

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 14000417

Date Listed: 7/18/2014

May Lake High Sierra Camp  
Property Name

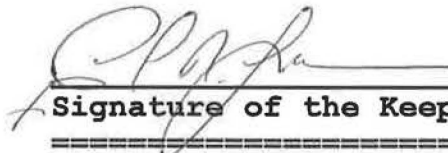
Tuolumne  
County

CA  
State

Yosemite National Park MPS  
Multiple Name

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

7/18/2014  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

=====

Amended Items in Nomination:

**Location:**

The Street Location is revised to read: *Eastern shore of May Lake.*

**Bibliographical References:**

The property was not previously determined eligible by the Keeper of the National Register. [The determination was made by the NPS for compliance purposes only.]

These clarifications were confirmed with the NPS FPO office.

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DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name May Lake High Sierra Camp

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number N/A

N/A	not for publication
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city or town Yosemite National Park (YOSE)

N/A	vicinity
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state California code CA county Tuolumne code 109 zip code 95389

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this  nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local

Adrian A. Burtin, Deputy FPO June 4, 2014  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

National Park Service  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Carol Roland-Nawi 7/19/2013  
Signature of commenting official Date

California Office of Historic Preservation  
State Historic Preservation Officer Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register  determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register  removed from the National Register

other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] 7/10/2014  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action



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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
 (Check only one box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
13	6	buildings
		sites
3		structures
		objects
16	6	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

Historic Resources of Yosemite National Park,  
 California

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

**Current Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/camp  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

DOMESTIC/camp  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

**Materials**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: Rustic  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

foundation: concrete/stone/wood  
 walls: canvas/stone/wood frame with stone  
           veneer/wood  
 roof: canvas/metal/log/shake  
 other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### Summary Paragraph

May Lake High Sierra Camp (May Lake Camp) sits at an elevation of 9,270 feet in Yosemite National Park and is one of six High Sierra Camps connected by the High Sierra Camp Loop Trail. One of six camps that comprise a loop system, May Lake Camp is approximately 7.9 miles southwest of Glen Aulin Camp and 8 miles northwest of Sunrise Camp. Located in a grove of hemlock trees on the east shore of May Lake, the camp faces Mount Hoffman, an impressive peak that is the geographic center of the Park. Granite outcroppings and ridgelines are prominent features of the setting, and the camp is located along the base of a granite ridge that runs parallel to the eastern edge of the site. The ground within and around the camp is strewn with granite boulders and rocks. Native granite is used heavily in the construction of the buildings and site features; it defines pathways, marks the campfire ring, and is incorporated into building foundations and walls.

Each camp provides beds in cement-floored canvas tents, eating facilities in combination cook house tent diners, hot showers, and flush toilets. Dormitory-type guest tent cabins hold four to six people, usually men and women separately, with special arrangements possible for family groups or couples. While open in the summer months, the camp accommodates 36 guests and consists of five permanent buildings (stone cook house, lantern shed, propane shed, comfort station, and dry storage shed) and fourteen seasonal buildings (tent diner, tent bath house, five employee tent cabins, and seven guest tent cabins). Two permanent buildings, eleven seasonal buildings, and three structures contribute to the May Lake High Sierra Camp Historic District.

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### Narrative Description

#### LOCATION & SETTING

May Lake Camp is located in Yosemite National Park in the Sierra Nevada. The camp sits at the east shore of May Lake opposite Mount Hoffman, which reaches 10,850 feet in elevation. May Lake provides a beautiful setting as well as recreational opportunities, such as boating and fishing, and drinking water.

The camp is located along the base of a granite ridge that runs parallel to the eastern edge of the site. The ground within and around the camp is strewn with granite boulders and rocks. Native tree cover consists principally of mountain hemlock (*tsuga mertensiana*) with some fir and pine species. Native granite is used heavily in the construction of May Lake Camp; it defines pathways, marks the campfire ring, and is incorporated into the building foundations. Two of the buildings, the stone cook house and comfort station, have walls made of native granite. Local timber is also used in the construction of the camp. The stone cook house has quarter-log roofing, and logs are used to define the pathways and provide seating.

Located in the High Sierras at an elevation of 9,270 feet, summers in May Lake are short, moist, and cool; winters are long, cold, and wet. Snow usually begins to fall in November and may accumulate as much as six-feet deep.<sup>1</sup> Temperatures range from approximately 11 to 40° Fahrenheit in the winter to 33 to 75° Fahrenheit in the summer. Heavy winter snowfalls dictate the dates the High Sierra Camps are in operation as well as the building types used and seasonal

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<sup>1</sup> "Vegetation Overview," *Yosemite National Park*, 15 September 2010, <[www.nps.gov/archive/yose/.../vegetation.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/yose/.../vegetation.htm)>.

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nature of the camps. Because it is at a higher elevation than some of the other High Sierra Camps, May Lake Camp sometimes opens later. The camp's permanent buildings have gabled or shed roofs, which shed snow and rain away from entrances. Warm summer weather allows for the use of uninsulated tent cabins equipped with stoves for colder days and nights. The tent cabins are deconstructed every fall, leaving only the concrete foundations.

From the ridgeline east of the camp, there is a spectacular view through Tenaya Canyon. The view spans from Half Dome to Tenaya Lake including many mountain peaks such as: Mount Dana, Mount Gibbs, Mount Lyell, Cathedral Peak, Clouds Rest, Mount Clark, Half Dome, Vogelsang, Mount Florence, and Tenaya Lake. Historically, people gathering on the ridge could see the evening Firefall, the drop of hot embers from Glacier Point, which was a summer ritual at Yosemite from 1872 to 1968. Today, this view from the ridge line continues to be popular with guests during sunrise and sunset.

## PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

May Lake Camp has provided guests shelter, bedding, prepared meals, and showers in the High Sierras since 1938. The High Sierra Camp Loop was established to provide overnight accommodations for park visitors who wished to visit the backcountry without carrying their own supplies. This convenience attracted large numbers of visitors to the backcountry who, through park interpretive programs, learned about conservation and NPS policies in a relaxed atmosphere.

The idea of backcountry interpretive camps was an important facet of NPS Director Stephen T. Mather's plan to build a constituency of park supporters and advocates while providing an authentic wilderness experience. Interpretive rangers continue to present periodic evening programs and hikes, and the camp managers also provide an informal history of the camps at mealtime talks.

May Lake Camp and the other High Sierra Camps have maintained their original use: providing rustic accommodations, meals, and recreation to entice visitors who otherwise might not experience the backcountry. Since inception, horses and mules have been used to bring supplies and some visitors to the camps, while other guests hike in. This tradition also continues today. The camps are managed by a concessioner in partnership with NPS.

Heavy snows dictate that buildings at the High Sierra Camps are either structurally substantial or removable in the winter. As a result, some buildings, such as the cook house, are stone structures with thick walls able to withstand the heavy snow loads. The canvas tents and metal frames of the temporary buildings are dismantled and stored when the camps are closed in the fall, leaving only the concrete slab foundations during the harsh winter months. The buildings at May Lake Camp that contribute to the National Register Historic District consist of two permanent buildings, eleven seasonal buildings, and three structures.

The spatial arrangement of May Lake Camp reflects the physical constraints of the site and the camp's orientation in relationship to the area's main attractions, May Lake and Mount Hoffman. The buildings and structures are placed within the landscape with minimal alterations or regrading. The camp is located on a slightly sloping site, which is bordered by May Lake to the west and a steep granite ridge to the east.

The spatial organization of May Lake Camp is less formal than that of some of the other High Sierra Camps: it is not arranged around a central common area. Rather, the guest tent cabins, tent diner, and campfire ring are oriented toward the lake. The tent diner is positioned with its long side and row of window openings facing the lake to take advantage of the views. Most of the guest tent cabins are placed in a linear formation roughly paralleling the lakeshore and face the lake rather than the camp. Other buildings and features are sited more haphazardly, nestled among the trees. The common area is smaller at May Lake Camp than at some other camps such as Glen Aulin. It is defined by the tent diner on the south side and the lakeshore on the west. Between the diner and the lake is a campfire ring where guests and



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employees can sit with views of the lake. All tent cabins (guest and employee) are located north of the tent diner, which provides a clear separation between the camp and the backpackers' campground to the south.

The tent bath house and a new comfort station addition sit southeast of the guest tent cabins, north of the tent diner/stone cook house. Employee tent cabins and storage structures are spread throughout the east portion of the site at the base of the granite ridge. In contrast to the row of guest tent cabins, the employee tent cabins are more widely spaced, likely to provide privacy. Utilitarian structures such as the propane shed, lantern shed, linen tent cabin, and dry storage shed are located east of the tent diner/stone cook house. Directly adjacent to the east elevation of the stone cook house, there is a work area surrounded on three sides (north, south and east) by a vertical board fence (shown on 1959 site plan). At the interior of the fence, there is a double bowl utility sink, which is at the approximate former location of the men's restroom shown on the 1953 site plans.<sup>2</sup> Since the period of significance several small-scale features have been added to the camp such as bear boxes, concrete slab behind the cookhouse, concrete vault northeast of the cookhouse, fire extinguishers, and a new hitching post.

