

# THE HEYDAY OF PACKING

Supplement to "MINERAL KING COUNTRY" by

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## THE HEYDAY OF PACKING - 1927

"Mineral King Country," 1988, describes the history of recreational packing at Mineral King. Mineral King, on the old mining road, was the first and dominant entry into the High Sierra. What the book didn't have was an eyewitness account and pictures of one of the classic trips of that time.

After reading the book, friend and neighbor, Nell Shannon revealed the existence of a wealth of new information.

### DAVIS (Excerpts From "MINERAL KING COUNTRY")

In the fall of 1984, after a long absence, I went to visit the third Davis son, Lawrence, eighty-five years old. He recalled early days at Mineral King with pleasure. He was enthusiastic about my planned story and described his boyhood and the annual back country trips made by the family - the parents, five boys and two girls. Lawrence expressed lifelong gratitude to the valley and to a free and unrestrained boyhood. In the 1920's he had his own packing business and he contracted with the government to supply the construction of the High Sierra trail. It was his most difficult assignment.

If the Davises take a large role in this story, it is because of their historical significance - and equally for the affinity that this wilderness family had for its environment - one that can be imagined but not recaptured in our world.

### BUCKMAN

John and Mary Ellen Buckman and their children, including Philip (1900 to 1985), lived on their rural homestead near Lemon Cove.

In the summer of 1917 Phil Buckman went to Mineral King. There he became an extra member of the Davis family. His special pal was Gene, the fourth Davis son. As one of nine Buckman children, Phil was finding his independence there, but fate had deposited him in the bosom of a mountain family, where he could learn how carefree country life could be. Jeff Davis was not very demanding of himself and even less of his family. It was a shock to Phil when he came face to face with the reality of the Davis home life, and the back country hyperbole and extravagance of expression that was the hallmark of the American frontier. The Davises had an ease and facility of expression that the more conservative Buckmans could not achieve. "They were wonderful people to know if you had any kind of trouble in the mountains," said Phil Buckman.

The Davis flair for public relations was well known and admired. Phil Buckman told the story of Lawrence's taking a group of women for a back country outing. On gaining the summit of Farewell Gap they realized that one pack horse was missing. It was necessary to return to the butcher shop until the horse was found three days later in the White Chief area. Phil assumed that Lawrence was able to entertain his guests for three days with fanciful stories in the best mountain tradition.

## PACKING

The Davises were voluble and outgoing and brought the needed knowledge and ability to the task of packing. They knew where the tourists should go and how to get them there. What had started as an extension of their mountain lifestyle became serious business.

In the mid-twenties the second Davis son, Philip, became the leading packer. In 1927, Phil Buckman was his assistant, and in 1929 Phil became a partner.

There was considerable business with people of affluence. Actors, business leaders and nationally known political figures went camping. Their travels ranged from Mount Whitney to Yosemite and, typically, were for a month, with a style of living during the trek far different from that of earlier mountain travelers. To whatever extent possible, they hoped to take civilization with them and to keep the rustic life at a respectful distance. Tents, stoves, tables, chairs and rugs were some of the desired equipment.

### THE HEYDAY OF PACKING - 1927

Where would you go if you wanted to spend six carefree weeks in the mountains? And who would you go with?

How about starting in Yosemite and heading south on the John Muir Trail? And why not go with the pioneer packers of Mineral King?

Holding vivid memories of their first mountain trip, two women share their diaries with us. Nell Kenyon and Catherine Rogers of Santa Barbara were 15 in 1927, a time when diaries and letters were written and faithfully preserved.

Nell's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Oades Kenyon and their friends Dr. and Mrs. Solomon Weiner from New York together with Nell and Nell's friend Catherine went to Yosemite to meet their packers. They arrived in Yosemite bringing only their personal equipment. The packers had come by truck from Three Rivers bringing all the food and camping supplies plus eleven riding horses and twenty-four pack mules. The tourists had two days to spend in Yosemite while workers with shovels cut a trail over the pass. It was a year of heavy snow.

Catherine's letter to home folks:  
From Glacier Point Hotel

Mi Querido Familia,

We're all dressed up in our riding togs today and we feel quite dressed up. This is Wednesday and tomorrow we meet our pack train and guides for our horseback trip. We started this morning from Yosemite in a great big bus and after climbing and climbing through all sorts of trees that you would love; and after awhile through patches of snow; we reached this nice hotel. Talk about being on top of the world! As I look out of the window here by my desk I can see snow topped mountains all around and two of the most beautiful falls I have ever seen and also down below, quite a ways, Mirror Lake. We have just had our lunch and are waiting until 3:40 pm for our bus to take us back to our cabin in Yosemite. Now that I have told you everything about today, I will begin on yesterday.

