Big Meadow

Yosemite National Park

Cultural Landscape Report
Summer 1996

Yosemite National Park

CULTURAL RESOURCES DIVISION•WESTERN REGION•YOSEMITE, CALIFORNIA

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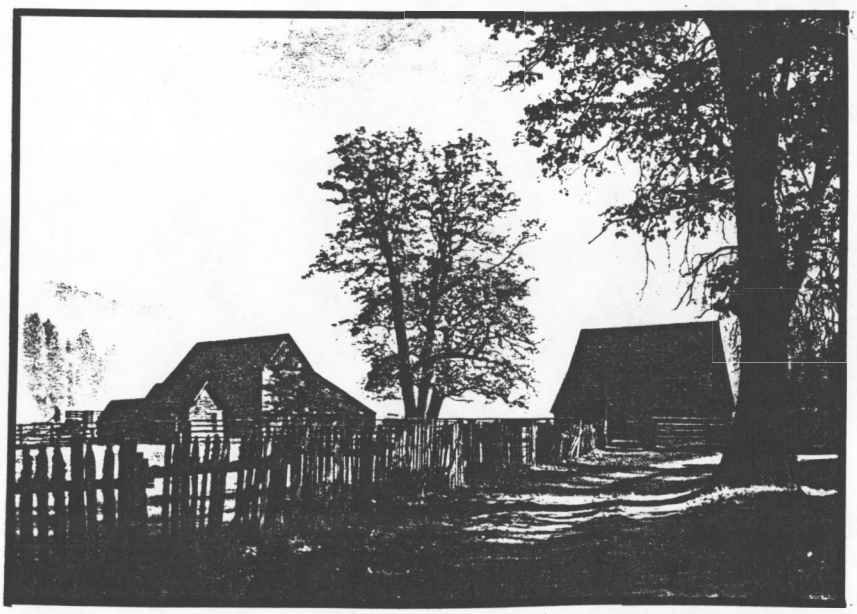
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INTRODUCTION

This Cultural Landscape Report provides an inventory and evaluation of the historic landscape at Big Meadow, in the Foresta area of Yosemite National Park. This report analyzes the development and evolution of the Big Meadow, from prehistoric Native American occupation to present use under National Park Service ownership.

In conducting the research for this cultural landscape report, both primary and secondary sources were utilized including letters, interviews, and books about Foresta and the Big Meadow site. In addition to archival and library research, an inventory and analysis of existing landscape features such as vegetation, slope, soil type, and irrigation infrastructure, was made on site.

Based on the information obtained through the evaluation of the historic landscape resources at Big Meadow, this report includes recommendations for the preservation, rehabilitation, maintenance and interpretation of the resources at Big Meadow.



The Meyer barns located to the north of the Coulterville Road. October 5, 1941.

This document was developed in the Yosemite National Park Cultural Resources Division. Previous documents prepared for use by park staff, addressing historic resources at Yosemite National Park include: Cultural Landscape Report: Recommendations for Treatment of the Residential Historic District in Yosemite Valley 1996, Yosemite Valley Cultural Landscape Report 1994, Historic Resource Study, Yosemite 1987.

NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC: Meyer Ranch
CURRENT: Big Meadow

LAND USE

HISTORIC: Agriculture/subsistence
agricultural field, animal facility
CURRENT: Landscape
park, residence

LOCATION

Big Meadow
Yosemite National Park, CA
USGS Quadrangles: El Portal, California and El Capitan, California
County: Mariposa T3S R20E Section 3

ACCESS

■ **YES unrestricted**
□ **NO restricted**

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY

■ **PUBLIC**
□ **PRIVATE**

LANDSCAPE TYPE: Vernacular, Ethnographic

NATIONAL REGISTER STATUS

Determination of the National Register status of Big Meadow pending nomination

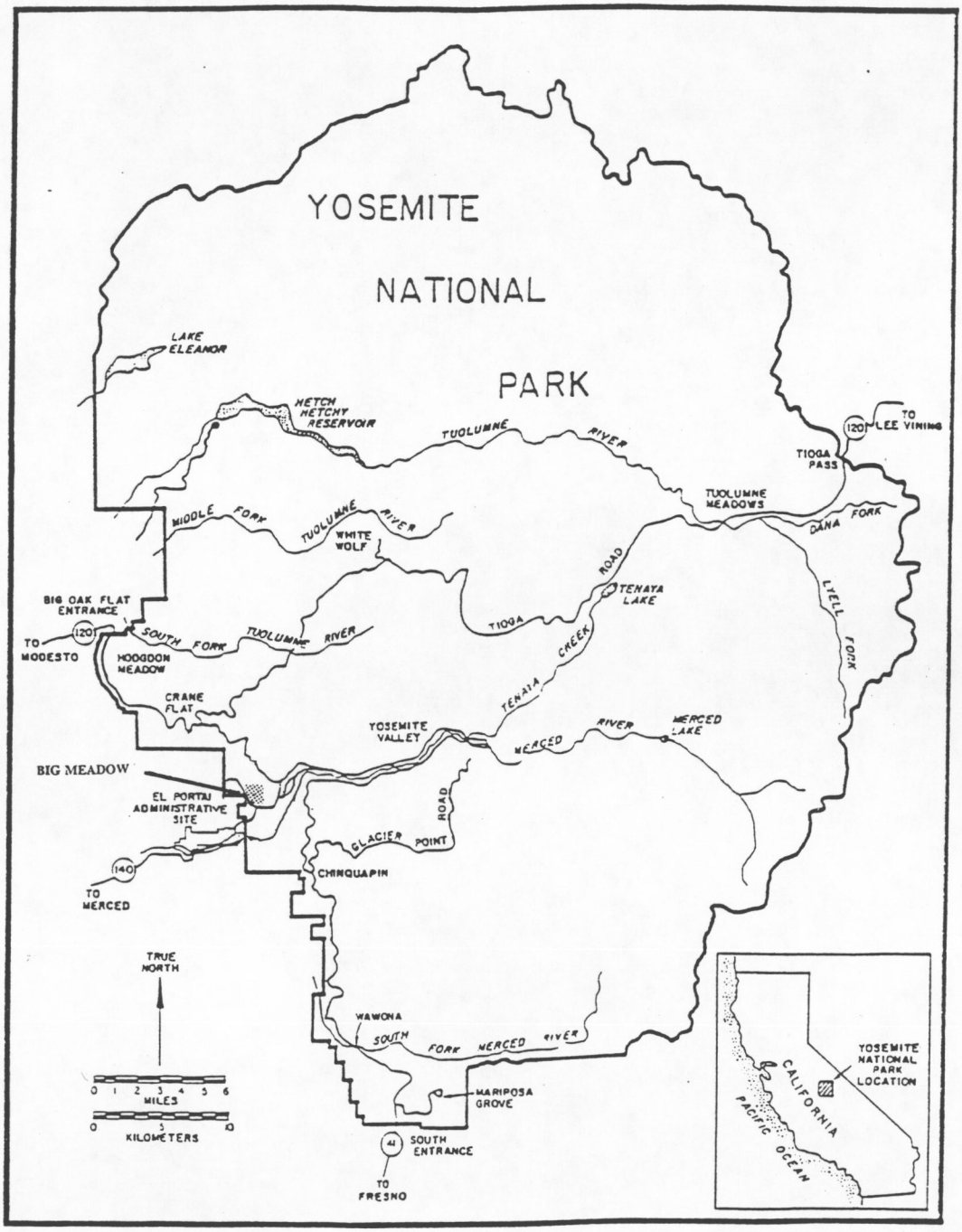
ASSOCIATED NATIONAL REGISTER LISTINGS

McCauley/Meyer Barns
National Register of Historic Places, 1978
Local Significance: 19th-century agriculture and architecture

Old Coulterville Road and Trail
National Register of Historic Places, 1976
Local Significance: 19th-century transportation and engineering

Foresta–Big Meadow Archaeological District
National Register of Historic Places, 1979
State and Regional Significance: Prehistoric archaeology, 19th and 20th-century historic archaeology and commerce

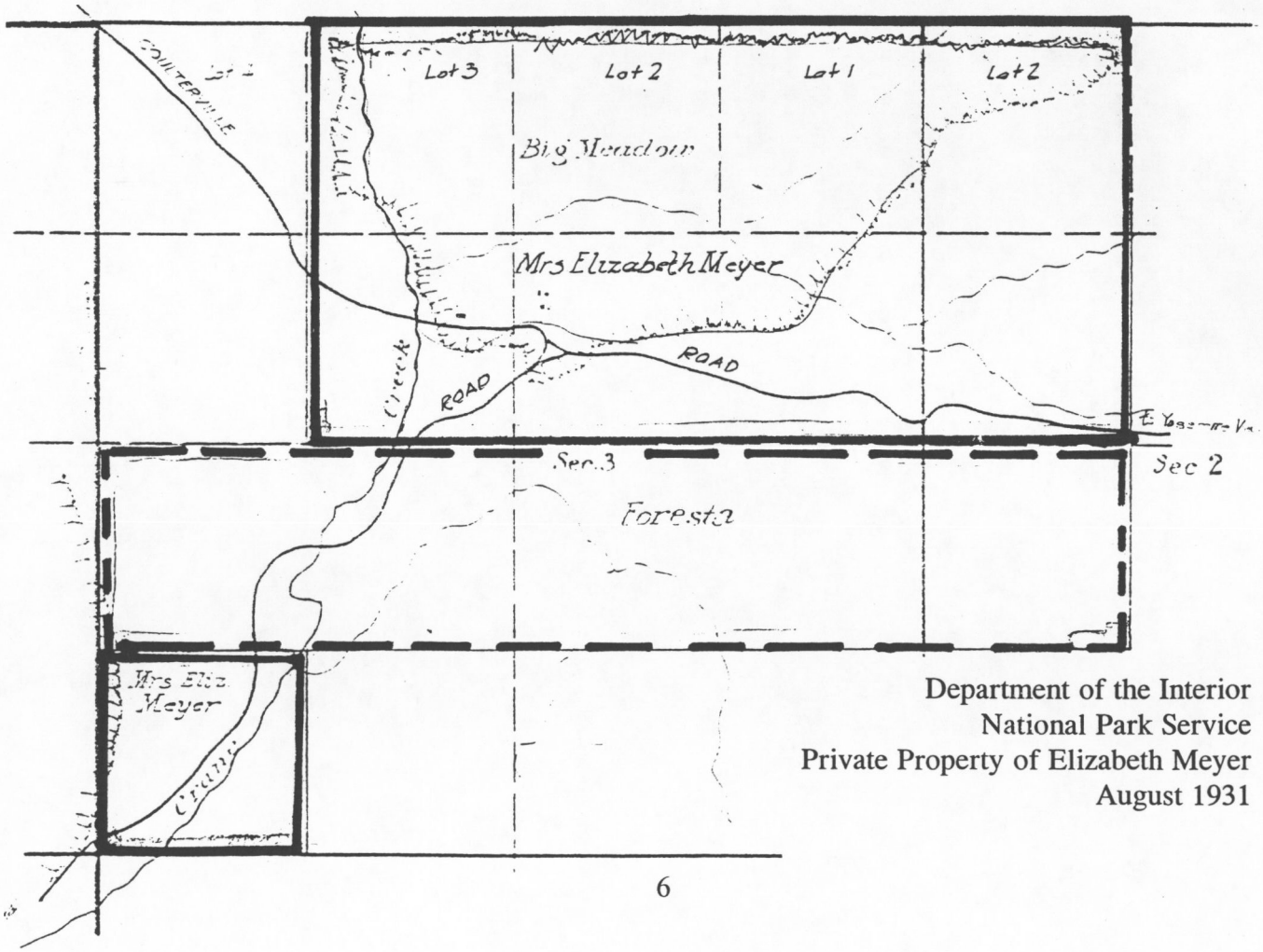
LOCATIONAL MAP



In order to provide a contextual framework and comparative basis for the identification of the cultural resources within the Big Meadow, the contextual boundaries for this cultural landscape report will include the entire 324 acres of the former Meyer property.

CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

The Big Meadow encompasses approximately half of the original property. of the Meyer family. The Coulterville Road, which first opened up the area for settlement, runs east to west through the southern portion of the Meyer property. The Coulterville Road was built as a stage route from Coulterville into Yosemite Valley. The Meyer Ranch was a stage stop on this route during the later part of the 19th-century. The land holdings of the Meyer family also included the McCauley 40, a 40-acre tract of land located to the southwest of the Meyer property. This land had initially belonged to Elizabeth Meyer's uncle, James McCauley, but it was transferred into her own holdings in 1923. This tract of land has not been included within the scope of this analysis. The former Meyer property holdings are located approximately 2 miles west of (New) Big Oak Flat Road.



Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Private Property of Elizabeth Meyer
August 1931

POLITICAL

Property Description
T3S R20E M.D.B. 8M
Lots 1,2, and 3, 5 1/2 NE 1/4
SE 1/4 NW 1/4 and SW 1/4 SW 1/4 Sec 3

The 324.88 acres originally owned by the Meyer family was annexed by the federal government to Yosemite National Park in 1905. However, the Meyer family held a patent to their land, therefore it was permitted to remain in private hands. In 1964 the National Park Service condemned the ranch, ordering the removal of livestock and the cessation of agriculture in the meadow. Litigation ensued for several years. The Meyer's did not leave the Big Meadow until the 1970s, and the Park Service finally assumed control of the property. Since that time various alternatives have been proposed for the use of the Meadow.

To the south of the Big Meadow site and the former Meyer property. is the private development of Foresta. The land to the north of the former Meyer Ranch is part of Yosemite National Park. The east property line divides the former Meyer property from Yosemite National Park. To the west of the former Meyer property line is land also owned by the National Park Service. Approximately 1350 feet west of the western boundary of the former Meyer Ranch is the Stanislaus National Forest.

CIRCULATION

Coulterville Road

The Big Meadow area can be accessed by the Coulterville Road which runs east west along the southern boundary of the former Meyer Ranch. The section of the Coulterville Road from Coulterville to Crane Flat was constructed in by the Coulterville and Yo Semite Turnpike Company in 1859 at a cost of $15,000. From Crane Flat, tourists journeying into Yosemite Valley continued by horseback. Seeing a need for increased access into the valley, the Coulterville and Yosemite Turnpike Company, with Dr. John T. McLean as president, constructed a toll road at an additional cost of $50,000. The Coulterville Road was completed in June of 1874, becoming the first road into the Yosemite Valley. The toll road led from Coulterville, approximately thirty miles to the west of the former Meyer Ranch, to the Dudley's Hotel and ranch, and past Bower Cave, a popular tourist spot. From Bower Cave the road traveled through Hazel Green, Merced Grove, Crane Flat and Big Meadow before descending into the Valley near El Capitan. According to J.M. Hutchings,"The road was simply built by following the natural grades and building a few bridges."[1] The "Coulterville Route" required two days to travel from Mariposa into Yosemite Valley and carried everything from mail to tourists. By 1911, the Coulterville Road was turned over to Mariposa County after the maintenance costs far exceeded the revenue and the company had failed to pay its taxes for five years. On August 23, 1913, the Coulterville Road again made history by becoming the first road into Yosemite to be officially opened for automobile traffic.

Currently the Coulterville Road begins at a junction with the (New) Big Oak Flat Road, northeast of the Big Meadow, and continues west to the small town of Coulterville. Although the Coulterville Road is not under regular Yosemite Park Service maintenance, the mostly unpaved road is still utilized by area residents, park service employees, and tourists.

Big Oak Flat Road

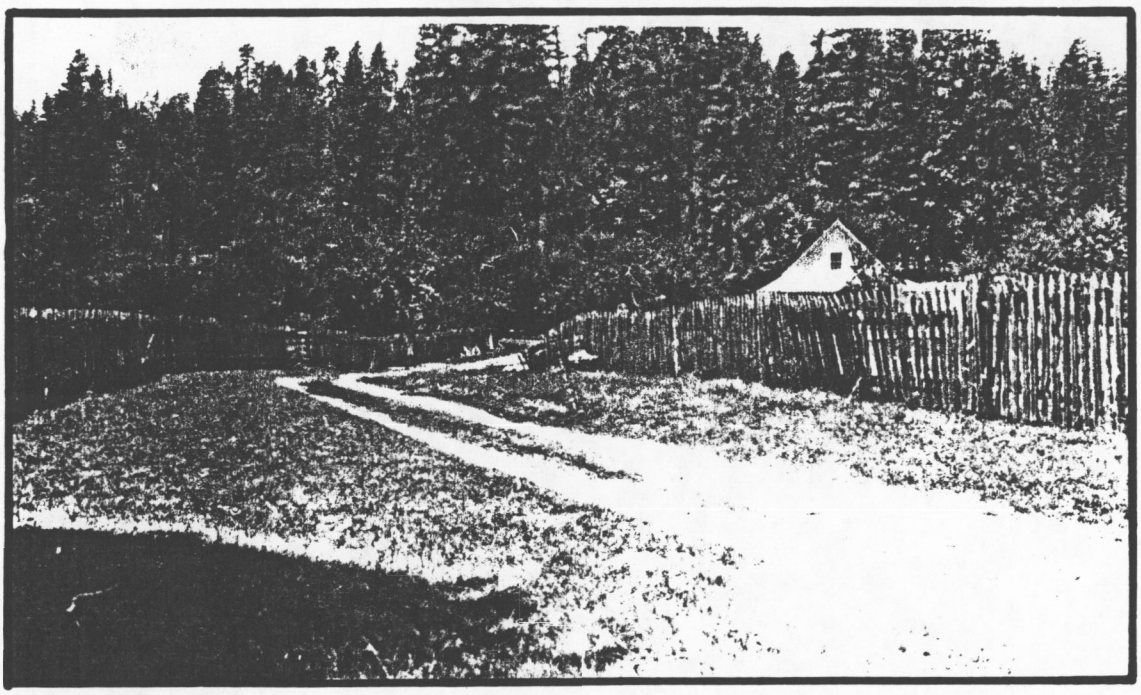
Approximately two miles to the north of the location of the former Meyer Ranch is the (New) Big Oak Flat Road. This two lane highway, completed in 1940, begins at a junction with Highway 140 and turns into West Highway 120 before entering Big Oak Flat, a small mining village. The (New) Big Oak Flat Road replaced Old Big Oak Flat Road which was completed in 1874, one month after the Coulterville Road was completed. The Old Big Oak Road passed through Crane Flat and Gin Flat before descending into Yosemite Valley through Tamarack Flat. This steep route, which followed a series of switch backs coming down the talus slopes of the Valley, entered Yosemite Valley some distance uphill from the present road.

Foresta Road

The northern end of the Foresta Road begins at a y-junction with the Coulterville Road. This road heads south off of the Coulterville Road, through the community of Foresta, to the village of El Portal, approximately 7 miles to the southwest of the Big Meadow. The road is not paved between the two communities, and is not suitable for automobile traffic.

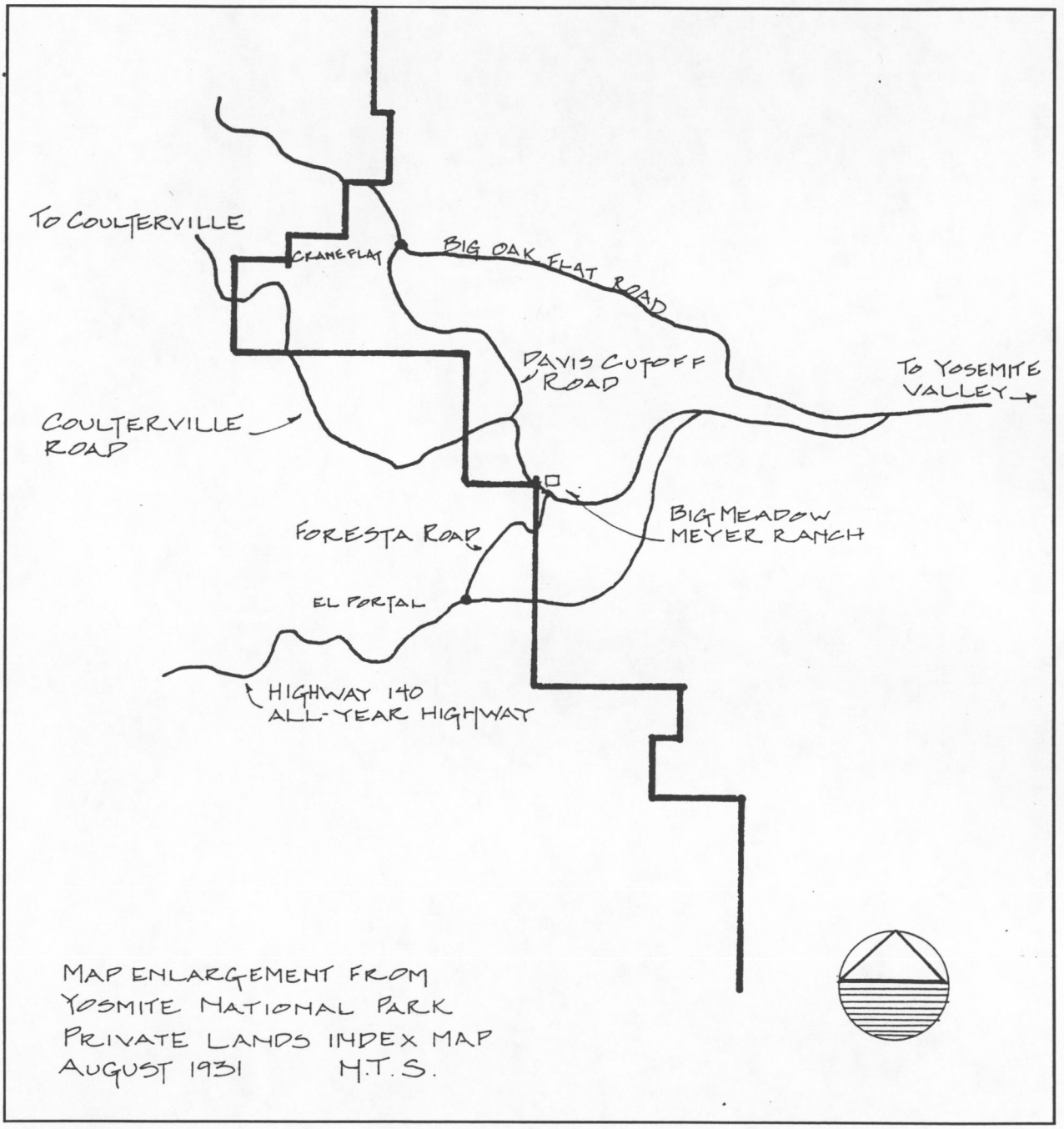
Davis Cut-off Road

The Davis Cut-Off Road was constructed by Alfred B. Davis, a businessman and director of the Sonoma Magnesite Company which had offices in Huron, South Dakota, Philadelphia and San Francisco. After exploring the area around Big Meadow and Foresta, Davis took over the financing of the Foresta Road as a business investment hoping to develop the Foresta area as a summer resort and a cultural haven in the wilderness. Eager to increase tourist accessibility into Foresta, Davis built this four mile road in 1914. The road began northwest of the Big Meadow and ran due north to Crane Flat and Big Oak Road. Davis continued to publicize his Foresta development and road until his death in 1923. Currently the Davis Cut-Off Road is not maintained.



The Coulterville Road as it passes through the Big Meadow, early 1930s

Map of Road Systems



The focus of this cultural landscape report is on the history of the Big Meadow as a ranch and agricultural area, thus the study site boundaries are set to include the meadow and its existing infrastructure as well as the surrounding vegetative transition zones.

VISUAL BOUNDARIES

Historically, fences served to define the boundaries of the Big Meadow. Currently however, very few fence posts are extant.

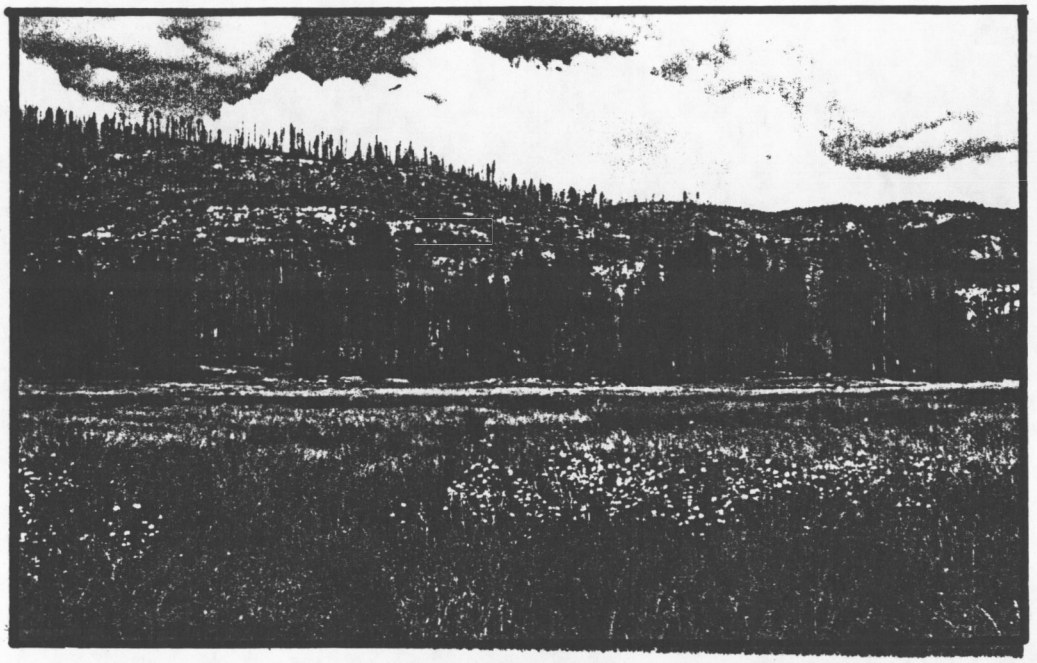
The east boundary of the Big Meadow study site is delineated by an increase in slope from approximately 1% to 10% at the 4330 contour, and to some degree by vegetative covering. Due to the forest fire of 1990 however, many of the pines that historically marked the edges have been burned, therefore only charred trunks remain to define the forest edge. In addition, the cessation of regular burning practices and grazing activity have allowed small evergreens to enter land that was historically covered in herbaceous material. This new growth vegetation serves to blur the boundary between forested and meadow environments.

