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THE FREMONTODENDRON OF SEQUOIA

This is the season when the upper foothills of Sequoia National Park are made glorious by the golden bushes of the Fremontodendron, or False Slippery Elm, which occurs only in California. The trees are from 10 to 20 feet high and the blossoms are a mass of large waxen yellow flowers. The fremontodendron is of interest to the average park visitor because it flames on the hillsides, and to the botanist because there is no other tree in the United States resembling it.

The Fremontodendron is native of the Upper Sonora Zone along the western slope of the Sierra Nevada Range in California, between 3,000 and 5,500 feet, and it is found from Lake County, on the north, to Kern County on the south, and thence southward to Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties in the Los Angeles Mountains. It is, however, more plentiful and larger in Fresno, Tulare and Kern Counties. The Fremontodendron, with the ceanothus, redbud, mountain mahogany, chamise and flowering ash, is one of the characteristic trees of the chaparral belt.

Dr. Torrey arranged the plant in a family by itself, scientifically describing it as "Fremontia California", in honor of General John C. Fremont, Pathfinder of the Rocky Mountains and Sierra Nevadas and first United States Senator from California, who discovered it and sent specimens to Washington for identification. Dr. Torrey gave as the type locality, "Sources of the Sacramento, in the northern part of the Sierra Nevadas of California."

The tree is also called "Leatherwood" from the tough fibrous nature of the wood; False Slippery Elm, in that the bark tastes like the bark of the Slippery Elm of the east, and Flannel Bush from the soft flannel nature of the foliage.

So rapidly were these trees being mutilated and destroyed by picnicking parties in Tulare County that in 1923, the county passed an ordinance for their protection.

People who visit the park will now find these beautiful trees in full bloom along the Generals' Highway from Headquarters and near Potwisha and Hospital Rock Camps to Deer Ridge; and on the old North Fork Road between Maple Creek and Colony Mill.