1880-03-16

Letter from John Muir to [Charles Sprague] Sargent, 1899 Aug 18.

John Muir

Martinez, Aug. 18, 1899.

My dear Prof Sargent-

I got home Friday the big north trip on the 3d- but had to go to the Sierra Calaveras Big Tree Grove almost before I settled hearing that it was to be sold & made into lumber- Mr Sperry I found who owns both the Calaveras & Santa Cruz & the Sugar pine region about them had been offered $100,000 for 2000 acres, but had refused the offer. So he tries there are 2 or 3 as fat. & he promised to let me know before accepting any offer that would include the Sequoia Groves.

The Harriman trip was a grand success the South & North ends of the Excursion in S.E. Alaska & Bering Sea I had seen under more favorable auspices before, but the Coast & inlets- from Cross Sound to Yakutat Bay, Prince Williams Sound Cook Inlet & Kodiak Island, Shumagin Island. & the Alaska Peninsula to Unalaska I had not seen, & though we stopped only a few days at a time here & there I picked up a good many bits of knowledge & enjoyed the trip in grand style- Here are a few

true notes that will be sure to interest you. At a landing we made on the N. end of Vancouver Isld we found Douglas Spruce in all its glory, & of course the big Thuya, Western Hemlock, & Mountain Hemlock also A. Amabilis. At Low Inlet on Princess Royal Isld the Douglas was not to be found. but A. Amabilis was abundant & of course Sitka Spruce Western Hemlock, & at the top of timberline Paton Hemlock. or Mertensiana as you now call it. & red Cedar (Thuya) & Alaska Cedar (T.) All the way along the Coast to the limit of tree growth on the Middle of Kodiak Isld & the mainland opposite on the Alaska Peninsula the forest is unbroken, consisting mostly of the indomitable P. Sitchensis & Western Hemlock. but the hemlock vanishes on the Alaska Penn. near the mouth of Cook Inlet leaving the Sitka Spruce to do all the forest work to the Westward. I was much interested in watching the ~~West~~ East limit of the forest. Not a tree is seen to the West of the Middle of Kadiak Isld, tho a small grove of Sitka Spruce planted on Onalaska 100 yrs ago is flourishing I found the largest of the grove 2 ft, 1 inch diameter & 30 ft high (Kept low by wind) & covered with brilliant red & purple staminate & pistillate flowers. A glorious show proclaiming

no end of strength & growing expanding vigor in that latitude & soil, under fair conditions. I asked Fernow why the Sitka Sp. forest did not keep on West he mumbled a lot of stuff about prevailing winds, composition of alder bushes & rank grass, & the "Japan Current" which simply meant he didn't know. The simple explanation is fire. The line of demarcation between the Western treeless, & forest-regions to the Eastward, plainly - that fire is the controlling agent. Most of the soil is volcanic & supports a dense lush growth of fire-feeding grass & brush. & I was told at Unalaska that notwithstanding the wet weather. fire ran in the grass any time of year after a single day of dry sunshine & that constant care & fighting was required to save the few trees planted at Unalaska.

At Prince Williams Sound at the head of a cold icy fiord I found a fine forest of Patton Hemlock at sea-level. trees 2, to over 3 feet diameter, & 80 to 100 ft high. Bark pale gray - almost white. pistillate flowers very dark blue 3/4 inch long. The grandest oldest most vigorous Patton hemlock forest I ever saw. varying long

gentle branches over the glaciers where even the sturdy P. sitchensis could not grow— Farther down the Inlet, 12 miles or 20 where the conditions of soil & climate were not so severe, P. sitchensis found about 1/2 the forest. This is no Lie about 62.! I'll send you photos as soon as I can.

Then are broad extensive forests of S. spruce western hemlock etc about Cook Inlet with a birch used for canoe making about 30 ft high 18 inches dia. I am promised the flowers of it.

One of the finest of the flower effects I saw was made by the dwarf Kamschatka rhododendron on the Shumagin Isld— one glorious mass of purple. the flrs 1 inch long 1/2 wide. The bushes penetrate in dense extensive mats. Expect to hear many hasty generalizations from Fernow he jumps at conclusions with the boldness of short sight. I wish I could be with you as you plan, but I must get some of this writing off my hand. Thanks for your kind invitation. You come here & will go to the Sequoias & perhaps get a Redwood Park organized. Remember me to your family Ever Yours Cordially

John Muir