The west boundary of the Big Meadow study site is delineated by the course of Crane Creek. To the east of Crane Creek the land slopes upward at approximately an 18% slope. This slope forms a sense of enclosure on the site and aids in the identification of the meadow area. The denser vegetative growth allowed by the additional moisture supply forms a distinct edge to the west boundary. However, copses of Black Oak, *Quercus kelloggii*, extend into the meadow area, again serving to visually blur the meadow edge.

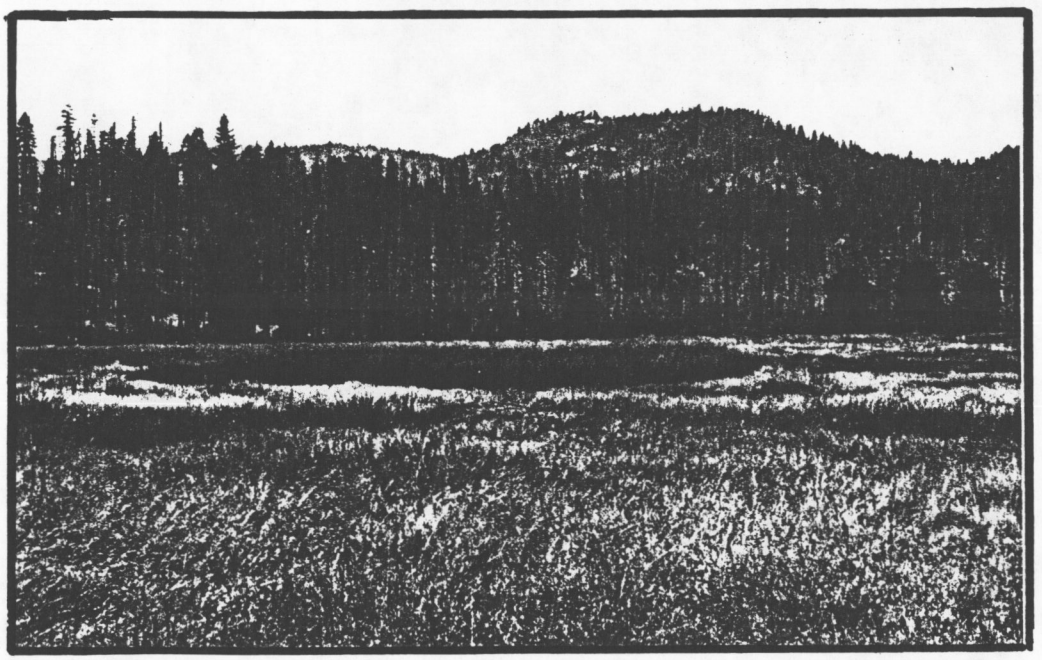
The south boundary is similar in character to the other boundaries in that it is defined both by transitional vegetation and a change in slope. The change in slope is approximately 20% on this boundary. The Coulterville Road provides a portion of the visual division between the forested and meadow areas of the property. Similar to the western boundary, the southern boundary is delineated further by a water way. A one-and-one-half foot wide irrigation ditch extends from Crane Creek, east along the southern border of the meadow. As is typical of the area, the vegetative cover on the slopes is denser, containing deciduous shrubs, scattered deciduous trees, evergreens, and occasional burned tree trunks.

The north boundary of the site is visually defined by a slight increase in slope and greater vegetative cover. The increase in slope on this boundary is approximately 15%. Unfortunately, due to the fire of 1990, much of the vegetative density is gone and only burned tree trunks remain.

Views of Boundaries



Northeast boundary

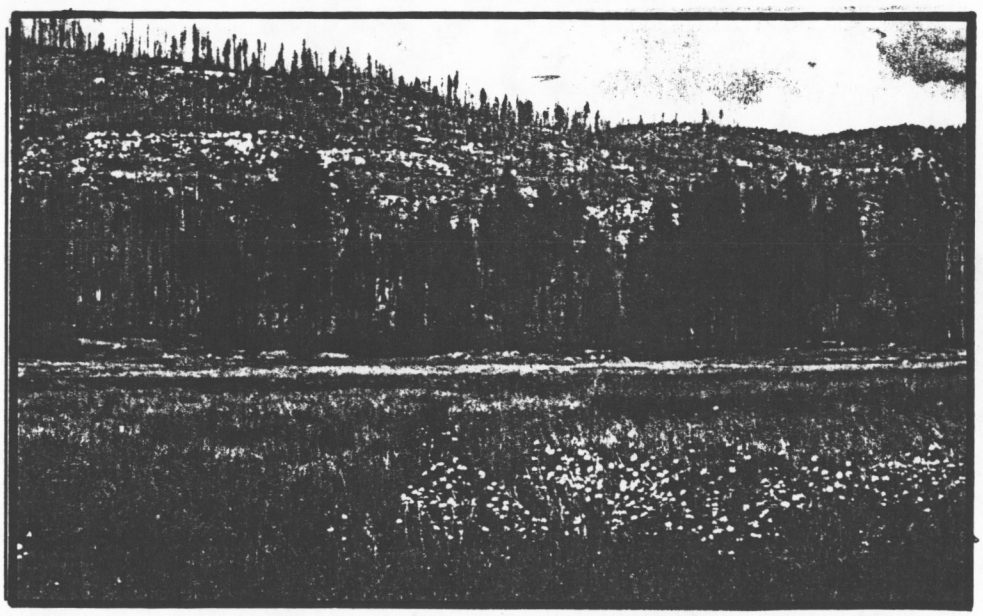


Northwest boundary

PHYSIOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES

The Big Meadow is located to the north of the private development of Foresta, on the eastern edge of Yosemite National Park. The elevation of the meadow ranges from approximately 4300 to 4325 feet. The meadow is distinctly separate from the surrounding foothills by an increase in elevation on all sides of the meadow.

Geologically, the meadow has been covered with surficial alluvium, talus, and glacial deposits dating from the Quaternary period of the Cenozoic era – approximately three million years ago to the present. This geological composition is similar to that found in the Yosemite Valley. The geologic composition of the surrounding foothills are of granodiorite dating from the Cretaceous period of the Mesozoic era – approximately 225 to 65 million years ago. Therefore, the meadow is distinctly separate geologically from its surroundings.



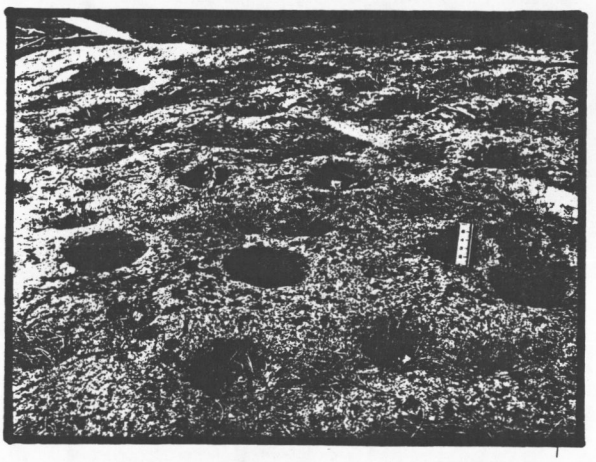
The granite outcropping in the northeast section of the Big Meadow

Central Sierra Nevada Archaeology

Formal study of the central Sierra Nevada region did not occur until James A. Bennyhoff began examining the region in the 1950s. The phases Bennyhoff outlined are comprised of the Crane Flat Complex (c1500 B.C. - A.D. 500), the Tamarack Complex (A.D. 500 - 1200), and the Mariposa Complex (A.D. 1200 - 1850). Artifacts and other pertinent information gathered within the major tributaries along the Merced and Tuolumne Rivers were compared with nearby assemblages from central California and the Lake Tahoe regions to assign relative dates to them. Bennyhoff then developed this chronology, which was defined largely by weight, type, and prevalence of lithic material collected on site. The three phase chronology of prehistoric occupation within the central Sierra Nevada region that was proposed by Bennyhoff are all present in the Foresta – Big Meadow Archaeological District.

History of Archaeological Survey within the Big Meadow

The Foresta–Big Meadow region has abundant archaeological resources, and thus a long history of archaeological survey within the area.[2] The climate, vegetation, and topography of the meadow made it an ideal habitation site, therefore it has had a high rate of occupation throughout prehistoric and historic times. Prehistoric archaeological sites within the Foresta–Big Meadow area had been informally recorded by National Park Service employees and local residents prior to any formal, systematic investigation of the area. The first informal mapping of seven of these known archaeological sites was completed in 1930, by C.C. Presnall. The first formal archaeological investigations within Yosemite National Park were first conducted in the 1950s by the University of California Archaeological Survey (UCAS), led by James A. Bennyhoff. In 1952, crews were able to do a survey of the Big Meadow, however, the survey area itself was not specifically documented. Despite time constraints, it was noted that the meadow had been sufficiently examined. As a result of this survey work, 11 prehistoric sites were recorded, many of which had already been informally noted. At this time, Bennyhoff classified 3 of these sites as large villages, 2 as small villages, 3 as house sites, 1 as a large camp, and 2 as small camps. Classifications were based upon mortar cup frequency and projected site size indicated through the survey work.



Mortar cups found in the Big Meadow

Following Bennyhoff's survey of the area, archaeological work was not conducted

within the Big Meadow again until the 1970s. At this point in time, crews from California State College Stanislaus (CSCS), led by L. Kyle Napton, came back to the Big Meadow for further survey work. This examination was focused upon well-watered, gently sloping areas, particularly those that contained potential stationary milling rocks, therefore, the Big Meadow fit perfectly within the scope of their research. As a result of this project, 12 new sites were recorded, and 10 of the 11 sites previously recorded were rerecorded. Only 1 site could not be relocated.

In 1987 and 1989, archaeologists from the National Park Service's Division of Cultural Resource Management within Yosemite National Park mapped and resurveyed the Foresta–Big Meadow Archaeological District. Attempts were made to update files, and to obtain additional data on areas that had been surveyed in the past. After the A-Rock fire swept across the meadow in 1990, National Park Service archaeologists were able to do a preliminary surface survey of the area while monitoring post-fire management activities. With fire lines bulldozed through the area, trees removed, and grasses burned off of the meadow, artifacts became clearly visible. Some of these were able to be collected, however some were flagged for later mapping and collection efforts only to be lost by illegal unauthorized removal from the site.

While the A-Rock fire did increase the visibility of the surface of the Big Meadow which was previously unobtainable, it did have negative impacts upon the archaeological resources within the area. Some historic structures, as well as floral and faunal remains, were lost. The increase in the surface temperature impacted upper level deposits, resulting in the damaging of artifacts and features. Obsidian artifacts received some patination, while other artifacts and features were damaged by the heat, resulting in spalling, cracking, crazing, potlidding, melting and blackening. Soil compaction and increased downslope wash also effected the archaeological resources within the area.

Due to the impacts upon the site as a result of the fire, data collection was necessary to determine the condition of, and effects to, previously identified archaeological sites. In the spring of 1991, the National Park Service contracted with the cultural resource management firm of Dames & Moore to complete a well documented archaeological survey. Rerecording of previously identified sites and a surface evaluation within the Foresta–Big Meadow area was completed at this time. As a result of this work, 26 prehistoric sites, 3 historic sites, and 7 sites that contain both historic and prehistoric components were identified and rerecorded. The prehistoric sites were categorized as 12 large village sites, 4 small village sites, 4 house sites, 7 large camps and 6 small camps. The delineation between camps and more permanent habitation sites was made on the basis of mortar cups. Historic sites included the 2 ranch complexes in the area and their associated infrastructure, one small habitation site, and two Native American sites that contain evidence of both pre-contact and post-contact utilization.

With the restoration of the south barn on the former Meyer Ranch in the Summer of 1995, a variety of historic artifacts were uncovered. Surface finds in the vicinity of the barns, and artifacts recovered from an excavated post hole, were recorded by provenience, sorted, washed, weighed, and examined. The more informative artifacts that were deemed to have future research potential were catalogued and accessioned into the Museum collection.

