Chaffee Allen

Unexplored!

Allen Chaffee

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INTRODUCTION

A pack-burro camping trip in an unexplored region of the high Sierras results in a series of adventures for three boys in the late teens, a young Geological Survey man and the old prospector who guides them.

They meet bears and catch rainbow trout, are carried to fight fire by the Forest Service Air Patrol, and trail the incendiaries through a labyrinthian limestone cave. They ride in a lumber camp rodeo and experience earthquakes and avalanches. And in the glacier-gouged canyons, the giant Sequoias, and sulphur springs, they trace the story of the geological formation of the earth, and its evolution from the days of dinosaurs.

CHAPTER I
THE RODEO

Ted Smith, flinging his long legs off a frisky bay, grinned delightedly as his eye caught a flag-decked touring car.

"Are you riding?" called the boy at the wheel.

"Sure AM!" drawled the ranch boy. "How about yourself?"

"Betcher life, Old Kid!" Ace King flung himself to the ground, disclosing the fact of his new leather chaps – a contrast to Ted's overalls. Greetings followed between Ted and Senator King in the back seat, and Pedro Martinez, a black-eyed young fellow who sat a pinto pony alongside.

The slanting rays of California sunshine were fanned by a breeze from Huntington Lake, as the crowd sifted about the corral fence at Cedar Crest. The prevailing khaki of the dusty onlookers gave way at intervals to a splash of color. An Indian in a purple shirt was borrowing the orange chaps of another broncho-buster; he had drawn number two from the hat. Most of the cowmen offset their "two-quart" sombreros with brilliant-hued bandannas knotted loosely at their throats. A few wore chaparreras in stamped leather, and a few in goatskin – red or black or tan – though most let it go at plain blue overalls. One of the machines drawn up beside the soda-pop stand fluttered a flag on its nose. For the Fourth was to be marked by a reading of the Declaration of Independence before the rodeo and barbecue. (The day had begun with a Parade of Horribles, in which every last lumberman took part, chanting the marching song to an accompaniment of well-belabored frying-pans.)

Unbidden, a band of unspeakably unwashed Digger Indians, attired in gay and ill-assorted rags, appeared, and seated themselves on the opposite hill-side, beaming vacuously as the ox was put in the pit to roast (together with two smaller carcasses that the camp cook winkingly designated as wild mutton, though he was careful to bury the antlers against the possible advent of the Forest Ranger).

The rodeo master, a megaphone-voiced blond giant, in high-heeled riding boots and spurs that made him limp when he walked, careened up and down the dusty field on a high-stepping bay, while two lasso men in steel-studded belts and leather cuffs helped round the range stock into the adjoining small corral.

An unbroken two-year-old with wild, rolling eyes tried to climb the fence when the rope tightened on his throat, and a sleek mule kicked out in a way that left a red mark on the flank of a lean white mare. Then one of the bulls in a separate corral shoved his head under the lower of the two log bars that fenced him in and lifted – lifted, – but could not break through.

"Riding, old Scout?" Ted asked the young Spanish-Californian.

"'Fraid I'd ride the ground," admitted Pedro, with a gesture of his plump, manicured hands.

"Yeh! – Saw-horse's HIS mount!" jollied Ace, though the pinto looked by no means spiritless. (And to himself he added: "Likely promised his mother not to. Gee! I'd like to cut him loose from her apron strings for about three months and see how he'd pan out!")

"*He's* got too much sense to risk his bones," championed the Senator, (a heavy, florid man with a leonine mass of white curly hair and Ace's daring black eyes).

Just then a petite young woman rode up, her bobbed curly hair and sun-flushed cheeks topping a red silk blouse joined to her khaki riding breeches by a fringed sash that reached half way to her elkskin boots.

"I say, Rosa, are you riding?" greeted Ace. The girl shook her head merrily. "Dad, that's Pierre La Coste's sister, – you know, he's fire-lookout on Red Top. Used to be one of our Scouts when we lived in Peach Cove."

"Yeh, we used to call him Pur-r-r," supplemented the ranch boy.

"And that's the horse Ranger Radcliffe's been trying to give her," added Ace, sotto voce. "Isn't he a beauty?"

"And she won't have him?" laughed the Senator.

"Won't have man or beast."

Ace, now studying geology at the University of California, though he had traveled widely since the old ranch days, still counted Ted, sandy haired, thin and freckled, struggling to make his mother's fruit ranch a go, his chum. Pedro, a neighbor of the old days, was his roommate in the fraternity house at Berkeley. All three ran to greet Norris, a young man in the uniform of the U. S. Geological Survey (son of the Forest Supervisor), who now appeared, galloping beside Ranger Radcliffe. For he was to pilot them on a camping trip into the high Sierras in a week or two.

The first entry was just being led forth to be saddled as the fifth and final member of their expedition arrived on the scene, afoot, – Long Lester, a lanky, bewhiskered old prospector in soft felt hat, clean but collarless "b'iled shirt," vest, cartridge belt and corduroy "pants," thrust into the tops of ordinary hob-nailed boots.

"Well, you broncho-busters, out in the center!" megaphoned the man on the big bay. "Five more riders here! – Two-fifty to ride and seven-fifty more to go up!" Three men came forward. "We want two more entries. If you pull-leather or fall off, two-fifty. If a fellow rides a bull with one hand hold, he gets seven-fifty. Ten dollars if you go up!"

Ace and Ted exchanged glances as they started forward.

"You're sure courtin' trouble," called the Senator.

"I reckon I am," grinned Ted, "but I'm broke."

"You'll have to pay your winnings to get your bones mended."

"I'll take a chance!"

King laughed. Most of the horses he recognized as having been ridden before. But he was secretly resolved if Ace drew a bad one, to exercise his parental authority.

The chums drew from the hat, Ace taking the last name. He started as he looked at his slip. "The white-faced bull," read Ted over his shoulder.

"Gee! Don't tell Dad!" breathed Ace. "What's yours?"

"Spitfire!"

The older boy emitted a long-drawn whistle.

"All right, broncho boys," megaphoned the starter.

The first entry, rearing and snorting, with two lassos about his neck, had finally been blind-folded and caparisoned.

"Johnny White from Fresno, on Old Ned from Northfork," rang the announcement. An Indian in overalls swung himself into the saddle simultaneously with the snatching away of lassos and blinders.

The horse tucked his head almost between his knees, and leaped into the air, bowing his back and grunting with each jump, while the dust rose till no one could tell whether the rider was on or off. Then the horse galloped to the opposite side of the corral and his unwelcome incumbent was perceived picking himself sheepishly out of the dust.

"Henry Clark from Table Mountain, on the pinto from Cascada," the next entry was shortly announced. The Indian in the purple shirt stepped forward, gorgeous in his borrowed chaps.

"Some buckaroo!" grinned Ted.

The pony, not quite so thin as most of the range stock, blinked startled eyes, and the fire-works began. The gorgeous one, barely surviving the first buck, and seeing himself riding for a fall in all his finery, leapt nimbly to the ground while the pony went on bucking. He landed right side up – with no damage to the purple shirt. A derisive jeer greeted this – fiasco.

"He sure wasn't goin' to dust them ice-cream pants," laughed one of the crowd hanging over the fence. The Indian signified a desire to try again. After a couple more riders were called, he was given the same mount again.

