

THE KERN RIVER OUTING OF 1916

By JESSIE McGILVRAY TREAT

Sierra Club Bulletin

THE weeks and months of anticipation were at an end, for the first of July had come at last, and we were actually started for Kern River Cañon. The Fates had decreed from the first moment that this should be the best outing ever taken by the Sierra Club. High fog, heaven-sent, made the much dreaded tramp through the foothills to Nelson's a delight. Inspired by that incomparable elation that comes when we can live each moment for the sheer joy of it, and measure our days only by our unrestrained pleasure and incessant delight, we swung up the trail, radiant. The path led up a closely covered foothill cañon, wooded with chaparral and occasional fine trees, now and then crossing rushing creeks which later poured into the South Fork of the Tule. An early luncheon close beside the stream, a drowsy half-hour stretched out in the shade listening to the ceaseless chatter of the swirling water, and then, refreshed, we pushed on to Nelson's. At this first camp all the old Sierrans graciously offered advice and assistance to the newcomers and the genial good-fellowship, which prevails throughout the outing, was at once manifest. Toward evening a rift in the fog gave us some idea of the beauty of the surrounding hills, and a rosy sunset glow promised a sunny morrow. This second day will be remembered by all forest-lovers, for our way was through superb sequoia groves on both sides of the Tule - Kern Divide. Fine specimens of sugar pine, yellow pine, and fir added variety. Then we followed down Freeman's Creek to Lloyd's Meadows, where we pitched our camp. Those who fortunately arrived early had the joy of a swim and developed great dexterity in catching the lemons which floated downstream from the soda-spring above, using them for manicure or shampoo, as fancy or necessity dictated.

Out of this meadow we climbed, a thousand feet, to drop and rocky bed of the stream making it an uncertain pleasure; others were ferried across by a most obliging member, who made countless trips with two animals; while on the opposite bank were gathered those who had arrived earlier and were drying out. "Gabriel," our most picturesque donkey, was almost drowned in the stream, and his rescue added a thrill of excitement.

Wednesday a delightful six-mile tramp over the Kern but brought us to Little Kern Lake, where we were to camp for several days. The real trip had begun; we had at last reached the Kern, our variable companion for several weeks to come. We should know its every mood, and part with it reluctantly. The fishermen here forgot their disappointment that this was the closed season for golden trout in their endeavors to catch the more familiar varieties. Lunch parties with trout cooked in the ashes or on a hot rock or in the less picturesque frying pan were not infrequent. Excellent swimming in Little Kern Lake made the small sandy beach a gay and busy place every afternoon.

These days of lazy pleasure were soon over, and we journeyed up the cañon past Lower Funston Meadow to the point where the Big Arroyo tumbles down in white

cascades to meet the Kern. This trip was a varied eleven miles between the precipitous walls of the cañon. The trail led now across talus slopes, now over grassy, sparkling meadows, then across swift running torrents. Each day we became more adept at crossing foaming, noisy streams on slippery logs, but the one over Rattlesnake Creek was a wet and undulating sapling, a test of self-control and coordination. The Big Arroyo camp was almost surrounded by two rivers, and the Big Arroyo unkindly rose at such a rapid rate after sundown that a hasty evacuation of some of the most charming campsites was necessary.

On Sunday we zigzagged up a very steep slope toward the Chagoopa Plateau, frequently stopping for breath and to enjoy the ever-changing prospect down the Kern Cañon, so colorful with living shadows. Pushing on through a splendid forest, we suddenly came out into Sky Parlor Meadow, too glorious a spectacle to describe or to forget, a wide-spread amphitheater, carpeted with flower-sprinkled green, encircled by dark pines and crowned by solemn, jagged peaks and glacial cirques, notably Sawtooth, Needham, and the many-hued Kaweah group. Impossible as it seemed to leave this enchanting spot, our next camp, Moraine Lake, was near, and we promised ourselves the joy of coming often during our week's sojourn.

Moraine Lake is an ideal campsite. Dense forest fringes the margin of this glacial basin. A clear, bubbling spring, icy cold, supplied delicious drinking water, and, despite snow-hung mountains mirrored in the lake and the almost 10,000 feet of altitude, swimming was more than possible. It was enjoyable. This idyllic spot is centrally located for countless trips varying in degrees of strenuousness to suit any inclination.

