

LeConte Memorial Lodge A Sierra Club Legacy

by Elaine Gorman

As I drove on Highway 120, approaching Yosemite Valley, my first view of the Merced River Canyon was breathtaking. And although I have been on this route many times, the soaring granite walls above the churning water of the Merced still fills me with awe. No wonder the turnouts were filled with visitors with cameras, enjoying the waterfalls and canyon vistas! Dogwoods rimmed the roadsides and trails with cascades of white blooms. The unusually warm mid-May weather seemed to fill everyone with a heightened sense of happiness and adventure.

The Mother Lode Chapter was well-represented during my week of service at LeConte Memorial Lodge (LML) — Jim and Anita from Yokuts group, Reuben from Sacramento group, and me from Tuolumne group. Our fifth volunteer, Stanton, is a member of the Redwood chapter. We welcomed visitors to LML, helping curator Bonnie Gisel to educate visitors to Yosemite, encouraging them

to check out the exhibits on Joseph LeConte, John Muir, Yosemite, Sierra Club, and climate change. “Grub” the bear continues to collect thoughts and signatures from visitors as they add strips of green paper “fur” to the large decoupage structure created by Bonnie. Families enjoyed the children’s nature corner, where kids are able to draw, read, and play with nature-inspired toys and games. If a visitor had a question that we didn’t know, a quick look in one of the hundreds of books in the library could usually supply the answer.

During my time in Yosemite Valley, as I walked along the trails, relaxed in camp, or spent time at LML, I kept thinking about efforts to protect this special place, Yosemite National Park. How the forethought of John Muir, Joseph LeConte, and other early Sierra Club members helped to preserve it for future generations. Muir and LeConte met in Yosemite Valley during LeConte’s first visit to Yosemite with his UC Berkeley

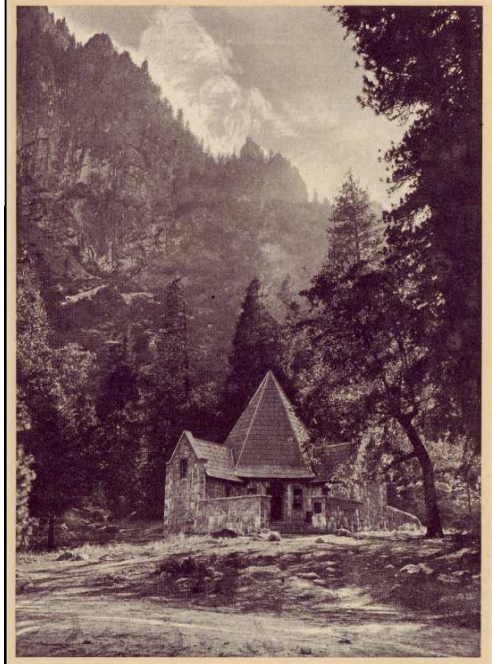


PHOTO OF LECONTE LODGE BY ANSEL ADAMS

students. They became fast friends and scientific collaborators on theories of geologic & glacial processes. Muir and LeConte were charter members of the Sierra Club, and LML was built to honor the achievements of Dr. LeConte. Dr. Gisel and Sierra Club volunteers continue the tradition of education and advocacy at LeConte Memorial Lodge.

On my last day, I took a final walk from LML, through Housekeeping and on the “secret” path that crosses the Merced River, heads toward Yosemite Village, and loops back to LML via Sentinel Bridge. On this little-used trail, I hoped for a glimpse of a coyote or some other wildlife. Under a bower of big-leaf maple, I saw a cluster of bleeding hearts, the beautiful dark pink blooms catching my attention. As I admired them, I thought again about the achievements of the Sierra Club and its members, how their dedication and efforts have allowed me to be able to experience beautiful places like Yosemite and to explore Sierra Nevada wilderness. It was appropriate that my wish for a final wild encounter turned out to be the bleeding heart, as my heart yearns for a healthy planet, full of wildlife and wilderness. There is so much work to be done

