Yosemite National Park

Yosemite National Park lies on the west slope of the central Sierra Nevada Mountains in the Sierra Cascade Biogeographical Province of North America. Total size is 1079 sq km. The area was previously heavily glaciated and although on glaciers are still present in the park the marks of their passing are everywhere. Glacial erosion combined with the granitic bedrock has resulted in unique and pronounced landform features. These include distinctive polished rock structures as well as the related glacial features of hanging valleys,U-shaped canyons, and U-shaped valleys. Monolithic granite blocks such as Half Dome and the perpendicular wall of El Capitan are classic distinctive reflections of the geological history of the area. Elevations vary from 750 m to 3805 m. The park is known for its many waterfalls including the Yosemite Falls and Nevada Falls, the third highest free-falling fall in the world (441 m). There are two major rivers which begin in the park and 330 lakes.

There is considerable climatic variation with mean temperatures varying some 25° between valleys and mountains. Precipitation also varies from 767 to 3650 mm. In Yosemite are found 5 of the 7 recognized life zones of the US. The variety of flora is reflected in the existence of 2 distinct vegetation zones which are governed by climatic variation. Notable are 2 groves of the giant sequoia, the oldest living things on Earth. Other vegetation includes flowering plants along with various other ferns, bryophytes, and lichens. There is one endemic, & threatened or endangered species of plants (18 Federal Register).

It is difficult to describe the values of Yosemite without emphasizing the US experience. The US National Parks system is considered the world leader in the establishment and management of protected areas. The National Park Service is a model for the continued operation of the national park concept. The US Congress has legislated special protection for Yosemite National Park, and the US Department of the Interior has designated Yosemite National Park as a World Heritage Site.

Although it is generally accepted that Yosemite was the site of the first national park legislation, Yosemite has not been without controversy. Legislation was first introduced in the Congress in 1866. In 1890 the Park was incorporated as the Yosemite Park and Grove of the Patriarch Act. In 1905 the Yosemite wilderness act allowed the conservation of all wild lands in the park. In 1933 the park was designated as a national park. In 1984 the park was added to the World Heritage List.

Adding to Yosemite’s cultural treasures are the cultural and artistic features found in the area. The park is home to a variety of cultural resources, including prehistoric rock art, Native American cultural resources, and cultural resources from the area’s history, including the California Gold Rush. The park is also home to a variety of wildlife, including the grizzly bear, the mountain lion, the California condor, and the California gray wolf.

Yosemite National Park: Longitude 119°53'-119°12'W / Latitude 38°11'-37°30'N