



1881-06-21

Letter from [John Muir] to [Louie Strentzel Muir], 1881 Jun 21.

John Muir

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Recommended Citation

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C13 54
St Michaels, Alaska,
June 21, 1881. 2.15 P.M.

Sunshine dear Louie, Sunshine all the day,
ripe & mellow sunshine, like that which
feeds the fruits & vines. It came to us just
days ago when we were approaching this
little old fashioned trading post at the mouth
of the Yukon River. How sweet & kindly
& reviving it is after so long & deep a burial
beneath dark slaty storm clouds. For a whole
month it snowed every day some days only
for an hour or two, some days ~~all~~ all day
but never one in all the month in which
more or less snow did not fall either in
wet slaty blasts in thick gloom or in dry
crystals blowing off the deck as fast as it
fell or sticking on the rigging & making
slippy sludge on the deck & then freezing
fast. I never before have seen so dark
a month, so steadily cloudy a sky. And
when we came here we seemed to have come
out of a cave into the living exhilarating
light. And yet strange to say in all this
gloomy month there has been no night.
All the thirty one days has been one cloudy day

01014 C33 *no longer a part of our minds as things of the*
manners like village parsons, they held
us in long interesting talks & gave us
some valuable information concerning
the broad wilds of the Yukon.
Yesterday I took a long walk of 12 or 14
miles over the tundra to a volcanic cone &
back leaving the ship about 10 in the forenoon
& getting back at half past 8. I found a
great number of flowers in full bloom
& birds of many species building their
nests & a capital view of the surrounding
country from the rim of an old crater
altogether making a delightful day though
a very wearisome one on account of the
difficult walking. The ground back of
St Michael stretches away in broad brown
levels of boggy tundra promising fine
walking but proving about as tedious &
exhausting as possible. The spongy
covering roughened with tussocks of grass
& sedges & creeping heathworts & willows
among which the foot staggers about &
sinks & squirts seeking rest & finding none

When we were still 50 miles from here a linnet came to meet us & flew about the rigging & then a heavy burly bumblebee as if to tell us about the sunlight & guide us to it in safety.

On the day of our arrival from Plouffe a little steamer came into the harbor from the upper Yukon towing three large boats loaded with traders Indians & furs. All the furs they had gathered during the winter. We went across to the storeroom of the Company to see them, a queer lot they were whites & Indians as they unloaded their furs. It was worth while to look at the furs too. Big bundles of bear skins brown & black, wolf, fox, beaver, marten, ermine, moose, wolverine ^{wild} cats many of them with claws spread & hair on end as if still alive & fighting for their lives. Some of the Indian chiefs the wildest animals of all, & the more notable of the traders not at all wild came in dress but rather gentle & refined in

until far down between the rocky tussocks. This covering is composed of a patch of mosses chiefly sphagnum about 8 inches or a foot deep resting on ice that never melts, with about half of the surface the moss is covered with white & yellow & red & gray lichens & the other half is planted more or less with grasses sedges heathworts & creeping willows & a flowering plant here & there such as primula & purple spiked pedicularis. Out in this grand solitude - solitary as far as man is concerned - in meadows a great many of the Arctic grouse, ptarmigan cackling & screaming at our approach like old laying hens, also plovers snipes curlews sandpeps loons in ponds, & ducks & geese, & finches & wrens about the crater & rocks at its base. We leave here for another cruise in the Arctic this evening hoping to return to this point in time to send letters by the Alaska Com Co's steamer "St Paul" which will leave about July 12. But in case we should be delayed by the ice I thought I would write now & leave it here in charge of Mr Lawrence the Co's agent. He has given me an invitation to go up the Yukon