

"The Forest: Among the Siskiyou Forests"

"The Forest: Among the Siskiyou Forests" by Charles H. Shinn. Garden and Forest, Vol. 2, Issue 94, December 11, 1889, p. 598.

I have just returned to San Francisco from a visit to the Mount Shasta region, which, as I should explain, is north of Shasta County, in Siskiyou. Although it was the middle of November, there was no snow in Strawberry Valley at the foot of Shasta, the air was dry and warm, the roads were excellent, and the Indian summer was in its lovely prime.

I am told that the sales of timber land made this year are greater than for any previous three years. Three new saw-mills will begin operations next spring. A broad gauge railroad is being built from Anderson, Shasta County, about twenty miles north, to meet a thirty-mile flume, tapping the heart of the finest forest of *Pinus Lambertiana* in northern Shasta. It is said that the four or five San Francisco gentlemen who are pushing this enterprise own 30,000 acres of the best Pine-lands of the district lying between Mount Shasta and Mount Lassen. Four or five years ago it was considered perfectly inaccessible and worthless. Hardly a word of opposition would have been raised if it had then been withdrawn from sale. I was offered five thousand acres of Sugar Pine and Yellow Pine, in 1887, for two dollars an acre in this district. Now it could not be bought for ten times the sum.

Californians have had dreams of a great Mount Shasta Park, some fifty or sixty miles square, including the head waters of the Sacramento, McCloud, Trinity, Shasta and other great rivers. But it was merely a subject for table discussion, and was never taken up and made a living issue on which men had to take sides. And now, if not already too late, it soon will be. The Southern Pacific Railroad Company, whose Oregon line passes through these forests, has the greatest individual interest in their preservation. There is no forest district in California more interesting to the fisherman, the hunter, the botanist, and the lover of nature; no district of more importance to the city dwellers; no region more closely connected with the agricultural prosperity of the great central valleys; but no one in California is "making a fight" for the Shasta Park. Senator Stanford is reported as saying, recently, that he had not known how fine the Pines of Mount Shasta were, and that he had thought of buying 1,200 acres, and keeping axe and fire out of it; but the saw-mills were already in the tract he wanted, and nothing has yet been done in the matter.

In the forest near Sissons, the leading trees are *P. Lambertiana*, *P. ponderosa*, *Pseudotsuga taxifolia* and *Libocedrus decurrens*; of these the *P. ponderosa* is most numerous. Among the young trees springing up in the forest, the Douglas Spruce seems most abundant, the *Libocedrus* next, and the *P. ponderosa* third, while the *P. Lambertiana* is hardest to find. The trees grow in little groups, no two alike, but all attractive in the highest degree. Where the sheep have been kept out, as in the largest tract I saw, there are millions of seedlings visible to a close observer, and their roots are so fibrous in this rich soil that I should believe in their easy removal. The proportion of Douglas Spruces is even greater among these yearlings than among those of five or ten years of age; when the Pines are destroyed, this will be chiefly a Spruce forest.

On the edges of the valley and on the lower mountain slopes, where the lumbermen are doing their heaviest work, the forests are largely of the Red Fir of California (*Abies nobilis*), with the *A. grandis*, and the great Pines before named. Pines, Firs, Spruces and all the magnificent conifers of the district must soon disappear. The groups of small *Cupressus McNabiana*, discovered by Jeffreys many years ago, some fifteen thousand feet above the valley; the alpine Pines, higher up

to the snow line, *P. monticola*, *P. Balfouriana*, and the graceful *P. albicaulis*, dwarfed to a mere white-stemmed shrub, will probably escape destruction because of the comparatively small amount of actual timber they can furnish.

There are thousands of cords of two-foot wood piled up along the railroad track. It sells at two dollars and a quarter a cord, delivered at the siding. It is not from refuse, or stumpage, or Pine-tops; it is clean, straight pine from the best part of the trunks. The wood-chopper takes every large tree just as surely as the lumberman does. These immense piles of cordwood are all "No. 1" white and yellow pine. The stumps stand in the valleys and on the slopes, the trees having been cut off at a height of from five to ten feet above the ground, much valuable wood being wasted; the whole top of the tree is considered worthless.

A California saw-mill is always run on a large scale. Labor is high priced, transportation is difficult, owing to the size of the logs, and so the only way to make money is to rush things. Every two or three minutes a log comes in, is squared, sliced into planks, ripped into laths, turned into broom-handles, shaved into shingles or split into scantling. It is gigantic work from dawn to dark, and sadly, strangely impressive. I have visited many of the most famous saw-mills of the coast, from the Navarro Redwoods - a million-dollar estate in Mendocino, where I have seen logs fifteen feet in diameter turned into railroad ties - to the great mills of the Pine-belt of the Sierras, and I know of nothing more calculated to make an American citizen pause and ask himself where it will end. I asked a mill-owner about it the other day, and his answer was: "When we have cut it all off we will go to Alaska."

"But the people want these forests left."

"The people don't care. Every settler within ten miles of my mill wants to sell me trees at a dollar apiece. The state doesn't care or it would have been saved, at least the school sections. The country don't care or we should hear from it. There is money in the lumber business, and every tree has got to go. Sorry for the feelings of the fellows who didn't know enough to get timber-land when it was cheap."

In the Mount Shasta region there are twenty-two species of conifers, and an observer from the Smithsonian listed 103 species of birds. There are great glaciers, hot, cold and mineral springs, mountain lakes, extinct craters, and all that goes to make the region "the keystone mountain mass" which upholds the northern arch of coast range and Sierra. The "Shasta Park" idea was a fine conception, but no one has taken a step towards its fulfillment. Is it indeed true that "nobody cares," and that nothing can be done to save these forests until another generation has been educated by hard necessity to a knowledge of the issues involved?

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