

Two Mules and a Motorist

A Spin With a Span Along El Camino Sierra

An Automobiling Article, Minus the Automobile but Describing a Joy Ride with Molly and Kitty

By PETER B. KYNE
AUTHOR OF SOME FACT AND MUCH FICTION

PHOTOGRAPHS BY W. G. SCOTT

In July the editor of SUNSET called me in to his office and informed me that I was looking thin and washed-out. I was. I had automobilitis, and I told him so.

“Very well” said he. “I want you to write me an automobile story. Take an automobile, go somewhere and write about it.”

“But,” I protested, “where am I to go?”

“I’m sure I do not know, and I do not much care” he informed me, “provided you find a new route in California. I want something NEW.”

The same old cry! Something new! That’s what brings gray hairs to we’uns who peddle he beloved children of our brain to saturnine editors who are never satisfied.

I got down my atlas and turned to the map of California, only to find that the Sacramento valley and the sunny San Joaquin were still in the same old spot, and, it being harvest time in that region, there would be nothing “new” until the early rains brought forth the grass. My thoughts turned, perforce, from valley to mountain – in fact, I thought of the remote Sierra where spring is latest, and that vast, little-known stretch of country on their eastern slopes. There are three counties there – Mono, Inyo and Kern – looming up as big as the Thirteen Original Colonies; and suddenly it occurred to me that we hadn’t heard from Mono county for quite a spell; in fact since the days when Mark Twain, seeking local color for his book “Roughing It,” spent a few quiet months on the desolate shores of Mono lake, and left to posterity an entirely fictitious account of his adventures in that section.



Here, said I, is something not quite stale. So I wrote to my friend, Mr. W. G. Scott, corresponding secretary of the Inyo Good Roads Club at Bishop, California, explaining my predicament, and inquiring if his club had any good new roads in stock. He wired back that they had only one, but it was a jo-darter of a road. El Camino Sierra he called it. I got down my English-Spanish dictionary and discovered that El Camino Sierra, literally translated, means "The Mountain Highway."

I received a lot more information from Scott. El Camino Sierra, he told me begins at Bridgeport, Mono county, which is a village forgotten, at the mouth of the Sonora Pass, where the Sonora State Highway spills out of the Sierra into the valley. From Bridgeport, El Camino Sierra stretches southward to Mojave, skirting the eastern base of the high Sierra. Scott added that if I would meet him in Bridgeport we two would journey leisurely down El Camino Sierra to Mojave, and if on that trip I couldn't find something to tell the motorists of California about, he, Scott, would immerse himself in gasoline and go playing with matches. So, to save the life of this reckless man, we met in Bridgeport. I was three days getting there. It requires nerve to get into Bridgeport, but the prospects of something new, together with telegrams of encouragement received from Scott along the line of march, lightened the journey considerably. I went from San Francisco to Reno, Nevada; from Reno to Wabuska; thence to Mason, thence over the Copper Belt road to Hudson; which is the end of the line. Nothing else – just the end. Here I found an auto-stage waiting, and after a fifty-two mile drive across the fair state of Nevada, I arrived ultimately and found Scotty waiting for me on the hotel porch.

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A word here before we start into the south, for Bridgeport deserves the passing tribute of a word. It is the county seat of Mono county, and it is old, old, old. There is the courthouse, the hotel, the blacksmith shop, the livery stable and the public school. Around these centers of civilization a few aged frame buildings cluster to form a hamlet. Shifty-looking Injun dogs skulk furtively through its single short street. Stolid Piute bucks loiter along the board sidewalks and on the hotel porch, cursing the selfishness of the pale-face in retaining for his own individual use and comfort the squirrel whisky that comes in on the big freight wagons from Minden, Nevada, eighty miles away. Stout squaws, with red silk handkerchiefs on their heads, peer around the corners at you. You see the bright glint of the head-dress and the tip of a nose. When you approach them you find that they are gazing at you hopelessly, wonderingly. They are all alike and they are everywhere, this fragment of a once powerful tribe. In this remote and undisturbed section of California they have made their last stand and dumbly await the end. There is something desperately pathetic about these people. They seem struggling to express a woe that they feel but can never understand.

