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Letter from John Bidwell to John Muir, 1896 Apr 20.

John Bidwell

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Chico, Cal.,
Apr 20, 1896.

John Muir Esq.,
Martinez, Cal.,

My dear Sir,

Your esteemed favor to hand – came during my late absence at San Jose. Glad to hear from you.

In the inclosed statement I have tried to comply with your request.

So you are going to Alaska again! Look out, for the glaciers there are full

of crevasses. (Please pardon poor pencil writing, my nervous hand being too unsteady to use the pen.)

Mrs Bidwell joins in best wishes and kindest remembrances.

Come and see us when you can.

Yours always
John Bidwell

over

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The Silva of North America I shall hope some time to see, but cannot fix the date.

The Democrats and Republicans have brought the country to the very brink of ruin — the times are terrible — financially we are literally crushed — fruit practically all killed — grain brings scarcely cost. Yet I intend to have the "Silva" if I ever get able.

Please do me the favor to revise and discard every thing in the said inclosed Statement you deem unnecessary — I have no time to revise or condense and put in presentable shape. Do please

J. Burroughs

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Statement.

In 1841, before Fremont had seen or named Great Salt Lake, Humboldt, Carson or Walker's rivers, or, so far as I know, before any white man had ever crossed the Sierra Nevada mountains, I crossed the plains to California and saw them all. The part I came with consisted of thirty two men one woman and child

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We struck a stream and ascended it to the eastern base of said mountains. This proved to be what is now known as Walker's river, which was named by Fremont in 1845 after a noted Rocky Mountain trapper, Jo Walker. There we scaled the now famous Sierra Nevada. and first struck waters flowing west. The stream

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we descended was the Stanislaus river, a tributary of the San Joaquin, both names to us being then unknown. Our party was now entirely out of provisions. One of the last two oxen had been killed before we began the climb, the other when in mid journey down the western slope. The oxen became so poor that the bones contained no marrow. Fires

had desolated the mountains and it seemed impossible to find or kill any game. It took about three weeks to get over the great chain, and during that time no game was killed except one wildcat and one crow. The last ox gone, mules and horses could not be spared, except when some became too poor to travel or crippled by falling down precipitous places, and so were our only resource

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for food. For a large part of the way down the mountain our course lay along the divide, on the north side of the precipitous cañon of the Stanislaus, and was generally west. We knew that California must lie to the west, and that was the direction we aimed to travel. With this understanding one morning, (about the 20th of Oct. 1841,

I think it was) I started ahead of the party to try to kill some game, and became separated for 36 hours or more. Near night I was hastening north to intersect the trail of the party going west. It was almost too dark to see a trail, when I came to an enormous fallen tree. I tried to go around the top but it was too bushy. As I passed by the but, which seemed to tower some twenty or more feet above my head, I was obliged to hasten on and find a secluded place to

spend the night, for Indian fires were seen and tracks fresh and plentiful.

I had come to the conclusion that the party had gone north (and not west), so at daylight I struck out east with all haste, but found no trail. Then I bore south till I found the camping ground where I left the party the day before. But the party had changed direction, followed an Indian path

down into the deep cañon, and scaled the cañon wall on the south side of the Stanislaus. As I climbed along their rugged trail I found several horses and mules had given out (too weak to go farther) and been left to the mercy of the Indians — who were cutting them to pieces even when standing and alive — unable to run or kick. My rifle I carried cocked in my hand; but, though

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alone and several hours after the party had passed, the Indians made no attempt to molest me.

But to return to the big tree which I had seen. The conditions under which I saw it - the darkness that was coming on - the haste to leave as soon as I could see in the morning &c. must be my excuse for the meagre report I am able to give.

This tree was, beyond a

a doubt, that huge wonder of the Calaveras grove of Sequoias known as the Father of the Forest.

Though I entered the grove and found a hiding place for the night near the east side I saw no standing Sequoias.

We had for several days been meandering among (to me) wonderful conifers, of which many must have been that monarch of all

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pines, the Sugar pine.

Besides, tho to me every thing was new and wonderful, there was at the moment no time to consider. And yet the impression that tree made upon my mind could not be forgotten.

Ever after when the mention of big trees happened to be made, I never failed to tell

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my big tree story.

In March 1844, when Fremont first came to California, I told him in the presence of Capt. Sutter, P. B. Reading, Col. Jos. B. Chiles and others, (at the breakfast table one morning at Sutter's Fort) of the big tree I had seen.

Col. Chiles was of

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our party. He had seen the Redwoods of the coast, and thought the big tree I had seen was Redwood, and declared he saw Redwood when we were in the Sierra Nevada &c.

But of course he was in this mistaken. And certainly too he was never within ten miles of my

were
big tree when we coming to California.

Finally after the Calaveras grove of Sequoias had been rediscovered in the early fifties I went there and recognized the tree that I saw and the lay of the ground.

John Bidwell

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Todd, against Todd, and
Dear Mr Muir. When Gen.
Jay Carter & 2 visitors Calaveras grove
Gen. recognized many features of
the locality, saying "Yes, I was
here"; and is how we reached
the hotel he described the Fall
of the Forest & the guide that the
latter replied "We have been
here." Tears filled my friend's
eyes & he turned away, but not
before I had seen them, & he
broke off alone to think for a
while, without daring to look
me in the face. He never did much
more; he as the morning
progressed was often seen, like
me by myself with those
memories. Sincerely Yours A. K.