

JOSEPH WARD

Desert Poet. Prospector. And a Manxman.
His Life and Adventures.

1879-1928.

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I remember standing on Queen Summit north of White Mountain head of Trail Canyon, where water is piped northeast to Candelaria, NV, 30 miles—a sudden declivity North with the White's angled down from 13 or 14 thousand feet elevation—Montgomery Peak adjoining at 13,000 feet. The Nevada State line passes through its summit running south-east, further south White Mountain peak, 14,150 feet. Wonderous view from the top of this, can see the Nevada ranges 150 miles east and the Sierras like a mighty wall to the west and south-west culminating in Mt. Whitney, whose crest is the highest in the United States. North-west the long snowy outline of the Sierra fades in the distance through Mono and Alpine Counties and the Lake Tahoe region. The deep depression of Owens valley, which is a profound fault from the crest of the Inyo Mountains furnishing sublime views unequalled in the known world, especially from Beverage Peak, a little north-east from Mt. Whitney, across Owens Valley, which stands like some mighty wall above the Saline Valley, being the steepest mining mountain known. It makes one's head swim to look down into the Saline Valley at the east foot of Beverage Peak. Its floor centered by a salt and borax pan ten or twelve miles in diameter, a few hundred feet above sea level at, most an arid region where rainfall is almost nil. The Death Valley Region being about 40 miles still farther beyond, south-east, over Ubehebe Peak and the Panamint Mountains.

Looking further east from Queen Saddle one could see similar drop-off on north edge of Lone Mountain Nevada—beyond which in straight line was Tonopah, then undiscovered. This was May 1900. A few days later in Huntoon Valley, 30 miles north-west, met a Denver mining man, and he said, "I thought all big things, found." (A Scotch friend said if we wanted to find another, we'd have to get out of the States to do so.) He said, "Pshaw, can't tell a thing about it—look at Jimmy Fair following a seam no thicker than a knife blade for hundreds of feet, where it finally opened out into the Consolidated Mine dollars, and whose Aladdin riches and Virginia City big bonanza, worth \$118,000,000. Jeweled glistening's dazzled the eye and mind—chlorides, bromides and iodides of silver in bewildering profusion—gold no end – wealth beyond dreams—hundreds of feet wide and high-pulsing the heart in a maze of delirious feelings of strange vibrations. Fairyland in the faces of the miners, reflections of the embattling emotions which possessed each human heart—never had human eye seen these vaults of fortune which were to swamp the world—demonetize the metals. Disappointment reigned for those who had not, yet all were happy at the site of this immensity of strewn fortune in nature's treasure vault. The treasure vault of the desert. A whirl of emotions and mental struggling to which it led - the desperation, suicide, and death and barometrical emotions of the human soul, or the heights of human happiness with its acme of fleeting powers running the gaunt of human emotion. I think the prospector in his dreams is the happiest and the better off. No concrete ills as those to which the discovery of this bonanza lead.

Would I find another – yes! Rather than the Kaiser's hell or Marshall's baton, or Napoleon, will I, or will I quit – ask the true explorer. Never!

At the very moment we discussed this point Jim Butler and friend, and burros were walking over and away from Tonopah just on the point of discovery, thinking it valueless, leaving it four months longer, but fate was kind to Jim, but not the other fellow. They fell out over washing the dishes. Jim's friend never returned. Jim got it, but his friends got more! She lay there to the sun, the world – hammer and drills sound like the battle of Manilla Bay. The blasting, floods of silver and gold, finding its way to what? None now living, will or shall, know the end. Oh, those days and times of 1900, I'd give the world to be back again!

Visit Mammoth and see the minarets over the low but main Sierra summit looking north-west – standing like black giant needles in the direction of Yosemite, the memories of which colour the thoughts with tones of music and sweet pictures. Save for a few flies in the mornings, it is perfection, but to avoid these, go south-west 12 miles to Fish Creek, via volcanic meadows through the red fire and tamaracks and delightful coolness of 9,000 feet elevation to ten, where the trail passes on the breaks of the San Joaquin. Cross the great divide pumice stone summit, 10,000 elevation, then cross another divide from Fish Creek south to Mono Creek and explore the south fork of the San Joaquin. Splendid fishing below the falls on the main south fork above its junction into the main river, then return to Reds Meadows north-west of Mammoth, Soda Spring and Devil's Post Pile, a mass of basaltic rocks, which looks like cord wood in hexagonal blocks from six to 20 inches in diameter and of many feet in length, just as they crystalize, cooled and fractured, strewn on the ground under the trees – a very pretty sight. Just west of this, on the main river, is Rainbow Falls.

