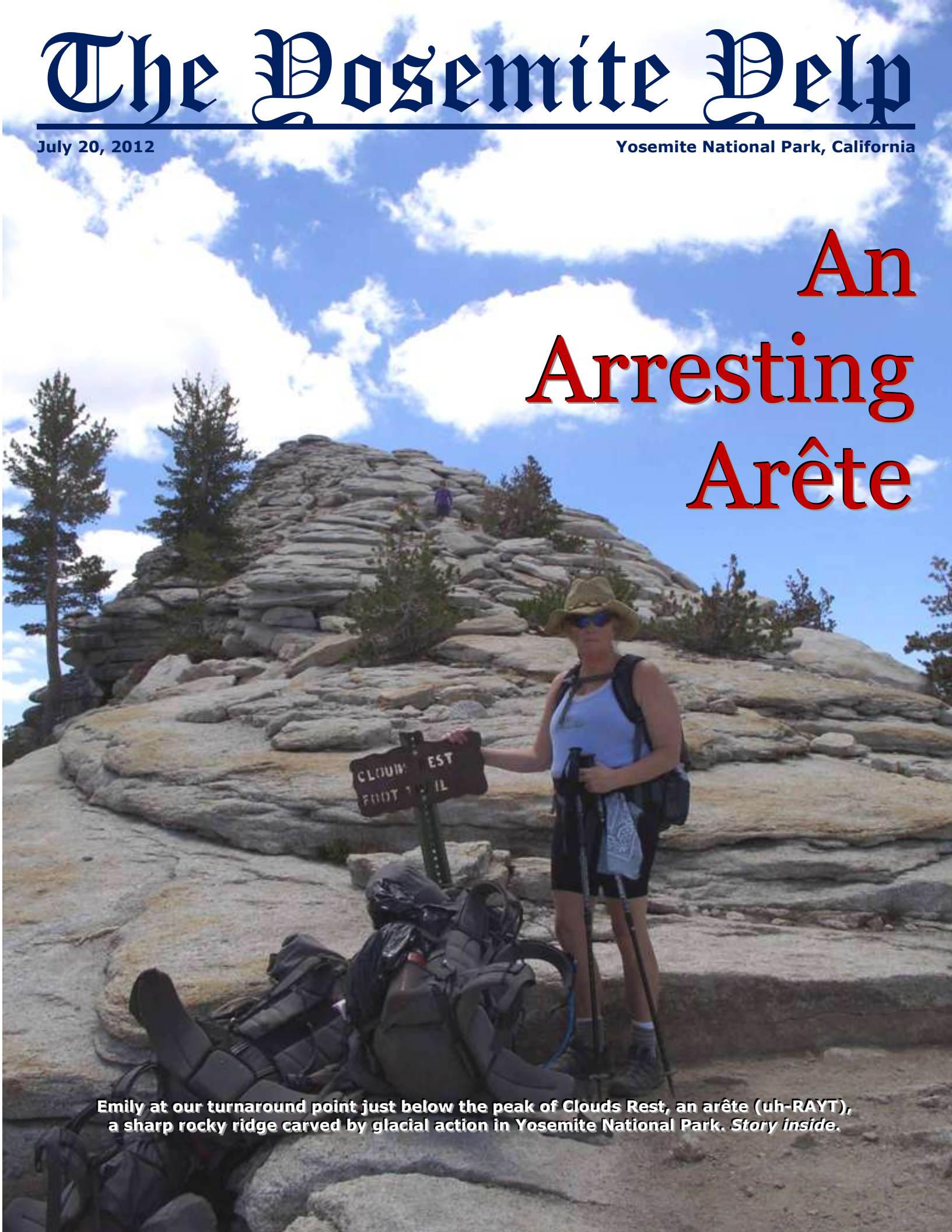


The Yosemite Delp

July 20, 2012

Yosemite National Park, California

An Arresting Arête



Emily at our turnaround point just below the peak of Clouds Rest, an arête (uh-RAYT), a sharp rocky ridge carved by glacial action in Yosemite National Park. *Story inside.*

An arresting arête



From near the top of Clouds Rest you can just make out the blue waters of Tenaya Lake, six miles away as the eagle flies, where our hike began.

We had just climbed above the last bit of forest and gained the knife edge of the naked Clouds Rest summit ridge when Emily said she had gone as far as she could go.