When we left Alpine Tavern it was about 7:00 am. It was a lovely ride all the way but of course after we began getting nearer to Yosemite it was beautiful. We rode almost all the way, along side a lovely river (not a creek) that changed colors from green to blue. Every once in awhile we could see a lovely fall, this country seems to be full of them. When we got to Yosemite it was rather crowded but not bad. In Yosemite you seem to be shut in on all sides by mountains, most of them solid rock. Our cabin is lovely, it is a double one (like a double house) and two sleeping porches. Nell and I slept on one of the porches. This morning two little deer walked leisurely by the cabin, and this noon up here at the Glacier Point Hotel where I am writing this letter, two little deer came right up to us and even let a little boy pet one of their noses.

Love, Catherine

Nell - June 30, 1927

They met their packers. "All the boys (packers) are so full of pep and look awfully good-natured."

Nell - July 1, 1927

I woke up with a start this morning. I heard a thud, thud, thud. . . . It was the boys rounding up the horses. At 9:30 all the animals were ready to start and off we went. After six hours of quite hard going we reached Buck Meadows. A few members of the crowd are so tired and cranky, but I am glad to say Catherine and I are not included.

Catherine -

The deer had chewed up a good saddle blanket to get the salt. They packed the mules and put the folding stove on one young mule which bucked violently. My horse was Bess and Nell's was Shorty. Mr. Kenyon had an asthma attack; "the doctor gave him a shot in the arm and relieved him in exactly three minutes." (Mr. Kenyon had a severe allergy problem and that may have prompted his high trips.)

Nell - July 2, 1927

A day of rest!

Nell - July 3, 1927

Gee, it was cold as . . . . . last night!! Talk about cold feet!! Off to Moraine Meadows - 3 hours. I went to bed quite satisfied with myself. I caught two fish. . . . .

Nell - July 4, 1927

Up at 7:45, dressed at 8:15, lining up for a grand 4th of July parade. Our four flags were certainly given good use. Mother beating on a tin wash basin, Father playing Yankee Doodle Dandy, and Doctor singing while Catherine and myself all waved our flags vigorously. After breakfast nothing happened until about 2:30 when Catherine took a very, VERY, VERY, cold bath in the creek supplied by cold snow. I also washed my bean. I almost forgot the most important thing, the fish were marvelous!

Nell - July 5, 1927

Up at 5:30, leaving for Fernandez Pass at 8:15 and Oh! how beautiful it was - also how mad I was when I found I didn't have any camera film with me. It was loads of fun to slide down to the bottom, not counting the dampness.

Catherine's letter to her parents:

Pumice Flats - Devil's Post Pile - July 8, 1927

That candy and the cookies sure tasted good. They are going like hot cakes because it's been some time since we've tasted chocolate candy and crisp cookies. I've read almost half of the book you sent and it's keen. Nell must have told the Dr. and Mrs. Weiner that I was going to have a birthday because I was presented with the slickest Boy Scout knife this morning.

There are five boys altogether taking care of us. The guide, Eugene Davis who is the brother of Phil Davis, the owner of this outfit, and is still in college, the last year of Occidental; the cook, "Buck" Phil Buckman, who graduated from Occidental, Jeff Davis, a brother of Gene's and is in his first year of college, John Eberhart, who is also in college, and Tom Carroll who is just a regular cowpuncher; these last three pack. We have 35 head of stock, isn't that great? There are 24 mules and 11 horses.

Tuesday we rode over Fernandez Pass, it's 11,150 feet high and we were just surrounded by snow. It looked like it did when we went on that hike at Rainer and were standing up at the top ready to slide down with snow all around us. The boys dug a zigzag trail on Monday when we were camped on the other side. They took the mules down one at a time and then we slid down on our seats like we did at Rainier. When we got down, we ate our lunch and then started off again.

We get up on the mornings we travel at six o'clock and it's so cold that I have to step on my tube of tooth paste to get any paste out, the water is mighty cold too, your fingers just ache after you wash. Nell and I are sitting down here by the river now, she's trying to draw the falls that come down up above; they make such a roar that we can't hear anything else. The river is terribly swift, it just ripples by. From where I sit I can see the stock grazing in the meadow. Meadows are thick around here, we always stop at one because they can't carry food for the horses and mules.

