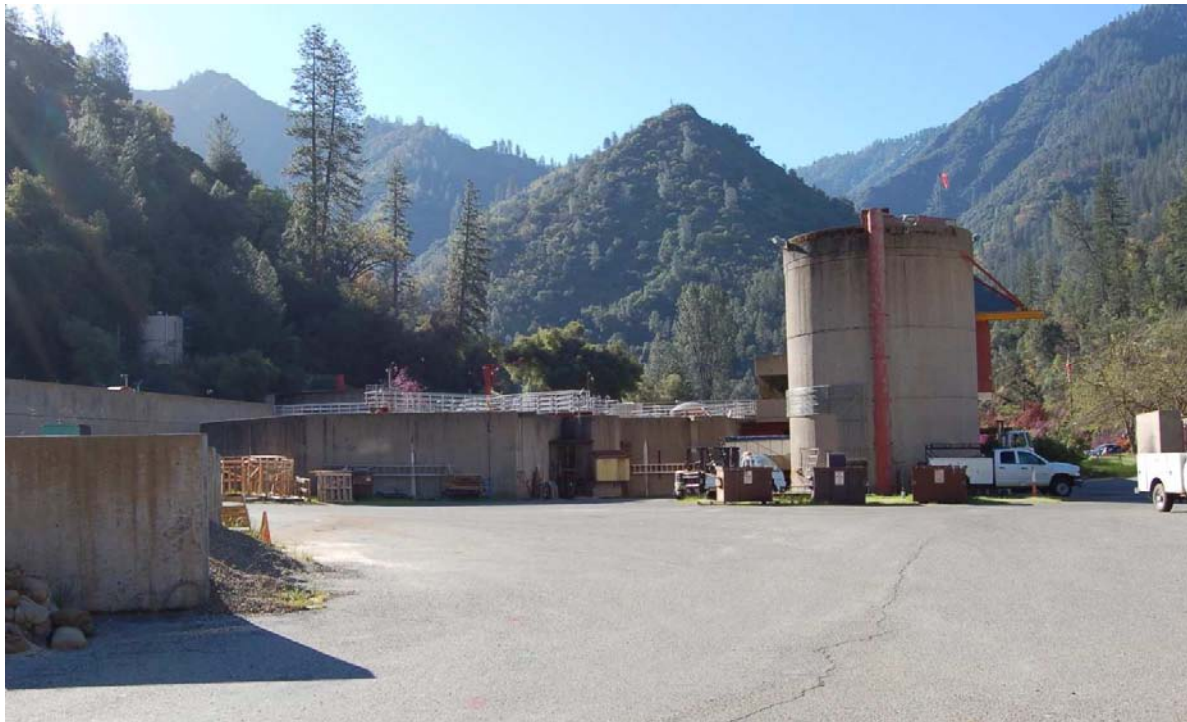


Figure 39 - Wastewater treatment plant (NPS 2011)



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## APPENDICES



**Deed information regarding John Wilson's El Diablo Ranch.**

1. Patent recorded in Mariposa County, March 31, 1938.
2. Patent awarding the property to John Wilson's heirs, his three granddaughters, in 1953.
3. Memo regarding title research by NPS in 1981.



D. G. Kidder, Recorder

No. 139

PATENT

Record No. 07952

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

To all to whom these presents shall come, Greetings,

WHEREAS, a schedule of allotments approved by the Secretary of the Interior has been deposited in the General Land Office, whereby it appears that John Wilson, an Indian of the Yosemita tribe, has been allotted the following-described land:

One south half of the southeast quarter of the northwest quarter and the north half of the north half of the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of section sixteen in township three south of range twenty east of the Mount Diablo Meridian, California, containing thirty acres:

I, J. KNOX YE, of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in consideration of the premises, has hereby declared that it does and will hold the land thus allotted (subject to all statutory provisions and restrictions) for the period of twenty-five years, in trust for the sole use and benefit of the said Indian and at the expiration of said period the United States will convey the same by patent to said Indian in fee, discharged of said trust and free from all charge and incumbrance whatsoever; but in the event said Indian dies before the expiration of said trust period, the Secretary of the Interior shall ascertain the legal heirs of said Indian and either issue to them in their names a patent in fee for said land, or cause said land to be sold for the benefit of said heirs as provided by law; and there is reserved from the lands hereby allotted, a right of way thereon for ditches or canals constructed by the authority of the United States.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States of America, have caused these letters to be made Patent, and the Seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed.

BEFORE ME, GIVEN under my hand, at the City of Washington, the SEVENTEENTH day of FEBRUARY in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and SEVENTEEN and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and FORTY-FIRST.

(SEAL)

By the President: Woodrow Wilson  
By N. P. LeRoy Secretary.  
L. Q. C. Lemar,

RECORD OF PATENTS: Patent No. 567976 Recorder of the General Land Office.

Recorded at the request of F. A. Bordahu March 21, 1938 at 20 minutes past 3 o'clock P. M.  
Volume 5 of Official Records, page 37 Mariposa County Records.

2-1-1938

62719  
10994-S. I. L.  
Sacramento 07952  
39 Yosemite

# The United States of America

We all in before these presents shall come, bearing:

WHEREAS, an Order of the authorized officer of the Bureau of Indian Affairs is now deposited in the Bureau of Land Management, directing that a fee simple patent issue to the claimants, Minnie Wilson Karamanos, Marion Wilson Lucero and Mildred Wilson Segura Bautista, heirs of John Wilson, for the following described lands:

Mount Diablo Meridian, California.

T. 3 S., R. 20 E.,

sec. 16, N $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , S $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ .

