

We will now retrace our steps toward Calistoga, and make an ascension of Mount St. Helena, about three miles distant to the base and nearly seven miles to the summit. It being already late in the day and we a little fatigued—perhaps a little petrified, from being in so close proximity with the trees—we conclude to postpone our trip until morning. At four A. M. we are informed that our horses, and an extra mule, packed with all the necessary provisions and “extras,” are in waiting, for we belong to a hungry family and cannot get along without regular rations. On leaving Calistoga, the road winds through a very narrow valley; on all sides the scenery is beautiful, and, as we approach the base, the forest becomes thicker. We finally reach the trail, and after a rather difficult though interesting ride, attain the summit, 4,343 feet above the level of the Pacific. The view from here is magnificent. With the naked eye we see Clear Lake, Lakeport, Upper Lake, Borax Lake, a great portion of Lake County, Cobb and Uncle Sam Mountains; beyond the Coast Range, the broad expanse of the Pacific Ocean, with numerous sails in the far distance; on the other side, the great Sacramento Valley, with its towns and villages; further on, the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and close around us numerous smaller mountains, some of which are wooded, while others are without vegetation.

The hour of 11 having arrived, we spread our cloth to partake of some refreshments; will then begin our descent and try our hands at shooting, as quails and other birds are plenty. On one side we notice a ridge of very steep mountains, in which of late large deposits of quicksilver have been discovered. Mention was first made of this locality in 1859, but was at that time not considered of sufficient importance to commence operations. Lately, however, quicksilver has attained such high prices that search has been made in this and other localities in the neighborhood with success.

As we continue our descent we catch sight of numerous deep defiles, high precipices and beautiful views on different sides, not noticed when going up, and often stop our horses to admire, for a moment, the magnificent panorama spread out before us. During our course into the valley we shot quite a number of quail, doves, hares and rabbits; we also shot at a deer, but being rather inexperienced, missed him. The height of our ambition, however, was to kill a bear. All travelers when visiting distant and partly unexplored regions, have a desire to meet with some adventure which can be related at the fireside; we also possessed that feeling. Our wishes, as the continuation of this narrative will show, were gratified, not in a very satisfactory manner with the bear, but the more so with a “pretty” little animal which inhabits the valley.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon. The day was very warm. We had staked our horses to allow them to rest, and had stretched ourselves out in the shade of an oak. Everything was quiet around us; nature seemed to be taking a “siesta.” The silence was occasionally broken by the cry of the quail, the song of the California nightingale or the hammering of the woodpecker.

We were recalling to view the beautiful scenery of the morning, and saying: “how interesting it would be, if we could only see a bear.” This thought continually haunted us and floated uppermost in our minds. The old saying of “never paint the devil on the wall, lest he should unexpectedly appear,” was here verified—for, we suddenly heard a rustle among the bushes and emerging from the underbush, not fifty yards from us, we saw a black bear. Immediately seizing our guns, for we had no rifles, we prepared for the attack the bear, however, whether from a feeling of contempt for us, or with warlike intentions, came toward us. We both fired at once; the bear stopped, but did “not” fall! Whether our aim was bad, or whether we had omitted to put shot into our guns, is yet a mystery; we incline to the latter, however. Suffice it to say, that we were dumfounded and were only awakened from our “trance of terror,” when the bear was close to us, certainly with no amicable intentions. At this critical juncture, our minds had but a single thought, and that was; guess, dear reader, \* \* \* \* \* to run! Yes, we did run, leaving horses, mule and all our equipments!

Every one running from danger, whether imaginary or real, frequently looks behind; so did we, when, to our great pleasure, we saw the bear making tracks in another direction.

We halted to take breath, and gradually becoming reassured we retraced our steps to our horses. Hastily gathering our things, we left this enchanting spot, with the firm resolve never to forget the “shot” in future. We finally reached the valley, and, in consequence of being unacquainted with the neighborhood, missed the right road, finding ourselves on one of the many trails leading in all directions. Thinking to bag some more small game—not bears—we reloaded our guns, hoping to strike the right road by letting our horses follow their own inclination, or meeting with some wood-cutters of whom to inquire. While looking about for something to shoot at, we saw, quite near us, a small animal, of black color, with white stripes upon its back. We approached very quietly, and, when within easy range, one of us fired. The animal was not killed, but appeared to be wounded, as it did not run away. Thinking to have shot some California curiosity, worthy of being presented to a museum of natural history, we hastily ran to the spot to catch our prey. When about to lay hands upon it we were rewarded with a very strong perfume—not “Cologne.” Imagine, dear reader, what it was. We had shot a “skunk!”

This was by far the most disagreeable adventure; our shameful flight from the bear might never be known, but our ignorance in regard to the latter named quadruped would speak for itself—“odor will tell.” At