

BY DAVID RUTTER



Muir Woods was the first National Monument created from a land donation by a citizen, William Kent, whose goal was to save the old-growth coastal redwood forest from destruction. Muir Woods is a unit of the United States National Park Service, and is located near the Pacific Coast in southwestern Marin County California, about 12 miles from San Francisco. John Muir is pictured in 1907 shortly before Theodore Roosevelt made a declaration to preserve this land.

The Greatest Campout of All Time

AT 7:30 ON THE CHILLED MORNING OF MAY 15, 1903, the Presidential special train chugged into the station at Raymond, Calif., the nearest mainline rail connection to Yosemite, the pristine jewel of America's surviving wilderness.

Aboard was the customary coterie: traveling press, White House aides, partisans, favored people who thought the planned events of the next three days would be the traditional political hoorah of the new century. There was a 30-man unit of cavalry security, all mounted astride matching dapple-grey steeds.

But it would not be just another presidential outing or publicity event. Not by a darn sight.

John Muir and President Theodore Roosevelt had their own plans that did not include firing off the \$400 worth of fireworks planned for the presidential reception. There were the customary salutations, a welcoming band, and then the party boarded stage coaches and headed upland.

Soon the group would break up. Roosevelt dismissed the cavalry with a hearty "God bless you."

Muir, the raging, passionate Scottish poet of the American West and Teddy, the affable, boyish

cheerleader of Americanism had come to camp out.

Yes, camp out together.

When they sat around a shared campfire the next three nights, they were alone. They were thinking and planning. And mostly sharing. They both were talkers.

If you want profound moments in American history – the history of conserving the natural world – this was that moment.

It was the most important camping trip in American history.

ENDURING HISTORY

History sometimes hopscotches through the future, but it also can dispatch profound effects in straight lines. The Greatest Camping Trip Ever rippled out in all directions.

The Poet Scot of the Wilderness and the Champion of the Roughriders were not the same man with identical views. But they forged a conservation alliance that has only grown stronger in a century.

The wilderness would be protected as a national treasure, not a state by state prerogative. Chance was not good enough. Teddy would wield power to do it.

That line in shared devotion darts directly to the Sierra Club that Muir founded and even to local organizations such as Barrington's Citizens for Conservation, which has protected 2,500 acres of public land locally. Same idea. Same passion. Only the faces are new.

Years of planning and dickering have created four new forest preserves: Ela Marsh, Fox River, Grassy Lake/Flint Creek, and Baker's Lake Youghusband Prairie.

All safe now. Modern conservationists are warmed and inspired by that blazing campfire that Muir and Roosevelt lit in the deep valleys of Yosemite.

One of those new faces belongs to Jim Vanderpoel, a Barrington lawyer with Continental Automotive in Deer Park, and a lifelong outdoor passionista whose devotion to deep woods camping dovetails with the Citizens for Conservation goal of guarding the natural universe.

He and brothers John, Tom, Bill, and Mark are lifelong campers who adopted the art of outside life from their parents.

Without belaboring the point, he understood what Muir and Roosevelt might have been feeling on their trip into Yosemite and their nights around the fire.

There is a quiet that gets inside a soul if you let it. Life and the universe come into clearer focus at those times.

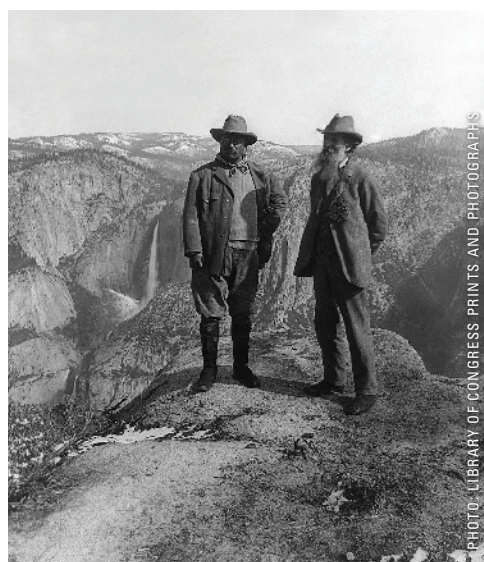
Muir knew that feeling intimately. "Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life," he wrote in 1901.

In fact, Vanderpoel and his brothers might well

have camped at sites near that 1903 primordial event. "Camping (in the wilderness) is special both because of the people you go with and because it's a special place. It has a lot of meaning," Vanderpoel said.

"When you're camping and just struggling to sleep, it's clear that this is not like a restaurant. You're fishing for your food, cleaning and then cooking it, and then if you don't catch anything, it has effects. You realize that if you don't catch anything, you'll be hungry. Camping means that simple things become real drama."

"My great trips have been with my four brothers. All of us working together. When you are camping at the high timberline, you can see a fast



Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir on Glacier Point, Yosemite Valley, California in 1903.

storm come up. When you see lightning strike a rock, you realize you're higher than the rock is. It very much intensifies the experience. Then to see the sun rise and see it set the same day. Experience intensifies," Vanderpole says.