The area described contains 30 acres, according to the Official Plat of the Survey of the said land, on file in the Bureau of Land Management:

NOW KNOW YE, That the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in consideration of the premises, HAS GIVEN AND GRANTED, and by these presents DOES GIVE AND GRANT, unto the said claimants and to the heirs of the said claimants, the Land above described; TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the same, together with all the rights, privileges, and appurtenances, of whatsoever nature, thereto belonging, unto the said claimants and to the heirs of the said claimants forever. The land covered by this patent is not liable for any debt contracted prior to this date, as provided by Section 5 of the Act of February 8, 1847 (24 Stat. 344, 345), and the amendatory Acts of May 8, 1906 (34 Stat. 182) and June 21, 1906 (34 Stat. 323, 327).

And there is reserved from the lands hereby granted a right of way thereon for ditches or canals constructed by the authority of the United States.

RECORDED AT THE REQUEST OF *Minnie Karamanos*  
AT 5:55 P.M. FEBRUARY 17, 1948  
MARICOPA COUNTY REC'D  
...*Verdugo St*...  
...*Low*...

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, the undersigned authorized officer of the Bureau of Land Management, in accordance with the provisions of the Act of June 17, 1948 (62 Stat. 476), has, in the name of the United States, caused these letters to be made Patent, and the Seal of the Bureau to be hereunto affixed.

GIVEN under my hand, in the District of Columbia, this

day of FEBRUARY In the year of our Lord one thousand nine  
hundred and FIFTY-THREE and of the Independence of the  
United States the one hundred and SEVENTY-SEVENTH.

For the Director, Bureau of Land Management.

Patent No. 1177608

By *Roe M. Beall*  
Acting Chief, Patents Section.



## memorandum

09-30-81

Assistant Valley District Ranger

Title Search

Administrative Officer

I performed a title search on the ten-acre parcel of private land within the El Portal Administrative Site and described as follows:

The East two-thirds of the Southeast quarter of the Southeast quarter of the Northwest quarter, and the East two-thirds of the North one-half of the Northeast quarter of the Northeast quarter of the Southwest quarter of Section 16, Township 3 South, Range 20 East, Mount Diablo Meridian.

This is Assessor's Parcel No. 010, Assessor's Map Book 06 - Pg.230, County of Mariposa, CA, 1979. The parcel is landlocked by Federal (NPS) land. Mr. Ray Green, 17215 President Drive, Castro Valley, CA 94546, purchased this parcel through a tax sale in 1979 for approximately \$3000.00. Mr. Green now desires to develop the property for private residential purposes and has made a verbal request to the NPS for Right-of-Way access across NPS lands. Such access would, of necessity, include crossing the Merced River. It is Mr. Green's intention to accomplish this via a concrete paved ford (usable only during extreme low water conditions such as presently exist). There is an existing unimproved fording area that was used by PG & E approximately ten years ago to access the south side of the Merced River during installation of buried cable to the Yosemite West Subdivision. Mr. Green has been issued a Residential Building Permit (#333 dated 08-24-81) with Septic system approval by Mariposa County. A permit would have to be issued by Cal-Trans for encroachment on Highway 140. There is currently some question regarding the status of Cal-Trans' Special Use Permit/Right-of-Way through sections of the El Portal Administrative Site.

Parcel No. 010 is all that remains of an original thirty-acre GLO land grant (Patent No. 567970) that was patented to John Wilson, a Yose-  
mian Indian, on February 17, 1917. John Wilson died on May 23, 1937--  
two years prior to the expiration of the 25 year trust period. In ac-  
cordance with the terms and conditions of the original patent, a Fee Simple  
deed for the thirty-acres (No. 1137608) was issued on February 3, 1953, to  
John Wilson's heirs, Minnie Wilson Karamanos, Marion Wilson Lucero and Mildred  
Wilson Segura Batista, by the BLM.

Grant Deed (No. 664) was issued on July 1, 1954, transferring sole own-  
ership of the ten-acre parcel to Marion Wilson Lucero from Mildred Wilson  
Batista and Minnie/Johnny Karamanos. Marion Wilson Lucero defaulted on  
property taxes, resulting in the 1979 purchase by Mr. Green.

The remaining twenty-acre parcel (of the original thirty-acres) was sold by the heirs to Raymond and Gertrude Cruikshank on July 16, 1954. The Cruikshanks sold the twenty-acre parcel to the United States of America on January 14, 1959.

None of the documents relating to the original thirty-acre allotment or remaining ten-acre parcel grant or imply an access Right-of-Way. The only Right-of-Way referred to is a reservation granting the United States a Right-of-Way for ditches or canals.

There are no recorded liens against the property.

Respectfully submitted,



Steven D. Hickman  
Assistant Valley District Ranger

cc: Bates  
Tucker

### **Establishing the El Portal administrative site.**

1. Press release, November 4, 1958.
2. List of residential leases from El Portal Mining Company.
3. Sketch map from NPS survey in 1957 of unleased housing in Abbeville.
4. Plan showing recreational housing tracts on Sierra National; Forest land, on north bank of Merced River, southwest of El Portal, otherwise referred to as Yosemite Valley Railroad Tract.
5. Plan showing recreational housing tracts on Stanislaus National Forest land.
6. List of leases from Stanislaus and Sierra National Forest.
7. Plan showing El Portal lot lines as established in 1985.
8. Proposed regulations for El Portal administrative site, 1958.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Yosemite National Park, California

November 4, 1956

PRESS MEMORANDUM

For Immediate Release to the Local Press:

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ANNOUNCES PURCHASE OF LAND  
FOR NEW ADMINISTRATIVE SITE OUTSIDE YOSEMITE BOUNDARY

Purchase of 972 acres of land at El Portal, California, to serve as an administrative site for Yosemite National Park was announced today by the Department of Interior, National Park Service. Acquisition of approximately 101 acres of unpatented land will also be involved. The land, according to National Park Service Director Conrad L. Wirth, is being obtained from the El Portal Mining Company. Terms of purchase have been agreed upon and it is hoped that transfer of title will be completed soon, Wirth said, because the Attorney General has already rendered a preliminary title opinion.