No further archaeological examination of the area has since occurred. However, with the upcoming restoration of the north barn in September 1996, an archaeologist will be on site during the process and will be conducting a surface survey of the effected area. The archaeologist will also be examining any excavated builders trenches. A map of the archaeological sites located in the Foresta-Big Meadow Archaeological District can be obtained through the Archaeology Department of the Cultural Resource Management division of Yosemite National Park. This is sensitive information, not subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and thus can only be accessed by qualified archaeological personnel.

Prehistoric Component

Archaeological evidence of Native American occupation of the Big Meadow in Foresta has been traced back over 2000 years. Southern Sierra Miwok people found the Big Meadow, which was called "O'Pim"[3], with its well-drained soil, fresh water and oak trees, to be the ideal environment for long term encampments. It was used in autumn as a place to harvest acorns and escape the cold weather of higher elevations before wintering down in El Portal. The black oak acorns were gathered in mid-autumn in burden baskets, ground up with mortars and pestles, and then leached of their tannic acid. The resulting meal was abundant and storable through the winter. It has been suggested that the acorns in the region were so abundant that the Miwok inhabitants could have sustained themselves on acorns alone. Naturally however, they had a very varied diet that included pinenuts, seeds, roots, and berries as well as mule deer, small game, and fish.

The combination of a comfortable elevation with an abundance of natural resources made this meadow a heavily utilized location. Evidence of prehistoric Miwok occupation has been found in the form of biface fragments, projectile points, obsidian, basalt, and chert debitage, and 588 mortar cups that have been ground into exposed sections of bedrock. O'Pim was utilized by the Miwoks much like it was by later residents for food procurement and production. To date, archaeologists have recorded 26 prehistoric features within the Big Meadow alone, with no doubt than many more have yet to be discovered and examined. Within the Foresta–Big Meadow Archaeological District, it has been estimated that there were 12 large village sites, 4 small village sites, 4 house sites, 7 large camp sites, and 6 small camp sites, within the area over time.



Oak growth bordering the Big Meadow

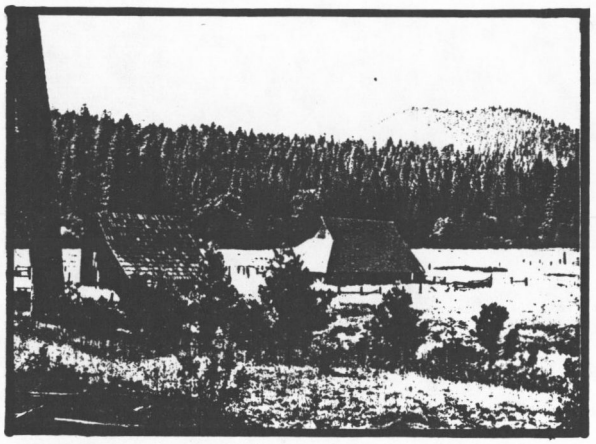
1870-1905

With Euro-American settlement of the Yosemite Valley came the construction of the Coulterville Road. This road was constructed by the Coulterville and Yo Semite Turnpike Company from 1870-74. The thirty-four mile road began west of Big Meadow in the town of Coulterville, and became the first wagon route into the Yosemite Valley. The Coulterville Road, bordering the south side of the Big Meadow, was a well traveled segment of the stage route from San Francisco to Yosemite Valley. The cost of construction of this road was $71,000. Unfortunately, toll revenue had only returned approximately half of this initial investment by 1899 due to the opening of the Big Oak Flat Road soon after the Coulterville Road was completed. The Big Oak Flat Road was easier to traverse, and thus quickly became the more popular route.

However, in the early years of its existence, the Coulterville Road saw much use. In addition to tourists, the opening of the Coulterville Road allowed greater access to the plentiful resources of the Big Meadow. Euro-Americans, once they entered the area, were quick to identify the great agricultural potential of the Big Meadow.

In 1850, four brothers named Meyer left Germany for California's goldfields and became prominent ranchers and businessmen in and around Groveland. The eldest Meyer and another German immigrant, Peter Mieson, saw the meadow as an excellent location in which to raise cattle and grow profitable crops such as hay and grain. In 1873, Meyer and Peter Mieson purchased the squatter's rights to the Big Meadow from a Native American who was living there at the time. Mieson remained in the area and began to utilize the meadow, eventually homesteading the area. A few years later Mieson obtained a new partner, George Meyer, a younger brother who had followed his older siblings to this country. They filed for adjoining 160 homestead plots, but due to boundary irregularities they obtained 324 acres. The meadow itself was enlarged by these two men through the removal of brush and trees to allow for large tracts of arable land.

From what information is available, it has been surmised that the former ranch house and two barns located in the Big Meadow were constructed in the late 1870s by Meyer and Mieson, with the help of Yosemite Trail builder George Anderson. For his assistance, Meyer and Mieson allowed



Meyer Barns, c1930s

Anderson to build his own log cabin on their property near the southern boundary of their holdings. This cabin remained there until 1914 when it was purchased and moved to become the first home in the then new development of Foresta. It was moved again in 1961 to the Pioneer History Center in Wawona. This cabin is currently being restored.

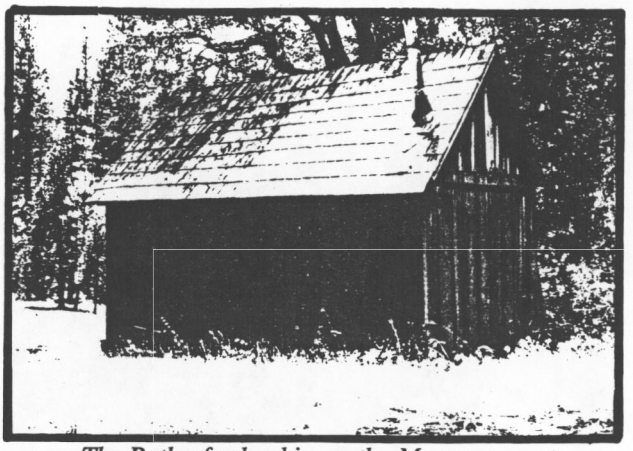
The construction of the nearby Coulterville Road was not only a convenient avenue of transportation but also served as a source of revenue for Meyer and Mieson, as their ranch became a point of toll collection in 1875. The ranch was also a popular stage stop, as their property was the last place for stages to change horses, and the first for those leaving the Yosemite Valley. Meals were served in the ranch house to hungry passengers and drivers. It has been suggested that the Meyer Ranch was also used for camping by travelers along the Coulterville Toll Road.

While Meyer and Mieson assisted in the management and maintenance of the toll road, they also tended to their primary objective - agriculture. With the enlargement of the Big Meadow, cattle and hogs were raised and crops grown. Crops raised in the meadow during the late 19th century included alfalfa, hay, barley, potatoes, berries and apples as well as some produce in a smaller garden. These products were then sold to the stores and hotels in Yosemite Valley.

During this period, fencing of different types was built to separate stage company horses from the Meyer's horses, and milk cows from beef cattle. It has been estimated that over 10,000 linear feet of rails were split for fencing for the ranch at Big Meadow by Meyer and Mieson to be constructed by their Native American ranch hands.

Thomas A. Rutherford, a former New Yorker, also settled in the Big Meadow during this time period. In 1878, he homesteaded 160 acres adjoining Meyer and Mieson's southern boundary. He built both a blacksmith shop and a water powered sawmill on the east bank of Crane Creek. After Rutherford's death in 1884, Meyer took over his businesses. The saw mill burned the following year. Rutherford's land holdings were transferred to Phillipe Proveur, and were subsequently sold to James McCauley for $100. This land eventually became the development of Foresta.

In 1900 George Meyer married Elizabeth McCauley, a niece of nearby neighbor James



The Rutherford cabin on the Meyer property

McCauley. Elizabeth Meyer was ofen in charge of the by then infrequent toll and stage stop operations. Every other day, George Meyer would load his wagon with hay, cover the hay with canvas and place beef on the top. Then he would travel into the valley to sell to the concessionaires.

In April 1901, Peter Mieson passed away as a result of a stoke suffered one month earlier. Upon Mieson's death his adjoining acreage was bequeathed to his partner George Meyer.

1905 - 1964

In 1905, a number of boundary revisions occurred and the Big Meadow became incorporated within Yosemite National Park. From 1890 to 1914 the national parks were under U.S. Army jurisdiction. However, since the Meyer land was homesteaded and patented in 1894, their rights and privileges as private property owners were retained, although they were surrounded by public land. This new portion of the park was administered by the U.S. Calvary units, whose edicts had to be followed regardless of

title ownership. Under military jurisdiction cattle was required to be fenced in, thus somewhat effecting the infrastructure of the Big Meadow. The army did purchase produce and beef from the ranches in the area, stimulating business for local residents. When the National Park Service was formed in 1916, the Meyers' and other private property owners no longer had to adhere to official edicts and were again able to retain their private property rights.

In 1917, George Meyer died leaving the ranch to his wife and two sons. Elizabeth Meyer ran the ranch until her eldest son, Horace, took over the ranching operations in 1924. By this time the family had discontinued large scale crop agriculture, instead concentrating on raising cattle.



The original Meyer Ranch house, c1870s-1936

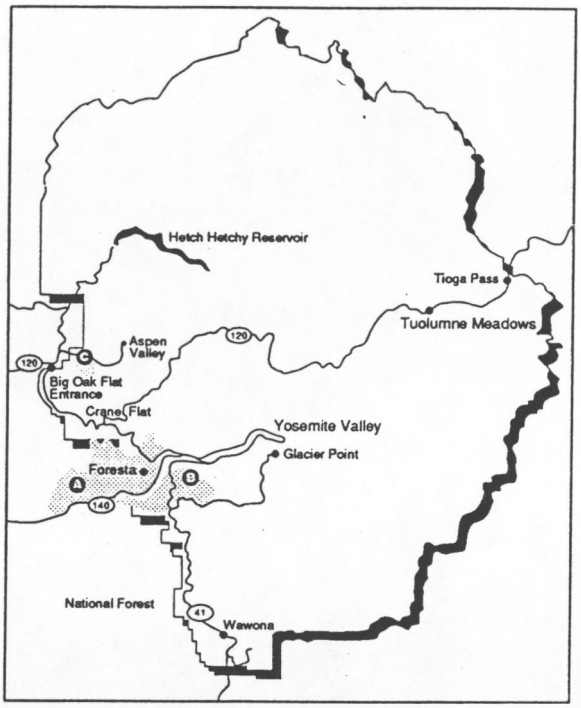
In 1930 a new picket fence was constructed around the residence. In 1931, a National Park Service survey of private land holdings within Yosemite National Park estimated that approximately 100 acres of the Meyer Ranch was "...in good meadow land, well able to support a reasonable number of pack animals and stock."[4]

In August of 1936, sparks from the chimney ignited Elizabeth Meyers' home, burning it completely. Elizabeth and her son George resided in the old Rutherford Cabin nearby on the Big Meadow until George and Horace completed a new home for her in 1938. Her new home was constructed on the same site as her former one, as she wished, built out of native timber that was cut in the nearby McCauley saw mill. The orchard across from her home remained intact. In June of 1938, Ansel Adams and other photographers came to the Meyer Ranch and photographed much of the meadow and the built environment. Six varieties of fence, among other agricultural remnants, are noted as having been subjects of the artists' many photographs.[5]

On January 25, 1952 Elizabeth Meyers' passed away, leaving the ranch to her only surviving son, Horace. In 1964 the Park Service condemned the ranch, having desired the Big Meadow for many years. However, Horace continued raising cattle on the land after condemnation while litigation occurred, into the 1970s.

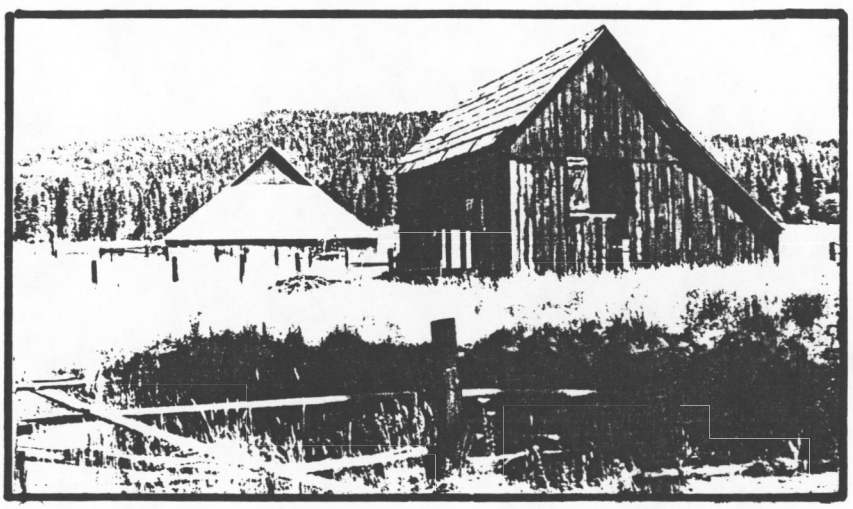
RECENT HISTORY – FIRE OF 1990

On August 7, 1990 intense thunderstorms set-off a series of lightning strikes which caused the most extensive fire in Yosemite Park's 100 year history. As the maps illustrate, there were three main fires: A-Rock, Steamboat and T-Grove 4. On August 9th, the Foresta and Big Meadow, located in the territory of the A-Rock fire, suffered extensive damage to homes and vegetation. No major structures were lost in the Big Meadow due to fire damage, however fencing, outbuildings, and various trees were destroyed in the blaze. The fire also caused extensive vegetation loss in the forested areas around the Big Meadow – altering views, wind patterns and levels of enclosure.



