



BY SUZANNE HURT

In a flat land far, far away lives a chocolate-covered dog. This dog is the color of a truffle—a 75-pound, chocolate truffle. You can tell by looking at the Labrador that her favorite place is our kitchen. When we make dinner, she plants herself in the geographical center of the room so she is equidistant from any food that could conceivably fall to the floor and be retrieved in one blinding flash of animal cunning. Fifty pounds of her are chest and head. Her feet are literally webbed like a duck's. She lives to swim and go for walks. And when she does, her amber eyes glow with insane puppy happiness. We call her Abbie the Wonderdog. Abbie's never seen one of the most beautiful places on the planet: Yosemite. She's wanted to visit ever since she was all feet, tail and floppy ears. She's nearly 11. Time has crept into her face, marking her eyebrows, muzzle and even two round cheek spots with gray. But time hasn't crept into her eyes. They still shine with a depth of feeling that's unreal. So we found a way to take our brown-eyed girl to Yosemite. Her first reaction: "It gave me a huge appetite." But then, everything does.

TOP 10 THINGS TO DO IN YOSEMITE WITH YOUR DOG

PHOTO: ERIC WHALEN



1 DEEP INSIDE YOSEMITE VALLEY

Canines can hike one of the sweetest spots on Earth, thanks to at least 10 miles of paved paths in the valley. Abbie drooled so much over amazing vistas of Yosemite Falls, Cathedral Rocks, Royal Arches and distant Half Dome she didn't mind walking on pavement. Dogs also can use boardwalks through restoration areas unless signs say otherwise. Mist in the valley added to an ethereal experience Abbie will never forget.

WHERE: The paths can be accessed from many points in the eastern Valley. They are marked as "paved bikeway and foot trail" on the Official Map & Guide to Yosemite, available at entrance stations. The paths loop from Swinging Bridge east to the intersection of Southside and Northside drives before Curry Village. A larger loop can be created when the hike to Lower Mirror Lake and then back past Royal Arches is included.



2 ESCAPE TO LOWER MIRROR LAKE

This is the closest your dog's going to get to legendary Half Dome. Dogs can walk this road through dogwoods and along wild Tenaya Creek one mile to the lower lake. This isn't really a lake at all, just a flat, dammed spot in the creek that may reflect nearby formations if the water level is right. In any season, your pup can walk beneath towering domes—Half Dome being the largest and most photographed—as well as Clouds Rest, Washington Column and Mt. Watkins.

WHERE: Park in lot at Yosemite stables, eastern end of Yosemite Valley (at Southside Drive's end).



3 KILLER SUNSET AT TUNNEL VIEW

El Capitan and Bridalveil Fall frame a gorgeous Valley view from this lookout. You can share the sunset with your dog—and carloads of people. But Abbie barely noticed them once she scored this jaw-dropping panorama. Fog covered so much of the Valley the weekend we visited we couldn't see much driving in on Highway 41 in our truck. Abbie stood in back and poked her head into the cab to see. We came out Wawona Tunnel. Mist parted. Mountains rose before us. Abbie's canine eyes zeroed in on Bridalveil Fall and she let out a loud whine. You've got to be lucky to get a great sunset. Tunnel View is a beautiful spot any time of day.

WHERE: Two parking lots east of Wawona Tunnel on Highway 41/Wawona Road.



4 KICK BACK AT THE REDWOODS

Abbie liked chilling each night next to a fire in a cozy cabin. Especially when snow fell in the upper elevations and signs in the area warned she might have to dodge hungry mountain lions and killer deer on her walks. Instead, she hatched plans to get some of our homemade berry pie. The Redwoods Guest Cottages offers 31 cabins with one to four bedrooms for dogs and their friends for \$117–\$501. Abbie's cabin had a woodstove fireplace, microwave, coffeemaker, cable TV, DVD player, stereo, countless other appliances and all the bear décor she could handle.

WHERE: On Chilnualna Falls Road near Wawona, at the park's south entrance; 209-375-6666, www.redwoodsinyosemite.com, or email info@redwoodsinyosemite.com.



5 HIDDEN WAWONA

Dogs dig Wawona, which is not designated wilderness. Here they can walk along the Merced River even without a paved path. Dogs also can hike 3.5-mile Wawona Meadow Loop, a stunning meadow set beneath Chowchilla Mountain. An old road circles part of a golf course and a wild meadow infused with flowers in spring and early summer. Abbie got so into the mammoth evergreens she didn't notice rain stitching watery jewels onto her fur coat. You might spot wildlife like great gray owls, whitetail deer, mountain bikers and funkily-dressed golfers. Dogs can't swim in the river within park boundaries.

