

A Trip Through the California Sierras

In September 1904



Previously Unpublished Historical Essay

By George Bucknam Dorr

FOREWORD

by Ray DeLea

There are very few published accounts of pack trips in the Sierra Nevada in the early years of the Twentieth Century. In fact, I am only personally aware of a couple. The first is the 1903 Sierra Club trip into Sequoia National Park. Henry Brown's book *Mineral King Country* gives a good account of the 1903 Sierra Club High Trip from Mineral King via Farewell Gap to the Kern River, Mt. Whitney and return to the Giant Forest by way of Kaweah Gap to Giant Forest.

The next detailed published account doesn't occur until the 1916 Sierra Club High Trip from Camp Nelson, in Sequoia National Park, to the Kern River, Mt. Whitney, Center Basin, Rae Lake and Onion Valley via Kearsarge Pass. This trip was detailed by Jessie McGilvray Treat and published in one of the Sierra Club's *Bulletins*.

It is no wonder then that it was a treasure to discover George Dorr's 1904 unpublished account of his pack trips to the summit of Mt. Whitney, Mineral King country, and his trans-Sierra trip from Onion Valley (Kearsarge Pass), Kings River, Marvin Pass, JO Pass and Giant Forest. George's description of his High Sierra adventures with a seemingly inexperienced packer was an adventure to be sure. He and his packer's ordeals with mountain mule wrecks, snow, losing the trail and wandering in circles are humorous but are a reflection on the real ordeals faced by people packing in the Sierra Nevada in those early years. I'm sure that George, being an "easterner," was probably overwhelmed by not only the grandeur of the Sierra Nevada mountains but by the challenges presented to him by his packer. As a Sierra Nevada packer myself for six summers with Mt. Whitney Pack Trains, I can relate to George's mountain trials as well as to those of the packer. George's stories will not only thrill you but

give you pause as to the struggles those early packers and guests must have endured to experience John Muir's Range of Light.

NOTE 1: This previously unpublished copyrighted account is held in manuscript form at the Bar Harbor Historical Society. For a full account of the life of Maine land conservationist and horticulturist George B. Dorr, consult *Creating Acadia National Park* (Bar Harbor: Friends of Acadia, 2016).

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NOTE 2: The graphical content and Foreword were not part of the original manuscript but were added by Ray DeLea to improve the impact of the manuscript.

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Part III - Kings Canyon / Sequoia National Park Pack Trip

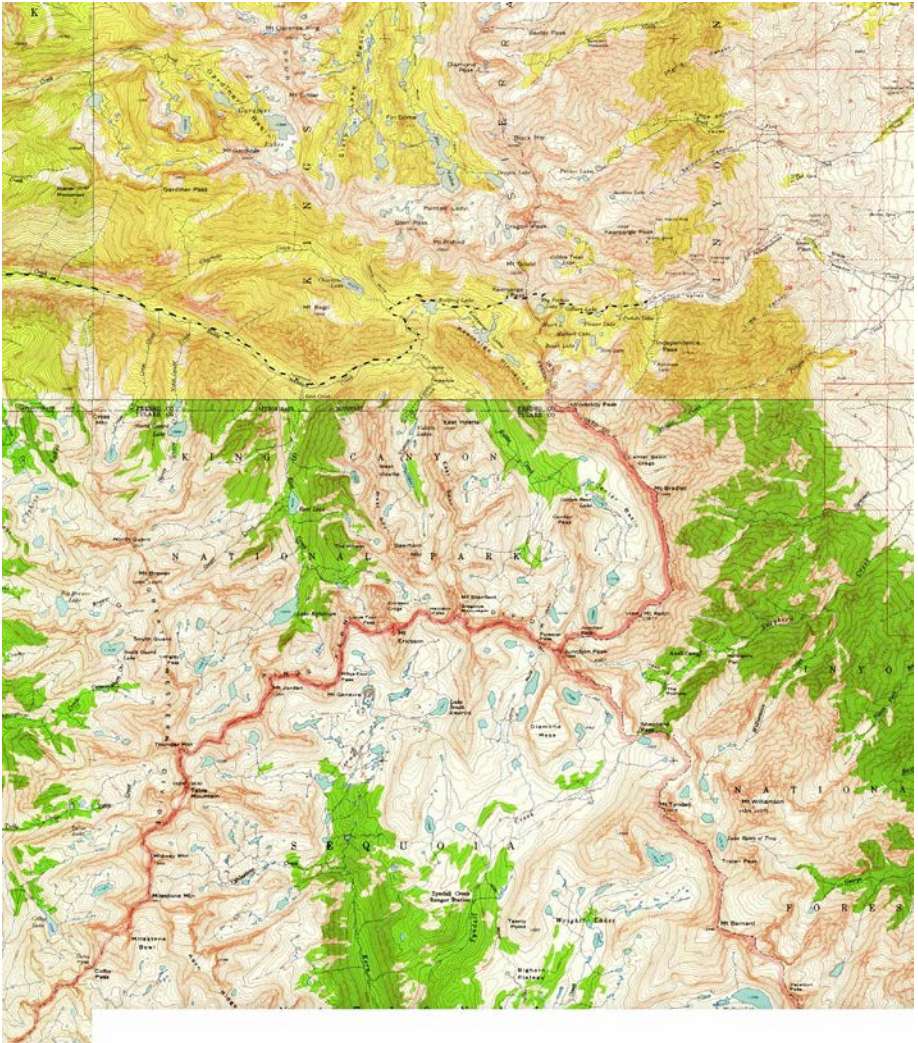
I want to finish telling you about my trip through the mountains while it is fresh in my mind. I stopped where I was starting out from Owens Valley to return back across the Sierras over Kearsage Pass. But I want first to give you some idea of Owens Valley for it interested me a good deal.

