

PUBLICATIONS OF THE SIERRA CLUB

No. 49

SIERRA CLUB BULLETIN

Vol. IX

No 3



JANUARY, 1914

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

1914

THE 1913 OUTING TO THE KINGS RIVER CAÑON

By Lena Martha REDINGTON

Our special train of Pullmans left Oakland early in the afternoon of July 2d. The next morning the Southern California contingent had been attached to our train at Mojave and 10 o'clock found us at Owenyo, a desert station on the east side of the Sierra. Here the sleepers were abandoned for a strange little train of mixed composition—freight cars, old-time plush-seated coaches, cabooses, anything that could be used to hasten our progress to the land of mountain peaks. As we looked back upon the suit-cases, destined for shipment to the point where we would next see our civilized clothes, a month hence, it was as if the station of Owenyo consisted of a city block of baggage, red-tagged. For an hour we travelled on the newly improvised train through a sage-brush country where the wonderful sky, the soft green of the vegetation, and the dull yellow of the sand seemed to release the spirit from worldly cares and suggest the freedom of the unconventional days to come. On the west rose the snow-streaked heights and pinnacles of Mt. Whitney. Next in the succession of peaks came Mt. Williamson, a complete reversal of Whitney's slopes, for it is precipitous on the west, and sloping on the east. This promenade of peaks ended at Citrus, or Kearsarge, as it is now called, where another motley array of vehicles was awaiting. This time there had been gathered, from far and near, conveyances propelled by horse-power, mule-power and gasoline-power, and into them we scrambled to be whirled through sand and sagebrush to Independence.

This interesting old mining town deserves more than a passing word. Far from railroads, it is unspoiled by close association with modern civilization. But, material beings that we are, not until we had settled the lunching question did we have time even to listen to the all-Indian band playing patriotic tunes; for this was July 3d. One would have attributed the general scheme of color and festivity to Uncle Sam were it not that wide festoons of evergreen spelled the words, "Welcome Sierra Club." The afternoon was spent in the same conveyances, en route for Pine Cañon. There we found all that was necessary for the comfort of our first night's camp.

Dreadful prognostications had made Kearsarge Pass all but insurmountable, for Kearsarge Pass is 11,823 feet above sea level and it is not usual the first day to climb so high, the elevation of our camp being about 6,000 feet. We had been awed to an early sleeping bag, so we had to forego the pleasures of a sapphire twilight and of a starry sky. But the morrow had not half the terrors and drawbacks that we had been led to expect. Every quadruped in Inyo County capable of bearing a saddle had been pressed into service for the day's climb. The cavalcade which left Pine Cañon on that first morning of real exertion seemed to be interminable.

The view from Kearsarge Pass is justly one of the most renowned in the Sierra. To the east lay Owen's Valley and Independence, now grown very tiny. Prominent on the western horizon were North Guard, Mt. Brewer and South Guard. Peering out behind Table Mountain we could see just a corner of Milestone. This glimpse of an old friend furnished occasion for reminiscence of the previous summer's outing when the Club was on the other side of the Kings-Kern Divide. Close at hand were the Kearsarge Pinnacles and the Kearsarge Lakes, stretching on down to Bullfrog Lake, or, as it is sometimes called, Lake Bryanthus. Passing these we descended into the cañon of Bubb's Creek to our second night's camp at the base of the East Vidette.

To me there has always been something surpassingly precious about the first two or three nights in the mountains. Just as the poet used to comfort his fretful child by taking him to see the stars, so are we, children of this busy world, comforted by the lustre of these clear Sierran nights.

The more restless and strenuous were not willing to leave unseen the view from University Peak, 13,000 feet, or the shores of Vidette Lakes, about 11,000 feet above the level of the sea. But the busiest preparations had for their object the Rae Lake knapsack trip. While the main party was to descend into Kings Cañon by the Bubb's Creek trail, more seasoned adventurers were weighing and discarding until

they got their packs down to a comfortable shape and weight. The route over Glenn Pass is a steep one and does not readily admit of transportation by animals. Hence impedimenta must be carried by means of the human foot and shoulder. A four days' trip was planned with provisions for about sixty persons. Rae Lake is one of the most beautiful if not the most beautiful of our Sierra mountain lakes. It is encircled by a wonderful array of towering peaks which it mirrors on its island-dotted surface.

