

# The Passes

By John Muir

**T**he sustained grandeur of the High Sierra is strikingly illustrated by the great height of the passes. Between latitude  $36^{\circ} 20'$  and  $38^{\circ}$  the lowest pass, gap, gorge, or notch of any kind cutting across the axis of the range, as far as I have discovered, exceeds 9000 feet in height above the level of the sea; while the average height of all that are in use, either by Indians or whites, is perhaps not less than 11,000 feet, and not one of these is a carriage-pass.

Farther north a carriage-road has been constructed through what is known as the Sonora Pass, on the head waters of the Stanislaus and Walker's rivers, the summit of which is about 10,000 feet above the sea. Substantial wagon-roads have also been built through the Carson and Johnson passes, near the head of Lake Tahoe, over which immense quantities of freight were hauled from California to the mining regions of Nevada, before the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad.

Still farther north a considerable number of comparatively low passes occur, some of which are accessible to wheeled vehicles, and through these rugged defiles during the exciting years of the gold period long emigrant-trains with foot-sore cattle wearily toiled. After the toil-worn adventurers had escaped a thousand dangers and had crawled thousands of miles across the plains the snowy Sierra at last loomed in sight, the eastern wall of the land of gold. And as with shaded eyes they gazed through the tremulous haze of the desert, with what joy must they have descried the pass through which they were to enter the better land of their hopes and dreams!

Between the Sonora Pass and the southern extremity of the High Sierra, a distance of nearly 160 miles, there are only five passes through which trails conduct from one side of the range to the other. These are barely practicable for animals; a pass in these regions meaning simply any notch or cañon through which one may, by the exercise of unlimited patience, make out to lead a mule, or a sure-footed mustang; animals that can slide or jump as well as walk. Only three of the five passes may be said to be in use, viz.: the Kearsarge, Mono, and Virginia Creek; the tracks leading through the others being only obscure Indian trails, not graded in the least, and scarcely traceable by white men; for much of the way is over solid rock and earthquake avalanche taluses, where the unshod ponies of the Indians leave no appreciable sign. Only skilled mountaineers are able to detect the marks that serve to guide the Indians, such as slight abrasions of the looser rocks, the displacement of stones here and there, and bent bushes and weeds. A general knowledge of the topography is, then, the main guide, enabling one to determine where the trail ought to go-- must go. One of these Indian trails crosses the range by a nameless pass between the head waters of the south and middle forks of the San Joaquin, the other between the north and middle forks of the same river, just to the south of "The Minarets"; this last being about 9000 feet high, is the lowest of the five. The Kearsarge is the highest, crossing the summit near the head of the south fork of King's River, about eight miles to the north of Mount Tyndall, through the midst of the most stupendous rock-scenery. The summit of this pass is over 12,000 feet above sea-level; nevertheless, it is one of the safest of the five, and is used every summer, from July to October or November, by hunters, prospectors, and stock-owners, and to some extent by enterprising pleasure-seekers also. For, besides the surpassing grandeur of the scenery about the summit, the trail, in ascending the western flank of the range, conducts through a grove of the giant Sequoias, and through the magnificent Yosemite Valley of the south fork of King's River. This is, perhaps, the highest traveled pass on the North American continent.

The Mono Pass lies to the east of Yosemite Valley, at the head of one of the tributaries of the south fork of the Tuolumne. This is the best known and most extensively traveled of all that exist in the High Sierra. A trail was made through it about the time of the Mono gold excitement, in the year 1858, by adventurous miners and prospectors--men who would build a trail down the throat of darkest Erebus on the way to gold. Though more than a thousand feet lower than the Kearsarge, it is scarcely less sublime in rock-scenery, while in snowy, falling water it far surpasses it. Being so favorably situated for the stream of Yosemite travel, the more adventurous tourists cross over through this glorious gateway to the volcanic region around Mono Lake. It has therefore gained a name and fame above every other pass in the range. According to the few barometrical observations made upon it, its highest point is 10,765 feet above the sea. The other pass of the five we have been considering is somewhat lower, and crosses the axis of the range a few miles to the north of the Mono Pass, at the head of

the southernmost tributary of Walker's River. It is used chiefly by roaming bands of the Pah Ute Indians and "sheepmen."

