

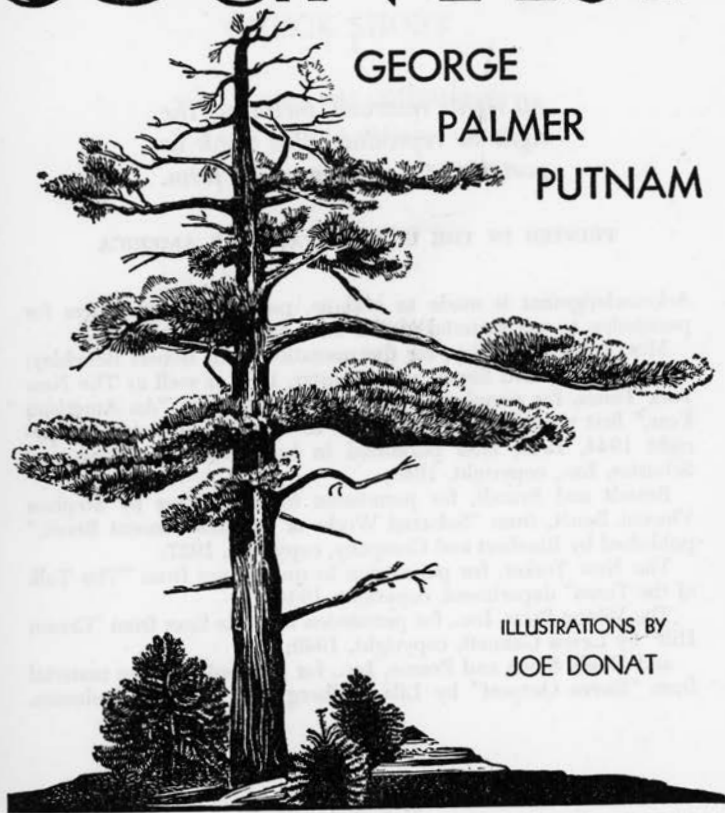
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Up in Our Country

GEORGE PALMER PUTNAM

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JOE DONAT

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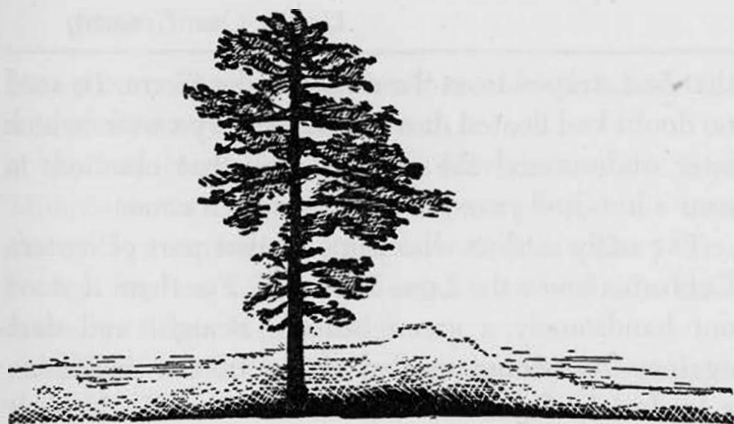
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I. Lone Pine

Before ever I saw the place, the name "Lone Pine" charmed me.

A lovely name. Exactly when bestowed or by whom is uncertain. It was one of those inevitable namings.

Long ago there grew a solitary pine tree on the fringe of the desert valley westerly from the town of today. It stood beside the little stream, which came to be called Lone Pine Creek, the only Jeffrey pine on the near side of the bare Alabama Hills, a maverick

that had strayed from the slopes of the Sierra. Its seed no doubt had floated down with the very waters which later undermined the sturdy trunk that climbed, in near a hundred years, from that vagrant cone.

The early settlers who came to that part of eastern California knew the Lone Pine well. For them it stood out handsomely, a green beacon, straight and dark against the tawny, tousled slopes of the Alabamas, a landmark of desert travel visible for miles. In early days there were only low basket willows and cottonwood along the rivulets that were born in the mountains, and later poplars and fruit trees on the lower reaches and beside irrigation ditches. Sturdy bouquets of lilacs, too, with iris at their feet, and bright gardens, for where the water was led plants thrived.

Then the creek changed its course. The roots of the Lone Pine were washed away and one night it fell. That probably was before 1870. The old tree had stood on public land, the property of no one, though everyone knew it, and so there was no precise record of its end.

Two portions of the pine became butcher blocks. They served for years in the shop that once was next to the store of old Charles Meysan, the same for whom the Meysan Lakes are named, where Nogales pool hall now is. A section of the trunk was fashioned into a roller, used for smoothing ploughed land. Owned

Lone Pine

by no one, it was put to work as needed. Likely the rest of the tree became firewood.

Midway between the Sierra Nevada and the Inyo Mountains, in the midst of Owens Valley, Lone Pine the village remains the symbol of that solitary tree, though few are left in that long brown land who have memory of the old pine itself.

West of Lone Pine the geography of the highlands is Gothic. It's a tumbled region tilted up on edge, steep and breathless, looking down upon the valley named for Dick Owen a hundred years ago, and across the sun-drenched Inyos to the illimitable deserts where lies the lowest, hottest, driest of them all, that fabulous sink called Death Valley.