

# “Death could have been prevented by simply following the rules.”



## BEN CUNNINGHAM-SUMMERFIELD

*works as an Interpretive Park Ranger and Cultural Demonstrator at Yosemite. In addition to his popular guided “Bear Walks,” he leads tours highlighting the stories, arts, and games of Native Yosemite.*

**Tank, one of the last Yosemite bears to have an official name,** was initially trapped in the Curry Orchard in 1996. In June 1999, he was captured in Camp Six after being seen breaking into vehicles. He was also captured that July after being seen eating food out of a vehicle that had been broken into in Curry Village. He was relocated to Lake Eleanor, but returned shortly thereafter and was seen in the immediate area of numerous break-ins after his return to the Valley. Owing to the number of places Tank broke into, and the potential for him to “train” other bears to view vehicles as food sources, he was euthanized during this capture.

Visitors often want to know where we get the props for our programs. I think in this case it is exceptionally important for the visitor to understand the ramifications of their actions on the park’s wildlife. I explain to visitors how and why Tank was killed. I also explain that my wife and I skinned him for educational purposes. The emotional connection attained by using a skin from the park as opposed to one acquired from a taxidermist is much more powerful. Many people are upset by the use of a real bearskin and skull, but I feel it helps drive the point home that people need to be mindful of where they are. Many people are upset by the use of a real bearskin and skull, but I feel it helps drive the point home that people need to be mindful of where they are.\* It creates a “slug in the gut,” realizing that this death could have been prevented by simply following the rules.

\*Yosemite National Park is home to hundreds of voracious American black bears. Their curiosity and amazing sense of smell leads them to seek out human food. Bears who become used to getting human food can become aggressive, and sometimes have to be killed as a result. Yosemite campers are strenuously instructed to store their food properly, in order to prevent a bear’s unnecessary death.