The development at May Lake Camp can be roughly divided into four main groups based on location and function. The first, the guest tent cabin group, is composed of five tents in a linear arrangement along the lake shore (1-5). A sixth guest tent cabin sits to the northwest, removed from the other guest tent cabins (6), and a seventh sits to the east, closer to the employee tent cabins (7). Guest tent cabins 1-5 are spaced with approximately 6 to 20 feet between them: the spacing is often dictated by the location of trees. Guest tent cabins 1-4 face west, toward the lake, and guest tent cabins 5 and 6, which were built later, are not oriented toward the lake or other cabins.

The second cluster consists of the communal camp facilities: the stone cook house, attached tent diner, tent bath house, attached comfort station, and campfire ring. The stone cook house and tent diner define the south edge of the camp. The tent bath house and attached comfort station sit to the north of the stone cook house in the center of the camp. The campfire ring is located between the tent diner and the lake. In addition to making communal buildings conveniently grouped for guests and employee access, locating the stone cook house, tent bath house, and comfort station in close proximity allows the utilities to be clustered in one place. The manager's tent cabin is located within this group.

The third cluster consists of three employee tent cabins (E1-E3), which are spread out at the northeast end of the camp, ostensibly for privacy. Employee and service areas are located further from lake at the "back" of camp.

The fourth cluster consists of the camp's storage buildings and utilitarian structures, all of which are located east of the stone cook house. A service yard at the east end of the stone cook house is defined by a wood fence. A utility sink is located in the yard, and a propane shed abuts the fence. A concrete pad used for storing propane tanks sits close to the east side of the fence. The lantern shed, tent cabin E4 (linen tent), and the dry storage shed are located east of the service yard.

The camp is accessed via the High Sierra Loop Trail. From Yosemite Valley, the trail leaves the valley at Mirror Lake and climbs through Tenaya Canyon by way of the "Tenaya Zigzags." The camp is a mile higher in elevation than the valley, and the trail is almost entirely uphill. It crosses Tioga Road near Snow Flat about a mile before reaching the camp. The trail runs through the camp between the guest tent cabins and employee tent cabins, roughly at the "back" side of the camp. There is no formal entrance to the camp from either direction.

Circulation within the camp is informal, and there are numerous small, interconnecting paths. All paths are unpaved, well worn, generally curvilinear, and vary in width. Like the more haphazard arrangement of tents, the configuration of trails at

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "May Lake," Site plan, 1953 (On file at the National Park Service Archive, El Portal).

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May Lake Camp is also irregular and appears to be largely based on the most direct routes between buildings. Over the decades excessive social trails have led to the compaction of soil and dearth of understory vegetation. During the summers of 2005 and 2006, volunteers worked on the High Sierra Camp Restoration Project with the goal of "bringing the camps to a more natural condition helping to enhance guests' experiences by improving the camp aesthetics and reducing dust."<sup>3</sup> As part of this project, trails within the camp were delineated; vegetation islands were created using rocks and logs as borders; formerly trampled areas were decompacted; native seeds and duff were spread; and native plants were transplanted.

No historic images have been located that verify historic circulation patterns. However, the locations of the campfire ring, rock outcroppings, mature trees, and many of the buildings have changed little and limit the possible paths of travel. Circulation routes are likely similar to the historic paths. Although the historic configuration of the paths cannot be documented, the current paths are compatible with the historic character of the camp. In addition, the delineating materials are native and easily reversible.

A backpackers' campground, which is maintained by the National Park Service (NPS), is located southwest of May Lake Camp and outside the boundaries of the district. The May Lake High Sierra Camp and backpackers' campground are distinctly separate. Each has its own restrooms, water source, bear boxes, and campfire rings. The backpackers' campground has not been included within the historic district boundaries for a number of reasons described in the boundary description. Further east from the backpackers campground, near the southern end of the lake are two steel tanks and metal boxes, ostensibly for water treatment. A concrete block, shed-roofed pump house sits near the water tanks, and solar panels, which likely provide power for the pumps, sit on metal stands on a rocky outcropping nearby. This facility was constructed c. 1990 and is outside the district boundary. The corral remains roughly in its historic location, approximately 300 feet south of the camp. All of the corral features, such as fences, hitching posts, and shed, appear to be of recent construction. The boundaries of the historic district have been drawn to exclude the corral because of its loss of integrity and physical distance from May Lake Camp.

## CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

### ***Stone Cook House, permanent building (1938)***

Measuring 26'6" by 16', the stone cook house is a simple building with a roughly rectangular footprint oriented east-west. The walls are thick, load-bearing granite fieldstone, which rest on a concrete slab foundation. Deeply recessed mortar joints give the exterior walls the appearance of dry-laid stone. The front-facing gabled roof structure rests on the stone walls and consists of log beams, purlins, and trusses. Wood boards topped with half logs clad the roof. Some of the logs retain their bark, while others are stripped. The log purlins are exposed at the gable ends, and at the apex of the west gable end, there is a pair of four-light, inward opening casement windows, and the wall is covered with vertical log siding. An exterior stone stove and chimney are located on the east elevation. The stove box has been filled with concrete and is no longer in use.

On each of the north and south elevations, there are two small windows. Heavy wood lintels span the openings, and the windows are wood, three-light awning sash, which open inward. Wood-framed metal screens are mounted on the exterior. A heavy wood lintel spans an opening on the east elevation, which is fitted with a wood Dutch door covered with metal cladding. On the interior side of the Dutch door, there is a wood screen door. A pair of wood doors, also clad in metal, is located in the west elevation and opens into the tent diner.

<sup>3</sup> Sign mounted at camp.

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The south elevation has a small shed-roofed addition. Wood shingles clad the addition's walls, and corrugated metal panels cover the roof. A pair of metal doors in the south elevation provides access.

At the interior the ceiling is open, and the log beams and rafters are visible. The walls are plastered, and the beams and rafters are varnished.

***Lantern Shed, permanent building (c. 1938)***

The lantern shed is a small building with a square footprint measuring 6'2" on each side. Board-and-batten siding clads the walls of the wood-frame structure. The building rests on a concrete slab foundation, and a gabled roof tops the building. Wood shingles cover the roof, and rafter ends are visible along the eaves. A solar panel is located on the north slope of the roof, and on the south slope, there is a solar panel base. A wood board-and-batten door is located on the west elevation. A window has been covered on the east elevation.

***Tent Diner (foundation 1938)***

The tent diner consists of a main block and a smaller connecting section, which together have a "T"-shaped footprint. The main block of the tent measures 30' by 18', and the connection measures 7'4" by 15'. The tent diner abuts the west elevation of the stone cook house. An interior steel frame forms an intersecting gable roof and wall structure, which is covered in canvas. An additional canvas rain fly supported by steel brackets and beams covers the roof. The building rests on a concrete slab foundation, which is lined at the perimeter with granite stones. A horizontal band of wood-framed screens spans the west wall. Pairs of screened wood doors are located on the north and south elevations, and a single wood door leads from the stone cook house into the tent diner's east end (connection). The building has a reddish-tinted concrete floor, and a small wood-burning stove is situated at the east side of the room. Combination stone and concrete steps lead to the tent diner's north entrance, and a stone and concrete ramp leads to the south elevation. Canvas awnings supported by metal poles cover the entrances of the south and north elevations.

***Tent Bath House (foundation 1938)***

The tent bath house is rectangular in plan and measures 8' by 20'. The structure is a steel pipe frame that supports an asymmetrical gabled roof and rests on a concrete slab foundation. Canvas covers the frame. Native granite stones are piled around the perimeter of the slab. Painted metal corrugated panels mounted on the steel frame divide the building into two halves: one for women and one for men. Each side has two sinks and showers. Partial wood doors (open at both the top and bottom) at the east and west sides of the structure provide access to the interior.

***Employee Tent Cabin E1-E3 (foundations c. 1955) & Manager's Tent Cabin 8 (foundation c. 1938)***

Employee tent cabins E1 and E2 face north, and E3 and the manager's tent cabin face west toward the lake. Employee tent cabins E1-E3 are set away from the communal and guest camp buildings. The manager's tent cabin is located northeast of the tent bath house. Each cabin rests on a concrete slab foundation that measures roughly 12' by 14'. Stones are set into the foundations of E1, E2, and the manager's tent cabin but not E3. A steel frame structure creates a gabled-roof form that is covered with plastic canvas. An additional canvas rain fly supported by steel brackets and beams covers the roof. Unlike the communal camp tents (such as the tent diner), the employee tents are plastic-coated "CDAI Flame-Resistant Fabric" not standard canvas. A door opening is centered on the façade of each tent and is fitted with a wood door with a screen in the upper portion. One window-sized opening is located on each of the long sides of the tent and is fitted with insect mesh and covered with a retractable plastic-canvas flap. Each tent cabin has a small stove with stove pipe, which vents out the rear of the tent (or front for E2). The tents have stone and concrete steps or landings.

