

A Badly Researched History of Yosemite National Park's Giant Sequoia Trees

Yosemite National Park was the first piece of land to be protected by the state of California. That is, in as much as a piece of land can be protected by the people who first stole it from people who were already protecting it.

It is an impressive display of stark rock faces, brilliant meadows, wildlife, and spectacular forest. At the heart of these forests, we find the subject of today's story, the giant sequoia tree.

These trees are rare. This is the only part of the world they have grown naturally. They are tied to this land like heartstrings hold onto old lovers. Like even if you uproot them and plant them far away they will still grow toward the light of their former homes.

Because they have been protected they have grown much older than most trees you have known. If you asked how old, I couldn't be sure exactly, but imagine that your great great grandmother got her first period when the tree had already hit adulthood.

You know she thought she was dying at first, your great great grandmother. She didn't know of the development of women, her mother often absent. She spent the first few days hiding stains on black cloth knickers until she bled through the back of her school dress and the sick-nurse took her aside to explain what was happening.

The trees knew nothing of this. They were developing too, stretching roots deep into earth, never to have it explained. Instinctually knowing the steps they must go through in order to grow up. They are different like this, trees and women.

One of the reasons people come to see these trees is the sheer size of them. I couldn't tell you the exact height but I could tell you about when I was a child and I tried to climb a rock face behind our property. My mother's friend was visiting with her two boys who were in their teens. I desperately wanted them to like me, so when they decided they were climbing the rock face I said I would too. I was fine until I got to the top, then the sheer enormity of it overwhelmed me and I had to be carried back to the bottom by the teens. I cried the whole way down. When I look to the top of a giant sequoia, the same feeling wells in my stomach.

Similarly, I do not know about the cultural or spiritual practices surrounding these trees, but I do know that when I am walking through the forest surrounded by these wooden beasts, I get the same feeling I have had in churches and places of worship, the quiet dignity of them lulling me into a kind of awed respect.

The rangers and townsfolk of this area have spent a long time perfecting the protection of this place and these trees. They nurtured and cajoled the trees and flora into flourishing, a trial by error that occasionally did more harm than good. At one point they nearly loved these giant trees into extinction. Amongst their plan to protect them were fire safety measures, to stop the bushfires that are frequent in this part of the state. It took a long while of these trees dying quiet deaths for them to realise that fire was a vital part of the sequoia's reproduction process, that it needed the flames to release the seeds from their pods.

They are similar like this, trees and women. Sometimes you have to burn everything, in order to keep going.