If you left the Southern Pacific road at Reno just before it begins its climb out of Nevada over the Sierras, and followed the Sierras southward, rising up to the west of you like a great mountain wall, past Carson City, you would after a time find yourself in Owens Valley, and through it you could then pass on beyond with scarce a rise to the Mojave Desert. A new line of railroad is now under survey to run from Salt Lake down along this route to southern California, reaching Los Angeles through one of the low passes which break through the mountains there. When it is built, this route will doubtless be used instead of the San Francisco one by people going to southern California over the Union Pacific for it is not only much shorter and saves the long climb over the high Sierras, but the view of them which it would give one is superb, the rise is so abrupt, the range so continuous and the height so great, from eight to eleven thousand feet above the valley floor. The valley itself is naturally an arid plain, open at either end but narrowly shut in by mountains upon either side. The sun there is hot but the heat is tempered by the valley's height, 4000 feet above the sea, and



Frank Dorr's route from Onion Valley to Giant Forest - DOTTED LINE

by the dryness of the air, and the winter is only just too cold for growing oranges – with a dozen degrees or so of frost. Other fruit grows there better than in California – with finer flavor and, wherever there is irrigation, the crops are great.



Frank Dorr's route from Onion Valley to Giant Forest - DOTTED LINE

On one of the ranches that I stayed at, owned by a man who had come out there thirty odd years ago from western New York, they raised 400 tons of alfalfa hay a year from less than one hundred and fifty acres of grass-land and had, besides, great orchards of apple trees and pears and peaches, and vineyards

for raisins, and great stands of bee hives – for honey is one of their great industries there, the bees feeding on the alfalfa flowers which make a pure white honey famous for its flavor. This ranch got all the water that it needed for its 400 acres, much of which was used for pasture land, from a stream piped down from the mountains a couple of miles away, but the owner of the other ranch at which I stayed, some twenty miles away from this had selected his land with reference to an irrigation canal which had seemed certain of accomplishment when he settled on it near thirty years ago but which had finally failed through want or combination among the ranchers in his region and the opposition of new settlers in the upper valley and then after twenty-five years of efforts to obtain it and meager crops and disappointment he had suddenly discovered that water more than he could use for all his farm had lain beneath it all the while, needing but a shallow driven well to bring it flowing to the surface. And it seemed to me that with the great Sierra range above it with its heavy snowfall abundant water ought some day to be obtained, by storage reservoirs above and by artesian wells below, turn the valley into a garden, walled in by mountains, giving it surpassing beauty. And if one of the great continental lines should then run through it, how wonderful its change from barrenness and solitude. There is a dramatic quality about it which appeals to one's imagination. I talked a great deal about the valley with these two ranchers, leading men in their region and interesting characters both of them. And all through my trip I talked a good deal with the men I met and got a great deal from them. All of the older men and most of the younger ones as well have come from elsewhere and have known other lands,



Trail from Onion Valley - Kearsarge Pass at top of photo.

it difficult to drive the pack animals on the mule he was riding and I changed mules with him. The other mule went better and he started down with the packtrain, to find the trail, at a good pace. I started, too, but my saddle only had a single cinch and mules are so round-bellied that it is hard to make a saddle stay without a double one. My saddle turned and landed me on the ground. I put the saddle on again and cinched it tighter but again it turned. Then I called to my man to stop but he was already out of sight and hearing and I started to lead the mule down. She refused to budge. Then I got behind and whacked her. It was hard to get her moving even so but once she got well started on her way down the hill and saw I was behind her she lit out at a trot for the hay fields she had left and I after her on the double quick to catch her.

Meanwhile my man had found the right trail and started up it, leaving me behind. I chased the mule a mile or more, she quickening her step whenever I did mine, and I thought she wouldn't stop until she reached the ranch which we had started from but presently I found a chance to cut across and head her off. It seemed to me a forlorn hope for she might easily have kept ahead of me by quickening her step. A horse would have done it but mules are oddly different in their ways and I found out afterward that it was characteristic of them to give up and surrender, if they simply see you start out to head them off. So I caught mine and headed up the hill again.

But she went back in quite a different mood, and a mile or so beyond the point at which I picked up my pack train's trail she refused for good and all to go another step. Not a single step would she stir, do what I would, so I tied her to a scrub oak alongside the trail, took of her saddle and bridle, picked up my saddlebag and trudged along up hill to find my outfit. I had to climb twenty-five hundred feet or more before I reached our camping ground – a few acres of open meadow ground shut in by mountains, precipitous and towering, the highest of the range. It was dark starlight when I got there. There was no wood for a campfire – barely enough for cooking and my packer had crept in among some bushes to keep warm. He made me a cup of tea and then we went to bed. I called him at early dawn and he started off at once to get the mule. I stayed and had just begun to make a fire and get some breakfast when a fierce hail storm began. I gave breakfast up and gathered up our bedding and supplies into a heap and spread my tent over them. We had not

put it up the night before and rarely used it. Then I crept under it myself and read until my man returned bringing the mule, whom he had only got to start, himself, by putting a slip noose round her neck and tying the rope to the horn of the saddle of the mule whom he had ridden down who literally hauled her up, he walking.