***Guest Tent Cabins 1-4 (foundations c. 1938) & Guest Tent Cabin 7 (foundation c. 1955)***

Guest tent cabins 1-4 and 7 measure roughly 12' by 14', and all face May Lake. The tents are composed of steel frames, which are inserted into metal poles set in the concrete foundation slab at the corners and long sides. The frames support the gabled-roof form of the canvas, which is nailed to 2" by 4" wood baseboards at the interior. An additional canvas rain fly supported by steel brackets and beams covers the roofs. Unlike the communal camp tents (such as the tent diner), the



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guest tents are plastic-coated "CDAI Flame-Resistant Fabric" not standard canvas. A door opening is centered on the facade of each tent and is fitted with a wood door with a screen in the upper portion. One window-sized opening is located on each of the long sides of the tents and is fitted with insect mesh and covered with a retractable plastic canvas flap. The buildings sit on concrete slab foundations; some have granite stones embedded into the concrete. Concrete or stone steps lead to the door openings. The number of steps for each tent varies based on the terrain, ranging from one to three steps. Each tent has a small stove with stove pipe, which vents out the rear of the tent.

#### ***Water Tanks (2) (c. 1955)***

Southeast of camp on a ridge, there are two large steel water tanks with pipes leading to the camp below.

#### ***Campfire Ring (c. 1955)***

The campfire ring sits between the tent diner and May Lake and consists of inner and outer stone rings.<sup>4</sup> Several cut stumps have been placed on end as seating. Modern plastic folding chairs are also used. The seating is non-contributing. The campfire ring is shown on the 1959 site plan for the camp.<sup>5</sup>

### **NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES**

#### ***Comfort Station, permanent building (1965)***

The comfort station is a small building constructed in 1965 as an addition to the tent bath house. The building has a rectangular footprint measuring 10'6" by 7'. The east wall is made of an uncoursed fieldstone veneer, and the west wall (which abuts the tent bath house) is wood-frame. The north and south elevations are clad in board-and-batten siding. A steeply pitched, front-facing gabled roof covers the building. The roof is clad with split logs, and purlin and rafter ends are exposed at the gable ends and eaves. The apexes of the gable ends are fitted with screens. The building rests on a concrete slab foundation, and concrete landings lead to paired doors on the north and south elevations. The doors are clad in board and battens that align with that of the walls. Interior plywood partitions on wood studs divide the building into four sections; each is accessible by one of the exterior doors and contains a toilet. There are no sinks.

#### ***Propane Shed, permanent building (1967)***

The propane shed is a small building with a rectangular footprint. Vertical board siding clads most of the walls of the wood-frame structure; the south elevation and top of the west elevation are covered with split logs. The building rests on a concrete slab foundation, and a shed roof tops the building. Corrugated metal roofing covers the roof, and rafter ends are visible along the eaves. Vertical board doors are located on the east elevation. The service yard fence abuts the east elevation of the building. The building is in poor condition.

#### ***Wood Shed, permanent building (c.1980)***

The dry storage shed is a small building with a rectangular footprint. The walls of the wood-frame structure are faced with metal siding up to the level of the eaves. A shed roof tops the building and is clad in corrugated metal panels. The building sits on wood posts set in precast concrete footings. A metal door is located on the west elevation.

#### ***Dry Storage Shed, permanent building (c. 1990)***

The dry storage shed measures 8'3" by 8'1½" and has a rectangular footprint. The walls of the wood-frame structure are faced with particle board covered with metal siding up to the level of the eaves. A front-facing gabled roof tops the building and is clad in corrugated metal panels. A small hatch is located in the east gable end. The building sits on wood posts set

<sup>4</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Branch of Landscape Architect, "High Sierra Camps and Utilities, Part of the Master Plan, Yosemite National Park," Site plan, 1959. (On file at the National Park Service Archive, El Portal).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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in precast concrete footings. A metal door is located on the west elevation, and wood stairs lead to the entrance. Galvanized sheet metal covers the interior walls and floor.

***Guest Tent Cabins 5 and 6 (foundations c. 1970)***

Guest tent cabins 5 and 6 measure roughly 25' by 12'. Guest tent cabin 5 faces west, and guest tent cabin 6 faces south. The tents are composed of steel frames, which are inserted into metal poles set in the concrete foundation slab at the corners and long sides. The frames support the gabled-roof form of the canvas, which is nailed to 2" by 4" wood baseboards at the interior. An additional canvas rain fly supported by steel brackets and beams covers the roof. Unlike the communal camp tents (such as the tent diner), the guest tents are plastic-coated "CDAI Flame-Resistant Fabric" not standard canvas. The door openings are fitted with a wood door with a screen in the upper portion. Two window-sized opening are located on each of the long sides of the tents and are fitted with insect mesh and covered with a retractable plastic canvas flaps. The buildings sit on concrete slab foundations with granite stones embedded in the concrete. Concrete and stone steps lead to the door openings. Each tent has a small stove with stove pipe, which vents out the rear of the tent.

***Employee Tent Cabin E4 (c. 1980)***

Employee tent cabin E4, also labeled "linen tent" on some site plans and sketches, measures roughly 12' by 10' and faces west toward May Lake. The tent is composed of a metal frame, which supports the gabled-roof form of the canvas, which is nailed to 2" by 4" wood baseboards at the interior. An additional canvas rain fly supported by steel brackets and beams covers the roof. A door opening is centered on the west side of the tent and is fitted with a wood door, painted green, with a screen in the upper portion. One window-sized opening is located on each of the long sides of the tent and is fitted with insect mesh and covered with a retractable plastic canvas flap. The building sits on a raised wood platform with posts set in concrete footings. Wood steps lead to the door opening.

**INTEGRITY**

Today, May Lake Camp reflects many of the qualities that characterized it during the period of significance, 1938-1961. The extant historic buildings and structures, including the stone cook house, tent diner, tent bath house, lantern shed, and historic guest and employee tent cabins, help convey the design, character, and functional relationships of the High Sierra Camps. With the exception of the early comfort stations and two guest tent cabin pads, the foundations and buildings of May Lake Camp as shown on a 1959 site plan are extant and intact. Similarly, although two guest tent cabins (5 and 6), an employee tent cabin (E4), and dry storage and propane sheds have been added after 1961, overall, the layout of buildings and structures has a good degree of integrity from the historic period. The canvas material that clads the tent cabins has been replaced and is modern. However, this is to be expected: by nature canvas fabric must be periodically replaced especially in a harsh outdoor environment such as the High Sierra. The current tent diner design is almost identical to the original 1937 drawings including its "T"-shape, door and window openings, rain fly, and canvas awnings.<sup>6</sup>

New buildings, such as the comfort station, guest tent cabins 5 and 6, employee tent cabin E4 (linen tent), and the dry storage and propane sheds do not significantly compromise the setting; they are located close to the perimeter of the camp and do not interrupt the historic spatial relationships. The new buildings are simple and use compatible materials. The buildings and structures of May Lake Camp retain a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

In addition to the buildings and structures, a number of aspects of the landscape also help to convey the historic character of the site. At May Lake Camp, the historic patterns of topography, overall spatial organization, and vegetation types

<sup>6</sup> Eldridge T. Spencer, "Scale Pattern for Tent for May Lake," Elevations and plans, 1937 (On file at the National Park Service Archive, El Portal).

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remain discernable, providing a physical context for the site's buildings and structures and helping to convey the site's design, feeling, and historic associations. These qualities are further enhanced by the natural setting of May Lake Camp, which has changed very little since the historic period. In addition, smaller site features that date from the period of significance, such as the campfire ring, are also intact.

Some landscape elements have changed or been altered since the period of significance. The growth of young trees in revegetated areas along the lake shore could eventually block views of the lake from the fire ring and tent diner. Other elements have been altered but are compatible with the site such as the circulation patterns defined during the summers of 2005 and 2006 and two modern wood hitching posts. These changes do not substantially diminish the historic character of the site. Through its extant buildings and structures, intact patterns of spatial organization and the natural setting, May Lake Camp continues to present a coherent picture of an early to mid twentieth century backcountry camp. Overall, May Lake Camp has good integrity.



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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Conservation
- Education
- Entertainment/Recreation

**Period of Significance**

1938-1961

**Significant Dates**

1938

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Yosemite Park and Curry Company

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance for May Lake High Sierra Camp spans from 1938 (the date the camp was first built) to 1961 (the date Sunrise Camp, the final High Sierra Camp, was built, and the High Sierra Camps were completed).