From the Mammoth Summit looking down the Joaquin canyon south-west a picture – one of the most beautiful of High Sierra views. The minarets are exceedingly rough and, in many places, inaccessible. I am not certain whether it is possible to scale Mt. Lyell, which bears about 30 west – south-east of Yosemite Falls. A view from Parker Pass on the trail to Rush Creek is one of the very finest in the High Range.

Standing on the breaks west of Mammoth Summit, east of main river and looking south-west one can see the Kaiser Creek divide dark forests beyond, which is Pine Ridge, and sawmills 50 miles N.E. of Fresno. Mt. Patterson, white vertical cliffs facing south to north Fork Kings – trail south of North Fork, south of Patterson Passes over steep narrow ridge to main King south. Trail over top about 6,000 feet. Wonderful view looking up Kings Canyon, great timbered ridge of Millwood divide south-east, where lumber flumes snake down into King's canyon to valley floor. Strange and weird colouring of russet reds, green and drabs – poison oak brush vines, odd scattering pines high, and oaks below – Manzanita and Chapparal so thick one can't get through it. A horizontal belt of this flanks the whole west Sierras 2,000 feet vertical through it from 3,500 to 1,000 altitude. One must follow the cut trail crossing or passing through this till 4,000 feet is reached. Rugged scenery looking east up King's main range in the distance. The Mono trail west of Mammoth to Madera and Fresno flats crossing main front range, dense timbered,

passing Jackass Meadows – famous Placer Camp in ‘70’s – 15 miles north of crossing on main Joaquin to Chiquita Lake and over the top to Vernal and Nevada Falls, nearly killing a jimmy going down an eight-foot slide rock the north side Yosemite Valley slope to the Glacier Point trail, striking it between Nevada Falls and Glazier Point where it passes either way to Valley Floor. Also trail from Cloud’s Rest, east of Yosemite Valley, passing and crossing Merced River – rising to timber line south and over the top to head of Granite Creek, three miles above timber line. I picked my own trail here through big rocks – had to fill in holes so jacks could walk across, or I would never have got them across. I was half a day going half a mile, weather perfect.

I heard strange stories of Pumpkin seed gold being found on Granite Creek coming supposedly from hill head of Jackass Creek. Granite drains it on the north and east. A bar at mouth of Granite Creek said to contain much gold, it was unworkable on account of high water. Farther east is North Fork Joaquin, which bounds Minaret group on the west and drains inaccessible are, impossible even on foot. Had awful time getting little Jimmy across North Fork Bridge in ‘05. Blind-folded we dragged her over behind horse, she could see the white foam 20 feet below and didn’t like it, or the bridge, and trembled like a leaf. Excited, kicked, and nearly broke my knee cap. Strange a horse is never afraid of those scaly bridges. – ask Darwin why!

Pass over main range east from June in to head of Dead Man, very steep anvil shaped ridge, easily tunneled through. Someday a R.R. will pass here. Killed a jenny west of here near top, so steep and weak she rolled sideways. I could not unpack and get her up. Horse flies on top of the pass sounded like a brass band – one never sees these fellows at night, or when the afternoon breezes from the Pacific reach these summits; only during the morning hours, when the sun is dazzling bright, and dead calm reigns. Few on Joaquin, but small mosquitos at evenings, some, not many, except in wet spots thousands of meadows in high range absolutely no flies or see none, not even a house fly under the cool shady Tamaracks, or very rare.

Mary’s Lake at Mammoth and others, one and a half to two miles south-west of store, altitude of latter, 8,000, Lake 9,000, in basin south four miles, a pocket opening north and east, fine fishing, beautiful scenery, perfect temperatures.