



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

1880-03-16

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

John Muir

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Recommended Citation

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Martinez, Aug. 18. 1899.

My dear Prof Sargent.

I got home from the big north trip on the 3^d. 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 & South Grove & the Sugar pine region about them had been offered \$100,000 for 2000 acres, but had refused the offer. So the trees there are safe as yet. I'm 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 Alaskan 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

tree notes that will ² be sure to interest you. At a landing we made on the N. end of Vancouver Isd we found Douglas Spruce in all its glory, & of course the big Thuja, Western Hemlock, & Mountain Hemlock also *A. Amabilis*. At Low Inlet on Princess Royal Isd 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 (Thuja) & Alaska Cedar etc. All the way along the coast to the limit of tree growth on the Middle of Kodiak Isd & 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 ~~east~~ ^{west} limit of the forest, Not a tree is seen to the west of the middle of Kodiak Isd, tho a small grove of Sitka Spruce planted on Unalaska 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 strength³ & growing expanding
vigor in that latitude & soil, under fair
conditions. I asked Fernow why the
Sitka sp. forest did not keep on West
He rumbled a lot of stuff about prevailing
winds, competition 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 trees, & forest-regions
^{to the eastward,}
shows 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 pure forest of Patton
~~or Western~~ hemlock at sea-level, trees 2, to over
3 feet diameter, & 80 to 100 ft high. Bark pale
gray-almost white. Fertilite flowers very dark
blue $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long. The grandest oldest mossiest
Patton hemlock forest I ever saw. Varying long

gestle branches over ⁴ the glaciers where even
the sturdy *P. Sitchensis* could not grow
farther down the Inlet, ^{12 miles or so} where the conditions of soil
& climate were not so severe, *P. Sitchensis*
grows about $\frac{1}{2}$ the forest. This is in
Lab about 62. I'll send you photos as
soon as I can.

There 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 Kamshatka rhododendron
on the Shumagin Islds - one glorious mass
of purple. The fls 1 inch long $1\frac{1}{2}$ wide. The
bushes prostrate 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 mind.
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