

Selections from *Camping Out in California*
By: Mrs. J.B. Rideout

CHAPTER I.
THE GIGANTIC REDWOODS.

In the month of July I received an invitation to go with a party of young folks. They were to take a large wagon and roam “over the mountains and far away,” pitching their tents wherever night found them, and cooking their provisions the old-fashioned way over a camp-fire in a dutch oven and along-handled frying pan.

I must confess I felt dubious about starting, but after the comforting assurances that if we were upset down some steep mountain side, or if wild beasts devoured us, or a band of robbers carried us away, they would all willingly bear me company in each and every trouble, I consented to cast in my lot with the rest.

There were seven of us, but as I have not asked permission, I shall not give their true names, but will call some of them Linnie, Will, Eda, Ben and Harry; all in their teens except Harry, and he as brave and eager for fun as the others.

After the provisions, bedding, tent and etceteras were packed in the wagon it did not look as if there was room for the living portion of the load, but when we safely stowed away we had comfortable seats...

After a good lunch we started on and in a short time were among the gigantic redwoods. Words give but a faint idea of the appearance of these grand old monarchs of the forest, so large and tall and straight, tapering gradually to the far away tops. We were all quite excited and looked out first on one side and then on the other, and every few

minutes the boys would jump out and measure a tree, until they found one that was over forty feet in circumference and even then they were not satisfied, but wanted to measure another one that looked a little larger.

It was now cool and pleasant, and we soon began to go down, down the mountain, whirling around short turns and still seeing the road winding back and forth below us. There were places which made me feel dizzy to look down, and if the other members of the party had not reminded me of the fact that they were clinging to me I would have been more frightened.

The road was very steep and they kept the brake on the wheels until I became alarmed and said, "Oh, I am afraid the brake will break."

"If it don't brake we shall all be killed," replied the driver coolly.

Occasionally we passed a house built of shakes, and in comparison with the trees around, it looked like a play house built by some child. It was nearly sundown when we reached the bottom of the grade at a place called Low Gap, where we were granted permission to camp near the spring on condition that the boys would not shoot the quail, which were so tame that they came up to eat with the chickens.

Low Gap was a very dismal place, dense woods on every side, and as darkness settled around us the girls became somewhat afraid and talked in lugubrious tones of grizzly bears, mountain lions and other beasts of prey...

We had a lively time in the morning, for the pigs smelled our breakfast, and came flocking in from all directions, determined to share it with us, and we were glad when we were ready to resume our upward way.

Now we began to really enjoy our journey, for the air was cool and filled with a woody fragrance that was pleasant and refreshing. The joyous birds welcomed us with their sweetest music, and the bright jay-bird flitted noisily through the trees and ever and anon large flocks of quail would go whirring beyond the reach of a stray shot, while all the time busy squirrels went scampering up the trees, scolding loudly at our intrusion, and the scenery was both beautiful and grand all that day...

We came to a good camping place as the sun was sinking among the distant trees...

...Standing where we were and looking down, far down on the tops of the trees, they seemed all on a level, but beyond the canyon the trunks of the massive redwoods and pines were visible from the roots to the branches. What an army of monsters, standing every one a little higher than its nearest neighbor below, and nodding their lofty heads to the ocean wind that marched along the high land but did not dare venture down into the deep gulches; they almost seemed like a battalion of giant soldiers climbing the mountain.

Far above and overhanging the valley, were huge pinnacles of rock which reminded us of ancient castles, with high walls, domes and vestibules, all brilliantly lighted by the fire-rays of the setting sun. While just above the castellated rocks a bright cloud moved silently like a chariot of the heavens, from which we could imagine angels were looking out in order to get a passing glimpse of earth's attractive beauty and thrilling sublimity.

But our pleasant reverie was broken by the shouts of the girls and the crackling of the camp-fire which recalled us to the fact that supper must be prepared. The boys were seen coming through the trees

bringing gray squirrels and a young rabbit as their addition to the bill of fare, and the dutch oven, frying-pan and coffee-boiler were placed over the fire, and a good supply for all was soon ready...

CHAPTER II. MENDOCINO CITY.

The next morning we passed an old logging camp. Ben and Harry said they would like to live there all the time, they could have such fun playing on the stumps.

The fire had swept over the fallen trees and the side of the mountain was seamed and scarred where they had sent the huge logs crashing down into the stream. We thought of the grand and beautiful forest through which we had been passing and the contrast between that and this blackened and devastated scene was so great that it made us think of Eden before and after the fall, and we wondered why it was that man so often marred the handiwork of God.

For quite a number of miles our road lay through this despoiled forest. We then entered a damp, dark canyon, so cold we hastily donned our heavy cloaks and coats, and wrapped up in blankets to keep comfortable, while far above our heads the grey light faintly glimmered through the interlaced branches. On one side of the road there was a stream so sluggish that it had formed in pools bordered by coarse sedges.

It was so cold and gloomy that even the birds did not sound a note of praise, although we saw them occasionally flitting from bough to bough and darting across the road before us. An audacious little chipmunk was the only thing that dared make a noise. From the branches which overhung the slimy pools drooped long loops and pendants of ragged grey moss which gave a weird look to the dreary

scene, while away through the dark vistas of the forest we imagined we could discover under the mistletoe-crowned oaks just such places as the ancient Druids would have chosen for their most inhuman rites...