This time he saved his finery by grabbing hold with both hands.

"Pulling leather only gets two-fifty," adjudged the megaphone man.

"He sure had a good hand hold," gurgled Ted. "Pretty hard on the wrists, isn't it, Henry?"

"Wait till we get you a medal!" boomed Ace.

Next came a white rider, who won the nick-name "Easy Money" by riding a mule up with a surcingle, then another Indian, – they were mostly the youngsters working on local pack-trains, – who began by straddling the neck of his mount and ended by going over the animal's head, landing flat on his back. A momentary hush, and the fence lizards began collecting around the limp form. The Indian's round brown face had turned gray.

"Stand back and give 'm air," megaphoned the starter, fanning him with his hat. Some one brought water, then the Indian opened his eyes, and presently signified a desire to get up. He was helped to his feet. "He's all right," was the final verdict as the little group led off the field. "Somebody give 'm a cigarette." The Indian leaned against the corral fence nonchalantly, lighting up, though with fingers that shook the flame out of several matches.

"Gee!" nudged Ace. "Dad's motioning us, and if he knows I've drawn that bull, he'll sure–"

"You're nineteen."

"Aw, he's the Gov'ner, just the same. If you had one you'd see. Let's stick here behind this bunch till my turn comes 'round."

"Sure you'd better try it?" Ted laid a hand on his chum's shoulder.

"Sure thing! What's the use of living if you never take a chance? Besides, you've got a reg'lar rocking-horse yourself, huh?" he scoffed.

"That's all right, I was born ridin'," Ted made light of it.

It was now time for the bay bull. As a saddle swings around on anything but a horse, it is easier to ride bulls and mules with a surcingle. It took three men to get the bull into the saddling pen, two with lassos and one with a pole, but the strap was finally adjusted around his chest, and the mount made.

One Shorty Somebody was the rider. And Shorty rode him, – stuck clear across the corral. But there the bull torpedoed the middle log of the fence and went straight through, scraping Shorty off.

Straight into a startled ring of spectators plowed the enraged beast, sending horses whirling and pedestrians dodging for their lives. The petite Rosa's mount got to dancing, and finally staged a petite runaway on his own account, but Rosa kept her head and a tight rein. A small boy scrambled into a low-branching tree. But three lassos and a dozen mounted men finally headed off the bull and got him into a smaller corral.

Ted looked inquiringly at Ace, but the Senator's son evidently had his blood up. The white-faced bull, meantime, was again trying to thrust his massive shoulders beneath the lower bar.

Two mules came next on the program, one rider bringing his mount to terms so quickly that people were laying bets it was just a pack-mule, while the other stuck when his jumped the fence.

Ranger Radcliffe, galloping back beside Rosa's now docile mount, waved a hand to the boys. Then a murmur rippled through the loungers that encircled the corral, as the white-faced bull was called for. Ace's nerves began to tingle.

This bull had been kept in close confinement for several days past, and it had not improved his temper. They had to throw him to put on the straps.

"Hold him! – Hold him!" at intervals percolated through the hum of voices, as the great brute lay panting in the saddling pen, his eyes ringed with infuriated white, his snorting breath – audible thirty feet away – sending spirals of dust scudding before his nose.

"Well, what do you say? Say it quick! I'm betting on the bull," King was challenging the Ranger, little dreaming who the rider was to be.

This bull was to be ridden with a saddle and one hand hold. The gate of the saddling pen cracked as its occupant tried to rise.

"You folks around the fence, you had better look out!" megaphoned the starter. "This 'ere bull may not look where he's a-goin'!"

The gate cracked again. A woman nearby screamed. Two men with lassos ready waited on either side, their mounts aquiver. Ace's ruddy face had grown strangely lined, but he stood his ground.

"The fellow that rides that bull is sure foolhardy," the Senator was remarking, pulling his hat further over his iron-gray brows against the slant of the sun. Then the Ranger rode up with Rosa, and she was invited to a seat behind the fluttering flag.

"Either that or almighty sandy," amended Radcliffe.

Like a streak of lightning the bull arose, jaws slavering. One mighty crack and he had burst the gate, a plunge and he was plowing his way across the field, trailing a rope that still held his saddle horn. The starter raced after, his big bay holding back with all his might on the rope. The dust blew chokingly into the faces of those on the Senator's side of the corral. Then the bull caught sight of that fluttering red, white and blue.

For one awful instant Rosa found those staring white-rimmed eyes glaring straight into her own. The bull's next leap would carry him over the fence and into the machine. She blanched, but sat silent. Pedro, drawn up beside her on his pinto, felt paralyzed. The Senator threw his engine on as if to back away.

"Hold him! – HOLD him!" shrilled the starter, pounding back. The rope on the saddle horn – would it hold? Then a lasso was thrown, tightening neatly around the hind legs of the runaway.

"Got him stretched now!" came the triumphant shout, as the bull went down with an infuriated snort, and lay there, chest heaving, while the vaqueros made him fast.

"The ride's off, – nobody goin' to ride *him* to-day!" decided the man on the bay. The bull was relieved of his saddle and headed protestingly back into the small corral.

Ace King's face was set in deep lines. He had been all nerved up to his ride. Now that it was off, his knees felt shaky, and he climbed to a seat on the top rail. And Pedro flushed to hide his pallor.

But Ted's time was yet to come. One rider in between, whose horse piled him on the ground, and the announcement came: "Ted Smith from Peach Cove, rides Spitfire from Huntington Lake."

"I'm sorry for that kid," stated Long Lester, who leaned lankily over the gate, thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest. "Want up, little miss?" and he helped a child to a vantage point beside him.

"Go to it, old pal!" Ace thumped the contestant breath-takingly.

"Spitfire! O-o-wah-hoo-o!" bellowed a group of cow-boys, in imitation of the falsetto Indian yell.

"OO-wah-hoo-oo-oo!" the Indians bettered them.

Senator King honked in joyous abandon. Pedro's dark eyes flashed. "Spunky kid!" commented Radcliffe. "I'm betting he'll ride him straight up!"

"He'll be killed!" Rosa shivered.

"Not with those long legs to get a grip with," the Ranger reassured her.

"Ain't that hoss a dinger!" admiringly Long Lester demanded of the assemblage, as Spitfire danced forth with three lassos trying to hold him for the blinders. Again he tried to climb the fence, eyes wide, nostrils quivering.

"I'm just itchin' to ride him," Ted replied to Ace's questioning gaze. Every nerve in his wiry body was keyed electrically. Then the saddle was adjusted, Ted was in the stirrups, and the blinder was jerked free. "R-r-ready! Let 'er go!" was megaphoned.

About that time things began to happen. Spitfire, as if feeling that his reputation needed demonstrating, began to double in his best bucking form.

"*Ride* him, Ted!" yelled Ace. "Hey, Ted rides him, eh?"

"Scratch him!" contributed Long Lester, who believed in spurs. "Say, he's a-scratchin' him up and down! – Ya-hoooooo!" as Ted rode him up again and again, both arms free, slapping him hip and shoulder, hip and shoulder with his sombrero. Zip! —*Zip!*– Zoom! – Around and around they went, the mustang snorting loudly with each bounce, lathering in his effort to unseat his rider. But Ted had grown to his back.

