

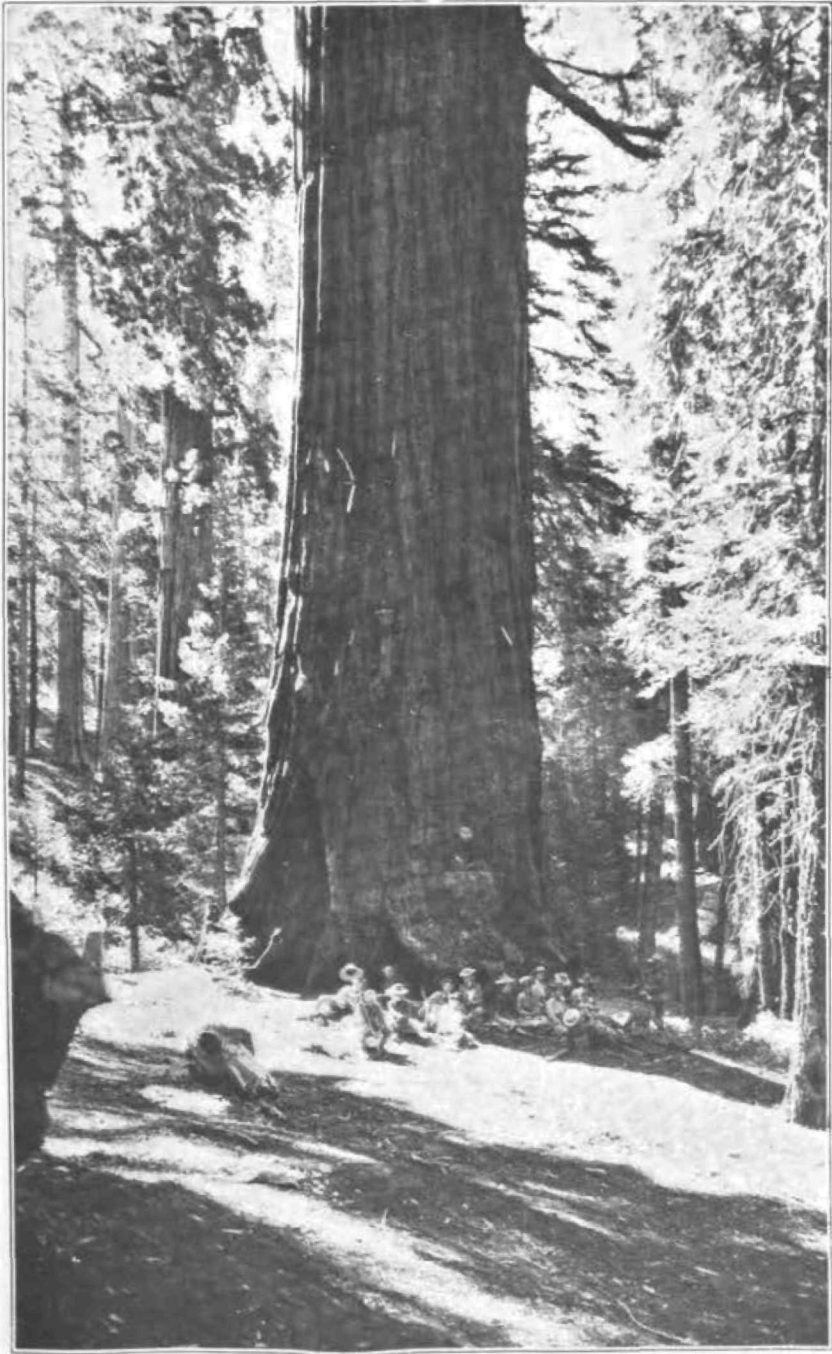
THE SIERRA CLUB OUTING TO THE KINGS RIVER CANYON.

By MARION RANDALL PARSONS.