Approximately 200 additional acres for the new El Portal administrative site outside the Park will be made available to the Park Service under an agreement with the U. S. Forest Service from lands under its administration which are contiguous to the newly purchased acreage. Forest Service officials have cooperated wholeheartedly in arranging for the new site.

Funds for purchase of the land were made available under MISSION 66, the broad 10-year program begun in 1956 for conservation and development of the National Park System.

"Park and conservation experts," Wirth explained, "have long been concerned over the growing development and congestion on the floor of the world-famed Yosemite Valley, especially those developments which did not directly serve the visitor but were required for over-all operation of the Park.

"There has been remarkable unanimity among such authorities that developments within the Valley should be limited to those facilities necessary to directly serve the visitor, and that all supporting facilities necessary for the operation of the Park as a whole should be located elsewhere.

"The accomplishment of this aim required the establishment and development of an operating base outside, but near, Yosemite Valley to serve the entire park. Fortunately a site for such a base was available at El Portal on the tract just acquired, which is located about two miles west of the park boundary, adjacent to the western, or Arch Rock, entrance to Yosemite. Establishment of the new administrative site was authorized by Congress in September, 1958, and the acquisition of the El Portal tract will make it possible for the National Park Service to proceed with plans for its development."

Warehouses, bulk storage, equipment storage, repair shops, employee housing and related supporting facilities of the Park Service and concessioners now located in Yosemite Valley, but which serve Yosemite National Park as a whole, will ultimately be relocated at the new El Portal operating base.

"The facilities to be relocated," Wirth said, "have long since passed the obsolescent stage, but have never been replaced for want of a suitable alternative site. Establishment of the new administrative site will permit eliminating from Yosemite Valley the present obsolete incinerator and unsanitary public dump which have long been major eyesores and headaches for park management and visitors alike. These will be replaced with a modern incinerator of adequate capacity at the new operating base."

Established in 1890, Yosemite is the sixth largest National Park, with a land area of 1189 square miles. Visitation to the park has increased steadily, reaching a total of 1,138,716 in 1957.

Establishment of the new outside-the-park administrative site is the major feature of the over-all park improvement and development program for Yosemite under MISSION 66. Work is under way on other phases of the 10-year program which includes provision of more than 4,500 additional campsites, improved park roads and trails, additional picnic areas, campfire circles, visitor centers, museums and other visitor facilities, and extensive improvements of the park's water and sewerage systems. Under the program, the park staff also is being strengthened to serve the increasing number of visitors.

