

Bulletin No. 5  
February 17, 1925.

By: Walter Fry, In Charge,  
Nature Guide Service,  
Sequoia National Park.

Stencil No. 59

Historic Series

## SEQUOIA NATURE GUIDE SERVICE

### HOSPITAL ROCK IN THE SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK

It is the glory of the Sequoia National Park that it contains not alone the mightiest forest and groves of California Big Trees (*Sequoia gigantea*) but also many other regions of majestic scenery and historical interest. Not the least of these is the noble canyon of the Kaweah River, a stream which tumbles within a few miles from the 13,000 foot peaks of the Great Western Divide down to the oak and yucca clad foothills of the Three Rivers district.

About six miles above park headquarters at Alder Creek, near the north bank of the Middle (or main) Fork of the Kaweah River, stands Hospital Rock. This mammoth glacial boulder is about sixty feet long and twenty feet thick; and it overhangs in such a way that there is a circular room under one side. This natural dwelling place is thirty feet long and seven feet high. Over fifty people might sit in this room and, indeed, in the days when Hospital Rock was a great Indian Rancheria the room was used for tribal gatherings.

#### A SCENIC AMPHITHEATER

Just one glance at this Hospital Rock country is all that is necessary to convince one of its great importance as an Indian rancheria. It is one of the most beautiful spots of the Sierras. Situated at an elevation of 2,600 feet, it is poised beside the beautiful tree and vine bordered canyon of the Kaweah River, a brawling, foaming torrent. Moro and Castle Rocks, like guarding sentinels, stand a little to the eastward on either side of the canyon, and lift their colossal domes heavenward from 4,000 to 6,500 feet above the river. At Hospital Rock the canyon widens out with sloping expanse to about 4 miles in width and over 4000 feet in depth. The lower slopes are heavily studded with 6 varieties of acorn bearing oaks as well as other graceful deciduous trees; while the upper crests are bordered with heavy forests of pine and sequoia. It is in this canyon that most of the wild animals of the region for miles around are forced to spend the winter months when deep snow clothes the higher country. In the river fish abound. Thus it will be seen that the Indians of this camp were in a position to obtain both acorns, deer and bear meat and fish with but little effort.

#### A HISTORICAL SPOT

Of great historic interest is this Hospital Rock and surrounded by an atmosphere of romance. Before the white man came to California, and for an all too short period thereafter, this region was an Indian rancheria. Indeed it was one of the principal gathering places for Indians in this part of the State. The massive natural house served as a storehouse for supplies, a hospital for the sick and for new born babes. Here was the seat of government for over two thousand Indians. Here was the house of the chiefs and medicine men of the tribe, where councils were held, marriage ceremonies solemnized and funeral rites given. It was here that the men of the tribe returned from long hunting expeditions to rest and recuperate. Here it was that campfires were kept burning the year round. The Indians belonged to the Potwisha tribe; the dividing line between this tribe and the valley Indians of the Watchumna tribe was at Lime Kiln Hill, Lemon Cove.

PICTOGRAPH RECORDS OF PAST DAYS

On the south side of the rock there is a smooth perpendicular surface, 20 feet by 30 feet, where the boulder split in twain by the Master Mason of the Universe. This expanse of smooth rock is covered by hieroglyphics and picture paintings, dark red in color, and for which no key or interpretation has yet been found. Latter day Indians claim that these markings were made before their time and that they cannot interpret them; nor do they even know the ingredients and material used for painting these seemingly indestructible pictures. It would therefore seem that a prehistoric people inhabited this spot, a people antedating perhaps by centuries the Indians who were there when the white men came in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although this region shows signs of having been inhabited down through the ages, no written records were left except these hieroglyphic and pictograph writings which have not yet been deciphered.

For hundreds, yes, perhaps thousands of years those primeval peoples lived out their lives according to their destiny at this Hospital Rock rancheria with little or nothing to disturb them. But when white men entered their country and took practically all their land away from them it was a serious and painful matter for the Indians. For then they were compelled to surrender their birthplace and the home they loved so well to a stronger and more enlightened race or people. This they did without bloodshed or armed resistance. They left their lands to our keeping with tearful eyes and melancholy thoughts and departed forever to other lands - we know not where. For the tribe is now practically extinct, and not one remains in the vicinity to tell its sad story.

