

Wilderness Outings

Today's Sierra Club Outings are a far cry from the first High Trip into the Yosemite country, when the century was new. There have been changes in the kind of trip, in methods, equipment and clothing, and perhaps even in people. The routes and the modes of travel by which the mountains are now approached, the new trails leading to the farthest uplands, and the towns and power dams where once were meadows, all dim the memory of earlier days when the wilderness was more than a dwindling sample. But unaltered in spite of change, the purpose of any outing today—just as it was when Will Colby greeted the first Sierra Club campers at Tuolumne Meadows in 1901—is to acquaint people with the mountains.

Merely seeing a painting of a rugged Sierra canyon or a photograph of a delicate alpine meadow cupped between granite cliffs, reading about the whispering of a forest stirred by night breezes, or having someone tell you of the grandeur of a white, pounding waterfall, can never be a substitute—no matter how skilled the artist or narrator—for experiencing mountain days and nights for yourself. You who have known the fragrance of an albicaulis bedsite, who have wondered that exhilaration and humility can be so strangely mingled as you stand upon a magnificent peak, who have mused, quiet and alone, where a stream runs through a sun-dappled grove you are sure to oppose the violation of meadow or forest or stream much more vigorously than if you had never felt their spell.

Knowing, then, that the person who actually visited the high places would be most concerned about their protection, John Muir and his associates built a Sierra Club devoted to the preservation of mountain wilderness. Nine years after the cornerstone was laid, the Annual Outings were inaugurated.

Beginning with that first outing in 1901, Sierra Club High Trips—and, more recently, the several variations on the original theme—have visited and revisited every part of the High Sierra from Mount Whitney to Yosemite, as well as various out-of-state wonderlands. It would be hard even to guess how many people have thus been introduced to the mountain world, but summer after summer old-timers have watched the metamorphosis from freshman to mountaineer, and have known that the wilderness was gaining new friends.

In its earliest form, the Annual Outing—the traditional High Trip—was a base camp, from which side excursions were made for the purpose of exploring little-known country or climbing a prominent peak. The main camp might be as much as three long days from the end of the road. The side excursions usually were made with pack trains, although there were backpacking expeditions, as well. A climbing party, which offer, traveled several days away from the camp, might number forty or fifty, but was made up only of those who had qualified through good climbing records or by performing creditably on preliminary excursions.

Within a few years, the trips took on the aspect of those we know today. First the main camp was moved once or twice in the course of the outing; then it was moved at more frequent intervals, until the outing became the large scale roving pack trip, unique among all mountaineering organizations, and possible only in the Sierra.

For more than four decades, the Annual Outing—held each year except 1918 and 1942-45, inclusive—has enabled large numbers of people to visit the mountains at small expense and (far more important!) with the minimum depletion of grazing resources. In the light of midcentury problems—never dreamed of forty years ago—the consideration of grazing is of great importance. Wilderness boundaries are shrinking and the popularity of mountain trips is growing so rapidly that we are approaching (some think we have already

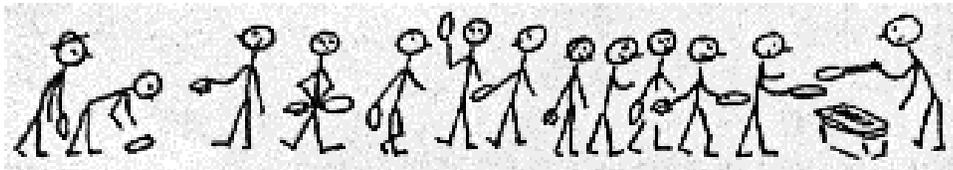
reached) the point at which mountain meadows simply can't support all the people who want to visit them. The High Trip fills a real need, getting the maximum number of campers into the mountains with the minimum number of pack animals—about half an animal per person, as against the usual two to five head per person in small but "luxurious" private parties.

By the latter thirties the High Trip had grown so large that inauguration of additional trips of other types met with enthusiastic response. Burro trips, knapsack trips, saddle trips, and a base camp were added to the ventures sponsored by the Outing Committee. Each has its peculiar advantages, and each serves the same fundamental purpose.