# ST. PETERS BAY CO.

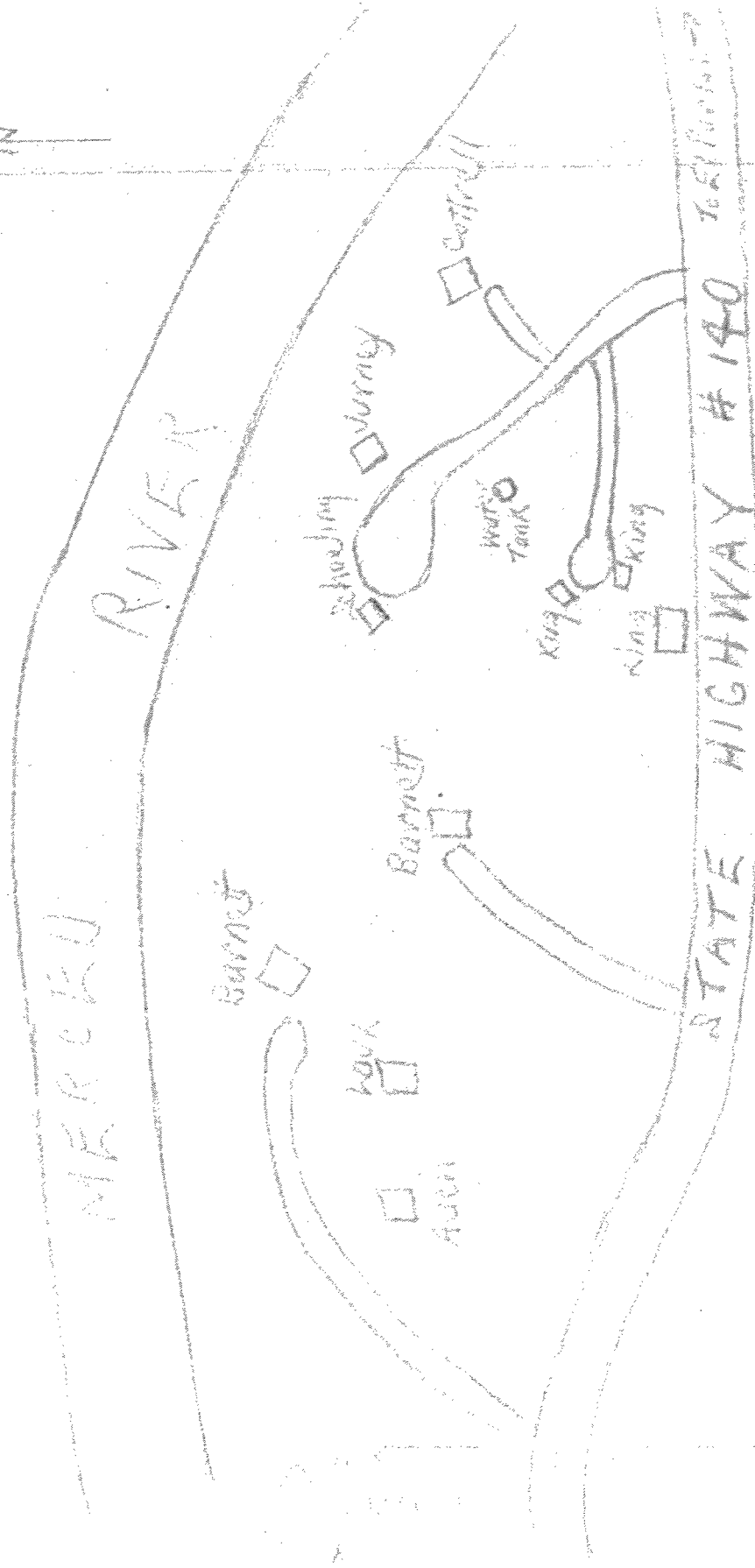
4-30-60

Lot	Tenant	Annual Rent	Leased to:
Trailer	Chas. Nelson	\$12.00	
1	Mrs. M. Johnson	\$120.00	
2	A. A. Gallenrick	\$30.00	4-30-60
3	John Milanovich	\$30.00	4-30-60
4	Walter S. Brantley	\$30.00	4-30-60
5	H. S. Brantley	\$30.00	4-30-60
6-A	C. A. Clark	\$25.00	4-30-60
7	J. A. Kirk	\$25.00	4-30-60
8	Ernest Cameron	\$25.00	
9	W. Gullie	\$25.00	4-30-60
10	H. S. Anderson	\$25.00	4-30-60
11	J. G. Wright	\$25.00	4-30-60
12	L. Youk	\$30.00	4-30-60
13	G. B. Parrish	\$30.00	4-30-60
14-A	Andrew J. Koller	\$25.00	4-30-60
15	J. Hansen	\$40.00	
16	Margaret Colin	\$25.00	4-30-60
17	Nabel Jackson	\$30.00	4-30-60
18	Mildred Saly	\$25.00	4-30-60
19-A	Virginia Carter	\$25.00	
20	T. A. Stevens	\$25.00	4-30-60
21	Robert Leacock	\$25.00	
22	T. H. Murphy	\$25.00	4-30-60
23	William Kirk	\$25.00	4-30-60
24	George Dukes	\$25.00	4-30-60
25	Carroll Clark	\$25.00	4-30-60
26	Wm. Elliott	\$25.00	4-30-60
27	Wm. Bennett	\$25.00	4-30-60
28	Mrs. Bobb Clark	\$25.00	4-30-60
29	James Ray	\$25.00	4-30-60
30	A. Odgers	\$25.00	4-30-60
31	Ed. Mercer	\$25.00	4-30-60
32	Raymond E. Johnson	\$25.00	4-30-60
33	Theresa Daniels	\$25.00	4-30-60
34	Vernon Webb	\$25.00	4-30-60
35	Alfred Nelson	vacant	
36-A-2	Wm. Frost	\$30.00	4-30-60
37	L. Barthelme	\$25.00	4-30-60
38	Wm. H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
39	J. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
40	G. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
41	H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
42	H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
43	H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
44	H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
45	H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
46	H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
47	H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
48	H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
49	H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60
50	H. H. H. H.	\$25.00	4-30-60



<u>Lot</u>	<u>Tenant</u>	<u>Annual Rent</u>	<u>Leased to:</u>
85	I. V. Winwall	\$25.00	4-30-60
87	W. F. Hickock	\$25.00	4-30-60
88	Otto A. Ringquist	\$25.00	4-30-60
89	W. J. Fitzpatrick	\$25.00	
90	Pete Taglia	\$25.00	4-30-60
91	H. F. Boughton	\$25.00	4-30-60
92	B. Daughter	\$25.00	4-30-60
93	A. C. Phillips	\$30.00	Jublets
94	L. G. Winterburn	\$25.00	4-30-60
94-A	Mrs. Maddox	\$25.00	4-30-61
95	Mrs. Maddox	\$25.00	4-30-60
96	William Sayers	\$25.00	4-30-60
97	William Sayers	\$25.00	4-30-60
98	W. A. Sayers	\$25.00	4-30-60
99	Hall & Thomas	\$25.00	
100	Hall & Thomas	\$25.00	
101	Louis J. Gay	\$25.00	
102	R. J. Brown	\$25.00	
103	J. J. Murphy	\$25.00	4-30-60
104	A. or Belle Vance	\$25.00	4-30-61
105	M. Jemma	\$25.00	4-30-60
106	T. Moore	\$25.00	4-30-60
107	John Hallager	\$25.00	4-30-60
108	J. J. Murphy	\$25.00	4-30-60
109	Stanley Hallageworth	\$25.00	
110	James Price	\$25.00	4-30-60
111	G. J. Casphard	\$60.00	4-30-60
112	A. E. Gartsch	\$25.00	4-30-60
113	J. Bartholme	\$30.00	4-30-60
114	J. Dalton	\$30.00	4-30-60
115	vacant		
116	Brothy C. Smiley	\$25.00	
117	vacant		
118	A. J. Williams	\$25.00	4-30-60

