

MONTE

Lone Wolf

of the Mokelumne

VEDA GUILD LINFORD

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Foreword

WHEN MY MOTHER Veda Linford recounted her memories of Monte Wolfe for her grandchildren, they hung on her every word and asked for more. This Wolfe Cabin campfire story time for Louise and my children led to our repeated requests that mother put the Monte memoirs into writing.

She started writing during the mid 1950's-revised and rewrote over the next twenty years. When she died, my brother, Bob, and I promised my father, Jim Linford, that we would publish it. He had edited it somewhat but it was not quite ready-or did we drag our feet for another reason? Perhaps we were worried by the fragile nature of the Mokelumne wild area. Any book of this type might well result in even more use of this delicate area. This plus our concerns of large numbers of curious jeopardizing the future of Monte Wolfe's home has caused us to hold up on publication. Ironically, the use, even overuse of the Mokelumne, was accelerated by the Forest Service "Wild Area" designation in 1963.

Immediately following this change in land use designation, we noted a sharp increase in the numbers of people there. Once an area which was only wilderness because of its inaccessibility, it is now noted as 'wild area' on the maps supplied by the Forest Service. Even though this area is legally protected from roads, dams, mining and lumbering, it no longer provides the solitary experience that I knew as a young man.

So our thinking has changed-no longer need we delay telling his story. This story is a personal one for me. I was nine years old when I first met Monte. During the next nine years he set a number of strong impressions for me. How could I have not admired his seemingly Herculean feats. The examples he set by absolute confidence in his ability to survive in the wilderness, his innate knowledge of tracking and trail finding, his skill with his double bitted axe, and his keen ability as a hunter and fisherman, all these have helped give me confidence all through my life.

Growing up in a large city as I did may not make for easy adaptation to the wilds. In my case I am at home and comfortable in the wilderness thanks to lessons I learned from Monte Wolfe.

In 1974 while with my family camping at the Wolfe Cabin site, we were visited by a free lance writer-photographer from the Sacramento area. His story about us and the cabin soon appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle and the Sacramento Bee. Within days I received a number of telephone calls from people who had had experiences with Monte, experiences which put a lie to "Monte being a dangerous criminal." One incident was related to me by a resident of Castro Valley. Her grandfather had built a cabin just off Highway 4 about a mile west of Mosquito Lakes. One spring they arrived at the cabin to find that much of the stored food had been eaten but the cabin was full of freshly cut and split fire wood. She said she knew it was cut in the winter time because the height at which the stumps were left indicated considerable snow depth at the time. The most likely candidate was Monte. This was how Monte paid for something he got. This was his code of ethics. Unacceptable under white -man's law, it was nevertheless a way of the native American.

I am sure that as you read this book, you'll come to know Monte as I knew him ... a teacher, a friend, an ethical and moral person and one I will never forget.

Perhaps too, after you read this book, you will appreciate my concerns about his unique cabin. If it is to be saved, those who believe it is a superb example of the nearly lost art of primitive log home construction must speak out.

-John A. Linford

Preface

THE SOURCE S of our information about Monte Wolfe include his letters to us, our own personal diaries and letters, vivid memories

of our years of association with him, and my son John's remarkable memory of his friend and teacher, a friend who shared his love of the mountains and his experiences in Indian lore with all of us. John, an eleven year-old boy when we first found Monte in the summer of 1933, was fascinated by the unique skills and fantastic tales told by his new friend.

After the San Francisco Chronicle and other papers published articles about Monte with pictures of the cabin, we were contacted by several of his friends. Episodes and incidents were added to our knowledge of our friend and partner.

-Veda Linford

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AUGUST 11, 1933: we were five miles from Hermit Valley on the Ebbett's Pass highway, following the flow of the north fork of the Mokelumne River, when a plume of smoke alerted us that we were not alone. But we were not prepared for the forceful "Stay right thar!" spoken in

a high nasal twang, by a belligerent-looking man carrying a long rifle and tending a brush clearing fire. Our friendly smiles and the unusual sight in those days of a woman and a young boy in the wilderness literally disarmed him. When he saw we carried nothing more threatening than my husband's fishing rod, he put down his gun and covered his embarrassment by scolding in a high falsetto. "Dontcha know better than to sneak up on a fella like that? You might get yourselves killed. Always give the wolf call. OWOO-YIP-YIP-YIP. Then I'll know you're coming." His voice dropped a full octave as he relaxed and explained why he had set the fire he was tending. "Rattlesnakes have a den in here and the only way to get rid of the varmints is to burn 'em out."

Was this the real Monte Wolfe we had heard about? My mind went back to a trip earlier this summer with a fishing companion, Jack Blum and his friend Bill Drew. Bill's father ran cattle in this area during the summer, and Bill knew the country well. He pointed out a fresh bed by the river made from fir boughs, the handicraft, he said, of an outlaw Indian, Monte Wolfe. He told us many tales about Monte, the lone wolf of the Mokelumne: a living legend, capable of hiking extraordinary distances with a heavy pack; a teller of tall tales; an expert hunter, trapper, fisherman and guide; probably wanted by the law somewhere, because he never stayed more than a day or two in one place; a thief, according to some of the local summer cabin owners who feared him and were afraid to prosecute for fear of reprisals. All in all Bill gave us a rather frightening picture of a mysterious Indian.

But in the clearing, smoke rising, snake dens in ashes, this Indian, with his friendly smile and relaxed manner, did not frighten us. As we visited with him we decided the stories of his escapades were at best exaggerated.

We asked if he wasn't afraid of losing control of the fire, or of getting in trouble with the Forest Service. He admitted that one of his brush fires had gotten away from him and had attracted the rangers' attention, much to his embarrassment. "Boy," he said, "that was some CON-FALAGRATION." He wasn't satisfied with the word and tried again. "Maybe I should have said CON-FLAG-URATION." Then young John, unwilling to try the word himself, came to Monte's rescue with, "I bet it was a big fire."

Talk moved to the condition of the water in the river. It looked clear enough to be just right for fly fishing. Monte said, "You can get a few if you know how." So soon he and Jim were off, leaving our son John with me at the mountain man's remarkable cabin.

Entering the cabin, we found a bed where we rested. The cabin was cluttered, and what we could see of the shake floor and walls, constructed of fir and pine logs, made the cabin look like a hurry-up job. The roof and interior walls were covered with hand-split shakes of incense cedar. In the corner opposite Monte's bed, cooking utensils hung over a small cast-iron cook stove. The cabin door faced south, and a table was in front of the only window, which looked east. A kerosene lantern stood on the table. Under the table were large cans with tight lids where Monte kept his food and clothing safe from pack rats, mice, and squirrels. Apparently the cabin afforded adequate if primitive shelter.

John and I wandered outside to look around while we waited for the fishermen. As a site for his cabin in the rugged canyon Monte had selected one of the few large level timbered areas, one that was hidden from, but with easy access to, the river. The site had been covered with a forest

of pines and firs the proper size for building. Monte had cleared the site except for a few large pines, and he had built the cabin with the felled timber. Rocks, large and small, lay where they had fallen from the steep canyon walls over the years. Low-growing ceanothus and manzanita covered the ground between the rocks. This undergrowth was what Monte had been burning when we arrived. A dry creek bed ran just east of the cabin. Willows and alders grew along the river.

As darkness approached and the men still had not returned, I grew nervous. Had we misjudged our new acquaintance? Maybe the stories were not exaggerated. At last I was relieved to hear Monte's wolf call as the happy fishermen returned. We answered with a welcoming OWOOPYIP-YIP- YIP, a call our family has continued to use to announce or acknowledge an arrival to camp. Monte and Jim had made a fine catch of rainbow trout, which Monte refused to keep for himself. Evidently the men got along well, and Jim's skill with a fly rod had won Monte's respect.

Monte insisted on cooking dinner for us before we headed back to the car, but delaying our hike out worried me. We had crossed the river on a log coming in that day, and I told Monte I did not want to walk that log in the dark; it had been hard enough in daylight. "Don't worry about hiking out after dark," he said. "I will take you to Hermit Valley. And we won't walk the log, because we can use a better trail, on this side of the river, since Deer Creek is not in flood." (The flow of Deer Creek, which drains Blue Lakes, Pacific Gas & Electric Company's reservoirs, is controlled as power requirements vary at Salt Springs Reservoir's electric generators.) Reassured, we accepted Monte's invitation to dinner.