But, leaving wheels and animals out of the question, the free mountaineer with a sack of bread on his shoulders and an ax to cut steps in ice and frozen snow can make his way across the range almost everywhere, and at any time of year when the weather is calm. To him nearly every notch between the peaks is a pass, though much patient step-cutting is at times required up and down steeply inclined glaciers, with cautious climbing over precipices that at first sight would seem hopelessly inaccessible.

In pursuing my studies, I have crossed from side to side of the range at intervals of a few miles all along the highest portion of the chain, with far less real danger than one would naturally count on. And what fine wildness was thus revealed--storms and avalanches, lakes and waterfalls, gardens and meadows, and interesting animals--only those will ever know who give the freest and most buoyant portion of their lives to climbing and seeing for themselves.

To the timid traveler, fresh from the sedimentary levels of the lowlands, these highways, however picturesque and grand, seem terribly forbidding--cold, dead, gloomy gashes in the bones of the mountains, and of all Nature's ways the ones to be most cautiously avoided. Yet they are full of the finest and most telling examples of Nature's love; and though hard to travel, none are safer. For they lead through regions that lie far above the ordinary haunts of the devil, and of the pestilence that walks in darkness. True, there are innumerable places where the careless step will be the last step; and a rock falling from the cliffs may crush without warning like lightning from the sky; but what then? Accidents in the mountains are less common than in the lowlands, and these mountain mansions are decent, delightful, even divine, places to die in, compared with the doleful chambers of civilization. Few places in this world are more dangerous than home. Fear not, therefore, to try the mountain-passes. They will kill care, save you from deadly apathy, set you free, and call forth every faculty into vigorous, enthusiastic action. Even the sick should try these so-called dangerous passes, because for every unfortunate they kill, they cure a thousand.

All the passes make their steepest ascents on the eastern flank. On this side the average rise is not far from a thousand feet to the mile, while on the west it is about two hundred feet. Another marked difference between the eastern and western portions of the passes is that the former begin at the very foot of the range, while the latter can hardly be said to begin lower than an elevation of from seven to ten thousand feet. Approaching the range from the gray levels of Mono and Owen's Valley on the east, the traveler sees before him the steep, short passes in full view, fenced in by rugged spurs that come plunging down from the shoulders of the peaks on either side, the courses of the more direct being disclosed from top to bottom without interruption. But from the west one sees nothing of the way he may be seeking until near the summit, after days have been spent in threading the forests growing on the main dividing ridges between the river cañons.

It is interesting to observe how surely the alp-crossing animals of every kind fall into the same trails. The more rugged and inaccessible the general character of the topography of any particular region, the more surely will the trails of white men, Indians, bears, wild sheep, etc., be found converging into the best passes. The Indians of the western slope venture cautiously over the passes in settled weather to attend dances, and obtain loads of pine-nuts and the larvæ of a small fly that breeds in Mono and Owen's lakes, which, when dried, forms an important article of food; while the Pah Utes cross over from the east to hunt the deer and obtain supplies of acorns; and it is truly astonishing to see what immense loads the haggard old squaws make out to carry barefooted through these rough passes, oftentimes for a distance of sixty or seventy miles. They are always accompanied by the men, who stride on, unburdened and erect, a little in advance, kindly stooping at difficult places to pile stepping-stones for their patient, pack-animal wives, just as they would prepare the way for their ponies.

Bears evince great sagacity as mountaineers, but although they are tireless and enterprising travelers they seldom cross the range. I have several times tracked them through the Mono Pass, but only in late years, after cattle and sheep had passed that way, when they doubtless were following to feed on the stragglers and on those that had been killed by falling over the rocks. Even the wild sheep, the best mountaineers of all, choose regular

passes in making journeys across the summits. Deer seldom cross the range in either direction. I have never yet observed a single specimen of the mule-deer of the Great Basin west of the summit, and rarely one of the black-tailed species on the eastern slope, notwithstanding many of the latter ascend the range nearly to the summit every summer, to feed in the wild gardens and bring forth their young.