The mules are awfully cunning, you should see what they can carry. There is one little white one named White Rat, she always carries a pr. of (panniers) (they are two boxes which fit into canvas bags or covers. They fill them both and then weigh them and try to make them as even as possible and then strap one on each side of the mule), a dunnage bag and the dish pan strapped on the very top. Bess is the name of my horse, she is every bit black and supposed to be the wildest horse in the bunch, except the guides', she is as much as a lamb though, along side Monte. Tom is trying to teach me to rope but I'm afraid he will give it up for a hopeless job pretty soon. I wish you could see him do it, he has you run past him as he ropes both of your feet. Gene is going to take this up to some people camping a mile above us and ask them to mail it.

There is a soda spring about a quarter of a mile below here and Mr. Kenyon made some lemonade this morning and put some soda water in it, it made a keen drink. The trees and flowers are just thick in here, we sure see plenty of beautiful scenery. The boys say to tell you that you struck a mighty tender spot in their stomachs when you sent that candy. Thanks ever so much for the cards and everything.

C. R.

Catherine -

Parker, a small mule was crossing a stream and caught his foot between a log and a rock. "He kicked for a while but finally gave up and lay down right in the middle of the river. We thought sure that his leg was broken and when they hollered for an axe I thought they were going to kill him, so I raced full speed up the hill to wait until everything was over. They finally got him up after removing almost every stone in the river and he seemed none the worse for his fall. We were all very much relieved when he stood up and stretched his legs and so was he."

Nell -

Stopped at a lovely place for the night where Catherine and I made a keen snow slide. and got all wet again.

Nell - July 6, 1927

Gene came in with the horses at 5:30 ringing the bells like sixty to wake us up.

Nell -

On another occasion a little mule started across a snow-bridge with a stream of snow water rushing under it. All four legs went through the bridge but the mule's body and pack held it in place until it was roped and pulled out.

{{ Nells' diary ends and all the following entries are from Catherine's diary. }} H.M.B.

July 8, 1927

(A birthday party with a chocolate cake by Buck) "Imagine a birthday cake in camp." (Finally a hypnotist stunt by the boys)  
"That made us laugh until we cried."



### CAMPING IN KERN CANYON

Left to right: Oades Kenyon, Catherine Rogers, Carrie Weiner, Nell Kenyon, Edna Kenyon



Sunday July 10, 1927

The river that flows by here is called Fish Creek, but if any of our rivers at home were as large we would think of it as being huge. Its so swift that no one has caught any fish so far.

Monday July 11, 1927

The boys had a terrible time finding the stock this morning, but we finally got started. We rode through loads of snow going over Silver Pass. Pepper, Mrs. Kenyon's horse, began to flounder in it, it was so deep. We reached this lovely lake (without a name) pretty late and after supper the boys talked so much about Mt. lions that Nell can't go to sleep. (Catherine wrote in her diary at bedtime and sometimes she had trouble staying awake.)

July 13, 1927

We started this morning at nine o'clock and rode down a lovely canyon where Gene stopped at a soda spring and gave us a drink, it was awful! We reached Bear Creek pretty tired but happy; what they call creeks here look like rivers to us, in fact we haven't a river at home as large. The mosquitoes are terrible so I'm going to bed.

July 14, 1927

We reached Twin Lakes in time for brunch. Its a marvelous camping spot. The water is as blue as the sky and there are many trees around.

July 15, 1927

There is a little stream that runs out of the lake and we chased fish all up and down there with a couple of landing nets. Buck got so excited once that he went down right on his hands and knees after one, it sure was sport.

July 17, 1927 Colby Meadows

We stayed over today. Nell and I read all morning and then went in swimming this afternoon and say but the water sure am cold. Boy it certainly makes you feel keen even if it is as cold as ice (or colder). We've just been singing around the fire and having a keen time. Good Night

Monday July 18, 1927

We started this morning at 8:15 and went over Muir Pass. Its a mighty pretty pass but not very bad. We reached here at 3:30. The middle fork of the Kings River runs right by us and it sure is keen. The mosquitoes aren't at all bad because we aren't near any marshy meadows.