But I was happy that first night in Bridgeport. It was the Land of the New. The coyotes came down to the edge of the town and howled defiance at the village dogs. They made a merry hubbub and kept me awake much of the night; but it was only in the morning that I knew I had spent the night on the scene of the last stand of the Olden Golden West. Two cowboys rode in from Antelope valley and they wore bearskin chaps and artillery of the regulation pattern. They slouched across the floor of the hotel bar, with much jingling of spurs, and demanded whisky, and I noticed that the barkeep set out no "chasers."

Yes, Bridgeport is a hamlet forgotten. It has no telegraphic connection with the outside world; it has but one telephone, an antiquated affair that tries the soul and the pocket-book. It leads off into space somewhere, and over its single wire stale news of the world drifts into Bridgeport, and is there discussed with solemnity and wagging of beards.

After breakfast, Scott drove up to the hotel with a hang-dog look and a span of mules. Now, I don't like mules. I have always agreed with the man who said that a mule will be gentle for twenty years just to gain your confidence, in order that he may kick you when you aren't looking. Moreover, I had distinctly specified an automobile for our trip, and the appearance of these two "desert birds," drawing a fine buckboard with camp equipment, rather annoyed me. In addition it rather gave the lie to Scott's glowing commendation of El Camino Sierra as an auto route, and I demanded an explanation.

They were Scott's mules; so he explained. The road was all right, and he would have come with an auto, but owing to the unprecedented snowfall in the Sierra, snowslides had washed out the road in several places, and that section of the road along the western shore of Mono lake was under water, the lake being unusually high. Then he pointed to three weeks' grub and two saddles, explaining that at certain spots along the road we would unhitch, saddle the mules and take short side trips over trails usually frequented by mountain sheep and chipmunks. After accepting this explanation he introduced me to Molly and Kitty, the mules aforesaid; I climbed in, and we bade good-by to Bridgeport.



The editor of the Bridgeport *Chronicle* (which is printed on an old Washington hand-press that came around the Horn in '49) came down to see us off. He almost wept, but excused himself by saying that he had lived in the outside world when a young man, and now that we were leaving Bridgeport he was going to be lonelier than ever. We were sorry to leave him, too. He was a mighty good fellow and gave us a column on the front page, together with an earnest plea for better roads in Mono county. The road to Bodie he attacked in verse, thusly:

This road is not passable,
Not even jackassable,
And all those who travel it
Should get out and gravel it.

I shall not soon forget that morning leaving Bridgeport. We climbed a gentle rise, where we could look back at the little town, nestled at the mouth of the pass, with the white peaks to the north and west of it. The sun was coming up over Nevada way; there was dew on the sagebrush and a delightful tang in the atmosphere; meadowlarks trilled from the tops of fence posts; chipmunks and horned toads scuttled across the road; on a little knoll to our left a Piute wickiup gave forth its inhabitants to stare at us as we scuffed past. Everything whispered of peace, of serenity, a land where no one worked or cared to work. Out of the dark shadows to the west the mountains rose, peak on peak, shading away into colorings of red and white and blue and purple against a sky that would have driven an artist to desperation.

Molly and Kitty, filled with oats and the joy of living, jogged blithely on their way. Ere long we left the valley behind us and turned up a canon walled with cliffs of red lava. Through this natural causeway a magnificent stream gurgled north to join the west fork of the Walker river. It was lined with willows and reeds, and frequent flashes of blue from the wings of numerous kingfishers apprised us that the fishing was good. It was a temptation to refrain from jointing our rods and making a few casts from the buckboard.

For several miles our course led gradually upward through this box canon with its massive walls of red lava. Lizards were numerous, but as we emerged into the open mesa the bird life vanished and we jogged along through a country as silent as a tomb. At noon we had gained the crest of the rim of Mono basin and ten miles away we saw through a gap the sheen of a million heliographs. It was the sun shining on Mono the Beautiful.

The roadometer had registered 14.8 miles over a splendid road, even in the open desert. We were traveling a longer and a harder route, however, than the topography of the country should permit. I am informed that the proposed new route of El Camino Sierra from Bridgeport to Mono lake will skirt the very base of the Sierra instead of following the course we traveled, which led us at least seven miles from the mountains.