The broncho stopped, exhausted, flanks heaving.

"SOME riding!" gasped Pedro.

Then a shout went up. Ted was champion rider of the rodeo!

To the ranch boy's amazement, he now found his long legs dangling from a seat on the shoulders of his two college friends, while they marched about to the tune of "A Jolly Good Fellow," – Norris himself laughingly joining in the chorus, and Long Lester thumping him breath-takingly between the shoulder blades.

That was the day the camping trip had been planned. It was also the day Ace's little Spanish 'plane, wirelessed from its hanger in Burlingame[1], had given them all a surprise, and a trial sail. The pilot arrived shivering in leather jacket and heavy cap, woolen muffler and goggles, with similar wraps for Ace, whose leather chaps now served a purpose. For the intense cold of the upper levels it was necessary for the pilot to lend his outer apparel, as each of the prospective camp mates in turn took the observer's seat, with Ace piloting.

Ted was used to flying with him, – had, indeed, given him the nick-name which all had now adopted, as a compliment to his exploits as a birdman. But to the other three it was a new experience. He invited Norris first. Their route lay like a map below them, as they winged their way across the sky, steering first due South till the rim of King's River Canyon threatened to suck them down into its depths, then circling to the East till they could see Mt. Whitney rising snow-capped above the surrounding peaks, and back to the waiting boys.

Long Lester ventured next, and as he afterwards expressed it, he thought he was riding on the back of his neck as they soared into the blue deeps above them, while the ocean of the atmosphere tossed them about capriciously. This time Ace, running her into the cold strait above the river, headed her down canyon to within a hundred feet of the forest top, his grit based on sound mechanical training; his daring counterbalanced by his cool headed precision. He tried no stunts, however, as he had promised his father to indulge in no aerial acrobatics under 1,000 feet. When they finally returned to terra firma, right side up with care, the old prospector expressed himself as nowise envious of Elijah.

Pedro belted himself in with a lack of enthusiasm that Long Lester did not fail to note with sympathy, and away they soared, fearlessly on Ace's part, whose eyes, ears and lungs were in the pink of condition. But to the Spanish boy came first a dizzy, seasick feeling, coupled with a conviction that he could not draw breath against the head wind, then a chill that penetrated even the pilot's uniform, as he watched the earth recede beneath them. The motor purred as they gained momentum and the propellers whirred noisily, and the changing air pressures so affected the stability of the light craft that he felt half the time as if they were lying over on their side. He also reflected that, should the engine stall, their descent would be a matter of seconds only. In the dry heat they had been traveling with what seemed terrific speed. He protested once, but Ace did not hear him.

Then in the cold of the higher altitude, their speed was reduced and traveling was smoother. When at last the great white bird dropped back almost on the spot from which they had started, – the distinguishing feat of the Spanish 'plane, – he was almost a convert, though as Lester said, "a little green about the gills." When later the opportunity came to try it again, he abdicated in favor of Ted.

Norris assured them that there is air for 50 miles above the earth, and sometimes a tidal wave of atmosphere reaching as high as 200 miles, though after it gets about 190 degrees below zero, less

[1] Pronounced Blingam.

is known about it. Its density is reduced fully half at 18,000 feet, – half a mile above the highest peaks, like Mt. Whitney, but though the air of high altitudes is more buoyant, the cold none the less reduces the speed of the air cruiser.

While they were eating they discussed their itinerary.

Norris had the large trail maps of both Sierra and Sequoia National Forests. These he laid out and pieced together into one big sheet ten feet long. On these maps were marked out the good camp grounds, and where bears, or deer, quail or grouse, might be found, where supplies were obtainable, or pack and saddle stock, guides and packers, or Forest ranger stations (little cabins flying a flag from their peaks, to make them show up on the map).

There were the "roads passable for wagons," "trails passable for pack stock," and "routes passable for foot travel only." There were areas marked with varying tiny green tufts of grass labeled "meadows where stock grazing is permitted," and "meadows where it is not permitted," "meadows fenced for the free use of the traveling public" and "meadows fenced for the use of Forest Rangers only."

Diminutive green pine trees indicated forest areas particularly interesting, striped red areas signalized National Forest timber sales, cut over or in operation, black triangles denoted Forest Service fire outlook stations, and a drawing that looked like a woodshed showed where Forest Service fire fighting tools had been cached in various out-of-the-way places. "TLP" indicated the free Government telephone boxes, red doughnutty-looking circles meant good mountains to climb, with some indication of the safest routes to the top, areas marked out in red diamonds were labeled as geographically interesting, and those in green as botanically of more than ordinary interest.

A green feathery-looking line meant a canyon, a green triangle a waterfall, a plain green line a stream offering good fishing, and a broken green line a stream stocked with young fish, while an X meant a barrier impassable by fish, though what that meant, not one of them could say.

There were various other marks, such as a hub surrounded by the spokes of a wheel (whatever it was intended for), the key to which explained that from that point a good view was to be obtained.

But what most attracted their attention, all up and down the crest of the Sierra Nevada as it stretched from North, North-West to South, South-East, were the wide green areas "of special scenic interest," most of which was marked "UNEXPLORED!" in great warning red letters.

It was this part of the map that most fascinated the little camping party. Why should they choose a route that was all cut and dried for them, as it were, – where each day they would know when they started out just about where night would find them and what they would meet with on the way? Who wanted their views labeled anyway? That was all very well, very thoughtful of the Forest Service, for inexperienced campers, who would probably never venture into the unknown. But to Ace, the airman, to Ted, with his experienced wild-craft, and to Pedro the romanticist, no less than to the young Yale man whose thirst for far places had led him into the U. S. Geological Survey, the Mystery of the Unexplored called, with a lure that was not to be denied. Long Lester, they knew, was game for anything, – for had he not prospected through these mountains all his life? There was practically no place the sure-footed burros could not go, and there was no danger they were not secretly and wickedly tingling to encounter.

It was a wild region, as rough and as little known as anything from Hawaii to Alaska, – only different. The John Muir Trail, named for the explorer, – a "way through" rather than a trail, – stretched along the crest of the range, the roughest kind of going, (absolutely a horse-back trip, it was generally pronounced), and from its glacier-capped peaks, from 14,500 foot Mt. Whitney, to the even more difficult though less lofty Lyell, ran the Kings' River, North, Middle, and canyoned South Forks, the Kern and the Kaweah, the Merced and the San Joaquin, – to name only the largest.

Unlike the older Eastern ranges, the Sierra is laid out with remarkable regularity, the one great 12,000- to 14,000-foot divide, with its scarcely lower passes, giving off ridges on the Western slope like the teeth of a coarse granite comb. Between ridges, deep, glacier-cut canyons, "yo-semities," (to

employ the Indian name), with their swift, cascading rivers make North to South travel difficult, though one can follow one side of the openly forested canyons to the very crest of the main ridge.

Here and there was a grove of Big Trees, varying in size from the Giant Forest of Sequoia National Park to the few mediocre specimens at Dinkey Creek. But as a rule the hot, irrigated valleys of the Sacramento and San Joaquin gave way to patches of the small oaks and pines of the foothills, and these in turn, several thousand feet higher up the Western slopes, to yellow pine and incense cedar, Sequoias and giant sugar pines. Higher still came the silver fir belt, and after that, the twisted Tamaracks and dwarfed and storm-tossed mountain pines, reaching often in at least a decorative fringe along the rock cracks to the very peaks, all the way up to 12,000 feet. (Tree line in the White Mountains of New Hampshire comes soon after 5,000.) Above that, of course, only snow and ice could clothe the slopes.