It was still hailing when he got back and we started to pitch the tent and wait for better weather, but with one of those sudden changes which one finds among the mountains, the sun was shining before we had more than fixed upon our camping ground. So we packed up instead and started out to make the pass. It was then about nine o'clock in the morning and the summit of the pass was still five thousand feet above us.

A few hundred feet above our camping ground we came to snow lying since the storm which had begun the day we climbed Mt. Whitney. From there on we walked, using my saddle horse to drag the still reluctant mule along our stock was weak from hardship and poor feed upon the mountains coming over, but it seemed best to push on lest another storm should come and block the pass.

The snow got deeper and the trail more steep. Finally we lost the trail completely, buried in the snow which was up to our knees. We went on without it for some time, and then found it again zigzagging sharply up among big broken rocks facing a cliff that barred our way. There the snow had drifted deeply and at one place nearer the top the horses were up to their shoulders

and even then kept breaking through to lower depths. The necessity of dragging up the little mule, who still refused to go, made it doubly difficult, too, on the sharp zigzags of the trail. We reached the top, however, of that cliff and trudged along for quite a piece without more difficulty than the deep snow might make on such a trail, rocky and rough and always climbing. But presently we came to another sharp ascent, rock-strewn, with short, sharp zigzags leading steeply up it, and here we nearly met with catastrophe. The little mule held back and the horse, pulling her up and making a sharp turn, pulled her over toward him and then was himself pulled back on top of her by the rope which he was towing by. My packer called to me – for I went on ahead and trod the trail out and he drove up the stock behind and I came back to find the horse literally sitting on the mule and both of them perched upon a rock slide steep enough almost for them to roll down, once they started. It would have been very ludicrous if it had not been awfully serious for the animals. I hardly thought it possible to get them out of the scrape without a broken leg, but my packer managed quite skillfully to roll the horse down hill, with my help, so that he landed on his feet below. Then we got the mule up, with no bones broken, thanks to the soft snow. Then we started out again, not stopping anywhere for rest or lunch, and made our way around a series of dark, little glacier lakes embedded in the snow and full of still reflections of the cliffs and peaks about them, until late in the afternoon we reached, just beyond the furthest lake which nestled at its foot, a sharp, high ridge, of rock and gravel buried deep in snow, closing the valley through which we had been mounting. Its crest, a thousand feet above the lake, was the pass which we



View west from Kearsarge Pass

were seeking, the highest travelled pass, I have been told, in the United States or Canada. At first the footing, was good, as we began to climb it, and the ascent easy but for the depth of snow, but as we got up higher the climb grew steeper and small stones and gravel gave place under foot to rocks, making sure footing hard to find. The snow grew deeper, too, the higher up we got and the trail was lost beneath it. I still went ahead, leading the foremost mule and treading out a practicable way for the others to follow as I could find it. My packer was quite used up with the long climb, the exposure and high air.

As we got near the top the rock slide became steep enough to be dangerous for the animals if they missed their footing, and smooth, downward-sloping rocks that had to be circled round showed themselves beneath the snow as I felt my way along. We

slowly made out way up, however, until we got near the summit of the pass. There the rocks had become so big, the drifts of snow so deep and the ascent so steep that it seemed almost impossible to find a way up it for our animals, in their tired state. However, step by step, with much plunging through drifts and struggling for footing among the broken rocks beneath we got along until one sharp struggle more would land us on the top. But there the little mule decided to give out, and lay down on the snow – it's the way mules have, I found, when they don't like their job and does not usually mean, as it would with horses, sheer exhaustion. My packer, tired out himself, was quite hopeless, the most discouraged thing you ever saw. He sat down on the snow and looked at her with a forlorn and desperate expression. I went on, leaving the other animals strung out in a file behind, and broke my way through to the summit, across which the snow was drifted higher than my head. The crest was very sharp however, only a few feet wide, and I easily broke through the drift and looked down the valley on the western side.

The view was wonderful. The sun was setting and the valley I looked down to the westward opened far away toward the sunset sky, flooded with warm light. Deep down below me on the western side lay another little chain of glacier lakes, dark and fringed with pines. Further down, the creek that led from them opened into the deep King's River cañon.

To the eastward, framed in the half ellipse of the valley up which we had climbed and columned by snow-clad peaks on either side, lay Owens Valley, eight thousand feet below, over

which there hung, shadowing it and reaching up behind the snow peaks either side, the black, magnificent cloud-mass of a great thunderstorm. At our feet below, in solitude and stillness, lay the basin of the glacier lakes, its rocky detail lost in the deep snow while the still water in the lakes themselves was deep sea-green in color.

I could only linger for a few moments to look at it, for it was most important for us to get down to camping ground among the sheltering pines below before it got too dark to see our way. Stamping the snow down as best I could along the path which I had made I led the strongest of our mules up through it, one or two of the others following. It was difficult work for them because the snow was drifted deep among the rocks just eastward of the summit and where I with my lighter weight could walk securely, though up to my waist in snow, they again and again could reach no solid footing shoulder deep, but plunged and floundered. In the mean time my packer had taken everything off the little mule, our spare saddle which she had been carrying, and her bridle, and the rope by which we had been leading her, and packed them on the horse; then he started the horse up after the other stock, along our trail, leaving the mule lying on the snow when lo, she rose and followed. The packer and I looked at each other without a word and felt as though a miracle had happened; and now that I look back on it I feel so still.

