

SEQUOIA NATURE GUIDE SERVICE

The Discovery of Sequoia National Park and the Sequoia
Groves of Big Trees it contains.

Hale D. Tharp, of Three Rivers, California, was the first known white man to discover and explore the region now embraced within the Sequoia National Park and the Sequoia groves of Big Trees it contains.

Mr. Tharp, a native of the State of Michigan and stockman by occupation, located during the summer season of 1856 in the Three Rivers section at the place now known as the "Tharp Ranch", about two and one-half miles below where the village of Three Rivers now stands. He lived on his homestead until his death in 1912. In conversation Mr. Tharp told me that he did not remember the exact date of his first exploration trip, except that it was made during the summer of 1858; and that he made his way into the Giant Forest section of the park by way of the Middle Fork of the Kaweah River and Moro Rock. Mr. Tharp told me of his discovery and exploration of the Three Rivers country and the Sequoia National Park region. This is the account as I obtained it from him on May 25, 1910:

"I first located at my ranch where I now live in the summer of 1856. There were about 2,000 Indians then living along the Kaweah Rivers above where Lemon Cove now stands. Their camps extended up along the rivers on the south Fork to the Cahoon Ranch, the North Fork to Kaweah, the East Fork to Kane's flat, and the Middle Fork to Hospital Rock in Sequoia National Park. The Indian chief was named "Chappo" and he was a fine man. The Indians told me that I was the first white man that had ever come to their country. But few of them had ever seen a white man prior to my arrival. The Indians all liked me because I was good to them. I shot many deer for them to eat as they had no firearms and knew nothing about firearms. I liked the Indians, too, for they were honest and kind to each other. I never knew of a theft or murder amongst them."

"There was abundance of game and other animals in this country when I first came here. Deer were practically everywhere, with lots of bear along the rivers; occasionally a grizzly bear, too. Lions, wolves and foxes were very plentiful. There were a great many ground squirrels, cottontail and jackrabbits; quail were seen in covies of thousands. I never saw elk or antelope in the Three Rivers country. There were plenty of fish in the rivers below the rapids, lake trout and suckers; once in a while a speckled trout could be caught."

"Accompanied by two Indians, I made my first trip into the Giant Forest during the summer of 1858. We went in by the way of the Middle Fork and Moro Rock and camped a few days at Log Meadow, after which we came out by the same route that we went in. I do not remember the dates that we were there, but I carved with my knife on the big hollow redwood log my name and the date on the same day that we got there. These figures and my name should still show. When we arrived at Log Meadow there were a great many deer and a few bear in the meadow, which paid but little attention to us other than through curiosity. The deer came up all around our camp and looked at us, and some of the bears sat upright in order to get a good look at us. I shot a small buck for camp meat. This shot did not seem to frighten the other deer or any of the bears. I had two objects in making this trip. One was for the purpose of locating a high summer range for my stock; and the other was due to the fact that stories the Indians had told me of the "Big Tree" forest caused me to wonder, so I decided to go and see."

"I made my second exploration trip into Giant Forest during the summer of 1860, and by the same route that I went the first time. On this second trip I took with me John Swanson. We camped one night at Log Meadow, then went on over into the Kings River Canyon, returning again to Log Meadow after a period of about two weeks. In the course of our journey Swanson got one of his legs badly injured. The leg became so badly swollen and pained him so terribly that he could not walk. I moved him to Hospital Rock, where the Indians doctored him. They bound his wounds with hot applications of crushed green jimson leaves and

bear's fat, which soon relieved him and by the third day he was practically well and we went home. A few days after our return we took a trip up the East Fork to Mineral King and back down the South Fork by way of Hockett Meadow. So far as I am aware I am the first white man who ever visited either the Sequoia National Park or the Three Rivers region."

"By the spring of 1861, a few white men had come to the Three Rivers country, and I decided it was about time for me to begin occupying the Giant Forest range in order to hold it. So when summer came I drove some horses up to Log Meadow, where I left them all summer. John Swanson and George Swanson, my step-sons, helped me drive in. George was just a small boy then. The next day after we arrived there we all went over and climbed to the top of Moro Rock. We came back to Three Rivers by the way of Alta Meadow and the Middle Fork. We saw hundreds of deer, grouse, quail and a few bear on our trip. We also saw six of the mountain gray wolves."

"From the year 1861 up to 1890, when the park was created, I held the Giant Forest country as my range, and some of my family went there every year with stock. When the land up there was thrown on the market, with other men we bought large holdings, some of which Nort, my son, still owns."

Prior to the time that I obtained the above statement from Mr. Tharp, and on several occasions since, I have conferred with the various early day settlers of Tulare County, and the Three Rivers district, regarding Mr. Tharp as being the first white man to discover and explore the Three Rivers and park country. All persons whom I have approached on the subject are quick to affirm Mr. Tharp as being the first white man in the discovery and the one to whom credit is justly due.

The private holdings of lands in Giant Forest, referred to in Mr. Tharp's statement, have since been acquired by purchase, and the title thereto now rests with the United States Government.

Owing to his truthfulness and honor, Mr. Tharp was a man who was honored and liked by all who knew him. He passed away at his home near Three Rivers on November 5, 1912, age 83 years. He leaves children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, all of whom now live in the vicinity of Three Rivers.

According to all information obtainable, Mr. Tharp was the first white man to discover and explore the Sequoia National Park, the first to disclose its wonderlands to the world. Such is the honor to which he is entitled and it should be given him.

Hale Tharp built a unique summer home at Giant Forest, and one as comfortable as it was unique. It is a log cabin structure, the design of which but few people are accustomed to seeing, consisting as it does of a huge hollow Sequoia log fitted with door, window and stone fireplace. This fallen tree is 24 feet in diameter at the butt, and is estimated as having been 311 feet in height when it fell; as the topmost portion is now gone. The hollowed out portion of the log in which Mr. Tharp lived consists of a room $56\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length and 8 feet high in front, tapering to 4 feet in height and width at the rear.

This house-in-a-log tree is now being carefully preserved by the National Park Service as one of the antiques of the park. The Three Rivers' Womens Club has assisted in its restoration.

On this same hollow log there is found an inscription, which reads as follows: "H. D. Tharp, 1858." This bears out Mr. Tharp's statement relative to the carving of his name and the date on the log on his first trip into the park and the Giant Forest section.

It is evident from the above, that Mr. Tharp was not only the first white man to discover and explore the Sequoia National Park region, but as well the first to live in the park or discharge firearms within the reservation.