

## Hiking Hetch Hetchy

Help protect Hetch Hetchy by following Leave No Trace principles. A wilderness permit is required for all overnight trips. Permits can be obtained at the Hetch Hetchy entrance station.

### Wapama Falls

5 mi (8 km) roundtrip  
Elevation gain/loss: 507 ft (155 m)

This trail follows the shoreline of the reservoir with moderate up and downhill hiking. The trail includes spectacular views of both Tueeulala and Wapama Falls. To access the trail, cross the dam and pass through the tunnel.

### Rancheria Falls

13 mi (21 km) roundtrip  
Elevation gain/loss: 1909 ft (581 m)

The trail to Rancheria Falls continues past Wapama Falls and may be done as either a long day hike or an overnight trip. The hike to Rancheria is 6.5 miles with beautiful views of the valley and waterfalls. Backpackers can access Tiltill or Rancheria mountains and the vast northwest wilderness of Yosemite from the Rancheria area.

### Lookout Point Trail

2 mi (3 km) roundtrip  
Elevation gain/loss: 680 ft (207 m)

This hike involves moderate elevation gain and brings hikers to a rocky outcropping overlooking the Hetch Hetchy Valley. Begin hike at the Hetch Hetchy entrance station.

### Laurel/Vernon/Rancheria Loop

29 mi (47 km) roundtrip  
Elevation gain/loss: 5929 ft (1807 m)

This multi-day, 29-mile hike includes spectacular views of Hetch Hetchy, beautiful high Sierra lakes, and access to the park's north wilderness. The first four miles of this loop follow the old Lake Eleanor Road as it climbs out of the valley. This portion may also be done as a more strenuous 8-mile day hike.

### Poopenaut Trail

2.5 mi (4 km) roundtrip  
Elevation gain/loss: 1279 ft (390 m)

This trail is a steep descent to the Tuolumne River and a strenuous climb back up. Begin at the signed trailhead 4 miles past the entrance station.

### Smith Peak

Smith Peak (7,751 ft) is the highest point in the area and offers outstanding views. There are two trailhead options. One route begins 6 miles beyond the entrance station and is 13 miles (21 km) round-trip with 3,700 feet (1128 m) of elevation gain. The other route begins at the entrance station and is 16 miles (26 km) round-trip with 3,300 feet (1006 m) of elevation gain. The Smith Peak trails can also be used to access the Yosemite high country.

## Regulations

### Swimming and boating are prohibited in the reservoir.

In order to maintain a clean source of drinking water, public access is prohibited below the high-water mark of the reservoir.

### Pets are not allowed on the dam or on hiking trails.

Wild animals are threatened by domestic animals in their territory and may endanger your pets. Dogs are allowed in the day-use area but must be leashed at all times.

### Fishing is prohibited from O'Shaughnessy Dam.

Public access is prohibited below the high-water mark of the reservoir.

For other areas, a valid California fishing license is required. California state and Yosemite National Park regulations apply. For more information on state fishing regulations, visit [wildlife.ca.gov/regulations](http://wildlife.ca.gov/regulations).

For more information on fishing regulations in Yosemite National Park, visit [go.nps.gov/fishyosemite](http://go.nps.gov/fishyosemite).



## Hetch Hetchy Valley

*Hidden in Yosemite National Park's peaceful northwest corner, Hetch Hetchy Valley is a treasure worth visiting in all seasons.*

In spring, two of North America's tallest waterfalls plummet spectacularly over thousand-foot granite cliffs. With its towering falls and dramatic domes, many have compared Hetch Hetchy's grandeur to the more well-known Yosemite Valley. From early spring through late fall, visitors have easy access to a vast wilderness filled with high-country lakes, streams, and wildlife. Snowy winter days give adventurous visitors a chance to explore on skis or snowshoes.

Hetch Hetchy Valley in 1911. Photo by Matt Ashby Wolfskill, courtesy of the Library of Congress.

