



THE CAMP AT TUOHEY'S.

TROUTING OVER THE OLD HOCKETT TRAIL.

(CALIFORNIA.)

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THE Mount Whitney region of the southern Sierras, with the district lying directly north, including the Yosemite Valley, is perhaps the roughest of the whole of that exceedingly rough range of mountains. It was the favored home of the grizzly bear, now almost exterminated thereabouts. The very roughness of the country makes it surpassingly beautiful; its variety of aspect, its ruggedness of form and ever-changing color, together with its great forests, in which are found the famous California big trees (*Sequoia gigantea*), the great sugar pine, most distinguished of its kind the yellow pine, with firs and cedars of enormous proportions, and adding to them a valley like the Yosemite at its head and the highest peak in the United States at its feet, all unite to render it a spot almost unique.

Numerous rivers head in these mountains. To the northward are the Merced

and the King, flowing into the San Joaquin, and to the south the Kaweah and the Kern, flowing into Tulare Lake; all following the western trend of the watershed.

In the rivers and lakes of the Sierras there are seven kinds of trout to be found. These embrace four varieties of the rainbow species: the two of the upper Sacramento and McCloud Rivers, one called *Salmo irideus shasta*, the rainbow of the fish culturist, and another, *S. irideus stonei*, or No Shee trout. In these waters is also found the only char of the Pacific Slope, known as *Salvelinus malma*, the Dolly Varden trout.

As you go further south, the rainbow is found in all the numerous streams running through the range until you reach the neighborhood of the Truckee River and the lakes in that region, including Tahoe, Independence, Webber, Donner and others, where, besides the rainbow, which is plentiful in the Truckee, the *Salmo mykiss*, or cutthroat or black-spotted trout, abounds. A number of the streams in this vicinity have also been stocked with *Salvelinus*

fontinalis, the brook-trout of our Eastern seaboard.

This makes five varieties, and, going still further south, to the Mount Whitney country, two others are found, the *S. irideus gilberti* or Kern River trout, and *S. irideus agua bonita* or golden trout of Whitney Creek. It is of these two beautiful fishes, of which little has as yet been written, that some account will be given.

Should one enter this country from the Nevada side, following the railway down as far as Owens Lake, the trail into the cañon of the Big Kern would doubtless prove the easiest mode of approach. The usual method, however, is to start from Visalia, in Tulare County, California, and go eastward by wagon road as far as Mineral King, some sixty miles, and then by pack-horses over Farewell Gap to Trout Meadows, say, twenty-five miles, and from there into the cañon of the Kern, another day's ride.

We left Visalia on the 21st of June, and, as the snow in the Gap was not to be trusted so early in the season, were obliged to take the old Hockett Trail up the south fork of the Kaweah River, regulating our marches by the feeding grounds where pasturage was available for our animals. Our route, therefore, led us by Tuohey Meadows, Soda Springs and Trout Meadows, thence into the Kern, a much longer and far more difficult journey. Seven pack animals (six of them bronco mules, three-year-olds) and eight riding horses, with John Broder as guide, philosopher and friend, "Uncle Bob," the indispensable, a packer and a cook, completed our outfit.

If one happens to be roughing it on a trail, the companionship of John Broder is a liberal education, while from the view of the vaquero, "Uncle Bob" will furnish the points and the history thereof. Then if it be your misfortune to fall in with such a Mexican as the "Barrel Organ," a name he earned early in the march, a cook that didn't cook, and adding to this a packer who had to look to the "boss" to throw every diamond hitch; with six beautiful bronco mules which bucked their packs off every now and then, and had to be blindfolded, and lariatied both fore and aft, in order to replace them, you would be in the way, if an observing person, of seeing lots of fun.

The writer started from Visalia with "Uncle Bob" on a buckboard over the Mineral King road, expecting to overtake John with the pack-train before going many miles. After reaching the foothills we began to think that John must have had some differences to settle with those mules, for he was not within sight. We pushed on to Dave Carter's, about thirty miles out, where we called a halt.

Dave Carter is from Virginia, and his welcome was warm as he bade us come in. Although the house was filled to overflowing with Dave's family, and could therefore offer us no shelter, it is entirely surrounded by magnificent fig and mulberry trees, which make as good a roof as any camper could wish for, so, after getting something to eat, we adjusted our beds beneath the foliage and turned in for the night.