At half past two on the morning of July first our special train drew up at Lemon Cove, a fruit growing community on the eastern border of the San Joaquin Valley. Out of the Pullmans we tumbled, but half awake and only hastily shaken into the unfamiliar camp garb, some of us still fumbling with neckties and belt fastenings as we ran. We stumbled through the darkness to store our suitcases in the baggage room, found places in the waiting stages, and then we were off and the outing had fairly begun.

The drive through the valley by moonlight was delightful. Dawn found us climbing among parched brown hills where oaks and sycamores were sparsely scattered and where the few streams ran sluggish and warm. Higher and higher we climbed, among hot, chaparral-clad hills till towards noon the pines began to appear. We stopped for lunch at Juanita Ranch, a well-kept farmstead lying in broad meadows where some superb oaks grew; and then it was forward again, still climbing. Now we were in the true pine belt of the Sierra. Giant yellow and sugar pines were mingled with silver firs and libocedrus, and underneath grew a thick carpet of bear clover whose pungent odor, mingled with the aromatic breath of the sun-heated pines, brought many a former forest day vividly to mind. Here a few belated flowers were blooming—pink gillias, godetia, prettily called "Farewell to Spring," and long-stemmed, delicate Mariposa tulips growing in wonderful profusion in the grassy open spaces.

Then as the afternoon waned we entered the sequoia forest. Walking ahead of the toiling stages and their accompanying cloud of dust, one could sense the wonderful silence and peace and serene calm of these ancient trees, oldest of living things on our globe, that were standing here in the full glory of their prime when Pan was still worshipped on earth. The afternoon winds that stir the grasses and flowers to sudden merry



A GIANT SEQUOIA

Photo Edward T. Parsens

confusion pass unnoticed by their majestic crowns; fires that exterminate the lesser forests leave the sequoias unharmed. The marks of many a conflict with this dread destroyer scar their massive boles, it is true; but so seldom does forest fire or lightning fell one of these noble trees, that we, whose lives are of such brief span, thinking of the cycles that have passed them by may almost class them among the immortals.

Just beyond the sequoia forest, at an altitude of about 7,000 feet, lay Quail Flat, the camp for the night. There was little at first glance to recommend it beyond the solemn welcome of Charley Tuck, the incomparable Chinaman who has been our chef on every outing, and the ingratiating grins of his five heathen assistants, tenderfeet all, for Charley Tuck brooks no rivals and never engages a popular assistant the second time. Dunnage bags were quickly unpacked, dinner was despatched, and soon we were ready for the first night under the stars.

Tramping began the next day. A rise of a few hundred feet took us out of the zone of the pines into a red fir forest, then through a long stretch of tamarack-pines where a stream ran brightly between grassy banks, till the trail plunged down hill into the canyon of Boulder Creek. Here many of us lunched and then it was upward again, among meadows where larkspur and daisies were blooming, to Horse Corral Meadow where a beautiful camp was made among the Jeffrey pines.

A short hour's walk in the morning brought us to the brink of the Kings River Canyon, one of the huge, glacier-carved canyons of the Sierra, of structure similar to that of the Yosemite Valley, Hetch Hetchy, or the Kern. Some of us climbed the few hundred feet to Lookout Point, gaining thereby a splendid view of the great mountains to the north and east that we were later to climb. The rest of us hastened down the 3,000-foot drop to the canyon floor. Every now and then, between the spreading arms of the sugar pines, we glimpsed the distant ranges of snowy mountains. Later, when the growing canyon walls shut out the far horizon, we looked down on the valley floor where the pigmy trees dotted the meadows in tiny splotches of dark green and the river wound among them a narrow ribbon of silver. Down to the river at last—how our knees did ache! A long descent is worse than a climb when muscles are soft with the winter's idling. The

swift, strong river looked mild mannered enough to those of us who remembered it in surging flood four years ago. The water was indeed uncommonly low and the season very far advanced. But the fishermen smiled an anticipatory smile and were happy.

Five miles above the point where the trail enters the canyon permanent camp was established under the Grand Sentinel in a grove of libocedrus and yellow and sugar pines. Here four days passed uneventfully but happily. Fishing parties rambled up stream to Mist Falls or down stream to Roaring River where, in the shadow of cliffs half a mile high, they lunched most luxuriously on rainbow trout.