A day of idleness on the shores of the lake afforded time for varied diversions – fishing, photographing and climbing. Next day we followed down the cañon of Wood's Creek whose walls reminded us of the steep cliffs of the Kern-Kaweah gorge, Paradise Valley, our aim. Here the importance of the moment lay in determining which was the spot whose previous historic associations made it important as a camp. The pleasing combination of fern and grass, tree and rock, moss and stream, might properly have challenged any other so-called Paradise to prove its claims. The cliffs grew higher and the walls closer together as we approached the main Kings River Cañon. One more day down the banks of the South Fork, past Mist Falls, and we were again with the main party which had preceded us to Kanawyer's at the junction of Copper Creek and the Kings River.

We remained five days at Copper Creek. It was such a delightful camp, with its memories of former outings, that we hated to abandon it. The camp stretched along the river bank, as busy at certain hours of the day as the sacred banks of the Ganges. Washing, pulling up water in buckets and other housekeeping duties here went merrily on; fishing and afternoon tea parties were held, and last, but not least, every afternoon the famous swimming parties at the big rock.

Many side attractions in the form of one-day trips kept us in active training. Roaring River Falls were three miles away, Granite Creek, two miles, and Sentinel Rock, with its superior view, towered above us. I must not omit to mention the famous two-day trip of three of our best mountaineers to Colby Pass, a newly discovered crossing of the Kings-Kern Divide, in the neighborhood of Milestone.

Unwillingly we brought to an end our delightful stay at this South Fork camp. The climb out, up the Copper Creek - Granite Basin trail – a rise of 6,000 feet – had been described as something to be dreaded, but, like all zigzagging, it was more monotonous than difficult. However, no climb can be very monotonous which unfolds such admirable views of distant valleys and peaks. Here we overlooked Sentinel Dome, Avalanche Peak, the Sphinx and Bubb's Creek. This landscape gave way to delightful spaces of red fir forest, which in turn began to thin out into granite boulders. Flocks of Mr. Muir's "hoofed locusts" met us here, driven by the usual Basque herders. By noon we were at Granite Basin, a beautiful camp though very cold, the only stop between the South Fork Cañon and Simpson Meadows.

Those who wished made the ascent of Goat Mountain, an excellent view point, since it stands conspicuously alone in the center of a circle of lofty peaks that form the rim of vision. The next day the party descended over 5,000 feet in elevation to Simpson Meadows, where a permanent camp was established for eleven days.

One of the most wonderful natural gardens in the Sierra is in Simpson Meadows. The Middle Fork of the Kings River rushes by. In the open, fern braes are mingled with a luxuriant growth of flowers whose fragrance greets one in advance. Ladies' tresses, elephant's heads, tiger lilies, larkspur, wild roses, wood violets, all these most delicate flowers are there, either mixed with ferns or alone in beds by themselves. Out beyond are picturesque groupings of pines framing views of Mt. Woodworth, 12,214 feet, and the Goddard Cañon. Our camp was conveniently installed on numerous branching streams, so numerous as to cause more than one person to stray by night beyond his bourne.

Beautiful as was our meadow it could not restrain the restless mountain climbers. The first morning's excitement centered around a pine on which were posted the lists for the side-trips scheduled to leave for Mt. Woodworth, Marion Lake and the North Palisade.

The less said about the many wet days that followed the better, though merry were the post-campfire ceremonies of drying out wet sleeping-bags and wearing apparel. In spite of the rain we started forth on our side-trips in three divisions. The Triple Falls brigade was to stay three nights at the falls on Cartridge

Creek, making daily trips to points of interest. Another party went to Marion Lake and crossed into the Palisade Basin and visited Grouse Valley, and a third, the picked mountaineers, attempted the difficult and dangerous climb of the North Palisade (14,254 feet). The first night we all camped together up Cartridge Creek Cañon at Triple Falls. Next day we separated to go our various ways. It would take too long to relate the details of the trip to the Palisade Lake Basin, the long snow and ice slide, the magnificent storm clouds, the dead tree which we set on fire and which fell in the night among the sleeping bags, the incessant rain which at first seemed to succeed in defeating the project of gaining the summit, then the safe ascent of all those who waited over an extra day to try again.

