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The Outdoor Life of California

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The Outdoor Life of California

By

William Greer Harrison

President of the Olympic Club

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WE live in our lungs; therefore, anything that improves our abode is of importance. The question naturally arises, "What is the best method of increasing lung power?" The answer is, "Deep breathing of pure air." In other words, the continuous exercise of the lungs in inhaling clean air and exhaling impure air. Exercise in the open is the way of enlarging the breathing capacity of the lungs.

Throughout California the conditions of climate are such that lung exercise may be indulged in at all times without risk to any organ. The temperature is never oppressive; no blizzards, no cutting winds, no stabbing of the lungs by frozen air: a genial, balmy, yet exhilerating atmosphere everywhere. San Francisco has a mean temperature of 65 degrees. The temperature throughout the State makes a mean of about 60 degrees. In the interior the air is so dry that at a summer temperature of 100 degrees, outdoor sports, tramps, and mountain climbing are as freely indulged in as in the autumn. In midwinter outdoor amusement, such as long-distance tramps, shooting, fishing, and swimming, are

enthusiastically pursued. On Christmas day of 1903, and on New Year's day of 1904, the writer led some seventy-five members of the Olympic Club over a ten-mile tramp right into the Pacific Ocean, where the party breasted the breakers, played leapfrog on the shore, and gamboled and scampered like lads of ten, and not a man caught cold. All over California there is in the air an electrical stimulant which is most bracing and which does away with that tired feeling so common elsewhere.

Then we have the pines, the aroma from which is almost an intoxicant and is the most subtle and effective of lung tonics.

We have the redwoods; giants, grand, stately towers in the forest. The exhalation from these acts upon the lungs as a light massage and emollient.

We have rivers and mountains, lakes and valleys, not exceeded in natural beauty anywhere.

We have pine-clad and brush-clad hills to clamber through, which is a joy without limit. The pleasure in hill-climbing is increased always by the beauty of the landscape, the rivers or the ocean, with islands, points, promon-

OLYMPIC CLUB MEMBERS TAKING A DIP ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 1903

tories, and straits which fill the eye everywhere and yield a sense of enjoyment found only in the use of the eye and the muscles.

California is a land of brown shadows and blue skies—the brown of the hillside, the blue of the ocean, produce unpainted pictures in lavish abundance. Wild flowers—unwritten poems—greet you everywhere. Waterfalls, the joy tears of the mountain sprites; cascades, in whose music you hear the weeping of wood nymphs over dead forest kings. The bubbling, babbling brooks, interpreting the song of their silver-coated citizens; the cooing of the dove, the whir of the quail, the whiz of the snipe, the honking of the wild goose, and the frou-frou of the duck—all these are for the man who loves Nature and desires to be at home with her, and are common everywhere in California.

Here the sportsman finds his paradise, and here are—

Birds: Mountain and valley quail, English jacksnipe, wild pigeon, blue grouse, sage hen, robin (big, full-bodied birds), meadow lark, curlew, black ibis, billhead plover, vacet, willet (snipe), king rail, Virginian rail, reed bird, robin snipe, sandpiper.

Ducks: Widgeon, teal, sprig, gadwell, canvasback, redhead, butterball, ruddy, blue-bill, Mexican tree duck, brownhead or whistler, mallard, spoonbill.

Big game: Brown or cinnamon bear, black bear, elk, mule deer, blacktail deer, silver-gray fox, red fox, California lion (puma).

Small game: Gray squirrel, pine squirrel; rabbit—cottontail, brush, and hare; beaver and ground-hog.

Fish: Salmon—landlocked, quinnat, blue-back, hookbill; trout—rainbow, cut-throat, red speckled, brook, Loch Levin, Von Behr, and golden; rock cod—blue and red; flounders, tomcod, smelt, halibut, barracuda, striped bass; perch—redtail, surf, and big-eye; sole, white bait, pompano (butterfish), sturgeon, shad, anchovies, sardines.

Fish, birds, big and small game can be reached easily by short-rail routes; and then comes the true pleasure of the sport—the climbing, clambering, tramping; the oxidation of the lungs and muscles; the joy, the pure physical joy, of movement; the luxury that follows the overcoming of difficulties; the scramble over big rocks; the climb over hills carpeted with pine needles, and the enthrall-

ing sense of victory when the objective point is reached.

Alone in the woods—alone with God! Alone on the mountain top, you are reverent and prayerful, but never sad or depressed. Breathing in the pure mountain air, you breathe in hope, inspiration, and you would commune with the Master of the World, and rejoice that you live and move and find harmony in your heart. You can throw your cap peakward and shout like the schoolboy out for his holiday; for you have drawn away from, and mounted high above, the pettiness of the lesser life. You have shuffled off the business coil which bound you to your desk; you are free, and the thought of freedom is yours; and you are buoyant and gleeful and in love with all the world.

California is the home of the artist; indeed, California is another Italy, and a new Virgil would write the Bucolics and Georgics as of and about the Italia of the Pacific. Virgilian description of the old Italy exactly fits the newer and richer state. But we have color effects here, not known, I think, even in Italy. Take the hills overlooking San Francisco—Marin hills—and you have a bronze-brown

OLYMPIC CLUB MIDWINTER OUTING

effect in color that is tantalizingly beautiful, because you want to catch and hold it as a something too exquisite to be left to itself. You have an infinite variety of shadings to this weird brown; indeed, there is a kaleidoscopic change, from second to second, which is literally fascinating.