Hell-for-Sure Pass was one name that attracted Ace's eye on the map. He judged that it must mean stiff going, – but even had they actually planned to climb that way, he would have preferred to wait and discover for himself the reason for its nomenclature. There was also Deadman Pass, (another name to tickle the imagination), Electra Peak, Thousand Island Lake, The Devil's Post Pile, Volcanic Ridge, Crater Creek, Stairway Creek, Fawn Meadow, – and dangerously near, Bear Meadow, – Vermilion Cliffs, Piute Pass, Disappearing Creek, Lost Canyon, Table Mountain, (reminiscent of the Bret Harte days), Deadman Canyon, (flavoring more strongly of the gold days of '49), and Rattlesnake Creek, (doubtless deserving the title.) – To say nothing of such ordinary features as 13,500 foot University Peak, (a mere wave of the sea of peaks surrounding champions Lyell and Whitney), Diamond Peak, 13,000 feet, Mt. Baxter, likewise around 13,000, Mt. Pinchot, and a score of others (occurring at short intervals in a solid phalanx). Whoever wants to climb a mountain everybody climbs, seemed to be the final verdict of the party. There are other peaks almost as high as Whitney, (certainly quite high enough to suit the most fastidious sportsman), and probably even more difficult of ascent. Why not discover something new under the sun? In other words, why not strike off at random into the Unexplored? They would head right into the thick of the thickest green patch on the map, and wander as fancy dictated. If they felt like climbing, they would climb. If they felt like lazing, (as Pedro put it), they would laze. If they came to a river they could cross, all right. If they could not cross, why, all right, who cared?

There was rumor of vast caves that riddled the back country. There were hot springs, soda springs, – who knew what? Good pasturage was never hard to find. The verdant meadows left by the glacier lakes could be counted on up to the very backs of the 9,000 foot ridges. Most of them were half to a mile wide, and at the head waters of the big rivers, they had heard, were meadows nearer ten miles in length.

With one exception, every lake in the Sierras is a glacier lake (that exception being Huntington, a "made" lake four miles long that falls three thousand feet through a flume to add power to an electric plant). These lakes lie all the way up to as high as 8,000 feet above sea-level, Norris's theory being that in time they will be found higher still. The glaciers left by the last ice age naturally melted first in the lower reaches, and as those that now cap the peaks and flow down between ridges like the arms of a starfish, melt in their turn, they will leave their icy, green-blue crystal pools higher and higher up the mountainsides. Just North of Mt. Ritter, Norris told them, lies a glacier lake at an altitude of 12,000 feet, while the glaciers still to be found are slowly, slowly grinding out the basins of the lakes that will one day, (possibly centuries hence), lie where now linger these evidences of the last glacier epoch.

Where these lakes have in their turn disappeared they have left these rich-soiled meadows. Where these level-lying meadows failed them pasturage for their burros, Norris guaranteed that there would be plenty of hanging meadows, – long, narrow, bowldery strips of weed enameled verdure slanting up and down the moraine-covered canyon sides, beginning away up at timber line, where springs the source of their life-giving moisture.

Before the group broke up that day, word came that Rosa's brother had broken his leg, there at the fire outlook on Red Top. (A pack-mule had crowded his horse off the trail on the steep slope of an arroyo, and the horse had fallen, though breaking his otherwise sure descent into the creek below by coming sharply up against a tree trunk.)

"The worst of it is," worried Radcliffe, "with men so scarce, I don't know who to send in his place. Besides, it's a week's horseback trip from here, – and fires breaking every day, – and he needs a doctor."

It was not till the deed was done that Ace returned to announce, with the smile of the cat who has licked the cream, that Rosa had insisted on taking her brother's place. He, Ace, had found the spot from her sure knowledge of the topography of the place. (She had kept house there for her brother the summer before, in the wee, wind-swept cabin.) And leaving Rosa there, as she pluckily insisted, Ace brought her brother back, covering in minutes, as the bird flies, what it would have taken a week to traverse on horseback. Those mountain trails corkscrew up and down the canyon sides till instead of calling a certain distance a hundred miles according to the map, one states it, "a week into the back-country," – or in the case of the trailless peaks, (among which Long Lester felt most at home), the same distance might be a matter of a four-weeks' camping trip, with no human habitation, and the likelihood of not even a ranch at which to purchase supplies, in between.

Then the Senator sent the 'plane back to San Francisco, and its hangar in Burlingame, before – as he said – his young hopeful could start anything more. He himself was to spend the next month fishing around Kings" River Canyon, putting up at the canvas hotel. But he took as much interest in the camping trip as if he had been a member of it, – as, indeed, did Ranger Radcliffe, though word of a fresh forest fire breaking cut short his part in the powwow.

The question now arose, should they go horseback, or afoot with pack-burros, – a string of which Long Lester yearned to pilot.

True, a mountain-bred pony will hop and slide up and down mountain ledges that would make an Eastern horse's hair literally stand on end. They have been born and bred to it, physically and mentally. They have been known to sit back almost on their haunches and slide when they could get down no other way. Some of them will walk a log twenty feet above the surface of a stream. (The Eastern rider will find that hard to believe, until he recalls the feats of circus horses.) But not all horses are alike, any more than people. Why should the plains horse and the park horse and good old Dobbin, the farm horse, be equine mountaineers and prospectors?

"Shank's horses" and the pack-burros won the final ballot, – to Pedro's open dismay. But they would first ride the well-defined two-days' horseback trail from Giant Forest to the Kings' River Canyon, and Giant Forest is an automobile stage ride from Fresno, which is another short day's ride from Huntington Lake.

(Strange are the threads of destiny! Not one of that group so much as dreamed that they were embarking on anything but a five weeks' camping trip.)

CHAPTER II
THE CAMPING TRIP

A week later Morris and the boys arrived at the lumber camp on the Canyon rim, where they were to await Long Lester, – Ace in a piratical and plutocratic black Stetson sombrero, hiking boots and flannel shirt, a red bandanna at his throat, and to supplement his khaki riding breeches he had bestowed lovingly in his duffle bag the Mexican leather chaps. He also displayed the eight-inch leather belt of the cow country, and elbow length leather cuffs studded with silver nails.

Ted let it go at his second best blue overalls and heavy shoes, a green plaid gingham shirt, with a brown one to change off and straw hat. Pedro lounged gracefully about in corduroy trousers and elkskin boots, (which Norris warned him would last about a week on such rough going), and a wool jersey in the same soft tan. He took their guying good naturedly, however, and in mockery of Ace's more picturesque accoutrement, gave a first class imitation of a motion picture director with the Senator's son for his prize Bad Man. Norris wore his second best uniform, and all had sweaters and a change of socks and things, to say nothing of an extra pair of shoes.

When word came that the old guide had had "some investment business" come up to delay him, they decided to establish a make-shift camp. There was not one chance in a hundred of any rain, but they decided a lean-to would be convenient anyway. They got some shakes of an old lumberman whose function it was to split the giant shingles from three foot lengths of log.