Then follow you, wherever hie
The traveling mountains of the sky.
Or let the streams in civil mode
Direct your choice upon a road.

An evening walk to the edge of the ridge gave one a glorious comprehensive panorama from Mount Whitney, in the main crest beyond the Kaweahs, along a sharply broken skyline of granite peaks in the Great Western Divide, to the unnamed snow-clad cirques just across the gorge. From the almost perpendicular walls of the Big Arroyo one seemed to be perched on the top of the world. A faint boom from the river far below throbbed in the evening stillness. As the long purple shadows filled this magnificent valley we hastened back to our forest-hidden camp, elusive even by day.

Here were six days brimful of pleasure. One hundred and forty intrepid ones climbed Kaweah Peak; knapsack parties journeyed off in all directions, some to Lost Cañon, Columbine Lake, and Sawtooth, some to Mount Needham; and toward the end of the week ardent hikers with bed and board on their backs journeyed up the Big Arroyo and across the Kern-Kaweah Divide, descending through the wonderful Kern-Kaweah Cañon to join the main party again at Junction Meadows. For those not so energetic there was still much to be done - fishing parties down at the Big Arroyo, dreamy days at Sky Parlor Meadow, and swimming and fishing in Moraine Lake. History has it that once

upon a time a mighty 8½ pound trout was caught there; but although many saw three gigantic beauties, neither secret sorcery, hypnotism, nor fancy flies could lure them to impale themselves on any deadly hook.

As each day was more wonderful, so each night the spell of the campfire drew us closer into the magic circle. "Lost and found" were distributed with appropriate remarks, the trips described in terms of Colby or Tappaan miles; and then came a wide diversity of entertainment - interesting talks on birds, trees, glaciers, Alaska; singing of solos or tout ensemble; haunting melodies of flute and violin, peculiarly suited to these surroundings.

The annual Sierra Club Vaudeville given here in the forest theater was a high-class performance which brought out much talent - "Street Scenes in Venice," beautifully staged, was interrupted somewhat by temperamental "Gabriel"; music, skits, monologues, and even Shakespeare a la mode, were greeted with generous applause. Another day the bulletin board announced that a bandana exhibition would take place, and all were urged to enter gaudy squares in this unique competition. Things of beauty were produced from grimy dunnage bags, hand-woven brocades, block-printed silks, and oriental scarfs of much interest. The last evening found the commissary metamorphosed and we dined sumptuously and well at "Cafe Moraine," served by familiar faces rising above unfamiliar garments. The men had raided the women's camp and now appeared in flowered kimono, highland kilt, or prim shirt-waist.

A wealth of stirring memories is associated with this camp - the mysteriously fascinating eclipse of the moon, a "by request" violin concert on the sloping hillside near the spring, a vivid electrical storm over the upper Kern region. So it was with genuine regret that we left the Chagoopa Plateau to return to our former campsite in Lower Funston Meadow for one night and then push on eleven miles to Junction Meadows.

This day we crossed the mighty Kern itself and proceeded to the upper end of the cañon, whose grandeur was enhanced by mighty sculptured walls and forbidding cliffs, culminating in minarets and domes, rushing streams, pouring at intervals from some side cañon, and occasional mistlike waterfalls, "like down-ward smoke, slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn." Junction Meadows, where the Kern, Kern-Kaweah, and East Fork meet, had been ravaged by a terrible tornado since the club camped there in 1912 and splendid trees were everywhere lying prone. The knapsackers returned, thrilled by the rare beauty of the upper Kern-Kaweah, and, animated by their glowing description, many decided to explore for themselves. It seemed as if some whim of creative force had hidden in this remote canon at least one perfect form of every kind of mountain scenery, as a reward for those who persevere.

On Wednesday morning two hundred left for the Crabtree Meadows base camp to ascend Mount Whitney the following day. One hundred and seventy-five reached the summit, the largest party of mountaineers ever registered there. Those of us who remained below anxiously watched the angry clouds pile up in the direction of Mount Whitney on Thursday. A dark sky threatened rain, but only a few scattered drops fell at noon; the clouds soon dispersed, and these spatters were the only shower of the trip.