This of map Yosemite National Park shows the location of the three main fires: A) A-Rock, B) Steamboat, C) T-Grove 4

The A-Rock fire crossed Highways 140 and 120 and encompassed a perimeter of 18,100 acres in Yosemite National Park and Stanislaus National Forest by August 17, 1990 when it was contained. The three main fires and the smaller fires combined resulted in approximately 26 million dollars worth of damage.



Photograph of the Meyer barns and the Big Meadow taken prior to the fire of 1990 in July, 1984. Notice the dense vegetative growth and level of enclosure on the north boundary of the property.

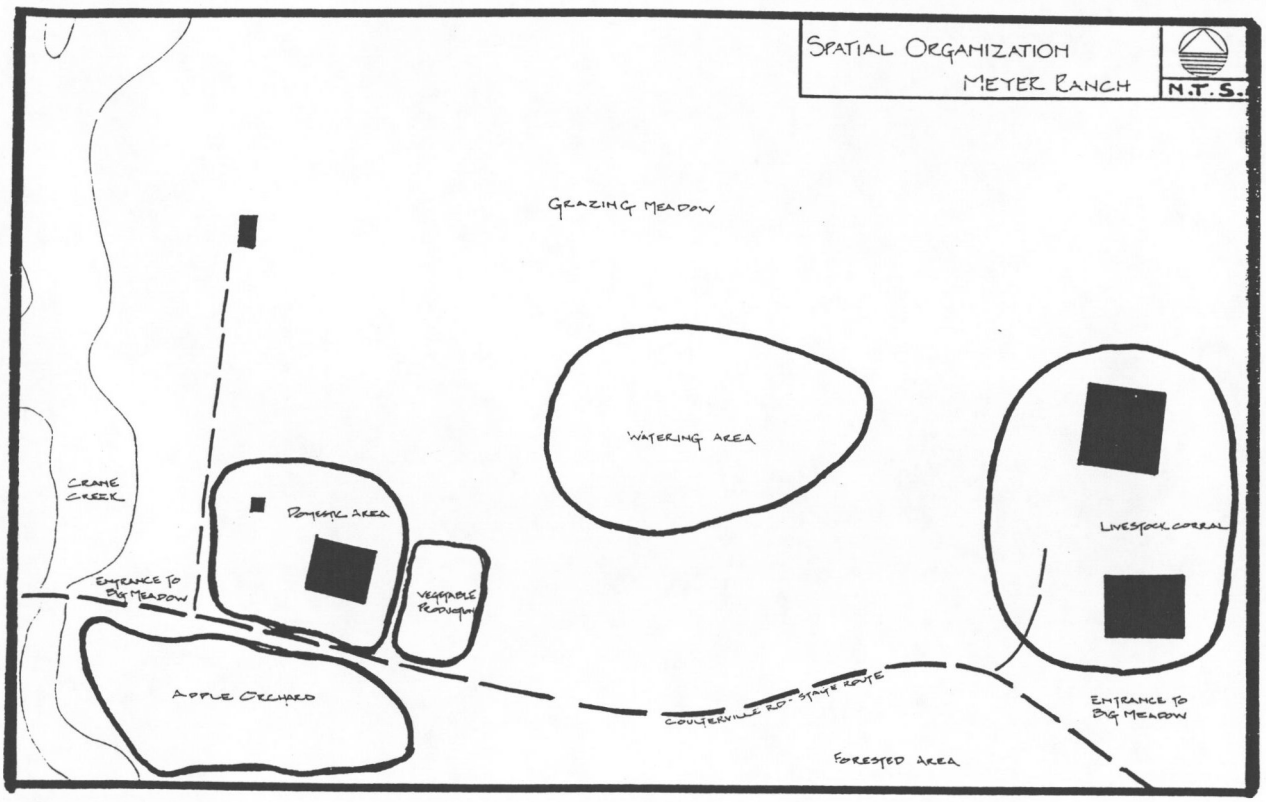
SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

The location of the Meyer Ranch was determined by the topography and vegetative composition of the landscape of Big Meadow. The Meyer family took advantage of a natural clearing which they expanded, an abundant water supply from Crane Creek, and available lumber from the surrounding forests. The former Meyer Ranch had two separate physical orientations determined by the two original primary functions of the property – ranching/agriculture and tourism.

The first and primary function, that of ranching/agriculture, determined the orientation of the barns. The main entrance doors on the two barns faced towards the meadow, which allowed for ease of animal and machinery circulation. The buildings are located along the southern perimeter of the property to insure a high level of meadow utilization for crops and grazing. Three stock ponds are also located between the house and barns for stock use. Approximately 200 yard separate the house and barns, which provided a buffer zone against pollution caused by the ranching operation. Turn of the century photographs suggest that the area to the immediate east of the ranch house, within this buffer zone, was used for growing vegetables.

The second major component of the property that helped to determine its layout was the ranch's early function as a toll gate and a stage stop on the Coulterville Toll Road. Both the house and barns are located near and parallel to the road. Although the current house was built in 1936-38, long after the road became public and the stage stop ceased to function, it was constructed in the same location and orientation as the original building, facing towards the road. Locating at least one structure at each entrance to the Big Meadow along the Coulterville Road perhaps provided a better means of procuring toll payment and a greater exposure to passing tourists. The exact location of ranching versus agricultural infrastructure was not determined in this study.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION



Spatial organization of the Meyer Ranch, depicting the location of existing structures

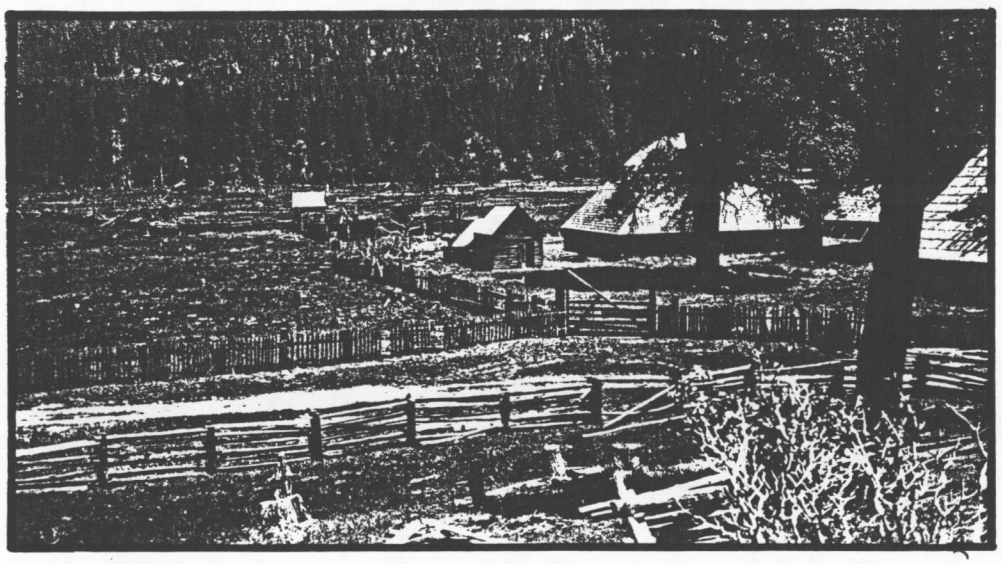
BUILDING DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

South Barn

The south barn is a three-bay, gable-roofed structure. Dimensions of this structure measure approximately 30' x 62'. The frame of the barn consists of hand-hewn timbers arranged in five structural bents, braced on each side with a diagonal timber. Pegged mortise joints were implemented in the construction of this barn. The frame is sheathed with vertical boards. The wood shingled roof is supported by peeled log rafters. Archaeological survey suggests that the eastern side of this barn was used to store blacksmith paraphernalia. This building was rehabilitated to the Secretary of Interiors Standards of Rehabilitation in the summer of 1995.

North Barn

The north barn is a large crib structure measuring approximately 50 feet square. The core of the structure consists of a rectangular log crib, approximately 25 feet in height, which supports the gable portion of the roof. The crib, which was utilized for hay storage, is constructed with peeled logs stacked on alternating tiers, and joined with ve notched corners. There is no chinking between the logs. An open level was provided within the body of the crib for pitching hay into the nearby stalls. Stalls were built on the east, west, and south sides of the crib. Hand-hewn studs and sills were utilized in the construction of this structure. The roof is supported by peeled log rafters, and the barn is sheathed with vertical boards. The original wood shingle roof was covered with corrugated metal in the early 1950s. This building is scheduled for rehabilitation according to the Secretary of Interiors Standards in September of 1996.



Meyer barns, c1930s

SITE CIRCULATION

The Coulterville Road provides the only current vehicular access to the Big Meadow area. Historically used as a stage route from the town of Coulterville to Yosemite Valley, this mostly unpaved road is currently used by both park employees and visitors as a link between the Foresta-Big Meadow area with Coulterville to the west and Big Oak Flat Road to the east. Coulterville Road is also maintained as a fire road. A deck bridge spans Crane Creek on the Coulterville Road to the west of the ranch house.

Historical maps detail a former truck trail utilized by the former owners when tending to the north and east edges of the meadow, as well as the very western boundary of the property.



An informal vehicular access way, south of well house 1996

A pedestrian path, defined primarily by trampled vegetation follows Crane Creek to the north of the ranch house. It appears as if the southern portion of this path leading from the road to the well house has been informally used for vehicular access.

The circulation patterns of the ranch animals between the existing barn structures and the meadow area have not yet been determined. The circulation patterns of the ranch animals and pedestrians between the structures on site is also unclear.

Two culverts are located along the Coulterville Road in the vicinity of the Meyer Ranch. They were most likely installed to direct the irrigation ditch routed off of Crane Creek. The culverts are comprised of corrugated metal tubing. Large stones assist in the routing of irrigation water in the western most culvert.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

South Barn, after 1995 restoration

North Barn, after 1996 restoration

BUILDING DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

Original Ranch House, c1870s-1935

The existing ranch house is the second home to be located on this site. The first Meyer house was built approximately the same time that the barns were constructed on the ranch. George Anderson, who helped in the construction of the barns, also assisted with the construction of this home.

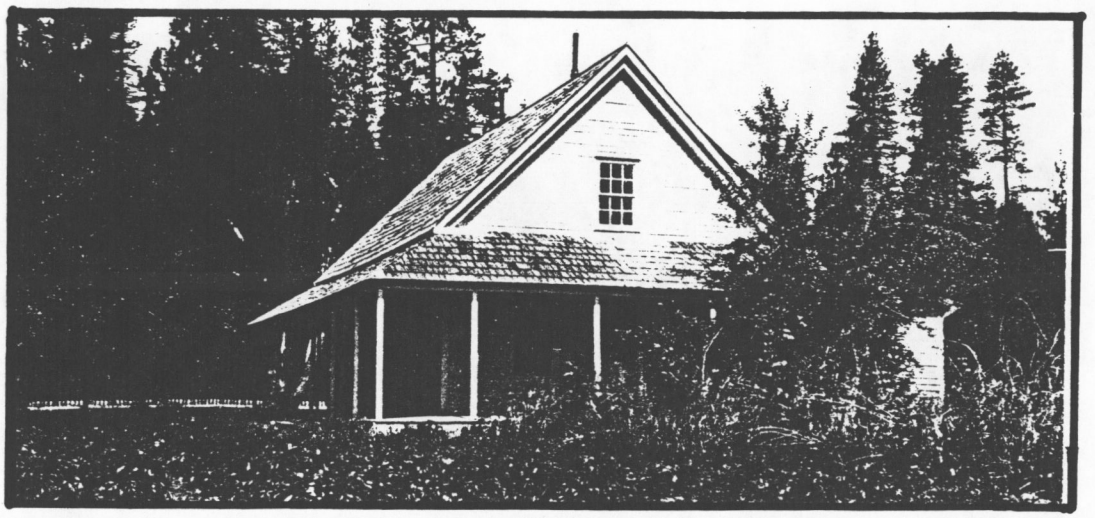
This early house, like its later replacement, was a side-gabled structure, oriented south facing the road. This earlier structure contained stylistic elements reminiscent of Greek Revival architecture, seen in the wide corner boards and the cornice returns. A full one-story porch was located on the south and east facades. The north 1/3 of the east facade porch was enclosed at an unknown date. The siding of this one-and-a-half-story structure was clapboard. The roof was sheathed with cedar shingles. The foundation material of the structure is unknown, but it was probably of roughcut or uncut granite.

