

HOW THREE EASTERN TENDERFEET CLIMBED MT. WILSON

An Appreciative Description of One of the Most Delightful Bits of Mountain Climbing to Be Found in the World

Felix J. Hoch in Washington, D. C. Post.

Even the beautiful gets lonesome on a vacation journey, and you realize this out in California. Even the magnificent estates, with their broad stairs flanked by palms and poinsettias; the avenues of peppers, they enchant for a time and then both that you may have variety and that, a bit later, you can enjoy these so much the more, you come to yearn for just a spice of the simpler life.

And if you are willing you can get it within a stone's throw almost of tourist land, at Los Angeles.

If you want something different from any other excursion in all southern travel-land, you can make Mt. Wilson.

Of course you have made Mt. Hamilton, by stage, by day or by night. And equally obviously, you have been up Mt. Tamalpais or Mt. Lowe. But Mt. Wilson, it is new and wild, and autre-chose and so you have your doubts.

You, however, can be coaxed of course. There are others willing to try it and if they can afford to waste a day from tourist land, well, so can you.

You take the cars for Pasadena and then beyond to Sierra Madre. Something in that name makes you think of childhood happy days, when you traced mountain ranges for teacher on the wall map.

It is five minutes to eleven when you reach the street car terminal. For once out here in tourist land you are left to your own resources. No guides to pester, no urchins to lead the way, in hope of possible tip. Just your common sense and perhaps a pedestrian going cityward to direct you. It is actually refreshing.

You walk a few squares up a country, noting a particularly pretty place among some pepper trees, and an orange grove, en-passant and then the head of the valley, whence rises Mt. Wilson.

Here should be the station for the burros making the ascent. No huge caravansary, with livered attendants, here. Just a little stable, with the burros standing about among the eucalyptus trees and an occasional donkey gamboling by as might a steed from Chaucer.

If you are tall you get a horse, if you are tall and heavy you get a mule; if, lucky creature, you are small and of not too much avoirdupois they give you a burro and you may be happy. Any of these are two dollars and a half the round trip, payable in advance and without insurance, should the burro toss you over the cliffs.

You are still alone—delightful independence. Those others on the car or at the hotel backed out when they saw the steeds.

No one else is going up and as the mule knows the way—there being but the simple harrow trail—you set out alone.

Really this is charming. For fifteen years you are assured there have been ascents of Mount Wilson owing to people wanting to get up into these mountains, some of which attain 6000 feet in height. And then one could go at any season of year, which is likewise an advantage.

You are on the mule and she takes her own course. You note the heavy saddle, with a circular piece of iron on the end of a short bar, at the front, to hold to. Also, at the sides the heavy tin stirrups. Then you note the other mules just behind the stable and wonder if you got the cream of the herd.

Already it doesn't seem so. The animal simply rambles at her ease. Like Stevenson's Modestine in the Covenens she absolutely refuses to run. It is 11:05 when you get past the stable.

You are alone, and in no hurry, and so let her take her way. Result, she takes part of the way along with her, munching of brush and trees.

There is the narrow trail over the rocks, with the browsing mule alone in sight. Then the trail becomes narrower and muddy and the mule goes slower and it is harder to keep her from browsing.

She seems to have method in her madness, nevertheless, at the first, stopping at a point where there is a magnificent view of the flat valley, with the trees and the shrubbery stretching off to the distant mountains, while just below there is an orange orchard, and right ahead are bleaker mountains.

The trail at once turns steep. Steep as it is the old men from New Hampshire, typical Yankees, gray-haired, weakened and dry, but jolly withal, make their appearance upon it. They

scorn your weakness in having hired a mule; they will walk to the top of Mount Wilson. But for that they would not have left their wives in Los Angeles—to ride, that were childish.

Just for company's sake you yield to the mule and ride slowly, that you may chat with these pedestrians.

Now and then, too, they come in opportunely, when you want a bit of life in a snap shot.

The bends of the trail are carrying you ever higher up the mountain and then down into a narrow gulch or valley between the slopes of two yellow mountains, thinly covered with scrub.

Two ladies are resting on the trail and they smile at the aged mountain climbers. There seems sarcasm in their smile that we, who are young, should be riding and the two old men should walk, but the old men cannot go home and say they rode even a bit of the way up Mount Wilson.

Now we are right at the brink of the trail, while on our left rises the mountain, with the scrub patches of laurel and a glossy leaved plant that the mule takes delight in, though half of the shrubs are barren, and with the moss and fern and an occasional wild bird. Below is the deep descent of slope, and the hungry mule ever threatens to dash us into it.