### History

People have inhabited the Hetch Hetchy Valley for more than 6,000 years. Early American Indian cultures were prominent long before the first European Americans arrived in the 1850s. The modern valley name is derived from the Miwok word *hatchhatchie*, which means "edible grasses." Native place names are still used for other features in the valley, including Tueeulala Falls, Wapama Falls, Kolana Rock, and the Tuolumne River.

Many groups of people used resources from this area, some also gathering here for trading. The valley offered a year-round water supply, mild winter weather, good hunting and fishing, and abundant acorns and edible plants.

As early as 1882, the rapidly growing city of San Francisco began to look at the Hetch Hetchy Valley as a potential site for a new reservoir.

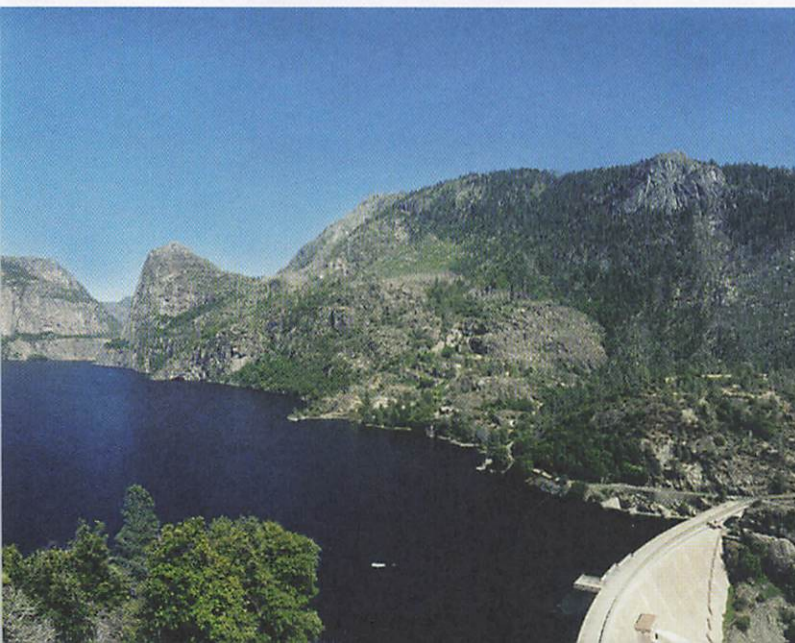
Preservationists, led by John Muir, wanted Hetch Hetchy to remain untouched. Launching a campaign for the protection of the valley, they maintained that another location for a reservoir could be found outside of the national park.

Supporters of the dam countered that a reservoir in Hetch Hetchy would offer tremendous social and economic benefits. Due to its increasing population, San Francisco was already facing chronic water and power shortages.

For the first time in the American experience, a national audience considered the competing claims of preservation and development.

Until the early 1900s, many Americans viewed wilderness as something to subdue and natural resources as infinitely renewable. The long battle over Hetch Hetchy asked Americans to weigh the true cost of progress.

In 1906, an earthquake and fire devastated San Francisco, adding urgency and public sympathy to the search for an adequate water supply. Congress passed the Raker Act in 1913, authorizing the construction of a dam in the Hetch Hetchy Valley, as well as a second dam at Lake Eleanor. The first phase of construction on the O'Shaughnessy Dam (named for its chief engineer) was completed in 1923. The final phase was completed in 1938, raising the height of the dam to 430 feet. Today the reservoir holds 117 billion gallons of clean drinking water, supplying over 2.7 million Bay Area residents and businesses. Two plants downstream also provide hydroelectric power. The reservoir is eight miles long and is the largest single body of water within the national park.



### Flora and Fauna

Hetch Hetchy is home to a diverse array of plants and animals. Gray pine, incense-cedar, and California black oak grow in abundance. The distinctive manzanita bush is common, and many beautiful examples of this red-barked shrub can be found growing along the road. Spring and early summer bring brightly colored wildflowers, including lupine, wallflower, monkeyflower, and buttercup. Seventeen species of bats inhabit this area of the park, including North America's largest species, the western mastiff bat. Hikers should remain alert for rattlesnakes and black bears on trails.

2023 marked the centennial of the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir and O'Shaughnessy Dam. Photo by Greg Lawler.