After starting a good fire in his stove, Monte opened a Mason jar of boiled venison and made a nourishing stew, adding a potato, a can of peas, and then a can of tomato sauce for flavoring. He took a pan of baking powder biscuits from the oven that looked delicious but tasted awful. (Monte had used last winter's bear fat for the shortening.) We were hungry, so ate them anyway with the stew, which was very good. After heating some water on the stove and washing the dishes, we left him the food from our packs and prepared to depart. Monte closed the cabin door but did not lock it. Shouldering John's and my packs, Monte started up the trail in the dark, and we followed. He guided us steadily for the entire two hour trip to our car without flashlight. This man knew his mountains. Before parting, we made an engagement to meet Monte the following Friday evening at Hermit Valley.

Who was our new friend, what was he really like? We were to learn more with each visit. Monte stood about five feet six inches, was clear skinned and usually clean shaven, had a smiling face with eyes occasionally showing mischievousness, and wore his hair long. He was slender except for his massive legs with their tremendous muscles. We could tell at our first meeting that he gloried in his unusual strength and endurance.

As rumored, he could carry incredible burdens a long distance. Although he was only part Indian, he took pride in his Indian heritage and always referred to himself as an Indian. He told us that his mother, daughter of a Sioux chief, had married a Scottish Indian agent named Ed McGrath. Monte was named Ed McGrath after his father, but his mother called him Wolf. "That's Indian style," he told us. "My mother was brought up proper and knew what to do." Monte loved and respected his mother, and he spoke with pride of his quiet, self-disciplined father.

Monte had been reared in the Indian manner. Before he could walk, he had learned that crying without reason brought only the punishment of isolation. A crying child might alert tribal enemies and endanger the whole tribe. As a small boy, he had to prove his courage and independence by sleeping on a high platform far from camp. This was a required step toward winning the precious feathers that would mark him a brave.

I asked him later where the name Monte came from. He answered, "When I was working with timber some of my companions called me Monte. I don't know why, but the name stuck. Now I always refer to myself as Monte Wolfe."

And so began a long and treasured friendship. Monte had accepted us as we had accepted him, with respect and friendliness. From the beginning, he called me "the Mrs." and John was "my boy."

2

IT WAS ALMOST midnight Friday before we reached the agreed meeting place. Monte was waiting for us, resting against a tree with a small fire in front of him. As we unrolled our sleeping bags for the night, we offered Monte some blankets from our car, but he declined, saying he needed no wraps. "White man make big fire, soon cold; Indian make small fire, warm all night." At 7000 feet, it is cold at night. We were impressed.

It seemed that daylight immediately followed our going to sleep. Up at the crack of dawn, we were soon on our way, carrying the case of tomato sauce, the four cans of Crisco shortening (for better biscuits), and the ten pounds of dried egg yolk that we had brought Monte. He was pleased with the gift and, I think in order to offer something in return, insisted that we leave our sleeping bags behind, saying he had plenty of bedding for us to use.

On this hike Monte led us past his cabin on a carefully concealed trail over rough terrain, through meadows and forested areas and across streams to his lower camp. He kept the trail hidden by walking on granite, by avoiding crushable plants, and by often taking a divergent route to confuse followers.

When we arrived at the camp several hours later, we found an awful mess. A tarpaulin that had covered tools and supplies had been torn to shreds, and cans of food were bitten open and scattered about: a marauding bear. Monte's anger flamed. "Dad-dad-dad bless that thieving son of a-a-seacock. I'll skin 'im alive!" Swear in the presence of the Mrs.? Not Monte! We cleaned up the worst of the mess, leaving a time-consuming job for another time.

During lunch, Monte told us his plan to build a new home on this site. Although he had built his existing cabin conveniently near his trap lines so he could store traps and pelts and find refuge from a sudden storm, it filled only a temporary need. Monte was determined to have a real home, more than just a storehouse, located farther away from roads and unwanted neighbors. His plans were complete. He had scouted the Sierra canyons until he had found this ideal location: a timbered flat large enough for a cabin and a garden at an ideal elevation for both summer and winter, about 5400 feet. "It took a long time," he said, "but I sure found just what I was looking

for. It's far enough from the river to be private. Best of all, I've got a fresh water spring, so I won't have to depend on the river."

Monte's existing cabin was built illegally on Forest Service land, and he did not have authority to build this new cabin; but he said, "By cracky, I gotta have a place to live, and I ain't botherin' nobody." Then he added, "Sheriff Barrett don't bother me neither, he's my friend."

Monte told us he planned to file a mineral claim, based on a large outcropping of quartz near the cabin site, probably in order to establish his right to the land. Although he would be using the land illegally, he said many of the Forest Rangers were his friends and recognized his usefulness as an on-the-spot fire fighter. The rangers had even provided him with fire-fighting tools such as Forest Service shovels, axes, rakes and saws.

Monte planned to build a weather-tight cabin here using the excellent log-size trees he had felled and that lay scattered over the flat. He had already cut and skinned enough of them, he explained, to complete his cabin. He described the floor plan. It would be a comfortable home, about 14 by 20 feet. The front door, facing south, would open into a room the full width and height of the structure, a room large enough for a stove, table, bench, chairs, and for tool and firewood storage. The rear portion of the first floor would be divided into two rooms, one for storing food and bedding and the other for his bedroom. The ceiling of the two rooms would be the floor of a loft that would serve for additional sleeping and storage. Monte planned a window at the peak of the front south wall, one in the main room over the table looking east, and one in the north wall opening into Monte's bedroom. He showed us where the cabin would be. The surrounding areas were beautifully timbered with Western yellow and sugar pines, white firs, incense cedars, and black oaks.

We did not doubt the new cabin would be built properly. Monte's experience as a logger had given him an understanding of handling logs and tools and a working idea of construction. He was skilled with an axe, seldom wasting a swing.

The mountain spring was Monte's prize discovery. He had found a swampy area that stayed moist year round. "It is always wet, so I knew it must be more than just melting snow," he said. "I looked for a flow above the wet ground. Sure enough, there it was, trickling down under a granite ledge at the foot of the canyon wall, but only about a hundred and fifty feet from where I will build the cabin. The spring was there, but I had to dig a shallow well before I could use it." The well is about three feet in diameter and two feet deep. The good water, with flow sufficient to keep the well filled under normal use, would be sufficient for cooking, laundry, and bathing. But Monte would first use the water to lubricate the skid-rails that would move the heavy logs to the cabin site.

We spent the night here. Monte cut saplings to make a bed for us, a six-by-nine frame about two feet high, covered with interlaced fir branches. He called this a Canuk bed. It was similar to the one our friend Bill Drew had shown us before we met Monte. Part of his bedding turned out to be rather dusty horse blankets. It was comfortable, but noisy. Nocturnal rodents liked the hideaway, chasing one another across and under the bed. Jim awoke with a start when one raced across his face.

I think we might have slept better if Monte had been a little less considerate of our comfort.

The next day, in spite of the tremendous cabin-building job he was facing, Monte insisted on guiding us back to the road, about a five-hour trip. After a brief goodbye, he turned around and walked back to the cabin site.

That Monte would take time to guide us back struck us as extraordinary, and we continued to be amazed that he would do this after each of our visits. Over the years, however, we came to understand that for someone whose normal mode of travel was by foot, an extra five hours of walking in a day was little. Perhaps, also, a few more hours of companionship were welcome to one who spent much time alone.

Early in September Jim and John went down the canyon to fish and to see how Monte was progressing. John led, following Monte's trail. They were astonished to find the cabin walls already six logs high. Monte was proud and happy to have made such a good start. Although totally unschooled in engineering, Monte had cleverly devised a way to move the heavy logs to the building site. He made a parallel track of two or three small trees, which he had skinned and kept wet for use as rails. The wall logs, twelve to eighteen inches in diameter, were also kept wet. Monte used a peavy, rope, and his own brute strength to skid and roll the logs in position for raising.

Next Monte had raised these logs—we estimated their weight at six to eight hundred pounds each—by himself without block and tackle.

He rolled them up a ramp of small logs, which he leaned against the wall. He used two ropes so he could roll both ends of a log evenly. One end of each rope was tied to the top of the wall, and the other end passed under the new log on the ground and back over the top of the wall. By pulling the free ends of the ropes, Monte could roll a log up the sloping ramp into place on top of the wall. The rolling log ramp reduced the effort required so that a one-hundred-and-fifty pound man could raise a large log.