A long, steep pull out of Junction Meadows to the ridge, although exhilarating, brought with it a certain sorrow that here we must part with our many-mooded companion, the Kern. We consoled ourselves with the ever-changing panorama as we struggled on and up toward the crest. A glorious prospect was here presented. Peaks of the High Sierra, especially Mount Whitney, seemed broad, gently sloping masses, while Red Spur and the Kaweahs, now seen from the north, looked unapproachable and awe-inspiring. The Whitney climbers straggled across the upland meadows, each group content at times to nestle down among protecting rocks and scan the marvelous beauty radiating on all sides.

A desultory content had entered into the souls of most of us, with Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the United States, conquered; but at the Tyndall Creek camp those insatiable ones who must explore found Mount Tyndall and Mount Williamson challenging them to their best efforts. In the evening at the campfire all of us scrambled up Williamson's chimney, blistered our hands on the hot rocks, and pulled ourselves through the small "window" to the apex vicariously.

Off early in the gray of Sunday morning, the crisp coldness of the air most stimulating, we were conscious that this day was to bring the climax of the outing. Swinging up a gradual rise toward Shepard's Pass, we paused often to admire the wild majestic beauty of the Great Western Divide - Table Mountain, with its mesa-like summit, Thunder Mountain, dark and sulky, then farther southward that unique shaft of granite, Milestone. Suddenly, rounding a rocky crag, we were almost overwhelmed by the glorious spectacle before us, dazzling snow-fields with the trail descending in zigzags across their gleaming surface on toward a retreating canon whose walls were hung with purple shadows. Farther down this rugged gorge opened out into Owens Valley, a shimmering desert, whose farther margin merged into the foothills of the Inyo Mountains, broken and undulating. Slowly we clambered down this slippery way to a pyramid of rocks which bore this significant message, written on a slip of paper: "Sierra Club, turn here and work toward the plateau covered with trees." Now the route became rock-work. Scrambling and jumping from boulder to boulder, we eventually reached the storm-beaten stunted pines cowering on the upper edge of the timberline. Here we found ourselves on the recently completed portion of the John Muir Trail, one of the most worthy results of the Sierra Club's concerted efforts. At such an easy grade is the trail built that the ascent to the highest point, Junction Pass (13,200 feet), was surprisingly comfortable. This route from the Kern River basin over Shepard's and Junction passes into the Kings River watershed is through one of the most impressive and utterly wild regions of the High Sierra.

At the summit of the pass, where all were to await information concerning the safety of the pack-train before advancing farther, we snuggled down among wind-breaking rocks and with the satisfaction that comes after such a climb serenely enjoyed the elemental wonder of it all. Spread before us in splendid diversity were alpine lakes, sparkling streams, glacial slopes, somber cañons, precipitous crags, grassy meadows, wind-swept forests, and silent peaks. On the left Mount Stanford loomed boldly, while to

the right was a sharply serrated ridge culminating at intervals in peaks - Mount Keith, a few hundred feet higher than the pass, Mount Bradley, and finally University Peak. Above timberline one is submitted to direct actinic rays and kindly shade is hard to find. But out of the sun the wind was too cold, and the consumption of much variously flavored snow had made exercise desirable. When word came that the pack-train had crossed the first snow-fields and we could proceed to Vidette Meadows at our pleasure, small groups at once began to descend over a flinty trail toward the lovely lakes in Center Basin.

Encircling Center Peak, now towering high above us, we came upon an unnamed glacial lake, colorful and perfect. Mirrored in its waters were bluest sky, fleecy clouds, and snowy peak; its edges were beds of mossy green, flower-scattered. With East Vidette to beckon us, we pushed down toward our next camping place, but each time we stopped to take our bearings that deceptive landmark seemed just as far away. In the late afternoon we arrived at the junction of Vidette and Bubbs creeks. A long and varied day was drawing to a close. Seventeen of the most wonderful miles ever traveled had been accomplished, and reluctantly we felt darkness creep upon us, as "by punctual eve the stars were lit."

But this Vidette camp at night was one of rarest beauty - here there was the silence of the High Sierra meadows uninterrupted save by an undertone from the smoothly flowing stream, "the floor of heaven . . . thick inlaid with patines of bright gold," and outlined against this glittering curtain towered that majes-tic pyramid, East Vidette.