In view of the long occupancy of this region by Indians, both prehistoric and modern, it may be expected that when its archaeology is carefully studied many interesting facts and objects will be disclosed. Meanwhile all excavation or disturbance of existing conditions is forbidden under National Park Service regulations.

EARLIEST SETTLER'S STORY

Regarding the Indians former occupancy of the Hospital Rock country and the Three Rivers region, this is best given in a report from the late Hale D. Tharp, who was the first white person to enter the Three Rivers country and the Sequoia National Park region. This is the account as I obtained it from him on May 25, 1910:

"When I first came to the Three Rivers country in 1856, there were over 2,000 Indians living along the Kaweah River above Lemon Cove. Their headquarters camp was at Hospital Rock. That was the seat of government where all tribal business was transacted and and festivities were held. Chief Chappo, his council, and the medicine men lived there. The camp was never vacated during either winter of summer, and the campfires were kept burning continually. All the Indians who were sick, extremely old or crippled, as well as most of the women with young babies remained there the year round. During the summer months a great many of the Indians went to the higher mountains, but the camp at Hospital Rock was always kept filled."

"I had my first trip to the Hospital Rock camp during the summer of 1858. Chief Chappo and I had become the very best of friends and he asked me to come up and stay with him over night. He sent down two young Indian men to pilot me in, as there were no trails in the country, just Indian foot-paths. I went on horse-back and it took me about 8 hours to work my way in, the distance being about 18 miles from my Three Rivers ranch. When I arrived at the Camp, Chappo and his men extended me a cordial welcome and gave me the best his camp afforded. He called an individual in the camp and with much dignity and long ceremony introduced

me to all. There were over 600 Indians then living at the camp. My arrival at the camp excited the curiosity of most of the Indians, as I was the first white person that had ever visited their camp, and only a few of their leaders had ever seen a white person before. As for myself, I did not attract half so much attention as did my horse and saddle, my weapons, and the clothing that I wore. These were all new to most of the Indians, for they had never seen such things before.

On the following morning Chappo showed me all through his camp and explained its many advantages over that of others. It was the cleanest camp that I have ever seen. He showed me the house rock, the spring, the river, the sweat houses, and what extra stores of food, clothing, and other supplies he had. The supplies were all stored nicely under the rock, leaving just enough space for two beds. In one of the beds was a woman with her leg broken, and in the other a woman with a very young baby. The bed mattresses were bear robes, and the quilt coverings were of nice white buckskin. Nearly all the Indians wore buckskin suits. They had great quantities of acorns, meats, skins, medical herbs, and other supplies stored under the rock. There was no smoke on the room ceiling then. This has been caused by the whites camping in there after the Indians left. He showed me the paintings on the rock and asked me to tell him what they meant. He said that none of his people understood them, or knew from what material they were made. He had given orders that none of the Indians should touch them, as undoubtedly they had been put there by some people before their time, and that maybe some day some person would come along and tell him what they meant.

By the spring of 1862 quite a number of whites had settled in the Three Rivers section, and the Indians were gradually forced out. Then, too, the Indians had contracted contagious diseases from the whites, such as measles, scarlet fever and smallpox and they died off by the hundreds. I helped to bury 27 in one day up on the Sam Kelly place. About this time Chief Chappo and some of his men came to see me, and asked me to try and stop the whites from coming into their country. When I said that was impossible, they all sat down and cried. They told me that their people loved this country, did not want to leave it, and knew not where to go. A few days later Chappo came to me with tears in his eyes and told me that they had decided not to fight the whites, but would leave the country. From that time on, they moved out little by little and from time to time until all were gone. I think by the summer of 1865 the Indians had left the district. Their Hospital Rock camp was the last vacated, and they left it clean as a ribbon. For a few years after they left one or two of the Indians would occasionally drift in for just a short while; but this practice soon ceased, and I gradually lost track of them. I don't know what has become of them now. I named the camp Hospital Rock when Everton got shot there in 1873."

