

BOOK REVIEW

My First Summer in the Sierra. By John Muir. 1987. First published in the United States in 1911. Edition with an introduction by Gretel Ehrlich was first published by Penguin Books in 1987. This edition was published by Penguin Books in 1997. 264 p. US\$12.00 softcover. ISBN 0-1402-5570-2.

John Muir was born in 1838 and at a young age emigrated from Scotland with his family to a farm in Wisconsin. He escaped the hard labor of the farm and the cruel discipline of his father to enroll in the University of Wisconsin. Except for a short stay at the university, he was self-taught in botany, geology, biology, and Latin. He did work in a machine shop for awhile and left when an industrial accident left him temporarily blind. He had a keen memory for physical detail and a longing to ramble freely in the wilds.

He walked from Indiana to Florida, suffered a bout of malaria, traveled to Cuba and the Panama Canal, then on to California in just 1 year. He had no particular destination. When he was 30 years old, he had already walked thousands of miles or more before he reached San Francisco, California, in 1868. While walking the width of California, he came upon the Sierra Nevada. After a brief visit, he worked as a ferry operator, sheepherder, and bronco buster. In May 1869, Muir was short of money (as usual) and hired on to help move a band of sheep to summer pasture at the headwaters of the Tuolumne and Merced Creeks near Yosemite. He hated the sheep but found his employer, an Irishman named Pat Delaney, to be a mentor and friend. Delaney urged Muir to sketch, hike, and botanize freely in the mountains.

Leaving in June 1869, Muir, Delaney, and a Saint Bernard named Carlo began moving the sheep up the mountains. As they traveled, Muir made notes about wild rose, azaleas, and cedars. He made notes about everything around him. He made acquaintance with lizards, ants, and squirrels. He mused about sheepherders and camp life. He absorbed himself in the wonders of his surroundings: magnificent landscapes, lush foliage, wildlife, and graceful rivers. The book includes more than 20 of Muir's original sketches.

My First Summer in the Sierra is an account of Muir's excursion as a sheepherder from June until September, when the sheep were brought back to the foothills. More than 40 years after that experience, Muir gathered the detailed notes and wrote this book.

In her introduction Gretel Ehrlich writes, "*My First Summer in the Sierra* is the most purely refreshing, savory, and lyrical of all John Muir's books." As a reviewer, I agree. This book was pleasing to read, and I look forward to reading other books by Muir.

Jan Wiedemann, Society for Range Management, Texas Section, College Station, TX. ♦

