

## Dick Hagerty: Limiting Yosemite for your own good

By Dick  
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Once again our beloved National Park Service has irritated and offended many of us who visited Yosemite over the Memorial Day weekend.

Knowing the crowds would overwhelm Yosemite Valley, we opted to make our annual early season outing at Hetch Hetchy. A quick hike out to Wapama Falls and back is always exhilarating, and this fairly level 6-mile round trip is a great way to start the summer trail experience.

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We had gotten only a mile or so into the hike when an armed NPS ranger blocked our path and informed our group that there had been a rock slide ahead and the trail was closed. We made some mild protests, to no avail. Sorry, trail closed and no discussion allowed.

Then a group of hikers came from beyond the blockade, cheerfully making their way past us and on their way back to the dam and parking lot. We asked the ranger why they could cross and we could not.

“They are coming from the backcountry,” he explained, and are just making their way back to the end of their hike.

“So,” I protested, “it’s just fine for them to come this direction and not be stopped, but you will not let us proceed in the direction they just came from?”

“It’s for your own protection,” he said. To which I responded, “I really do not need the Park Service, nor a young ranger, to protect me from unusual situations along a trail. I started hiking these trails when I was a kid, more years back than I can count, and I have encountered about every ‘situation’ imaginable. I do not need park authorities to watch out for me. We have encountered numerous bears, some quite hungry, on this trail in the past. Rattlesnakes, downed trees, rockslides, poison oak – you name it, we have seen it, and never needed the rangers to rescue us at any of those times.”

This is the same NPS that has drastically limited access to the most spectacular day hike in the West – climbing Half Dome.

I continue to get regular calls from folks trying to find out how they might get into the lucky drawing and get what has become a very rare permit for this climb. Last month a friend from Illinois called; he had come out years ago and climbed the dome with us. His daughter was anxious to duplicate his achievement.

“Sorry,” I said, “our esteemed NPS has made this a very difficult thing to do.” Particularly for someone from the Midwest who does not have the luxury of showing up for a few days waiting to get a lucky cancellation.

The great irony of our Hetch Hetchy hike is the same as above. The NPS enforces the draconian rules of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.

We had taken friends new to our area on our hike, and when they asked about the fishing in Hetch Hetchy, I simply



smiled and said, "Ask San Francisco. You are not allowed to touch this sacred body of water."

They were shocked. "You mean that the same hard-core environmentalists in the Bay Area that insist on sending our potential irrigation water out to sea are hoarding this water for their own private enjoyment?"

Yep! And that pretty much sums up the one-way attitudes enforced these days in Yosemite National Park. A place theoretically owned by all of us, but rigidly controlled by just a few.

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