But to most of the one hundred and seventy people there assembled permanent camp meant little more than a headquarters, where, between side trips, clean clothing might occasionally be procured, or boots be cobbled—a place of fabulous luxury where bread and meat were consumed daily and where the construction of one's personal camp was a serious matter involving the collection of pine needles or fir boughs instead of that hasty ceremony of casting down one's sleeping bag on the least precipitous, least bouldery spot in sight so characteristic of the more nomadic life of the side trips.

So, only waiting for the Los Angeles division to reach camp, nearly seven-eighths of the entire party set forth for a week's sojourn in the high country in the vicinity of Bullfrog Lake.

About two miles above the Grand Sentinel the Kings River branches. To the north lies Paradise Valley and the upper waters of the Kings, while eastward lies Bubbs Creek Canyon and the main traveled trail to Bullfrog and Kearsarge Pass, one of the oldest trails in the region. Half way up Bubbs Canyon, at the base of the massive pile of sculptured granite known as the West Vidette, the stream again forks. The right branch, East Creek, leads to the base of Mount Brewer; our trail still followed Bubbs Creek eastward. Passing the northern flank of the West Vidette and that playground for the water ouzel, Bubbs Falls, we came to Vidette Meadows where we left the main trail to establish camp half a mile up stream in an open forest between the Kearsarge Pinnacles and the pyramid-like East Vidette.

Plate XIV.



Photo Marlon Randall Parsons
EAST VIDETTE FROM BULLFROG LAKE

Plate XV.



Photo Marlon Randall Parsons
MT. STANFORD AND JUNCTION PEAK, SHOWING THE PASS

Timberline in the southern Sierra reaches an altitude of 11,000 feet and at 10,000 feet camping is comfortable enough though the nights are apt to be frosty. As no tents need be carried the problem of shifting camp is much more easily solved than in the rainier northern mountains, and an hour's work suffices to make camp habitable. The transportation question, long a source of infinite annoyance and discomfort, has at last been settled for us by the good services of a most competent head packer who has brought his train of sixty animals and his corps of men to the highest degree of efficiency. This prompt service of the packtrain, while adding much to the comfort of us Sierrans, takes something from that picturesque element of uncertainty that lent so much charm to the after recollections of our early outings.

However, this first night at the Vidette camp held an amusing flavor of those early times, pleasant to remember now. The packtrain had had a hard journey—heavily laden with provisions for a week and with twenty pounds per head of personal dunnage for a party of one hundred and fifty, it had traveled that day sixteen uphill miles over a very rough trail gaining more than 5,000 feet in altitude. One division, that including in its packs the commissary kettles, was somewhat behind the rest. The stoves were set up, fires lighted in them, provisions set forth ready for cooking, but still no kettles were forthcoming. The imperturbable “Fryer” Tuck went calmly about his preparations, directed the broiling of the plentiful supply of trout that had been brought in, and displayed no anxiety about the ultimate outcome. Not so the hungry Sierrans, notably the tenderfeet, who had no data concerning the infallibility of the packtrain and who were visibly perturbed. One by one, with specious offers of assistance, they came behind the dead line dividing kitchen from dining room only to be ignominiously expelled. Longingly they lingered near the bread slicers and the butterers thereof; greedily they watched the sizzling trout. At last they secured plate and cup and sat down in the immediate vicinity of the kitchen to await developments. Meanwhile the delayed division had unostentatiously come in. The kettles were filled and set on the stoves and before the hungriest tenderfoot had dreamed of expecting it, hot soup, rice and tomatoes were ready to be served. Then indeed, not with their wonted dignity, not like real gentle-

