

The Mount Shasta National Park Movement: Its Origin and Development

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Mount Shasta has been a popular subject for writers ever since its discovery by white men in the latter part of the second decade of the nineteenth century. The earliest mentions of the mountain, however, are of the most casual sort; chiefly in the diaries of travelers, or explorers sent out by the United States government. But even such parties as those of Wilkes in 1841 or Fremont in 1846, are satisfied merely to record having observed "Shasty Peak." Still other writers oftentimes base their statements on nothing more than mere hearsay, and distort facts almost beyond recognition. It is commonplace, for example, as in the Rev. Charles G. Nicolay's work "The Oregon Territory" (London, 1846), to read of a belief gullibly accepted by many that the elevation of the summit of Shasta was no less than 20,000 feet!

After 1860, however, a change occurred. With the establishment of the California State Geological Survey, a rigorous scientific exploration was inaugurated. The first serious study of Mount Shasta was made in 1862 by that body under the leadership of the pioneer of California geology, Josiah Dwight Whitney. His explorations resulted in the fixing of 14,440 feet as the then official elevation of the summit of Mount Shasta.

Other explorations followed shortly. In 1870 Clarence King discovered true glaciers of the mountain; in 1875 the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey erected on the summit a monument for triangulation purposes; and in 1883 studies were made of the glaciers of Shasta by Professor Isreal Cook Russell, of the University of Michigan, while the volcanic features of the mountain were described by Dr. Joseph Silas Diller, one of the most noted volcanists in the United states.

The direct outgrowth of all these investigations, coupled with the completion of the railroad connecting San Francisco and Portland, was to arouse mountaineers and nature lovers to the scenic beauties of Mount Shasta. It is small wonder, then, that the suggestion should be forthcoming that Mount Shasta and the lands round about be set aside as a national park.

The idea of a Mount Shasta National Park found expression as early as 1888 in the writings of the beloved naturalist, John Muir. In "Picturesque California," which he edited, Muir says: "The Shasta region may be reserved as a nationl park, with special reference to the preservation of its fine forests and game. This should by all means be done..... The Shasta region is still a fresh unspoiled wilderness, accessible and available for travelers of every kind and degree. Would it not be then a fine thing to set it apart like the Yellowstone and Yosemite as a National Park, for the welfare and benefit of all mankind, preserving its fountains and forests and all its glad life in primeval beauty? Very little of the region can ever be more valuable for any other use--certainly not for gold nor for grain. No private right or interest need suffer, and thousands yet unborn would come from far and near and bless the country for its wise and benevolent forethought."

Visitors to Mount Shasta may cast their eyes over the desolate stretches of manzanita with here and there a few "ghost trees" looming up as relics of devastating fires and picture in their mind's

eye Muir's "fresh unspoiled wilderness," not without sharp pangs of regret that his wisdom had not been heeded.

The suggestion of a Shasta National Park was revived, after a lapse of seven years, in an article contributed by Mr. George S. Meredith, of Oakland, to the Overland Monthly of May, 1895.

Mr. Meredith, an ardent Shasta enthusiast, wrote: "Mt. Shasta, with its surrounding woods, should be, and I hope will be, set apart as a national park: for it is the most picturesque mountain in the United States, and as such should have the same protection as that afforded to Yosemite."

The first concrete attempt to create the Mount Shasta National Park took the form of a set of resolutions adopted by the Sisson Promotion Association on February 14, 1912.

These resolutions open by drawing attention to the many natural wonders found in California, and especially to the glaciers, forests, canyons, and volcanic features of Mount Shasta. They observe, further, that the Panama Pacific International Exposition to be held in San Francisco in 1915 would attract thousands of visitors to California, many of whom would desire to make the ascent of Shasta. These resolutions conclude by urging "Mount Shasta, together with such additional territory as may be determined, be declared a National Park and maintained as such."

On February 23, 1912, copies of these resolutions were forwarded to President Taft, Secretary of the Interior Walter L. Fisher, the director of the United States Geological Survey, the congressional delegation from California and to the state senator and assemblyman from the district.

Accordingly, on March 26, 1912, the late Judge Raker, representative from the Second Congressional District of California, introduced into the House of Representatives H. R. 22353 (Sixty-second Congress, second session) entitled: "A bill to set apart certain lands in the State of California as a public park, to be known as the Mount Shasta National Park, in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, in the State of California, and for other purposes."

