

Muir, John. "Shasta Bees." *Daily Evening Bulletin* [San Francisco] 5 Jan. 1875: 2.

SHASTA BEES.

A Honeyful Region--The Bee Lands--A Summer Paradise.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

SISSON'S STATION, near Mt. Shasta, December 17, 1874

The Shasta woods are full of wild bees, and their honey is exactly delicious. At least such was the quality of my samples, and no wonder, inasmuch as it was in great part derived from the nectar bells of a huckleberry bog by bees that were let alone to follow their own sweet ways. The hive was a living pine-tree, and the distance to the honey-bells was only a moment's buzz. Bees themselves could hardly hold the conception of a more honeyful place--honey-bog to left of them; honey-bog to right of them; blooming willows for springtime; golden-rods for autumn; and beside a'that and a'that, miles of acres of buttercups and columbines and rosy chaparral. Regarding Mount Shasta from a bee point of view and beginning at the summit, the first 5,000 feet is clothed in summer with glaciers and rags of snow, and is, of course, almost entirely honeyless. The next 1,000 feet of elevation is a brown zone tufted and matted with bush penstemon and bryanthus. Next comes the silver-fir zone, about 2,500 feet in height, containing few sweet flowers, but rich in honey-dew and pollen. Next the zone of honey-bearing chaparral or Shasta heather, forming the smooth, sunny slopes of the base. This last is six or seven miles wide and has a circumference of more than seventy miles. Companies of spruce and pine break across it in well-watered sections; yet, upon the whole, it is remarkably regular and contains all the principal honey-grounds of the mountain.

THE BEE LANDS.

The formation of the Shasta bee lands is easily understood. Shasta is a fire-mountain, created by a succession of eruptions of ashes and molten lava, which, pouring over the lips of the craters, layer over layer, grew outward and upward like the trunk of an exogenous tree. During the glacial period the whole Shasta cone was capped with ice, which by erosion degraded it to some extent and remodeled its flanks. When at length the glacial period began to draw near a close the ice-cap was gradually melted off around the bottom, and in receding and breaking up into its present condition deposited those irregular heaps and rings of moraine matter upon which the Shasta forests are growing. The glacial erosion of most of the Shasta lavas gives rise to soils composed of rough boulders of moderate size and a great deal of light, porous, sandy *detritus*, which yields very readily to the transporting power of running water. An immense quantity of this finer material was sorted out and washed down from the upper slopes of the mountain by an ancient flood of extraordinary magnitude, and redeposited in smooth, delta-like beds around the base. These form the main honey-grounds. The peculiar vegetation for which they were planned was gradually acquired, huckleberry bogs were planted, the seasons became summer, the chaparral became sweeter, until honey distills like dew. In this

glorious honey-zone the Shasta bees rove and revel, clambering in bramble and huckle-bloom, ringing and singing, now down among buttercups, now out of sight in the rosy blossoms of the buckthorn. They consider the lilies, and roll into them; and like lilies they toil not, for bees are run by sun-power, just as mill-wheels are by water-power, and when the one has plenty of water and the other plenty of sun they hum and quiver alike.

I have often thought in bright, settled sun weather, that I could tell the time of day by the comparative energy of bee movements. Gentle and moderate in the cool of the morning, gradually increasing in fervor, and at high noon thrilling and quivering in wild sun-ecstasy.

Bees are as directly the outcome of bright light as flowers are. Bee death and flower death are also alike--merely a sun-withering and evaporation.

Shasta bees appear to be better fed than any other I know of. They are dainty feeders and enormously cordial withal. Mint moths and humming-birds seldom set foot on a flower, but reach out and suck through long tubes as through straws; but bees hug and clasp and rub their blunt countenances upon them like round, awkward children upon their mothers.

DELIGHTFUL REGION.

Of all the overworked and defrauded toilers of California towns, only about twenty came to the daylight of Shasta last season. How the glories of this region have been so long unvoiced when the Oregon and California stage has run daily past for years on the very skirts of the great white cone, is a mystery. There is no daylight in towns, and the weary public ought to know that there is light here, and I for one clear my skirts from the responsibility of silence by shouting a cordial *come*. Come a beeing; huckleberry bogs in full bloom are glorious sights, and they bloom twice a year. The flowers are narrow-mouthed purple bells that seem to have caught the tones of the alpen glow. Later, these blooms turn to berries, and the leaves to crimson petals. Here you may go with the bees. Conceive if you can the magnetism of brushing through the bushes with myriads of honey-bells singing against your knees, and, besides, no softness ever enjoyed by human foot is comparable with the softness of a bog. Come all who need rest and light, bending and breaking with over work, leave your profits and losses and metallic dividends and come a beeing. It is hard to die the dark death of towns; hearse, coffin, cloth and countenances all black. In June the base of Mount Shasta will be as white with honey bloom as the summit with snow. Follow the bees and be showered with blossoms; take a baptism and a honey-bath and get some sweetness into your lives.

If you like to think, there is plenty here to think at. How Shasta fires have burned and builded, and how, notwithstanding it is still hot within, glaciers dwell on its flanks; and how as one of the grand ashy hearths of nature its base flows with honey. Geology, botany, zoology, grand object lessons in each, and if you like hunting there is game in abundance. But better let blood alone and come purely a beeing. The honey-grounds will be blooming in June.