From this location knapsack parties went to Mount Brewer or Rae Lake. The main camp became a scene of bustling activity; the weighing of food and stowing it in small bags; the sorting and packing and resorting of the "thirty-five pounds"; the trying-on of "packs" of food and bed, and attempting to persuade oneself that this unwieldy excrescence is a bundle of joy - all these occupations were everywhere in evidence. The much-heralded beauty of Rae Lake accounted for this restless uncertainty among us, and even the avowedly indolent were strongly tempted to try this one knapsack trip. Rumors of the difficulty of the trip varied widely. Some admitted Glenn Pass to be a stubborn climb through talus and heavy snow, while others promised a comfortable yet thrilling trip, possible to anyone who had survived so far. Fully fifty finally went, and all of them confided to the "stay-at-homes" later that it had been worth the effort.

Good fishing in Bubbs Creek, East Creek, and Lake Charlotte; the opportunity to explore the upper reaches of Vidette Creek, with its well-concealed lakes; the walk down Bubbs Creek to the falls, or farther to the wooded ravine from which East Creek pours forth and where a fine view of Mount Brewer was to be had - these jaunts were compensation for the intimidated.

Thursday we moved camp a short distance to Sunset Lake, one of the chain of sparkling sapphire pools which lie at the base of Kearsarge Pinnacles. Many were off early to visit Lake Charlotte on the way, a delightful place to spend the day, with good fishing, and for those who went merely to "fry them in the pan" there was the additional

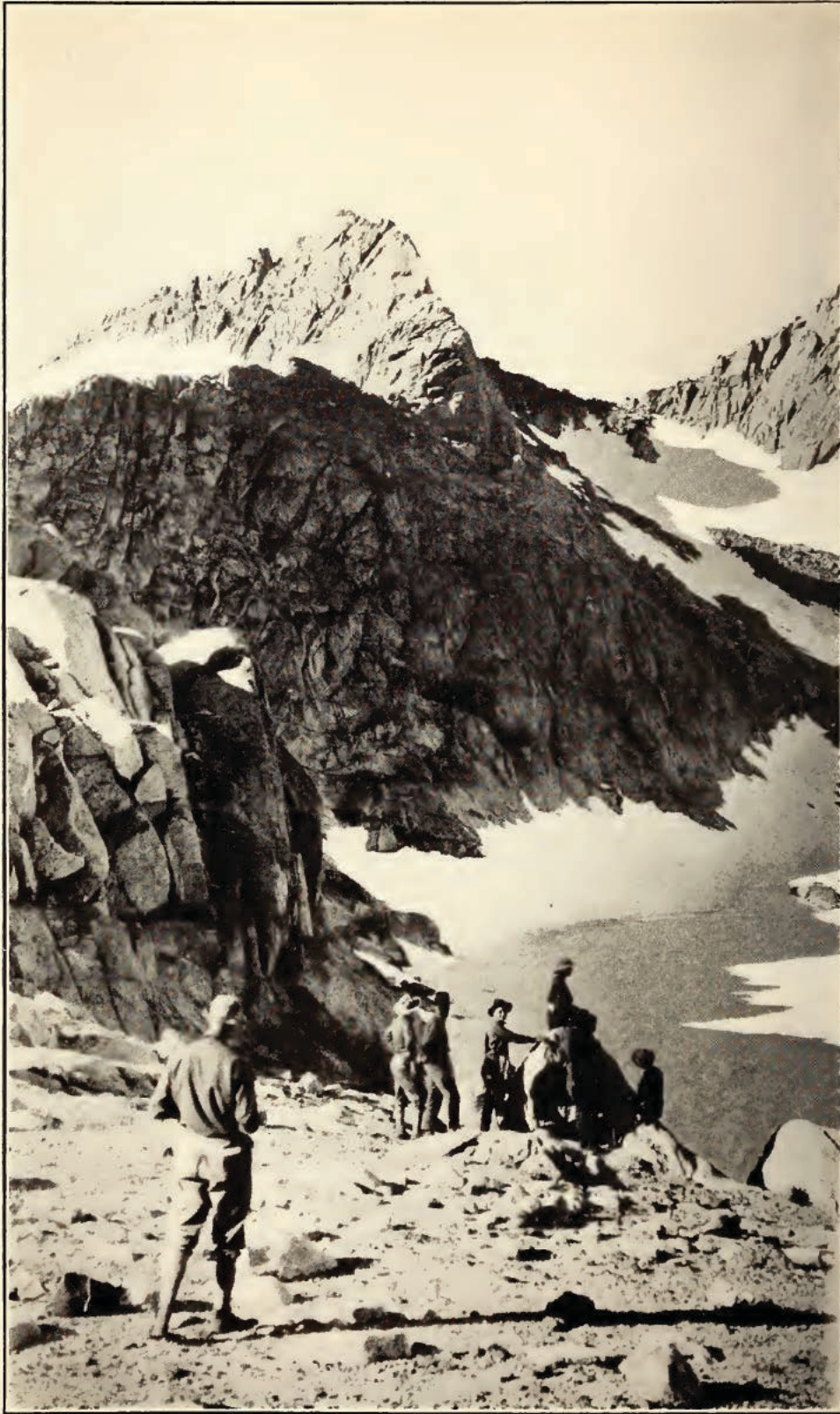
interest of greeting the knapsack parties from Rae Lake and being the first appreciative audience. Reluctant we were to leave this heavenly spot, for tomorrow afternoon would find us in Independence, back among watermelons and white folks.