At this point in our pilgrimage the sagacious Kitty discovered a spring a hundred feet off the road, so we outspanned under the willows, and lunch was served for man and mule. This spring is perennial and lies 14.8 miles south of Bridgeport. The water is clear and cold, and it was evident from the signs scattered about that the Basque sheep-herders, coming in over the mountains from the west and working up through Inyo and Mono during the summer, with their flocks, make the spring their headquarters.

After an hour's rest we took to the road once more. From the spring the highway slopes gently down to the shores of Mono lake, then swings west, following the shore for at least seven miles. We had a narrow-tired wagon and it was rather a heavy pull on the mules, but while the road was sandy it was readily passable for a motor-car. There were tracks of an auto to prove this contention. In the worst spots the road is ballasted with sagebrush.

At the first sight of Mono lake, one is appalled at the sublimity of its utter desolation. It is the Dead Sea of the West. Lying as it does in a basin in the desert, it vies with the heated sands in reflecting the sunlight until it is almost an impossibility to secure even a fairly respectable photograph of this remarkable body of water.

The myriads of little black flies, of which Mark Twain writes in his "Roughing It," still cumber the shores of Mono lake in a perpetual, swarming, seething, dying, putrid mass. Mud-hens and wild duck abound by the hundreds of thousands. In the center of the lake, which is estimated to be about eighteen miles wide and thirty miles long, two islands rise, side by side, one black, forbidding, the other milky-white. Strange as it may seem, these islands are the homes of countless thousands of sea-gulls, which lay their eggs here and hatch their young. One is conscious of surprise to find these' sea-birds three hundred miles inland.

Both islands are of volcanic origin and composed entirely of lava. The white island is called by the Indians Pa-o-ha, and I believe there is a legend to the effect that a beautiful Indian maid was spirited away, with felonious designs, by a horrible supernatural monster who dwells in the hot mud springs on the black island, and the Indian maid was never heard from any more.

Round the north side of the lake we wore, past two or three lonely ranches, which, for all their squalor and weather-beaten appearance, were nevertheless beautiful with their groves of graceful Lombardy poplars and weeping willow trees silhouetted against the baked and forbidding Mono basin. After passing Mono lake post office we struck a mile of wonderfully beautiful road, overhung with poplars and weeping willows, and down these deep cool vistas of greenery we drove to our first stopping-place,



Hammond's Inn, on the west shore of Mono the Beautiful. We had traveled 27.8 miles of mingled valley, desert, hill and vale, and Molly and Kitty heehawed joyously at the prospects of supper and bed.

Hammond's is the first point on El Camino Sierra after leaving Bridgeport, where one can secure oil, gasoline, bed and meals. You would never choose Hammond's outside of Mono county, but in Mono county Hammond's is really above the average. The beds are clean and only four in a room, and the meals, while plain, are well cooked and

enjoyable. Some day, after the Highway Commission has taken over El Camino Sierra, and "The Pasear," spoken of elsewhere in this article, is known as the greatest automobile highway on earth, a great tourist's hotel, with a garage, will rise on the western shore of Mono the Beautiful. Scott, who is something of a nature faker, offers to furnish a genuine wild man to live in a cave up the mountain-side and screech horribly through a megaphone for the edification of the tourists; also, he thinks an aluminum sea serpent, disporting in the saline waters of the lake and worked by push button from the manager's private office, would be an added attraction. We tried vainly to arouse mine host Hammond

to a sense of the advantages of modern improvements, but just now he is catering to the trade that comes out of the sagebrush, and all that the sagebrush trade asks is "scoffin's and floppin's."

We stayed two nights and a day at Hammond's, and experienced the wonder of a mental transformation. One's first impulse, when descending into that dead, baked Mono basin, is to flee from such horrible desolation. But stay all night at Hammond's and watch the sun rise on Mono. It will not be difficult then for you to realize why the Indians call it Mono the Beautiful. The two barren, forbidding lava islands, the black malapai headlands, the snow-covered crests of the Sierra along its western shore, are all mirrored in its shimmering bosom.