Then our sunsets; in them there is a supreme beauty, since all colors, all shades—dazzling, rioting, perplexing—mingle with or are a part of the rays which glorify the sky, the hills, the valleys, the seas, the ocean, with a light that is as the smile of the Eternal. Here is the place in which to *breathe* the sunshine. Light and colors are inhaled, and it is time some one explained the beneficent effect of the inhalation on the blood and brain and moral nature of man. California is the solarium of the world. When the sun throws aside the robes of night and breathes his morning benediction, until his evening prayer, when his lingering blessing touches everything with his kiss, there is a golden dusk or a sun-charged atmosphere in which man may drink a newer, richer draught of life.

And the ocean, the Pacific; never monotonously peaceful; just a vast champagne bath,

a universal salt glow, where massage is free to all the world. Always open, never a bar to ingress; no ice, no snow; a storm only momentary and joyous excitement. The roar of the breakers an organ peal, the swell a flowing song, the spume an electric bath. Summer or winter, never a day when you can not safely enter the Pacific, plunging and swimming, breasting breakers or high waves, with a feeling of victorious pleasure and a sense of fitness that is a promise of eternal youth.

From San Francisco to San Diego and thence to Catalina Islands there are bays, inlets, roadsteads, where foaming steeds, white horses of the sea, rush madly to the shore. Here the strong swimmer finds joy inexpressible. Dashing under the swirling breakers he floats triumphantly for a moment in the long hollows of the ocean, and then with an increasing vigor again and again evades the rush of waters and with practiced arms steers his way to the "sea incarnadine" that lies like another sky beyond the breakers. Here, summer or winter, he flings aside the resisting waters and heads oceanward—a long, steady pressure, an overhead stroke or a side stroke carries him far from view, until presently he

turns shoreward with rapid strokes when he once more margins the breakers. These he uses like a circus rider, and mounts horse after horse until he is again on the shore lines. The strength of it, the joy of it, only the swimmer can feel.

And all this in winter as safely as in summer. Indeed, it is absurd to talk of winter in the Golden State. All days are open to the athlete and his pleasures.

If you tire of the old ocean, then turn your eyes lakeward. Tahoe sits in the Sierra like a great golden-gray bowl, full of limpid water teeming with silver-coated trout; guarded by mountain ranges so weird in form and in color that one naturally looks for the gnomes, elfs, goblins, which have, or ought to have, their homes in the curious crevices, caverns, brakes, peaks, domes, curves, and bends which make of Mount Tallac and his kin a giant's causeway leading to a land of delight. Tahoe is 6,000 feet above the sea level; Mount Tallac is 3,000 odd feet above the lake, and from its rugged peak you look down upon a score of lakes set like precious gems in a setting of emerald green. The tramp to Tallac's gray top is just rough enough to give an added in-

OLYMPIC CLUB CROSS-COUNTRY WALK

terest; it is a stiff climb, but when the peak is under your feet you forget everything except the glory and the joy of the vista.

You tire of the lake scenery? Then off to the McCloud River for trout, or to Monterey Bay for salmon trolling, or the Sacramento for perch and salmon. Oh, I could name you hundreds of places in which to be glad that God made you!

Once a year, usually in the month of August, members of the Bohemian Club of San Francisco shake the city dust from their feet and for three weeks make their home in the heart of the redwood forest. 'Neath the green sentinels, whose feathery plumes sweep the patines of Heaven, they pitch their tents and abandon themselves to a life that is in harmony with Nature. The fisherman fishes and the pedestrian makes his ten or fifteen miles daily, whilst others lie prone on the bosom of Mother Earth, breathing in the forest air with a sense of pure enjoyment. The singer and the story-teller weave fancies that find expression in music and literature and painting. Others group themselves in nooks and hollows and wonder what the record of the giant trees would read like if only Nature enabled them

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to reveal their knowledge. These trees were above ground long before the Babylonian empire fell. They were lofty pillars of the forest when Joseph went down into Egypt, and they were probably full grown when Christ was taken by another Joseph to the land of the Pharaohs. Europe was the home of barbarous tribes when these felt their full growth; and civilization after civilization appeared, fulfilled its destiny and was succeeded by new thoughts, new purposes, these to make room for the dominant purpose of to-day. Yet these trees lived and breathed ere England or America had a name or a place upon the map of the world.

California is the only country in the world, I think, where midsummer is entirely free of rain and where it would be possible to spend three or four weeks absolutely in the open.

Polo, football, baseball, and tennis are playable all the year through; and golf, lacrosse, and cricket are only temporarily retarded by the degree of wet in the soil after our annual shower bath. Thousands of our young lads and lassies pay no attention to rain, but pursue their walks in wet weather as in dry. Indeed, few outdoor pursuits are affected by our wet season. We have usually three or four days'

rain, followed by a fortnight of the most delightful weather—clear, bright, sunful days when one rejoices in life.

In the bay counties we have sea fogs, which are of infinite service to all growing things, and are to many a source of pleasure in their effect upon the skin.

But the great charm of California is that always and everywhere you can live in the open, except in the brief interval when rain is most abundant.

Fullness of days, rather than length, is the desideratum. A weak man is a travesty on Nature. Better fifty years of strenuous, full life than one hundred years of vegetable existence. But in California long life and full days go together. In the free, open life of the Golden State there is no excuse for lack of health; only the inherently indolent suffer. All who accept the treasures of the air, the sea, the forest, and the ocean as their own put on the full garb of man and woman and live such a full life as can be lived only in California.

The joy of living; the rapid-coursing, life-making blood; the clean, full lungs; the buoyancy of youth in middle-aged man—these are ours, and we thank God for life!

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