The glaciers are the pass-makers, and it is by them that the courses of all mountaineers are predestined. Without exception every pass in the Sierra was created by them without the slightest aid or predetermining guidance from any of the cataclysmic agents. I have seen elaborate statements of the amount of drilling and blasting accomplished in the construction of the railroad across the Sierra, above Donner Lake; but for every pound of rock moved in this way, the glaciers which descended east and west through this same pass, crused and carried away more than a hundred tons.

The so-called practicable road-passes are simply those portions of the range more degraded by glacial action than the adjacent portions, and degraded in such a way as to leave the summits rounded, instead of sharp; while the peaks, from the superior strength and hardness of their rocks, or from more favorable position, having suffered less degradation, are left towering above the passes as if they had been heaved into the sky by some force acting from beneath.

The scenery of all the passes, especially at the head, is of the wildest and grandest description,--lofty peaks massed together and laden around their bases with ice and snow; chains of glacier lakes; cascading streams in endless variety, with glorious views, westward over a sea of rocks and woods, and eastward over strange ashy plains, volcanoes, and the dry, dead-looking ranges of the Great Basin. Every pass, however, possesses treasures of beauty all its own.

Having thus in a general way indicated the height, leading features, and distribution of the principal passes, I will now endeavor to describe the Mono Pass in particular, which may, I think, be regarded as a fair example of the higher alpine passes in general.

The main portion of the Mono Pass is formed by Bloody Cañon, which begins at the summit of the range, and runs in a general east-northeasterly direction to the edge of the Mono Plain.

The first white men who forced a way through its somber depths were, as we have seen, eager gold-seekers. But the cañon was known and traveled as a pass by the Indians and mountain animals long before its discovery by white men, as is shown by the numerous tributary trails which come into it from every direction. Its name accords well with the character of the "early times" in California, and may perhaps have been suggested by the predominant color of the metamorphic slates in which it is in great part eroded; or more probably by blood-stains made by the unfortunate animals which were compelled to slip and shuffle awkwardly over its rough, cutting rocks. I have never known an animal, either mule or horse, to make its way through the cañon, either in going up or down, without losing more or less blood from wounds on the legs. Occasionally one is killed outright--falling headlong and rolling over precipices like a boulder. But such accidents are rarer than from the terrible appearance of the trail one would be led to expect; the more experienced when driven loose find their way over the dangerous places with a caution and sagacity that is truly wonderful. During the gold excitement it was at times a matter of considerable pecuniary importance to force a way through the cañon with pack-trains early in the spring while it was yet heavily blocked with snow; and then the mules with their loads had sometimes to be let down over the steepest drifts and avalanche beds by means of ropes.

A good bridle-path leads from Yosemite through many a grove and meadow up to the head of the cañon, a distance of about thirty miles. Here the scenery undergoes a sudden and startling condensation. Mountains, red, gray, and black, rise close at hand on the right, whitened around their bases with banks of enduring snow; on the left swells the huge red mass of Mount Gibbs, while in front the eye wanders down the shadowy cañon, and out on the warm plain of Mono, where the lake is seen gleaming like a burnished metallic disk, with clusters of lofty volcanic cones to the south of it.

When at length we enter the mountain gateway, the somber rocks seem aware of our presence, and seem to come thronging closer about us. Happily the ouzel and the old familiar robin are here to sing us welcome, and azure daisies beam with trustfulness and sympathy, enabling us to feel something of Nature's love even here, beneath the gaze of her coldest rocks.