#### A HOSPITAL FOR WHITE PEOPLE

Not only has this Hospital Rock been used as a hospital for Indians down through the ages, but of late years it has been used by the white people in the same way.

During the summer of 1860, John Swanson and Hale D. Tharp, while on one of their exploration trips, stayed under this rock for a period of three days and three nights. Swanson had injured one of his legs so that the pain and agony prevented him from going further. The Indians doctored him by binding his wounds with hot applications of crushed green jimson leaves and bear's fat which practically cured the patient within three days.

#### NAMING THE ROCK

The name "Hospital Rock" arose through an accident that befel Alfred Everton while camping there in the autumn of 1873. Mr. Everton and George Cahoon were

hunting and trapping for bear and had put out several set guns. The guns were to be discharged by means of strings attached to the triggers and stretched across the trails for the bear to walk into. Everton, while traveling through the brush accidentally came in contact with the string of one of the guns. He received the load in one thigh, causing a very serious and painful wound, which crippled him for the remainder of his life. Cahoon succeeded in carrying Everton to the rock under which he left him and went to the settlement for assistance. His call for help brought out the following pioneers: Dr. Bradley of Visalia; George Cahoon, Joseph Palmer, George Swanson, Almer Lovelace and Chris Devoe of Three Rivers. These men proceeded to Hospital Rock and brought Everton out on a litter the third day after the accident. As Hospital Rock the place has ever since been known.

Following the Everton tragedy at Hospital Rock, next comes that of James Wolverton, the sick man. It was here that Mr. Wolverton, a pioneer hunter and trapper, was stricken with a groin abscess while living at Hospital Rock during the spring of 1893. Mr. Wolverton, at the time, was employed by Hale D. Tharp and his son Nort as a lookout to prevent their stock from drifting out of the mountains from above. Mr. Wolverton's failure to come down to the Tharp ranch for supplies, a distance of some 18 miles, on the date agreed upon, caused Nort to suspect that something unusual had happened - so he went to the Rock to see. Upon his arrival he found Wolverton lying prostrate and helpless, and immediately returned to the settlement for assistance. The following named individuals are the persons who helped Mr. Tharp carry the patient to his home: Dick Lane, B. W. Trauger, and U. B. Luce, all of Three Rivers. After a short stay at the Tharp ranch, Mr. Wolverton was taken to the Harry Trauger ranch about 6 miles above Three Rivers, at which place he died and was buried. Thus ended the calamities at Hospital Rock.

#### THE HERITAGE OF THE INDIANS

It is a strange coincident and not without interest that in the creation of the Sequoia National Park, this spot, which may be termed the capitol grounds and capitol building for the government of a tribe of Indians, was, inadvertently, included within its boundaries. Nevertheless, such was fortunately the case, and Hospital Rock will hereafter be held by posterity in sacred memory of a people that has passed from the face of the earth.

Although the Indians that inhabited the Hospital Rock country were forced to surrender their homes to the white invaders, in so doing they left an heritage which we, as white citizens, are morally bound to respect. This is the heritage left by the Indians: they turned over to the white race the beautiful canyon of the Kaweah River, the spacious amphitheater around Hospital Rock, and the noble forests of sequoia, pine and fir which crown the whole; and when they bequeathed it to us they left it with all of its natural resources and scenic beauties unimpaired. Of such an heritage every American citizen should feel justly proud; and he should feel the responsibility of handing down that scenic heritage unspoiled to future generations of Americans.

Can the white man do less than the untutored Indian? Is progress only measured by mechanics and man made things? What profiteth a nation if it build city upon city at the cost of destroying all natural beauty? Let the many civilizations which have arisen - aye and fallen - answer those questions.

As for Americans, they have answered those questions by creating the federal reservations, known as National Parks, and are thereby declaring that the preservation of beauty has its place in our national life.