John and the pack-train arrived next morning. He had had several differences with those mules. The whole outfit on reaching us was in such a demoralized condition that it was deemed prudent to move on but five or six miles further, to the south fork of Kaweah River, and go into camp.

Getting off the dusty road and striking south by the trail was a great relief. We were soon among the hills, in beautiful timber skirting the river, where everything was green and wild flowers were growing in profusion, nodding their white, blue, yellow and purple heads to the gentle southern breeze.

After arranging camp we put our rods together and went to the river for a mess of trout, strictly for the pot. Now, the Kaweah is much resorted to by the sportsmen of Visalia, and is pretty well fished out; for few of these anglers have got beyond the ken of worms and grasshoppers, and they go for fish.

We did not find the trout over-numerous nor of any great size, but they rose to our flies in sufficient numbers to furnish an abundant meal. Pretty little rainbows they were, though quite unlike the variety found across the divide.

Reveille sounded at three A. M., and came in loud notes from the "Barrel Organ." With the prospect of work ahead the Mexican suddenly discovered pains in his interior that could be expressed only in heart-aching groans. He could not get breakfast, nor pull a pack-

rope. Utterly impossible. We were truly concerned for him and believed him to be in dire extremities. A large dose of chlorodyne was administered. He then mixed up about a quart of sweetened flour paste, which he heated over the fire, and swallowed the whole mess, after which he sat down by a tree and groaned as loudly as ever. We had to turn in and get breakfast without him, and pack the animals as well. It was a circus, and we all played clown to the six trick mules. Betimes the outfit was started, the Mexican having saddled his horse and dropped in behind.

The weather was delightful. The forest-covered hills in their richest green of early summer, the ground carpeted with masses of wild flowers, the distant peaks glistening in the sunshine, and the fresh morning air united to bring a sense of enjoyment to the faces of all save the "Barrel Organ" and the mules.

The Hockett Trail was built by a man of that name, under a grant by the Legislature of the State, in order to supply the mining camps in the neighborhood of Lone Pine, some one hundred and seventy miles from Visalia. During his ownership a toll was collected for its use, until the State finally regained possession by purchase. In the early days the trail was kept in good condition. Easier means of access, have long since been found to reach Lone Pine and the old trail has fallen into disuse. The mountains of the Big Horn are almost like pampas to it, and the trails of the Yosemite, kept in admirable condition, seem in comparison like veritable boulevards.

"Uncle Bob" twice led us off the trail, and once with almost disastrous results. A halt was called, but the mules, not understanding our language, crowded up, and one, getting a push on his pack, went ears over tail down the mountain. In his revolutions we saw a wheel going round, showing at rapid intervals, four legs, a pack, two ears and a tail. Why he did not go down three thousand feet into eternity will always remain a mystery, but he brought up with his forefeet against some obstruction about one hundred and fifty feet below, and we finally got him out—the pack still on his back, no bones broken, cut and bruised somewhat, but quite ready to follow on when we turned and picked up the trail again.

For many hours we had been rapidly ascending. The giant sugar and yellow pines, the huge cedars, became fewer in number, being replaced by firs and tamaracks. The mountain peaks quite near at hand were entirely covered with a mantle of snow sending down great white stripes where it filled the rocky ravines on their sides, while patches of considerable size lay still unmelted by the side of the trail. At intervals one saw the wonderful snow-plant, transparent in vermilion, and almost crystalline in appearance, looking far more like a creation in candy than a vegetable form.

The severity of the climb had been hard on the animals. Packs had to be re-adjusted frequently, and no one was sorry, when with the sun well below the western hills, the divide at Tuohey's Meadows was reached. The day had also proved a mule tamer. The business end of those animals had lost its aggressiveness, and one could approach them in comparative safety.

The Mexican had ridden this tough march and was not long in arriving, but the saddle had scarcely left his horse before the groans were resumed. A good dose of cholera mixture followed the chlorodyne; he mixed himself another quart of sweetened paste, partook quite liberally of other food, wrapped himself up in blankets, and was still groaning when sleep overtook us.

The horses were rounded up before daylight in the morning. In the wet places considerable ice had formed overnight, and the cool morning air, suggestive of early December, greeted our awakening. With a bit of breakfast aboard, we headed the outfit down the incline for Soda Springs. After passing beyond the flat of the meadows, the trail again assumed its old ruggedness. In the steep descents we most frequently led our horses, and did about as much walking as riding.