Four poles for corner-posts made a substantial beginning. Smaller ones morticed to lie crosswise gave something to which to nail the shakes, which were overlapped shingle-fashion on both sides and roof. The tarpaulins would make a curtain across the front. The floor was bedded down a foot deep with springy silver fir boughs, laid butts down and toward the foot. To this could be added fresh browse as it grew dry and harsh.

Tables were made by borrowing a saw of the lumbermen and slicing a four foot log into eight inch slices, then gouging these out on the under side so that stout legs could be fitted in. Stools were made from short lengths of a smaller log, and behold! the open air dining-room and kitchen were furnished, at cost of a few hours' fun.

Norris even made a sort of steamer chair of poles, using a double thickness of his tarp for the seat and back.

Next came a stone fireplace, with an old piece of sheet iron across the top, and a great flat hearth-stone on which to warm the plates.

Each tin can as it was opened had its top neatly removed and was washed and set aside as a chipmunk-proof container, and Pedro fashioned a refrigerator by replacing the two sides of a cracker box with screen wire, (bartered from the cook of the lumber camp), hinging the door with discarded shoe tongues.

Cord was strung for clothes-line, and a supply of several kinds of fuel brought in. The down logs were simply run into the fireplace, butt ends first, and shoved closer as they burned. Ted devised a rake for gathering together the dry twigs and cones and bark with which the ground was strewn, by using nails for teeth, set in a small board fastened at an angle to the stick that served as handle.

Following Norris's lead, each fellow heated water and took a sponge bath daily, (except Ace, who took a cold plunge in the glacier-cold stream), and afterwards washed out his change of socks and underwear and his towel. The dish-washers also laundered the dish towels after each meal. That way, everything was always ship-shape. And, be it noted, any cook who burned the nested aluminum pans and kettles had to clean them himself, and though Norris had made that easier by bringing along a box of fine steel-wool, it was amazing how few scorched dishes occurred! Of course where pots were used over the fire, the outsides got sooty, but after all, it was only the insides that affected one's health.

The boys found that they slept warmer by doubling their blankets into sleeping bags, pinning them shut with horse-blanket safety-pins, with their tarps for a windproof outer layer. And many's the sleeping bag race they ran, – or rather, hopped, to the amazement, no doubt, of the wild folk who very likely watched from the shadows. Agile Ted won the grand prize at one of these stunts by hopping the full length of a fallen log in his bag, without once falling off.

There were also pine-cone battles and bait-casting contests, Pedro excelling in the throw by reason of his big arm muscles. Thus day succeeded cool and perfect day, and night followed star-strewn night, for nearly a week. The tooth-brush brigade sallied forth as soon as the sun began slanting its long morning rays through the forest aisles, and the boys often began nodding at a ridiculously early hour around the bon-fire, tired from their strenuous day in the open. But each day found their spirits higher, their muscles harder, their eyes brighter, – and their appetites more insatiable. Ted was plumping up and Pedro trimming down on the self-same medicine.

The chipmunks soon became so tame that they ran all over the place, over the boys' feet, on up to their shoulders, and into their pockets for the goodies they sometimes found. But they never ran under any one's palm. Pedro got one cornered and caught him with his bare hands, and put him on a leash, but the furry mite spent the next half hour straining to get away, too unhappy to eat, – cowering, trembling, when the boys stroked his orange striped back with a gentle finger, – and Pedro finally gave him back his freedom, (and a pyramid of peanuts).

"Camp Chipmunk" it was finally voted to call the place, and the name was inscribed on the side of a huge fallen log with bits of yellow-green live moss.

Though the chipmunks could easily have gone to the creek, as they must have before the boys came, they displayed a preference for drinking out of the same water pail the boys did, and they sometimes took an unexpected and unappreciated plunge bath.

Besides the very tiny chipmunks, there were some of the ground-squirrel size with the same orange and black. They were duller of wit, and more timid, but they used to chase the little fellows to within an inch of their lives. One day a big Sayes chipmunk attempted to fish a cheese rind out of the fireplace. The ashes were still hot, and he plunged into the soft stuff over his head, he was out and away, with a piercing squeal, almost instantly, trailing white ash behind him.

The boys used to bury nuts just to see how fast the littlest chipmunks would smell them out. After repeatedly finding the Dutch oven bread nibbled around the edges, Pedro hung the bread-bag from the clothes-line one night. He was awakened next morning by the shout Ted sent up when he found two chipmunks running down the string and squeezing their way delightedly into the bag.

Some one always had to watch while the meal was being laid, for the mouselike villains would be right up on the table sampling the butter, if some one did not keep an eye out. Or they would climb up the leg of the table and peek over the edge with their beady eyes, wondering how far they dared approach without danger to their agile persons. But the funniest thing was when two chipmunks would quarrel, – as generally happened when one unearthed a nut that another had buried. Nickering in the angriest way imaginable, the two tiny things would come at each other with ears laid back, in what appeared for all the world like a head-butting contest. Around and around they would whirl in a spiral nebula, till one got a head start on a race for home and mother.

Each morning they awoke to the hack-hack-hack of the sawyers and the steady grating of the log saw, the twitter of the donkey engine and the volcanic remarks with which the bull-puncher was urging his team forward. The yellow sunshine sifted aslant through the giant trees, birds sang, and chipmunks chattered. A water-packer passed them one day with his mule plodding along under 40 gallons disposed in canvas bags on a wooden frame, and beyond, across the singing creek, they could see the swampers burning the brush they had cut from the pathway of the tree next to fall.

Breakfast dispatched, the boys hurried over to watch the two-bitted axe biting its huge kerf in the side of a ten-foot trunk. When it had eaten a third of the way through the giant trunk, the sawyers began on the opposite side, nearly as high as the top of the kerf, resting the long instrument

on pegs driven into two holes that had been bored for the purpose. Iron wedges were driven after the saw. The instant the tree began to lean, the head chopper had driven a stake about 150 feet from the base on the side of the kerf, declaring that the falling tree would drive that stake into the ground, so accurately could they gauge the direction of its fall. The swampers had cleared the way between. Then came the cracking of neighboring branches, as the mammoth trunk swayed and toppled to the forest floor. There was a crash that shook the ground, which rebounded with a shower of chips and bark dust, and the stump gaped raw and red where for perhaps 2,000 years it had upborne the plumed Sequoia Gigantea.

The boys, far above whose heads the fallen trunk towered, scrambled up the rough bark and raced each other up and down the novel roadway that it made. Then, the excitement over, they suddenly realized that they were hungry and ran another race back to camp.

Later they watched as the donkey engine, stronger than ten oxen, was made fast to a stump and stoked till it could move itself into position to haul the log lengths to the waiting ox team. Peelers with axes and long steel bars had been peeling off the thick red bark, which the boys found could be whittled into odd shapes and rubbed velvety at the cut ends. The sawyers were sawing the trunk into lengths short enough to ride on box cars, and the chain tenders were driving the "dogs" or steel hooks into the forward segment preparatory to attaching the chain that was to draw the log after the panting donkey engine. The block shifter was ready with his pulley, and the gypsy tender was gathering down wood.

