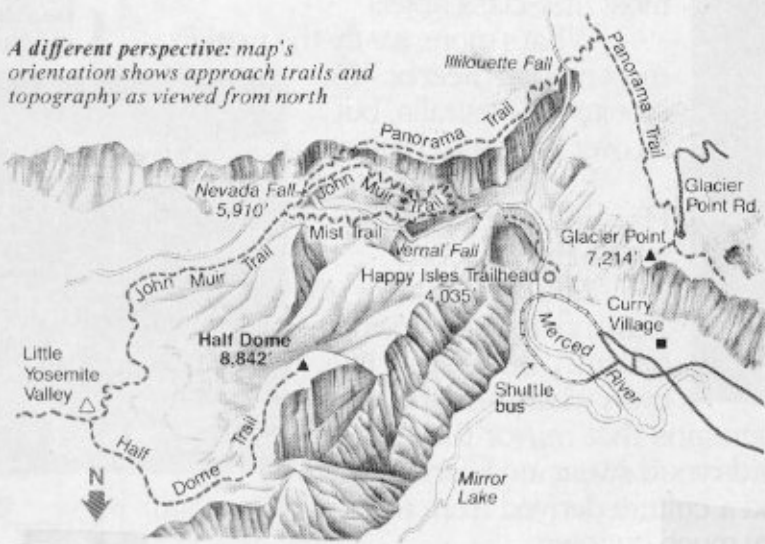




*Cable handhold, anchored in granite, eases strenuous last half hour of 5- to 7-hour climb to summit; wooden planks positioned every several yards make welcome resting spots*

*A different perspective: map's orientation shows approach trails and topography as viewed from north*



*Bird's-eye view for hikers on Half Dome's northwest lip takes in Yosemite Valley nearly a mile below*

To the top of Half Dome.  
Don't laugh. Fifty people do it  
every summer day

From Yosemite Valley, the top of Half Dome appears inaccessible to all but zealous rock climbers. In fact, in 1870 geologist Josiah D. Whitney claimed Half Dome was "probably the only one of all the prominent points about the Yosemite which never has been and never will be trodden by human foot."

But hidden from view on its eastern side is a large rock buttress that provides trail access to within 700 feet of the summit. From there, with the help of cables maintained by the National Park Service, hikers can reach the lofty crest 5,000 feet above the valley floor.

During the five-month season, an average of 40 to 50 people climb the dome each day. September's cooler days and less

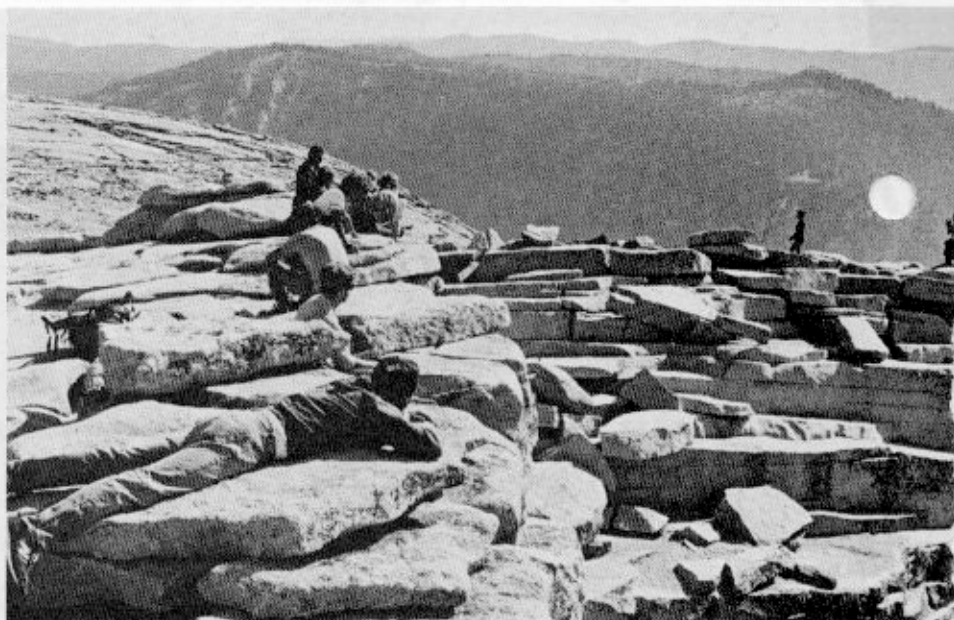
crowded trails make it a good month for an ascent. Most years, the cables stay up through mid-October. When foul weather threatens, stay off the dome.