The best? "For me it was a trip to Yellowstone. It was October, and we were sleeping out. There had been an 8-inch snowfall overnight. We had gotten up in the night, and you could see the steam rising off the hot springs. We walked past a herd of 200 bison right by the campsite.

"To have those experiences makes you feel very lucky. I feel that every time I go out. How lucky we are that somebody had the foresight to save it. You can go to parks in Arizona and some of them are surrounded by urban sprawl. It's the same thing in California with L.A., which is a giant megalopolis.

Yosemite is just three hours away from that. Just think that three hours from Los Angeles are trees that are bigger around than my living room. I often wonder looking back to 1830 or so if someone had thought to save an area in Illinois the size of a county. Sure, we would have lost farmland, but would we really have regretted that? We wouldn't have had the big landscapes, but we would have had some of the same [wilderness] benefits."

THE WORDS OF MUIR

Roosevelt had sought out Muir. He had read the Scot's shouted admonishments about saving the West, but he wanted to hear the gospel straight from the Saint of the High Country. Muir was famous by then. He had written persuasively for every influential publication of the era and had roused the public's consciousness along with Emerson and Thoreau.

His family, headed by a stern Presbyterian minister, immigrated to Portage, Wis. He tried college for three years and then set off to actually see the natural world. Muir's walk from Indiana to the Gulf of Mexico set the stage for his life to come. He would sail for Cuba and then to the West Coast. There he discovered California's Sierra high country and was astounded by it. Captured by it.

After receiving a personal letter from Roosevelt 40 years later, Muir wrote to a friend: "An influential man from Washington wants to make a trip into the Sierra with me, and I might be able to do some forest good in freely talking around the campfire."

They hiked through Mariposa Grove, Sentinel Dome, Glacier Point, and Yosemite Valley; Muir urged Roosevelt to rise up mightily and save the land. Roosevelt needed little convincing of the commercial misuse of forests, however. In 1900, the cut of Redwoods was about 520 million board feet in California alone. This alliance was revolutionary because two unlikely men – one a hunter, the other a zealous preservationist – merged philosophies.

Their union on that trip was like the robust campfire they shared under the stars. Teddy slept on 40 rolled blankets.

They would not only be thinly aligned parks, but preserved monuments held in the national interest. The new alliance was permanent.

The federal park system was sealed. U

The photo of John Muir at a tree, and the image of one of his sketches are courtesy of John Muir Papers, University of the Pacific, ©1984, Muir Hanna Trust.

(Story continued next page)



This sketch by John Muir is estimated to date back to 1890. Muir was a prolific journalist and illustrator throughout his travels, recording everything from rock formations to artifacts he saw along the way. The John Muir collection at The University of the Pacific in California has 78 journals and 386 drawings that he produced. The handwriting on this image says, “Tenaya Cascades 700 ft. high and smooth ice-polished canyon 5 miles above Yosemite.”

John Muir was born in Scotland, and grew up in Portage, Wis. He became America's first and most famous naturalist. Below are some of his thoughts and words.

“I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.”

“The mountains are fountains of men as well as of rivers, of glaciers, of fertile soil. The great poets, philosophers, prophets, able men whose thoughts and deeds have moved the world, have come down from the mountains; mountain dwellers who have grown strong there with the forest trees in Nature's workshops.”

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”

“Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.”

— from *Our National Parks* (1901)

“When we contemplate the whole globe as one great dewdrop, striped and dotted with continents and islands, flying through space with other stars all singing and shining together as one, the whole universe appears as an infinite storm of beauty.” — from *Travels in Alaska* (1915)

“In God's wildness lies the hope of the world - the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and wounds heal ere we are aware.”

— from *John of the Mountains* (1938)

“Another glorious Sierra day in which one seems to be dissolved and absorbed and sent pulsing onward we know not where. Life seems neither long nor short, and we take no more heed to save time or make haste than do the trees and stars. This is true freedom, a good practical sort of immortality.”

— from *John of the Mountains* (1938)

“In every walk with Nature one receives far more than he seeks.”

“This grand show is eternal. It is always sunrise somewhere; the dew is never all dried at once; a shower is forever falling; vapor ever rising. Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset, eternal dawn and gloaming, on seas and continents and islands, each in its turn, as the round earth rolls.”

— from *John of the Mountains* (1938)

“Oh, these vast, calm, measureless mountain days, inciting at once to work and rest! Days in whose light everything seems equally divine, opening a thousand windows to show us God. Nevermore, however weary, should one faint by the way who gains the blessings of one mountain day; whatever his fate, long life, short life, stormy or calm, he is rich forever.”

— from *John of the Mountains* (1938)

“As long as I live, I'll hear waterfalls and birds and winds sing. I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm, and the avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can.”

— from *The Journals of John Muir*



David Rutter is a frequent contributor to Quintessential Barrington.

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