Suddenly, just as the chain had stretched till the log began to move, some weak link snapped and with a rebound like that of a cannon it flashed over the hillside, catching one man and toppling him over with a broken leg. The camp cook, whose accomplishments varied from the ability to deliver an impromptu and usually unsolicited sermon to that of calling off the numbers at a stag dance, was summoned in haste and from a long black bag that went with the framed diploma that hung at the head of his bunk, this unusual individual administered surgical treatment. The injured man took it philosophically, – his out of door constitution would repair the damage with more than average speed, – and the work of getting out the big log proceeded as before.

They also watched, fascinated, as the logs at a camp further back were sent down a crude slide that slanted sheer to a sizeable lake. Ace threatened to try riding a log some time, but Norris rendered one of his rare ultimatums on that score.

"Let's take plenty to eat!" bargained Pedro, who was beginning to suspect it was no afternoon stroll he had embarked upon. "Hadn't we better 'phone old Lester to lay in some extra supplies?"

"There is always fish," Norris reminded him.

"One gets tired of fish. I say let's take plenty of grub, if we're going away off where for weeks we may not see a living soul to buy a pound of bacon of. Eating's half the fun of camping. And if we get up there on the John Muir Trail, we can't even catch fish, can we – always?"

"That's the stuff!" seconded Ace. "If we aren't tied too tightly to the problem of rustling grub, we will be freer to roam where we please. But gosh! Won't it take a whole train-load of burros to pack enough stuff? Five men, three times a day, that's fifteen meals. And thirty days would make it 450 meals. Besides we'll eat just about double the normal number of calories, – the way I feel already. And twice 450 meals is 900."

"Whoa, there!" begged Norris. "How much can a burro carry, anyway? We can't take all our food, or we'll have such a pack-train we won't have time for anything but donkey driving, and if we carry feed to keep them going on the trail, we'll have to take more burros to pack the feed, and they will have to have feed too, and – there's no end to it."

"Well, of course we'll fish, when we can," amended Pedro. "And we can take compact rations, dried stuff, instead of watery canned goods. They're just as good, aren't they? Only the water's been taken out of them, and we can put it back in each night before we eat it. What's the use of packing tin cans that are mostly full of water?"

"I wouldn't call canned peaches mostly water," retorted Ace, who though less dependent than the plumper Pedro on his three square meals per day, was even more particular what those three meals tasted like.

"It isn't only the juice," said Pedro. "The peaches themselves are half water. Dried peaches are the same thing except for that, and two pounds of dried peaches will go a whole heap farther than a two-pound can, let me tell you!"

"All right," said Ace. "Dried peaches! What else? Mr. Norris, you've had a lot of experience on these back-country trips."

"H'm!" said the young Survey man, his eyes lighting reminiscently. "Did you ever eat black bean soup with salt pork and garlic to flavor it?"

"I have," said Pedro. "It's a meal in itself, with black rye bread and dill pickle. And what about fried frogs' legs and watercress? Broiled mushrooms, stewed mushrooms and onions, and crayfish soup?"

"Sounds good to me," Ace admitted. "But have we a mushroom expert in our midst? I'm not ready to commit suicide just yet."

"Nor I," laughed Norris.

"Nobody asked you to," Pedro looked aggrieved. "Goodness knows I'm no expert, but I do know a few kinds, and I know those few kinds for sure."

"Hot dog!" commented the Senator's son. "Go to it, ol' boy!"

"Then," Norris continued, "there've been times in my life when I didn't turn up my nose at corned beef hash browned."

"And spuds!" Ace completed the recipe. "And onions."

"Dehydrated," Norris admitted. "Can't carry potatoes for more than the first few days, and dried onion is just as flavorful as fresh."

"An onion a day – " began Ace.

"Keeps everybody away," finished the young Survey man laughingly. "And that reminds me of apples, – dried apple pie, apple pudding, apple dumplings, (baked or boiled), apple fritter, (made with pancake flour), and apple pan-dowdy with cinnamon."

"Pan-dowdy!" queried both boys.

"Yes, when the cook has to roll it out with a bottle, or an oar handle, or a smooth stone instead of a rolling pin, and perhaps bake it in the frying pan, and he hesitates to label the result, he terms it pan-dowdy, and then nobody has any kick coming if it isn't exactly flesh, fish or fowl, if you get me."

"We get you!" grinned Ted, who had thus far been a silent partner to the plans. But as usually happened at such times, he had been doing a lot of thinking. He now added his contribution: "How about rainbow trout broiled with pork scraps, and served with horseradish? Let's take a bottle of horseradish."

"Dried horseradish and a grater," amended Pedro.

"All right. Then there's trout baked with tomato and onion sauce, trout baked in clay, trout boiled for a change, with lemon, (we could start the trip with a few), trout skewered, griddled, baked in ashes, baked on a stone, fried – of course, and roasted and stuffed with sage. Let's take sage. Then how about cold boiled trout salad with mustard dressing, and fish chowder a la canned milk, with dry-dated – what do you call it? De-hydrated potatoes and evaporated onions? Eh? And garlic isn't such a bad idea. It's the handiest little bit of flavoring I know of, – if we all go in for it alike."

"We'll all go in for it good and strong," winked Ace.

"Strong is the word," chuckled Norris.

"Anyway," Ted defended his suggestion. "I've camped through the back-country a heap in my time, and I've generally found it isn't the sameness of the fish-three-times-a-day that lays you out, but the lack of flavorings. Now I even take caraway seed to give a different flavor to a batch of biscuit, and raisins, or some anise seed, or a little strong cheese, that you can grate into it or on it and then toast it

till it melts. Then there's cinnamon and cheese toast for dessert, and plain cinnamon and sugar melted on white bread makes it just bully! And why do we have to eat white bread all the time anyway?"

"Of course we'll have cornmeal and buckwheat in our pancake mixture," said Norris.

"Bully! But why not take part rye flour too, and part oatmeal to mix in? It bakes fine and flaky. And there's oatmeal cookies mixed with peanut butter and sweetened!"

"Good!" Norris pronounced.

"Y'r *all right*, kid!" Ace thumped affectionately on his thin shoulder blade, "y'r all right," but at the threatened repetition of the bearlike caress, Ted dodged.

"Another idea," Pedro broke in. "Why eat bread all the time anyway? Why not macaroni and cheese, and spaghetti and tomato paste?"

"And garlic?" teased Ace.

"Surest thing you know! And vermicelli, and noodles, and all those things. They're all made of flour, and they're different."

"A little bulky," protested Norris.

"Oh, well, for the start of the trip, then. They're not so heavy, parked up on top of a burro's regular pack."

"Good!" agreed the leader of the expedition. "We may come to cattle ranches where we can get beef and mutton occasionally, though not after we get into the higher altitudes. And we can start off with a few fresh eggs, for compactness and safety broken a dozen at a time into glass jars. After that – I don't know whether you fellows would like scrambled eggs or not, made of egg powder. Personally I don't. Nor the famous erbswurst."

"Aw!" drawled Ted, barely concealing his impatience. "The thing that stands by you best on a hard trip, after all, is jerky and pemmican. I think old Lester jerked some venison himself last fall, and he's probably got it yet. And he'll grind us some pemmican, if we get him word before he starts."

"Gee Whiz! Those are emergency rations!" vetoed Ace.