The descent on the western side of the pass was rapid, for though the snow was still up to our knees, it was much less deep than on the eastern side and the slope beneath it was of gravel,



Bullfrog Lake

not of rock.

We went on for another hour till it was starlight only and then camped among some pine trees near the lakes. The snow was still some eighteen inches deep but while my man unpacked the mules I cut down an old dead pine whose branches against the sky, telling of dry firewood close at hand, had led us to stop there, and we soon had a bright warm fire to make ourselves some tea and cook some bacon by. Then my man rolled himself up in his blankets without more ado and fell asleep, exhausted. I was not quite so tired as he and it occurred to me that it would be well to gather up our flour and other things and get them under cover. I had just finished doing this and made my bed upon the snow between two folds of my tent – my man had used for this a

canvas strip we had for covering the pack when it began to snow again, and snowed all night. There was no use turning out our stock to graze so we gave them a part of our flour – little enough it was which lined their dark faces comically in the morning, and tied them in a row under the shelter of some low pines a few feet off from where we lay – where they stamped and quarreled and stood patiently by turns till dawn.

The next morning we made an early start and by the middle of the forenoon got out of snow, the bare ground very welcome under foot. The first change we had to let our animals feed, on a patch of meadow grass that grew beside the creek, we stopped awhile; then, when we started again I let my packer push on ahead with the stock, headed for a rangers' camp for we had now come into one of the Government reservations – which we knew that we should find a few miles further down the valley, and at which we hoped to get some barley for our animals. I stayed behind, lingering along the way to see the valley and its trees, which had been rapidly changing through the morning from purely alpine species to the giant sugar pines and yellow pines and the great firs belonging to the middle belt.

Suddenly as I turned a corner in the trail I came upon our little mule stretched out in a grassy hollow, flat and motionless. I thought for a moment her end had come. Then I noticed that her eyes were bright and one of her big ears lifted up to make inquiry of my coming. So I went on encouraged. But further down a little way I came upon my packer with our animals who said "I've got another mule sick now," and there was the



Glaciated Kings River Canyon

red mule he had been riding earlier in the trip, the best one that we had, gagging and nearly choked, unable to swallow. My packer thought that he was going to die, but I had once seen a horse affected in the same way, the day I went down into the Grand Cañon in Arizona. Then a freshet had swept away the feed alongside of the stream in the side cañon through which we were descending and our horses had browsed at noon on the thorny desert bushes of the region. That horse got well during the night which followed, the trouble having come apparently from a thorn lodged in his throat deep down; so I thought that the same might have happened to our mule.

We unpacked our animals and turned them loose to feed,

those that could. Then taking each a piece of cheese for lunch to eat upon the way – there wasn't any bread – we both started down the valley for the rangers' camp. The trees were magnificent, sugar pines from seven to eight feet through and yellow pines and firs from five to six feet through, growing in open woods alongside of the stream which tumbled swiftly down in a succession of cascades with deep, clear pools between. My man hoped to find the rangers still at their camp and, if he got down early enough, to return with a fresh horse and grain, so I let him push on, thinking, if he did get back, to meet him on the way and go back with him, and if not, to follow him down to the camp for the night.

After a time I came out where the high hanging valley I was in broke away abruptly to the level forest covered bottom of King's River Cañon rock-walled and deep like the Yosemite. The sun was slowly sinking down the cañon, lighting warmly up and deeply shadowing its granite walls and the tree tops of the somber forest at its bottom. High up above, the peaks were white with snow, which caught the lingering sunlight and the sunset glow when all was growing dark about me and below.

I sat there for a long while, looking down at the valley. Then I went down quickly, knowing that my man would not return, but by the time I reached the bottom it was already growing dark. I crossed the creek which I had left above which had plunged down from the upper valley by a bold succession of cascades and falls, on a rough log bridge and passed into the woods beyond. I had not gone a hundred yards, however, before I came upon

another still as broad and deep as that, and waded it again. By that time it had grown quite dark under the tall pines and firs and cedars which there grew close together and I found I could no longer see the trail. Fortunately I had with me in the small bag I carried slung across my shoulder a little folding candle lantern, the only lantern that we had with us upon the trip, and a short bit of candle. I lit that and started out again upon the trail. But I found that a woodland trail could easily get lost by candle light and I lost it promptly. In a little while I found myself down by the edge of the river – where I had no business to be. I made my way to the last brook which I had crossed, found my trail and started out afresh. That time I landed in a thicket. I began to



Cedar Grove Ranger Station

think I should have to make a fire and spend the night by it where I was. But I went back to the brook again to find my trail and, following it up step by step with greater care, that time I kept it, coming out

soon into more open ground where it was better marked. After following it down for a couple of miles over the valley floor and across a series of well marked glacier moraines it led me to the river where there should be a bridge, I knew from my map, across to the rangers' camp. The bridge was there but the rangers had been rebuilding it and all there was of it were two great logs about a yard apart, stretching from shore to shore. A heavy wire ran out from either side sloping to each log part way across; and

for part of the way across, rough cross-pieces had been laid. At the entrance I found one of my man's mittens, left to tell me he had gone across. I followed, but when I came to the middle of the bridge where there was no wire to steady myself by, I did not like it! Daylight is better than a candle lantern when one comes to crossing rivers up on logs – so I sat down, straddling the log, and worked my way along until I reached the wire that ran out from the other side.