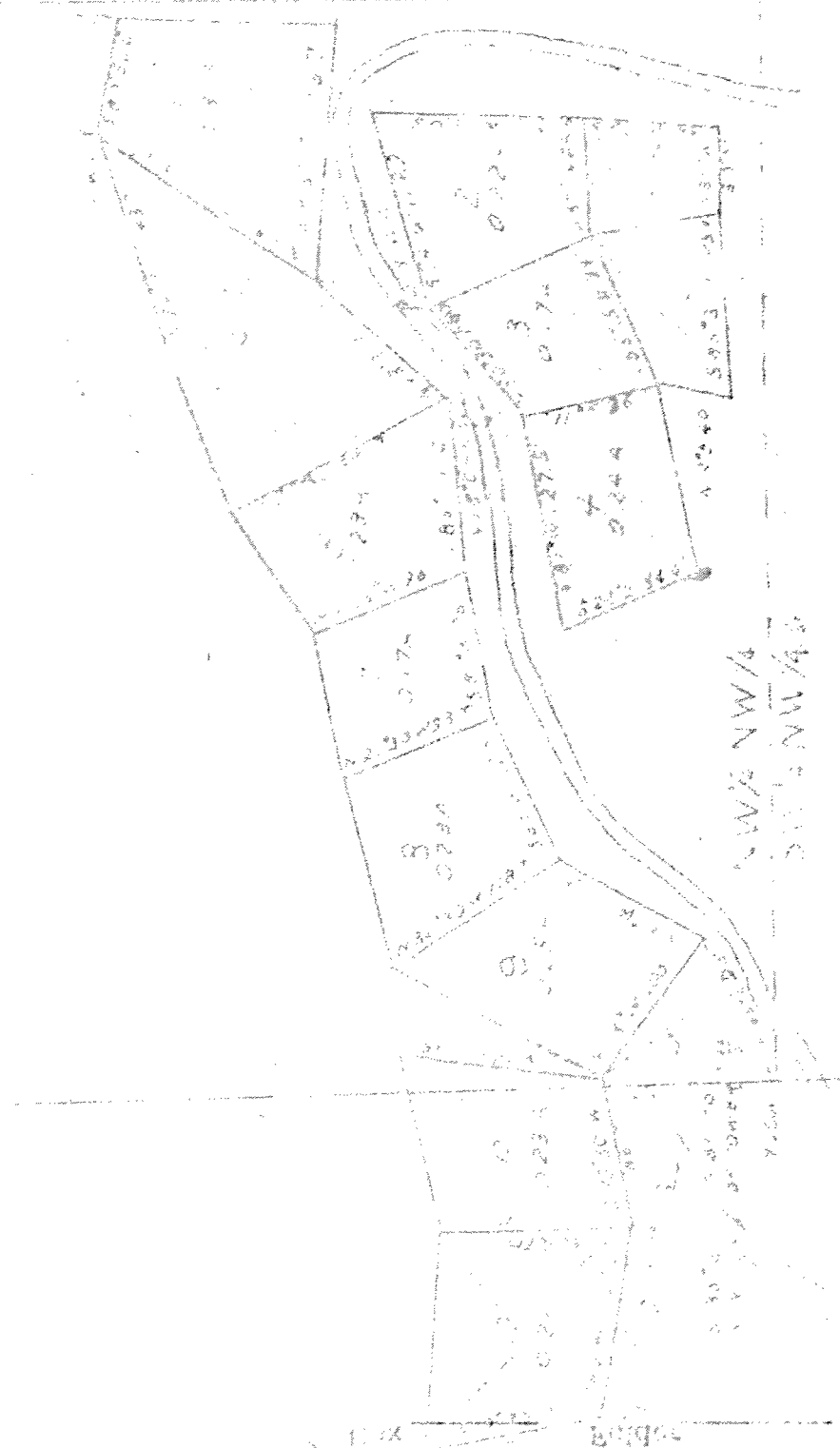
# Sketch of Residential Sub-leases of Kl Portal Road Co. lease from Kl Portal Mining A



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10/20/57



11. 1000/1000 1000/1000  
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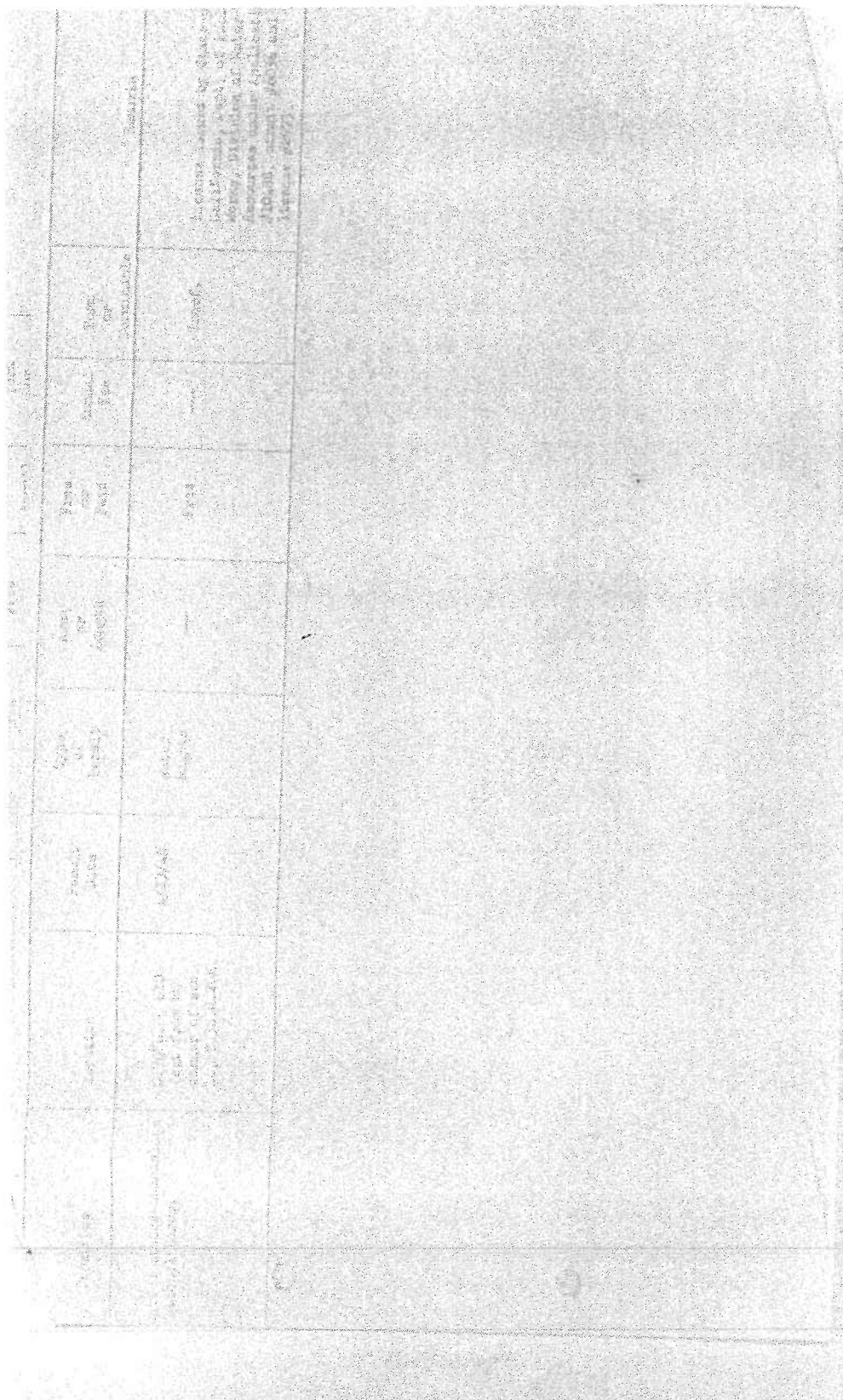
Yosemite National Park Archives