About this time hearts began to grow heavy, for the end of the outing was drawing near. Only the four days' trip to Shaver was left and the 1913 outing would be over. These days were unsurpassed in beauty by any other part of the trip. The first night's camp was in Tehipite Valley with its wonderful cliffs and pinnacles and great dome, rising nearly 4,000 feet in the air above the floor of the valley. The rain need not be mentioned since everybody but the photographers had grown used to it by this time. While we have always, while travelling in the Sierra, prepared for a passing thunder shower, we never dreamed that it could rain so many days in succession, and at all hours of the day and night. The photographers sat with cameras poised, waiting for the dome to smile through the clouds which enveloped its cap, while the rest of us enjoyed the fleecy bits of cottony whiteness that floated from pinnacle to pinnacle.

The following day the steep climb out of Tehipite Valley made heavy demands upon suitable adjectives to express the artistic Japanesque effects of odd fir trees, blackly silhouetted against a white background of fog, or of logs and rocks which took on weird forms. Mystery surrounded even the most intimate friends, while distressed calls from lost sisters were heard above the drip, drip, drip of the pine boughs. This was Gnat Meadow, which seemed the veritable home of the clouds.

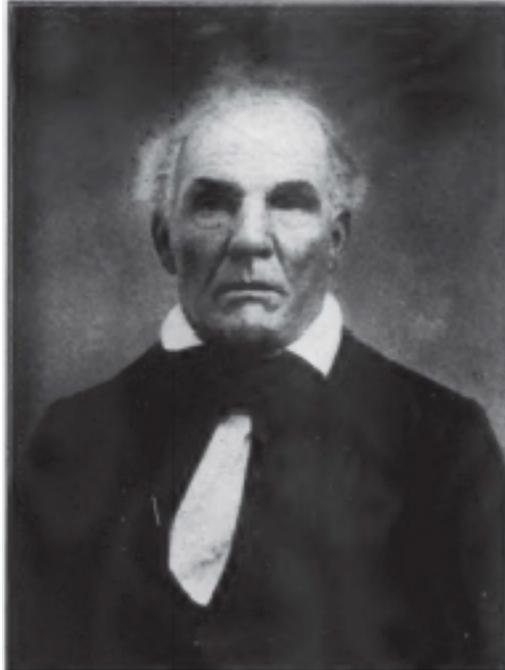
House Meadow lay eighteen miles beyond Gnat Meadow. The swimming in the North Fork of the Kings River was excellent and restful, so that by the time we had passed through the exquisite bit of forest and meadow left for the late afternoon, we arrived in good condition at the driest camp we had seen for some time.

En route to the next camp most of the party went through the McKinley Grove of Big Trees. Some rangers had volunteered to lead the march in order that we might not stray off on the various cattle trails. A line was formed about one hundred and fifty strong, or rather long, since the march was made in single file. Jokes and badinage passed up and down from one end of the line to the other until the grove was reached. The grove is typical of the Big Tree groves and the specimens numerous and of perfect form.

At Glenn Meadow, the last night's camp, we had to forego the pleasure of a campfire because of the early start necessary next morning. It was not that the trip to Shaver was so long, only twelve miles, but the packers had to have the dunnage bags early in order to get down to Stevenson's Creek at half after ten, the time scheduled for departure on our special train. Shaver was surprised at eight o'clock in the morning by the unexpected descent upon it of the members of our party.

Down a steep trail, four miles beyond, was Stevenson's Creek, near the terminus of the San Joaquin and Eastern Railway. Civilization which we had left so far behind on the other side of the Sierra was meeting us again. We survived the excitement of the moving picture company, which photographed us; we enjoyed the expansive but warm foothill views, until finally Fresno came all too soon, and then a night in the train and we were back in town.

And now there often comes a longing to return to those pleasant spots – a longing which brings with it memories that are as refreshing as a cool, fragrant breeze from far-away mountain summits.



Captain Joseph Reddeford Walker

No portrait of Walker has hitherto been published so far as known to the writer. He is buried in Martinez Cemetery, and the date of his over-night camp in Yosemite Valley is taken from the monument over his grave. The portrait is from a daguerreotype in possession of Mrs. Mary Vaughan Walker, of Walnut Creek, California, by whose courtesy the reproduction is made.

Various rare books, maps and manuscripts in the Bancroft Collection of the University of California Library have been consulted.

For assistance in locating rare books, maps and manuscripts acknowledgments are made to Mr. H. I. Priestley, Assistant Curator of the Bancroft Collection.