A little way beyond I found the rangers' camp. There were two or three rough buildings but no light. I called and presently my packer answered me from inside one of them. He came to a square hole in it which served as a window and told me that the rangers had gone down the valley, that very day apparently, for their trail was fresh; he had found some sacks of barley they had left, however. The door was pad-locked, so I scrambled in after my packer through the window opening and found two rough bedsteads with axe-riven slats and a few old strips of canvas with one or two abandoned comfits, as they call them there. Altogether they did not make more than warm covering for one of us and he thinking that I had decided not to come had already made his bed with the whole pile. He offered to share it with me but I told him I did not sleep sound enough for that! So we divided out the spoils sleeping none too warm in consequence.

The next morning, anxious over our mules, we made an early start, breakfasting on a bunch of raisins and a few nuts I had with me in my bag and each of us taking a little sack of barley for the mules. I again let my packer go ahead, lingering on the way



Zumwalt Meadows in Kings River Canyon

to see the trees.

When I got up to where we had left our stock I found the red mule who had been so ill the day before, grazing cheerfully and looking like himself again. So with a lightened heart I gave him a few handfuls of my barley and went on up to see how the little mule had fared. And presently I met my packer, mounted once more and driving down the mule before him, looking like her earlier self again and with her bell tinkling out in lively fashion as she came down the trail. She was on her feet and feeding when he found her, having already grazed some distance down the trail, and he said that the sound of her bell, which he heard before he saw her, was the best music he had ever heard. So we came back to where our pack was lying and cooked ourselves the



Kings River Bridge near Cedar Grove

first hot meal which we had had since the morning of the day before, and rested in the sunshine.

The valley we were in was an interesting one, cut out by the drainage

from a group of the highest mountains in the Sierra range and extending back into its wildest scenery. And at its lower end it opened, hanging high above it, into one of the deepest or the deep Sierra cañons at its head, looking down it to the west through perpendicular walls of granite cut by meeting glaciers driven onward by the pressure of vast fields of ice and snow sweeping down a thousand feet a mile perhaps, from the great peaks behind. There were relatively level stretches in this upper valley with open groves of splendid pines and firs, trees with great columnar trunks and deeply scaled or furrowed bark that ranged in color from warm red in certain species to deep browns and grays in others. And on the steeper, open slopes between and extending up the rocky bases of the cliffs which closed the valley in or down into open bits of meadowland bordering here and there the streams grew ferns and bushes and herbaceous plants turned to autumn coloring, browns and yellows, reminding one of home. And everywhere throughout the valley there was the sound of waterfall and rapid.

Had the season been earlier and my time less short I would have stayed on there camping for some days, but it was too late for lingering and the next morning we started out soon after sunrise, walking still ourselves, but with our little troop in good order and all there.

When it got down to the bridge, however, it narrowly escaped a new catastrophe. The entrance to the bridge was slightly barred across, to show that it could not be used, but our pack mules coming quickly down the trail ahead of the packer, scorned the slight obstruction and stepping over it walked out in single file on the short section over which cross pieces had been laid. The bridge was narrow – not much over a yard wide as I remember it and the packs on the loaded mules projected either side to the full width of the bridge as they stood on it. When the foremost mule came to the end of the cross pieces he naturally stopped – there was nothing ahead to step upon. Mules are curiously ambitious to lead when on the trail and it is – sometimes – interesting to see them cut ahead to take another's lead away when they think they see the chance. So now when the front mule stopped, the one behind him started to push past him on the bridge and in another moment would have pushed him off, bags and all, into the river, which was three or four feet deep and some eight feet below, if the packer had not arrived and stopped him by his shouts. Then he managed to turn them on the bridge and get them to the bank again, fording the stream.

At the rangers' camp we gave them a good feed of barley, packed one of the saddle horses with a coupe of feeds more,

and started out afresh down the valley. From there on I again let my packer go ahead, lingering along to see the valley. The day was beautiful and the cliffs, which are like the great smooth granite cliffs of the Yosemite though not so high, were glorious in the warm sunshine as they rose almost perpendicularly up from the level, sandy valley floor against the blue sky over head. This level floor of the valley with its sandy bottom – in which it also resembles the Yosemite – seems to be one of the peculiar features of' these Yosemite valleys, as they call them there. In the Yosemite it seems to have been caused by a recent lake formation in the valley and I suppose that similar lakes may have been formed in a number of these deep-cut glacier valleys by the moraines left as the glaciers receded, which they probably did quite rapidly at the end of the glacial epoch. In the Yosemite valley the level floor is only a few miles in length, seven or eight I judged, and in King's River cañon it seemed to me about the same, though not so wide and more obstructed by a succession of moraines. Here oak trees began to show themselves, and poplars along the water's edge – while in the valley up above, the last few miles, I had already found in sheltered hollows the large-leaved Californian maple, and the alder growing as a well-shaped tree of medium size. This maple was the only tree I saw, by the way, while I was among the mountains which had rich autumnal colouring, lighting up the landscape along the banks of streams here and in the Yosemite with golden colour such as that with which the canoe birch lights up our woods at home; some of the shrubs however and the herbaceous plants before hard frosts had cut them down took on rich hues that added not a little to the beauty of the landscape here and there.