Six weeks later Monte had erected all the logs except for the ridgepole. He met us at the highway and we hiked to the lower camp to help him celebrate the big event. The side walls were now ten logs high, dovetailed at the corners; the end wall logs were progressively shorter to the peak. There were smaller logs for perlines, 18 inches on center from front to back to support the shake roof. The ridgepole was to be rolled up on three long, stout poles slanted against the highest perlin. Three ropes were used for rolling. Monte, Jim, and John pulled in rhythm, I cheered, and presto, the cabin was crowned.

Monte still had a number of tasks to complete before winter set in.

He had to cover the open roof with hand-cut and split incense cedar shakes; door and window openings had to be cut into the walls, and the walls chinked. The window sashes, already carried down from Tamarack had to be installed; and a shake-covered door had to be built and hung. Monte had already packed in his cast iron cook stove and planned to set it up and live in the cabin that winter.

Early in June of 1934 we hiked down again and found that Monte had made excellent use of his time. The door and windows were in place, and although the wall logs were so skillfully fitted

that there was little space between them, he had chinked them with long pieces of triangular split incense cedar to be sure the cabin was weathertight. (The chinking was so well done that most of the chinks have stayed in place for half a century.)

Three rooms and the loft were finished. A shake ladder on the bedroom wall furnished access to the loft. Long metal spikes protruding from split poles set horizontally across windows and the door guarded the cabin. "They'll keep out four-footed bears," Monte said.

It seemed impossible that he could have carried so many bulky, heavy articles down the long rough trail. An iron sink; a cast iron stove top for out-of-door use; a table, several bedsprings and mattresses; and an old round galvanized tub. Most amazing of all was a heavy steel wheelbarrow. "I sure need it down here," he told us, "and the wheelbarrow was a help coming in. I had to unload it and carry it on my back through the heavy brush. Must have looked like an old-time monster! When I came to granite or level trail, I'd reload it. It was a lot of trouble, but it was worth it. I use it every day down here.

"I sure was lucky when Whiteside's up at Big Trees Hotel put in those new fangled inner springs. They gave me all I could use of the old stuff." Mr. and Mrs. Whiteside owned the hotel, since burned down, at Calaveras Big Trees Resort. After Mrs. Whiteside was widowed she lived in a home at Lake Alpine and continued to be a good friend of Monte. He cut wood for her and she gave him useful items in return. In fact, most of what people thought he had stolen came from her.

Monte had repaired and tightened the springs, put the bed frames back together and set each bed on four steady blocks, placing two beds in the cabin, and several others outside. Now he could have greater sleeping comfort in his new home. Guests could sleep inside or under the stars.

The mattresses served another purpose for Monte. Anything that needed pressing was dampened slightly, folded carefully, and left under the mattress until it was dry and almost smooth. Monte liked to be neat and clean. His ancient round galvanized tub was in frequent use for laundry and bathing.

Monte had also carried down several old milk cans, and he gave one to each of us-Jim, John, and me-to store our personal belongings at his cabin.

Our visits with Monte at his cabin settled into a routine over the years. We would arrive at the lower cabin by late afternoon, tired, cook a dinner and eat, and then go fishing. Fly fishing is best in the evening when the sun has just left the water. We would fish in groups of two, one group going up river, the other going down. We would fish until we could no longer see our fly on the water. Some of the areas we fished were as much as one-half to three-quarters of an hour's hike from camp, so we would be walking back to the cabin after dark. Whichever group returned first would put a fire in the stove, and we would have hot soup before bedtime.

Monte always wanted us to sleep inside the cabin, where he would have made up the beds in the loft. Although we preferred to sleep under the stars, since we always slept indoors at home, we used the loft, because Monte would have been offended otherwise.

After breakfast we would take day hikes from the cabin either up and down the river or over to Summit City Canyon. Several times we hiked to Beebe Lake.

These trips to the Sierra were made on three-day weekends, so our stay with Monte was never long. Each summer John would beg to be left with Monte for a week, but Jim and I said no. At the end of the weekend Monte led us to our car, sometimes taking us out a different way, down the canyon and out over Grouse Creek for example. On each new route Monte shared what he knew of the wilderness.

3

ALTHOUGH MONTE SHARED his lower cabin with his friends, the trail there was deliberately concealed. No identifying ducks on rocks were allowed to remain. For Monte, the security of his home was its remoteness and inaccessibility. The trail there was always the easiest walking possible for the route, but it was often concealed or misleading to someone unfamiliar with it. Yet anyone lost in the Sierra who accidentally discovered the cabin could take shelter there, for Monte kept the door unlocked.

We knew of one such hiker, who had heard of Monte's cabin and tried to reach it by a route shorter than the twelve-mile trail from Hermit Valley. The man followed an old trail from Alpine Lake over the mountain and down the steep canyon wall at a place called Underwood. The river at the bottom of the canyon was a raging torrent and impossible to cross. There was no trail up his side of the river. Rocks and brush made it nearly impassable. Frequently his choice was to swim the river (impossible) or climb high over rocks or around a narrow gorge. The man became exhausted and was really frightened. Fortunately, Monte saw him and paced him to a safe log crossing upstream, scolding all the way. When the man told Monte about his long journey up the wrong side of the river gorge, Monte, disbelieving, said, "Nobody but an Indian could have made it and he'd have more damn sense than to try."

Although Monte loved his cabin home and the mountains surrounding it, he needed, even craved, congenial companionship. Anyone who respected him and treated him fairly was his friend. The tribal loyalty he had learned as a child extended to the trail companions, hunters, and fishermen who were his friends. Monte dismissed his enemies with the comment, "I never want to see him again." That was the extent of his spoken disapproval.

Because we so enjoyed Monte's friendship, we began taking our friends to meet him. On one of Jim's weekend trips he took Jack Blum. We had been with Jack when we first heard of Monte, but Jack had not yet met him. Jack and Monte enjoyed each other enough that trip that before leaving, Jack made a date with Monte for the opening of deer season. They were to become very good friends.

The previous summer we had taken Jim's brother Hooper with us to meet Monte and enjoy the fishing. He, too, was an experienced flycaster and quickly became Monte's friend. Hooper decided to take his wife down to the lower cabin on his next trip. In spite of Hooper's effort to get her to wear hiking shoes, she walked the twelve miles in high heels, ruining both her shoes and her feet. Fortunately Monte had a pair of Keds to give her so she could hobble her way out to Hermit Valley. That was her last and only trip to the cabin.

Hooper's friendship with Monte grew with each meeting, and so it was natural the following year for Hooper to make him a pack frame after Monte admired the one Hooper had made for himself. Until then Monte had been using a heavy Trapper Nelson frame, which placed all the weight of the pack on the back and shoulders. Made of lightweight aluminum tubing, Hooper's frame relieved the shoulders by placing most of the weight directly on the hips, a concept well ahead of the times.

Monte used his gift from Hooper until his death, changing only the pack on the frame to better suit his needs and greater strength. The canvas pack Hooper had provided was too small for Monte's idea of a worthwhile load, so Monte replaced the canvas with a huge heavy leather pack.

We began corresponding with Monte by letter in late summer of 1934. His first letter to us verified a date to meet him for our last trip of the year. The letter was dictated. "I've got cramps in my hand so bad I can't write, so I'm having a lady write it for me." (He never told us who wrote the letter for him.)

We were to meet Monte at Nelson's cabin on Pacific Creek, one of our established meeting places. Monte never disappointed us. Even though we might arrive at the meeting place well after midnight, we always found him, and though often dozing with his back against a tree and a small fire at his feet, he was alert to the approach of our car and ready with a joyous greeting and whatever assistance he could give.

On this trip we brought Monte his winter supplies. Whenever he asked us to bring him something, he insisted on paying for it. We respected his wishes but always brought him extra, which he accepted gracefully without argument.

Although the river was low, it had not been too heavily fished, and we easily caught all the fish we wanted to eat there and to take home. The trip was a good conclusion to our summer in the Sierra.

When it was time to return to Oakland, Monte, as usual, walked us to our car. We thanked him and said goodbye, and he promised to write us in the spring.

Although the world we left behind remained Monte's year round, Monte's work changed as each season gave way to the next. Once the fall hunters departed and hard weather stopped easy travel to nearby settlements, Monte was alone with his winter work. The only person he might see during winter was the caretaker of the PG&E generating station at Blue Lakes, Mr. Green. To visit him Monte would have to travel by skis or snowshoes. Occasionally we could send a letter to Monte during winter via Mr. Green.