The mists rise along its lonely shores. The landscape spreads before one ineffably lonely, solemn, impalpable, magnificent in its terrible grandeur. In a little booklet entitled "California's Greatest Asset," which Scott has written to advertise Inyo the Peerless, and Mono the Beautiful, he pictures Mono lake in these words: "Mono the Beautiful, where reigns a seemly quiet of solitude and vastness as if Nature herself, astounded by the infinitude of her handiwork, had paused, stricken with reverential dread."

That word-picture explains it all. And yet that man Scott is a mining engineer!

Mono the Beautiful never looked more sublime than the morning we left Hammond's for a short side-journey of ten miles up into Tioga Pass. A mile from the inn we came across a bewhiskered man, long and lank, with sad poetic eyes, cooking flapjacks over a campfire. He greeted us cordially, and struck by the peculiarity of the man and his outfit we pulled up and talked. His covered prairie-schooner was decorated with clusters of wild plum, Indian pinks and the red and golden branches of various shrubs found in the mountains. Two aged and decrepit mares drew the wagon, and a third horse followed at will. This third horse, although fully six years old, had never been harnessed, and his owner referred to him affectionately as "the colt." An amiable bulldog sat on the seat and guarded the wagon.



We discovered that the wanderer had been in the mountains all summer. He lived on wheels. Evidently he had lived on them so long that they had become a part of him. He was a philosopher and an inventor. He showed us a collapsible water bucket, a folding camp-stove and a folding windmill which he had invented in the solitude of the wilderness. Neither of the three inventions was worth ten cents, but he must have had lots of fun inventing them. That inventor had life down to a shredded-wheat basis. He did the thing he liked to do; success or failure could never turn his head. He had the sky above and the sweet earth beneath. He paid no rent; water, light and fuel were free. He just wandered wheresoever he listed - a Huckleberry Finn sort of a man, and I envied him.

"I come out here every summer" he informed us. "Been four months on the road already. Left Los Angeles in March. Where am I headin' for? Lordy, neighbor, I don't know. Maybe I'll pull through the Sonora Pass an' winter in the Sacramento valley. I don't know."



He scanned us and our outfit with friendly, dreamy eyes.

"Nice in the mountings, ain't it?" he queried. "I like it up here because I can think." He waved a brown arm toward his own ramshackle outfit. "I ain't got much, boys," he said a little sadly, "but then," he added brightening, "I don't need much so I'm well off."

His philosophy charmed us; we egged him on to conversation, and seeing that we were friendly, he concluded that we were brothers of the faith.

"We've got somethin' no millionere can buy" he announced. "Look at old

Mono, with the mists risin' off'n her - an' the shadders on her. I can look at that all I want. Admission's free an' nobody can build a fence around our domain, can they?" A rare and wonderful smile lit up his ascetic countenance. "Still, we ain't no ways selfish an' greedy about what we got, are we? They can all come an' take a look if they want to."

He laughed insanely. Plainly he was a mild lunatic. He even admitted that inventions had upset his reason. Yet, as we left him and the bulldog discussing the coffee and flapjacks and turned up the Tioga Pass State Highway, Scotty sighed.

"If I'm ever crazy I'd like to be just as crazy as that chap," he said.

Seven miles up Tioga Pass we came to the foot of the long grade that leads over the mountains to Yosemite valley, only thirty miles away. A force of men was then at work putting this highway into shape, and at present, it is well adapted for automobile travel. We camped in a lovely meadow, hemmed in by towering cliffs and fringed with mountain pines. Lee Vining creek (it is really a river) flowed by our camp, and for natural, rugged, primeval beauty, Tioga Pass is second only to the majestic Yosemite.

We had left the desert now and had climbed 9000 feet above sea-level. For two days we kodaked and fished Lee Vining creek, where two-pound trout are the rule rather than the exception. On the third day reluctantly we broke camp bright and early, and two hours later Molly and Kitty jogged out of this Eden into the blistering heat of the Mono desert, and we were back on El Camino Sierra once more.