The day was beautiful and warm with sunshine and I had a delightful sense of leisure and a pleasant walk ahead as I saw my packer and his mules disappearing down the trail. I followed on more slowly for a while, then I said to myself "I'll sit down in the sun by the river and read a while." After I had read a few minutes I said to myself, "Perhaps it was better not to read but just to sit and look at things and enjoy the sunshine," and the next thing that I knew I was waking up with a delightful sense of absolute repose and far away detachment from all earthly things. I got up and wandered down the trail another while and then the clear fresh water tempted me and I joined a large trout whom I saw swimming in a pool – at least I tried to, for he didn't stay. And I didn't stay long either, for the water was bitterly cold.

Then I walked slowly down the trail, level, and sandy and partly shaded by large oaks, for three or four miles more until I reached another bridge opposite which the trail which we were following left the valley, at the foot of the deeper portion of its cañon, and climbed up over the lower mountains that bordered it beyond. It was then about an hour before sundown. I knew that the meadow where we meant to camp lay fairly high above the valley and that I had a climb before me but I had not given it much thought – now I got out my map, which gave the altitudes, and found that I had three thousand three hundred feet to climb before I got to camp.

The trail was a good one built by the rangers up a sandy slope covered with pines and firs. It zigzagged interminably, rising steadily but never seeming to advance. At last just as the last

deep sunset glow was fading in the west I reached the top of the ridge I had been climbing and looked out to the westward – I had been climbing up the ridge's eastern side – down the King's River valley I had left. I sat down and rested there awhile, until the deep red western glow had narrowed and vanished. Then I got out again my little folding candle lantern and followed on along the trail. It led now along the ridge, close to its summit on the eastern side, and gave me in the deepening twilight and the starlight as I went along, a great, solemn view of the wide upper basin of King's River valley – for I was now higher than the steep cañon's sides – a view which stretched back to the mountains of the eastern watershed which we had crossed two days before. The lower portion of the basin was filled with a dark coniferous forest, black, solemn and still beneath the snow covered slopes above. The wind, which an hour before had souged through the pine forest with the sound of rushing water, had dropped when the sun went down, and the occasional hooting of an owl or distant cry of some wild animal and once or twice the crash of a falling tree alone broke the silence. The sense of solitude was great – one does not seem so solitary in a narrow place, in a small valley or the like. One fills it with one's own life and presence as it were. But the great solitude of a great basin such as that, upon an autumn night starlit alone, with its dark forests, unseen depths and white enclosing peaks has a remote, mysterious quality in it which makes one feel that one is looking out upon another world, timeless and still, which life is strange to.

The next morning we mounted again, for the first time since we left Owens Valley, and rode along an easy trail for an hour or

more, coming then to some large meadows – called Horse Corral Meadows – beyond which the trail ran up a steep, forested hillside. Up which we went on foot again to ease our horses. The trail was as new to my packer as myself and we were rather taken back as we went on to find we had a pass to climb not marked upon the map, which rose seventeen hundred feet or more, as I afterward found out, above the meadow. The last part of the way up we found ourselves in snow again and beyond the summit our way lay through a long, level stretch of upland meadows over which the melting snow lay deep and even. The trail branched in these meadows but only a single trail was visible, slightly sunken on the surface of the snow, and as only one was marked upon my map we followed on along the trail we saw without a question and coming out of the snow went quickly down an open slope of sand, as easy to descend as hard to climb. We had already got far down it, congratulating ourselves that we had not had to climb it instead, with our tired selves and stock, when it began to dawn upon us that we were going in the wrong direction, the trail bending steadily to the westward while our main course lay eastward. We called a halt and studied map and compass.

There was no doubt that we had missed our trail but my packer thought our animals too tired to climb the hill which we had just come down and it seemed to us as we studied it over on the map that the trail we were following must connect further on, by a few miles detour, with the one we should have taken. So we went on, down through a magnificent fir forest for another hour or so. Then, coming out upon an open sandy slope, we came upon a camp with tent and campfire, by which there

was a woman cooking. We stopped and questioned her as to where we were and found we were indeed not only off our trail but that the trail which we were on was leading us down into a valley through which we and our pack animals would reach the stage road country in the foothills at a point where we would be several days by stage away from where we started and where our pack animals were to be left.

It was then the middle of the afternoon, we ourselves were tired, our stock exhausted, so we decided to camp where we were till morning and then climb the hill again. But while we were talking with the woman and looking at our map, our animals went on, turning off from the main trail onto another which ran up alongside of a brook that flowed down past the camp. I told my packer when I saw them moving off that we had best go after them and round them up but the woman said there was a little meadow just above where their horses went to graze and that ours were headed for it and would stop and feed there; so we stayed on talking until our plans were made. Then we went up to the little meadow to get our animals and bring them back to camp, and found they had not stopped but gone straight on, following the brook course up along a well marked trail. More than that, they whom we had thought too tired to climb the hill again when we first discovered we had missed our way, had "hit the trail" up this brook-course as soon as we were out of sight, at a jog trot apparently, and were already out of sight and hearing. We followed at a trot, too, not knowing how far they might go before we overtook them, and a mile and a half up the trail, considerably out of breath ourselves, we got them

just as the foremost of them reached the same Horse Corral Meadows we had left to climb the pass that morning. We had made a complete circuit with the aid of our mules.