It reminds you of mountaineering in the Balkans and Turkey, even to the unsuccessful attempts of these Yankees to take your picture on the trail. Then, too, there is similarity in this same gorgeous view, with the orange groves here replacing the olives in their square patches below, and the glades with the red-berried laurel and the bushes filled with bits of flowers, and, above all, the shade. In fact, at times, you feel yourself back in the Sandchak, and at others on the road from the Adriatic to Cotigne.

At one point on a rock is painted, "Oh joy," and it makes you pensive, as you go on and on. Occasionally there are dizzy heights, at others the trail is so steep you lead the mule in preference to being tossed over.

The two Yankees, so friendly at first, are silent. Conclusion, they are tiring.

On another rock you read: "I wish I was an angel." The Yankees do not smile.

You recall Stevenson and his travels on a donkey, you point out the great rocks in the tangles that stretch on and on, you state with joy that it is only quarter-past twelve, and we are almost at the top of the ridge. Once on that top, you look down to indicate the falls, far down in a deep, gloomy thicket. But there is little response from the Yankees.

The other men come down the trail, joking of how much further it is to the top, and as if to bear them out, at a most delightful point for looking down on the falls, is a sign, "Three-quarter mile to the half-way house." It is now 12:18.

You have come to a wild glen at the head of the valley, with a creek far below in its recesses, and magnificent mountains all about, while you are among leaves and shrubbery only. You cannot feel at ease to see those old men plodding, plodding on, and so again you volunteer your steed, such as it is. And perhaps assured that neither leaves nor birds are tattle-tales, the elder of the two accepts.

And again, in fancy, you are back in the Balkans, walking beside the mule, chatting on the narrow trail. Pleasant strolling in the great leaf-shadows, where the resurrection plants grow thick; pleasant in the deep glades, where the small-leaved mountain oaks rise in deep glossy tangles, pleasant among creeks that flow from distant mountains, and in the ever deepening forest of the low-crowned trees, you do not note that there is a descent, and that you are returning to the level of the water. Suddenly you are at the brook, ready to stop, to drink and to be snap-shot.

How wild it is the signs here everywhere against kindling fires assure these and notices of the law requiring everyone to stop and lend a hand at putting forest fires out. You see the mountain rising up—sheer above—and there are other slopes that lead you deeper to other brooks.

Despite the dark and shade, the ferns and the blooming gooseberries, and the great white rocks in the rivulets, it is getting very tiresome to walk and you wish you were back on your mule. Of course from time to time the Yankee volunteers to return to you your own, but, of course, you

always decline. And yet, down in your heart of hearts, you are angry that he didn't engage a steed of his own before he left the bottom.

Then in upon your rebellious thoughts rides a lady and a gentleman, on their mules, down the trail.

You have had yourself taken, you have taken the two Yanks and the mule so often instinctively you "snap" this charming picture on the instant you are the subject of a tirade of abuse for doing this without her permission.

The Yankees are surprised and all sympathy, and they pour their words of kind consolation out till the hoof beats of the other are gone. So you forget all about wishing you were back on your mule.

The mountain oak's shade and the water falls and the songs of the birds are all so primitive and beautiful, so much like trips you had abroad, that, but for the pumping of your heart you would fain linger and dawdle. Instead, however, you walk and rest, and rest and walk, on and on again down hill, until half past one, when you are due at Orchard Camp, a small unpainted shingle shack that serves as half-way house.

After the soft drink refreshments here the ride seems to drag. There are the miles of wilderness, with the blooming manzanitas and the aloes, there are the occasional passers on the burros, or the muleteers bringing down supplies as they do in Bosnia, there is a queer summer colony on the road side there in the heart of the Sierras that seem half a deserted village. And still you wind on and on, not up one mountain side as you had thought, but along the crests of many.

At last you are at the top.

Charming the prospect. Just a simple wayside tavern. And for guest rooms, cottages, rustic and simple, and each of just one room, with the porch built out into the tree tops, that the pines can sing you to sleep.

It is such gladsome relief from the stilled summer hotels of the other mountains. So much simpler than Tamalpais and Lowe and Hamilton. You are really glad you came, and sorry of the leaving.

Even the mule will hate to go, as you will find when the time comes for departure.

It will make you appreciate the more, by contrast, the other points of interest in wonderland. And as for the pilgrimage to Nature's heart, of course, you, too, will feel better.

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