Wednesday July 20, 1927

We went over some pretty steep places today but it was keen fun. We lost the trail once so Gene let little Gabby in the lead and he took us right back on the trail just as easily as if he had been born a guide. We reached Marion Lake (where Marion LeConte is buried) about 4:00. Its a lovely lake, I think I would like to be buried here myself.

Thursday July 21, 1927

We stayed over today and fooled around here for a while until it began to rain and drove us under the canvas the boys had strung up. First it poured and then it hailed and then it rained again. We're sleeping under our ponchos tonight to try to keep dry, its keen we have a regular roof over us.

"Good Night Ladies"

Friday July 22, 1927

It sure poured today. We had more fun than a picnic. We looked like a lot of monks with our ponchos on. It poured and hailed like the old Harry. We reached Bench Lake at 4:15pm and the lake is sure beautiful.

Saturday July 23, 1927

We had a keen time today. We went in swimming and boy! you can't swim any distance at all without getting all tired out. We've been playing cards tonight and I sat between Jeff and Buck. Well I laughed so much that I still ache all over. I'm sleepier than I ever was before in all my born days.

July 24, 1927

Mr. Kenyon caught a 25" trout.

July 25 Pinchot Lake

We've been writing letters and I hope everyone properly appreciates all the energy spent (if they don't they should).

July 26

After breakfast Tom and Jeff started off to Independence with my boots (which had been burned in the fire) and a list of supplies and we started for Rae Lakes. It started to pour but we didn't care, it was keen fun. We reached the lakes at 3:00pm and maybe we weren't hungry. The lake we are camped by is mighty pretty but I guess we won't go in swimming. (The weather won't permit).

July 28

Jeff and Tom got back today and they certainly got a hearty welcome. I got five letters and if everyone knew how I appreciated them they would feel repaid. Mother wrote me a keen letter and sent all the funny papers.

August 1 -

{{ The girls helped drive the horses. }} " They were only a mile away but I could have sworn it was fifty. When we got back we ate six hot cakes, two eggs and bacon. We camped on the Kern - Kaweah River. {{ Here, they were in the new addition to Sequoia National Park. }}

August 3, 1927 -

We're staying here today on the Kern River. Nell and I went out to get the horses over the river with Gene. It started to pour when we got there and boy! I sure had fun driving them down. (The girls knew all of the animals by name.)



Thursday - August 4, 1927 -

We only rode a couple of hours today. We're camped on Rattlesnake Creek. Nell and I started at the top of it this afternoon and came down shooting the rapids bumpity bump, it wasn't very deep. The water's lovely, it just roars.

Friday - August 5, 1927 -

We stayed out today, and it's been raining most of the time. Last night we made bear tracks all around the kitchen and turned everything upside down; this was after Buck was in bed. This morning Buck was all excited, (gee it was funny). Oh yes, and Mr. Kenyon put a wet grain sack down the stove pipe, so that the smoke all came out the front when Buck tried to cook. He cleaned out all the underneath and everything; he just couldn't figure it out, and we never told him.

Saturday - August 6, 1927

We got into Mineral King today at 4:00 o'clock and the whole town was up on the hill to see us come in. We sure were excited. We took a real hot bath in a real bath tub, (or I did), Nell and I flipped a coin to who would get in first and I got it and used all the hot water. Boy but Nell was sore! We've been moping around tonight thinking of all the things we did, but gee won't home look good to me!!!

C.R.



#### THE COMMISARY

Left to right: Phil Buckman, Gene Davis

Their friendship led to the establishment of the Mineral King Packing Co.

{{ We are indebted to Nell and Catherine for writing their youthful first impressions and for sharing them with us. The continuing monkey business of the "Boys" held the girls attention far more than what the older generation did. The Weiners thought the girls were "charming", and quite a contrast to New York girls.

The success of the trip was indicated by the return of the Kenyons to Mineral King for a second trip in 1928, and later by a continuing friendship with the Davises.

Nell Kenyon married the late Bob Shannon who became a school teacher and rancher at Springville. The Shannon family had a tradition of mountain packing in the Sierra.

Catherine Rogers married Llewellyn Goodfield and they too had a commitment to mountain Packing. Both families have been long time friends of my family at Santa Barbara and Carpinteria.}}

#### SUMMARY

When Mr. Kenyon ordered three pack animals and a horse for each tourist, plus the large support crew, it was a deluxe trip, but otherwise not unusual. The mountains were unrestricted and continued to be until the 50's and 60's. The trip revealed the mind set that prevailed in 1927, unimpeded by wars or depressions.

