

# Sierra Stars

By BLANCHE STALLINGS

**Y**ou can't do much collecting on a High Trip. Thirty-pound limits, and four-thousand-foot climbs, and Sierra Club educational influences take care of that. However, the fact remains that High Trippers come down from the Sierra with wonderful collections that are just given them, like Ike Livermore and his collection of passes. That's how I got these stars. May I spread a few of them out here? Of course, we all know some of them are planets, but for the present purpose it's simpler ball them all stars. Also, we know they really are not Sierra stars, as the Sierra had its own special stars along with its shining lakes and streams and granite, but are simply our loved star-friends at their sparkling best in a Sierra setting.

First of all, how do you like these large brilliant stars on the black patch of sky? This one group are not High Trip stars, as the rest are, but they are from the Sierra. There are not very many of them because there are too many trees everywhere. It's well up toward Sonora Pass, and it's about two o'clock in the morning. We'd driven up from the city after work and were so recently removed from artificial lights and pale city stars that these magnificent mountain stars seemed too sublime, too absolutely bright, pure, and perfect to be possible. How could they be accepted? But I looked again, and they were still there, and there was nothing you could do about it, so I simply had to take them.

Next, what do you think of this group—just another skyful of stars? Yes, in a way; but you'll notice there's something different about them that's because they're not actually stars. They're the reflection of stars in a lake, literally a whole lakeful of stars. It's Sally Keyes Lake, as you know about ten thousand feet up. Mount Henry is over there across the lake somewhere, but I doubt if you can see much of it now. We saw it for a while at sunset. It had been raining all afternoon, ever since we left Selden Pass. Down across the snow slopes, over the streams and the granite, through forests and flowery meadows, we walked in the rain, then came to the lake. It was gray. The sky was gray. The world was a dripping gray cloud around us and the pine trees. We were pretty wet, but someone managed to keep a big fire burning, and eventually the pack train came in, bedsites were found, camp was set up, and dinner was ready. Then the storm and the clouds disappeared, and across the blue lake was Mount Henry, purple and gold in the sunset.

The night was wonderfully clear and hushed and stilled after the storm. As someone said, you felt you shouldn't speak above a whisper. Gratefully we dried ourselves in the warmth and glow of the campfire, then decided it was time to be turning in. On the way to my camp I walked by the lake and for some reason stopped, looked down. The lake was clear and still and black as the sky, and full of stars. I wondered if I should tell everyone about it, but concluded that it was no doubt a common Sierra sight. However, I'm glad I took a good look, because in five High Trips since then I don't remember anything like it.

Now we come to something rather dramatic—stars with crescent moons. One of my favorites is this shining silver sliver flanked with a few bright stars above two massive, dark, imposing mountain peaks—Banner and Ritter. It's from a High Trip campfire near Agnew Pass, looking out across the canyon of the middle fork of the San Joaquin. Beyond the depths of the canyon, above snowfields and lesser mountains, Banner and Ritter rise majestically; rugged, powerful, authoritative; contrasting strikingly, yet blending in perfect harmony with the fine, keen light-essence of the stars and crescent moon. It's a cold view. Or maybe it only seems cold because an icy breeze is blowing down the backs of our necks and we remember that over there across the stream our sleeping bags are rolled out beside snowbanks. But that's all right, we like cold views, and it's worth a few shivers any time to see stars and a crescent moon over Banner and Ritter.

Well, we're getting a lot of stars spread out here. One more skyful ought to finish off the display very nicely. It's from a granite ridge on the rim of Chagoopah Plateau, with the Big Arroyo and peaks of the Great Western Divide on one side and everything between Moraine Lake and Mount Whitney on the other.

Having observed the open nature of a certain spot on the ridge and the large expanse of sky and earth to be viewed therefrom, I concluded that it would be a highly desirable place to be at sunrise. With these thoughts in mind, I eagerly accepted the invitation of two friends to spend the night on the ridge. That very night we left our camp down by the lake, took our sleeping bags up to the appointed spot, spread them out on granite, and crawled in. What a place for star-work; no lights, no moon no clouds, just sky and stars. We stayed awake for quite a while, finding the North Star, talking about the constellations, marveling at the Milky Way, thinking and wondering as one does in the presence of stars, finally dropped off to sleep. From time to time we'd turn over, open one eye to see what was going on, and note that there was a whole new pattern overhead.

Just at dawn we awoke, as we had hoped we would. From then on moment brought something different. The sky became lighter and bluer; the stars quietly faded, then disappeared; the colors changed; the first rays of the sun touched the highest peaks; the shadows moved down the mountains; pine needles became light-needles and the lake came into view. It was day again. We'd come up to see the sunrise, and we and it was wonderful. But besides that, just think, we had a whole nightful of stars thrown in for good measure.

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