She could see the 9,926-foot peak just a few minutes above us. But with the protective embrace of surrounding trees now gone, she could also see to either side of our narrowing upward path, and there was nothing there.

She sat down on a low flat boulder.

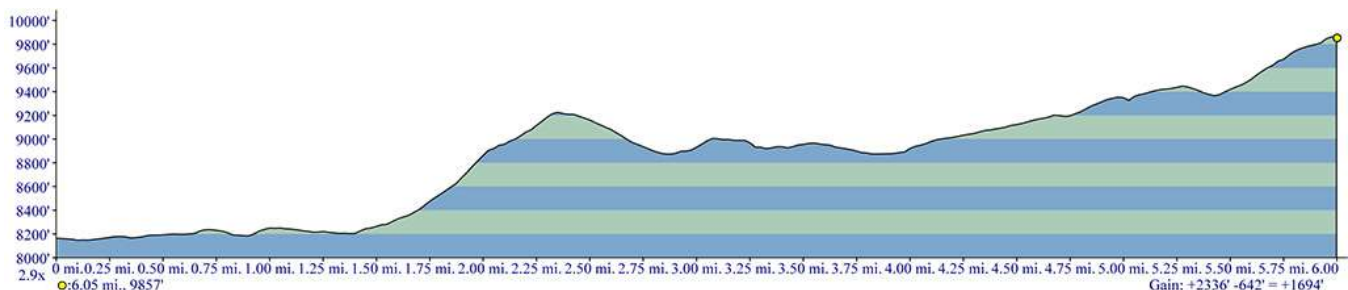
"I'm not going any further," she said.

There was trembling in her voice. "I don't want to be here. I feel so exposed."

Emily did not know when she used the word that "exposure" is a mountaineering term. It refers to the empty space below a climber through which she could fall.

We had known long before we headed to Yosemite that she might make this decision, and we had talked about this possibility with our hiking buddy Maureen Chandler, who had set her sights on doing this hike a year ago after climbing Half Dome.

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Fortunately the thousand-foot climb between the 1.5- and 2.5-mile marks of the Clouds Rest trail comes when hikers are still fresh. The final half-mile is difficult because of fatigue. The last 100 yards is a mind game. The return trip seems to go on forever.

An arresting arête

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Maureen was already at the top with her daughter, our group's other Emily, her brother Dean and his wife Adrianna. My Emily had hung back with me providing company and encouragement since we left Earth's atmosphere behind some miles back.

I was not comfortable trying to persuade Emily to go on, and I was not comfortable accepting her invitation to go the rest of the way alone. She asked that I take her picture to mark our forward progress at the sign where others had stashed their backpacks for the final push, and then I led her down to the trees.

"I feel fine, now," she said. We opened up a hiker's snack of granite chunks and blueberry glue.



Our hike began at the top of the map and ended at the bottom.

We had come seven miles and climbed nearly 1,900 feet since leaving the trailhead at Tenaya Lake five hours ago. The sight of Tenaya in the distance and the terrain we had covered reminded us why we were so tired and what we were preparing to do again.

Emily's endurance was going to help me off the mountain. Just a couple of miles

into the return journey my legs were beginning to get rubbery. Something was wrong with my stomach. I couldn't poop or puke. Loosening the waist belt on my backpack helped, even though that shifted more of the 40-pound weight to my shoulders.

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An arresting arête

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But there was a 400-foot climb on the return, and both of us were concerned about it. I still had on the long-sleeved undershirt and long hiking pants I started in when the temperature was in the 50s. It still felt comfortable in the 70s, even though Emily was in shorts and sleeveless shirt.

She had to ask three times before I let her zip off my pants bottoms and I peeled off the soaked undershirt. If my judgment was impaired by heat, I figured, I would be the last to know. So I trusted hers.

The cool air felt good. The hill was still a bitch on rubber legs, but then we had a thousand-foot downhill that was a test mainly to avoid turning an ankle on a misstep in the rocks.

We finished after helping each other over 14 miles and 10½ hours on the trail, the longest and most difficult hike I've tried.



Clouds Rest seen from the south at Glacier Point.



Clouds Rest seen from the north at Olmstead Point. It's 4,000 feet from the peak straight down to the canyon floor



**Our trail to Clouds Rest came up from the left on the more benign far side of the arête.
Our turnaround point is marked with the arrow.**

Views from along the trail



**The first mile and a half of the trail is mostly flat
at 8,150 feet, lake level of Tenaya Lake.**



Emily, left, and Maureen during the 1,000-foot ascent between Mile 1.5 and 2.5.