Before winter storms began Monte would overhaul his garden for spring, breaking the bunch grass sod and pruning the blackberry vines. After harvesting his crop of potatoes planted the previous spring, Monte would pit them for winter. He chose a dry sandy spot for the pit, dug a hole two feet deep, threw in several armsful of dried oak leaves and then the potatoes, which he covered with more leaves and soil.

Trapping was Monte's winter work. He set traps between the two cabins, checking them often to keep animals he caught from suffering unnecessarily. He prepared the skins for market, scraping

them carefully and hanging them in the upper cabin where he kept a pet cat to discourage rodents.

Monte fished and hunted for his winter food. He warned hunters, "Don't ever shoot a porcupine; that's my fresh meat for winter." He also relied on venison and bear meat, sometimes making jerky to preserve it, and sometimes stewing, then bottling it in Mason jars. Although Monte did not smoke fish, he occasionally hung them to dry. He wasted nothing, including bear fat, which was strong when newly rendered and became overpowering in time.

During winter Monte kept a hard pine knot smoldering slowly in his stove to warm the lower cabin. There he would cook beans or split pea soup, biscuits, muffins and flapjacks, as well as fish and game.

Several times during the winter on a warm day Monte would clear the snow from the potato pit, open one end, remove what he needed for a week or so, then cover the pit again.

For winter entertainment Monte played records on an old Victrola he had packed into the cabin. Books and magazines that friends left him were his companions through the long winter months. Monte read well and expressed himself clearly both verbally and in his many letters. His formal education had ended in the fourth grade, but between his experiences and his continual reading he had a good practical education.

When Monte encountered new words during his winter reading, he might speak them for the first time only when spring and summer brought visitors. Because he had never heard them spoken, he simply pronounced the words his own way.

"These here are wind clouds, but those ones are CLUM-NIS-ALUMINI," he would say. Despite his creative pronunciation, we always understood Monte.

"Last winter I read that the only vegetable that survived the great CATACLUMB was the big redwood, the GUYGANTIA. That was in the time of the DISHENARS in the PLATONIC age." Cataclysm, gigantea, dinosaur, and Pleistocene fell in place quite naturally, convincing us Monte had indeed read about the redwoods that winter.

Monte's first trip out of the wilderness each spring would usually be toward Markleeville rather than Tamarack where snow made the route more difficult. He would hike out Meadow Creek, along the south-facing slope where less snow accumulated, to Blue Lakes. Then he would walk to Highway 88 and hitchhike the rest of the way. Sometimes our first letter of spring was postmarked Minden, and the calendar on the wall of his cabin in the early days of our friendship was from the general store in Minden.

4

EITHER BANK of the Mokelumne canyon is enchanting, but there is a price to pay to see it: backpacking affords the only access. Dim trails leading down the canyon are often lost in stretches of granite or brush and are changed from year to year by winter storms that tumble trees and dislodge boulders. In the long meadows countless mountain rivulets have made narrow deep

gullies which, hidden by a growth of long heavy grass, can turn a hiker's ankle. Steep granite walls essentially preclude the use of horses.

When the heavy winter snow melts, torrents swell the Mokelumne and its tributaries, and fording some of these side streams becomes difficult.

Whenever Monte hiked with us the going was easier. He always carried the overburden. He knew exactly where he was going, the easiest route, and how to walk. Over and over we heard, "Take it slow and easy, you'll get there just as fast and you won't be dog-tired."

Now, as then, the river furnishes a musical background for our hikes, sometimes rippling gently, then roaring against an obstructing boulder as though in protest, or where the river becomes a waterfall, quieting itself at the top, then booming at the bottom of the drop.

Streams flowing from high lakes are bordered with water-loving plants: scarlet mimulus, shooting star, bold leopard lilies, and along the trail, pennyroyal and scarlet gilia. Each season has its own flowers. Aspen flourish in the water-soaked flats, and along riverbanks alders grow to trouble the flycatcher. Wherever cracks in the granite have admitted a little soil, seedlings struggle toward the sun. It is strange, but not uncommon, to see a gnarled pine or juniper growing out of split rock.

John was interested in everything the mountains had to offer. His curiosity challenged Monte's urge to teach his own unique skills to someone young, yet strong enough to follow him. Monte taught John to find a trail in the dark. "Just feel it with your feet. That's why Indians wear soft-soled moccasins: so they can feel the trail. When you step on the trail it feels firm and you have a quiet step. Just one step off the trail and you feel the crunch of untrod-upon rocks and hear the snapping of uncrushed leaves and twigs." Monte would walk along behind John, scolding each time he stepped off the trail. Monte said, "When walking, try to step between or over the rocks. Climbing on a rock wastes energy. Most important of all, learn the lay of the land and know where you're going."

Following Monte on the trail brought us many priceless memories.

"If you want to see animals, you've got to be quiet. When I stop, everybody stop. Don't move a muscle, just look and listen."

When Monte froze, we all froze, and were often rewarded. We might see a beautiful doe and her wobbly-legged fawn; coyotes trotting along, unaware of our nearness; or a buck unconcernedly feeding in a small glade.

We stopped instantly one time when ahead of us a black bear appeared and climbed a rocky slope Monte called The Devil's Staircase. We did not move until the big beast disappeared into the brush. "Come winter, I'll have his hide," said Monte.

Once while hiking up Summit City Creek, a tributary several miles below Monte's new cabin, we saw something special: harlequin ducks.

They had located a small cascade and were having a glorious time river running. We watched in amazement as they left the water at the bottom of their run down the steep cascading falls, and

with wildly flapping wings flew to the top for another run. I wanted to applaud, but Monte stood motionless, so we watched in amused silence.

Monte seldom talked on the trail. Conversation was saved for rest periods, when we learned the most about our friend.

At one such stop, John climbed to a ledge above me and took delight in flexing a bundled fly rod over my head. I asked him to stop, but he was bent on teasing. When he hit my head and connected with my hair I lost my temper. Monte said with glee, "First time I ever saw the Mrs. mad." He told John, "She sure told you off. You deserved it. Boy, was that something to hear." Then came the tale.

"My mother wouldn't stand for nonsense. Having fun was all right, but we had to mind the rules. After the padre talked Mother into coming to Mass we had to mind those rules, too. The rules were pretty much the same as Mother's Indian rules, except that one about loving your enemies. Mother said that if you minded your own business you wouldn't have any enemies.

"The Padre sure admired Mother, but he didn't think much of me. I told him off once and he kicked me out of the church. Mother talked to him and he invited me back. I don't think I acted any different after that, but it made Mother happy to have me back at church.

"When she died, they [the Catholic Church] wanted so much for the funeral. I couldn't pay it. The Masons offered a real proper funeral for about half the price, so she was buried in the Masonic cemetery. That was the end of me with the Padre. He said I was damned forever because I hadn't buried my mother in CONCENTRATED ground. Anyway, it was paid for."

Monte was silent for awhile, and we felt sure that another story was coming. He told us why he was convinced that minding his own business did not necessarily keep him out of trouble. "I believe in minding my own business, which is guiding and trapping. (I was minding my own business when I got into trouble in Tuolumne County, but I ain't gonna change my ways now. I just stay away from Tuolumne County.)

"One day I was over in Sonora and these men came up to me and said they'd heard I knew the mountain trails. Did I know an old one, a shortcut to Nevada? They wanted to meet some friends there. I knew the trail they were talking about. They offered good pay, so I said sure. It was an old Indian trail that hadn't been used for years, but I found it, and we were in Nevada sooner than they expected. They gave me a little bonus, and I said goodbye.

"I sure earned that bonus. It took me two days to get back to Sonora and into big trouble. The Sheriff tapped me on the shoulder and accused me of being in cahoots with jewel thieves. Those fellows were on the lam! They were wanted in Los Angeles. I told the sheriff my business was guiding and that was all I had done. He was rough. He wanted me to tell him where they went. I couldn't tell him 'cause I didn't know. He still thinks I was in cahoots with them, so I stay away from Tuolumne County. Anyway, ALAPINE's purtier. And Sheriff Barrett is my friend."

