

## A Powerful Perspective

California's national parks bring the natural world into focus ● BY BILL FINK

**I'M LOOKING UP AT GENERAL GRANT**, and he's a giant. Adorned with green moss on parts of his thick, gnarled and scarred bark, the mighty sequoia looks like an old warrior, standing with military stiffness and reaching a height of more than 267 feet above me.

This living monument stands in California's Kings Canyon National Park and is one of the world's largest known trees. Anyone would likely feel small in the presence of such a massive living organism—and I think that's a good thing. When you're driving your car on a freeway or connecting instantly to anywhere on the globe via the internet, it's easy to feel like a superpowered giant. You can lose perspective when the world can be reduced to a video clip on the phone in the palm of your hand.



*The General Grant Tree, top, stands more than 267 feet tall. A massive pine cone, above, from Yosemite National Park. The Yosemite Falls, left, cascades 2,425 feet into Yosemite Valley.*

To help regain a sense of perspective about the true scale and majesty of the planet, and to once again feel amazed at the natural world around you, take a tour of California's Majestic Mountain Loop, a 325-mile circuit that connects Sequoia, Kings Canyon and Yosemite national parks ([majesticmountainloop.com](http://majesticmountainloop.com)). The city of Fresno is often considered the gateway to the loop, which can be enjoyed by car or organized tour, or by riding one of the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) buses, which service a network of routes connecting many areas to Yosemite National Park, including Fresno and Mammoth Lakes.

It's the vastness of Yosemite's natural wonders that many visitors find so astonishing. Walking through Yosemite Valley, beneath the cliffs of El Capitan that rise 3,000 feet from the valley floor, and seeing Yosemite Falls 2,425 feet above me and Half Dome reaching up 4,737 feet from





Visitors can walk among the giants of Sequoia National Park.

in the world, as measured by volume, is as tall as a 27-story building, with a trunk so thick, it would take at least 20 adults, with arms outstretched, to encircle the tree.

Despite the popularity of Sequoia, Kings Canyon and Yosemite national parks, it's still possible for visitors to find moments of quiet reflection here. In the lesser-visited sequoia groves where the mossy forest floor absorbs sound, you become fine-tuned to the intricacies of nature: small birds hopping

where I stand is a thrill that simply doesn't translate to photos or videos of the park. Looking at the massive stone monolith of Half Dome, reaching nearly a mile straight up, I feel as if I'm witnessing the power of the Earth bursting forth in stone.

In Sequoia National Park, the trees impress not only with their size, but their age. Many have been growing in this area for more than 2,000 years. The General Sherman Tree, reported to be the largest known tree

between branches, a bee buzzing around a wildflower, rows of ants by the trail carrying tiny leaf clippings to their nest. You leave the trails of these national parks with a deeper appreciation for the scale of Earth's wonders, having a greater perspective about the world around you by feeling small among some of the planet's true giants. ✕

*Bill Fink writes from Oakland.*