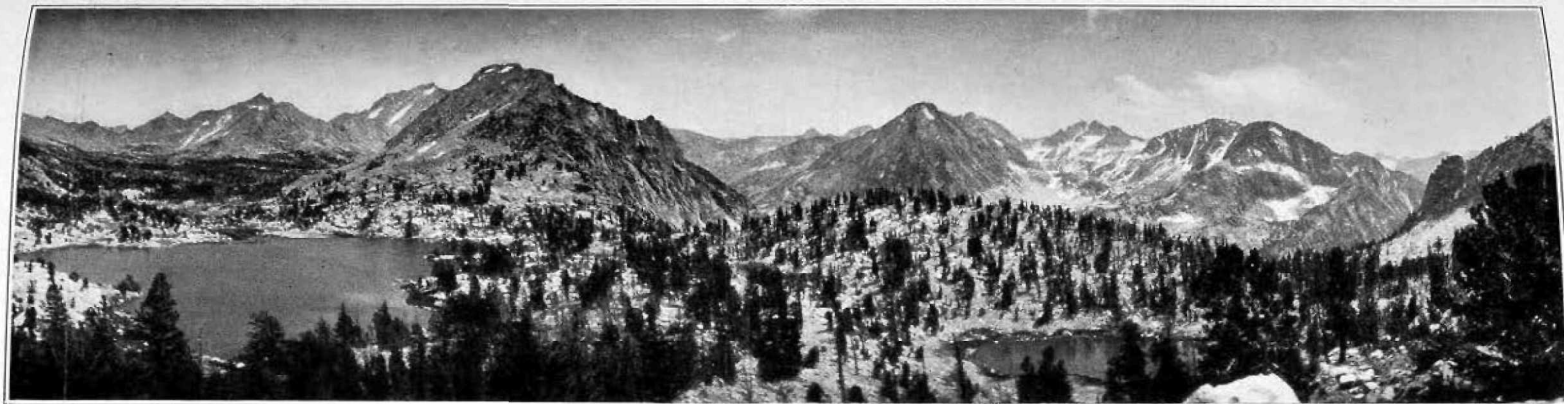
folk did they await the serving. Scrambling to their feet and emitting loud cries of joy, they ran for places in line and gloated visibly over their filled plates.

The most notable event of our stay at Vidette Camp was the attempt to get pack animals and fish cans over the Kings-Kern Divide by means of a pass between Junction Peak and Mount Stanford. A group of knapsackers planned to cross this pass afoot, climb Mount Whitney (14,501 ft.) and return by way of Harrison Pass and Mount Brewer. The plan was to take along a couple of pack animals and try to transplant some of the famous golden trout from Whitney Creek to the Kings watershed. Unfortunately the attempt had to be abandoned as the southern side of the pass was found to be too difficult. So the animals were sent back and the knapsackers pursued their way alone.

The rest of us found plenty to occupy our attention for a week. Ascents of University Peak (13,588 ft.), Rixford (12,856), Gould (13,001), Keith (13,990) and Stanford (13,983), trips to the Kearsarge Pass, to Charlotte and Bullfrog Lakes, to Center Basin and the beautiful group of lakes lying between the West and East Videttes were made by many parties, and the latter peak was conquered by two young men, who, finding no records on its summit, could claim the honor of a first ascent.

On breaking camp at Vidette Meadows a party of about fifty journeyed up East Creek and made the ascent of Mount Brewer (13,577 ft.), a mountain commanding one of the finest views in the Sierra as it stands somewhat away from the main summit crest. Several other parties, about twenty people in all, knapsacked across country, over Glenn Pass, to Rae Lake, making camp there for several days before joining their companions in Paradise Valley.

The main party returned to the Sentinel camp, remained but a day, and then started out again, up the Kings to its junction with Woods Creek in Paradise Valley. Here a camp was established for another week. Goat Mountain was climbed (12,203 ft.) and Arrow Peak (12,927) and then calamity overtook us, for it rained, not the brief afternoon thunder shower that one expects to encounter once at least during the outing, but an outrageous, unheard of downpour that lasted from eleven in the morning until nine at night. Motley, indeed was



BULLFROG LAKE FROM THE CHARLOTTE TRAIL, KEARSARGE PASS (extreme left), UNIVERSITY PEAK, KEARSARGE PINNACLE, EAST VIDETTE, AND WEST VIDETTE

Photo Edward T. Parsons

Plate XVII.



