



Where to Go and What to Do in Yosemite National Park

May 23, 2012 - June 26, 2012

Yosemite Guide



LeConte Memorial Lodge

First Permanent Visitor Center in Yosemite Valley & Home of the Sierra Club in Yosemite National Park



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LeConte Memorial Lodge*

Before Yosemite National Park undertook the construction of a visitor center and before the National Park Service was created in 1916, the Sierra Club, in 1903, built LeConte Memorial Lodge, the first permanent public information center in Yosemite Valley. The Memorial honors the life and legacy of Dr. Joseph LeConte, founding member and board member of the Sierra Club; professor of Geology at the University of California, Berkeley; and colleague of John Muir. LeConte supported Muir's ideas about the glaciation of Yosemite Valley at a time when Josiah Whitney, director of the California Geological Survey, not only disagreed with Muir's findings but went so far as to call him a sheepherding ignoramus.

Open to all Yosemite National Park visitors from May 1 until September 30, Wednesday through Sunday, from 10 am until 4 pm, the Memorial offers interpretive exhibits that showcase the life of LeConte, the history of Yosemite National Park including the significant work undertaken by Muir and Robert Underwood Johnson to create Yosemite National Park, the Sierra Club's environmental victories, and climate change. In addition there is a natural

history library and a children's activity corner. Free programs are offered Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings at 8:00 pm and present natural history and environmental issues; storytelling; concerts; art activities; narrative hiking videos; the history of Yosemite Valley and Yosemite National Park and the many individuals whose memory we have not forgotten—including Galen Clark, Theodore Roosevelt, and, of course, John Muir. The Sierra Club, created in 1892 to assist in the preservation of the newly created Yosemite National Park, founded in 1890, established a presence in Yosemite Valley in 1898. Renting two rooms in a small cottage built by Adolph Sinning, a Yosemite wood carver, the Sierra Club "Reading Room" provided photographs, an herbarium [a collection of dried native plants], maps, and books, and enabled the Club to assist visitors and work with authorities in preserving the Park. When LeConte died in Yosemite Valley in July 1901, just as the Sierra Club was about to embark from Curry Village on its first High Sierra trip (today called "Outings"), a decision was made to build LeConte Memorial Lodge not far from where LeConte died. The \$4,500 necessary to fund the construction of the Memorial was contributed by faculty, alumni, and students from the University of California; faculty from Stanford

University; prominent San Francisco merchants; geologists and mining engineers; and LeConte relatives and friends. The Sierra Club levied a \$1.00 assessment on each of its 764 members to help fund the construction.

The design for LeConte Memorial Lodge is attributed to John White, who was influenced by his brother-in-law Bernard Maybeck. Maybeck, who developed the "First Bay Tradition" of architecture, was renowned for incorporating the stylistic qualities of Gothic Tudor Revival and the Arts and Crafts movement. He proposed that building design should be derived from native building materials and that the site location should determine the design of the building. Maybeck favored sharply pitched roofs, high central spaces without horizontal ties, and a massive fireplace that dominated a focal wall. LeConte Memorial Lodge captures these elements, and adopted the verticality, color, and texture of Yosemite Valley. Featuring rough-hewn granite masonry, a steep-pitched wooden gabled roof, exposed hammer beams, and scissor trusses, the building lends itself to lofty thoughts and inspiration.

Constructed at the base of Glacier Point in Curry Village, at what was in 1903 the northern terminus of the John Muir Trail, the Memorial was

dedicated on July 3, 1904. Moved to its present location on Southside Drive in 1919, the facility has been guided by a succession of curators. Perhaps the most noteworthy was a young Ansel Adams, who joined the Sierra Club in 1919 to become the caretaker from 1920 until 1923.

Today, LeConte Memorial Lodge is owned by the National Park Service and the Sierra Club operates the building under an agreement with the NPS as a public service with public access to all visitors to Yosemite National Park. Designated a National Historic Landmark in 1987, the Memorial was the first center of naturalist activities and lectures for Yosemite visitors. Through interpretive environmental education exhibits, programs, and projects, the legacy of stewardship continues today. Through the service of Sierra Club volunteers, LeConte Memorial Lodge opens each season to welcome visitors to Yosemite National Park and continues to inspire generations to enjoy, explore, and protect the natural world. In keeping with the goals of the National Park Service, LeConte Memorial Lodge is dedicated to serving as a model for the preservation and conservation of America's natural and historic resources.