How the mules knew that the pleasant meadows they had reluctantly passed through that morning lay just above them on that brook-course is a mystery. None of them were familiar with the region nor had ever been on that mistaken trail of ours before, so far as my packer knew. But one of the things that struck me most upon the trip was the extraordinary memory of our pack mules for a trail. One of them, the oldest in the lot, led us the day we left Mt. Whitney, all day long across snow covered ground and in a driving storm, following a trail we often could not see ourselves, and which he had only followed once before. Now and then he hesitated for a moment and once he went astray for a few steps, but quickly found his way again. They seem to take so little notice as they go along the trail, reluctant and protesting, that their after memory of its every twist and turn and power to trace it even through a storm is wonderful. No doubt the salvation of all herding animals depends upon such faculty; yet, it is plainly not a mere instinct with them but an act of conscious thought, of reasoning from noted and remembered fact – quite as much with them as with the Indian or hunter on the trail.

We camped that night at Horse Corral Meadows since we were back there and the feed was good, but we ourselves walked down again and got our supper with the people in the camp below, where we had seen some venison cut in strips – jerkin as

they call it – hanging up to dry, I carrying down in slight return a bag of nuts which we had brought from Owens Valley. The owner of the camp turned out to be one of the leading men in the San Joaquin Valley opposite us below, who had come up with his wife some weeks before to get a change of air, and to look after cattle of his which had been ranging through the summer in the now snow-covered meadows up above.

They made us very welcome. Our host first offered us hospitality in the shape of a demi-john of whiskey which “the boys,” he said, – two cowboys whom he had with him – had brought up from below, and then his wife gave us the first good meal which we had had since Owens Valley, a venison stew, baked beans and soda biscuit, and fruits of their own preserving.

The next day we climbed our pass again, found the right trail – which led us on for hours, plodding along through heavy melting snow, then down across a deep and narrow cañon called the Marble Fork of the Kaweah – and an hour before sundown got back among the sequoias of the Giant Forest out of which I had started on my trip three weeks before. When I came to the sequoias I sent my horse ahead with the packer and spent a quiet hour alone with the great trees. Then I went slowly through groups of them scattered through a wood of giant pines and firs, to my outfitter’s camp, a log cabin in the midst of the sequoia grove. But he himself had gone down to his ranch among the foothills, and there was no one but my packer there, and two people, a man and a woman, who had driven up to spend a night or two and see the trees. They turned out to be brother

and sister, he from Los Angeles, she the wife of an anarchist editor in the town below, but both from eastern Maine not many years before. My packer opened the log cabin to them with its cooking stove and we shared our supper and our breakfast in the morning with them, she cooking for us all – and well – in genuine “down east” fashion.

The next morning my packer turned out the stock which we had with us upon the journey, to wild pasture, along with other stock their owner had up there, to stay until winter spoilt the feed in the wild meadow lands and grassy openings. Then he caught three other horses from among those at pasture, packed one of them with my camping outfit and saddled up the other two for us to ride. The road was a good one, the upper part of it just finished by the government, and gave us some wonderful views of deep valleys opening out westward through the foothills to the great plain beyond, valleys with long pale slopes no longer forest clad and full of sunlit atmosphere. For the first thousand feet or so of descent, however, the way lay through a forest of pine and fir, the sequoias being left behind soon after we had started. Five trees only made this forest up – the sugar pine and yellow pine and two silver-tipped firs – as they were called out there *abies magnifica*, with a vast, red trunk, and *abies concolor*, with a rough grayish one, which alone distinguished it to the eye from its companion, and a cedar-like tree, *libocedrus decurrens*, with foliage that recalls our *arbor vitae*. Quite suddenly, however, the coniferous forest stopped as we went on and low, spreading oaks, bushes of an arid region, and countless western buckeyes, bare of leaf with poisonous nut-like fruits untouched upon the



Main Street - Exeter, CA

trees, took its place.

After we left the forest the road followed a high and narrow ridge dividing two deep valleys, down one side of which it finally descended to the Kaweah River beside which solitary ranches, outposts of the agricultural region down below, began to show themselves. Reaching at length the valley bottom, five thousand feet or so below our morning camp, we rode on past cultivated farms and apple orchards to a ranch belonging to the father in law of the man who owned the camp above and had outfitted me. This man, Redstone by name, was quite a character in his way. (At the beginning of the Civil War his home was in Ohio.) When the first news of firing on Fort Sumter came he rushed out he told me the story himself – and posted a call for volunteers, acting on his own initiative. That night he led a rousing meeting



The "Stagecoach" to Exeter, CA

and enrolled a troop which, drilled and organized, soon went off to the war. But Redstone himself had made such a success of this that he was kept on at home for other work of this same kind and never – comically enough as it seemed to me – got into actual service so far as I could learn. Afterward, he was sent out to Europe, “on a special mission.” As he told me to the foreign governments, on some engineering scheme or new invention – I didn't gather what – which brought him interviews with some of the crowned heads and leading statesmen of the time abroad – a fact which he evidently looked back upon with not a little satisfaction, introducing the subject by asking me whether I had seen much of royalty when I was abroad the year before. Incidentally, he had been arrested at Pola, the Austrian naval station in Istria, for making sketches of the coast and then released upon sending a telegram to our minister at Vienna, with permission to go on and sketch whatever he chose. Later this same errand brought him to London where he met Mazzini who interested him in an international community movement and

got him to go back to America and organize a branch out there. This he did and led out a community to California where they settled in the valley where he is living now. It was they who had built the lower portion of the road down which I rode, in order to open up some mines and they were about to complete it and establish a sawmill in the Sequoia forest region up above where the government made its reservation there. But the movement proved a failure and the community disappeared, leaving Mr. Redstone behind as a flood might leave a tree upon the river bank to root alone. He had a pleasant little ranch along the river bank with old spreading oaks, and grape vines by it and fields and pasture lands and orchards beyond the ranch, of the limit of the hard Sierra winter.

