

Fred Whitney Sierra Trek

Lake Tahoe to Yosemite – 1914

Fred Whitney (known as “Nanka”) was the only grandfather that I knew personally¹, if one could say I knew him. He passed away when I was three years old. A few years ago my sister Patty gave me one of his old photo albums, recovered from our grandmother’s belongings.

This 7” x 11” album contains photographs of a 1914 expedition from Lake Tahoe to Yosemite Valley. Fred and his companions traveled on horseback, accompanied by pack horses and a horse drawn wagon. Most of the photos in this album are marked by place names.

Between 1911 and 1915 Fred spent much time in the Sierra-Nevada Mountains, and he was employed for a time at Fallen Leaf Lake Lodge, near South Lake Tahoe. In the first half of Fred’s photo album are several pictures of the scenery and landmarks in the Lake Tahoe region, including: Fallen Leaf Lake, Tallac Meadows, Mt. Tallac, Desolation Valley, Angora Lakes, Lake of the Woods, Mt. Agassiz, and Meyers Station. Some photos show groups of people, as if these were formal, organized expeditions into the high country.

About half way into Fred’s photo album is an entry “Tahoe to Yosemite, August 2, 1914.” What follows is my attempt to trace their route by finding the places named in the album, using topographical maps of the region and the Google Earth app. Some of the pictures they took along the way are included.

¹ Actually, he was my step-grandfather.



Fred's Home Base at Tahoe: "Fallen Leaf Lake from Porch at Camp"

Getting Started

Likely departure points for this cross-Sierra trek would have been Lake of the Woods, Echo Lake, or Meyers. One of the only two photos of Fred from this album is shown below.



"Fred Tightens the Cinch"



Pack wagon and horseback: How they traveled on the 1914 expedition.

Hope Valley

Their first night on the trail was spent at Hope Valley.



View of Hawkins Peak – Looking East Across Hope Valley

Hawkins Peak is one of the many volcanic peaks that overlook the small town of Markleeville on SR4. The popular Grover Hot Springs are at the base of this Mountain on the South Eastern Side. Hawkins Peak is one of the 10,000 ft peaks that surround Hope Valley.²

² Accessed March 31, 2022 from www.summitpost.org



Hope Valley



Hiking near Hope Valley

Faith Valley

The expedition then traveled from Hope Valley south to Faith Valley, a journey that could have taken them about a half day. Using Google Earth, it looks like they may have taken a route that parallels what is now Blue Lakes Road from Hope Valley to Faith Valley.



Top Left: "The road from Hope Valley to Faith Valley"

Top Right: "Faith Valley and Round Top – a veritable carpet of flowers"



"Faith Valley Camp"

Charity Valley

Continuing south on the Blue Lakes Road for another couple of miles, the group passed through Charity Valley and took a couple of photos (below).



Pond at Charity Valley



The Cowboy's "Abode" at Charity Valley

Junction with Pacific Crest Trail

Heading south from Charity Valley following the path of Blue Lakes Rd would bring the hikers to a junction with what is now the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), just north of Tamarack Lake, and east of Blue Lakes. From there, the PCT heads south then eastward. At that point Fred's group would have headed south to Indian Valley along what is now Sunset Lake Rd.



Indian Valley is situated at the base of Raymond Peak and Reynolds Peak

Indian Valley to the Stanislaus River

Several photos in Fred's album were taken along the Stanislaus River. Because this river has three forks, the challenge to reconstructing their route was to get an idea of where they first encountered the river and how far they followed it.

The headwaters of the Middle Fork Stanislaus River flow from Kennedy Creek just to the east of Relief Reservoir, at an elevation above 9,000 feet near the Emigrant Wilderness Area. From there it flows past Dardanelle Campground, Donnell Lake, and into Beardsley Lake. The river then flows in a southwesterly direction to its confluence with the San Joaquin River in the Central Valley.

One of the photos taken near the Stanislaus River has the caption "On the road up the Stanislaus." The wording conveys that the group was traveling upstream along the river. Another photo was taken at a place called Baker's Station. The Google Map shows a Baker's Campground on the Stanislaus River, in Dardanelle, at the entrance to Kennedy Meadows.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the likely route of this expedition continued on from Indian Valley, across what is now Highway 4, then south to Dardanelle, on Highway 108. From there they would have followed the Stanislaus River upstream past what is now Kennedy Meadows, to the dam at Relief Reservoir.