Rest stops were signposts for Monte, many of them named to record significant events. "Why did you name this rock Bottle Rock?" asked John. "Well, late last fall I went up to Tamarack and bought a rot of supplies. When I paid cash, Mr. Bracey put a bottle of Dago Red on top of my

pack. He said, 'A gift for you, Monte. Don't drink it now. Save it for a cold night.' He was joshing. He'd never seen me drink. I don't drink.

"On the trail to the lower cabin I had a heavy load and slipped against this rock. The bottle broke and Dago Red ran down all over the rock and my pack. At first I was mad. And then I thought, big ships are named with a bottle of champagne. I've named this rock with a bottle of Dago Red. That's how come it's called Bottle Rock."

Farther down the canyon is Pipe Flat, so named for a heavy steel pipe resting on a big boulder. Monte explained his intention of piping water from his spring one of these days. "If I ever have a trip when I'm not loaded up, I'll carry it on down."

The Devil's Staircase on Monte's trail is a slope of scree that impedes the hiker's step.

Rattlesnake Flat was named for its many inhabitants. We saw why one morning when Monte's quick sidestep avoided a rattlesnake coiled to strike. Using a stick, Monte struck the snake fast and killed it. One of John's friends was with us, and the two boys bubbled over with excited questions.

"Do they always warn you before they strike? How many of them have you killed? Does the mate hunt you down? Have you ever eaten rattlesnake meat? Has one ever bitten you? Do they really have dens?" On and on.

"Hey, wait a minute," said Monte. "One question at a time. When rattlesnakes buzz on the trail, they're scared. That's one reason you should walk quiet. You can't hear 'em if you're noisy."

"How many have you killed?"

"I haven't kept track, but I've killed quite a few. I always kill a rattler when he threatens me, and no mate ever tracked me down. That's just a wild story. I've eaten the meat, but you've got to be hungry to swallow it. I sure have been bitten more than once. I cut the wound open, squeeze out the poison, and then I pour in PERTASSIUM PERMAGATE. It takes a long time to heal, but I ain't dead yet. Sure snakes have dens. If you'll get up tomorrow before the sun hits the canyon I'll show you where they hole up for the winter."

Early the next morning we all followed Monte to a steep granite wall with a wide horizontal crack at its base. As we walked cautiously toward this opening, a rattlesnake sounded off with a characteristic buzz, its rattles vibrating madly. Monte's Old Bess, his antique spiral-wound double-barrel shotgun sounded off as he fired into the crack. The resultant furor sounded like a disturbed beehive or a yellow jackets' paper beehive. "They ain't making honey," Monte said.

When the smoke blew away, Monte used a long stick to reach into the opening, and he brought out three huge rattlers, victims of the concussion. "There y'are. Do snakes have dens? You tell 'em."

Monte said that rattlesnake dens were common in the canyon. Although he knew that rattlesnakes, the pit vipers of the United States, were very helpful in limiting the rodent population, he did not like them in concentration near his trails or campsites. Though he was not afraid of them, Monte did appreciate the danger of inadvertently stepping on one, or of blocking

its route of escape so that it felt threatened. The two hollow fangs that normally fold up into the roof of its mouth are extended when striking, and if the snake has enough time and is in the right position, it can puncture a leather boot.

Then came the lesson. "Always examine a rock before you sit on it. All around, and under. Don't take any chances with the varmints."

Back at camp Monte showed the boys how to remove, stretch, and salt the skin. "Do a good job now. They're yours to keep, rattles and all."

A natural teacher, Monte shared his knowledge of the wilderness with everyone he guided, but he especially enjoyed teaching youngsters. His advice on fishing came in a high falsetto. "Git down. Stay outa sight! Fish can't hear, but they sure can see. Cast your fly right over there under that willow. That's where they hide. Good boy! Now easy. Keep your line tight. No jerking. Just pull'er in."

Monte was an expert angler. As soon as his fly hit the water he talked to the fish. "Git on there, you dumb son of a seacock." The landing process was wonderful. He talked to the fish, the river god, his ancestors, and all the spectators, loud, loud, loud. Then he left that pool and slithered up to another one to repeat his performance.

Monte appreciated Jim's expert casting and fishing skills, but one day when John caught more fish than his father, Monte's joy soared. "That's my boy!" he shouted. Any success of John's gave Monte personal satisfaction, and he used every opportunity to tell his friends.

Apparently other children besides our John had benefited from knowing Monte. On one visit he told us about a listless boy whose father had written asking Monte for his help. The son, Tom, was lackadaisical and had no interest in anything. Maybe Monte's mountains would help. Monte agreed to expose the boy to the Indian way of life.

In describing the boy to us, Monte used the father's word for the child, pronouncing it his own way: "When he came up here he was just plain LACKSKADDLE. He spent a month with me, and I built up his STANIMA. When his dad came up to get him he walked out in record time. I and the Mokolumne sure REHALIBATED him. Now he comes in every chance he gets. His dad was sure pleased."

Monte was pleased, too. Guiding was his business and his pleasure, particularly when it could include turning a LACKSKADDLE boy into an enthusiastic mountaineer.

Beyond entertaining us with stories, Monte often enriched our visits to his cabin by playing records on his Victrola. His records included many songs popular in the 1920's and some monologues of vaudeville renderings.

No matter how many times we heard the question from "Cohen at the Buttonhole Makers' Picnic" (Hey Amy, what goes round a button?) we enjoyed Monte's gleeful uproarious appreciation of the response (A billy goat). His favorite record, "It's Roundup Time in Reno," was about a city familiar to him. "There ain't no dogies there, just girls with golden hair," Monte's voice boomed.

Rhyme and rhythm pleased him. He sang lustily when "pony" was rhymed with "alimony," and he dramatized his woodchopping by singing, "Let's bury the hatchet" (wham) "in the Kaiser's head!" (wham wham).

When the moon silvered the treetops near the cabin, Monte would sing with "Der Bingle" and "Sail along silvery moon." When he played the flip side of the record ("When you dream about Hawaii") Monte would say, "Betcha Hawaiian moons ain't as pretty as ours."

A favorite artist, Frank Crummet, sang on many of Monte's records, including, "Oh listen all ye maidens about to choose a man, never marry an old one, take a young one if you can." Monte gave the "reasons why" as forcibly as he gave a lesson on trail-following.

Often first thing in the morning we would awake to, "Oh the saddest sound of all was to hear the bugle call, you've gotta get up, you've gotta get up, you've gotta get up this morning." Then, "Someday I'm going

to murder the bugler, someday they're going to find him dead; but first I'll get the other pup, the guy who wakes the bugler up, and then spend the rest of my life in bed."

All ye maidens, Betsy Brown, the Bootlegger's daughter, the generous dad, Cohen, the GI sleepyhead, the bugler and the other pup were living, speaking friends who filled Monte's hours without argument, summer and winter.

5

IN JUNE OF 1935 Jim wrote his first letter to Monte for the year asking for fishing information and then sharing our news: "The Mrs. will not be up this year, since we have a new boy at home not quite seven weeks old. John and I will come." Monte replied promptly, June 12, 1935:

Dear Friend:

Your letter to hand Glad to hear from you and HURAY for the boy Lots of good wishes for his future and I'm Awfully sorry Mrs. cannot get up but I will think of her hope for next year Better come up one week from next Saturday Will meet you at Nelsons cabin There are plenty of fish lots of water no crossing the river logs all out highest water in many years Can give you lake or river fishing at that time I caught the limit today at Summit Lake I was out in May to Stockton Sold my furs, 21 martin 1 cross fox and some others Got \$13\$ all told One of the worst seasons I've ever seen for snow 29 feet at Highland.

Dear friends:

I am writing again June 20,1935 and will try to send it by some of the fishermen or else tomorrow by the road gang The road crew were almost to the Pass [Ebbetts Pass]

yesterday on the other side of Stanislaus Meadows Some people brought me up in a car where they were Then we left the car and walked to Pacific Heights where we fished those two little lakes and caught 3\$ nice trout two ladies and a boy I did most of the catching but they sure got a big kick out of it Now as to your coming up You can come next Friday if you want to but please don't wait until July 15th as I am engaged for a long trip and cannot disappoint the people Any Friday before that time I will meet you as I will be out on the road every weekend anyway Of course down below" wont be touched untill after July but up here" ". in the lakes and streams all will be fished over by July 4th Johnie would enjoy some of this upper country where there are no snakes and not so hard walking If you come up soon bring your own sleeping bags as I havent enough bedding at the upper cabin To Johnie I did not mention you in the other letter but I did not forget you my boy and I hope to get you fast to a fish that is bigger than that baby brother of yours and we will try to see you have a better bed than last time Well Jim better bring Hooper if you can break him loose from his wife or have him bring her if her feet are well enough I've got another pair of Keds too small for me so I can fix her up OK I am sending you a picture of the Lone Wolf and his lair taken in midwinter snow, furs, skis and all.