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Property Type: Resources Associated with Tourism, Recreation and the Preservation Ethic in Yosemite (1864-1973)  
Subtype: Camping, Hiking  
Period of Significance: 1938-1961

May Lake High Sierra Camp is significant under Criterion A at the local level for its role in recreation/entertainment, conservation, and education as one of the high country camps, whose origin dates back to the earliest days of the National Park Service (NPS). Director Stephen T. Mather believed that this type of public service in the Yosemite high country helped fulfill NPS's interpretive responsibility to educate visitors in the conservation role of the agency. The Yosemite camp system initially began in 1916 as an effort to attract people into the park's high country. Its purpose, as time went on, became closely tied to management problems: to relieve congestion in Yosemite Valley by enabling outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy the Yosemite wilderness with relative ease and some degree of comfort and to provide a compatible environment in which, through interpretive means, visitors could be instructed in the tenets of conservation and the objectives of NPS in that area. Through the use of organized parties guided by a Yosemite naturalist, NPS established a unique pattern of interpretive service in the high country of one of the most populous national parks, which helped acquaint the American public with the conservation objectives of the agency in all natural areas of the system.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

#### **HISTORIC CONTEXT: RECREATIONAL MOUNTAIN HUTS**

Recreational mountain huts (also known as alpine huts, mountain shelters, mountain hostels, wilderness huts, high huts, backcountry huts or hikers' camps) are found throughout the world, and are particularly abundant in Europe, and range from simple one-room shelters to more elaborate accommodations with multiple bedrooms, common rooms, indoor plumbing, and heat. Recreational mountain huts are built to shelter backcountry travelers such as hikers, mountaineers, climbers, and skiers.<sup>7</sup> It is probable that Donald and Mary Curry Tresidder, who were influential in growing the High Sierra Camps, were motivated to expand Yosemite's High Sierra Camps while traveling abroad and seeing their popularity of recreational mountain huts in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

In the United States, recreational mountain huts were first used in the northeast. One of the earliest and best-known recreational mountain hut systems was created by the New Hampshire Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC).<sup>9</sup> Each of the system's eight huts is spaced a day's hike apart (six to eight miles), covering a 56-mile stretch of the Appalachian Trail in the White Mountain National Forest.<sup>10</sup> AMC was founded in 1876 with the mission of preserving the White Mountains. In

<sup>7</sup> Louis Dawson, "Hut History," *10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division Hut Association*. 3 August 2010. <[www.huts.org/education/hut\\_history.html](http://www.huts.org/education/hut_history.html)>.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Tresidder was the first president of Yosemite's consolidated concessions operation, the Yosemite Park and Curry Company (YP&CCo.), and oversaw a remarkable expansion of park facilities. Mrs. Mary Curry Tresidder was the heir to the famous Camp Curry concession (founded in 1899) and remained integral to the concessions operations at Yosemite for decades, serving as the Chairman of the Board for YP&CCo. until the late 1960s.

<sup>9</sup> Madeleine Eno and Katharine Wroth, "Huts and Glory: AMC's Archives Offer a Wry Peek at Life on the High Peaks." *Appalachian Mountain Club*, 15 September 2010 <<http://www.outdoors.org/>>.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa McLaughlin, "Travel: Not Really Roughing It," *Time*, 15 September 2010. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1106327,00.html>>.

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1888 the club built the first of eight "high huts," Madison Spring Hut, which was modeled on Alpine shelters. Until destroyed by fire in 1940, the Madison Spring Hut was the oldest in the chain. The Mizpah Spring Hut, completed in 1964, was the eighth and the last AMC hut to be constructed. AMC huts hold 36 to 90 people and provide guests bunks; most huts are full service and include breakfast and dinner.<sup>11</sup>

Another example of a recreational hut system is the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division Hut Association. It is the most extensive mountain hut system in the United States and includes 30 backcountry huts in the Colorado Rocky Mountains connected by 350 miles of backcountry trails.<sup>12</sup> The system was founded in the 1980s and named after the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division of the U.S. Army, who stayed in mountain huts while training. Not all of the structures were originally built as mountain huts: some were converted from sheep-herder shelters and Forest Service guard shacks.<sup>13</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division Hut Association accommodates hikers, mountain bikers, and cross-country skiers.

Yosemite's High Sierra Camps are unusual in the context of recreational mountain huts. While most recreational mountain huts in Europe and the eastern United States were maintained by hiking associations, even if situated on public lands, the High Sierra Camps were built and maintained by a for-profit concessioner. Further, most recreational mountain huts were built with the primary purpose of providing year-round shelter, and their permanent buildings are used heavily by cross-country skiers. The High Sierra Camps are distinctive in their emphasis on interpretation programs and their seasonal, temporary nature of buildings.

Within the National Park system, there are other facilities that, like the High Sierra Camps, offer rustic accommodations and are accessible only by foot or pack animal, but differ in that they are primarily permanent buildings and are individual camps rather than a loop system. Some examples include backcountry lodging in Glacier National Park, Sequoia National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and Haleakala National Park.

The Sperry Chalet and the Granite Park Chalet are located in Glacier National Park and were built by the Glacier Park Hotel Company, a subsidiary of the Great Northern Railway. Construction on the Sperry Chalet began in 1913, and the complex soon consisted of a stone, one-story kitchen and dining room building and a stone, two-story dormitory. The Granite Park Chalet was built the next year, in 1914, and included a stone, one-story, dormitory building and a stone, two-story building housing a kitchen and dormitory. These developments slightly precede the construction of the earliest of the High Sierra Camps at Yosemite, which were built in 1916.

Sequoia National Park has a single backcountry camp that is very similar to the High Sierra Camps at Yosemite. It is called Bearpaw High Sierra Camp. Located along Sequoia's High Sierra Trail in the Kaweah River watershed, this High Sierra Camp opened for business in 1934. The camp complex includes a dining room/kitchen tent structure, a bathhouse, and, in a very similar fashion as Yosemite's High Sierra Camps, six tent cabins that sleep up to 18 visitors. Also, like the High Sierra Camps at Yosemite, Bearpaw is operated by a for-profit concessioner and offers meals to backpackers that are staying at a nearby backcountry campground.<sup>7</sup>

After the Fred Harvey Company was granted the concession to build a lodge in the Grand Canyon in 1922, the company hired noted architect Mary Jane Colter to design the buildings. Colter named the lodge the Phantom Ranch and designed

<sup>11</sup> *Appalachian Mountain Club*, 15 September 2010 < <http://www.outdoors.org/> >

<sup>12</sup> McLaughlin.

<sup>13</sup> Dawson.

<sup>14</sup> Tweed, *Uncertain Path: A Search for the Future of National Parks*. 168-170.



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a dining hall and guest cabins. Phantom Ranch is located at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, and is only accessed by foot, mule, or river raft. Additions were made over the decades, and the camp currently includes a combination of historic and nonhistoric buildings and provides guests accommodations, meals, and linens. Although the Phantom Ranch is comprised of permanent buildings and is not a part of a backcountry circuit, it is similar to Yosemite's High Sierra Camps in that it is a backcountry hostelry that is run by the parks concessioner.

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park has two lodges accessible only by hiking or horseback: Charit Creek and LeConte. Built as a hunting lodge in 1817, Charit Creek Lodge was converted to a youth hostel in 1987 and a full-service lodge in the 1990s. Sleeping space for 38 guests is provided in two cabins and two bunk rooms, and meal service is included. LeConte Lodge was built in 1926, and sleeping quarters for 50 guests are located in roughhewn cabins and dormitories.

Hiking trails in Haleakala National Park provide access to three small, permanent cabins built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The cabins are usually accessed from different trails and are not part of a loop system. Each cabin offers visitors a stove, kitchen facilities, and bunks, and guests prepare their own meals.

The lodging in National Parks described above is similar to the High Sierra Camps in that guests arrive by foot or pack animal, and simple sleeping accommodations are provided. However, there are important differences. First, the facilities described above primarily consist of permanent buildings. Secondly, the lodges and cabins are not part of loop systems. Thirdly, with the exception of the Phantom Ranch, most are a lodge building type, with at least some of the guests' sleeping quarters located in the main lodge.

#### ***HISTORIC CONTEXT: HIGH SIERRA CAMPS***<sup>15</sup>

An important and historically significant portion of the Yosemite National Park lies above the elevations normally approached by the casual tourist and sight-seer. The High Sierra Camps allow for exploration and enjoyment of this remote and seasonally accessed part of the park. A series of camps established for the enjoyment of the more adventuresome of visitors, the High Sierra Camps offer support and shelter on several of the trails that carry hikers, riders and backpackers through this rugged and challenging wilderness.

In 1916 the fledgling National Park Service asked its Yosemite concessionaire—the Desmond Park Service Company—to build mountain chalets at Tenaya Lake, Tuolumne Meadows, and Merced Lake. The Desmond Company owned the Sentinel and Glacier Point hotels and the Big Trees and Yosemite lodges in and around Yosemite Valley. Construction took place during that summer. Each camp contained a frame combination lounge, dining room, and kitchen building roofed with canvas. Guest tents provided sleeping accommodations, and the camp staff consisted of a manager, a cook, and a fisherman. The cost for dinner, bed, and breakfast the next day was minimal. The Desmond Company went bankrupt in 1917, and, as a result, the camps closed the following year. After reorganizing in 1920, the Desmond Company became the Yosemite National Park Company.

In 1920 the Park Service requested that the High Sierra camps be reopened. Superintendent Washington B. Lewis advocated their reestablishment to fill a need he saw for simple, inexpensive accommodations for the park visitor that could be provided at minimum expense to the operator. As a result, the camps at Tenaya Lake and Tuolumne Meadows were reopened as "Hikers' Camps." The first organized party to use them left Yosemite Valley on July 20, 1923, guided by

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<sup>15</sup> This context is based largely on excerpts from the 8 March 2010 Glen Aulin High Sierra Camp National Register Nomination prepared by Andy Kirk, Richard Coop, and Charles Palmer.

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a Park Service naturalist. Other nature-guided parties went out over the next two months and met with considerable success. As a result, Superintendent Lewis requested that the Yosemite National Park Company expand the system to include sites not accessible by roads. He sent Yosemite Park Naturalist Carl P. Russell on a pack trip into the Sierra to choose sites for five additional camps.