The previous day had tried our animals so severely that we determined to make a shorter march of this. Reaching the camping place about 2 P. M., we selected a beautiful spot where a small stream ran dancing down into the Little Kern River, which, flowed within a quarter of a mile southward of us.

We were now on the other watershed, and I was curious to see the trout. Moreover, we wanted fish to eat. The

size of the stream as well as its character, forbade the possibility of any finny monsters, so a 5¹/₄-oz. Leonard rod was soon rigged and quickly shot the flies over the rippling waters. Commencing with the brook by the camp, perhaps a dozen quarter-pounders were landed before reaching the Little Kern, out of which a sufficient addition was made to furnish the requisite "pot." Nothing over a half-pound fish was killed, but their eating quality was so far superior to those of the Kaweah as to command instant recognition. Their other peculiarities will be referred to later. Throughout our whole day we had been traversing a country of surpassing loveliness. Every turn of the trail brought forth changing views of snow-capped mountains, rocky peaks, dark and sinister-looking defiles, with forest-laden valleys and sparkling brooks and waterfalls, But the wild flowers had almost disappeared, and



ON THE MC CLOUD RIVER.

grass was nowhere to be seen. We had reached the country into which, in early spring, vast herds of sheep had been driven for pasture. The flowers had gone; where the grass should have been, nothing was to be seen but the gray soil.

In the flat country immediately surrounding the southern end of the Sierras, a large number of French immigrants, mostly from the Basque provinces of the Pyrenees, have settled. They own little or no land, few even have citizenship, but they raise sheep and drive their herds over the country, especially in the mountains, in search of

free grazing for their support. As soon as the grass crops out in the spring they leave the plains for the foothills, and before summer is over have consumed all the grass to be found in the meadows or on the most difficult plateaux of this mountainous region. In fact, they are a band of grazing tramps. One man, three or four sheep-dogs, a small burro packed with provisions, and about fifteen hundred sheep usually make up the outfit. In bands of about this size, it is said, some three hundred thousand sheep are driven into this locality annually.

A considerable portion of this region, more especially the northern section of it, is held by the Government as a forest reserve, and within it is situated the Sequoia National Park, instituted for the preservation of the big trees, of which there are something over two hundred thousand on the reservation. A troop of cavalry is maintained for the protection of the

forests, as well as to keep the herders off, but the soldiers reach the mountains about the Fourth of July, going in from the north, while the herders entering the mountains from the south have occupied the country since April, and little remains in the way of fodder for those who come after them. Fortunately, an enterprising Frenchman has rented Trout Meadows, where he has saved the grazing, and charges a small amount per head for animals stopping there. Mr. Funston, who owns the meadows in the Kern River Cañon, has preserved them as well, but he is a lover of his kind, and

you are welcome to feed there as long as you please for nothing. Were it not for these two oases in this desert of fodder, animals could not be maintained on the Kern, without packing in grain.

We had descended to a lower altitude. All the snow had disappeared, and, though the air was fresh and bracing, it had reached a comfortable temperature. After spending a refreshing night at Soda Springs, an early start was made for Trout Meadows. Our course took us down the watershed of the Little Kern, though rarely in sight of the stream. While the country is not so rough, neither is it so picturesque as that of the previous day, and we reached our destination early in the afternoon.

The route into the Kern River Cañon from Trout Meadows was a much more difficult journey than I had imagined. Its early stages were fairly easy, but when we reached the divide the old rugged characteristics appeared, and the legs of our horses were "all of a tremble" after reaching the top of some of those many rocky climbs, where we halted that they might regain their wind. Through this winding trail every moment was enjoyable, for at every turn some new and entrancing scene was discovered, and when the great river came into view, flowing with rapid pace through a cañon that vies with Yosemite in loveliness, we could but stop and gaze. This, however, did not get us to camp, so on we went, struggling up the rough ascents and down the loose and treacherous rocks, crossing shady brooks in sheltered defiles, tak-

ing a peep here and there at phantom-like waterfalls issuing from the sides of mountains miles away, until we reached a spot on the river most commonly used as a camp. After looking over the ground, the conclusion was reached that the grazing was not sufficiently good to hold our animals in safety.