"We'll have to have a long distance conversation with him to-night," said Norris. "Meantime we mustn't forget pilot biscuit and peanut butter for a pocket lunch and shelled peanuts, of course, and rice, and tea and coffee, and sugar, and baking powder."

"There are two things that can compactly," conceded the Castilian boy at this point. "The best grade of canned beets and spinach are pretty solid weight. I'll make no kick if we load on some of that until we get to the steeper grades."

"Hey!" shouted Ace. "In all this time nobody's mentioned bacon."

"We took that for granted," laughed Norris. "I'll bet Long Lester would never start out without it, whether we told him to or not. But I'm awfully afraid we'll use more tea than coffee. It's bulky, and worse, it loses flavor."

"Oh," said Ted, "I know the answer to that. Powdered coffee isn't one quarter so bulky, and put up in little separate tins, we keep opening them fresh, don't you see?"

"I've never yet seen a powdered coffee that could compare with the real thing," Ace complained.

"Why couldn't Les buy the real thing and then get it powdered and sealed into little separate tins for us?"

"He could," agreed Norris, "I suppose, – if we're going to be as fussy as all that." (Ace flushed.) "But with our woods' appetites–"

"Oh, and citric acid tablets," the Senator's son hastened to change the subject. "For lemonade, you know."

The discussion was cut short by Pedro's discovery that a bear had invaded the lean-to.

The American black bear, and his California cousin whose coat has generally lightened to the cinnamon brown of the soil, is all but tame in the National Parks, where for years he has been unmolested. A friendly fellow even in the wild state, – for the most part, – he roams the Giant Forest as much a prized part of the landscape as the Big Trees themselves. He has learned to visit the garbage

dump regularly every night, and it causes no sensation whatever to meet one on the trail. It was much the same about the lumber camp.

But to have him visit uninvited, and serve his own refreshments from their selected stores, was a less attractive trick. Nor did he show the slightest inclination to take alarm and vacate when the boys returned. On the contrary, he snarled and showed his teeth when they would have driven him from the maple sugar can, and even Ace felt at the moment that discretion was in order. It was not till Old Shaggy-Sides had pretty well demolished everything in sight, and then carried the ham off under his arm, that he took a reluctant departure.

This would never do. That night the unprotected edibles were hoisted just too high for a possible visitor to reach, on a rope slung over the limb of a tree. The boys still slept under the stars, for they knew enough about bears, (all but Pedro), not to be afraid. Pedro, however, got little sleep that night, though he would not have confessed to the fact for anything on earth.

"There was one bear in Sequoia Park," remembered Ace, "who got too fresh, that way, and raided some one's tent, and they had to send for help to get him out. When it happened half a dozen times, he was ordered shot. But he was the only one I've ever heard of acting that way. Now I'll bet, if we'd inquire, we'd find this bear had been half tamed, and altogether spoiled by these lumbermen.

"We were driving through Yellowstone last summer when one of those half tame bears came out to beg. We stopped the machine and I fed him some candy. Then we parked, and went up to the hotel for dinner. When we came back, we found he had mighty near clawed the back seat to pieces, – and why do you suppose? – To get at a side of bacon we had stowed away in there."

"Did he find it?"

"We never did."

"That reminds me of something I heard," laughed Norris. "Some friends of mine in Sequoia left their lunch boxes in the machine while they went to climb Moro Rock. When they came back they found a cub calmly sitting up there behind the wheel, eating one lunch after another."

Pedro was in for moving their headquarters to a great hollow Big Tree, the cavity in which was as large as a good sized room, with a Gothic sort of opening they could have made a door for. But the very next morning the old prospector arrived with the train of pack-burros, and they were off.

"How do you explain the Sequoias, Mr. Norris? Will we find more of them?" asked Pedro, with a last wistful backward glance.

"The Big Trees are by no means confined to Sequoia National Park and other well known groves," said the Survey man. "The Sequoia gigantea is to be found in scattered groves for a distance of 250 miles or more, up and down the West slope of the Sierras, at altitudes just lower than that of the belt of silver firs, – that is, anywhere from 5,000 to 8,000 feet above sea level. And in fact, south of Kings' River, the Sequoias stretch in an almost unbroken forest for seventy miles. Nor are they all of the proportions so often cited, where a man standing at their base looks like a fly on the wall by comparison with these prehistoric giants. Nor did they all get their start in life 4,000 years ago. There are young trees in plenty, saplings and seedlings, who will doubtless reach the patriarchal stage some 4,000 years hence. On what kind of earth will they look then? On what stage in the evolution of civilization? Will another ice age have re-carved these mountains? And how will man have learned to protect himself from the added severity of those winters?"

"It certainly gives one something to think about," mused Pedro. "It is only in these younger specimens that you can see what a graceful tree it is!" He glanced from a feathery Big Tree youngster of perhaps 500 summers, with its slender branches drooping in blue-green plumes toward the base, with purple-barked limbs out-thrust on the horizontal half way up, and at the top reaching ardently heavenward. Near it stood a parent tree of perhaps middle age, born around the time of Christ, whose crown was still firmly rounded with the densely massed foliage, now yellow-brown, and the bark red-brown.

The millions of two inch cones, surprisingly tiny for such a tree, hang heavy with seeds, – they counted 300 in a single green cone.

"With such millions of seeds," puzzled Pedro, "I should think the trees would grow so thick that there would be no walking between them."

"No," said Norris. "In the first place, remember that not one seed in a million escapes these busy Douglas squirrels and the big woodcocks that you hear drumming everywhere. Then even the millionth seed has to risk forest fires and snow-slides, lumbermen and lightning. But I'll tell you something funny about them. You'd naturally think, from the number of streams in these forests, that they required a lot of moisture. Well, they don't. Further South they grow and flourish on perfectly dry ground. But their roots retain so much rain and snow water that their tendency is to *make* streams. The dense crown helps too, by preventing evaporation. You'll find Sequoias flourishing in a mere rift in a granite precipice. But wherever you find a dense growth, as you do here, there you will find their roots giving out the seepage that feeds a million streamlets, and these in turn feed the great rivers.

"You see these trees *must* be able to survive drouth or they could not have survived the changes of so many thousand years. Why, these Sequoias might have formed one continuous forest from the American River on South, if it had not been for the glaciers that swept down the great basins of the San Joaquin and Kings' River, the Tuolumne and the Stanislaus."

"But why didn't the glaciers clean them off the basins of the Kaweah and the Tule Rivers, too?"

"Ah! There the giant rock spurs of the canyons of the King and the Kern protected the Tule and the Kaweah, by shunting the ice off to right and left."

"There's one thing more I'd like to know," said Pedro. "Where will we find the nut pines that have the pine nuts? Aren't they delicious?"

"There are several kinds," said Norris. "There is a queer little one with cones growing like burrs on the trunk as well as on the limbs, but that is only found on burnt ground. Another, that forms a dietary staple with the Indians of Nevada, is to be found only on the East slope of the Sierra, and the little nut pine that our California Indians harvest is away down in the foot-hills among the white oaks and manzanitas, so I'm afraid whatever else we come across on this trip, we won't want to count on pine nuts."

"What interests *me* more," said Ted, "is whether we are going to come across any gold or not."

"Now you're talking!" the old prospector suddenly spoke up.

Ted's eyes shone.