In winter the snow may reach the eaves, and occasionally it covers the entire cabin. Monte kept a shovel hanging in a tree for use when he had to dig out access to the door and clear the roof. There were forty-one marten in this photo. It was taken before Monte had finished putting shakes on the outside walls, but the chinks show plainly.

Jim accepted Monte's invitation, choosing June 22nd for the visit, and added, "We will have our sleeping bags, and my friend Walter Porter will be with us. Hooper can't get away."

Walter Porter's interest in fishing went back almost to the turn of the century when both he and Jim as youngsters had fished the Weber and the Logan Rivers and their tributaries in northern Utah. In those years, access to the canyons was by foot or horse, so the upper streams were seldom overfished. During recent years, however, each had experienced the frustration of casting in nearly fished out streams.

"You can still ketch 'em," Monte said, "you just have to know where they are and what they're taking. It ain't any roadside stuff like easy. You have to go where they are."

* The area Monte called the Hell Hole of the Mokelumne, the Mokelumne River between Summit City Creek and Meadow Creek.

** Highland and Wheeler Lakes, known for good fishing.

For the June 22nd trip Monte chose Highland Lake, still covered with ice. Only a strip along the edge was open. The fish were hungry. This was bait fishing, and Monte was prepared with a can of tree grubs. (He had shown John how to cut into bug logs to get the grubs on the hike in.) The results were fantastic. For Walter and Jim it was a return to the joy and satisfaction of their early youth. For John it was a habit-forming success. The marvelous fishing, fresh air, friendly mountain people, peace and quiet influenced Walter and his wife Alberta Porter to buy a cottage at Tamarack.

Monte's work of guiding and scouting made him feel responsible for those in his care, particularly those boys who were just learning to know the mountains. Once when Jim and John

planned a weekend hike into the upper cabin, about five miles, they invited Larry Timpson, one of John's friends, to go along. They planned to fish in the upper gorge. In some places on the trail the walls of this very deep granite gorge are almost perpendicular. John, who was accustomed to the trail, had no trouble with a narrow ledge far above the river, but Larry panicked. Monte was watching closely. Sensing Larry's fear, Monte shouted, "Look up, don't look down, I'm coming." Swiftly he reached the frightened boy. Gathering Larry up in one arm and balancing himself with rods and fishing gear in the other, he carried Larry to safety. Then he comforted the boy. "Shucks," Monte said, "lots of people can't stand heights. Just remember to look up and straight ahead. Never look down. That's scary."

July 4th, 1935 was an important date for Monte. Our cousins Chick and Edith Linford hiked to the lower cabin with Jim. They watched Monte as he posted his mining claim on the door of the cabin. Jim signed as his partner with Chick and Edith as witnesses, and for the first time Monte felt that his claim to his beloved cabin site was secure. He could now call Jim "Partner or Pal of Mine."

When the party returned to Oakland, Monte was with them. Two special things drew him. He wanted to see John's baby brother, and he wanted to see the new bridge connecting San Francisco to Oakland. The small infant, Robert, seemed to frighten Monte, but the ferry trips to San Francisco enthralled him. John acted as guide in Oakland and in San Francisco, thoroughly enjoying showing Monte what he knew, just as Monte had shared the wilderness with him.

We had a dinner for Monte, inviting friends who wanted to meet him. Chick and Edith invited us for dinner, and we spent an evening with the Porters. Monte was welcome and at ease everywhere, but it did not take long for urban life to pall. Monte loved the mountains with a passion, and the city pavement hurt his feet. After the evening with the Porters, Hooper took him back to his beloved Sierra.

Our next news of Monte came later in July from Alberta Porter, who was vacationing in Tamarack at their summer cabin. Alberta's card, dated July 30, 1935, brought unhappy news:

Yesterday about 6 p.m. they brought Monte into camp badly hurt. Mr. Bracey put him into one of his tents and sent to Berkeley Boy Scout Camp for a doctor. Monte's leg was broken in two places. He had been guiding three fellows into Wheeler Lake and slipped on the ice, fell over a ledge. The men helped him to the side of the trail, and then went on to fish! About 10 a.m. a guide from Alpine Lodge passed by. He promised to return and take Monte out. It was 2 o'clock before he got back. Monte had a long wait. This morning the stage took him away, and as soon as the stage comes back tonight we will let you know where they took him.

Alberta

MONTE WAS TAKEN to the county hospital in San Andreas, where Dr. G. P. Cooper set and cast his leg. Monte never talked or complained about his being deserted by the three men. With stoic self-reliance he no doubt insisted that the fishermen go on without him.

On August 2nd, Jim and John went to San Andreas to visit Monte at the hospital. He was unhappy about the confinement and worried about the expense. His greatest concern was about his cabins, which he had left unsecured, having expected to return soon.

Jim and John promised to hike down to the lower cabin and close things up for him. Monte gave instructions: "You'll find the lock in the table drawer in the upper cabin. Bring out four pair of medium socks from under the upper bed. Bring out razor, soap, blades, brush, suit of underwear, comb and two shirts. Be sure to use a Flit gun in both cabins." Monte's last next request revealed a hidden longing: "Please bring a clipboard and some paper. I'll write my life story." However, no manuscript has ever shown up. I wonder if anyone saw Monte writing it.

The next day Jim and John hiked down to the cabin and found everything just as Monte had left it. They called at the hospital on their way home. Monte was relieved to know that his guns and fishing gear were secure, and was glad to get the personal items they brought for him. When they asked, "How are you getting along?" he said, "Swell, and they even wheeled me out onto the porch so I could get plenty of ASTROVIOLET."

During Monte's stay in the hospital one of Jim's friends was anxious for his grandson to have some fishing experience. So Jim wrote to Monte asking where was the closest place to go for some fish. Jim knew that by this time of year every stream and lake near a road would have been fished to death. Monte answered promptly, and after a good-natured scolding, he told them where to go.

Calaveras Hospital

August 7th 1935

Jim Linford
Oakland California

Dear Friend Jim:

Are you off your trolley or what Sure must have a bug loose somewhere Haven't I told you be for There is none of that easy fishing Well if I haven't I will although you ought to know for yourself without my telling you it just ISENT don that way this time of the year.

Then he relented and answered the question.

Highland Creek is fine You could get a horse of Mike at Pacific if he is home, to pack your beds It is six miles to the upper part of Gabbett's Meadow twelve miles As for two or four miles there is none such that I know of My leg is in a cast and I am JOCKING around Feels good to be off my back you bet Got my first real night's sleep last night since I got hurt

Sincerely
The Lone Wolfe

Jim and friends did rent a horse and found good flyfishing at Highland Creek.

On August 22nd Jim wrote to Monte, "I hope that leg is healing satisfactorily. When we parted last year we were planning a trip over Labor Day. You will not be able to make it, so plan for next year." Monte answered on August 26th:

You dear friends Jim and family:

Your letter of August 22nd to hand Am getting along nicely Have been out of the hospital a week and living in a tent and doing my own cooking Got out of that darned heat and cur the expense account I will get off my cast September 6th I will not be able to go down on Labor Day sorry to say Probably not even for the first of hunting Jack Blum offered to take me to his cabin at Felton for a few weeks and come back for hunting so I am taking him up It is raining and storming up here now I will be better off if I dont try to travel to soon Suppose Johnie is starting school soon Tell him to study hard and be a good scout for Monte Best wishes to everybody
Sincerely

In September Jack Blum brought Monte down from the hospital to his cabin in Felton, where the mild winter in the Santa Cruz Mountains would make it easier for Monte to recuperate. On the way Jack stopped for gas, and Monte went into a grocery store to shop. He was gone a long time and came out sputtering. "That's the GOL DURNDEST store I ever saw. Nobody there to wait on you at all. A girl was sitting at a sort of desk writing in a book. Nobody said, 'Can I help you?' or 'What do you want?' I thought it was right unfriendly. Then a woman came in and picked up a basket and began to fill it with things from the shelves. I said, 'Pardon me, ma'am, but aren't there any clerks here?' She saw I was a stranger, and told me that this was a self-help store. 'The signs show where things are. Just fill your basket and check out.' I sure would get a tap on the shoulder if I tried that in Tamarack or Connell. The girl at the desk was called a checkout girl. All she had to do was take your money." The world was changing, and Monte was not at all sure he liked it.