Leaving the Hockett Trail at this point, where it crosses the river by a ford and leads to the southeast, we pushed on to Funston's Meadows, some six miles further up-stream. On the route we passed two beautiful lakes, made by a big landslide which fell into

the river and blocked up sufficient space to form them. Dead trees still stood out of the water in many places, and the huge boulders with broken timber carried down marked a scene of wild confusion in that might tumble. Toward the end of our journey the sides of the cañon rise to splendid heights in rough, treeless crags, but the bottom through



NEVADA AND VERNAL FALLS FROM GLACIER POINT

which the river flows widens out for perhaps a mile along its course, and here one finds Funston's Meadows, with grass in plenty, and as charming a spot as one could wish for a permanent camp. Down by the riverside, in a grove of tamaracks, where a rapid made music, we pitched our tents.

There was still plenty of daylight left in which to go a-fishing. Rods, reels and fly-books came from the packs, and up-stream we went. The Kern for a river in the mountains is a large one, though partaking of all the characteristics of mountain streams, with rapids and pools in profusion. It is fairly high

at this season of the year, and carries an immense volume of water considering its altitude. It is without those peculiarities, however, which lead to the growth of exceedingly large trout, by which is meant fish of five to fifteen pounds in weight, a feature which has made the Williamson River of Oregon and the Walker River of Nevada so famous. It carries, however, large numbers of two-pound fish, with an occasional three, four or even five pounder. Quite good enough this for anyone. Then the fish are most beautiful in appearance, far handsomer than the rainbows of the Williamson, which, though yielding to no trout of the Pacific in their rising and fighting qualities, are the plainest of their species.

We had not gone two hundred yards from camp before we commenced taking fish. First, one weighing about a pound, then a little chap of half the size, next a greedy two-pounder rose, and presently another of the same weight. So on we went, until our creels began to pull a bit at the shoulder, when we sat down to have an inspection.

The most interesting feature of the trout of Kern River rests in the fact that it is said to furnish the connecting link between the cutthroat and the rainbow species. Consequently, the first thing to look for was the cutthroat mark, which is a deep scarlet blotch on the half-concealed membrane between the two branches of the lower jaw. In the specimens we caught it was not strikingly developed, though discoverable in all of them. Unfortunately, at this early season the fish were not in high condition. They were dark in color, and over their entire length and breadth profusely covered with spots, much more so than any true trout we had ever before observed. The fish had not as yet recovered from the effect of spawning, which evidently occurs very late in these waters, and their lack of activity upon the rod was a disappointment to the spirit of the angler. Their reputation as fighters, however, is high, and no doubt, later in the year, when they have recovered their full vigor, they will make as merry a struggle for life as any of their kin,

The individuals under observation offered as great a variety of tints as can be found in our Eastern char, and their coloring is certainly beautiful.

Were it not for the faint streak of red down their sides they have little resemblance to any of the other rainbows.

The small scales of the Kern River trout and an indication of the cutthroat mark give him a claim of relationship to the *Salmo mykiss*, while the red streak on the side and the color and profusion of spots connect him with the *Salmo irideus*, and serve to produce a most interesting individuality.

We made our way up-stream, climbing many difficult wind-falls to reach the various pools, and by nightfall had a goodly catch of fish. From their varied appearance and great diversity of color one might imagine they were of a dozen different varieties, but color in trout is often as fantastic as the taste of gentle womankind. We whipped the stream for several days, both above and below our camp, with varied success, taking fish from one-half to three and a half pounds in weight. This largest specimen was a spent male twenty-two inches long, which in good condition would certainly have tipped the scale at five pounds.

The great curiosity of the region is the golden trout of Whitney Creek, *Salmo irideus aqua bonita*, and this we had yet to see. Some four miles below our camp at Funston's, Whitney Creek flows down through a little cañon of its own into the Big Kern, on the opposite side of the stream, and in order to reach it the river must be forded.

Riding down-stream about two miles, a place in the river came in sight which looked favorable to crossing, at least it did to John, and we took to the water. The footing on the bottom proved the correctness of his judgment, and though the current swept us down a considerable distance and the water at times nearly reached the backs of our horses, we landed safely on the other bank. I confess I was glad to get there. A climb of about three thousand feet out of the cañon of the Kern, brought us up again on the old Hockett Trail, which, crossing the river at a ford some distance below, makes its way through the watershed of Whitney Creek to the flatter country around the southern base of Mount Whitney, where Lone Pine is situated. A moderate ride brought us to the top of Whitney Creek Cañon, where we tied up our horses and proceeded to climb down.