THE HIGH TRIP

The Annual Outing is arranged to take participants by relatively easy moves to a series of camps near the timberline country. Because of the large number of pack animals, the number of suitable campsites is somewhat limited, and the itinerary is less flexible than that of a burro trip. Of course, that does not mean that, once determined, the itinerary is rigidly adhered to—the management would scarcely know what to do with itself if it were not devising a new schedule at least every other day throughout the trip. High trippers can be sure, however, that they will (1) move after two or three or four or five nights in one place; (2) remain two or more nights in the next camp whenever the pack trains, having unloaded dunnage and equipment, have to shuttle the food supplies; and (3) choose their own pace when they move, and their own companions— if any — on the trail.

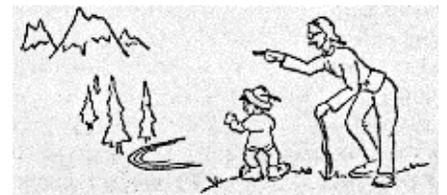
The trip runs continuously for four weeks, and campers have the choice of either the first or the second two weeks (or both, if reservation permit). On either two-week period there is ample opportunity for climbing, fishing, lazing, or organizing knapsacking side trips.



Since the High Trips have been going on the longest, they are rich in tradition. The prospective freshman would do well to ask an old timer about bandanna shows, trailside tea parties, mail, and indispensable sable extras not included in the official equipment check lists.

Small musical instruments and extra photographic supplies can usually be transported by special arrangement with the management.

Requirements of physical fitness are as necessary for High Trip as for the Burro Trips, for the itinerary still entails exertion at high altitudes, even though the mules are chased by the packers. Members must also be prepared to volunteer help in camp tasks; the size of and compensation for the commissary crew, as well as the cost of the trip, are based on the assumption that members will help.



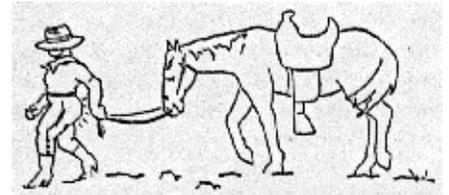
As a conservation measure, the High Trips do take far fewer members than they originally did. Although this is less economical (outing deposits are in consequence proportionally higher than in previous years), it is a necessary limitation because of the progressively increased grazing load upon the high mountain meadows. The

High Trip still takes the most people through the mountains with the fewest animals, but the Outing Committee does not feel justified in providing for such large parties as in past years. Few saddle animals will be available on a longterm basis; there will be some on hand, however, for emergency use at daily rates.

THE SADDLE TRIP

Seeing the Sierra from a saddle offers the Sierra enthusiast many attractions, to-wit:

1. The scenery can be enjoyed continuously. The riders find that they can appreciate the scenery all the way, while their mounts worry about; where to walk.
2. Riding is less tiring than walking.
3. Riders are allowed 50 pounds of dunnage.
4. More country can be covered by riding than by "foot-burning."
5. Excellent opportunity is afforded for learning riding and horsemanship.
6. The party is relatively small in size.



Riders start out with guides soon after breakfast. There is no attempt to keep riders in close formation on the trail. They ride at whatever pace and with whom they like. Usually, however, all riders and horses are, bunched at noon for rendezvous with lunch mule. The pack trains pass riders during the lunch hour so that dunnage is available for fishing reading, boudoir-making, etc., by the time riders reach camp.

Previous riding experience, although helpful, is not at all necessary. Guides and packers will always lend a hand. Any person in good health can enjoy this trip, but it is not recommended that those expecting a "soft" trip should make application. The high cost is made necessary the small size of the party, and is not an indication of luxury alone. Riders are expected to help with camp chores on a friendly volunteer basis just as on all club trips.

Although as much as 50 pounds of dunnage is allowed, "packers headaches," i.e., odd objects such as suit cases, satchels, wicker fish creels, or collapsible bathtubs, will be frowned upon. Riders able to play musical instruments, however, may have them transported in addition to the 50-pound limit,- but consult the management. Riding boots are comfortable, but not necessary; denim waist overalls, or equivalent, are both comfortable and necessary.

Excerpt taken from the *Sierra Club Handbook* of 1947