The last night in the mountains our commissary was established on a narrow neck of land between two lakes, and long before summons to dinner sounded there was "standing room only." After each knapsack trip, despite the glowing tales of scorched rice and superabundance of fish, the returned adventurers are always conspicuously first to dinner, and with heaping plate and brimming cup immediately go to the end of the line, in order to waste no time between first and second helpings. The evening air here was rather chill, and as the sunset glow faded from the tips of the Pinnacles all of us showed a decided preference for the campfire. It was a fitting climax to these characteristic gatherings that we should hear a chapter from John Muir's Florida diary, as yet unpublished. Little did we realize that on the morrow some of us would follow his example and find a comfortable camping place in a cemetery. Then we sang "High, high, high," and hied ourselves to our sleeping bags. Throughout the women's camp the fires sprang to life, reminding one of the old illustrations of Dante's masterpiece, each ledge with its flame dancing and changing and throwing mysterious shadow-figures. How grateful were these glowing embers when at 4:30 the rising call sounded and we found ice in our water buckets for the first time on the trip! With numb fingers we tied our dunnage bags and rolled them down-hill for the last weigh-in.

Although we were early on the trail to Kearsarge Pass, silhouettes of earlier climbers were already outlined against the sky. From this famous pass another comprehensive panorama made us loath to be en route. The desert lay in misty haze. Directly below us was Pothole Lake, still frozen over; behind us, whence we came, was a marvelous wonderland of faintly flushed peaks, hung with snow and partly hidden alpine lakes. The discomfiting assurance of an 8000-foot drop in our fifteen-mile tramp, and half of this distance across sand and sage, forced us to proceed downward. Passing by Pothole and Heart lakes, we came into Onion Valley, whose name belies it, for it was more truly a natural hanging garden where all mountain flowers bloomed in profusion. Especially fine was the delphinium, or giant larkspur. Following Pine Creek, we finally came to Independence, which eluded us as long as possible, and our weariness was forgotten in the reviving effect of fresh fruits and ice-cream. Our invasion on all food supplies will doubtless be remembered, and we hope the "preparedness" of the Ladies' Aid Society was amply rewarded. A day and a night on the train and on a Sunday morning we were back again among the worries and conveniences of every-day life. This month in the mountains is a singularly rich experience which "strengthens one's appreciation of the beautiful world out-of-doors and puts one in tune with the Infinite."