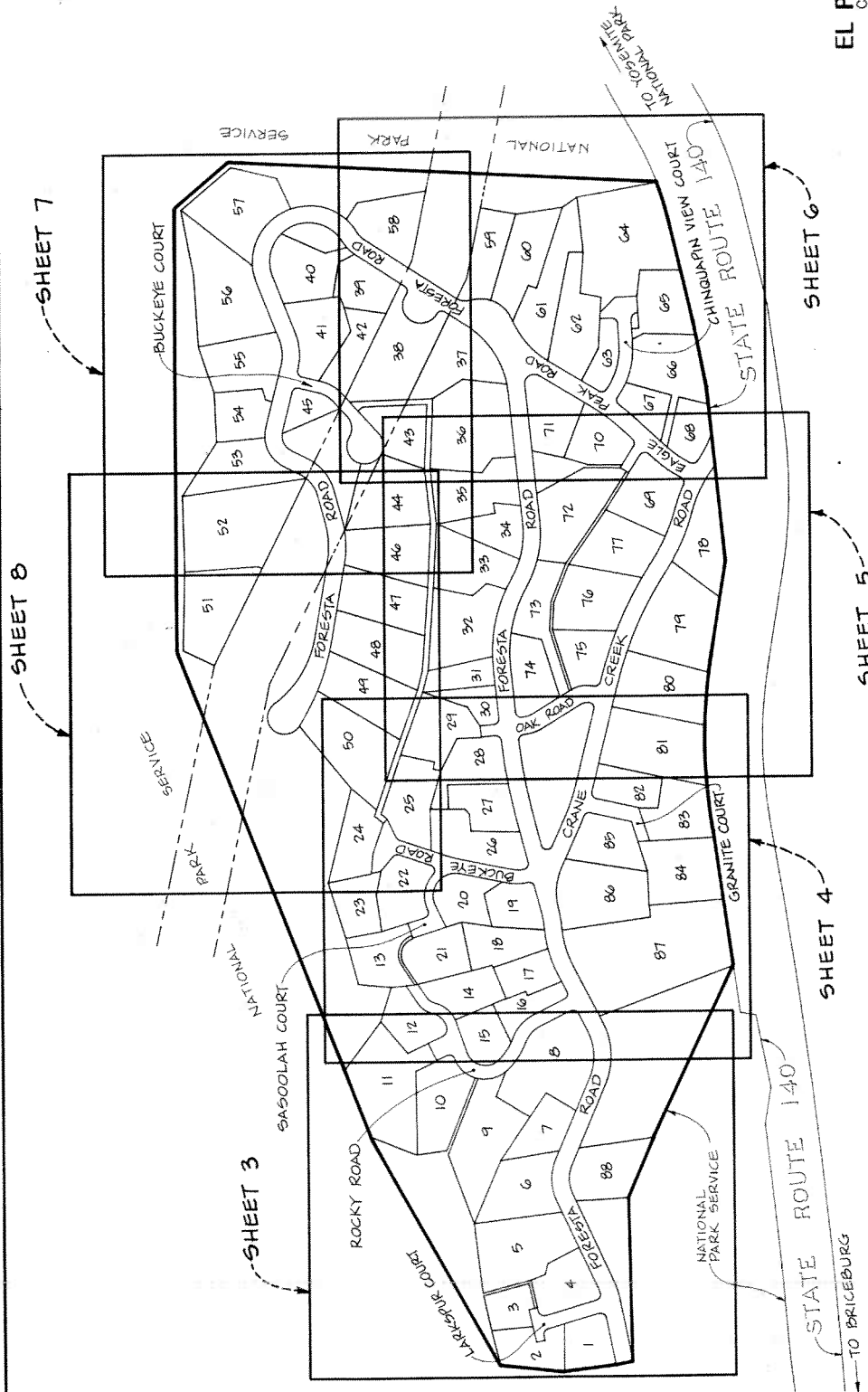
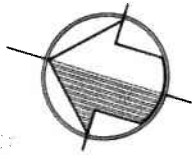
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Box 6

Folder permits







# **EL PORTAL VILLAGE EAST** CONSISTING OF NINE SHEETS

BEING A PORTION OF THE NORTHWEST QUARTER OF SECTION 16 AND THE NORTHEAST QUARTER OF SECTION 17 IN TOWNSHIP 3 SOUTH, RANGE 20 EAST, MT. DIABLO BASE AND MERIDIAN, AND SITUATED ENTIRELY WITHIN THE:

COUNTY OF MARIPOSA  
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

**CREEGAN AND D'ANGELO**  
CONSULTING ENGINEERS  
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

SCALE: 1" = 125' APRIL 1985

SHEET 2 OF 9 SHEETS

104/41195

## **NOTE:**

A THETA ANGLE OF 0° 29' 17.15" WAS MEASURED AT THE MONUMENT FOUND BRASS DISK STAMPED "USD 78-33 1978". THE CALIFORNIA COORDINATES OF WHICH ARE: N. 427897.545 E. 2207402.618

## **BASIS OF BEARINGS:**

THE BEARING NORTH 81° 30' 00" EAST BETWEEN THE FOUND BRASS DISK MONUMENTS STAMPED "USD 78-33 1978" AND "USD 78-34 1978" AS COMPUTED FROM COORDINATES SUPPLIED BY THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR - NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, WAS USED AS THE BASIS OF BEARINGS FOR THIS MAP.

EPR 12-29

D 45759

December 24, 1958

## Memorandum

To: Director

From: Acting Regional Director, Region Four

Subject: Proposed Regulations for the El Portal Administrative Site - Yosemite National Park

Attached is copy of Superintendent Preston's memorandum of December 16, together with copy of a set of regulations he has prepared and we have reviewed, for the El Portal Site of Yosemite National Park.

The regulations as proposed and including the one on advertising appear satisfactory.

With regard to the question of extending the U. S. Commissioner's jurisdiction, Field Solicitor McClellan suggests that the El Portal Act be amended to provide for a penalty for violation of the rules and regulations issued pursuant thereto and that the jurisdiction of the U. S. Commissioner be extended to include the El Portal Site.

It will be appreciated if your office will take such action as is necessary for placing the regulations in effect and amending the El Portal Act as suggested by Mr. McClellan.

B. F. Manbey  
Acting Regional Director

## Attachments

Copy to: Supt., Yosemite

151

(a) The regulations in this section shall be applicable to the El Portal Administrative Site authorized by the act of September 2, 1958 (72 Stat. 1722).

(b) Preservation of public property. The destruction, injury, defacement, removal or disturbance in any manner of any public building, sign, equipment and marker or structure, or of any tree, vegetation, rock or soil, or of any other public property of any kind, is prohibited.

(c) Travel on roads.

(1) Travel over State Highway #140 shall be subject to the laws of the State of California.

(2) Travel over roads built or maintained by the National Park Service shall comply with all traffic signs posted by order of the Superintendent of Yosemite National Park.

(d) Sanitation.

(1) Garbage, papers, or refuse of any kind shall not be thrown or left on or along roads or on any part of the area but shall be disposed of only at the designated disposal area.

(2) All comfort stations shall be used in a clean and sanitary manner.

(3) The drainage or dumping of refuse from any trailer, except in places or receptacles provided for such purpose, is prohibited.

(4) All matters regarding public health and sanitation shall comply with National Park Service standards for the area as recommended by public health service agencies.

(e) Firearms, etc. The use of firearms, including air pistols and rifles and firearms using CO<sub>2</sub> cartridges, and bows and arrows, is prohibited.

(f) Fishing. The season and hours of the day when fishing is permitted and the limit of catch shall be in accordance with applicable State laws.

(g) Fires.

(1) Campfires shall be built only in designated places.

(2) No fire shall be left unattended, and when no longer needed shall be completely extinguished.

(3) The use of fireworks or firecrackers is prohibited.

(4) Debris burning is prohibited except during periods of time designated by the Superintendent.

(h) Disorderly conduct. Persons who render themselves obnoxious by disorderly conduct or bad behavior shall be subject to penalties prescribed by law, and in addition thereto, or in lieu thereof, may be summarily removed from the area by the Superintendent.

(i) Private Operations.

(1) No person may reside within the area unless authorized to do so by the Superintendent of Yosemite National Park.

(2) No person, firm or corporation shall engage in or solicit any business or erect or maintain buildings or other structures within the area except when authority therefor has been granted pursuant to a revocable permit issued by an authorized officer or employee of the National Park Service.

(3) No person, firm or corporation shall construct or attempt to construct any private or public utility over, through or under Government land except where authority therefor has been granted pursuant to a revocable permit issued by an authorized officer or employee of the National Park Service.

(4) No person, firm or corporation shall construct or attempt to construct a road, trail, path or other way, over, across, or upon Government land except where authority therefor has been granted pursuant to a revocable permit issued by an authorized officer or employee of the National Park Service.

(5) Application for such authorization shall be addressed to the Superintendent, Yosemite National Park, California.

(j) Radios, loud speakers, etc.

(1) The use of radios and television in public camps, hotels, or other buildings or in residences or automobiles is prohibited when audible beyond the immediate vicinity of the radio or television set. Radio and television shall not be operated to the annoyance of other persons, nor so as to disturb the quiet of camps or other public places.

(2) The erection of aerials or antennae for radio or television reception is prohibited unless authorized by the Superintendent of Yosemite National Park.

(3) The use of loud speakers or public address systems, whether fixed or portable, is prohibited without first securing written permission from the Superintendent.



(k) Dogs and cats.

(1) Dogs and cats are allowed in this area but must be kept under restrictive control and not allowed to run at large. Residents must keep their pets confined to the building and ground which they rent or occupy by special use permit.

(2) Dogs and cats must have the vaccinations prescribed by the State of California law and such vaccination shall be indicated on a tag fastened to the collar of the animal.

(3) Stray dogs or cats running at large may be disposed of by the ranger in charge of the area.

(l) Camping.

(1) Camping is permitted only in designated camp sites.

(2) The Superintendent may establish limitations on the time allowed for camping in any public camping area.