FROM BASE OF FINN DOME EASTWARD OVER RAE LAKE, BLACK MOUNTAIN (left), GOULD, GLENN PASS (extreme right)

Photo Edward T. Parsons

the wear that day for with a twenty pound limit on baggage ingenuity was hard pressed to find the wherewithal to keep dry. Some improvised hooded capes out of their duunage bags; some folded newspaper shawls about their shoulders; others made umbrellas of rather restricted area but unlimited water-shedding capacity (down the back of the neck) out of tin basins and baking pans; and one fair lady who was not altogether enamoured of camp life made an anomalous picture of misery wrapped in an oilsilk bed-cover of vivid and giddy yellow. But the star, perhaps, was the staid Englishman who wore his collapsible bucket on his head and shrouded his shoulders in a capacious bath towel.

It was uncomfortable of course, but not too much so for us to make merry over it nor to enjoy its picturesqueness—the dozen campfires glowing among the trees, each one of which was the center of a lighthearted, laughing group of mountaineers, improvising verses and songs fitted for the occasion. There was a supper party even, where barbecued ham was consumed between song and story. And then the stars shone out and we could go to rest.

After a day's delay, during which the weather fulfilled all expectations and obligingly cleared, the majority of the party started up Woods Creek for Rae Lake.

No spot in all the Sierra can surpass Rae Lake. It lies close under a circle of high, beautifully sculptured, wonderfully colored mountains, a long, narrow lake, divided midway by a promontory where twisted, storm-beaten pines grow among the rocks. Northward the mountain walls stand apart revealing the canyon of Woods Creek and the distant peaks beyond, all watched over by that rugged guardian of the lake, Fin Dome. Between the tiny islands that dot the iridescent surface of the water sparkling ripples play, shivering the images of the painted mountains and chasing the shadows of the passing clouds, those glorious troops of luminous cumuli that daily journey across the paths of the sky.

Another charm, too, Rae Lake boasts—its trout are of phenomenal size and abundance, and nowhere else is there such a paradise for fishermen. Two beautiful days and two moonlight nights quickly passed, days spent in fishing along the deeply indented lake shore and in exploring the nearby Sixty Lake Basin. Three men climbed Fin Dome, presumably a first

ascent as no records exist of a previous attempt. Then we started back again, down past the domes and spires of the Woods Creek Canyon, past its meadows, shoulder high with columbine, monkshood and tiger lilies, through Paradise Valley and past Mist Falls to the Sentinel camp again.

So much more could be told of those eventful four weeks—how some of us made a sixty-mile detour from the Paradise camp across Pinchot Pass and the headwaters of the South Fork of the Kings River, over Ruskin Pass and down Cartridge Creek to the Middle Fork of the Kings and back by way of Granite Pass; how some climbed Split Mountain, southernmost peak of the Palisade group; how others visited Tehipite Valley and returned by Happy Gap; how others still explored Roaring River Basin and Deadman Canyon. What wonderful campfire entertainments we had too, the prizefight and the circus, the most ingenious shows that were ever conceived in the mind of Sierran or costumed from his inexhaustible dnnuage bag. All too soon it was over and we were leaving the alpine meadows and valleys behind us and returning to the forest country, on the homeward trail.

Taken as a whole this tenth outing was perhaps the most successful the Sierra Club has ever held. The details of management were less exacting than on last summer's outing where only once during our four week's circuit of the Yosemite National Park did we spend more than five nights in the same spot, the main camp being shifted fourteen times. Never before, certainly, have we traversed so great an area of country—from Quail Flat to Kearsarge Pass, from the Palisades to Mount Whitney—and this is the more noteworthy in that this region is the most rugged in all California, much of it as yet untraversed by trails, while many of those trails marked on the government maps are old sheep routes for years fallen into disuse and now hardly to be traced. But to many of us untrodden paths are the most alluring and the days spent in the wild, lonely regions in the very heart of the Sierra are the golden ones that we best love to recall.