WHERE: Park at Wawona Hotel or at Wawona Meadow Loop area off Highway 41, south of the hotel. From the hotel, cross the highway, follow the road across the golf course and continue on the road once it hits the trees and turns left. If parking at the Meadow Loop, simply follow the old fire road in the other direction. Either way, the last part of the loop runs along Highway 41.



6 COOL OFF AT BRIDALVEIL FALL

Bridalveil slams into the Valley floor from 620 feet above. A quarter-mile paved path led Abbie close enough to soak up splashing water that sometimes thunders down like the sound of crashing boulders. The fall flows even in late summer, when Yosemite Falls usually dries up. But a strong wind can push the fall sideways or even backwards when the flow is light. Abbie walked the path through granite boulders and evergreens where raindrops hung like moonstones. A side path took her across three frothy branches of Bridalveil Creek. An alternative is to hike the paved path to Lower Yosemite Fall.

WHERE: Park at Bridalveil Fall lot in Yosemite Valley.

HEY FIDO!

LISTEN UP!

WHAT DOGS CAN AND CAN'T DO IN YOSEMITE

Dogs have to follow rules while in Yosemite, to minimize their impact on an already crowded National Park and to preserve and protect Yosemite's wildness.

1. Dogs are welcome on roads, paved paths, developed areas and many campgrounds.
2. Keep dogs leashed or otherwise restrained.
3. Dogs can't be left alone, either outside or in a vehicle. Don't give cougars, bears and coyotes MREs—Meals Ready to Eat.
4. Dogs can't explore dirt trails or swimming beaches, or go into the backcountry. Guide dogs are exempt.
5. It is illegal to approach or feed wildlife.
6. Dogs can't ride shuttles or stay in most commercial lodging.
7. Pick up and toss all dog crap in the trash. Other humans will thank you.
8. Pets running loose or killing, injuring or harassing other animals or people may be impounded or destroyed.

For more information, visit
<http://www.nps.gov/yose/trip/pets.htm>.



7 CRASH UNDER THE STARS

Dogs can roast marshmallows and sleep in a tent at all campgrounds except Camp 4, Tamarack Flat, Porcupine Flat and Yosemite Creek. The National Park Service says reservations are required year-round to camp in the Valley. Reservations are needed summer through fall for campgrounds at Wawona, Hodgdon Meadow, Crane Flat and part of Tuolumne Meadows. Dogs can't stay at group campsites.



8 PICNIC AT BRIDALVEIL MEADOW OR SWINGING BRIDGE

Mealtime is Abbie's favorite time of day. She loved tailgating roadside in the meadow between El Cap and Bridalveil Fall, and lounging by a picnic table near a peaceful green curve in the Merced River at Swinging Bridge. Abbie had a surprise encounter with two of the park's giant ravens. They double-teamed her in an attempt to scarf at our table. She didn't bark or ever lunge at the black demons from the sky. But she did grow wild-eyed guarding her share of pie. From the size of these birds, they'd had a lot of pie already.

WHERE: On Southside Drive in Bridalveil Meadow and at Swinging Bridge Picnic Area.



9 SECRET HIKE #1

Dogs love abandoned Old Big Oak Flat Road. This roughly six-mile stretch used to be the way into the park before Highway 120 was built. The road hugs a cliff as it slopes gently up through ponderosa pine forest. You and your dog can snatch views of Bridalveil Fall and Yosemite Valley through openings in the trees. You can even picnic on flat rocks looking out at Bridalveil. Older dogs can hike the start of the road, which remains fairly clear. Younger dogs will have to navigate rockfall on the rest of the road—and watch for falling rock.

WHERE: Intersection with Highway 120, near Big Oak Flat entrance.



10 SECRET HIKE #2

Foresta Road in El Portal is officially outside park boundaries. But this hike in Stanislaus National Forest had to make the list. Foresta Road is more than just an unmaintained road connecting the communities of El Portal and Foresta. It's also one of the hottest places for Yosemite dogs to hang. Dogs can walk about five miles to the park boundary sign.

WHERE: Starting in El Portal, where Foresta Road meets Highway 140. 