Along the Stanislaus River



"Baker's Station on the Stanislaus River"

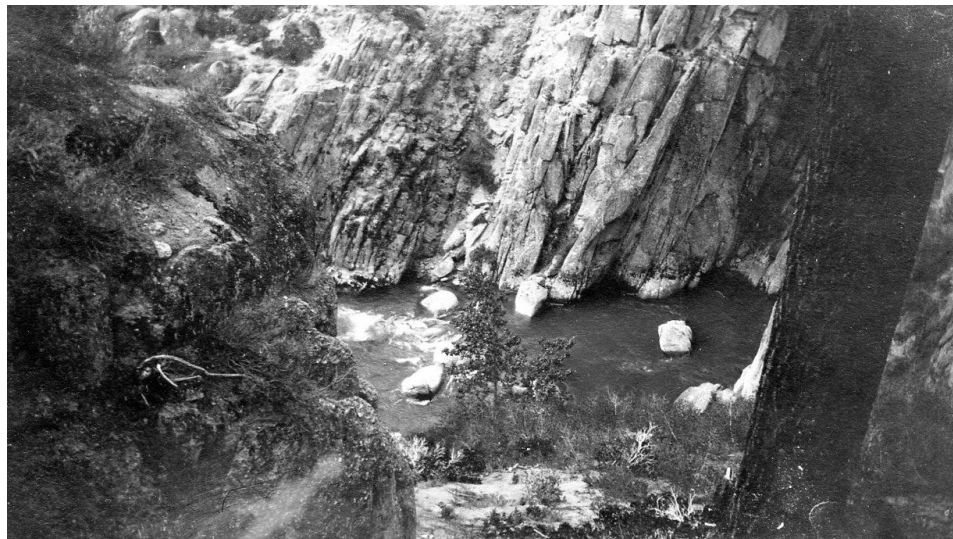


"On the road up the Stanislaus"



Above left: "Gorge on the Stanislaus"

Above right: "From the new wagon bridge on the Stanislaus"



Above: "Deep pool in the Stanislaus"

Relief Dam / Grouse Meadow

Following the Stanislaus River upstream, the party climbed up to Relief Dam and Relief Reservoir. The photo below was taken above Relief Dam from Grouse Meadow. Grouse Creek feeds into Relief Reservoir at about the midpoint of the reservoir's eastern edge.



“Southwest from Grouse Meadow”

Relief Creek flows into Summit Creek, which then flows into the south end of Relief Reservoir. The photo below was taken alongside Relief Creek, possibly near its junction with Summit Creek, looking northward to Night Cap Peak.



“Relief Creek and Night Cap Peak”

The expedition most likely followed a route parallel to Summit Creek upward and to the southeast, toward Grizzly Peak. Current topographical maps of the area show a hiking route labeled "Tahoe to Yosemite Trail." Two photos below show their location just before reaching Emigrant Meadow, which lies just east of Mosquito Lakes and northwest of Grizzly Peak. Their trek would then cross over Emigrant Pass at an elevation above 9,000 feet.



"Camp Before Reaching Emigrant Meadow"



"View from Camp Before Reaching Emigrant Meadow"

Emigrant Meadow and Emigrant Pass

Emigrant Meadow is situated at 9,500 feet elevation, and lies about half way between Brown Bear Pass and Emigrant Meadow Lake.

Emigrant Pass is at about 9,800 feet elevation, and is situated northwest of, and at the foot of, Grizzly Peak.



“Emigrant Meadow and Grizzly Peak”



“In the Emigrant Pass Region”

Up and Over Bond's Pass to Tilden Lake

From Emigrant Meadow the expedition would have headed southward. Studying topographical maps of the region reveals that most likely the expedition skirted the western flank of Grizzly Peak, rather than crossing Emigrant Pass. They would have then traversed a high-altitude ridge from Grizzly Meadow to Bond's Pass. Bond's Pass is situated about half way between Snow Lake to the west and Dorothy Lake to the east. After crossing Bond's Pass, the expedition would have headed southwest following Falls Creek through Jack Main Canyon, and around Mt. Chittenden to Tilden Lake.



"From the 10,000 Foot Level Near Bond's Pass" – and looking northward to Grizzly Peak



"Tilden Lake"



Above left: "Mt. Chittenden and Jack Main Canyon"

Above right: "South of Tilden Lake near Mt. Chittenden"

Southwest to Tiltal Valley / Tiltal Meadows

From Tilden Lake the expedition would have continued following Falls Creek through Jack Main Canyon, past Tiltal Mountain, and into Tiltal Valley.



"On the Trail Tilden Lake to Tiltal Valley"



"Cabin in Upper Tilttil Valley"

A note underneath this photo, in Fred's album, reads: "Found bear tracks in cabin and saw the first bear nearby."



"Pond Lillies Upper Tilttil Valley"



"Tiltil Meadow"



"Lower Tiltil Valley"

A note in Fred's album reads: "Saw second bear going from this valley into Hetch Hetchy."

Hetch Hetchy Valley and Tuolumne River

From Tiltil Valley the expedition continued southward to Hetch Hetchy Valley and the mighty Tuolumne River.³ How interesting that my grandfather's trek through Hetch Hetchy Valley was just before construction of the dam began.