The trail-side campsites that seemed best suited to the High Sierra system were at Little Yosemite Valley, Merced Lake, Boothe Lake, the Lyell Fork of the Tuolumne River, Tuolumne Meadows, Glen Aulin, and Tenaya Lake. Russell selected these locations because of the beauty of their surroundings, their distance from other promising campsites, and the availability of water. In 1924 five of those sites were planned as "Hikers' -Camps," built and operated by the Yosemite National Park Company. The Lyell Fork and Glen Aulin Camps intended for installation were omitted from that year's program of expansion. It was planned that all of the camps would consist of a mess and cook tent and dormitory tents for men and women. Attendants and cooks would staff each camp with equipment and supplies brought in by mules.

During a part of the winter of 1923-24, Naturalist Russell was in San Francisco on Yosemite Museum business. At the suggestion of Yosemite National Park Company officials, he took the opportunity to cultivate the acquaintance of some of the newspaper editors in San Francisco with the intent of releasing to them photographs, maps, and notes on the proposed Hikers' Camps. Writers for the *Call*, *Daily News*, *Examiner*, *Herald*, and the *Chronicle* seized upon the opportunity to use the material. The *Herald* for February 13, 1924, first publicized the camps, and other articles followed in quick succession. By February 17, 1924, the San Francisco office of the Yosemite National Park Company reported that it was somewhat overwhelmed with inquiries engendered by the publicity. The announcement made in the *Chronicle* of May 4, 1924 featured a full page of photographs of the camp sites. A 1924 article on the High Sierra camps by NPS Chief Naturalist Ansel F. Hall provided a description of the High Sierra Loop and the comfortable beds and wholesome meals, provided at a mere 75-cents each, that awaited backcountry travelers at day's end.

Meanwhile, the park prepared maps and colored posters announcing the expanded camp system and readied sets of hand-tinted lanternslides of "standard" size featuring the camps and the trails between camps. The Yosemite National Park Company met the expense involved in making those visual devices. During the travel season of 1924, the Hikers' Camps received a good deal of emphasis in evening talks, in a special printed bulletin, and on the pages of the mimeographed "Yosemite Nature Notes." On June 24, 1924, the first backcountry nature guide party, a group of ten, set out from Camp Curry for the Hikers' Camps. Thereafter, for the next six years, the six-day trips were offered throughout the summer at two-week intervals. Almost immediately, it became clear the camps drew people on horseback as well as hikers, and the name was changed from Hikers Camps to High Sierra Camps. Backcountry excursions were operated annually during the eight- to ten-week season during the summer when the snow pack had retreated sufficiently for the parties to access the trails.

By the mid-1920s, seven backcountry camps had been established: Little Yosemite Camp, Merced Lake Camp, Boothe Lake Camp, Mount Lyell Camp, Tuolumne Meadows Camp, Glen Aulin Camp, and Lake Tenaya Camp. The proposed Glen Aulin Camp began operating in 1927, but later moved slightly east of its original location because of a mosquito problem. A few years later the Boothe Lake Camp was abandoned in favor of a new camp, Vogelsang, first located near the junction of the Rafferty Creek and Lyell Fork trails and, in 1940, on the banks of Fletcher Creek. In 1938 the Tenaya Lake Camp was closed, and in its place another was established amidst the mountain hemlocks at May Lake under the ramparts of Mount Hoffmann. This left the Tuolumne Meadows Camp the only one on a road. Sunrise High Sierra Camp was not established until 1961.

The sheer size of and demand for access to this remote area of the park has required significant planning and coordination among the Park concessionaires, NPS, campers, and hikers. The following descriptions of the campsites and their physical relationships demonstrate the logistical dexterity necessary for the park to accommodate the tourists,

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maintain the integrity of the wilderness area in which these trails and camps exist, and protect the wildlife and scenic beauty indigenous to this region. In addition, the travelers must be protected from significant exposure to the dramatic elements that can change abruptly and without warning. What follows are the original 1924 descriptions of the sites selected for Merced Lake Camp, Tuolumne Meadows Camp, and Glen Aulin Camp:

[Merced Lake Camp:] Those who have climbed to Vogelsang Pass or have followed the Babcock and Emeric Lake Trail to Tuolumne Pass will remember the splendid park of Jeffrey pines that stands where the trail leaves the main Merced Canyon and branches up the McClure Fork. Here, a mile above Merced Lake stands Merced Lake Camp. The region is one of great beauty. The glaciated canyon cuts eastward deep into the heart of the mountains. Through it runs the singing Merced, now plunging over cascades, now flowing deep, now swift, and now loitering for a time in placid Washburn Lake. Not only here, but also in the McClure Fork, Babcock Lake, Bernice Lake, Emeric Lake, and other waters the trout abound. Merced Camp is a good base from which to ascend Florence Mountain or Mount Clark and its lofty neighbors. Within a long day's walk are Yosemite Valley and the hikers' camps at Lake Tenaya (via Clouds Rest), at Tuolumne Meadows (via Tuolumne Pass or Vogelsang Pass), and in Lyell Canyon (via Vogelsang Pass or Tuolumne Pass). A short day westward is the Little Yosemite Camp. A seven-mile climb on the scenic Babcock and Emeric Lake Trail, or on the even more spectacular Vogelsang Pass Trail, would take us to Boothe Lake Camp....

[Tuolumne Meadows Camp:] Of all the spots in the High Sierra, John Muir's favorite was the Tuolumne Meadows. So many are the attractive excursions that may be taken afoot from the camp near the junction of the Lyell Fork and Dana Fork that hikers will be tempted to prolong their stay here from days to weeks. Among the shorter walks are those to Lambert Dome, Dog Lake, Fairview Dome, Evelyn Lake, and Gaylor Lakes; a little longer are the trips to Young Lake, McCabe Lakes, Tioga Pass, Tioga Lake, Ellery Lake, Saddlebag Lake, and Old Tioga Mine; and then there are the ascents of Mount Dana, Mount Conness, Ragged Peak, the rugged summits of the Cathedral Group, and dozens of other unnamed vantage-points. Trails radiate in every direction. A few miles westward are the famous Waterwheel Falls, with Glen Aulin Camp conveniently located for hikers. A little to the south of west the Tioga Road leads to Tenaya Lake Camp, some eight miles distant. Southwest, a full day's walk by the Sunrise Trail lies Little Yosemite Camp. Southward one may climb in four or five hours up the Rafferty Creek Trail to Boothe Lake Camp. The Mount Lyell Camp is but two hours' walk southeastward up the canyon.

[Glen Aulin Camp:] From the highland plateau of Tuolumne Meadows one descends abruptly into the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne, passing California Falls, Le Conte Falls, and many other spectacular but unnamed cascades. Suddenly one comes upon Glen Aulin, a tranquil little valley shut off from all the world by great sheer granite walls. Here, where the river pauses for a moment before resuming its tumultuous rush into its mile-deep canyon, is Glen Aulin Camp. Waterwheel Falls, the Tuolumne's unique expression of leaping power and spotless beauty, may be reached by a newly constructed trail that further descends the canyon. Within one day to the north of Glen Aulin are Cold Canyon, Alkali Canyon, Virginia Canyon, and Matterhorn Canyon. Four hours to the southward Tenaya Lake may be reached via the McGee Lake Trail; half a day eastward up the Canyon lies Tuolumne Meadows Camp....<sup>16</sup>

Since 1925 the High Sierra Camps have been operated by the primary park concessioner. The camps have not principally been money-making ventures: services have been provided generally at less than cost. Russell, later Chief Naturalist of the Park Service, stated once that the High Sierra Camps comprised one of the most important assets of the park. He believed that the resumption of interpretive work in the camps and on the trails between camps in 1923 was a sagacious

<sup>16</sup> Ansel F. Hall, "High Sierra Camps," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 12, no. 1 (1924) 39-42.



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move on the part of the government, because the backcountry was considered the best field in which to spread the word regarding NPS objectives in the preservation and conservation of natural resources. It was recognized early that the comparatively small numbers of visitors that initially took advantage of this service in the backcountry could not be the criterion for judging the effectiveness of the project. The great advantages of placing a competent naturalist—provided free of charge by the Yosemite Nature Guide Service—with the same individuals day after day amidst the superlative high country surroundings outweighed most of the arguments of would-be efficiency experts in the government bureaucracy. The greatest asset of these ranger-guided trips was that ranger-naturalists would be on hand at moments of greatest visitor receptiveness—while they were viewing magnificent natural wonders—to help them understand and more fully appreciate the innumerable treasures of the Yosemite high country and, on a broader scale, those of all natural areas within the National Park System.

During the 1930s the High Sierra Camps underwent some renovation, and stone cook house/dining structures replaced the old frame and canvas ones. By 1938 five High Sierra camps existed: two original ones at Merced Lake and Tuolumne Meadows, which had ice houses, and new ones at May Lake (replacing the Tenaya Lake Camp), Glen Aulin, and Vogelsang (replacing the Boothe Lake Camp). The company had discontinued the Tenaya Lake and Little Yosemite Valley Camps. Mary Curry Tresidder, president of the Curry Company, established the Sunrise High Sierra camp in 1961 and equipped it with a canvas dining tent and stone kitchen structure. It overlooks Long Meadow on the John Muir Trail a few miles from Cathedral Pass.

