



1878-08-06

Letter from John Muir to [Annie Kennedy] Bidwell, 1878 Aug 6.

John Muir

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Recommended Citation

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In Camp near Austin Nevada,
Aug. 6th 1898 —

Dear Mrs Bidwell.

What magnificent floods of
sunshine we have here; open, shadeless, unmitigated
sun glow & too how hot it is riding all day on
the gray plains. We set out from Sacramento
on horseback & though buds fairly begun have
already ridden 700 miles across plains & mountains
many O. We spent the 4th of July at Glorious Lake
railed once more around the lake enjoying the
marvelous beauty of the water. Thence we pushed eastward
to the Wasatch mountains near Walker Lake thence north
to old Fort Churchill on the Carson - was delighted
to find the ancient outlet of the Walker River basin.
It flowed from the north end of Mason Valley
into the Carson opposite the old fort. It appears
therefore that the Great Carson & Humboldt Sink
also received the waters of Walker River towards
the close of the Glacier Period. From the fort we
pushed off in a north easterly direction across the
Sink & ascended the gray ashy looking range
that bounds it on the East. How the sun shone,
& how the burning air wavered & rippled - Strange
that even the very sunlight may become dreary
The gray alkaline lands have a weird mysterious
influence. Yet there is no real cause to make one
lose his senses. The delicate pink Abromia is in
full bloom & one sunflower & a leguminous bush
with purple flowers, & even the Sage is beautiful if
one only takes the time to look at it deliberately.

And several species of grass spread their handsome
families in the openings - Immense areas however
are perfectly smooth hard white & plantless. Here
is where the early emigrants called the 40 mile - desert
well marked even now by bones & wagon wrecks.
Anyhow it is beautiful however unfit for juicy
fruits & wheat. From the mountains we had a glorious
view of this rare old lake, towards sunset it was
one mass of color beautiful & delicate as tints rose
petals or the lips of shells. One of the most ineffably
beautiful of all natural paintings. The gray forbidding
mountains too are rich in gardens watered by streams
& small to ring audibly. Wish I had space to tell you
about them, but Alack! a letter tells nothing.
We next ascended the Augusta Range. Then crossed
more hot valleys & passed over the Desoto &
Shoshone ranges - crossed Reese River valley &
climbed one of the highest of the Toiyabe mountains.
(11,000 feet). From here we will proceed in a general
easterly direction to the Wasatch mountains - will probably
be out until November.

I was thinking of your leafy home the other day. Will
the changed state of affairs of the Sierra Lumber Co. allow the
waters of Chen Creek to flow once more in natural purity?
We are all basking & browning finely, some noses
blooming & shedding scale-like petals. Mine is not yet
so far advanced & the heat has but little effect.

Had a letter from your sister & Prof. Gray just before
leaving San Francisco. My next address good for two weeks from
this date will be Eureka, Nevada, Care A. F. Rodgers.

U. S. Coast Survey

I see that the irrepressible Gunning has been in Yosemite.
He is mistaken about the moraines he mentions.

With cordial regards to the General. I am ever your friend John Muir.