



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

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1895-10-01

Letter from John Muir to [Robert Underwood Johnson], 1895 Oct  
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John Muir

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Martinez, Oct. 1, 1895.

My dear Mr. Johnson,

I had a long talk the other day with the Vice President of our Sierra Club, Mr Olney, the friend of Irish, on Yosemite affairs, & after I had shown him how faithfully & well the Yosemite National Park was managed,--how sheep & destruction had been fenced out, the natural bloom & beauty called back, & how many visitors were now enjoying it; while the Valley itself, naturally the heart & soul of the park, was the only desolate neglected part of it--a frowsy, dirty, dusty, downtrodden, vular mustang pasture, going with deadly steadiness from bad to worse--he at length said "There is no hope for Yosemite under the management of shifting careless politicians. It must be receded to the federal government & placed under military supervision." Only the monopoly now in possession of the Valley are opposed to the transfer while most everybody else are simply careless. However travel to the park is increasing so rapidly public opinion must grow stronger from year to year for good management.<sup>1</sup> It is becoming less & less [an] attraction. How many would visit Del Monte, Golden Gate Park, Central Park, or any other park in the world if made a dusty unkept flowerless pathless pasture fenced with a maze of barbed wire & turned over to the bad mercies of dollar getters! This state of things has greatly alarmed the monopoly, & I think they would require but little pressure to make them take away their barbed wire fences & keep their horses in stables instead of turning them loose every night provided campers were compelled to feed their animals in

corrals & stables also.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Irish though no longer a Yo. Commissioner still acts as though he were the attorney of the monopoly. He lately made a savage attack in the Examiner on Hutchings--Still nobody as far as I heard on my late trip had a good word from him, though all praised Johnson for the grand work done in the Century for the forests. The Washburns who so savagely attacked you at Wawona were this year profuse in their praise. & by the way I carefully sounded all the small gardeners I met whose little spots are included in the park as to the way their interests had been affected, & all said they were glad to be delivered from the hordes of sheep that used to sweep over theirs & the adjacent lands & rob them of every blade of grass. That Committee Memorial for the purpose of breaking up the boundaries of the park presented last winter to Congress was all pine manufactures lying bosh.<sup>3</sup>

This is probably the last dying gasp of the old attack on you--perhaps J. P. I. work. Mr Field the most active of the board of Commissioners & the most influential is now working on the lines you laid out, & as I told you in my last was the one who induced the Commission to employ Mr Radford.<sup>4</sup> Mr Hutchings has been granted a lease of his old cabin with one acre of land, but he wants more land which the commissioners refuse to grant hence he is still fighting His cabin has been used for some time as a hay barn.<sup>5</sup>

I guess that this road sooner or later will be built at least to the West boundary of the park, & right of the hotel doors, if possible--<sup>6</sup>

The extention of the forest reservations & putting the management of them on a permanent bases is now the most important object in all the mountain regions of the country After fires are kept out the young growth of conifers & the underbrush in general will require most careful & laborious attention, else the best protected forests will be the most completely destroyed in some grand



fire that will get beyond control in time of drought & wind.

How weary & heavy laden you must be. Send me a line saying you are well.  
& let me know Olmsteads estimate of Radford.

Ever cordially yours

John Muir

- 1 Newspaper clipping from the Yosemite Tourist "The Season's Travel" attached here. Transcription follows.
- 2 Newspaper clipping from the Oakland Tribune "[?] Military Parks" attached here. Transcription follows.
- 3 Newspaper clipping from unidentified source, "Yosemite Valley," attached here. Transcription follows.
- 4 Untitled newspaper clipping from the San Francisco Chronicle attached here. Transcription follows.
- 5 Two newspaper clippings from unidentified source, "Survey for the Electric Railroad From Merced to the Yosemite Valley Under Way" and "Yosemite Railroad," attached here. Transcriptions follows.
- 6 Newspaper clipping from unidentified source, "Lumber for Fresno," attached here. Transcription follows.

*The Season's Travel*<sup>1</sup>

*The arrivals at the hotels have been a little less than 1400<sup>2</sup> up to date. This is at least 500 short of what the average was prior to the commencement of the recent panic, dating back two seasons. People have felt too poor to travel. The member of campers has reached almost 2,000. This is a third more than an average. In the Great Register 1,990 visitors have registered as against 1,437 for last season.*

<sup>1</sup>Dated 1895 by JM.

<sup>2</sup>JM holograph revision "1300."