We crossed several meadows and streams in the third and fourth miles, which hover around 9,000 feet, including this pond where Emily is shaded by her new hat.



Maureen makes her way through the lupine.



The peak comes into view in the last mile of the climb.

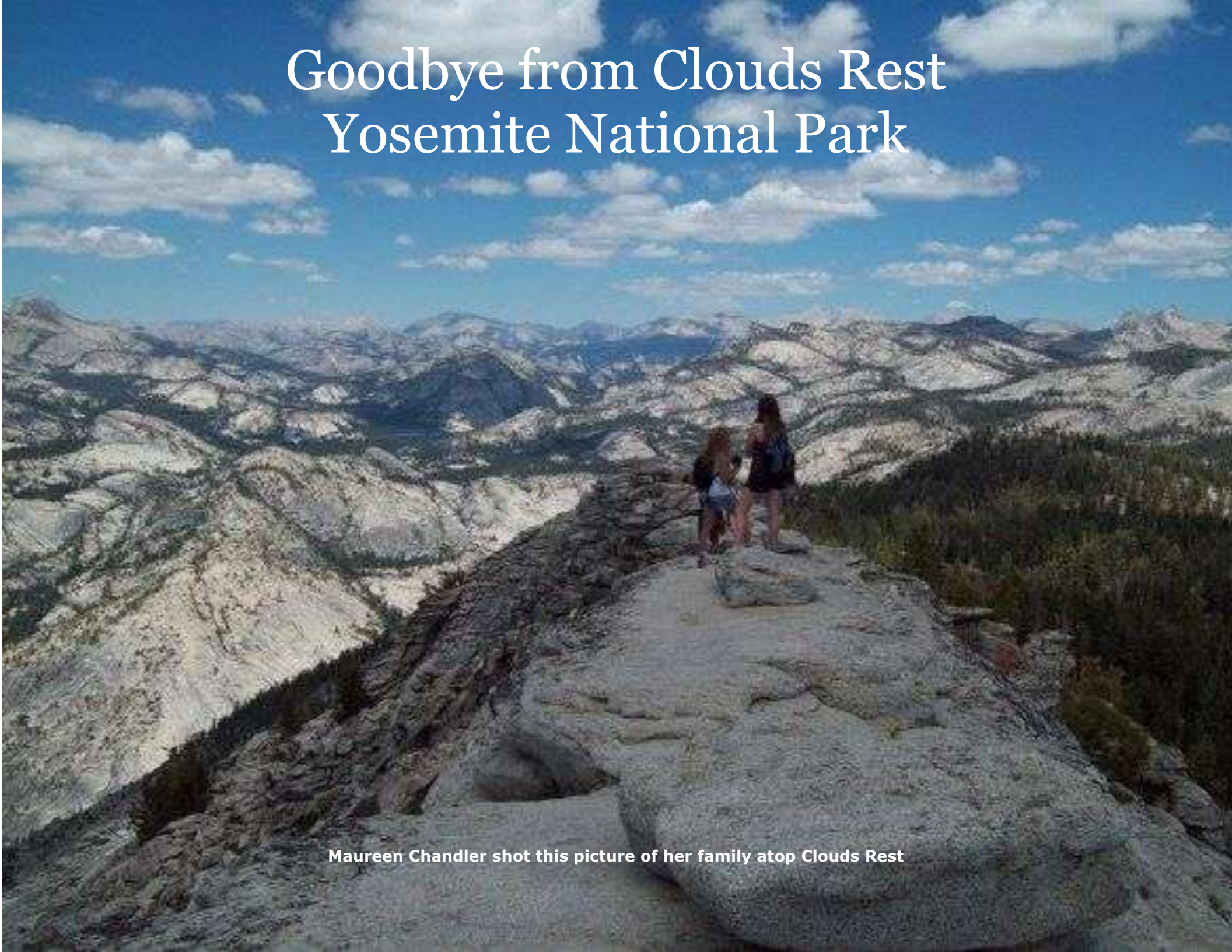


Mount Clark, 11,527 feet, on the descent from Clouds Rest

Emily looks back toward Tenaya Lake as we begin our return hike.



Goodbye from Clouds Rest Yosemite National Park



Maureen Chandler shot this picture of her family atop Clouds Rest