By mid-September, Jim wrote to Monte at Felton. "I may go fishing over the weekend. In case we get down to the cabin is there anything that you want me to bring out for you, or anything that should be done before the cabins are left for the winter. Don't suggest that I bring out the bedsprings and stove!" Monte replied promptly:

Dear friend Jim and family:

Your letter of September 17th to hand Louie Bauer has the keys to the upper cabin and will give them to you if you show him this letter Hope you have a nice trip See what Jack brought out if he went to the lower cabin If he did not he can tell you what I want You won't need to take any food down There is enough there and you are welcome to it I'm off my crutches and limping about nicely Got plenty to keep me busy so I'm not lonesome Rather like it here but the call of the high SERRIES is calling me back again Next spring you won't see me for dust Oh yes ... I don't know if you know Louie or not so its the house close to the road on the left caretaker Anybody can tell you at Tamarack

store [Louie Bauer stayed at Tamarack all winter as caretaker for cabins.] No leave the
springs and the stove Say when you rolled out the beds did you see some new socks Well
if you find them bring them out My high top shoes to Be glad to see you all some
weekend or any other time this winter We can catch fish here salt water with line and
hook or silver hook I been out once got a nice catch Was a little seasick but not bad Just
kinda let me know Id been on land a long time Still I enjoyed it
With best wishes for all Monte Wolfe
PS The lower cabin is unlocked

As soon as Monte could walk, the call of the High Sierra was too strong to resist, and he left for home. A note on the table at Felton explained. "I cant stand any more civilization" He left the empty woodshed filled to the ceiling with cut and split firewood and scrubbed the soot black cooking pots to a brilliant shine. Having finished all the work he could find, Monte became bored and went home.

Monte's rules were simple: take what you need, pay what you can now or later, leave the place clean and close the door. He followed these rules precisely himself, both in Felton and in the Sierra. Reports from cabin owners always give him credit for paying his way either with stacks of wood, a call in person to leave a fine mess of trout or a brace of mountain quail, or sometimes a venison roast.

Our next word was a letter from Tamarack, dated November 20, 1935:

Dear friend and family:

Hellow old scout Back again in my own home town and boy am I glad You tell em I will leave for the lower camp tomorrow morning with twelve inches of snow here and very cold road is closed from here up How would you like to be up here with me now on skis Hot dog Oh I mean a cold one Will be out the first of the year to Connell Write me there Get ready for a a big fishing trip next spring Tell JHONIE to step on his stuff so he can beat his dad again

I may be down at Camp Connell for Xmas and New Year Will be glad to see you if you can arrange it Road will be kept open Best wishes to all
Monte

Because of the accident, Monte was probably reluctant to be alone in the canyon in heavy weather. Christmas at Camp Connell was a fine solution. Although our family did not join him there for the holidays, stories of his time at Camp Connell reached us and others.

Monte was fully aware of his fearsome reputation, and he fostered it.

He could put on a swagger which suggested "the menace of the Mokelumne," but his dancing eyes gave him away to anyone who took the trouble to notice. Some took his fun seriously and slandered him. Several stories grew with repetition, particularly the one about his having chased the cook at Camp Connell. It was a game they played. She enjoyed squealing and being chased, and Monte had no intention of catching her, perish the thought! But it was fun to see her run. For those who did not know him, the story added to his wild Indian reputation.

As a born showman, Monte would also stand on the bar at Camp Connell that winter and give hilarious demonstrations on how to ski, complete with spills.

On November 21st Jim wrote to Monte at Camp Connell congratulating him on his quick recovery and adding, "I don't blame you for preferring the mountains. I like them myself. If there is anything you need this winter, please let me know." Monte answered:

Dear friend Jim and all:

Your letter of November 21st at hand Came down on the 15th and will be here for the winter sports We have a free slide for skiers TOBOGANS skis TOBOGANS for rent meals 50 cents special dinners 60 cents Sunday, cabins \$1 made up per person Come up some week and I'll show you how ski is done by gar I am ski instructor hows that for a raise

Then Monte described his first trip to the lower cabin since the accident. He took the same route as the intrepid hiker whom Monte had rescued years before. The difference was the time of year. Monte knew the river would be fordable in the fall.

When I came [from Felton) I was sure in luck Got through in one day and met Louie Bauer who took me to Tamarack that night The road is still open to there The snow is not very good yet but we expect a storm After I got to Tamarack I went over to Grouse Canyon same as we did the time the Misses and Johnie went in Then I got to the top and started down Snow was drifted six feet deep and I had no skis I wallowed down through it and believe me it was some job When I got to Underwood it was dark but I went on in I was sure a tired Indian Someone had left one of the beds and some of the dishes outside but they were only wet and no harm done I had 1 sack of potatoes and 3 sack of turnips [from the garden) sure will come in handy Found my SKIIS and guns all right Thank you a lot for putting things up for me I was lucky I came back as there was a big pack rat in the house and he had started plenty trouble but old Bess gave him his QUIETNESS I went up to Highland Lakes and caught 232 fish sure had some fun sure wished you could have been along

I came from my upper cabin to TAMRAC in one day on our last snow we have not enough snow for good skiing yet but next storm will make it fine I hope you can get up about New Years Tell HOPPER HELOW for me and best wishes to all

Sincerely Monte Wolfe

Old Bess was Monte's favorite shotgun, which he used on rats and rattlesnakes. The pack rats of the Sierra are thieves and a nuisance. Monte hated them. He was once accused of stealing, until Louie Bauer found the missing articles in a rat's nest. Monte never explained what was missing. It could have been keys, a pocket knife, money, a watch, reading glasses; anything they could pick up.

The continuing storm Monte expected did not materialize, and in January he wrote again from Camp Connell:

Got your nice letter and the packages of candy thank you all hope you had a good holiday and enjoyed yourselves I did VERRY nicely but we had very little snow I made VERRY little money got me a pair of rubbers mittens ski binders so Im OK Can go back and trap without wet feet and cold hands I am able to make the TELLMARK CRISTINA SWIRL and switchback very nicely with my ankle so am sitting fine Have not tried to jump any but I think I could If I come out for winter sports again it won't be Camp Connell however it is too low not enough snow to suit me I like my high places It rained all day

yesterday and is cloudy today again I will start back tonight or tomorrow morning so you won't hear from me til Spring will be looking for you early next spring will send you word at the first opportunity as to conditions of road

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MONTE WROTE US his spring letter from Tamarack on May 22,1936:

Dear friend Jim and family:

Out my first trip road open to ALAPINE We have a snowplow here new rotary Expect to be open to Pacific pass by the middle of June water is the highest in some years Fishing is wonderful We caught a limit in Wheeler Lake yesterday coming out in one hour and a half Will be at Tamrack next Saturday and Sunday come up if you can if not write me as to dates to meet me Am staying over Sunday at Louie Bauers meet me there Had a poor winter Not much fur and low prices much bad weather

Was well and my leg got on nicely Hope this finds you all top shape as it leaves me I do not expect to go out much this summer As I must tend to my work and garden, pay last summers debts will be looking for you next Sunday May 31st You can get a cabin for the night here and go up in the morning to Wheeler or Lake Union for some fishing or go down the Mokelumne Say more and explain better when you get here

Best wishes to all Monte Wolfe

Jim and John met Monte on the 30th of May. Fishing Wheeler Lake they caught 28 nice Eastern Brook trout.

Because Monte's plans that year for the Markleeville 4th of July celebration included a leather suit like the one he had seen in the tanner's window, Monte gave Jim three fine deerskins after the fishing trip to take to Nordquist, an Oakland tanner and taxidermist. On June 10th, Jim wrote to Monte: "The three hides would make only a jacket. Trousers would take two more. I have paid Nordquist for the tanning and we are awaiting your orders." Monte answered June 25, first giving current fishing information:

Fishing right at present is not so good but is likely to be top hole next week was at Highland Lake last week there seemed to be more fishermen than fish

Am sending you ten dollars and measurements I want fringe as I will mark for you more cost dont matter As for trousers Ill just wear the trousers Ive got

The finished jacket complete with fringe was taken to the mountains by the Porters so Monte could have it in time for the 4th of July celebration. He was the 'top hole Indian' there.

