

Monache Tour ... 1925

By Rena Elizabeth Roop-Moore

~ Our camp was in Monache Meadows ~

Beautiful Monache, surrounded by timbered slopes and granite peaks; a green mountain meadow, 9,410 feet above sea level, where cattle grazed and drank from snow-fed streams. A picturesque scene from any point.

We rode in from the north trail, and edged the meadow toward a log cabin along tall pines. As we approached the corral a young cowboy came to meet us, to take care of the horses and pack mules. George Brown, owner of the cabin, and the cattle, dismounted and introduced us to this smiling young man. Catherine Baily, daughter of the Cartago Chemical Corporation, and her fiancé, Joe Parker, and myself, the chaperone! It was 1925 and we were all on a week's horseback tour of the southern high country of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. George Brown was our host and guide, as he had known that section of the Sierra's since boyhood. He knew the trail and the most interesting places to show us.



Monache Meadow in the fall.

Catherine and Joe were college students home to Cartago for the summer. Cartago was a “plant town” three miles north of Olancha, where George Brown had his ranch. The next nearest town to Cartago was Lone Pine, twenty-three miles north. Situated on the western shores of Owens Lake, Cartago was not a place of much interest to young people, so Catherine's Dad had suggested this mountain tour.

Just about everyone in Inyo County knew how I enjoyed the mountains, so I was asked to join the tour as a chaperone, and I was delighted!

My mother was visiting in Cartago, as I had two younger brothers working there, so she offered to look after my two baby boys, which solved my only problem. George Brown occasionally rode in to Monache during the summer to check on the cattle and the two young men who stayed there, often giving them a few days to ride out to visit home, while he enjoyed a high country rest. He was a thoughtful and friendly man and a perfect host, and a fantastic cook! He enjoyed cooking, and insisted on preparing every meal, and they were all delicious! Not only did he insist on doing all the cooking, he wished to perform his magic alone in the kitchen, and encouraged us to relax in the hammocks under the pines until the meal was ready. So we did, without any coaxing!

One of the two packed mules, George brought in with us was loaded with food, fresh vegetables and fruit from his ranch, and two homemade cherry pies! On the other mule was our luggage, and a few things the boy's folks had sent up.

If you are wondering how he carried two pies up into the mountains on a mule, it's simple. He covered each pie with an empty pie tin, upside down, wrapped it in a dishtowel, and placed it in a shallow cardboard box, and they arrived in perfect condition.

The cabin was definitely a man's retreat, comfortable with no frills, just gun racks and deer horns adorned the walls. Indian rugs and blankets were the only colorful things except the bright patchwork quilt on the bed in the guest room, in which Catherine and I shared.

Our first all day ride was to Jordan Hot Springs. We traveled through patches of unspoiled wilderness, over wooded ridges and through fragrant, piney forests, under a blue, cloudless sky, stopping at a picturesque point along Snake Creek for lunch. Jordan Hot Springs is a perfect vacation spot in a wooded cove among giant cedar and pine trees at an elevation of 6,680 feet. Nine Mile Creek meanders through the camp and the Kern River is near by.

We enjoyed natural hot mineral baths, and tasted some pure water from a soda spring (ugh) which is supposed to be very healthful.

We were late leaving there, but arrived back at George's cabin before summer darkness set in, tired and hungry. It only took minutes for George to get a meal together, as the boys had a big fire going in the kitchen range, and a large teakettle of water boiling.

The next day we hiked around the surrounding countryside and down to the south fork of the Kern River, where Joe and George fished awhile. Catherine and I did some exploring, and went wading in a shallow place in the curve of a tiny stream. We frightened a bobcat from his sunning rock to eat our lunch on it. He didn't seem to mind too much, and probably had enough spying on us anyhow.



Jordan Hot Springs

Touring around the high country is most rewarding, on foot or horseback, and the days slipped by too quickly. The day we rode to Templeton Meadows was unforgettable. We found the day crammed full of exciting scenery, and several glimpses of wildlife along the way. We met two packtrains and another group of horseback riders just plugging along like we were.

The solitude serenity of the day was not disturbed all the way back to Monache and we truly enjoyed it. Dinner was climaxed with the most delicious slice of cake I ever ate. George baked it and completely smothered it with whipped cream between the layers and all over it!

We had fresh milk every meal because the boys kept a milk cow in a pasture near the cabin, and they even churned butter. One day while George was out checking on the cattle, Joe dozed in the hammock

and Catherine shampooed her hair. I wandered off down an interesting trail and walked farther than I realized until the sun was almost setting, when I scampered across the meadow and into the cabin. Everyone was about to sit down to dinner. Their glances were more or less questioning until Joe remarked "some chaperone you are!" Then everyone laughed and I explained how it was.

Our week was over all too soon, but it certainly was not soon forgotten by me at least. After some forty-eight years, I can still remember almost every incident, and many other high-country adventures that I enjoyed in the marvelous and primitive world known as the Sierra Nevada Mountains!