LITTLE KERN LAKE
Photo by Lawrence R. Kessing



A REST ON THE DESCENT OF SAWTOOTH
Photo by James Rennie



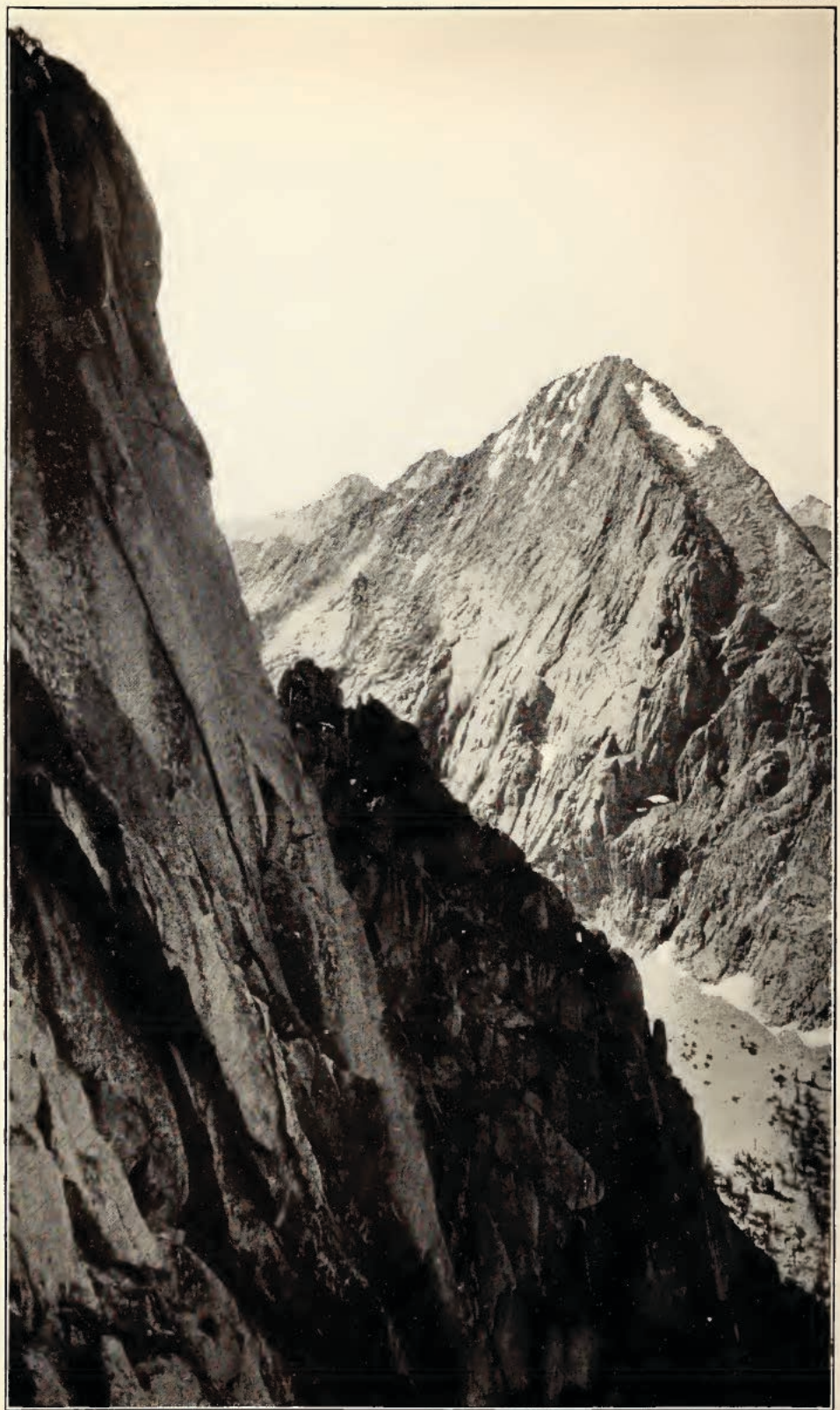
MORaine LAKE
Photo by Walter L. Huber



THE CREST OF THE SIERRA, LOOKING SOUTH FROM MOUNT WHITNEY
Keeler Needles in foreground
Photo by Walter L. Huber



ON THE JOHN MUIR TRAIL
Approaching Junction Pass from Shepard Creek
Photo by Walter Mulford



EAST VIDETTE, FROM THE FACE OF KEARSARGE PINNACLES

Photo by James Rennie



POTHOLE LAKE AND UNIVERSITY PEAK

Photo by Walter L. Huber



UP BIG ARROYO, FROM RIM ABOVE MORaine LAKE
Photo by Everett Shepardson



ON THE JOHN MUIR TRAIL
Descending snow-field at head of Shepard Cañon
Photo by Walter L. Huber



ON THE JOHN MUIR TRAIL.
Mounts Williamson, Barnard, and Tyndall, from summit of Junction Pass
Photo by Marion Randall Parsons

SC COMMITTEE REPORT OF 1916 OUTING

The standard of excellence of recent annual outings has been so high that each year the Outing Committee has been apprehensive that it would not be able to live up to its past record. However, the opinion was unanimously expressed, at the close of the 1916 outing into the Kern and Kings River regions, that the trip was the finest that the club had ever undertaken.