This bill was then referred to the House Committee on Public Lands, which on March 28, 1912, in turn transmitted the bill for report to the Secretary of the Interior. The Secretary of the Interior ascertained from the Commission of the General Land Office that of the 206,197.37 acres of land in the area included in the proposed park, 131,231.08 acres (or more than 63 per cent) were patented land. Nevertheless, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Thompson said, in reporting the bill to the House Public Lands Committee: "This department has no objection to its enactment into law if Congress deem it advisable to set aside the lands embraced in the bill as a national park. If the bill becomes law, however, an appropriation should be made sufficient to enable this department to properly administer the affairs of the park."

The Sixty-second Congress closed, however, before the bill had even been scheduled to be voted on.

Early in the Sixty-third Congress, Judge Raker, on April 7, 1913, again introduced the Shasta National Park bill, now numbered H. R. (Sixty-third Congress, first session).

This bill went through the same process as the former bill and was again reported upon favorably by the Secretary of the Interior, now Franklin K Lane. But it, like its predecessor, never came before Congress to be voted upon.

A new factor now entered to block the passage of this bill. It so happened that Judge Raker had introduced bills to create the Mount Lassen National Park on the same day as the Shasta bills. When in May, 1914, Mount Lassen conveniently erupted, it immediately became the center of attention throughout the country, while the Shasta bill was all but forgotten. Thereafter, Judge Raker concentrated his energies on the Lassen bill, which, however, did not become law until two subsequent bills (five in all) had been introduced; the Lassen bill was signed by President Wilson on August 9, 1916.

Nothing more was done in the direction of an attempt to create a Mount Shasta National Park until February 24, 1925, when Judge Raker introduced a third bill for this purpose. This was H. R. 12408 (Sixty-eighth Congress, second session). This bill, too, was referred to the Public Lands Committee and the National Park Service. The National Parks Service, however, reported unfavorably on the measure, and the bill died then and there.

In conclusion, it may be of interest to note some of the reasons for the failure of the Shasta bill to become law.

In the first place, the bills failed to receive the support anticipated. Very little publicity reached the major newspapers of the state, nor is anything to be found in the publications of the Sierra Club bearing on the matter.

Secondly, the first two bills introduced were interpreted to exclude grazing from the lands within the park, although no specific reference was made on that point. Opposition arose, however, so that a special provision was inserted in the third bill to permit grazing and thus to overcome that difficulty.

In the third place a considerable portion of the lands embraced in the acts were unworthy of being included within the borders of the national park. For example, it was contemplated to include Black Butte within the park boundaries. The area of the proposed park might well have been cut in half without the loss of any worthwhile feature.

In the fourth place, as we have seen, the project was overshadowed by the prominence attracted by the Lassen bill, and had to be abandoned at a time when the prospects for the passage of the bill were brightest.

In the fifth place, the area proposed as a national park contained too much privately owned land. This reason, however, applies only to the last bill introduced, inasmuch as the boundaries outlined in all three bills were identical; and, as has been noted heretofore, no objection was raised to the earlier ones. It is a regrettable fact that the unworthy area, mentioned above, constituted a goodly portion of the privately owned land within the limits of the proposed park; yet this fact was one of the main obstacles to the passage of the bill.

Finally, the National Park Service has now determined upon a policy of singling out the greatest example of any natural phenomena and setting it aside as a national park. Thus, the Grand Canyon has been created a national park because it is the greatest example of erosion; Mount Lassen is the only active volcano in the United States; Yellowstone has the greatest geysers; Sequoia the largest and oldest living trees, etc. There is nothing on Mount Shasta, the National Park Service argues, that is not duplicated on a larger scale on Mount Rainier, which is already a national park.

This last statement need not wound the pride of Shasta enthusiasts. Instead, it should suggest to them a new plan--namely to petition the president to set aside Mount Shasta as a National Monument.

Admittedly, Mount Shasta is one of the greatest of all our giant snowclad peaks. Indeed, it is safe to say that nowhere in the country is better opportunity afforded to study glacial action at work than in the Mud Creek Canyon.

Congressman Harry L. Englebright has expressed himself as believing that the outlook for a Shasta National Monument is bright. Cooperation on such a scheme is essential, however, and all the communities situated about the base of the great mountain--Mount Shasta City in particular--must back the project to a man. If this is done, Mount Shasta may yet take its place officially as one of the great scenic wonders of our country.