After clearing the southwestern arm of Mono lake, we swung at right angles back to the mountains. Past Crater and Farrington's ranch and the mouth of Bloody canon we went, following along the banks

of a glorious trout stream purling through the desert, a brilliant ribbon of silver and green through the grays and ochres of the scorched plain, emptying into Mono lake. Presently we came to a point where the plain narrowed to a canon mouth. Through this passage we journeyed, turned a corner and found ourselves on the shores of Grant lake.

Why attempt to describe a lake in the Sierra? No lord of language could ever do full justice to the magic beauty of this enchanted spot. A hundred yards from the point where the lake empties into Rush creek we made camp, and while Molly and Kitty, having searched and found a sandy spot on the creek bank, were rolling and grunting in delirious joy and Scott was endeavoring to decide whether we should have mock-turtle soup or fried clams for dinner, I stepped to the creek bank and made two casts. We needed one trout each, yet I lingered over the battle for thirty minutes. In my narrow metropolitan life I had dreamed of such a battle royal at the opening of each trout season, although privately I was of the opinion that such aquatic monsters belonged in the same category with Jonah and the whale.

We spent two delightful days at Grant lake. Two Swedes from Bodie and an Indian were camped there also. The fishing was marvelous. No other word describes it. All big fish, and fighters to the last flop. I hated to leave Grant lake. Even now it gives me a heartache to write about it, for the tourist follows the pathfinder and in a few years those fish will become educated and I will be voted a disciple of Ananias.

From Grant lake we swung back over the trail to the main traveled road, crossed ten miles of desert south of Mono lake, the trail winding around a range of a dozen extinct volcanoes. The desert at this point is littered with obsidian, or volcanic glass, and pumice stone, and, while these old volcanoes are said to be extinct, the heat in their immediate neighborhood was distinctly more pronounced than it was two miles further on.



I am informed that in winter the snow melts' very rapidly from their crests, thus giving ground for the assertion that there is a spark of life still left in these old boils on the neck of Mono the Beautiful.

Passing the volcanoes we struck a strip of territory five miles long. It was so barren as to be absolutely, void of vegetation with the exception of a little clinging vine with a pretty pink-flower and occasional clusters of a species of thistle with a beautiful but odorless white blossom. In the distance a dark blur against the desert gave promise of a pine wood, and presently we came to the first thin gnarled and stunted outposts of the forest. Here we looked our last on Mono basin and commenced the upward climb toward the crest of the southerly rim. At Mono Mills (gasoline, etc., is obtainable here) we rested for luncheon and a welcome drink of water, then pressed onward. Down a long gradual grade we passed, through cut over timber lands and, lands where logging crews were then at work, and finally leaving civilization behind we drove through the grateful shade of a virgin forest of mountain pine. Save for an occasional Indian and the ever-present chipmunk, we passed nothing living. On through the dim whispering aisles of the forest primeval jogged Molly and Kitty, until late in the afternoon we came out on the bare rocky brow of Sherwin's Hill and looked down into Long valley.

It was a magnificent vista of country upon which we gazed. No human habitation met the eye for thirty miles, although faint specks denoted cattle. We swung down the hill and at dusk came to Thompson's ranch on Dead Man's creek. Thompson's ranch is a tiny log cabin with a hitching rack in front of it, and Thompson lives there alone with his saddle horses and his dogs, keeping an eye on his stock which graze on the government range. He laid aside a paper a month old and extended us a frontiersman's welcome and dinner. After dinner we hitched the mules, now very weary and disgusted, and resisting Thompson's earnest invitation to spend the night with him (that was mean of us, too - Thompson hadn't talked to a soul in three weeks) we took the trail again. The moon came up and lighted our way through ten miles more of woodland road, and along about midnight we arrived safely at the Casa Sierra Hotel at Mammoth. We weren't certain of the trail and every time we came to one of the signboards tacked to a tree by the forest rangers, I would get out, light a match and read the sign. Then our matches gave out! Nothing daunted, we passed the responsibility for our predicament up to Molly and Kitty, who responded nobly, for at eleven-thirty we heard a dog barking in the distance. No one was up when we arrived, so we placed the mules in the stable, discovered that the "hotel" door was open, preempted two rooms and with brazen effrontery showed up for breakfast.

