

160 Alaska Days with John Muir

sweet, a riot of sound. It was an enchanted palace, and we left it with reluctance, remaining only six hours and going out at the turn of the flood tide to escape the dangerous rapids. Had there not been so many things to see beyond, and so little time in which to see them, I doubt if Muir would have quit Yosemite Bay for days.

THE DOG AND THE MAN

MY FRIENDS

Two friends I have, and close akin are they.
For both are free
And wild and proud, full of the ecstasy
Of life untrammelled; living, day by day,
A law unto themselves; yet breaking none
Of Nature's perfect code.
And far afield, remote from man's abode,
They roam the wilds together, two as one.

Yet, one's a dog—a wisp of silky hair,
Two sharp black eyes,
A face alert, mysterious and wise,
A shadowy tail, a body lithe and fair.
And one's a man—of Nature's work the best,
A heart of gold,
A mind stored full of treasures new and old,
Of men the greatest, strongest, tenderest.

They love each other—these two friends of mine—
Yet both agree
In this—with that pure love that's half divine
They both love me.

VI

THE DOG AND THE MAN

THERE is no time to tell of all
the bays we explored; of
Holkham Bay, Port Snet-
tisham, Tahkou Harbor; all of which
we rudely put on the map, or
at least extended the arms be-
yond what was previously known.
Through Gastineau Channel, now
famous for some of the greatest
quartz mines and mills in the world,
we pushed, camping on the site of
what is now Juneau, the capital city
of Alaska.

An interesting bit of history is to
be recorded here. Pushing across
the flats at the head of the bay at
high tide the next morning (for the
narrow, grass-covered flat between

Gastineau Channel and Stevens Passage can only be crossed with canoes at flood tide), we met two old gold prospectors whom I had frequently seen at Wrangell—Joe Harris and Joe Juneau. Exchanging greetings and news, they told us they were out from Sitka on a leisurely hunting and prospecting trip. Asking us about our last camping place, Harris said to Juneau, "Suppose we camp there and try the gravel of that creek."

These men found placer gold and rock "float" at our camp and made quite a clean-up that fall, returning to Sitka with a "gold-poke" sufficiently plethoric to start a stampede to the new diggings. Both placer and quartz locations were made and a brisk "camp" was built the next summer. This town was first called Harrisburg for one of the prospectors, and afterwards Juneau for the

other. The great Treadwell gold quartz mine was located three miles from Juneau in 1881, and others subsequently. The territorial capital was later removed from Sitka to Juneau, and the city has grown in size and importance, until it is one of the great mining and commercial centers of the Northwest.

Through Stevens Passage we paddled, stopping to preach to the Auk Indians; then down Chatham Strait and into Icy Strait, where the crystal masses of Muir and Pacific glaciers flashed a greeting from afar. We needed no Hoonah guide this time, and it was well we did not, for both Hoonah villages were deserted. The inhabitants had gone to their hunting, fishing or berry-picking grounds.

At Pleasant Island we loaded, as on the previous trip, with dry wood for our voyage into Glacier Bay.

We were not to attempt the head of the bay this time, but to confine our exploration to Muir Glacier, which we had only touched upon the previous fall. Pleasant Island was the scene of one of Stickeen's many escapades. The little island fairly teemed with big field mice and pine squirrels, and Stickeen went wild. We could hear his shrill bark, now here, now there, from all parts of the island. When we were ready to leave the next morning he was not to be seen. We got aboard as usual, thinking that he would follow. A quarter of a mile's paddling and still no little black head could be discovered in our wake. Muir, who was becoming very much attached to the little dog, was plainly worried.

"Row back," he said.

So we rowed back and called, but no Stickeen. Around the next point we rowed and whistled; still

no Stickeen. At last, discouraged, I gave the signal to move off. So we rounded the curving shore and pushed towards Glacier Bay. At the far point of the island, a mile from our camping place, we suddenly discovered Stickeen away out in the water, paddling calmly and confidently towards our canoe. How he had ever got there I cannot imagine. I think he must have been taking a long swim out on the bay for the mere pleasure of it. Muir always insisted that he had listened to our discussion of the route to be taken, and, with an uncanny intuition that approached clairvoyance, knew just where to head us off.