Though the cañon is small when compared with the immensities of the region, it has an individuality as well as a beauty quite its own. Its rocky sides are of volcanic formation, generally of a reddish-brown color, in striking contrast with the granite and limestone of the locality, while the timber within it is plentiful and greatly varied. Looking up the stream one sees a succession of waterfalls of various heights, the one which breaks the sky-line at the top making perhaps seventy feet in its descent.

That it is one of the most beautiful spots in this surpassingly attractive country no one would question. But, how any fish can live in this succession of falls, with water surging and flying over rocks everywhere in its precipitous descent, where scarcely a spot larger than an ordinary table-top approaches throughout its entire length anything like stillness, seems a mystery to the beholder. Yet, here is the home of the golden trout.

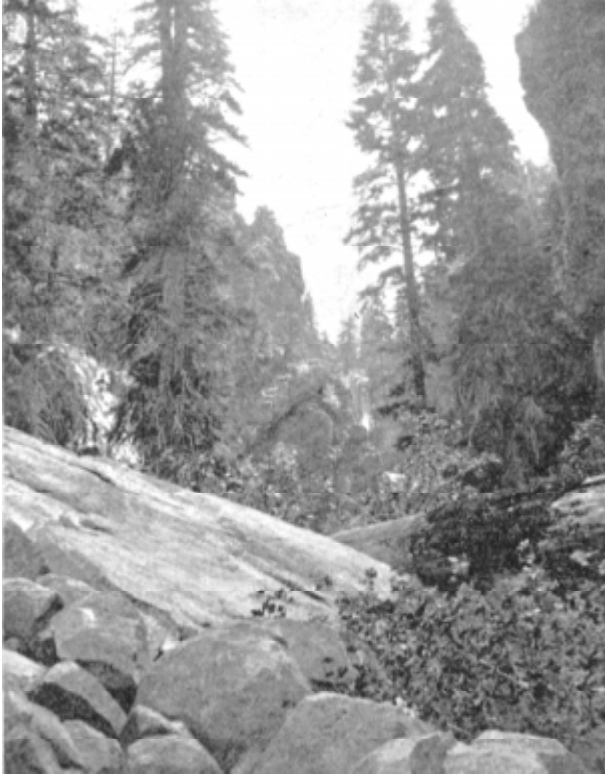
It was a stiff climb down to the bottom, where we put our rods together, and out of the little eddies soon commenced to lift those golden beauties, in appearance the most remarkable of the *Salmonidæ*.

In color the golden carp, commonly known as gold-fish, is about as ten-carat metal compared with these, their color reaching the deep orange of old and

pure gold. Their bodies are so smooth as to give the impression they are scaleless. All have the finger-marks so universally shown in young rainbows, and it would seem, if this be the sign, they have discovered the fountain of eternal youth. Scarcely any spots are observable save upon the head, tail, and fins, while even there they are not numerous. In this respect these trout are as immaculate as the sea-river forms or those inhabiting alkali lakes.

This extraordinary appearance led us

to an examination of the water in which they live. While the water of the Kern and the brooks flowing into it was as clear as crystal, and excellent for drinking and domestic uses, that of Whitney Creek was of an altogether different character. It was of a milky appearance, with a decidedly hard feeling and alkaline taste. There was nothing in the weather



CAÑON OF WHITNEY CREEK.

to rile this of other contiguous streams, and the inference is, there must be something within its own bed to produce this notable characteristic. The alkaline water would account for the scarcity of spots upon the fish; and there may be some chemical property in the volcanic rocks through which the stream flows, to produce the extraordinary color they exhibit. In a few instances this golden hue was observed in the trout taken from the Little Kern, but it was confined to a streak upon the

belly, and slight indications back of the gills; otherwise the fish were the same as those of the Big Kern.

After fishing a few days more for the sturdier trout of the big river, where they were gaining in strength and rising with far more avidity, we regretfully took our rods apart, stowed away our angling paraphernalia, and prepared to turn our backs upon the improving sport.

The packer was dispatched to round up the animals in the meadows above the camp, and soon we heard their foot-falls in a gallop, resounding from up the cañon. Leading the band came the six

bronco mules, with ears pricked high and ominous switching of tails. Their long rest and food in plenty had restored to them their amusing little ways.

It required the active exertions of all to catch them and we were obliged to blindfold and lariat, as in the early days, before the packs were adjusted, but, eventually, the cavalcade was in readiness; and as the sun came peeping over the craggy peaks at the head of the cañon, we bade farewell to Funston's and the Big Kern, which had furnished us with so many days of pleasure and of sport.