(3) Campers shall keep their camp sites clean. Garbage and refuse shall be placed in receptacles provided for that purpose.

(4) Digging or leveling of the ground or the installation of permanent camping facilities by visitors is prohibited.

(5) The Superintendent may establish hours during which quiet must be maintained.

(m) Prospecting and mining. Prospecting and the location of mining claims are prohibited.

(n) Gambling. Gambling in any form, or the operation of gambling devices, whether for merchandise or otherwise, is prohibited.

(o) Report of accidents.

(1) All accidents which are required by law to be reported shall be reported to the nearest ranger as soon as possible.

(2) Any accident on State Highway #140 must also be reported to the California Department of Motor Vehicles as required by the California Vehicle Code.

(p) Abandonment of property. The abandonment of any personal property in the area is prohibited.

(q) Lost articles. Lost articles or money, when found in the area, shall be turned in immediately at the office of the Superintendent of Yosemite National Park or at the nearest ranger station.

(r) Livestock. The running at large, herding, driving across, or grazing of livestock, is prohibited.

# RESIDENTS OF EL PORTAL

NAME	EMPLOYED BY	REMARKS
Accord, Fletcher	T. P. & C. Co.	
Anderson, James	(Non-Resident) Alameda, Calif.	
Babcock, Robert	T. P. & C. Co.	
Bartek, Earl	T. P. & C. Co.	
Bartholomew, Frank	T. P. & C. Co.	
Betz, Marie		
(also Johnson, George)	Conservator	
Bolin, Margit		
(See Rob Matthews - Absentee)	(Non-Resident)	
Boughton, Robert F.	T. P. & C. Co.	
Brantley, Bill	Self	
Brantley, Eloise	(Non-Resident) Fresno	
Brantley, Robert	Bill Brantley	
Bredeman, Ann	Main Post Office, Yosemite	
Breeding, (see) (see)	Standard Oil	
Brown, R. G.	Unemployed	
Carter, Lewis F.	(Non-Resident) San Lorenzo, Calif.	
Clark, Carroll	T. P. & C. Co.	
Clark, P. A.	T. P. & C. Co.	
Cline, Bebe	Widow	
Cornett, E. R.	T. P. & C. Co.	
Cushing, H. A.	T. P. & C. Co.	
Cuestachelf, Anna	Widow	
Cykes, George	Day Work	
Elliott, Bill	(Non-Resident) Kings Beach, Calif.	
Etapatrik, Walter	Postmaster, Yosemite	
Feitas, Tony (J.)	T. P. & C. Co.	
Gann, Clyde	Self	
Garribotti, Claudio	(Non-Resident) Oakland, Calif.	
Gillie, Wallace P.	Wife is acting Postmaster at El Portal	
Gonsen, Joan	Yosemite Lodge Post Office	
Griffith, Mildred	(Non-Resident) San Francisco, Calif.	
Hallidayworth, Stanley	Day Work	
Holmes, Ann	Widow	
Johnson, Bob	Standard Oil	
Kirk, H. J.	T. P. & C. Co.	
Keller, Andy (J.)	T. P. & C. Co.	
Kendy, Marilee	T. P. & C. Co.	
Kingster, Ben	T. P. & C. Co.	
Kirchhoff, Ed	Self	
Kristen, Cliff	Unemployed	
Klasse, Ann	Unemployed	
McAlligott, Charles	Unemployed	

Letter from California State Historic Preservation Office concurring with eligibility recommendations in El Portal, February 8, 1999.

**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

P.O. BOX 942898  
SACRAMENTO, CA 94296-0001  
(916) 853-8824 Fax: (916) 853-8824  
calhnpa@mail2.quinet.com



February 8, 1999

REPLY TO: NPS980810A

Raymond K. Todd, Project Manager  
National Park Service  
Denver Service Center  
12795 W. Alameda Parkway  
P.O. Box 25287  
DENVER CO 80225-0287

Re: Determination of National Register Eligibility for the *El Portal Historic Buildings* El Portal Administrative Site,  
Yosemite National Park, Mariposa County, California.

Dear Mr. Todd:

Thank you for submitting to our office your December 29, 1998 letter and supporting documentation in response to questions raised in our letter of September 24, 1998 regarding the determination of National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility for structures located at the El Portal Administrative Site, Yosemite National Park, Mariposa County. The determination of eligibility evaluation is designed to provide the National Park Service (NPS) with historical documentation on the site, as well as a description of existing conditions and evaluation of the significance and integrity of the cultural resources located at the site.

As a result of our review of the supplemental documentation, we can now concur with the NPS that the following structures are eligible for inclusion on the NRHP at the level of local significance under criteria established by 36 CFR 60.4:

- The Murchison House - Criteria A, B, and C
- The Office in the Yosemite Research Center - Criteria A and C
- Three National Lead Company Residences (Buildings 703, 704, and 705) - Criteria A and C

All of these structures have strong associations with the development and operation of the National Lead Company, a barium mining company that at its peak in the 1940s produced 73% of all the barite in California. The barium mine was the first and, for a long period, the only mine of its kind in the state. The structures also appear to retain most of the architectural elements of design, materials, workmanship, and setting associated with their historical period of significance (1928-1947). In addition, the Murchison House is associated with Earl H. Murchison, the manager of the National Lead Company's mining operations and chairman of the Mariposa Mine Operators Association, an influential organization in the local mining industry during the historic period.

We also concur with the NPS that the following structures in the *El Portal* Village Center area are also eligible for inclusion on the NRHP at the level of local significance under criteria established by 36 CFR 60.4:

- The Store - Criteria A and C
- Two Yosemite Valley Railroad Residences (easternmost and westernmost structures) - Criteria A and C
- One Yosemite Valley Railroad Residence (middle structure) - Criterion A
- The School - Criteria A and C