

**The Library of America • Story of the Week**

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*To Estella Leopold*

Grand Canyon

July 18

Dearest Estella—

I am making this sendable to Mother and Carl because I want to tell you of a very interesting little “passear” yesterday and haven’t time to write two letters. I used to have the habit of bumping into adventures—and don’t seem to be quite over it yet.

Arrived here yesterday morning and strolled down to the office, to find there an old prospector with palsy, a yellow beard, and troubles. His pardner, he said, had left him the day before to look for an alleged lead mine down in the Canyon, and hadn’t come back. He went equipped with a gallon canteen of water and a pick. Said mine was supposed to be on Pipe Creek, which is a large scope of country, especially in the vertical dimension.

Well we raised 4 men and 5 mules and 6 canteens and slid off down the trail. It’s right summery down there—we absorbed the 6 canteens before we got to the Indian Gardens, where we found more water but no tracks. We had figured he would cut north from there. So we crawled back up, cutting signs on the ledges. Shortly after noon we found the track—cutting north along a ledge at the bottom of the red sandstone. We had to leave all the mules but one—a wise old gray one who must

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have been born and raised in a stone quarry. The tracking was difficult—only occasional gravelly spots—rest mostly finding the scratches of his shoenails on the rocks. Some day you may see what a ledge is like in the Grand Canyon. Horizontal plan of it is like this



and vertical much the same, not forgetting the mule. We had to save water for our prospective customer and pretty soon we couldn't even keep a piece of pine gum wet in our mouths.

We eased that mule in for about three miles, and then had to leave him. The ledge got to be just a little less straight up and down than the cliffs. Half mile further, lying under a juniper bush, we found our man. He couldn't holler fifty yards, nor get up. He had evidently had convulsions, judging by the dusty path he was kicking toward the brink, which was not far and God knows how deep—a thousand feet at least.

He had been 30 hours without water—a miserable little gallon don't last long down there. We poured orange juice down him, and little dabs of hot canteen water, and when the sun got behind the cliff got mescal poles and eased him back to the mule. From the time we found him—4 PM—until eight, he took a drink every thirty yards. He had a long neck, a large Adam's apple, and drank straight up like a chicken. A pleasanter sight I have not seen in many a day.

He had lots of nerve—which helped a lot. We got back to the mules just before dark. It was a beautiful ride back up. Lightning playing on the Kaibab rim—the juniper thickets hanging like rich moss on the far ledges, and all around the mescal flowers, looking like hundreds of great skyrockets shooting up out of the rocks. Songs of canyon wrens tumbled down from a quarter of a mile straight overhead, and bounced on the rocks off into the blue gulf behind us, toward the pink shadows of mountains far below. Finally we got up into the black firs under the rim, and back—to the dudes who sit up here and think they see the Canyon, but don't.

There is a wild snapdragon down there—acres of it—which some day we must have in the garden. It is a cream-coffee color with maroon pencillings—and sweet as a lily-of-the-valley.

Today we are still drinking water every five minutes. Thirty hours must be bad. The old fellow says he dreamed of reaching the pools at Indian Gardens, and lying down in them under the willows to sleep.

Kiss the boys for me, Dear, and take care of yourself. I am one day behind my schedule but may still make it by Sunday.

Always,

Your Aldo

*July 18, 1917*

*To Estella Leopold*

Delkana Camp No. H

Kaniksu Natl. Forest

June 25, 1926

Stella Dear—

Since you have never been in a logging camp maybe you would like to know what this one is like.

You get here by driving over five miles of “pole road,” built of logs like railroad rails only 2–6' up in the air. There are log flanges to keep you from jumping the track. When you meet a truck coming down the road piled high with 2000 feet of white pine logs you feel like jumping the track anyhow.

You drive into the little camp clearing between walls of timber of indescribable grandeur. If “only God can make a tree” then who could make this magnificent forest, which is as much more than trees as America is more than Babbitt.

In the clearing is a street of log cabins, flanked on one side by a fleet of log wagons and on the other by great banks of logs ready to roll down upon the logging trucks.

We arrived in the hot afternoon when the camp was deserted. As we started to climb the mountain to visit the cutting areas a whole string of logs came thundering down the steep chute, which is greased till it nears camp and then curved to dump the logs on the landings. The logs come down with a roar, and when they begin to hit the spikes or “goose necks” set in the

chute to retard them, great silky ribbons of sapwood fly from each spike and fall in snowy piles by the chute. The logs slow up and finally stop with beautiful precision just at the landings.

We climb on up the heart-breaking slope—that is heart breaking to the fat men, and enter the burned area. (This sale was made to salvage the timber on this burn.) Here are freshly cut logs, brush, and dead snags heaped in seeming confusion, but through them great teams of percherons are threading their way dragging the logs to the chute, where crews with peaveys roll the logs down skidways into the chute and start them down their long slide to the camp. Ditch-digging is soft compared to the labor of skidding and rolling logs. It is cruelly hot and the men are all in undershirts, blue jeans, and spiked brogans, grimy with sweat and dust. A little spring has been flumed with little troughs of cedar bark and delivers a cool stream all along the chute, from which everybody drinks every five minutes. We climb on up another thousand feet to the upper slopes where the timber is smaller. You can stand still and hear the flat-headed borers chiselling away inside of the logs with a sound like a chorus of crickets. It is a race between the foresters and the bugs. They would ruin all this burned timber within a year, but we have beaten them to it. Likewise there will be no tangle of fallen timber on this burn to catch fire again and burn up the young pines which will shortly sprout from seed held over in the duff. Altogether 15 million feet will be salvaged—enough lumber to build 1500 homes, and we will get \$75,000 for it.

After looking over the cutting areas we slide down the mountain into camp just in time to escape the wrath of the cook for being late. 50 men lined up at board tables groaning under surprisingly good food, and every man—jack silent as a tomb. Conversation at meals is actually forbidden (because it annoys the cooks, and they rule the roost).

After supper all hands sit on the steps of the log cabin street and catch up on smoking, which is strictly prohibited in the woods. The forest men haul out their new toy—a little portable pump for fighting fire that purrs like an aeroplane and throws a 75 foot stream out of a 2 inch hose. With this they wet down the vicinity of the camp, while the teamsters curry and water their sleek horses. Nobody works but some Gyppos who are loading a last few trucks of logs to go down the pole road.

SELECTED LETTERS

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By this time it has turned cool and the thrushes are singing deep in the woods that wall the camp. I don't suppose many of these men hear them, but who knows? The hearers of thrushes may wear hobnails as well as long hair.

Our scaler has just confided that he has 10 grown children in Spokane. He hasn't been home since last 4<sup>th</sup> of July and is hoping it will rain this fourth so there will be no fires to keep him on the job.

Altogether it is an epic but a hard life in these camps. The city man who buys a truckload of lumber has no idea of what goes into it.

Goodnight now Dear.

Always  
Aldo