Wear rubber-soled shoes with good traction, and carry a sweater or jacket, since it's often windy on top. You may want to wear gloves while gripping the cables.

With an early start, you can do the strenuous 16½-mile round trip from Happy Isles trailhead in one day. A more manageable option is to stay overnight in Little Yosemite Valley Campground (permit required; see page 45), 3½ miles from the summit.

The John Muir Trail leads 3½ miles from Happy Isles to Nevada Fall on the way to Half Dome. Or if you don't mind getting wet, you can take the shorter but steeper Mist Trail, which passes Vernal Fall.

From Nevada Fall, the trail levels off for a mile into Little Yosemite Valley



MONTY VANDERBILT

*Clinging like lichens to stone, hikers peer over edge for vertical view of 2,000-foot north face—a classic route for rock climbers*

through the back-country campground. If you're camping, drop off your bulky gear (carry valuables with you) before setting out for the top. But be sure to carry water. (Plan to boil trailside water at least 3 minutes to kill disease organisms.)

Beyond the campground, the trail winds steeply up 3½ miles through a pine forest, over steps cut into the rock of the eastern buttress, and onto a smooth saddle where the cables begin.

The half-hour climb up the 46° slope isn't as steep as it looks—but if you're shy of heights, don't look down. Allow time to wander on the expansive summit and enjoy the 360° panorama.

On your descent, you may find it easier to step backwards down the cabled section. Most hikers return to the valley floor and take a shuttle bus back to their cars.

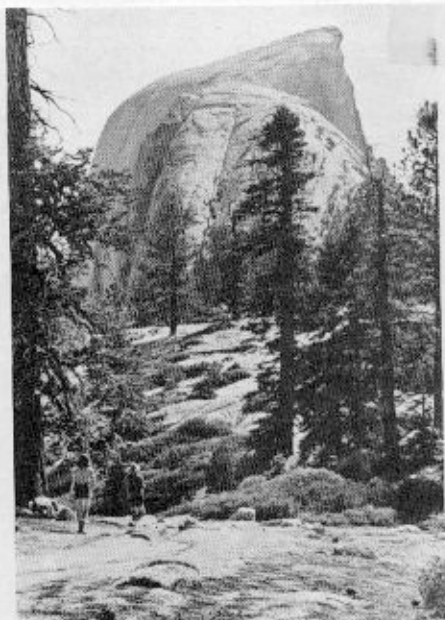
**Panorama Trail option.** An alternative route via the Panorama Trail from Gla-

cier Point offers spectacular vistas of Illilouette Fall and Half Dome, as well as mostly downhill hiking for about 4 miles to Nevada Fall. From there the Muir Trail leads into Little Yosemite Valley.

Tour buses to Glacier Point leave Curry Village in Yosemite Valley daily at 8 A.M. and 1 P.M.; one-way tickets cost \$8.25. To reserve, call (209) 372-1431 up to a day ahead. Overnight parking is available.

Yosemite Valley shuttle buses (free) stop at Happy Isles Trailhead every 15 to 20 minutes between 9 A.M. and 10 P.M. daily.

**Permits.** Free overnight back-country permits are available on a first-come basis up to 24 hours before departure at Big Oak Flat Entrance Station, Yosemite Valley Visitor Center, Wawona Ranger Station, and Tuolumne Meadows Permit Station; to be sure of a permit, get it a day ahead. For details on park roads, weather, and camping, call (209) 372-4454. □



*Eastern face of Half Dome looms high above approaching hikers*