By the early 1960s, the popularity of these guided treks had risen to the point that horse-mounted trips left the stables in the Yosemite valley weekly and traversed the trails from camp to camp in a clockwise direction. Hiking parties generally started at the Tuolumne Meadows area and traveled in a counterclockwise direction. Demand for the lodging at the camps has remained high, and currently the available beds are reserved months in advance, although because of cancellations, some permits are available on a day-to-day basis.

Six High Sierra Camps exist today and comprise the High Sierra Loop, a seven-day backcountry experience that is unique within the National Park System and attracts hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts year after year. The camps are along well-marked, safe trails and are open from six to eight weeks a year, from mid-June or early July to Labor Day, weather permitting. Tuolumne Meadows Camp is located at the end of an access road, 1.5 miles west of its junction with the Tioga Road, and is the only High Sierra Camp directly accessible by automobile. It is also the largest unit with 66 tents. Glen Aulin has eight guest tents, May Lake seven, Vogelsang twelve, Merced Lake nineteen, and Sunrise nine. The combination of fresh bed linens, good meals, and the great outdoors presents a unique way for Yosemite visitors to go hiking or backpacking.

The High Sierra Camps have been significant as an innovative interpretive concept luring more people into the Yosemite backcountry and representing a successful joint effort by the NPS and the Yosemite concessionaire to encourage travel beyond the roads and thus enhance visitor appreciation of wilderness areas. Their establishment also marked an early implementation of the Interior Department's policy of making remote areas of parks more accessible to the visiting public. Another aspect of the 1923 reopening of the camps involved Park Service Director Stephen Mather's strong desire to carry out what he believed were the agency's interpretive responsibilities in the high country. The park established a new pattern of interpretive service there, providing backcountry nature guide trips to the camps, which was unique within the National Park System and set precedents for similar programs in other units. None, however, developed along exactly the same lines as the High Sierra Camps. Despite the initially small number of visitors exposed to this service, Mather and park officials strongly believed that a naturalist talking to the same people day after day, amidst the magnificent peaks and meadows of the backcountry, could exert a stronger and longer-lasting influence on the formation of positive visitor attitudes toward national parks and conservation in general than could result from guided short walks on the valley floor,



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daily lectures at the museum, or single-day hikes to the valley rim. The High Sierra Loop is considered the highlight of the park's interpretive services to this day.

### **HISTORIC CONTEXT: MAY LAKE HIGH SIERRA CAMP**

In 1916 the NPS asked its Yosemite concessioner, Desmond Park Service Company, to build mountain chalets at Tenaya Lake, Tuolumne Meadows, and Merced Lake. Park Superintendent Washington B. Lewis sent Naturalist Carl P. Russell on a pack trip into the Sierra in 1924 to choose sites for additional hikers' camps. Over a decade later, in 1937, the decision was made to close Tenaya Camp and build a replacement on the shore of May Lake.<sup>17</sup> The new camp's site was selected by Don Tresidder, president of the Curry Company, and Mary Curry Tresidder.<sup>18</sup>

May Lake Camp lies in the shadow of Mount Hoffmann, a 10,850-foot high peak that is the geographical center of Yosemite National Park, named in 1865 for topographer Charles F. Hoffmann who accompanied the Josiah Whitney survey in 1863. Hoffmann named the lake below the peak for Lucy Mayotta Browne, whom he married in 1870.<sup>19</sup> When the first High Sierra Camps were established, they were more rudimentary: the tents had dirt floors, showers were not provided, and guests were responsible for their own linens. However, in answer to guest requests, tent floors, showers, and bedding were provided by the late 1930s.<sup>20</sup> Stone cook houses and dining structures replaced the old frame and canvas buildings. May Lake Camp was constructed during this building campaign and included the added camp accommodations.

In 1937 plans were drawn by Edridge T. Spencer, an architect who worked on many of the High Sierra Camp buildings, for a tent diner at May Lake Camp.<sup>21</sup> In July 1938 Yosemite Park and Curry Company carpenters and plumbers erected a stone cook house, tent diner, tent bath house, and several tents cabins in a grove of hemlock trees on the east side of the lake. New trails were constructed to make the camp more easily accessible from the Snow Creek Trail and Glen Aulin Camp, thereby connecting it to the High Sierra Loop Trail.<sup>22</sup>

Not surprisingly, during World War II, the High Sierra Camps were almost deserted but have otherwise been popular with park visitors.<sup>23</sup> By 1953 the basic configuration and features of the camp were in place including the stone cook house, tent diner, tent bath house, lantern shed, and ten tent cabins.<sup>24</sup> By 1959 several tent cabins had been moved. The

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Shirley Sargent, "Yosemite's High Sierra Camps," (Yosemite, Calif., Flying Spur Press, 1977) 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> American Planning and Civic Association, *American Planning and Civic Annual* (Washington: American Planning and Civic Association, 1938) 66.

<sup>21</sup> Eldridge T. Spencer, "Scale Pattern for Tent for May Lake," Elevations and plans, 1937 (On file at the National Park Service Archive, El Portal).

<sup>22</sup> Carl Parcher Russell and Hank Johnston, *100 Years in Yosemite: The Story of a Great Park and Its Friends* (High Sierra classics series. Yosemite National Park, Calif: Yosemite Association, 1992) 114.

<sup>23</sup> Fernando Peñalosa, *Yosemite in the 1930s: A Remembrance* (Rancho Palos Verdes, CA: Quaking Aspen Books, 2002) 158.

<sup>24</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "May Lake."

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locations of tent cabins 1-4, 7, manager's, E1, E2, and E3 as shown on the 1959 site plan match their current locations.<sup>25</sup> By that year, two steel tanks had been placed on the ridge east of the camp, and the campfire ring had been constructed at its current location. A comfort station was added to the tent bath house in 1965,<sup>26</sup> and a propane cabinet was added to service yard in 1967.<sup>27</sup> By about 1970 guest tent cabins 5 and 6 had been built. In 1977 the camp had eight guest tent cabins, and the guest capacity was 32.<sup>28</sup> By 1990 the employee tent cabin E4 (called the "Linen Tent") had been constructed east of the lantern shed.

While the function of the High Sierra Camps has not changed over the past eight decades, the role of interpretative programming has shifted slightly. In the early 1960s, park administration stressed that the services of interpreters should be made available to the greatest number of park visitors. As a result, interpretive programs directed at smaller numbers of guests in the High Sierra were decreased.<sup>29</sup> Currently, interpretive rangers continue to present some evening programs and hikes, and the camp managers also provide some history of the camps at mealtime talks.

Recreation at the camp includes fishing, boating, and hiking. Mount Hoffman and Tenaya Peak are attractions for experienced hikers. Historically, swimming was also popular. Currently, swimming is allowed in much of the lake but not near the water intake. A short stroll east of camp leads to a promontory with a spectacular view across and down Tenaya Canyon.

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<sup>25</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Branch of Landscape Architect.

<sup>26</sup> Spencer Lee & Busse, "Addition to Existing Bath House @ May Lake High Sierra Camp," Plans and elevation, 1965. (On file at the National Park Service Archive, El Portal).

<sup>27</sup> "Propane Gas Addition to Flamo Installation," Elevations, sections, and plans, 1967 (On file at the National Park Service Archive, El Portal).

<sup>28</sup> Sargent, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Peñalosa, 63.

May Lake High Sierra Camp

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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May Lake High Sierra Camp

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#### **MAPS AND DRAWINGS**

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May Lake High Sierra Camp  
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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Name of repository: Yosemite Research Library and Yosemite Archive, El Portal

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 3.7 acres  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	11N	280812	4191662
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	11N	280877	4191530
	Zone	Easting	Northing
5	11N	280895	4191515
	Zone	Easting	Northing
7	11N	280870	4191497
	Zone	Easting	Northing

3	11N	280888	4191662
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	11N	280895	4191530
	Zone	Easting	Northing
6	11N	280875	4191515
	Zone	Easting	Northing
8	11N	280766	4191497
	Zone	Easting	Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

See attached map.

May Lake High Sierra Camp  
Name of Property

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**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary for May Lake Camp encompasses the buildings and immediate setting historically associated with the complex and is based on natural and manmade features that define the site. The shore of May Lake is the natural boundary to the west, and the steep granite ridge marks the edge of the camp to the east, inclusive of the two steel tanks on the ridge. Between the stone cook house/tent diner and the backpackers' campground to the south, there is an undeveloped area that marks the transition between the two uses and is the southern boundary. To the north the boundary has been drawn just beyond employee tent cabin E1, the northernmost camp feature.