The roofing on the south porch was separated from the main roof of the structure, beginning slightly beneath the bottom the edge of the main roof. With only photographic evidence from the 1930s to rely upon, the initial configuration of the north facade is undeterminable. One possibility is that the north facade was a shed roofed addition, attached sometime after construction of the structure but located under the same contiguous roof. It is also possible that the original configuration of the house was that of a salt box style structure, with the rear portion extant prior to the construction of the porches on the other facades. Without further information, this cannot be determined at this point in time.

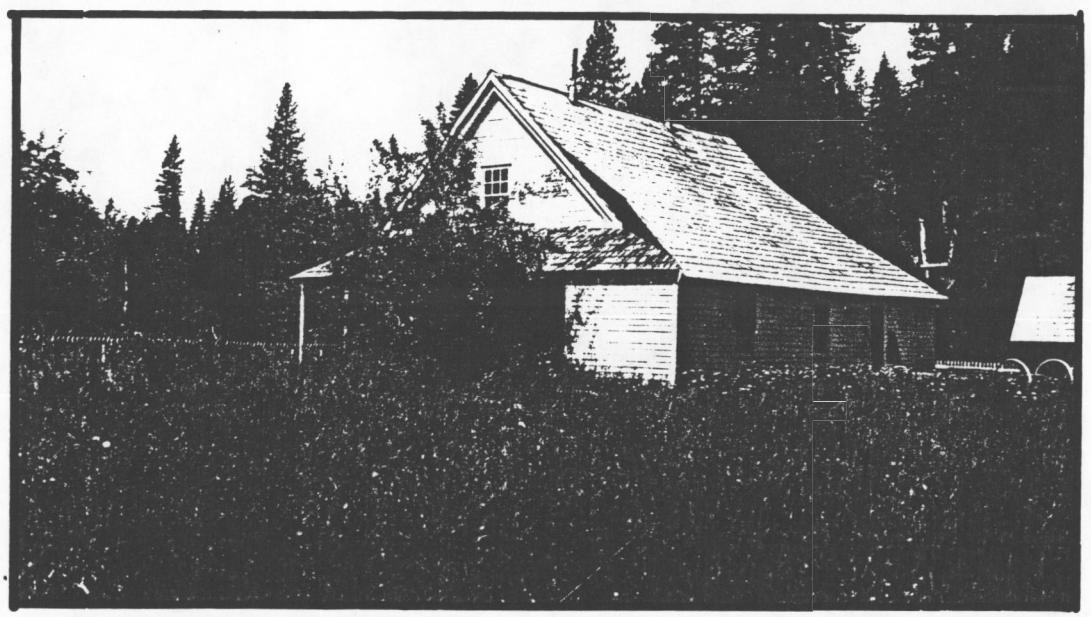
This seven room ranch was equipped with six-over-six double-hung sash. The east facade contained three windows – two on the first story and a third in the gable end. The south facade was six bays wide, arranged similar to a five bay center hall structure, only with the addition of a second door on the west end of the building. The north facade contained two windows on the east end, and one door on the west end of the structure.

In August 1935, sparks from the chimney set fire to the home, burning it to the ground. While neither Elizabeth nor her son George were harmed, all of their possessions were lost, save some bedding. Elizabeth and her son George spent the next two summers in the Rutherford cabin on the edge of the property while George and Horace, Elizabeth's other son, constructed her new home.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION



Ranch House, south and east facades circa 1931



Ranch House, north facade. circa 1931

BUILDING DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

Existing Ranch House, 1938

The new Meyer home was completed in 1938. Elizabeth Meyer's sons wanted her to live at a higher elevation, up on the hill, but she desired to be in the same exact location "...where I could look at the meadow."[6] Thus, the new home was constructed by George and Horace Meyer on the footprint of the earlier structure. This home is the one that still stands on the property.

The existing four room ranch house is constructed of local logs cut in the former McCauley Mill. The logs are laid horizontally and sheathed with clapboard siding. This three bay, side-gabled, one-and-a-half-story structure has one-over-one double-hung sash. Each bay is delineated on the south facade by a vertical post. The upper story windows on both gable ends have been boarded over. The foundation is of rough cut granite and the roofing is currently sheathed with corrugated sheet metal. There has been some sagging on the west end of the structure, evident in the siding as well as in the windows.



North and east facades of the existing ranch house, 1996

BUILDING DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

Ranch Infrastructure

On the east side of the house is a square cement cover at grade level indicating the location of a well or a septic tank. A pipe leading from the house enters it on the west side. The edges of the cement cover are cracked and are pulling away from the main central piece. A board with a chain attached to it is located on the southwest corner, covering the accessible opening. A propane tank is located to the west of the structure. Electricity lines come from the south, and hook up the home with the utilities that service Foresta. Telephone service is also provided by the same utility lines that service Foresta, however these are located underground.

Outbuildings, Existing and Former

Existing

The old well house is still intact on the site. This structure stands approximately 190 feet behind the ranch house, unharmed by the fire of 1990. This structure was initially roofed with cedar shingles and sheathed with clapboards. Currently it is sheathed and roofed with corrugated metal. It appears as if this structure is now used for storage by the National Park Service.

An outhouse is located to the west and slightly north of the ranch house. It is sheathed with clapboards and roofed with corrugated metal. The outhouse is oriented north, with the opening facing the meadow.

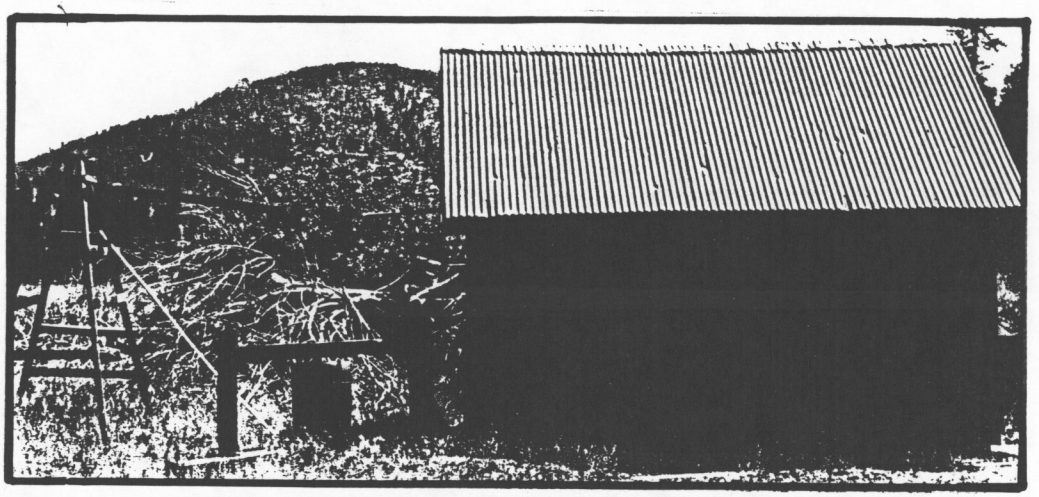
Former

A large number of small outbuildings associated with the agricultural complex, were lost in the fire of 1990 that swept over the meadow. Descriptions and approximate locations of ones found in historic photographs follow.[7]

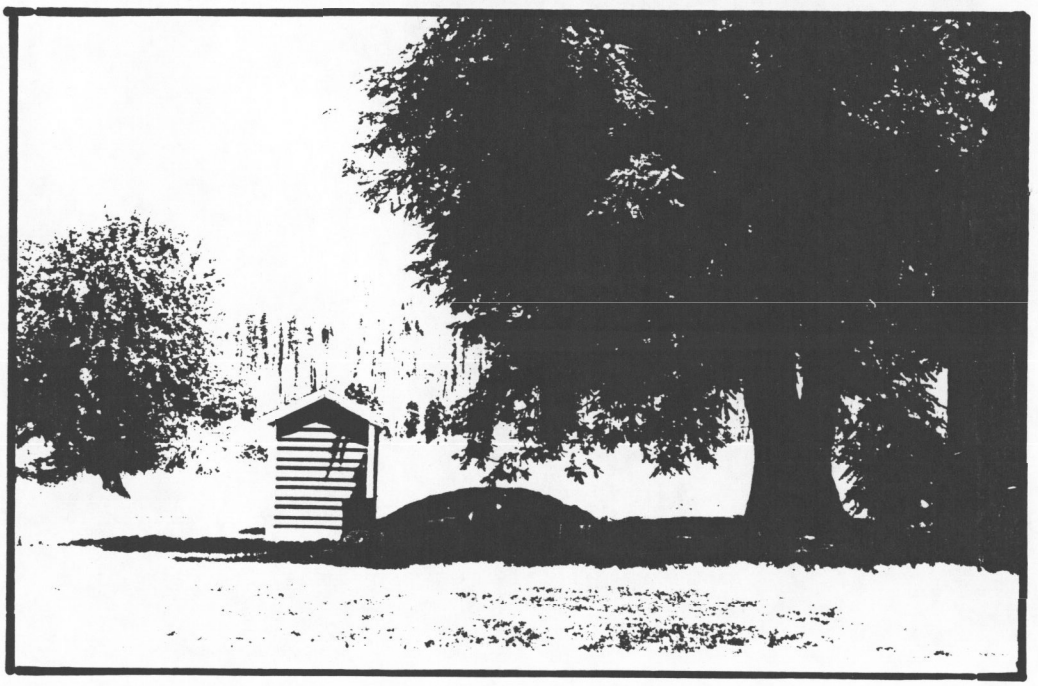
Two one-story outbuildings were located on the west side of the north barn, as seen in photographs from the mid 1930s. A small log structure was located just to the south of the north facade of the north barn. This structure had a gable roof that was sheathed with cedar shingles. The gable ends of the structure faced north and south. A slightly taller, narrower structure was located directly behind this one, oriented in the same direction. This structure was sheathed with clapboards and had a cedar shingle roof. At this point in time their functions are unknown.

Another one-story, gable roofed outbuilding was located northwest of the north barn. This structure was oriented east to west, unlike other nearby outbuilding structures. This structure was sheathed with vertical boards, and had a cedar shingle roof. A large slaughter wheel was attached to the north end of the structure. This equipment was utilized for stretching and drying out hides. This structure was not lost to the fire but actually removed sometime between the time the photographs of the ranch were taken in 1930s and prior to Elizabeth Meyer's death in 1952.[8]

BUILDING DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION



Well house, west facade with agricultural infrastructure 1996



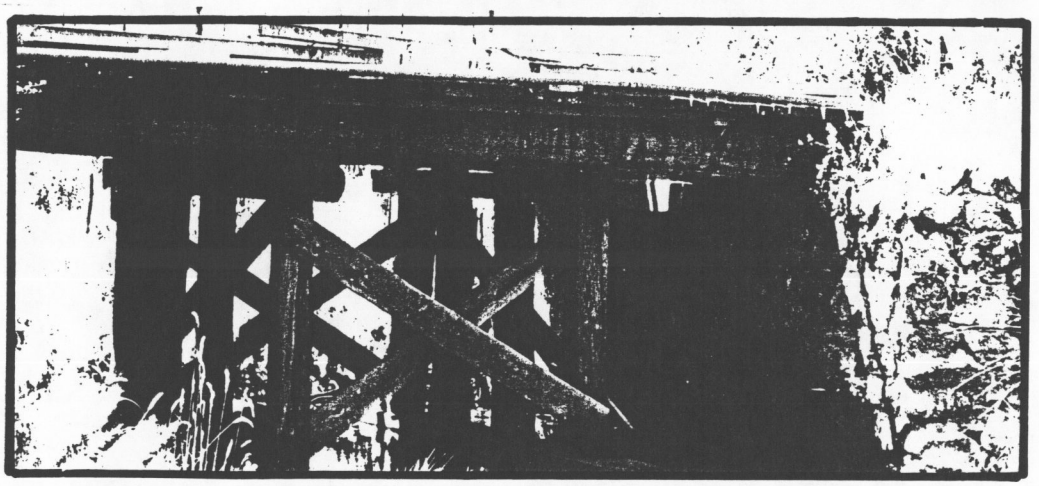
Out house south facade, to the west of ranch house 1996

ADDITIONAL SITE FEATURES

Coulterville Road Bridge

The first bridge to cross Crane Creek on the western boundary of the former Meyer Ranch along the Coulterville Road was originally a small log structure. This bridge was presumably erected at the time of the construction of the Coulterville Toll Road.

The National Park Service began working on a badly needed new crossing in 1934, but did not complete this new bridge until 1938. The replacement bridge is the one currently in use. This bridge is constructed of wood decking set on two stone piers. Three layers of decking are currently laid directly on top of each other, the lower deteriorating layers acting as support for the current top layer of decking. Wood truss work is centrally located underneath the decking for added support. The piers, constructed into the hillside, are of uncut, uncoursed fieldstone, laid with mortar. The piers are failing due to cracking and mortar failure. This failure is most likely due to the freeze/thaw action of the soil.