The effect of this expressive outspokenness on the part of the cañon-rocks is greatly enhanced by the quiet aspect of the alpine meadows through which we pass just before entering the narrow gateway. The forests in which they lie, and the mountain-tops rising beyond them, seem quiet and tranquil. We catch their restful spirit, yield to the soothing influences of the sunshine, and saunter dreamily on through flowers and bees, scarce touched by a definite thought; then suddenly we find ourselves in the shadowy cañon, closeted with Nature in one of her wildest strongholds.

After the first bewildering impression begins to wear off, we perceive that it is not altogether terrible; for besides the reassuring birds and flowers we discover a chain of shining lakelets hanging down from the very summit of the pass, and linked together by a silvery stream. The highest are set in bleak, rough bowls, scantily fringed with brown and yellow sedges. Winter storms blow snow through the cañon in blinding drifts, and avalanches shoot from the heights. Then are these sparkling tarns filled and buried, leaving not a hint of their existence. In June and July they begin to blink and thaw out like sleepy eyes, the carices thrust up their short brown spikes, the daisies bloom in turn, and the most profoundly buried of them all is at length warmed and summered as if winter were only a dream.

Red Lake is the lowest of the chain, and also the largest. It seems rather dull and forbidding at first sight, lying motionless in its deep, dark bed. The cañon wall rises sheer from the water's edge on the south, but on the opposite side there is sufficient space and sunshine for a sedgy daisy garden, the center of which is brilliantly lighted with lilies, castilleias, larkspurs, and columbines, sheltered from the wind by leafy willows, and forming a most joyful outburst of plant-life keenly emphasized by the chill baldness of the onlooking cliffs.

After indulging here in a dozing, shimmering lake-rest, the happy stream sets forth again, warbling and trilling like an ouzel, ever delightfully confiding, no matter how dark the way; leaping, gliding, hither, thither, clear or foaming: manifesting the beauty of its wildness in every sound and gesture.

One of its most beautiful developments is the Diamond Cascade, situated a short distance below Red Lake. Here the tense, crystalline water is first dashed into coarse, granular spray mixed with dusty foam, and then divided into a diamond pattern by following the diagonal cleavage-joints that intersect the face of the precipice over which it pours. Viewed in front, it resembles a strip of embroidery of definite pattern, varying through the seasons with the temperature and the volume of water. Scarce a flower may be seen along its snowy border. A few bent pines look on from a distance, and small fringes of cassiope and rock-ferns are growing in fissures near the head, but these are so lowly and undemonstrative that only the attentive observer will be likely to notice them.

On the north wall of the cañon, a little below the Diamond Cascade, a glittering side stream makes its appearance, seeming to leap directly out of the sky. It first resembles a crinkled ribbon of silver hanging loosely down the wall, but grows wider as it descends, and dashes the dull rock with foam. A long rough talus curves up against this part of the cliff, overgrown with snow-pressed willows, in which the fall disappears with many an eager surge and swirl and plashing leap, finally beating its way down to its confluence with the main cañon stream.

Below this point the climate is no longer arctic. Butterflies become larger and more abundant, grasses with imposing spread of panicle wave above your shoulders, and the summery drone of the bumblebee thickens the air. The Dwarf Pine, the tree-mountaineer that climbs highest and braves the coldest blasts, is found scattered in stormbeaten clumps from the summit of the pass about half-way down the cañon. Here it is succeeded by the hardy Two-leaved Pine, which is speedily joined by the taller Yellow and Mountain Pines. These, with the burly juniper, and shimmering aspen, rapidly grow larger as the sunshine becomes richer, forming groves that block the view; or they stand more apart here and there in picturesque groups, that make beautiful and obvious

harmony with the rocks and with one another. Blooming underbrush becomes abundant,--azalea, spiræa, and the brier-rose weaving fringes for the streams, and shaggy rugs to relieve the stern, unflinching rock-bosses.

