

360 To Yosemite

Ed: "In 2009, Harold Burrows, Dave Fildes and Roland Layland traveled to California to attempt Half Dome. To celebrate their 60th birthdays; hence **3 x 60 to Yosemite**. This is their story"

The 360 to Yosemite Adventure - Dave Fildes

Wednesday June 10th:

06:00 time to get up and get ready for what could be the trip of a lifetime or a horrendous disaster. By 07:00 the others have arrived at my house and a number of photos were taken in our travelling outfits – more about those later but what a godsend.

Into Manchester airport by 08:00 courtesy of my long suffering wife. We had plenty of time to kill as our flight was scheduled for 10:55 – why do we need to be there 3 hours in advance? So it was sausage and bacon sandwiches and doing our US entry documentation. I thought that the new ESTAS system was supposed to do away with this hassle. We were pleased to see that our plane left on time and we actually arrived in Atlanta 20 minutes early. Having cleared immigration and

customs and re-checked our bags it was off to find the next flight. At the gate I had time to try my new dongle on my laptop so I could e-mail the UK and post on Facebook – silly thing to do. What do I mean? – well see what I posted "*now sitting in Atlanta airport - big thunderstorm going on. Hope it doesn't delay our next flight. Good flight from UK. Going for a meal shortly.*"



I used to use Atlanta airport a lot in a previous life and know how susceptible it is to traffic disruption when there is a storm. My main concerns were –

- We only had 30 minutes when we landed in Salt Lake City to make our flight to Fresno so any delay was potentially disastrous.
- We had two rooms booked in Fresno with a 16.00 hour cut off time.
- We were supposed to be meeting Rick Deutsch – Mr Half Dome in Fresno that night.
- He had arranged for us to be interviewed at 06.30 on Thursday morning on the local CBS news station.

4 hours and 45 minutes was the delay and we eventually took off for Salt Lake City. We arrived there to be greeted by the news that we were staying at the Downtown Radisson – very swish – but we had to be back in the airport to catch the 07:00 flight to Los Angeles and on from there to Fresno. The next direct Delta flight was at 12:40 and we would be standby on it so we went to LA. Into bed at 02:00 (09:00 UK) and up at 05:00 – who needs sleep any way? Back to the airport and check in and grab a breakfast with our \$14 worth of food vouchers each courtesy of Delta. Into LA and then onto Fresno – this flight was only 45 minutes late.

Fresno at last and there was Rick waiting patiently for the 3 Limeys. All we have to do now is collect our bags and get the hire car – simple! Not quite – firstly no bags – 45 minutes spent trying to track them down and report their disappearance. Onto the car hire with a voucher that had written across it in big letters **PAID IN FULL**. Now I know that we don't always have the same understanding of words used in English but the above statement is pretty clear - No Sir!! - you want the keys you have to pay \$6.27 tourist tax. Why it says paid in full? I lost that argument and so we headed out to get our van - "oh no its green - that's unlucky" - I was getting past caring - I just wanted to get on the road to Yosemite. Roly got in Rick's car and Harold and I followed in the van. Next stop Yosemite - no it wasn't - Rick took us to the REI store in Fresno to introduce us to energy bars - what a tremendous discovery - no struggling to make sandwiches; take a couple of energy bars. REI are a massive chain of sports shops. Rick had been speaking there the night before about Hiking Half Dome - what a cool way

to make a living. Then it was off to Yosemite. About 2 hours later we reached the edge of the Park and paid our \$20 for our weekly ticket – great value as we were staying outside the park. (Here's a tip – if you enter and exit the park late evening or night or early morning there is no-one to check if you have the ticket – but you'd be a cheapskate!)



First thing in the park is a toilet break and then a quick scoot up to the Giant Sequoia Trees of Mariposa. It was about 2 ½ miles to the back of the grove and a height gain of 1000 feet; a nice 5 mile walk to remove some of the stiffness from airplane and airport seats. These trees are awesome and grow up to 3000 years old. What is even more amazing is that they can be burnt, have holes in the trunks and still keep growing. The famous tree that had a road through it fell down a few years ago and we took photos of the fallen tree.



Back into the car and continue up through the park to one of the famous viewing points for the Yosemite Valley. We stopped and did the tourist thing and took photos. To my mind this is not the best viewpoint to see the Valley for the first time; that is the view point that you come to when you enter the Park on the I-120 from San Francisco which we got to see before we came home.