The next day at noon I took the stage into Exeter, "stage" being a euphemism for a rickety old wagon with a pair of horses and a driver who gathered up the mail from boxes at the roadside as he went along, and who explained to me that he had "a regular stage wagon – a big one with four horses," but that he hadn't brought it out that morning as he had got soaked the day before and thought that day he'd bring a wagon with a top to it. My bags just filled the back seat, he and I the front one. "Now," said he, "it'll be just my luck to have a lot of people want to ride. It's always the way when I bring this wagon out." Presently a man with a bundle in his hand came walking out to meet us as we came in sight. "There," said the driver, "I told you so! He wants to ride!" "Kind o' crowded, ain't ye?" said the man. "Guess we'll make it somehow if you want to go," said the driver. "But there's two more people down at the next house,"

said the man, "who want to get up to town. I don't know what they'll do if you can't take 'em. I guess I'll have to wait and go tomorrow." So west on the bags and cramped our knees with them and somehow managed to get these other people in. They proved to be a carpenter and his wife who had come out to that region from Iowa. We supped together that evening at a little working man's eating house while we waited for our train and I picked up a good deal that was interesting from him. The way still lay down the Kaweah valley until the valley issued on the plain, its enclosing hillsides which had been an arid brown when I went up three weeks before – already green with young grass springing from the recent rains. Some of the best orange and lemon groves in the state lay scattered here and there in sheltered nooks along the valley bottom or ran up over the black-loamed foothills as they reached out into the plain. One orange grove I saw – hundreds of acres in extent – covered the whole western slope of a gently sloping hill five hundred feet in height above the plain and was irrigated by water pumped to the hilltop from the river by power obtained from a reservoir built in the high Sierras a hundred miles away, and used for lighting the cities opposite it in the central valley up and down for many miles. It is a curious thing that the lower foot hills which lie open to the plain are warmer in winter than the plain below them, less subject to frosts, the cold air settling over the valley bottom and driving up the warmer. So that one passes through and out of the orange and lemon growing belt upon these and not as one descends into the valley. Later, when I went into the Yosemite, I met a man who had a ranch over five thousand feet above the sea, where he was raising on an open western slope, a crop of

strawberries which he expected to market early in December.

I started out for my mountain trip from Visalia, one of the small agricultural cities in the broad San Joaquin valley. I went by stage, my way lying at first across the flat plain of the valley floor, through yellow stubble fields and immense orchards of plums where the fruit was being gathered up and dried for prunes. Then I came into the foothills region with its great orchards of apples, oranges and lemons and its brown hill-slopes; and early in the afternoon I reached the ranch of a man named Redstone on the Kaweah river where I was to spend the night.

The road out from Visalia was oiled for the first five miles. This I found widely done throughout California, the crude oil obtained from wells in the coast region being used for it. It makes a rather pleasant road to drive over, in relief from dust and glare, but my driver told me that in the hot summer weather it was apt to soften and get sticky and was, besides, so heating to the horses' feet that he had found their shoes too hot sometimes to rest his hand on.

My only fellow passenger on the stage was a young man from Ohio in the employment of an electric works' construction company in one of the Ohio cities, who had been superintending the work on an electric power plant for a Californian company which was utilizing a water power in the high Sierra to supply the region opposite with light and power. He had been in that region all summer, superintending the work, and his wife, an Ohio girl – they were only married in the spring – had been with him and was waiting for him then at the end of the stage route.

The middle of the day we stopped at a store by the roadside which was one of the regular stations of the stage, and the store keeper came out and told him that he was wanted at the telephone. He came back in a few moments and said that they had rung him up from his company's office in San Francisco to order him to take the next stage back and the evening train there. He was very blue over it, for he had been away a fortnight and up traveling nearly the whole night before and had counted on getting at least a day or two of rest and on being with his wife. But he could only drive ahead with me until he reached the next station of the stage, to which his wife had driven down to meet him, and then turn back from there on another five hours' stage-ride over the dusty road which we had just travelled. His wife was waiting for him and her delight at getting him back and dismay when he told her he had got to leave her again in another half hour – she was all alone there with him so far as friends went – was really pathetic.

The next morning I left the Redstone ranch in the early morning and drove up all day into the mountains over a road which climbed about six thousand feet during the day and which brought me at the end of it to a park established by the government in one of its reservations for the preservation of a splendid growth of the giant sequoias. There, in the midst of a forest of these trees, mingled with pines and firs, a rough summer camp had been established by two ranchers from below, Broder and Hopping by name, who also outfitted people for trips through the mountains beyond.

We passed no house upon the way after our first couple

of hours upon the road, and ate our lunch by a spring at the roadside, taking the same horses through with us all day. Late in the afternoon we reached the coniferous forest, these conifers not growing in that region lower than five thousand feet or so above the sea, and in the course of another hour or so, after passing two or three camps of negro soldiers stationed there to guard the park and save it from fire, we reached the camp where I was going. There was one wooden cabin, which served as dining room and kitchen, and a number of tents to sleep in. In the evening there was a campfire which lighted up in a wonderful way the great trunks of the sequoias and the tall branchless shafts of the pines and firs among which they were growing. These shafts were bare for at least a hundred feet above the ground, the tree tops lost in the firelight, and the effect was that of some great, many-columned hall whose columns, vast and irregular, reached up mysteriously into the darkness, with here and there the sight of stars between.