

Bridal Veil Falls

We arrived at Bridal Veil Falls on Saturday 24th May, about two hours before sunset. The falls was gushing and it felt like it was raining on the trail to the bottom of the falls. Because of the position of the sun there was a small perfect rainbow formed across the base. It was such a beautiful site. Then as we were preparing to leave we saw three ladies set up their cameras and we noticed that there was a rainbow across the Falls. They mentioned that as the sun set, the rainbow moved higher and higher. Most of us stayed at Curry Village in Cabins. We had a unit reserved at House Keeping, so Rajesh and Rajan spent the nights out there. House Keeping was much better than Curry Village.



Half Dome Hike

ELEVATION: 4035' to 8842'

LENGTH: 16.4 miles round trip

Seven of us (Rajesh, Matra, Dushyant, Hetal (Gadget Gal), Vinod, Shilpa and Birdie) started off from Curry Village on Sunday Morning at 6:30AM. We walked to Happy Isle (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile) which is at the Vernon falls trail head.



The hike to the Vernal Falls Bridge (4,400', 0.8mi) is moderate walking. This is the last potable water on the trail so it's a good place to fill up your water bottles. It's also the location of the first toilet on the trail. Vernal Falls was flowing full with the Sierra snow melt. From the bridge across the base of Vernal Falls, you have an option is to take the Mist Trail which takes you to the top of Vernon Falls, onwards to the bottom of Nevada Falls, and then all the way to the top of Nevada Falls. The Mist Trail follows the Merced river. At this time of the year, it gets very wet when passing by Vernal falls and hence the name. We took the John Muir Trail instead to Nevada falls. The Mist trail to Nevada Falls 1.2 miles shorter, and is a wet experience at this time of the year.

After some distance we come to a place called Clark's point where we see a formation that looks like Half Dome, but is not. There is also another formation called Liberty Face. Here too, you have a choice of joining the Mist Trail which takes you to the bottom of Nevada Falls and you can either head back to Vernal Falls or take the trail to the top of Nevada Falls. We took the right fork and headed to the top of Nevada Falls.

Nevada Falls (5,960, 2.5mi) was gushing too and by far was the most powerful of all the waterfalls including Yosemite Falls. You can view the Nevada Falls from both sides. Around here is the second toilet of the trail to Half Dome. Half Dome is another 5 miles from Nevada Falls. At this point Rajan took off and was last seen at the top of Half Dome. Shilpa was tired and turned back at Nevada Falls, back to Curry in a Hurry. She was the youngest and the only one who did not make it to the top.



Nevada Falls

After crossing Nevada Falls, you reach a fork to Glacier Point. In summer, people drive up to there to start their hike. It is much shorter and all down hill to this fork. After a short distance you pass through Little Yosemite Valley (6,120', 3.7mi), over a sandy trail along the Merced river. Little Yosemite Valley is a popular back packing spot and has the last toilet of the trail. You can see the back side of Half Dome from here. You can also take a detour to Lake Merced. Another hike from here is to Clouds Rest.

After hiking through Little Yosemite, the trail turned upward again. Now we climbed into a densely forested area. Part way through the trail you get a glimpse of Half Dome and you can see the cables and people climbing up to the top. Somewhere along here Rajan was overtaken by a couple who would rest after awhile, and he would catch up with them. Rajan called them the Wabbits and he was the Tortoise. The Wabbits would Wace and West and the Tortoise would Trudge along. You continue climbing until you come out of the tree line to a wonderful view of snow capped mountains in the distance.



Here you see the dome, out of the trees, and it is an awesome sight along with the surrounding landscape. You climb some more across some residual snow that still hasn't melted. The hiking poles come in very handy in helping with stability. There was a steep snow covered section that was easy because of foot prints already made for you and the poles.



Next you climb up 24 switchbacks of narrow, uneven granite steps, placed precariously, as a pathway to the base of the infamous Half Dome cables. This is by far the toughest part of the climb. You run out of breath because of the altitude. The tortoise kept trudging and wasted the wabbits somewhere here and never saw them again.



A Stairway in the Sky

At the base of the cables there apparently is a pile of gloves. We didn't notice it. The cables are steep. At their steepest, 55 degrees is not an exaggeration. There are 2 x 4's spaced about 10 feet apart, like slats on a ladder. People are on their way up as well as down using these cables. Because of the traffic you get ample opportunity to rest and tackle these cables at a leisurely pace. It looks hard, but is not. Even though you are gaining elevation rapidly, your focus is on what is before you and you don't notice the slope of the dome that much.





The Summit



The Legde

Rajan reached to top at 1PM. Dushyant and Hetal reached 15 mins later. From the top, you can see the Yosemite Valley and Curry Village. You can see cars on the road and overall the view is spectacular. They sat and waited for the rest of the gang to show up. Rajan had his blues harp

with him and he played a few tunes while waiting.



Dushyant, Hetal & Rajan started descending around 2PM, when Hetal asked Rajan to see if he spotted Rajesh. She told him Rajesh was hard to miss since he was wearing a blue shirt, black pants and white hat. Sure enough he was spotted just as he was about to start at the base of the cables. We waited for awhile and let people pass, eventually Hetal and Dushyant said they would go down and Rajan decided to go back up and wait for Rajesh, Matra and Vinod. After awhile Rajan got impatient and started down again. There were more people going down at this time than coming up. This was not a good time for anyone to climb up. A little ways down Rajesh, Matra and Vinod were spotted coming up. So Rajan waited for them to catch up to him and climbed back up again. It was now 3PM.

The climb down the cables can be tricky if one has a fear of heights. Some (like Rajesh & Matra) chose to climb down backwards. The most efficient way is to grab the cables and pull them up towards you, lean forward and walk down. By pulling on the cables, you generate more friction and thereby get better traction.

It's not a "Disneyland line" but on a Memorial Weekend afternoon the cables are busy with traffic. It is best to ascend early since after 3:00 pm, the potential for thunder storm activity increases. Certainly you do not want to be on the cables in a thunder storm. Passing on the cables has to be negotiated. It is dangerous for both the climber ascending and the climber descending to be moving at the same time. Instinctively that fact seemed to be recognized by everyone. Routinely, you would give the hiker climbing up the option... Occasionally, the climbers were happy to let you slide down to their roost while they rested, huffing and puffing with physical exertion.

Coming down the rocky switchbacks was a breeze. Next we had to go down the steep snow covered terrain and then it was a long walk back to Curry Village. We left the base of the dome at about 4PM and Rajan reached Curry in a Hurry at 7:45PM. The rest of the gang showed up at 9:15PM. It was dark, but they had head lamps. It was a 11hr to 13hr hike round trip.

People say that it is an extremely challenging hike. It would be for someone who is not in shape. We were sore, but for the most part we were OK and fine the next day.

References:

<http://www.halldomecam.com/>

<http://hometown.aol.com/Yosemite33/>

<http://www.hiking-world.com/halldome.shtml>

<http://www.employees.org/~ciwata/yosemite/halldome/halldome.html>

<http://www.yosemitevacation.com/hike.halldome.htm> - Great Lightning Picture of Half Dome

<http://kevingong.com/Hiking/HalfDome.html>

The next morning, Monday, we went to the Hetch Hetchy reservoir. There are nice camp grounds in there as well. We had a picnic lunch. Went for a stroll to the DAM and then returned back.