Coulterville Bridge, north side, 1996

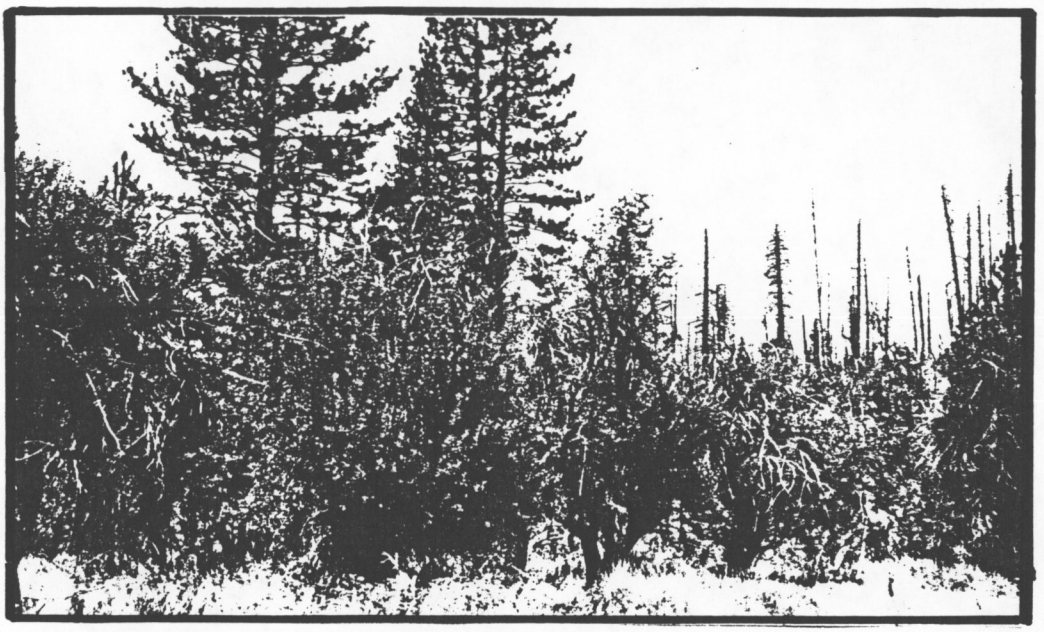
ADDITIONAL SITE FEATURES

Apple Orchard

No specific information has been found concerning the introduction of apple trees into the Big Meadow. On site observation of size and condition has suggested that the trees are at least one hundred years old – perhaps planted when the first homestead claim was made. This however is a somewhat inaccurate method of dating. Through a study of cultivars grown, the approximate age of the orchard can be more accurately determined.

The planting of fruit orchards on the land that now comprises Yosemite National Park was once very common. In order to ensure the protection of homesteading rights, five years of cultivation or residence upon the land had to be proven. The planting of an apple orchard was a relatively easy way to illustrate an intent to remain permanently.

Although other fruit was grown in the valleys of Yosemite, apples were in the greatest demand. The production of cider was extremely important, especially in areas like the Big Meadow where tourism was a source of income. It has been suggested that cider, as a beverage of hospitality, probably survived longer at Yosemite than anywhere else outside of Appalachia.



Apple orchard, 1996.

ADDITIONAL SITE FEATURES

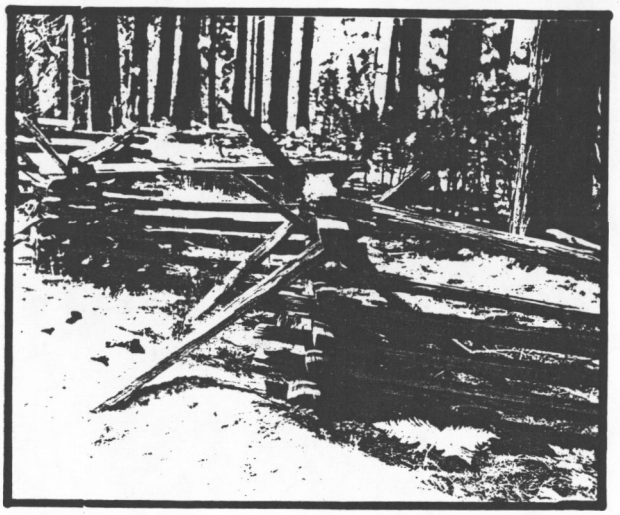
Fencing

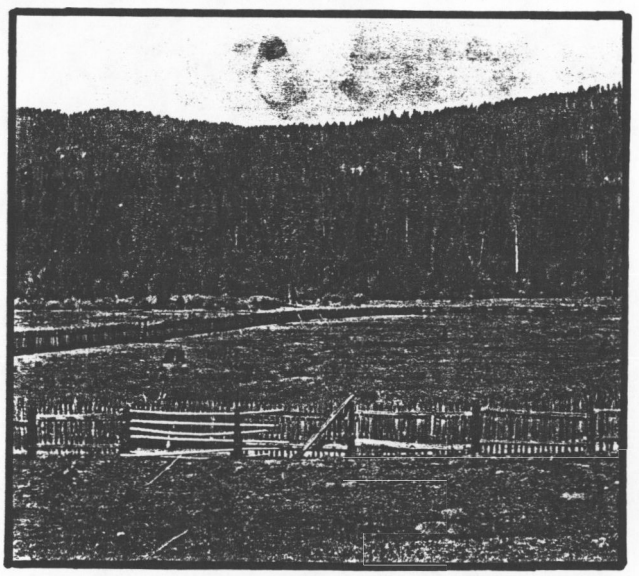
During the early days of the Meyer ranch, it has been estimated that George Meyer and his partner Peter Mieson may have split over 10,000 feet of rails for fencing on their ranch.[9] In June of 1938, six different varieties of fencing on the Meyer ranch were photographically recorded by Ansel Adams.[10]

With park ownership of the land, existing fencing around and within the Big Meadow was left to deterioration and not maintained as well as it was while the ranch was a working agricultural complex. As a result of the fire of 1990, practically all of the fencing within the meadow was lost. Only a few burned fence posts remain within the meadow itself.

A portion of picket fencing at the front of the home, on the north side of the Coulterville Road, is still intact, albeit in poor condition. This segment stretches from the telephone pole west, a distance of fifteen feet.

Some fence segments and posts still exist in the vicinity of the barns. Fence segments and posts along the east side of the barn complex serve as a physical reminder of the separation between the complex and the rest of the meadow that once existed. The longest stretch of relatively intact fencing is located to the south of the barn area, leading towards the Coulterville Road. For approximately twenty feet it runs parallel to the road before it ceases, perhaps the result of flames or earlier neglect.

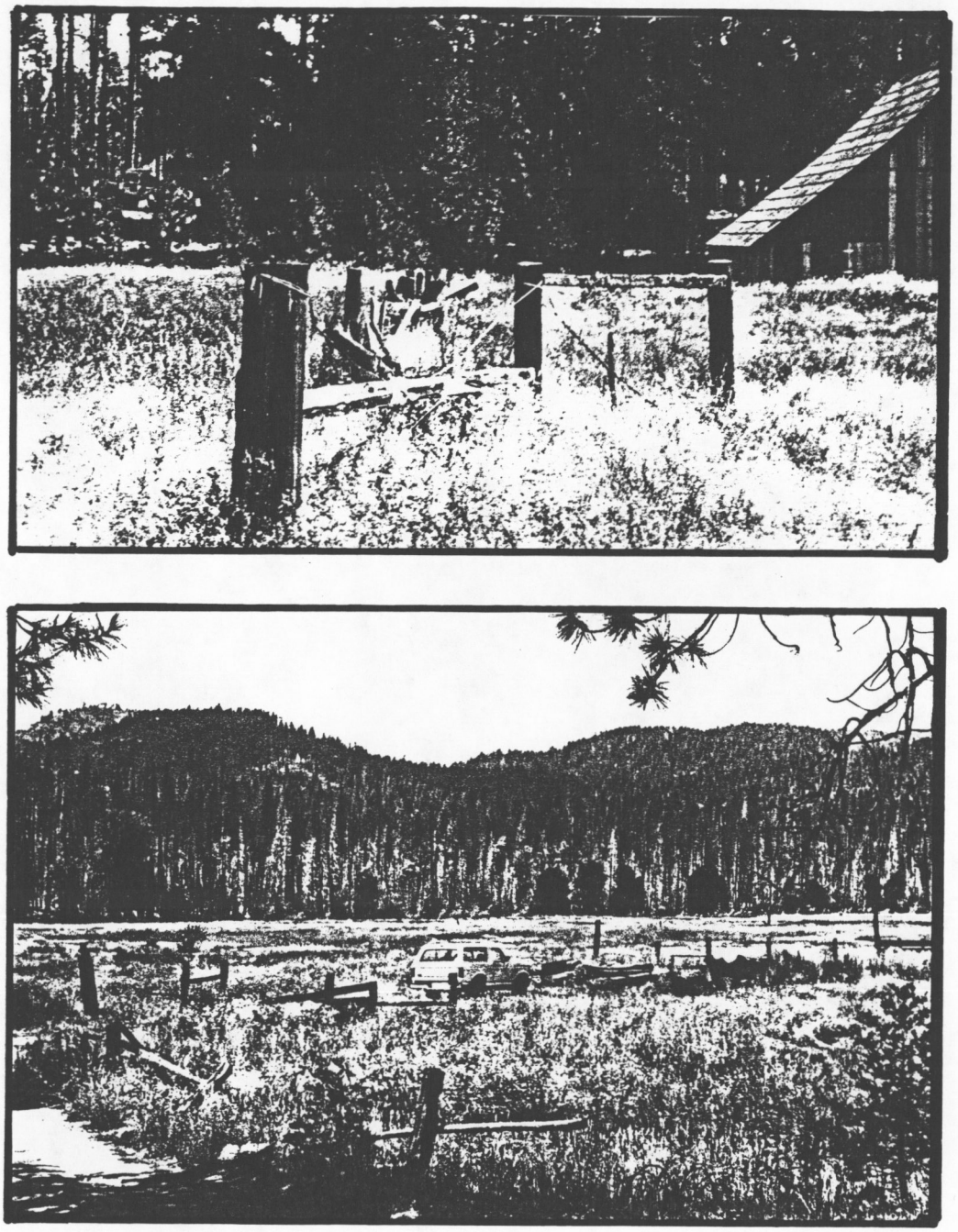




Former fencing on the Meyer Ranch

ADDITIONAL SITE FEATURES

Existing Fencing

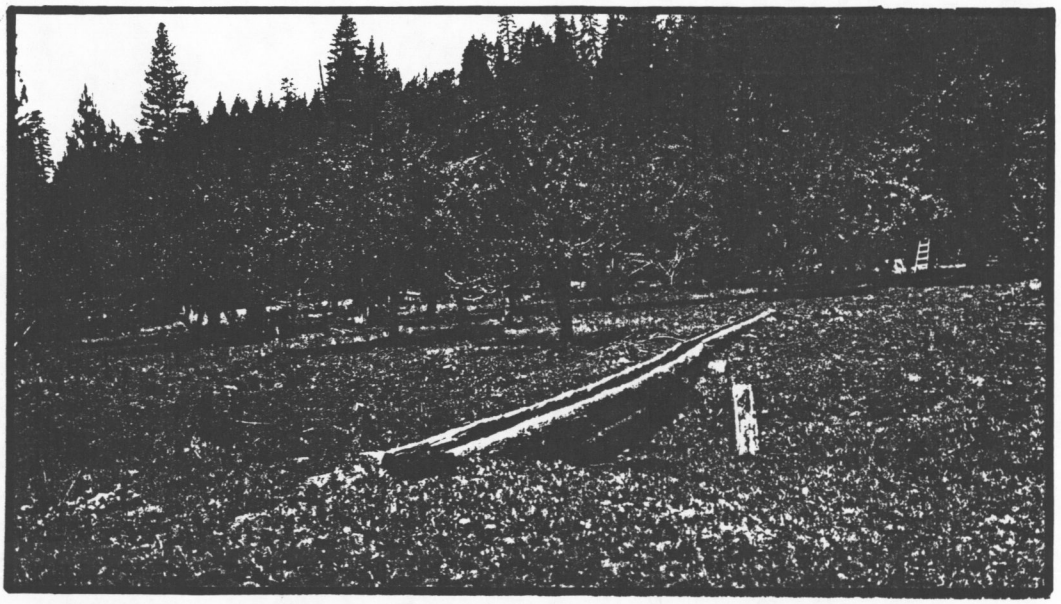


Photographs of existing fencing, 1996

IRRIGATION DESIGN AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Within the basin of the Big Meadow, seeps and springs are common. During the Meyer residence, these natural drainage patterns were altered through the use of irrigation ditches. The flow of water was directed throughout most of the meadow so as to obtain the highest and best possible use of this resource.