After crossing the Tuolumne, and traveling through "The Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne" they headed toward Yosemite Valley.

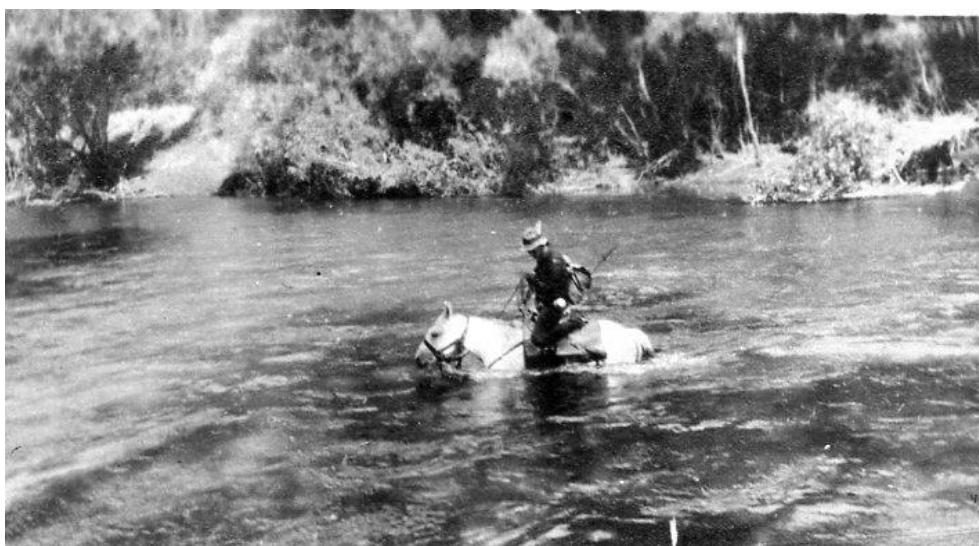


"Upper Hetch Hetchy – my last film"

³ Please see brief history of Hetch Hetchy Valley at end of story.



"Fred Fords the River"



"Ashley Brown"

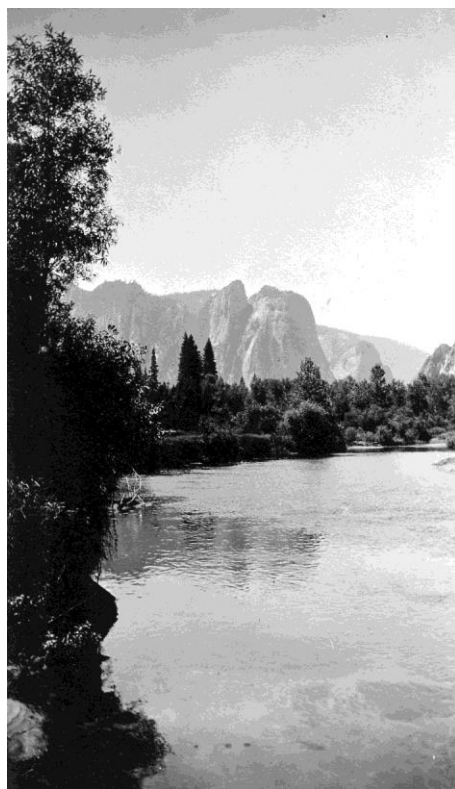
Yosemite Valley

A note in Fred's album reads: "We entered Yosemite by the Tioga Road Trail and came down by Yosemite Falls."





“Bridal Veil Falls”



Brief History of Hetch Hetchy Valley

The following image and historical excerpt are from the website [History of the valley | Restore Hetch Hetchy](#). Accessed on April 29, 2022.



Hetch Hetchy Valley in 1908. Photo by Isaiah West Taber

Hetch Hetchy was once a resplendent glacier carved valley, with towering cliffs and waterfalls cascading onto a serene valley floor. Pioneer conservationist John Muir called it a “remarkably exact counterpart” to the now world-famous Yosemite Valley – 15 miles to its south. Hetch Hetchy was one of Earth’s most beautiful places.

Due to its glacier carved U-shape, Hetch Hetchy was one of the more hospitable locations in California’s rugged Sierra Nevada. The valley was home to many Indigenous peoples both seasonally and year-round.

In 1850, the Screech brothers were the first European Americans known to have visited Hetch Hetchy. Naturalist John Muir followed soon thereafter, describing Hetch Hetchy as “a grand landscape garden, one of nature’s rarest and most precious mountain temples.” Muir led the campaign to convince Congress to create Yosemite National Park in 1890 and to protect Hetch Hetchy Valley “in perpetuity”.

But in 1913, the United States government allowed, for the only time in our nation’s history, a single city to develop one of our national parks for its own exclusive use. When President Woodrow Wilson signed the Raker Act on December 19, 1913, he permitted San Francisco to build a dam in Yosemite National Park’s spectacular Hetch Hetchy Valley.