Through this delightful wilderness, Cañon Creek roves without any constraining channel, throbbing and wavering; now in sunshine, now in thoughtful shade; falling, swirling, flashing from side to side in weariless exuberance of energy. A glorious milky way of cascades is thus developed, of which Bower Cascade, though one of the smallest, is perhaps the most beautiful of them all. It is situated in the lower region of the pass, just where the sunshine begins to mellow between the cold and warm climates. Here the glad creek, grown strong with tribute gathered from many a snowy fountain on the heights, sings richer strains, and becomes more human and lovable at every step. Now you may by its side find the rose and homely yarrow, and small meadows full of bees and clover. At the head of a low-browed rock, luxuriant dogwood bushes and willows arch over from bank to bank, embowering the stream with their leafy branches; and drooping plumes, kept in motion by the current, fringe the brow of the cascade in front. From this leafy covert the stream leaps out into the light in a fluted curve thick sown with sparkling crystals, and falls into a pool filled with brown boulders, out of which it creeps gray with foam-bells and disappears in a tangle of verdure like that from which it came.

Hence, to the foot of the cañon, the metamorphic slates give place to granite, whose nobler sculpture calls forth expressions of corresponding beauty from the stream in passing over it,--bright trills of rapids, booming notes of falls, solemn hushes of smooth-gliding sheets, all chanting and blending in glorious harmony. When, at length, its impetuous alpine life is done, it slips through a meadow with scarce an audible whisper, and falls asleep in Moraine Lake.

This water-bed is one of the finest I ever saw. Evergreens wave soothingly about it, and the breath of flowers floats over it like incense. Here our blessed stream rests from its rocky wanderings, all its mountaineering done,--no more foaming rock-leaping, no more wild, exulting song. It falls into a smooth, glassy sleep, stirred only by the night-wind, which, coming down the cañon, makes it croon and mutter in ripples along its brodered shores.

Leaving the lake, it glides quietly through the rushes, destined never more to touch the living rock. Henceforth its path lies through ancient moraines and reaches of ashy sage-plain, which nowhere afford rocks suitable for the development of cascades or sheer falls. Yet this beauty of maturity, though less striking, is of a still higher order, enticing us lovingly on through gentian meadows and groves of rustling aspen to Lake Mono, where, spirit-like, our happy stream vanishes in vapor, and floats free again in the sky.

Bloody Cañon, like every other in the Sierra, was recently occupied by a glacier, which derived its fountain snows from the adjacent summits, and descended into Mono Lake, at a time when its waters stood at a much higher level than now. The principal characters in which the history of the ancient glaciers is preserved are displayed here in marvelous freshness and simplicity, furnishing the student with extraordinary advantages for the acquisition of knowledge of this sort. The most striking passages are polished and striated surfaces, which in many places reflect the rays of the sun like smooth water. The dam of Red Lake is an elegantly modeled rib of metamorphic slate, brought into relief because of its superior strength, and because of the greater intensity of the glacial erosion of the rock immediately above it, caused by a steeply inclined tributary glacier, which entered the main trunk with a heavy down-thrust at the head of the lake.

Moraine Lake furnishes an equally interesting example of a basin formed wholly, or in part, by a terminal moraine dam curved across the path of a stream between two lateral moraines.

At Moraine Lake the cañon proper terminates, although apparently continued by the two lateral moraines of the vanished glacier. These moraines are about 300 feet high, and extend unbrokenly from the sides of the cañon into the plain, a distance of about five miles, curving and tapering in beautiful lines. Their sunward sides are gardens, their shady sides are groves; the former devoted chiefly to erigonæ, compositæ, and graminæ a square rod containing five or six profusely flowered erigonums of several species, about the same number of

bahia and linosyris, and a few grass tufts; each species being planted trimly apart, with bare gravel between, as if cultivated artificially.

My first visit to Bloody Cañon was made in the summer of 1869, under circumstances well calculated to heighten the impressions that are the peculiar offspring of mountains. I came from the blooming tangles of Florida, and waded out into the plant-gold of the great valley of California, when its flora was as yet untrodden. Never before had I beheld congregations of social flowers half so extensive or half so glorious. Golden compositæ covered all the ground from the Coast Range to the Sierra like a stratum of curdled sunshine, in which I reveled for weeks, watching the rising and setting of their innumerable suns; then I gave myself up to be borne forward on the crest of the summer wave that sweeps annually up the Sierra and spends itself on the snowy summits.