Of all the beautiful and interesting spots on El Camino Sierra, Mammoth will linger longest in the memory. I know now that I shall never get it out of my blood. Bert Bernard is the boniface who runs this frontier hostelry. He makes no pretension to style or sanitary plumbing, but he had a darky cook who served real food. Also he has saddle horses and pack mules to take you up the Mammoth trail over to the Minarets and the Devil's Post Pile, and when you return all fagged out he has good clean beds with timothy hay mattresses, and if you don't like it, there are a lot of people that do.

At Mammoth we saddled Molly and Kitty and went up to Mammoth City. It used to be a city along in '79 and '80. Nobody lives in Mammoth City now. The forest has made a sortie into the main street and among the half-dozen tumbledown log cabins a new crop of young pines is growing. Wild animals



prowl through the old sawmill with its rusting machinery; a hundred cords of wood, cut for use in the winter of 1880 and never used because the camp "petered out," is dimly visible through the underbrush and trees which have grown up around it. A moldering, decaying arrastre marks the location of a mine where some Argonaut sunk his youth and his money. The destroying hand of time has mangled and crushed the pathetic little log cabins where the brave heart of the vanished pioneer once beat high with hope. It is a sad place. In the canon nestle the Twin lakes; a gentle breeze, blowing off the eternal snows,

comes down through Mammoth City and rustles the young pines that strive to hide her helpless old age; the subdued thunder of a waterfall far up the face of the, mountain where the waters of Mary lake come down to form the Twin lakes, comes faintly to the air. It is the eternal requiem of Mammoth City.

To hunt, to fish, to destroy any living thing in this Eden of the West would be a sacrilege. One merely grows drowsy with the sad beauty of the scene - lulled to sleep by the dirge of the pines and the waterfall, to dream that the souls of the pioneers that built a city here and then deserted it are passing to a just punishment for their inconceivable desertion.

Two never-to-be-forgotten days at La Casa Sierra Inn, under the shadow of Mammoth mountain, and we took the road again, past the geyser of La Casa Diablo, where the old "desert rats" and Indians come to "b'ile out," and down through Long valley. Every few miles a big cold stream, fresh from the melting snows of the Sierra, comes purling across the desert valley, emptying into Owens river. There were bridges across most of these streams, but all of them are fordable even in an automobile. Good fishing in all of them, and flocks of sage-hen rise from the sage beside the road.

Coming out of Long valley through a little pass, we emerged into Little Round valley. From Little Round valley we crawled up Crooked creek canon, along a road hacked in the face of a red and black lava cliff, and down into Round valley. Nightfall found us out of Round valley and at the upper end of Pleasant valley. I thought this latter was aptly named, for here we entered a farming and dairying country and put up for the night at a farmhouse.

We resumed our pilgrimage next morning, driving through large prosperous ranches whose fields were dotted with droves of fine cattle. There was a beautiful interchange of fields of timothy, alfalfa, corn and grain-fields. The ranches were well kept, every house and barn had a red roof and was surrounded by weeping willows or Lombardy poplars. Truly, it was a pleasant valley.