Ace had an experience about this time that flavored his nightmares for some time to come. Following a lumber chute, one of these three board affairs, up the side of a particularly steep slope one day, where at the time of the spring floods the yellow pine logs had been sent down to the river, he thought to try a little target shooting with Long Lester's rifle. But at the first shot a bunch of range cattle, – of whose presence he had not known, – began crowding curiously near. He fired again, and a cow with a calf took alarm and started to charge him, but was driven back with a few clods and a flourished stick.

He fired again. This time, quite by accident, his bullet hit an old bull squarely on the horn. The shock at first stunned the animal, and he fell forward on his knees. Recovering in an instant, however, the enraged animal made for Ace.

The Senator's son had that day worn his heavy leather chaps. He had found them burdensome enough on his slow climb upward. They now impeded him till he could not have outrun the animal had he tried, nor was there any tree handy between him and it.

Then a wild thought struck him. The log slide! – It was mighty risky, but then, so was the bull. Leaping aboard a log that still lay at the head of the slide, he pulled the lever and sent it shooting to the stream below, and the fallen pine needles flew out in a cloud before him, as the log hurled down the grade. His heavy leather chaps really helped him balance now, and his hob-nails helped him cling.

The log came to a stand-still before it reached the river, – but Ace did not. And the bull was hopelessly out-distanced.

CHAPTER III
LIVING OFF THE WILDERNESS

On every side stretched a sea of peaks. They might have been in mid-ocean, stranded on a desert island, had they not been on a mountain-top instead.

For one glorious fortnight they had camped beside white cascading rivers, and along the singing streams that fed them, following their windings through flower perfumed forests and on up into the granite country where glacier lakes lay cupped between the peaks to unfathomable cobalt depths. They had seen deer by the dozen feeding in the brush of the lower country, – graceful, big-eyed creatures who allowed them to approach to within a stone's throw before they went bounding to cover. They had thrown crumbs to the grouse and quail that came hesitatingly to inspect their camp site, protected at this season by the game laws and so unaccustomed to human kind that they were all but tame. They had crossed and recrossed rivers not too deep to ford, and rivers not too swift to swim. They had scaled cliffs where nothing on hooves save a burro – or a Rocky Mountain goat – could have followed after.

But always the shaggy gray donkeys had kept at their heels like dogs, – save when they got temperamental or went on strike, – waggling their long ears in a steady rhythm, exactly as if these appendages had been on ball bearings. The burros, five in number, had each his individuality. There was Pepper, the old prospector's own comrade of many a mountain trail, who, knowing his superior knowledge of the ways of slide rock and precipices, insisted always on being in the lead. This preference on his part he enforced with a pair of the swiftest heels the boys had ever seen. There was old Lazybones, as Pedro had named the one who, presenting the greatest girth, had to carry the largest pack. There was Trilby, of the dainty hooves, who never made a misstep. He – for the cognomen had been somewhat misplaced – was entrusted with the things they valued most, their personal kit and the trout rods. The Bird was the one who did the most singing, – though they all joined in on the chorus when they thought it was time for the table scraps to be apportioned. And finally there was Mephistopheles, whose disposition may have been soured under some previous ownership, – since the blame must be placed somewhere. Ace had added him to Long Lester's four when a lumberman had offered him for fifteen dollars. The name came afterwards. But though he sometimes held up operations on the trail, he was big enough to carry 150 pounds of "grub," and that meant a lot of good eating.

Despite their hee-hawing, however, the diminutive pack animals did a deal of talking with their ears. When startled, these prominent members were laid forward to catch the sound. When displeased, the long ears were flattened along the backs of their necks. If browse was good, they remained in the home meadow, – after first circling it to make sure there was no foe in ambush. If not, they wandered till they found good feed, – and one night they wandered so many miles, hobbled as they were, that it took all of the next forenoon to find them and bring them back to camp.

They could walk a log with their packs to cross a stream, or, packs removed and pullied across, they could swim it, if they were started up current and left to guide themselves. They would not slip on smooth rock ledges, they could hop up or down bowlders like so many bipeds. It was a constant marvel to Ace and Pedro what they could do. No lead ropes were necessary at all.

Long Lester was meticulous in their care. Every afternoon when the packs were removed he sponged their backs with cold water. And though the party was on its way by seven every morning, – having risen with the first light of dawn, – and though by ten they would have covered half of their average twelve miles a day, the old guide never watered them till the sun was warm, which was generally not till after the middle of the forenoon. For a wilderness trip comes to grief when any

one member, man or beast, gives out, as he knew from a lifetime of experience in that rugged and unpeopled region.

They had figured on about three pounds of food per day per person, for the four weeks' trip. That loaded each burro with a grub list of ninety pounds, and about ten pounds of personal equipment, besides the axes and aluminums and such incidentals as soap and matches. Ease of packing was secured by slipping into each of the food kyacks a case such as those in which a pair of five gallon coal oil cans come.

Their kit included neats' foot oil, (scrupulously packed), for the wearing qualities of their footwear along those stony trails depended in large degree on keeping the leather soft. No mosquito netting was necessary in the mountains, – it was too dry and cool for the insects, – but each member of the party had a pair of buckskin gloves, six good pairs of all wool socks, – worn two at a time to pad the feet against stone-bruise, – extra shoe laces, and a pair of sneakers to rest his feet around camp. Norris carried a pocket telescope, and Long Lester a hone made of the side of a cigar box with fine emery cloth pasted on one side, coarse on the other. They saved on blankets by doubling each into three crosswise, – except the old guide, who was too tall, – and on the higher, colder elevations they found that to wear a fresh wool union suit, and socks warm from the fire, to sleep in, was as good as an extra blanket, if not better.

Everything was to be turn and turn about, – Ace had been the most insistent member of the party in not leaving Long Lester to do the lion's share, – they were obliged, each in turn, even Norris, to learn certain fundamental rules of cookery. Long Lester got it down to this formula:

Put fresh vegetables into boiling salted water.

Put dried vegetables (peas and beans) into cold, unsalted water.

Soak dried fruit overnight.

To fry, have the pan just barely smoking.

To clean the frying pan, fill it with water and let it boil over, then hang it up to dry. Jab greasy knives into the ground, – provided it is not stony.

You can fry more trout in a pan if you cut off their heads.

As the boiling point drops one degree for every 800 foot rise, twenty hours' steady cooking will not boil beans in the higher altitudes unless you use soft water. They may be best cooked overnight in a hole lined with coals, if put in when boiling, with the lid of the Dutch oven covered with soil.

Three aluminum pails, nested, provided dish pan and kettles for hot and cold water. Butter packed in pound tins kept fresh indefinitely in those cool heights, and salt and sugar traveled well in waterproof tent silk bags. Long Lester had figured on a minimum of a quarter of a pound each of sugar and bacon per day per person, three pounds of pepper and twenty-five of salt.

Of course the one thing each member carried right on his person was a pepper tin of matches, made waterproof with a strip of adhesive tape. For the snow fields, they also had tinted spectacles, as a precaution against snow-blindness.

Axmanship came to be the chief measure of their campcraft. Ace had wanted to bring one of the double-bitts he saw the lumbermen using, but the old guide vetoed it as more dangerous to the amateur than a butcher knife in the hands of a baby.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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