

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Big Sur Country

The words "Big Sur Country" seem to bring a nostalgia to one who is at all familiar with this country down the coast from Carmel. There is a sense of greatness, of pioneering, of the power of creation behind it all. At least that is our experience.

We remember the beauty of the approach to Monterey, the steepness of the Carmel hill, the first glimpse of the line, the narrowness of the road, the expectancy of a passing motorist or the stage and the mail man, the first sight of the redwoods or the anticipation of a picnic luncheon at the Little Sur and at last the arrival at Pfeiffer's.

I have experienced all this in the years gone by. The early breakfasts and dinners under the climbing rose arbor which covered the porch at Pfeiffer's, were truly "out of this world" in those days before this virgin territory became a state - owned park and the name was changed to Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. The park is composed of 760 acres, is 35 miles from Monterey, and was acquired by the State of California in 1933 at a value of \$171,260.

The attendance at this Monterey County public park, situated on one of California's most scenic highways, is many thousands a year. There are camping facilities provided, a lodge and a number of cabins, all administered by the State Park system.

I recently came across an article published in The Monterey Cypress in 1889 which expresses the feeling folks have for that country and most of its people, especially the pioneers.

It reads: "The grandest women and men on God's earth are found in that country, the bond, sinew and moral forces are pent up there and when brought to the surface are resplendent with genius and produce an Abraham Lincoln, a Stephen A. Douglas and a Patrick Henry, a Mrs. Browning and a Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The physical is developed in consonance with the mental and our great men and women have received their inspiration beside the running brooks, the beautiful scenery of the mountains and the country life there. One who has gone out to the country to fish, or hunt, has never peregrinated over the hills, mountains and vale, can never understand its beauties, and can never know the toil, fatigue and self - satisfaction of remote vastness in the mountains."

A more picturesque sight was never witnessed than that of the Little and Big Sur country, bordering on the ocean. "Grander men and women never lived than these toilers of the sea, generous, unselfish; they live hoping ever, expecting some day to realize their dreams of childhood," wrote our journalist of seventy years ago.

"Nature has provided beautiful tall redwood trees, tan bark, live oak, fir, all the elements are there that must and will be utilized in the near future. Money, they do not have much of, they do not need, but the future will bring forth abundance of all these things."

In those days a man by the name of Sterritt had a mill run by waterpower up the Garrapatas creek, which he used to grind his and his neighbors' corn. In Bixby Canyon trains of mules loaded with tan bark passed over the trails that many would think impassable.

They arrived at broader trails intended for wagons where tan bark and live oak wood was hauled a distance of several miles to a chute, there to be let down to a vessel, probably at Knotley's Landing, and taken to San Francisco.

It has been reported that 40,000,000 feet of redwood was a low estimate of the resources of the Little and Big Sur Country in those days. At least 50,000 cords of tan bark were likewise shipped from that country—a wealth to those who could afford to toil and wait.

In 1889, it was estimated that the value of the roads built in that country by a few hard working and industrious pioneers would exceed \$15,000. These roads were built a short distance at a time, as necessity demanded, but they were built and stand as monuments erected in memory of those good, people living there.

The only meat, probably for a year at a time, eaten and enjoyed by the pioneers of the Big and Little Sur, was the deer and the fish caught in the river.

The Cypress writer had a bit of advice for the young man of 1889 which might also apply in 1966. "The hospitality shown by those folks would make the denizens of our towns and citizens ashamed of their miserable parsimony; for stinginess is stranger to those people.

"Young men go into the wilds and cease longer to sow your wild oats, take up a government claim and if you can afford to wait, wealth and happiness is in store for you.