Outside of the national register boundary are three developed areas that are either non-historic or have lost integrity: the backpackers' campground, the water treatment facility, and the corral. The backpackers' campground to the southwest has not been included within the historic district's boundaries for a number of reasons. The campground and the High Sierra Camp each have their own unique history of development, management, and purpose. While the High Sierra Camps have been operated by park concessioners throughout their history and have provided many of the amenities and comforts of more traditional lodging, the backpackers' campgrounds are maintained by the NPS and provide far fewer amenities. The adjacent backpackers' campground and May Lake High Sierra Camp have completely separate facilities (toilets, water, and campfire rings) and do not share equipment or space. Additionally, all existing built features associated with the backpackers' campground appear to be modern. The corral has not been included within the district boundaries because of physical distance from May Lake Camp and lack of integrity: all of the corral features, such as fences, hitching posts, and shed, appear to be of recent construction.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Andy Kirk, Richard Coop, Charles Palmer  
Jody R. Stock and Katherine Petrin

organization UNLV Public History/ 03/08/04  
Architectural Resources Group (ARG) date 07/05/11

street & number UNLV, 4505 Maryland Parkway Box 455020/ (702)895-3544/  
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e-mail jody@argsf.com and katherine@argsf.com

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

May Lake High Sierra Camp

Tuolumne, California

Name of Property

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- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

---

**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: May Lake High Sierra Camp

City or Vicinity: Yosemite National Park

County: Tuolumne

State: California

Photographer: Shayne E. Watson

Date Photographed: August 6, 2010

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 1 of 29: Stone cook house, permanent building, east elevation, view looking west.
- 2 of 29: Stone cook house, permanent building, south elevation, view looking north.
- 3 of 29: Lantern shed, permanent building, north and west elevation, view looking southeast.
- 4 of 29: Tent diner, north and west elevations, view looking southeast.
- 5 of 29: Tent diner, south and east elevations, view looking northwest.
- 6 of 29: Tent bath house, west and south elevations, view looking northeast.
- 7 of 29: Employee tent cabin E1, north and west elevations, view looking southeast.
- 8 of 29: Employee tent cabin E2, north and west elevations, view looking southeast.
- 9 of 29: Employee tent cabin E3, west and south elevations, view looking northeast.
- 10 of 29: Manager's tent cabin 8, west and south elevations, view looking northeast.
- 11 of 29: Guest tent cabin 1, west elevation, view looking east.
- 12 of 29: Guest tent cabin 2, west elevation, view looking east.
- 13 of 29: Guest tent cabin 3, west elevation, view looking east.
- 14 of 29: Guest tent cabin 4, north and west elevations, view looking southeast.
- 15 of 29: Guest tent cabin 7, west elevation, view looking east.
- 16 of 29: Water tanks, view looking southeast.
- 17 of 29: Comfort station, permanent building, south and east elevations, view looking northwest.
- 18 of 29: Comfort station, permanent building, north and east elevations, view looking southwest.
- 19 of 29: Propane shed, permanent building, north and west elevations, view looking southeast.
- 20 of 29: Wood shed, west and north elevations, view looking southeast.
- 21 of 29: Dry storage shed, permanent building, north and west elevations, view looking southeast.
- 22 of 29: Guest tent cabin 5, west and south elevations, view looking northeast.
- 23 of 29: Guest tent cabin 6, west and south elevations, view looking northeast.
- 24 of 29: Employee tent cabin E4, west and south elevations, view looking northeast.

May Lake High Sierra Camp  
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- 25 of 29: Campfire ring, view looking west toward Mount Hoffman.
- 26 of 29: Service yard, view looking south.
- 27 of 29: Concrete slab, view looking west.
- 28 of 29: Water features, view looking east.
- 29 of 29: Water features, metal boxes.

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**Property Owner:**  
(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

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name \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

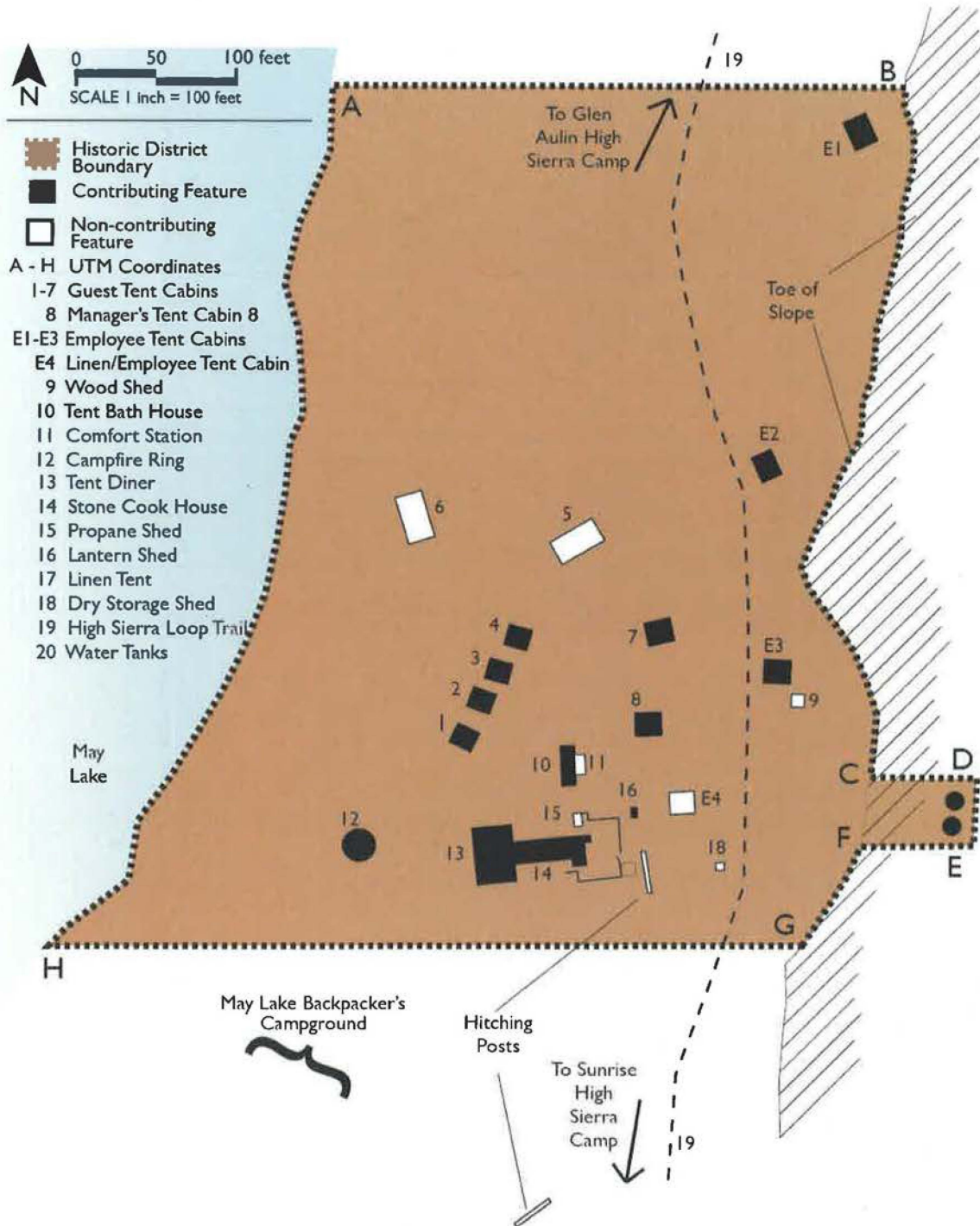
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).  
**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



**May Lake High Sierra Camp**

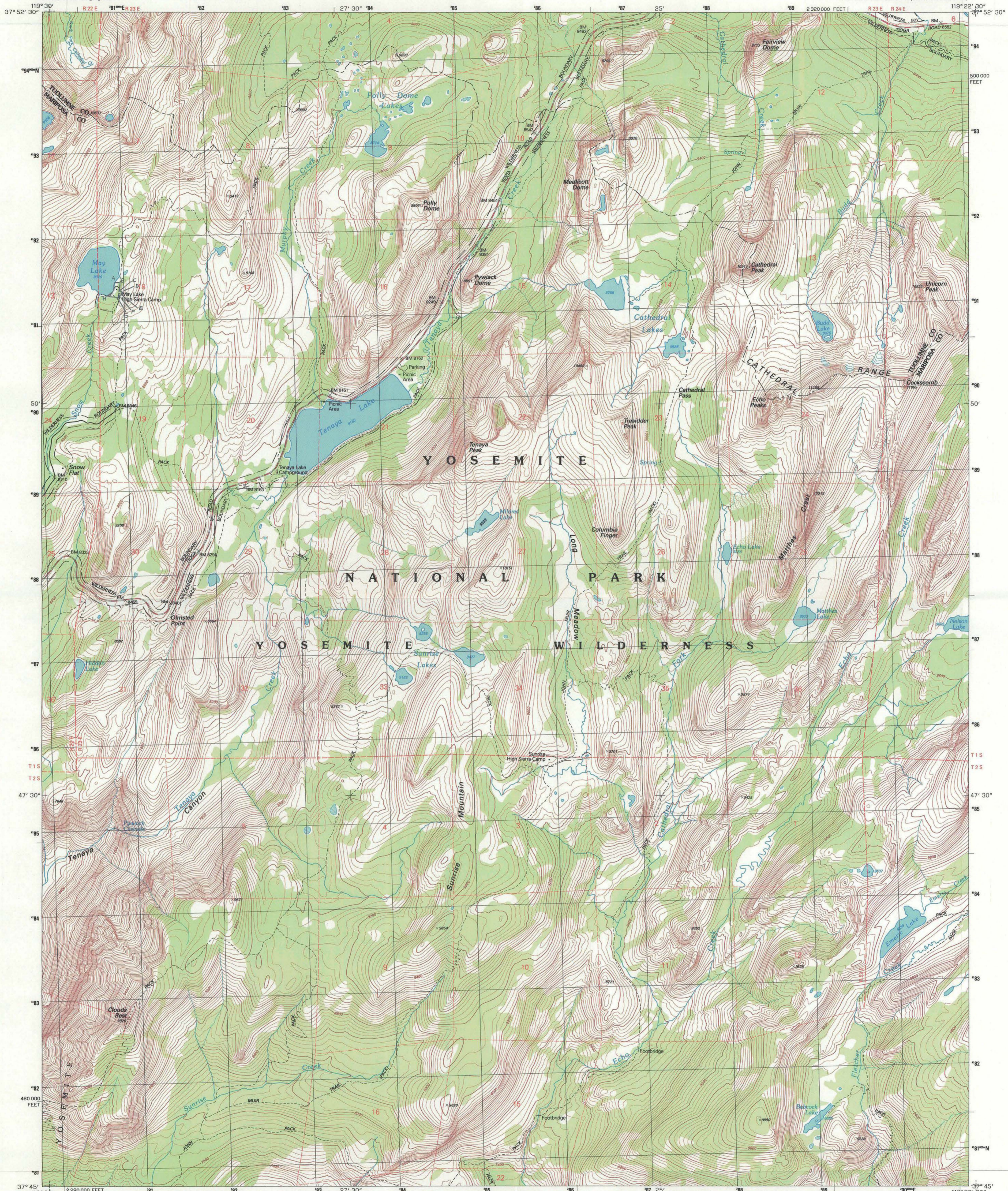
**Tuolumne, California**  
 County and State