At the Big Tuolumne Meadows I remained more than a month, sketching, botanizing, and climbing among the surrounding mountains. The mountaineer with whom I then happened to be camping was one of those remarkable men one so frequently meets in California, the hard angles and bosses of whose characters have been brought into relief by the grinding excitements of the gold period, until they resemble glacial landscapes. But at this late day, my friend's activities had subsided, and his craving for rest caused him to become a gentle shepherd and literally to lie down with the lamb.

Recognizing the unsatisfiable longings of my Scotch Highland instincts, he threw out some hints concerning Bloody Cañon, and advised me to explore it. "I have never seen it myself," he said, "for I never was so unfortunate as to pass that way. But I have heard many a strange story about it, and I warrant you will at least find it wild enough."

Then of course I made haste to see it. Early next morning I made up a bundle of bread, tied my note-book to my belt, and strode away in the bracing air, full of eager, indefinite hope. The plushy lawns that lay in my path served to soothe my morning haste. The sod in many places was starred with daisies and blue gentians, over which I lingered. I traced the paths of the ancient glaciers over many a shining pavement, and marked the gaps in the upper forests that told the power of the winter avalanches. Climbing higher, I saw for the first time the gradual dwarfing of the pines in compliance with climate, and on the summit discovered creeping mats of the arctic willow overgrown with silky catkins, and patches of the dwarf vaccinium with its round flowers sprinkled in the grass like purple hail; while in every direction the landscape stretched sublimely away in fresh wildness--a manuscript written by the hand of Nature alone.

At length, as I entered the pass, the huge rocks began to close around in all their wild, mysterious impressiveness, when suddenly, as I was gazing eagerly about me, a drove of gray hairy beings came in sight, lumbering toward me with a kind of boneless, wallowing motion like bears.

I never turn back, though often so inclined, and in this particular instance, amid such surroundings, everything seemed singularly unfavorable for the calm acceptance of so grim a company. Suppressing my fears, I soon discovered that although as hairy as bears and as crooked as summit pines, the strange creatures were sufficiently erect to belong to our own species. They proved to be nothing more formidable than Mono Indians dressed in the skins of sage-rabbits. Both the men and the women begged persistently for whisky and tobacco, and seemed so accustomed to denials that I found it impossible to convince them that I had none to give. Excepting the names of these two products of civilization, they seemed to understand not a word of English; but I afterward learned that they were on their way to Yosemite Valley to feast awhile on trout and procure a load of acorns to carry back through the pass to their huts on the shore of Mono Lake.

Occasionally a good countenance may be seen among the Mono Indians, but these, the first specimens I had seen, were mostly ugly, and some of them altogether hideous. The dirt on their faces was fairly stratified, and seemed so ancient and so undisturbed it might almost possess a geological significance. The older faces were, moreover, strangely blurred and divided into sections by furrows that looked like the cleavage-joints of rocks,

suggesting exposure on the mountains in a cast-away condition for ages. Somehow they seemed to have no right place in the landscape, and I was glad to see them fading out of sight down the pass.

Then came evening, and the somber cliffs were inspired with the ineffable beauty of the alpenglow. A solemn calm fell upon everything. All the lower portion of the cañon was in gloaming shadow, and I crept into a hollow near one of the upper lakelets to smooth the ground in a sheltered nook for a bed. When the short twilight faded, I kindled a sunny fire, made a cup of tea, and lay down to rest and look at the stars. Soon the night-wind began to flow and pour in torrents among the jagged peaks, mingling strange tones with those of the waterfalls sounding far below; and as I drifted toward sleep I began to experience an uncomfortable feeling of nearness to the furred Monos. Then the full moon looked down over the edge of the cañon wall, her countenance seemingly filled with intense concern, and apparently so near as to produce a startling effect as if she had entered my bedroom, forgetting all the world, to gaze on me alone.