The party left the train at Springville and camped the first night near Smith & Wilson's summer resort in a beautiful pine forest. The next day the party crossed the divide above the Tule and entered the Kern River watershed, camping at Lloyd Meadow. The next day the party crossed the Little Kern and camped in Trout Meadow. Little Kern Lake was reached on the day following, where two days were spent. Camp was then moved to the mouth of the Big Arroyo, and on the day following to Moraine Lake and Chagoopa Plateau. Here a stay of nearly a week was made. The opinion formed on the previous trip of the club to this region was confirmed, and this was generally conceded to be one of the finest camping spots that the club has ever had in the mountains. The shelter of the thick forest about the lake and opportunity for swimming, as well as the many trips to nearby points of interest, all added to its attractiveness. Several knapsack parties visited Lost Canon, climbed Sawtooth, crossed into Five Lake Basin, and camped at the head of the Big Arroyo, crossing the divide into the Kern-Kaweah, and thence rejoined the main camp at Junction Meadow on the Kern River, the main party having in the interim moved camp to the latter point. Quite a few members climbed Milestone. Almost the entire party visited Crabtree Meadows at the base of Mount Whitney (14,502 feet), and 175 made the ascent, which is the largest number that has visited the summit in a single day. This probably sets a record for a mountain of this height. Mount Tyndall and Mount Williamson were also climbed by several members of the party.

The great feature of the trip was the safe passage of the entire party, including baggage and pack animals, over the recently completed section of the John Muir Trail. Heretofore it has been necessary in order to reach the Kings River Basin from the Kern River, or vice versa, to travel around by way of Giant Forest or cross the Sierra and drop down into Independence, making an arduous detour of several days. The party left its camp in Tyndall Meadow at an altitude of about 11,000 feet and crossed Shepard Pass, which is on the crest of the Sierra at the divide between Shepard and Tyndall creeks. Dropping down from Shepard Pass a little over 1000 feet, the trail turns northwesterly, following up the northerly branch of Shepard Creek, and again crosses the main crest of the Sierra at an altitude of about 13,300 feet at Junction Pass, this pass being between Junction Peak and Mount Keith. The pass itself is a broad level area partaking of the nature of a plateau, and the trail follows out to the north on a divide between two branches of Center Basin, and finally descends into Center Basin itself and thence on down Bubbs Creek to Vidette Meadows, where the club camped that night. While this made a rather long day, the entire party arrived safely in camp that night after one of the most thrilling experiences of any of the outings. To take a party of this size, with all its camping equipment, over a pass that exceeds 13,000 feet in altitude, is an accomplishment the club can well be proud of. Four days were spent at Vidette

Meadows while members of the party knapsacked to Rae Lake and also to Mount Brewer and vicinity. Before crossing Kearsarge Pass a camp was made for a single night at Kearsarge Lakes underneath the Kearsarge Pinnacles, and this wonderful experience will long remain in the memory of members of the party. The next day Independence was reached, where the night was spent, and the members of the party returned to their respective destinations in Los Angeles and San Francisco by special train.

The music furnished by Signor and Madame de Grassi, Mr. Louis Newbauer, Miss Anna B. Ludlow, and Miss Mizpah Jackson, as well as that so generously contributed by many others, made the campfires of this outing more than ordinarily enjoyable. The club is also greatly indebted to one of its members, Mr. J. E. Eibeschutz, of Independence, who generously rendered assistance "in many ways.

The outing planned for the summer of July, 1917, is one of the most ambitious that the club has ever contemplated. The plan of the trip, as previously announced in the preliminary circular, will be reversed. The party will start from Huntington Lake and travel by way of Hot Springs, Vermilion Valley, Blaney Meadows, and Evolution Basin on the South Fork of the San Joaquin, will cross Muir Pass over the recently constructed portion of the John Muir Trail, and will enter the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Kings River. Camp will be made in this wonderful cañon in the vicinity of Grouse Valley, from which the wild and rugged Palisade country can easily be reached, and the party will then travel on down the newly constructed trail, which the club has assisted in building, to Simpson Meadows, then on to Tehipite Valley, and will return to the railroad by way of Shaver Lake. This trip will give an opportunity for visiting a magnificent region of the Sierra that has heretofore been known to but a few of the members of the club who have been pioneers. The recent trail building has made this region sufficiently accessible so that the entire outing party will for the first time have the opportunity to enjoy its wonders this summer. Written application should be made at an early date.

WM. E. COLBY, Chairman,
J. N. LE CONTE,
CLAIR S. TAPPAAN,
Outing Committee