When we took him aboard he went through his usual performance, making his way, the whole length of the canoe, until he got under Muir's legs, before shaking himself. No protests or discipline availed, for

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Muir's kicks always failed of their pretended mark. To the end of his acquaintance with Muir, he always chose the vicinity of Muir's legs as the place to shake himself after a swim.

At Muir Glacier we spent a week this time, making long trips up the mountains that overlooked the glacier and across its surface. On one occasion Muir, with the little dog at his heels, crossed entirely in a diagonal direction the great glacial lake, a trip of some thirty miles, starting before daylight in the morning and not appearing at camp until long after dark. Muir always carried several handkerchiefs in his pockets, but this time he returned without any, having used them all up making moccasins for Stickeen, whose feet were cut and bleeding from the sharp honeycomb ice of the glacial surface. This mass of ice is



THE FRONT OF MUIR GLACIER

We could understand the constant breaking off and leaping up and smashing down of the ice, and the formation of the great mass of bergs

so vast and so comparatively still that it has but few crevasses, and Muir's day for traversing it was a perfect one—warm and sunny.

Another day he and I climbed the mountain that overlooked it and skirted the mighty ice-field for some distance, then walked across the face of the glacier just back of the rapids, keeping away from the deep crevasses. We drove a straight line of stakes across the glacial stream and visited them each day to watch the deflection and curves of the stakes, and thus arrive at some conception of the rate at which the ice mass was moving. In some parts of the glacial stream this ice current flowed as fast as fifty or sixty feet a day, and we could understand the constant breaking off and leaping up and smashing down of the ice and the formation of that great mass of bergs.

Shortly before we left Muir Glacier, I saw Muir furiously angry for the first and last time in my acquaintance with him. We had noticed day after day, whenever the mists admitted a view of the mountain slopes, bands of mountain goats looking like little white mice against the green of the high pastures. I said to Joe, the hunter, one morning: "Go up and get us a kid. It will be a great addition to our larder."

He took my breech-loading rifle and went. In the afternoon he returned with a fine young buck on his shoulders. While we were examining it he said:

"I picked the fattest and most tender of those that I killed."

"What!" I exclaimed, "did you kill more than this one?"

He put up both hands with fingers extended and then one finger:

"*Tatum-pe-ict* (eleven)," he replied.

Muir's face flushed red, and with an exclamation that was as near to an oath as he ever came, he started for Joe. Luckily for that Indian he saw Muir and fled like a deer up the rocks, and would not come down until he was assured that he would not be hurt. I shared Muir's indignation and would have enjoyed seeing him administer the richly deserved thrashing.

Muir had a strong aversion to taking the life of any animal; although he would eat meat when prepared, he never killed a wild animal; even the rattlesnakes he did not molest during his rambles in California. Often his softness of heart was a source of some annoyance and a great deal of astonishment to our natives; for he would take pleasure in rocking the canoe when they were

trying to get a bead on a flock of ducks or a deer standing on the shore.

On leaving the mouth of Glacier Bay we spent a week or more exploring the inlets and glaciers to the west. These days were rainy and cold. We groped blindly into unknown, unmapped, fog-hidden fiords and bayous, exploring them to their ends and often making excursions to the glaciers above them.

The climax of the trip, however, was the last glacier we visited, Taylor Glacier, the scene of Muir's great adventure with Stickeen. We reached this fine glacier in the afternoon of a very stormy day. We were approaching the open Pacific, and the *saanah*, the southeast rain-wind, was howling through the narrow entrance into Cross Sound. For twenty miles we had been facing strong head winds and tidal waves

as we crept around rocky points and along the bases of dizzy cliffs and glacier-scored rock-shoulders. We were drenched to the skin; indeed, our clothing and blankets had been soaking wet for days. For two hours before we turned the point into the cozy harbor in front of the glacier we had been exerting every ounce of our strength; Lot in the stern wielding his big steering paddle, now on this side, now on that, grunting with each mighty stroke, calling encouragement to his crew, "*Ut-ha, ut-ha! hlitsin! hlitsin-tin!* (pull, pull, strong, with strength!)" ; Joe and Billy rising from their seats with every stroke and throwing their whole weight and force savagely into their oars; Muir and I in the bow bent forward with heads down, butting into the slashing rain, paddling for dear life; Stickeen, the only idle one, looking over the side of the boat as

though searching the channel and then around at us as if he would like to help. All except the dog were exhausted when we turned into the sheltered cove.