The night was full of strange sounds, and I gladly welcomed the morning. Breakfast was soon done, and I set forth in the exhilarating freshness of the new day, rejoicing in the abundance of pure wildness so close about me. The stupendous rocks, hacked and scarred with centuries of storms, stood sharply out in the thin early light, while down in the bottom of the cañon grooved and polished bosses heaved and glistened like swelling sea-waves, telling a grand old story of the ancient glacier that poured its crushing floods above them.

Here for the first time I met the arctic daisies in all their perfection of purity and spirituality,--gentle mountaineers face to face with the stormy sky, kept safe and warm by a thousand miracles. I leaped lightly from rock to rock, glorying in the eternal freshness and sufficiency of Nature, and in the ineffable tenderness with which she nurtures her mountain darlings in the very fountains of storms. Fresh beauty appeared at every step, delicate rock-ferns, and groups of the fairest flowers. Now another lake came to view, now a waterfall. Never fell light in brighter spangles, never fell water in whiter foam. I seemed to float through the cañon enchanted, feeling nothing of its roughness, and was out in the Mono levels before I was aware.

Looking back from the shore of Moraine Lake, my morning ramble seemed all a dream. There curved Bloody Cañon, a mere glacial furrow 2000 feet deep, with smooth rocks projecting from the sides and braided together in the middle, like bulging, swelling muscles. Here the lilies were higher than my head, and the sunshine was warm enough for palms. Yet the snow around the arctic willows was plainly visible only four miles away, and between were narrow specimen zones of all the principal climates of the globe.

On the bank of a small brook that comes gurgling down the side of the left lateral moraine, I found a camp-fire still burning, which no doubt belonged to the gray Indians I had met on the summit, and I listened instinctively and moved cautiously forward, half expecting to see some of their grim faces peering out of the bushes.

Passing on toward the open plain, I noticed three well-defined terminal moraines curved gracefully across the cañon stream, and joined by long splices to the two noble laterals. These mark the halting-places of the vanished glacier when it was retreating into its summit shadows on the breaking-up of the glacial winter.

Five miles below the foot of Moraine Lake, just where the lateral moraines lose themselves in the plain, there was a field of wild rye, growing in magnificent waving bunches six to eight feet high, bearing heads from six to twelve inches long. Rubbing out some of the grains, I found them about five eighths of an inch long, dark-colored, and sweet. Indian women were gathering it in baskets, bending down large handfuls, beating it out, and fanning it in the wind. They were quite picturesque, coming through the rye, as one caught glimpses of them here and there, in winding lanes and openings, with splendid tufts arching above their heads, while their incessant chat and laughter showed their heedless joy.

Like the rye-field, I found the so-called desert of Mono blooming in a high state of natural cultivation with the wild rose, cherry, aster, and the delicate abronia; also innumerable gilies, phloxes, poppies, and bush-compositæ. I observed their gestures and the various expressions of their corollas, inquiring how they could be

so fresh and beautiful out in this volcanic desert. They told as happy a life as any plant-company I ever met, and seemed to enjoy even the hot sand and the wind.

But the vegetation of the pass has been in great part destroyed, and the same may be said of all the more accessible passes throughout the range. Immense numbers of starving sheep and cattle have been driven through them into Nevada, trampling the wild gardens and meadows almost out of existence. The lofty walls are untouched by any foot, and the falls sing on unchanged; but the sight of crushed flowers and stripped, bitten bushes goes far toward destroying the charm of wildness.

The cañon should be seen in winter. A good, strong traveler, who knows the way and the weather, might easily make a safe excursion through it from Yosemite Valley on snow-shoes during some tranquil time, when the storms are hushed. The lakes and falls would be buried then; but so, also, would be the traces of destructive feet, while the views of the mountains in their winter garb, and the ride at lightning speed down the pass between the snowy walls, would be truly glorious.

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