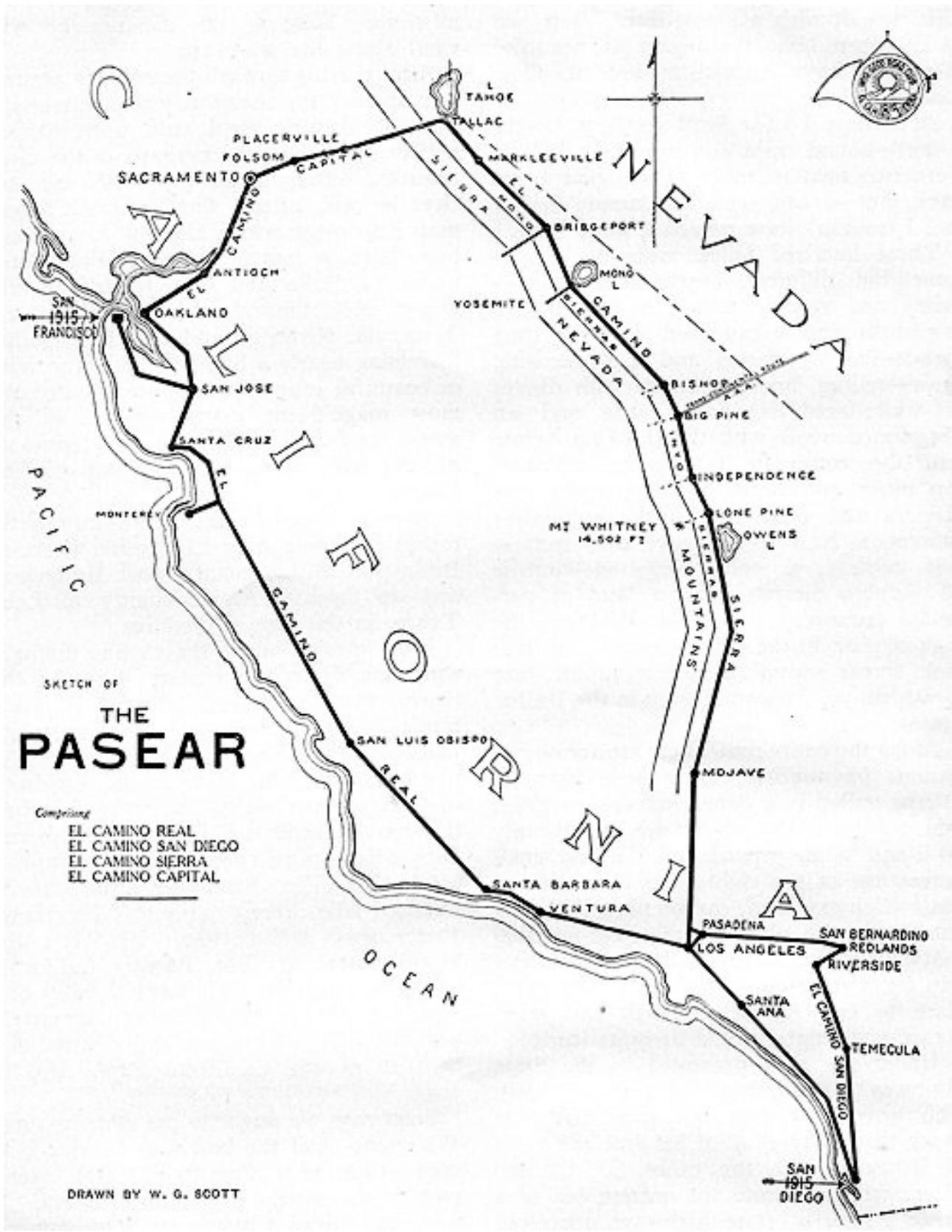
We arrived at Bishop, Inyo county, about noon, having traversed one hundred and thirty-five miles behind Molly and Kitty. After resting two days in Bishop, we resumed the journey down the Owens river valley. The country around Bishop - in fact, down to Lone Pine - is very beautiful. It has the charm of the unexpected. From a desert strewn with heaps of malapai, one passes into green fields with irrigating ditches. A few miles of this and then - the desert.

We had passed all the big mountain peaks by the time we reached Lone Pine late in the afternoon. Mt. Gillett, Mt. Morrison, Kearsarge and Whitney - we passed along their bases in succession. They are the real sights of El Camino Sierra - snow-capped, cloud-enshrouded, majestic, terrible, overawing in their calm assumption of the impotence of eternity.

At Lone Pine we endeavored to secure horses and climb Mt. Whitney, but under the advice of Mr. Marsh, who built the Smithsonian observatory on the summit and appears to be Mt. Whitney's favorite son, for he knows every dip, spur and angle on her wrinkled old face, we abandoned the attempt. There was still too much ice on the trail, and while under Marsh's guidance we could have reached the summit, it would have been a difficult task.

From Lone Pine we motored down the valley and across the Mojave desert for nearly one hundred miles, following along the line of the Los Angeles aqueduct. This portion of El Camino Sierra is least interesting. The white Sierra gradually recedes as you go south, and gives way to a low range of scarred volcanic hills, scarlet with oxide of iron. It is just plain desert, but the desert is beautiful after you have learned to love it. The road is good.