While the men pitched the tents and made camp Muir and I walked through the thick grass to the front of the large glacier, which front stretched from a high, perpendicular rock wall about three miles to a narrow promontory of moraine boulders next to the ocean.

"Now, here is something new," exclaimed Muir, as we stood close to the edge of the ice. "This glacier is the great exception. All the others of this region are receding; this has been coming forward. See the mighty ploughshare and its furrow!"

For the icy mass was heaving up the ground clear across its front, and, on the side where we stood, had evi-

dently found a softer stratum under a forest-covered hill, and inserted its shovel point under the hill, heaved it upon the ice, cracking the rocks into a thousand fragments; and was carrying the whole hill upon its back towards the sea. The large trees were leaning at all angles, some of them submerged, splintered and ground by the crystal torrent, some of the shattered trunks sticking out of the ice. It was one of the most tremendous examples of glacial power I have ever seen.

"I must climb this glacier to-morrow," said Muir. "I shall have a great day of it; I wish you could come along."

I sighed, not with resignation, but with a grief that was akin to despair. The condition of my shoulders was such that it would be madness to attempt to join Muir on his longer and more perilous climbs. I should

only spoil his day and endanger his life as well as my own.

That night I baked a good batch of camp bread, boiled a fresh kettle of beans and roasted a leg of venison ready for Muir's breakfast, fixed the coffee-pot and prepared dry kindling for the fire. I knew he would be up and off at daybreak, perhaps long before.

"Wake me up," I admonished him, "or at least take time to make hot coffee before you start." For the wind was rising and the rain pouring, and I knew how imperative the call of such a morning as was promised would be to him. To traverse a great, new, living, rapidly moving glacier would be high joy; but to have a tremendous storm added to this would simply drive Muir wild with desire to be himself a part of the great drama played on the glacier-stage,

Several times during the night I was awakened by the flapping of the tent, the shrieking of the wind in the spruce-tops and the thundering of the ocean surf on the outer barrier of rocks. The tremulous howling of a persistent wolf across the bay soothed me to sleep again, and I did not wake when Muir arose. As I had feared, he was in too big a hurry to take time for breakfast, but pocketed a small cake of camp bread and hastened out into the storm-swept woods. I was aroused, however, by the controversy between him and Stickeen outside of the tent. The little dog, who always slept with one eye and ear alert for Muir's movements, had, as usual, quietly left his warm nest and followed his adopted master. Muir was scolding and expostulating with him as if he were a boy. I chuckled to myself at the futility of Muir's efforts; Stickeen

would now, as always, do just as he pleased—and he would please to go along.

Although I was forced to stay at the camp, this stormy day was a most interesting one to me. There was an old Hoonah chief camped at the mouth of the little river which flowed from under Taylor Glacier. He had with him his three wives and a little company of children and grandchildren. The many salmon weirs and summer houses at this point showed that it had been at one time a very important fishing place.

But the advancing glacier had played havoc with the chief's salmon stream. The icy mass had been for several years traveling towards the sea at the rate of at least a mile every year. There were still silver hordes of fine red salmon swimming in the sea outside of the river's mouth. But the stream was now so

short that the most of these salmon swam a little ways into the mouth of the river and then out into the salt water again, bewildered and circling about, doubtless wondering what had become of their parent stream.

The old chief came to our camp early, followed by his squaws bearing gifts of salmon, porpoise meat, clams and crabs; and at his command two of the girls of his family picked me a basketful of delicious wild strawberries. He sat motionless by my fire all the forenoon, smoking my leaf tobacco and pondering deeply. After the noon meal, which I shared with him, he called Billy, my interpreter, and asked for a big talk.

With all ceremony I made preparations, gave more presents of leaf tobacco and hardtack and composed myself for the palaver. After the usual preliminaries, in which he told