[Newspaper clipping from the Oakland Tribune]

[ ? ] *Military Parks*

*The Federal Government has made three great reservations for military parks on the other side of the country. These are Gettysburg, Chickamaugo and Antietam. Two other reservations are proposed viz: Shilo and Vicksburg. This result is due largely to the Grand Army of the Republic in co-operation with the friendly support of much southern influence. These reservations are all battle fields in the soil of which Union and Confederate soldiers are buried, and to the memory of whom monuments have been erected. These military parks will be well preserved.*

*The Federal Government has a military park at Yellowstone. There are no battles to be commemorated there. But the only way in which all the great national wealth could be preserved was by putting the entire reservation under military supervision. Yosemite Valley is something less than a military park. But some years ago it was found that the sheep herders were destroying all the young growth of the forests by fires, and the constant beating of the*



ground by sheep. A military patrol was organized as the only method by which such a nuisance could be abated. Now it is reported that the young growth is unmolested, flowers spring up every where in the little openings. This military supervision is made effective with great satisfaction to citizens and tourists who have visited Yosemite during the present season. It is a pity that the same supervision is not extended over the floor of Yosemite Valley.

#### YOSEMITE VALLEY

Some few years ago a gentleman prominently connected with one of the great Eastern magazines paid a visit to Yosemite valley and upon his return entered at once upon an active crusade on behalf of what he called preserving the natural beauties of the valley. He did not want a road or bridle path cut on the floor of the valley, nor any of the underbrush removed, nor anything done to make the valley comfortable and habitable. So interested was he with his own pet hobby that he actually undertook to get the United States to revoke its grant of Yosemite to the State of California and make it a national park.

This year in the place and stead of an enthusiastic but prejudiced magazine editor, there has been in Yosemite valley a scientific landscape engineer, George K. Radford, formerly associated with Frederick Law Olmstead, and Mr. Radford has reported his views to the Yosemite Commissioners. Mr. Radford says: "The environment and surroundings of cliffs, waterfalls, etc., are as nature made and left them, and neither need control nor can be improved, but the floor of the valley itself can be utilized and made 'a thing of beauty and a joy forever' for the present and coming generations.

He recommends the removal of the undergrowth, the protection of the banks of the Merced river, the improvement of roads and bridle paths and walks, and the introduction of electric lights. In other words, he speaks from a modern



*and sensible standpoint, that of preserving natural beauties wherever available, but at the same time removing obstacles to the full and free enjoyment of such beauties.*

*As to Mr. Radford's precise plans, it is probable that he has not formulated them fully. He has been authorized to make a survey of the floor of the valley, and the action of the Commission will, no doubt, depend largely upon his report. At all events, as far as he has gone, he has illustrated the difference between the professional and the amateur, and especially the amateur with a hobby.*

[Newspaper clipping from San Francisco Chronicle]

*The Board of Yosemite Commissioners will violate neither the letter nor the spirit of any existing law if they will give to John M. Hutchings a life lease, rent free, of his cabin in the Yosemite valley. If there be any one man in California who has worked in season and out of season to make the world understand what Yosemite valley is, it is John M. Hutchings. In some countries he would be given a pension which would insure him a comfortable old age. California can certainly afford to give him the rent of his modest cabin in the valley, which has been his home for so many years, and which owes so much to his personal and individual exertions. The request of Mr. Hutchings, made in so simple and modest a way, does not seem debatable.*

*Survey for the Electric Railroad From Merced to  
the Yosemite Valley under way.*

*The final survey for the electric railway between Merced and the Yosemite Valley is under way. The surveying party had pitched a tent on Court House avenue. The capacity of electric roads has hardly been tested yet. Steam railroad exten- [...]*

### *Yosemite Railroad*

*A Mr. McRoberts, who is rated as a Chicago capitalist, left yesterday for Yosemite Valley. Accompanied by a corps of engineers. It is understood that Mr. McRoberts will have final surveys made for a railroad to be constructed from Merced to the Yosemite.*

### *LUMBER FOR FRESNO*

*A Michigan Company Buys Timber Land and Will Work It There.*

*FRESNO, September 10.--The White-Friant Company, composed of wealthy lumbermen of Grand Rapids, Mich., has secured 19,000 acres of fine timber land in this county on the north fork of the San Joaquin, and is in the market for more. The company proposes to build sawmills up the river and float the lumber right into Fresno. In this connection mills will be established here to supply dressed lumber, doors, blinds and boxes. The nearest terminal of a lumber flume to this city is Clovis, ten miles distant and the prospect of a flume built right into Fresno is hailed with delight by the people here.*