Onto the hotel and check in; no bags had materialised. We had now been in the same clothes for about 45 hours. They still felt clean crisp and very pleasant and they did not smell. We retired to the restaurant for a meal and a drink and as we walked back to our room I spotted our bags in the hallway by reception – they had just been delivered. Hallelujah!

Friday June 12th:

A lazy day with a trip around the Valley with visits to Curry Village; good pizza for lunch, a visit to the John Muir Centre where Rick knew the curator and a visit to the very swish Ahwahnee Hotel to get onto their free Wi-fi. We also visited the store and museum and visitor centre, then it was back to the hotel for an early night. I don't think Rick was overly impressed when we decided to drink almost all the half bottle of Penderyn Whisky I had brought to drink on the summit before we went to bed.

Saturday June 13th:



An early call at 03:45 (I thought this was a holiday!) then a departure at 04:30 meant that we were able to set off for Half Dome at 05:15 in the dark. The route is fairly easy and pleasant to the bridge over the Merced River



After some easy walking you then come to next major climb up to top of Nevada Fall. This is another long grind of step irregular rock steps again about 700 of 'em.

From Nevada Fall there is about a mile of very easy walking along the floor of Little Yosemite Valley. The trail then starts to rise in a series of switchbacks (zigzags to you and me). These seem to go on for an extremely long time but it is good underfoot and it is a pleasant way to gain height. Eventually we arrived at a small plateau just before the start of the ascent of Sub-Dome. You now get the full impact of the size, scale and the impressiveness of Sub Dome and Half Dome.

The grind up Sub Dome covers over 800 granite steps of various sizes as the path zigzags up the white granite rock. I am sure that the view from the top of Sub Dome makes most sane people ask "What the **** am I doing here?". You are now looking down at the saddle between Sub Dome and Half Dome which is not very wide and drops off onto steep slopes that then become vertical cliffs and of course the wires are in full view. We reached the top of Sub Dome at 10:04. We relaxed here until 10:27 and started up the cables.



The cables were already very busy and it took us about 40 minutes to get up them. They are extremely strenuous and very dangerous.

They are also inhabited by lots of people who have no hill experience or perception of how potentially dangerous they are. If you slip and loose your grip there is very little to stop you falling as much as 2500'

Weather wise we were very lucky in that firstly it was not too hot and then the weather began to break and we decided to curtail our stay on the summit to about 45mins. There was mist coming and going and there were some very ominous black clouds approaching.

On the summit we took photos and at one stage stood on the Visor with a Welsh Flag and sang "We'll keep a Welcome" to the astonishment and applause of the American summiteers. We ate a couple of energy bars and

where you can look up and see the Vernal Falls in the distance. Off we go and start up the Mist Trail; at last something is going our way, we are not getting wet as the wind is blowing the spray from the Falls away from us. This is a long grind of about 700 rock steps. At the top there is a viewing point and you can stand fairly close to the extremely powerful flow of water.





met some very nice people and drank lots of fluids.



Descending the cables was even more hairy as people were trying to rush up the cables before the weather broke completely. We came down face first which really highlights the exposure. It gets very scary when you get a log jam on the cables with people not moving in either direction. At times tempers start to get frayed and this is not what you want when you are dealing

with people who are struggling to overcome very real fear.



We left the summit shortly after midday and descended Sub Dome in an air of euphoria – we had done what we wanted to do and we had beaten the cables and the weather. I know how slippy the rock can be under the cables as my Camelback lost it's mouthpiece part way up the cables and

sprayed fluid over the rocks. The rock was like polished ice.

As we descended we kept looking back at Half Dome and the cables and our fears grew as the weather got worse. At about 14:30 we had a brief hailstorm and we were a couple of thousand feet below the summit. By about 15:30 we could see water running off the saddle between Half Dome and Sub Dome and we were thanking our lucky stars for Rick insisting on an early start. Our MR experience made us very concerned for the safety of the people trying to complete Half Dome after us. The granite under the cables is like glass when it is wet. That is not a place we would have wanted to be.

We completed the round trip at 16:15 – total time 11 hours – a very respectable time we were told.