At Mojave I bade Scott good-by, caught a north-bound train and was back in San Francisco next morning. I was glad to get back, but - I had seen El Camino Sierra, and I wouldn't have missed it for a farm.



Three hundred miles, more or less, of something different every three miles - valley and stream, mountain and lake - sagebrush and greasewood and big pine forests-baking desert and cool, inviting snow-rolling, lovely meadow with droves of white-faced Hereford cattle and an abandoned waste with the skulking coyote and the courteous rattlesnake-whispering pines and lakes and waterfalls and glaciers and cliffs and dark, bottomless canons, a land of romance and wonder and mystery, a world forgotten-that is El Camino Sierra. It is a land of perpetual paradox. From Mt. Whitney, the highest peak in the United States, one may look across several mountain ranges into Death valley, the lowest point in the United States.

Along the entire route there are accommodations for tourists; every little town in Owens valley is a depot for auto supplies and repairs. The roads are surprisingly good and by the expenditure of a very small percentage of the eighteen million dollars' State Highway fund, can be placed in such condition with the natural road-building materials right at hand, that a week-end trip for dwellers in towns from San Francisco to Los Angeles through this great scenic wonderland would be quite feasible.

Under the plan presented to the State Highway Commission by my friend Scott, who loves California and good roads so much that he gives all of his time and most of his money to the cause, El Camino Sierra will constitute the eastern leg of a great system of state highways conceived by Scott and designated by the singularly euphonious Spanish title of The Pasear.

Starting at San Francisco, the tourist, after having visited the Panama-Pacific International Exposition to be held in 1915, can motor down El Camino Real to Los Angeles. He will pass through the wonderfully fertile coast valley of the state, through Del Monte, historic Monterey, Santa Barbara and the old California missions. Most of the distance he will wind along the sea-coast.

After touring through the country around Los Angeles, the visitor may next start south over El Camino Real, and upon arrival at San Diego, located perhaps in the most beautiful setting in all this world for any city, he will attend the Panama-Californian Exposition which also will be in progress there in 1915. After visiting Coronado, La Jolla and Tia Juana, he will motor back through the mountains, via Temecula, Riverside and San Bernardino, traversing nearly a hundred and fifty miles of beautiful country where are situated the most magnificent orange groves in the world, and at Los Angeles will terminate his trip over the San Diego loop of The Pasear.

Starting at Los Angeles he will fare north, through Mojave, over El Camino Sierra to Bridgeport, Mono county, past Bridgeport and up through Alpine county to Lake Tahoe, in the Alps of America.

From lovely Tahoe, the visiting motorist will wind down the western slopes of the Sierra, through scenes hallowed in California history, song and story, through Placerville and Folsom or via Donner lake to Sacramento, the state capital, on down the Sacramento valley, following the river through the Gardens of The Netherlands and back to San Francisco via El Camino Capital.

That is The Pasear - a little fifteen-hundred-mile stroll through Fairyland. Pretty good scheme, isn't it? With the establishment of The Pasear, California will come into its own more rapidly and will be known far and wide as a motorist's paradise. It will be an added attraction to both of our California Expositions in 1915.

Scott says we ought to see America first. We ought - and the best way to start is to take a trip over The Pasear and spend two weeks along El Camino Sierra. If you can't afford a motor-car, I recommend a span of mules, a good buckboard and lots of grub. If you can't afford such an outfit (indeed, in these days of cheap motorcars, it's a toss-up which to take) then I suggest a gun and rod, a roll of blankets, a knapsack and a pair of sturdy legs. Go somehow.

W. G. Scott of the Inyo Good Roads Club converted me. El Camino Sierra is as close to heaven as I ever expect to get, and having once tasted the delights of the trail, I'm going back. Even as this story goes to press, Molly and Kitty are sticking their long sad heads out the window of Scotty's barn in Bishop, watching us leave for another trip over the same route-in a motor-car. Pretty hard on Molly and Kitty to have to stay behind, but that's what comes of being a mule and pulling a load all of one's days. Don't you be a mule. Back out of the pack some summer, kick up your heels, and heehawing with joy go cantering down El Camino Sierra; for there is a prize at the end of the trail.

Try it.



