



## 2008 Fact Sheet/Backgrounder

The Bracebridge Dinner at Yosemite

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### **Overview**

The Bracebridge Dinner at Yosemite is a unique American holiday tradition. It offers a captivating blend of world-class musical theatre and cuisine, inspired by Washington Irving's tales about a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Old English Yuletide, all set in the majestic natural beauty of Yosemite in winter. Since it began 81 years ago in 1927, The Bracebridge Dinner at Yosemite has earned an unrivaled reputation for reconnecting each guest with the spirit and enchantment of the holidays.

### **The Origins**

- Inspired by Washington Irving's tales in *The Sketch Book* (1819) about Christmas at Bracebridge Hall in Yorkshire, England.
- The first Bracebridge Dinner pageant was performed 81 years ago in 1927, shortly after The Ahwahnee hotel opened. Dr. Donald B. Tresidder, president of the Yosemite Park and Curry Co., and later president of Stanford University, conceived the idea with his wife, Mary Curry Tresidder. The two played the roles of Squire and Lady Bracebridge until his death in 1948.
- Famed Yosemite photographer Ansel Adams was among the Yosemite locals who originally played the chief characters, performing as the Lord of Misrule in 1927 and 1928. He later served as director of The Bracebridge Dinner from 1929-1973.
- Prominent Bay Area choral conductor Eugene Fulton joined The Bracebridge Dinner in 1934, became musical director in 1946, and overall director when Adams retired in 1973. His daughter, Andrea Fulton, has been director and producer since his death in 1978.

### **The Performance**

- This three-and-a-half hour holiday feast transports guests to Old England, where more than 80 singers, court characters and other performers tell the story of a Christmas celebration with Lord Merrick of Bracebridge and his household.
- The essence of Bracebridge is the music and singing, which includes a variety of original and classic carols performed by the rich operatic voices of The Andrea Fulton Chorale. In 2008, Andrea, who also plays the role of The Housekeeper, marks her 59<sup>th</sup> year as a performer and 30<sup>th</sup> year as director and producer.

- The Ahwahnee Dining Room, with its 50-foot ceiling topped by massive log beams, serves as the Great Hall at Squire Bracebridge's manor. The entire room is a stage, crowned by an elaborate Squire's table and sideboard and bejeweled with traditional Yuletide decorations. These include a 30-foot faux stained-glass window and smaller holiday roundels above each cathedral window, and heraldic banners hanging from the massive wood ceiling trusses. These and other elements of the original set still in use today were created by The Ahwahnee's interior designer, Jeanette Dyer Spencer, between 1927 and 1929
- The Bracebridge Dinner at Yosemite has been recognized for decades as one of the most sought-after holiday events in the United States. In 2006, *The Wall Street Journal* proclaimed, "Bracebridge is, without much doubt, the country's, if not the world's, premier Christmas dinner." Previously, Bracebridge was featured in 1938 on the cover of *Life Magazine* and recognized as an impressive and extravagant American holiday tradition.

### **The Food**

- A major player in The Bracebridge Dinner at Yosemite is the food. During the performance, larger-than-life litters representing each course are presented to the Squire for his approval, including The Fish, The Peacock Pie, The Boar's Head and Baron of Beef, and the Pudding and Wassail.
- Each year, Ahwahnee Executive Chef Percy Whatley and his world-class staff create a new seven-course English feast tuned to discriminating modern tastes.
- The menu for the 2008 season includes Pickled Beets and Farinata (The Relish), White Bean Puree (The Soup), Fennel Cured Steelhead Trout (The Fish), Petaluma Chicken Bisteya (The Peacock Pie), and Roasted Angus Beef Tenderloin (The Boar's Head and Baron of Beef) followed by an Endive and Citrus Salad. The traditional Plum Pudding and Wassail represent the final course, served with Mignardises & Truffles.
- Planning the menu takes months of preparation. During the eight performances, more than 2,000 guests dine on more than 14,000 courses of sumptuous food prepared by a 75-person culinary team and presented by a meticulously choreographed wait staff of more than 60.

### **The Setting**

- Yosemite National Park in winter provides the perfect backdrop for The Bracebridge Dinner at Yosemite with its snow-clad mountains and ice-laden waterfalls. Winter visitors also enjoy unparalleled access to breathtaking seasonal vistas and a wide variety of recreational activities.
- *Badger Pass Activities* – Since opening in 1935, Yosemite's Badger Pass Ski Area has been a favorite downhill and cross-country ski, snowshoeing and snowboarding destination for generations of winter adventurers, and is accessible via free shuttle bus from all Yosemite Valley lodging.
- *Ice Skating* – The Curry Village outdoor ice skating rink offers guests ice-skating with views of two of Yosemite's most dramatic sites – Half Dome and Glacier Point.
- *Guided Sightseeing Tours* – The best way to see and learn about Yosemite's spectacular sights is by guided sightseeing tour. The two-hour Valley Tour, conducted in a heated coach, stops frequently at Yosemite's most popular locations.
- *Photography Walks* – Spend time with a professional photographer/guide from the Ansel Adams Gallery learning how to capture your Yosemite vacation on film.
- *Interpretive Programs* – Free and fee-based winter programs include Wee Wild Ones for kids six and under, Full Moon snowshoe walks with interpretive messaging, Historic Ahwahnee tours and many wildlife and ecology programs.

### **Reservations and Information**

- The 2008 performances of The Bracebridge Dinner at Yosemite take place December 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24 and 26, starting at 6:00 p.m. Lodging packages and dinner-only tickets are still available for most dates.
- It's easier than ever to attend Bracebridge. In 2002, the lottery system used for decades by the National Park Service to manage demand for tickets was eliminated. Since that time, the number of performances was increased to eight, and guests now can reserve their seats and accommodations a year-and-a-day in advance.
- One- and two-night lodging packages for two at The Ahwahnee, Yosemite Lodge at the Falls and the Wawona Hotel are still available for most dates. The 2008 package rates range from \$925 to \$1654 plus tax, and include gratuity. Tickets to just the performance and seven-course dinner are \$375 per person, including tax and gratuity.

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### **For more information, press only:**

To view additional information on The Bracebridge Dinner at Yosemite, or about Yosemite in Winter, please visit our Media Web page at

<http://www.thebracebridgedinneratyosemite.com/media.html>