We soon came to a large plain that some time in the past had been swept by the fire. Scattered over it here and there were the bare, lifeless trunks of blackened trees. The ground was covered with dark green bushes, which caused one of the company to say, "That looks very much like a blueberry bog;" and as we reached the bushes another exclaimed, "Blueberries! Blueberries!"

The bushes were loaded with berries, and as it was the first time we had seen any growing since we left New England, we went to gathering the fruit, and when we had eaten all we wanted, we filled pails, pans and everything available with the delicious berries.

What a hearty laugh we had after we gathered at the wagon, for we were an exceedingly blue looking company. As there was no water on the plain we were obliged to be resigned to our blue looks, but we thought if we should meet any one he would conclude water must have been very scarce where we last camped.

The scenery was different now, for we had left the mountains. The trees were not so large and we found hazel and blackberry bushes, but we were too late to share in the nuts and berries. We saw a peculiar looking bush with the nuts growing each in a shell by itself, but about twenty clustered together in a compact ball. They were not quite ripe and we could never learn what they were.

We were very much interested in the different flowers, shrubs and trees and would have lingered longer had we not heard the distant roar of the ocean. As we drew near the coast, expectation was at its height.

We all eagerly desired to look out on the rolling billows of the mighty Pacific. The young people clapped their hands and talked and laughed so heartily that a gentle rebuke from the more sedate was occasionally necessary.

But how exceedingly cold and damp it was! Never before had we experienced such a chilling sensation in the month of July. The fog became so dense that we could see but a few feet in either direction, and the great drops of water fell so constantly from the trees that we almost imagined ourselves in an eastern forest during a shower. But there was something pleasant in the sound of the patter, patter of those drops falling on our wagon-cover from the tops of the trees. The road soon became muddy with pools of water standing here and there, while the horses were as wet as if they had been out in an actual shower, and we were so wrapped in blankets that Ben thought every person we met would think we were traveling mummies...

...We found it necessary to obtain another supply of provisions, for the pure mountain air and the cold sea breeze proved to be wonderful tonics. Never once in all the time we were camping did I hear one of the company complain of having no appetite.

One of our number was dyspeptic. Before leaving home he ate but twice a day, and only crackers, broth, rice, or such light articles of diet usually recommended to invalids. Now he ate three hearty meals consisting of coffee, bacon, hot biscuits and wild game, besides vegetables and fruit.

We bought some delicious honey in the comb, and as it was considerable trouble to pack it safely away, Eda volunteered to hold it. The box leaked, and before we reached our camping ground she was as sweet as she had been blue a few hours before. She took the laughter and joking quite coolly, and said: "Now if I hadn't washed off

the blue-berries I should have been pretty good sauce.” She received immediate assurances that she was saucy enough as it was...

We camped near a pretty little cove and went to bed early, for a gentleman told us it would be low tide about six o'clock in the morning, and a good time to gather abalones.

The roar of the ocean wind and the loud and continuous booming of the waves against the rocky coast were so different from the pleasant music of the forest, which had so long acted as a lullaby in soothing us to rest, that we found it almost impossible to sleep...

CHAPTER III. TREASURES OF THE DEEP.

In the morning we found that the ocean had not lifted her veil, but we did not fret about that, for we were determined to remain at the coast until we could have a good view of the Pacific.

We did not wait for breakfast but made ready to go hunting abalones. When the gentleman came along with an iron rod, and a sack, he said if we would go with him he would show us the best place to find them. He led the way along the cliff and finally began to descend an almost perpendicular path. It looked as if it was a perilous undertaking, but the boys and girls went ahead and told me if I fell I could fall on them so I would be all right.

For some distance the path wound under trailing vines, so dense we could not part them, and so low we could not stand erect. When we came to the ledge we found crevices in it which enabled us to cling with more safety, but it was so damp with the ocean spray that we had to “make haste slowly.”

The rocks left bare by the tide were covered with sea-moss and weeds. The gentleman lifted some of it and pointing to something beneath said, "That is an abalone." We had never seen an abalone, and the object to which he called our attention looked to us like a bulge in the rock covered with a greyish looking moss, but he inserted his rod at one edge and in a moment more it fell upon the sand. Then the girls said, "Ugh! who could eat such a horrid black thing as that?"

The boys gathered about a dozen, then we went to the camp to have our breakfast. They dug the abalone out of the shells and trimmed off the outside until it could hardly be distinguished from a peeled white turnip; then it had to be sliced and beaten like a piece of tough steak, and fried in hot lard. The children liked them very well, but we never ate anything that had the least resemblance in taste to an abalone...

When the tide was in so we could not go down the cliffs to the rocks we visited the little sheltered cove, where we never tired of watching the billows as they came gently gliding up to the beach, one after the other like children at play.

We found a species of kelp with a turnip-shaped bulb, and a root from one to twenty feet long. The boys considered them a good substitute for whips and had a lively time chasing each other up and down the beach. There was quite a variety of shells, and the girls gathered more than we had room to carry...

All along the cliff we noticed that the pines were very different from those we had passed in the seclusion of the forest. Here, instead of being tall and massive and symmetrical, we found them stunted, dwarfed and gnarled. Continually shaken and beaten by the mighty ocean wind, they leaned toward the mountains, and with their branches all extending in the same direction, they seemed to implore assistance from their sheltered and more favored brethren.

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