Name of Property

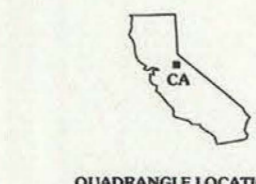
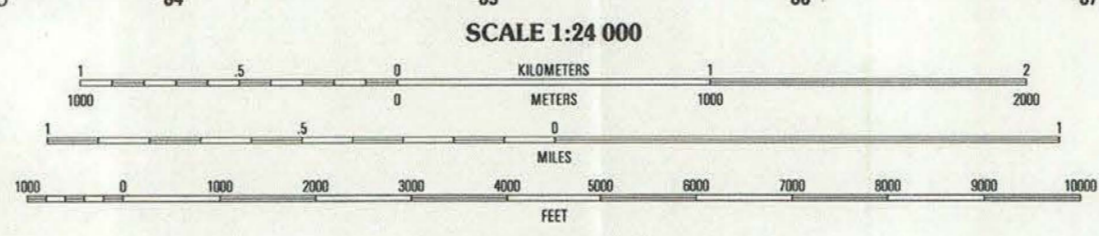
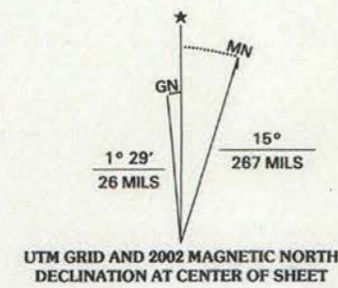


**May Lake High Sierra Camp**





Produced by the United States Geological Survey  
Derived from imagery taken 1985 and other sources. Photoinsected using imagery taken 1997; no major culture or drainage changes observed. PLSS and survey control current as of 1986. Boundaries verified 2002.  
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 1 000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 11 10 000-foot ticks: California Coordinate System of 1927 (zone 3).  
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software.  
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map. Where omitted, land lines have not been established.



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway hard surface .....	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface .....
Secondary highway hard surface .....	Unimproved road .....

Interstate Route   
 U.S. Route   
 State Route

QUADRANGLE LOCATION

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	

1 Ten Lakes  
 2 Falls Ridge  
 3 Three Pines  
 4 Yosemite Falls  
 5 Vegetation Peak  
 6 Hall Dome  
 7 Merced Peak  
 8 Mount Lyell

ADJOINING 7.5' QUADRANGLES

TENAYA LAKE, CA  
1997  
NIMA 2159 IV SW-SERIES V895



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

















































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3

3





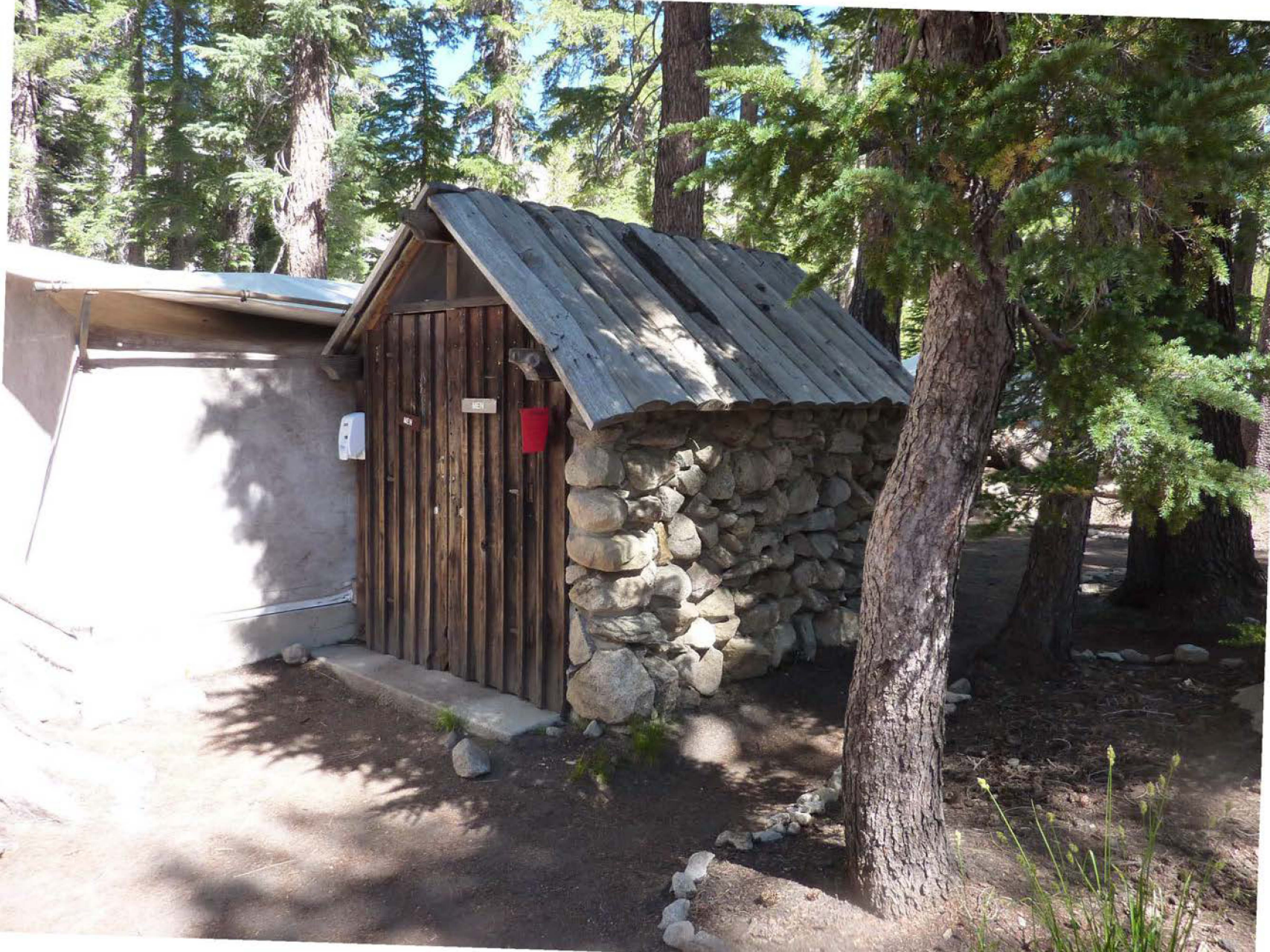
















WOMEN

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**DANGER**  
NO SMOKING  
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RECYCLING  
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY May Lake High Sierra Camp  
NAME:

MULTIPLE Yosemite National Park MPS  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: CALIFORNIA, Tuolumne

DATE RECEIVED: 6/02/14 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 6/25/14  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 7/10/14 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 7/19/14  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 14000417

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

\_\_\_ACCEPT \_\_\_RETURN \_\_\_REJECT \_\_\_\_\_DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**The May Lake High Sierra Camp is locally significant under National Register Criterion A, in the areas of Conservation, Education, and Recreation/Entertainment. Intended as a means of getting Park visitors out beyond the congested Yosemite Valley and into the Sierra high country, the 1938 May Lake Camp was a crucial component of the six site loop system established in Yosemite's high country during the early twentieth century. The seasonal camps combined permanent facilities with simple platform tent cabins designed consistent with the NPS' rustic aesthetics. Emphasizing varied interpretive programs, the camps were envisioned not just as additional recreational venues, but as educational tools by which the Park could introduce visitors to the vast landscapes of the National Park system and promote a better appreciation for the conservation objectives of the NPS. The property meets the registrations requirements set out in the Yosemite MPS.**

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept Criterion A

REVIEWER Paul Lusignea DISCIPLINE HISTORIAN

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE 7/18/14

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR  Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.