Stock ponds were also created in the central, low lying areas of the meadow. In their unmaintained state, these ponds are filling in with wild grasses.

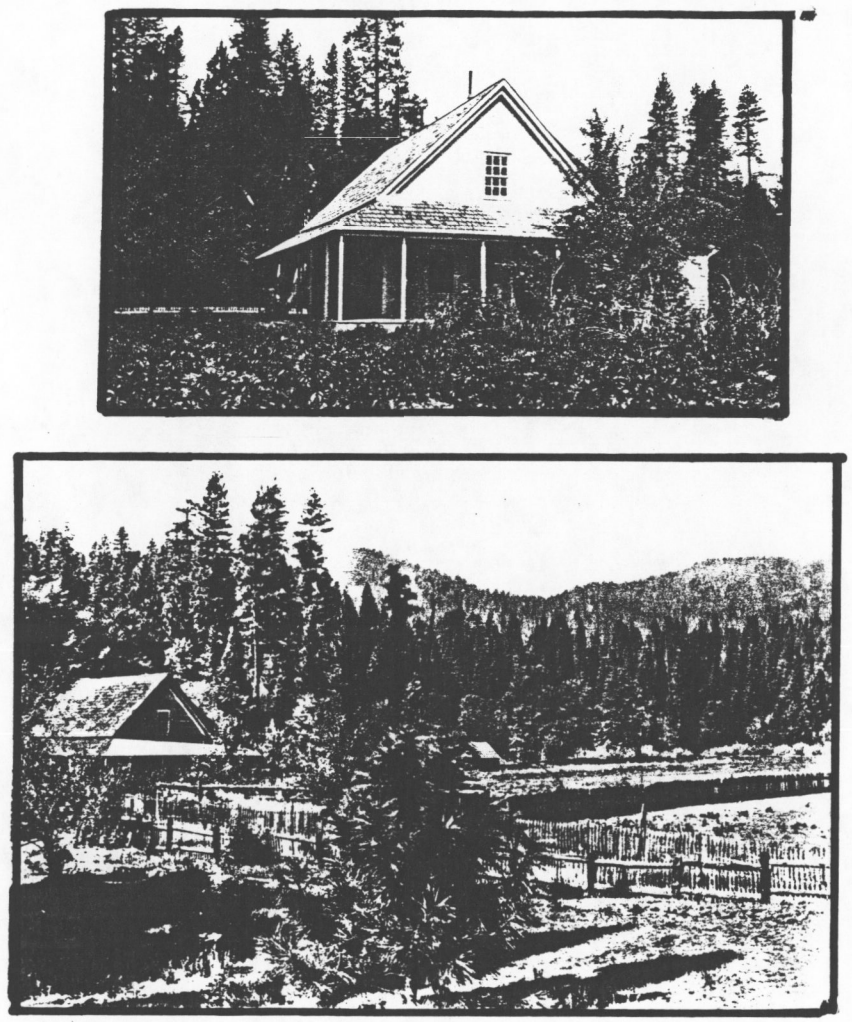


The apple orchard with a hand hewn log flume in foreground, c1930s

VEGETATION

The Big Meadow is located in the Yellow Pine Forest vegetative community characteristic of elevations between 4000-6000 feet within the Central Western Sierra Nevada. The Big Meadow area also contains non-native species introduced to support livestock and agriculture. The following is a list of plants, located within the study site, according to their botanical form.

The meadow, while occurring naturally, has been altered to a great extent by human intervention–particularly during the Meyer ranching operation. During this period the meadow was enlarged through the cutting of trees, such as the Quercus occurring in the transition zones between the meadow forbs and the evergreen vegetation on the edges of the meadow, to increase the amount of land under tillage and grazing.



Meyer Ranch, c1930s. Notice the vegetative growth to the immediate east of the ranch house

VEGETATION

SAMPLE VEGETATION OF BIG MEADOW AND SURROUNDING TRANSITION ZONES

The following vegetation was found growing in or near the Big Meadow in July of 1996.

Trees

Incense cedar	*Libocedrus decurrens*
Sugar pine	*Pinus lambertiana*
Ponderosa pine	*Pinus ponderosa*
Jeffery pine	*Pinus jeffreyi*
Canyon oak	*Quercus chrysolepis*
Black oak	*Quercus kelloggii*
Coulter pine	*Pinus coulter*

Understory shrubs

Elderberry	*Sambucus*
Manzanita	*Arctostaphylos patula*
Mountain misery	*Chamaebatia foliosa*
Whitethorn	*Ceanothus leucodermis*

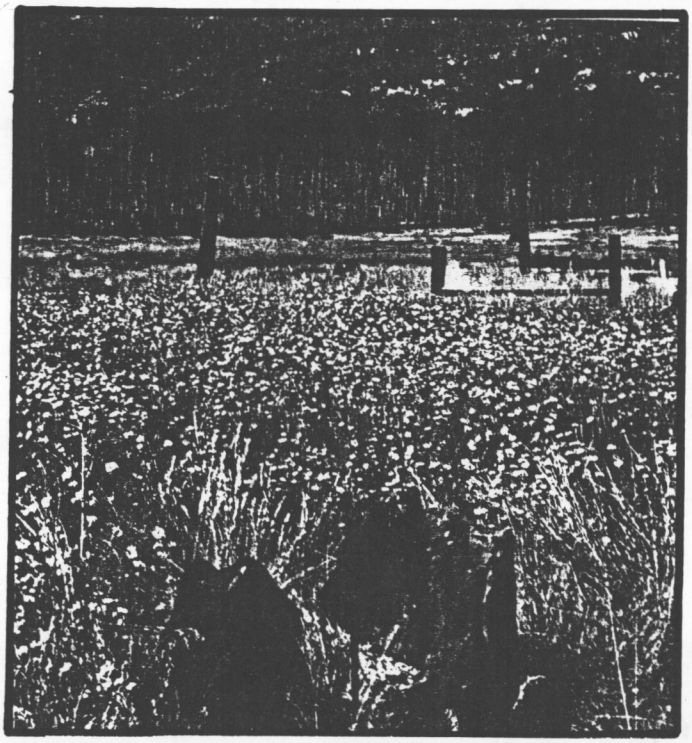
Forbs and Grasses

Achillea lanulosa
Anaphalis margaritecea
Cirsium drummondii
Solidago californica
Stephanomeria
Cinquefoil
Carex
Aster
Rye
Asclepias

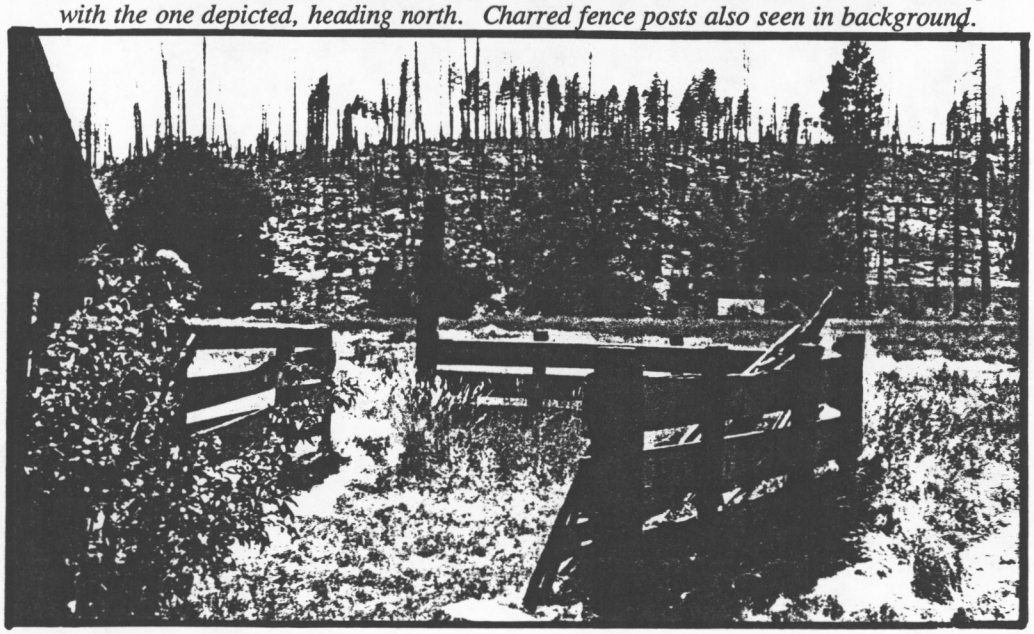
Crops Grown during Meyer Ranch Period

Alfalfa
Hay
Potatoes
berries
apples
produce within vegetable garden

VEGETATION



Burned Black Oak (Quercus kelloggii) stump in foreground, west of the barns. Other burned stumps are aligned with the one depicted, heading north. Charred fence posts also seen in background.



Elderberry shrub (Sambucus) at the northwest corner of the north barn. The only other elderberry within the meadow is located to the immediate north of the well house.

HUMAN LAND UTILIZATION RESPONSE TO NATURAL FEATURES

Human land adaptation has been integral to the history of the Foresta and the Big Meadow area for over 2000 years. Early hunting and gathering Native American groups utilized the abundant resources of the small meadow. The acorns and fruits of the oak, manzanita and other trees and shrubs provided rich food sources, as did the abundant game in the region. These resources combined with a comfortable elevation made the Big Meadow, or O'Pim as it was named by the Miwok, ideal for long term encampments.

Although Euro-Americans had entered the Meadow area prior to the construction of the Coulterville Road, their impact on the meadow environment as hunters and fishers, was negligible. With the construction of the Coulterville Road in the early 1870s, the meadow was opened up for greater use by Euro-American homesteaders. The Coulterville Road, which borders the south and the west edges of the Big Meadow, led from the Yosemite Valley to the town of Coulterville. With the construction of the road, the first European American homesteaders settled within and around the Big Meadow.

In the early years of ranching operations on the Big Meadow, the existing meadow was slowly enlarged. Oak trees, manzanita, and other deciduous material on the periphery were removed to provide a larger tract of cleared land. The main crops grown within the meadow included hay, barley, alfalfa and potatoes. An apple orchard was also located on site. In addition to agricultural pursuits, cattle and hogs were raised.

Due to the large number of uses attributed to this parcel of land, fencing was abundant and was altered on a regular basis for a variety of reasons. During the days of the stage stop operation, fencing of different types was built to separate stage company horses from the ranches own horses, Dairy cows were also kept separate from beef cattle. U.S. Calvary regulations during the Army administration required all cattle to be fenced in. Livestock had to be kept out of the adjacent crops.

From the mid 1920s, until the mid 1960s most of the agricultural production of vegetable crops ceased and the ranch became almost entirely invested in cattle. Hay was cut on site for the cattle. Vegetables however, were no longer cultivated for more than personal utilization. With the change from mixed pursuits to purely livestock the associated agricultural infrastructure, such as fencing and circulation patterns, were altered. Since its acquisition of the property, the park service has not used the ranch site for any agricultural purposes. However with the restoration of one of the remaining barns completed and the restoration of the second structure underway, it is possible that the barn structures and the meadow will be utilized once more.

VEGETATION
MEYER RANCH

SCALE: 1"=60'-0"

NOTES:
-
ALL TREE DIAMETERS APP
ALL VEGETATION LOCATIONS APPROXIMATE
MAP BASED ON SITE OBSERVATION, PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESEARCH MATERIALS
FOR ADDITIONAL PLANT SPECIES SEE TEXT PLANT LIST

DRAWN BY JENNIFER HANNA

BLACK OAK
8-12" DIA.

WELL HOUSE

BLACK OAK
18" DIA.

APPLE TREE
1' DIA.

CRANE CREEK

DOMESTIC AREA

EXISTING VEGETATION SAME AS MEADOW MOWED TO 3" PREVIOUSLY CROPPED TO APPROX. 6" (PHOTO. 1931)

CURRENTLY LOW DAMP AREA HISTORICALLY USED AS A STOCK WATERING AREA

RANCH OUTBUILDINGS NO LONGER EXISTING

BARN

FORMER LOCATION OF BLACK OAK APPROX. DIA. 24" (PHOTO. 1941)

LOCUST DIA. 12"

EXISTING AREA OF RYE PREVIOUSLY USED FOR FRUIT/VEG. PRODUCTION (PHOTO. 1931)

COULTER PINE
2'-6" DIA

BIG MEADOW

ON SITE EVIDENCE OF TREE STUMPS DIA. APPROX. 20" (PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE C. 1930)

BARN

PONDEROSA PINE

BLACK OAK
20" DIA.

PERENNIAL IRRIGATION DITCH

SEDGES

INCENSE CEDAR
8" DIA.

IRRIGATION DITCH

8-12" DIA. PINES

EXISTING APP ORCHARD

MEADOW GRASSES & FORBS

NEW GROWTH PINE
1"-4" DIA.