



1868-07-14

## Letter from John Muir to David Gilrye Muir, 1868 Jul 14

John Muir

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### Recommended Citation

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at the <sup>affected</sup> ~~world~~ & novel business  
 of sheep shearing, & had very  
 funny, lawless, exciting times.  
 There was about thirty men in  
 the first gang, I worked in, composed  
 of Spanish, Indian, Irish, English,  
 Scottish, & mixed mongrel & moral  
 & able elements of Californian  
 society too numerous to mention.  
 All of this fine regiment was driving  
 the sheep into the shearing pens  
 would look & feel like devils  
 the sheep, wild as untamed, would  
 become ungovernable. In fact  
 of wholesale sheep hunt & a common  
 in which deeds of romantic  
 daring might be witnessed in  
 the hearing, surging masses of  
 men & mutton equal to those  
 of the Knights of old in the  
 tournament. These sheep  
 are not like those of Palestine -  
 dumb before their shears for  
 many of them keep up wild &  
 obstreperous war fare with  
 kicks & bleat from the first  
 at ears to the last at tail

My long stay in the valley of the Merced  
 & the mountains of California  
 & the mountains of California  
 & the mountains of California

Address in the State of California  
 To Holt-Atherton, 21 is near the  
 Send my love to Holt-Atherton

On the Merced river near  
 Snelling, Merced Co -  
 Cal July 14<sup>th</sup> [1868]

Dear Bro David, I have  
 lived under the sunny sky  
 of California nearly 3 1/2 months,  
 but have not yet rec'd a single  
 letter from any source. Perhaps  
 a few went to the dead letter office  
 while I was in the mountains,  
 but I am settled now with a  
 ranchman for eight or nine  
 months, & hope to enjoy a full share  
 of the comfort of letters during  
 my long isolation.  
 I traveled along the San Joaquin  
 valley from San Fran to Gilroy &  
 crossed the Diablo Mountains by  
 the Pechee pass, crossed the  
 & river of San Joaquin, & traveled  
 on into the Sierra Nevada to  
 the Mammoth trees & Mayrup cent  
 Jo Pass in Valley, thence down  
 the Merced to this place.

My health which suffered such  
wreck in the South has been  
thoroughly patched & mended in  
the mountains of California.  
I had a week or two of fever  
before leaving the plains for  
Serrita, but it was not severe  
& I was only laid up three or four  
days, & a month in the Sierras  
cooled with mountain winds  
& delicious crystal water has  
effected a complete cure.

And now David this is a  
splendid country, & you might  
truthfully make use of more  
than half of the Methodist hymn  
'Land of pure delight' in describing  
it. It flows with more of milk  
& more of honey than ever did  
old Canaan in its happiest  
prime. Of all the bright shining  
ranks of happy days that God  
has given me since I left  
Wisconsin these of California are

the happiest

This place is ten or a dozen  
miles from the lowest foothills  
of the great Sierra range, & opposite  
& parallel to it at the distance  
of 40 or 50 miles is the Diablo  
range, both of which with their  
gorges, & valleys, & sharp rounded  
peaks, are in full clear view  
like a picture in a room.  
& They form together with the  
purple plains & pure sky a scene  
of exhaustless & unmeasurable  
happiness from all the fields  
where I work.

I have been in the harvest  
field, but harvest work is easy  
here where tractors are used.  
Many farmers in this valley  
raise from 20 to 20 thousand  
bushels of grain. I never had  
so easy times in harvest field  
before.  
I worked for some time here

[Original letter in possession of David Gilrye Muir]

On Merced river near Snelling, Merced Co.,  
Cal., July 14th, [1868].

Dear Bro. David:

I have lived under the sunny sky of California nearly 3 1/2 months, but have not yet rec'd a single letter from any source -- perhaps a few went to the dead letter off[ice] while I was in the mountains, but I am settled now with a ranchman for eight or nine months, and hope to enjoy a full share of the comfort of letters during my long isolation.

I traveled along the San Jose valley from San Fran. to Gilroy and crossed the Diabolo Mountains by the Pecheco pass, crossed the plains and river of San Joaquin, and traveled on into the Sierra Nevadas to the mammoth trees and magnificent Yo Semite Valley, thence down the Merced to this place.

My health, which suffered such wreck in the South, has been thoroughly patched and mended in the mountains of California. I had a week or two of fever before leaving the plains for Yo Semite, but it was not severe, and I was only laid up three or four days, and a month in the Sierras cooled with mountain winds and delicious crystal water has effected a complete cure.

And now Davie, this is a splendid country, and one might truthfully make use of more than half of the Methodist hymn 'Land of pure delight' in describing it, and it flows with more of milk and more of honey than ever did old Canaan in its happiest prime. Of all the bright shining ranks of happy days that God has given me since I left Wisconsin, these of California are the happiest.

This place is ten or a dozen miles from the lowest foothills of the great Sierra range and opposite and parallel to it at the distance of 40 or 50 ms. is the Diabolo range, both of which with their gorges, and valleys, and sharp snow-clad peaks, are in full clear view, like a picture in a room. They form, together with the purple plains and pure sky, a source of exhaustless and unmeasurable happiness from all the fields where I work.

I have been in the harvest field, but harvest work is easy here where headers are used. Many farmers in this valley raise from 10 to 20 bushels of grain. I never had so easy times in harvest field before. I worked for some time here at the wild and novel business of sheep-shearing, and had very funny, lawless, exciting times. There were about thirty men in the first gang I worked in, composed of Spanish, Indian, Irish, English, Scottish, and mixed, mongrel, unanalyzable elements of Californian society "too numerous to mention." All of this pied regiment in driving the sheep into the shearing pens would hoot and yell like demons. The sheep, wild as antelopes, would become ungovernable, and a sort of wholesale sheep hunt would commence in which deeds of romantic daring might be witnessed in the heaving, surging masses of men and mutton equal to those of the knights of old in tournament. These sheep are not like those of Palestine - dumb before their shearers, for many of them keep up wild and obstreperous warfare with kick and bleat, from the first snip at ears to the last at tail.

My love to Cath. and the little ones. Please write very soon, and advise Maggie and J[ohn] Reid and all the rest to write.

Affectionately,

J. M. [John Muir]

Send my letters to Hopeton. It is nearer than Snelling.

[Year 1868 supplied, as that is the year in which Muir reached California]