As we approached the Valley bottom we started to hear the sound of a helicopter. It transpired that a 40 year old man from California had slipped to his death at about 15:30 and there were 41 people trapped on the summit of Half Dome. It took until 20:45 to get everyone off the summit and it was 01:45 in the morning when the last person reached the trailhead.

The whole trip was a real experience as the scenery was breathtaking, the difficulty in completing it and the exhilarating experience of the cables.

I thought it was an awesome experience. H said “It was a wonderful day of contrasts and a truly memorable day on the hill”. Roly’s comments were “A terrific day with the King of Half Dome – Rick Deutsch.” No record of this trip could be complete without a sincere Thank You to Rick Deutsch who has been a veritable superstar in his support of this venture.

Sunday June 14th:

We said goodbye to Rick but not before we had a photo taken of us all wearing the first ever Rick Deutsch “I climbed Half Dome tee-shirts”.



Today was to be a rest day – well for H & Roly any way! It was my duty to drive – our target was fabulously interesting real live ghost town – if it can be live and a ghost - called Bodie. To get there meant a really wonderful drive all the way across Yosemite with the road reaching heights of nearly 10,000 feet in places – that is over 1000 feet higher than we had been on the summit of Half Dome. This road is the Tioga Road or pass and is only open in the summer and autumn. The scenery and sights along this road could make another article. We even saw Half Dome from an entirely new angle. There was plenty of snow about and we even had photos taken in the snow.



What a bonus on Sunday we saw an actual bear from a distance of about 100 yards – fabulous!



Bodie is a fascinating place and well worth a visit. It has a very interesting history and once was one of the real “bad old towns of the Wild West”. It is a place of extremes 100°F in the summer and 30-40°F below in winter. They were some extremely tough people. We ate in a little town called Lee Vining which is like the gateway to the park from the east. This side of the park has a number of ski resorts in the winter.

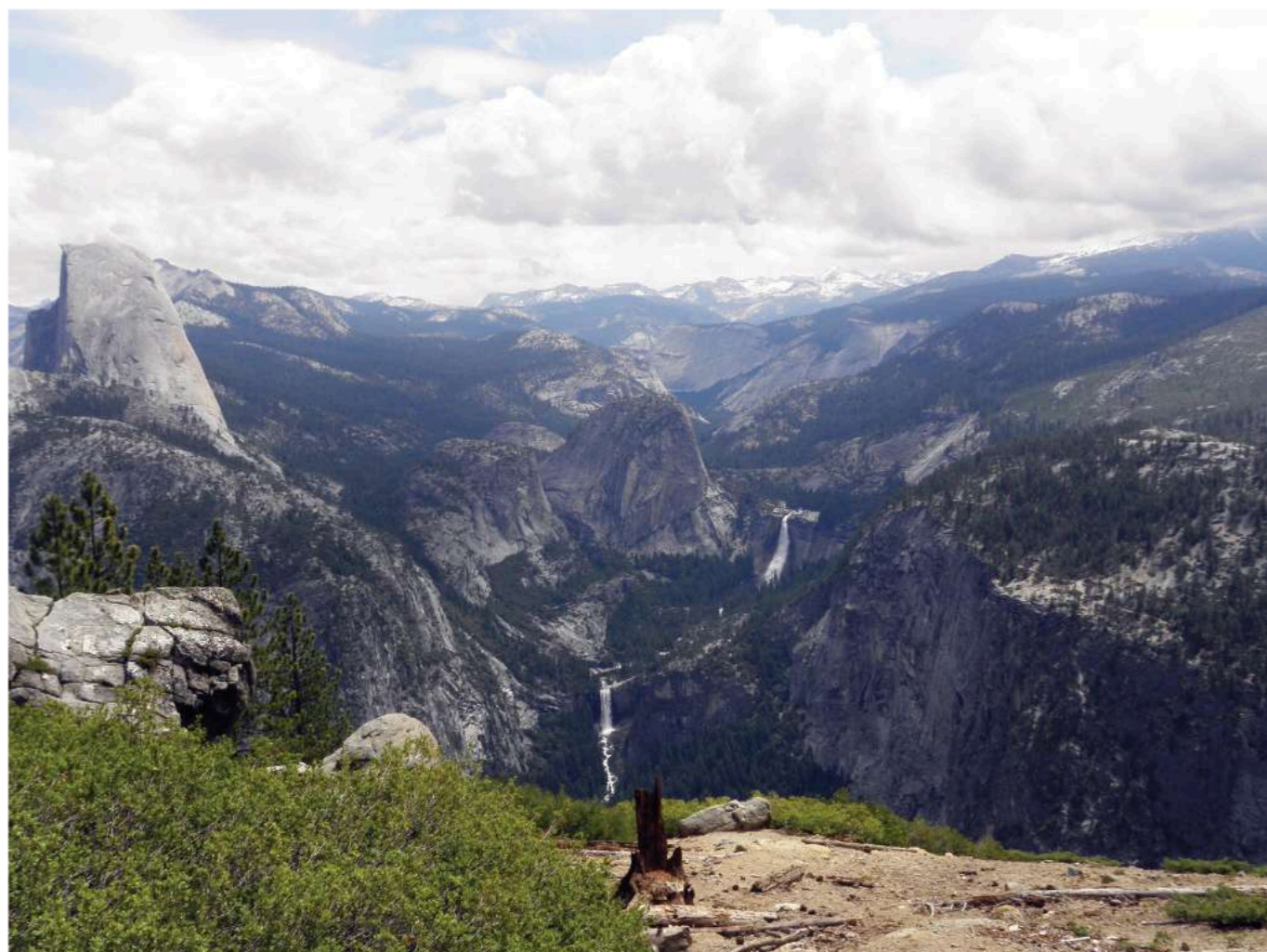
Monday 15th:

We did some shopping and touristy things before driving the 25-30 miles to Glacier Point. Glacier Point is a vantage point overlooking the Yosemite Valley as the crow flies it is about 3000 feet straight up. There are 2 trails – 4 Mile Trail and The Panorama Trail which is 9.2 miles long. These can be done from the valley up to Glacier Point or catch a bus up to Glacier Point and walk down – guess which we did on Tuesday. The views from Glacier Point are absolutely awe inspiring and should be on the itinerary for anyone who visits the park. A large part of the Half Dome Route is visible from here as you look down on Vernal Falls, Nevada Falls and up into Little Yosemite Valley. We left Glacier Point and then went and walked up Sentinel Dome – again amazing views – the round trip was all of 2.5 miles.

Tuesday 16th:

Up early to get into the park to catch the 10:00 bus from Yosemite Lodge to Glacier Point – the driver Charles loved the sound of his own voice and he repeatedly told us how long he had driven these coaches – you would have thought that in his 31 years he would have developed a more interesting talk.

11:30 Glacier Point and relative silence as we set off on the Panorama Walk. This took down into the Illilouette



Valley and the spectacular Illilouette Water Fall. The scene at the top of the fall was idyllic with lots of rocks to sunbath on if you wanted but an easy escape into the shade of the trees. As you leave the Falls you start to climb to a height of about 6650 feet a gain of 3-400 feet as you go over the Top of Panorama Cliffs. Then is the gentle descent to the John Muir Trail – you can turn right and visit the top of Nevada Fall (218) but as we were there Saturday we decided to continue on down to the trail head at Happy Isles. Trail time exactly 4 hours – another fabulous day.

Wednesday 17th:

Oh well, all good things come to an end so it was pack the car and head off back to Fresno. At Fresno there was time for a bit of retail therapy with a quick return visit to REI to get more energy bars and time to introduce Roly and Harold to Eddie Bauer's Menswear for what I think are the best khaki's you can buy. Unfortunately Eddie Bauer's looked like they were about to go into Chapter 11 that day and I got my TV interview after all as I was asked about how I would feel if Eddie Bauer's ceased to exist. The flight to Salt Lake City was fine and we treated ourselves to a meal at a Mexican restaurant across the road from the hotel. The place was called the Red Iguana and people were queuing at 21:00 to get in. The portions were enormous and the food was really tasty. Roly and I were defeated by ours but H finished his – so who has the big gut???

Thursday/Friday 18/19th:

First a flight to Atlanta and then one onto Manchester and home safe and sound.



There are a number of people who have supported us on this trip and they deserve a mention;

Paul Bailey of Snowdon Sherpa

- Keela Clothing
- Mountain Junky
- Mark at Wirralphoto & Website design for designing and hosting our website

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