In cooperation with the Park Service, the Sierra Club, for many years the biggest commercial user of stock in the mountains, started a trend in the other direction. In the 50's they started using lighter equipment and stoves (burning propane and not using wood, etc..) and relaying it from camp to camp in a way to make for efficient use of stock.

The balance continued to shift until now, the typical back country outing is of two to four people traveling through the high country and carrying all their own necessities. Horses no longer dominate, especially in the park. Where the heroic Western horsemen once wrote his own ticket, he now has learned the new rules of the back country. Partly, as a result of the new Wilderness guidelines, he now goes with the least impact possible. Foot Campers also come under the new awareness rules of Wilderness conduct.

Under the new order, horses continue to take their historic place in the mountains. An important treatment of this subject can be found in the April, 1989 issue of the National Geographic Magazine.

In August, 1989, I was on a pack trip in the Golden Trout Wilderness. It was my good fortune to be with Charles Morgan, onetime part owner of Mount Whitney Pack Trains and a Sierra Club Member. Also present was Ben York, a former packer for Ike Livermore and the Mt. Whitney Pack Trains. Later Ben packed for the Mineral King Packing Co. I lingered nearby as they casually recalled past events involving the hierarchy of the Sierra Club and mountain packing in the 40's and 50's. Laced in their musings were the Buckmans, Malloys and other mountain people of Mineral King and Sequoia Park.

Charles was a young observer and Ben was a packer in 1948 when Morgan and Livermore sent out fifteen "strings", (75 mules), into the Mount Whitney back country, (Crabtree Meadows et al.), to relay the Sierra Club through the high country. Charles spoke warmly of the big campfire and evening programs that had been so well described in "Mineral King Country", (the 1903 Sierra Club trip to the Kern River.)

When I first visited Crabtree Meadows in 1947, we stopped at one of the main camps. There on the banks of Whitney Creek was a sad sight. The tin can pile was huge - an easy throw from the campfire. All of those cans had been packed in and left. Our cans were tossed on the pile without comment. The horseman was not a noted cook and depended heavily on canned food. Other noted sites, within and without the Park, were likewise degraded. Ten years later the cleanup began.

(( Editorial Comment by Charles Morgan: The horsemen were not totally to blame for the degradation and build up of litter in the High Country. In 1958 Mt. Whitney Pack Trains packed out over 50 mule loads - almost four tons - of bottles, cans and other litter collected on the Whitney Trail between Mirror lake and the Summit, (East side). This section of trail was never camped on by horsemen.)) C.M.

### We leave with one last mule story by Charles Morgan WENDY MULE GOES IN THE RIVER

In 1961, Mt. Whitney Pack Trains was packing the Sierra Club High Trip in Northern Kings Canyon National Park. I was in charge of the packing for the trip. We had 8 strings of mules, (40 head), and 15 saddle Horses. The task for the day was to move one half of the entire camp from Hutchinson Meadows to Colby Meadow in Evolution Valley. The route followed down Piute Creek to the South Fork of the San Joaquin River and thence up over two swinging bridges and the final climb into the valley.

The first bridge was old and rickety - no guard cables or rails and some of the holes in the split log planking had been patched with rocks to fill the hole. The approach to the bridge was at an angle. I was leading a mixed string of mules with three small mules roped up in the lead and three larger mules following behind. As sometimes happens in such a situation, the larger mules balked at going on the bridge and pulled back. As the accident developed the lead mules laid down to avoid being pulled off, poor Wendy Mule was picked up bodily and pulled off the decking and was left hanging by her lead ropes. I cut the back mules loose and that left her dangling over the white rushing waters of Piute Creek. There was no choice but to cut her halter rope and down she went into the boiling water. She rolled and tumbled end over end. Her pack of two, forty pound blocks of cheese and two, twenty-five pound sacks of flour came loose or surely she would have been pulled under and drowned.

A hundred yards down stream, Bob Golden, the assistant leader of the trip, was eating lunch. He spotted her plight and when she swirled up in a chest-deep eddy close to shore, he plunged in and grabbed her halter. This helped her to stabilize her position in the water and she was able to get her footing on the bottom. Several of us rushed to give Bob a hand, and we were able to get her up on the bank. She survived without a scratch - The fish downstream enjoyed, I am sure, a fine meal of 80 lbs. of Jack and Cheddar cheese.