We received a brief letter from Monte dated July 10th:

Dear friend Jim:

Your letter to hand and it is raining pretty hard Will be on the lookout for you on July 16th Should be able to go with you as things look now Will let you know before the 16th if [am dated up Bring one dozen bait hooks double prongs like Porter had One pair of work gloves 8 or 9

Good luck
Monte

The trip on July 16th was a special one. We took our small son Robert into the mountains for the first time. He and I stayed with the Porters in Tamarack while Jim, John and three friends met Monte and went on to the lower cabin. The fishing was excellent. On the 20th of July they brought out a fine mess of trout and announced their plan to return on the following Friday for more fishing. Alberta asked us to stay until they returned, and I needed no urging.

On Friday Monte and Louie Bauer came to the Porter's cottage on a Forest Service assignment to cut down the enormous white fir near the Porter's house. The forest rangers had condemned the dying tree. Using a two-man saw and double-bitted axes they worked quickly, soon penetrating the heartwood.

Alberta and I watched their efficient use of saw and axes from the open windows of the cottage. Soon we began to look everywhere in the house for the "dead beasties" we could smell. Then Monte paused and shouted in a high-pitched nasal twang, "She's a sour old bird!"

The "dead beasties" were vegetable, not animal. We learned that when the heart of a large white fir dies it decays, giving off a penetrating and putrid odor.

The tree dropped exactly where Monte had planned. When cut and split, it provided enough fuel to heat the houses of Tamarack for several years.

Monte wrote from Tamarack o~ October 10th 1936:

Your letter of October 6th to hand Sorry you could not get up This will be my last mail so send nothing the stage* stops running on the 15th never mind the skins this year maybe next

Spring 1937 brought his usual welcome letter:

Dear Friend:

Well Jim it has sure been a cold winter and is still cold 18 below here and 32 below at the top I was up at Blue Lake last week and heard about the net falling and breaking at the big bridge [Monte was referring to the safety net in use at the Golden Gate Bridge construction project which fell, carrying several workmen to their death.] I am going to build at the upper cabin and build a cellar water pipe below so do not intend to be at Tamarack this year but will meet you at Hermit Valley as soon as the road opens [expect to be down to Tamrack by May 15th so if you will write me at that date I will get it then I dont expect to guide much this summer but will be glad to see you any time that you can come How is Johnie Robert and the Mrs Hope you are all well HELOW to everybody and lots of best wishes

[sent my gun down by Jack Blum last fall Will you see him and get it for me when you come up I'll pay you whatever it is I wanted a new barrel and peep sights If they have it done bring it on your first trip You could write me via Ed McGrath MARKLEVILLE California care of Green [Mr. Green of PG&E] Blue Lakes

* The stage was probably a small car or covered truck that ran from Angels Camp to Minden, then back through Markleeville and over the hill. It had room for two or three passengers and groceries and other small supplies.

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THE ROAD OPENED on June 15. We left our small son Robert with a friend and drove to Hermit Valley. After a short sleep under the stars we arose at dawn to hike through the fields of spring flowers. This was my first mountain hike in two years, and the miles seemed long. I was soon sunburned and muscle sore but enjoyed the sight of the bitter cherries in bloom along the trail, the sound of water running free, and the magnificence of the scenery. Spring showers had made the river high and very muddy, and we did not attempt the long hike to the lower cabin.

Monte said we might find some fishing in Deer Creek, so we decided to climb out that way. The fishing was not good, but we found a frightening remnant of an electrical storm. Monte led us up and up through the fields of wild flowers to where a majestic pine had stood, high and alone. The tree had literally exploded. Jagged timbers and slabs of bark were scattered over a wide area.

"Never take shelter under a lone tree in a thunderstorm," Monte said. "Don't even hike in a thunderstorm. You never know where the chips will fly."

Somehow the wanton destruction reminded Monte of his experiences under General Pershing as a scout and tracker, hunting Pancho Villa and his bandits in Mexico. A short rest and a receptive audience loosened his tongue.

"Scouting is some different when you're hunting men with guns," he said. "President Carranza's Federals were hunting the VILLISTAS too. It was sure hard to tell which was the enemy. They were all armed and they" all looked alike. When I found a few threads of burlap on the rocks I was able to track them, even though they were covering the horses' hooves. Once when we thought we had 'em, bandits popped up behind us, and one of the scouts said, 'General, I think we've got 'em surrounded on one side.'

"I sure admired General Pershing. I followed him again in the Philippines and Europe. I was an aerial gunner in the war and a photographer too."

We believe Monte did serve in the 1918 conflict, because we had seen his Army clothes, coat, trousers and leggings. He had decorated his stiff brimmed Army hat with a snakeskin band complete with rattles. The uniform was Monte's dress-up suit. He wore it on special occasions and pressed it in the Monte way, under the mattress.

Monte also claimed to have driven a four-team freighter, a large freight wagon with eight horses.

How many of Monte's tall tales were a product of his vivid imagination we will never know for sure. He had the ability to project himself into any story he read. Although his actual provable experiences were exciting enough to us, his memories of personal participation laced by his reading brought him more satisfaction, more inner excitement perhaps than his real life.

Monte had a gift for story-telling. His impish sense of humor was activated by what he read in the newspapers. He was for freedom of action. "By cracky," speaking of nudist news in the paper, he commented,

"there's too many NATCHELL impulses nipped in the bud. Do you think I'd care if I saw a NUD man standing over there?"

Although Monte had chosen a life of isolation, he was aware of what went on in the world. Since he had seen the two San Francisco bridges under construction, the tragedy of the falling safety net was almost a personal experience. Monte's memory and imagination went hand in hand. For example, one of our friends mentioned to us how thrilled Monte had been that Jim had taken him up on the catwalk of the Bay Bridge. Monte had wanted that impossible stroll with such intensity that he actually willed it into his memory.

All loners should have such an imagination, thrills without risk, and the satisfaction of having a good story to tell. Whenever Monte read an adventure story he identified with the hero. Yet sometimes what we had thought were just more of Monte's tales turned out to be true, we discovered.

He told us about a close call he had during the flood of 1935. The river was lapping over the banks and the water in midstream was racing at the speed of an express train. "While following my trap lines I always crossed the river on a large log. The log was still in place. One end was on high ground. It seemed safe and I started over. The low end of the log swung into the river and dumped me into the fast water. I started to swim toward the bank but was making little or no progress. I couldn't get out of the fast water.

"After traveling about three miles I caught a small log. It supported me until I reached a section where the river spread out and slowed a little. I was able to get near enough to the bank to grab some alder branches and pull myself out, wet, cold and exhausted. I carry matches in a waterproof container and soon had a fire. After about half an hour I was able to make it to the upper cabin where I got dry clothes and something to eat. My pack was empty and I was able to save my aluminum pack frame."

From our visits with Monte have emerged a collage of information about him and about the wilderness. There was the time Monte found himself talking to a coyote. He and John were approaching the cabin flat, and Monte gave the wolf call. There came an immediate reply from across the river. "

"By golly that fellow, whoever he is, sure has his coyote call down pat," he said. "Must be someone I know." But when they crossed the river to meet the friend, they found no human footprints in the sand, only those of a large coyote. Coyotes were usually Monte's active enemies, raiding traps and occasionally ruining valuable furs. But this coyote made Monte laugh at his own mistake. Yet he must also have felt some pride that the coyote had answered his call.

Monte's dislike of snakes was tempered by their value to him as predators of rodents. Preying on birds or nests was not permitted, and a snake caught following this impulse would be destroyed.

Monte said that wild animals were frightened of us; that they were dangerous only when they felt trapped; that by walking quietly and watching, one often saw them unfrightened. John learned

quickly. When he and Monte found two young coyotes upwind of them, they froze and then had the thrill of seeing two of those unconcerned carnivores playing together, unaware they were being watched.

One evening Jim and John were enjoying a dinner of trout and fried potatoes with Monte when they heard what they thought was a dog barking_ Jim turned quickly, just in time to see a large brown spotted owl disappear into the trees. The spotted owl is described in my Peterson bird book as "rather rare, with a voice; a high-pitched hooting like a small dog." We never saw it again.

Every evening during the warm summer a saw-whet owl gave us an interesting and monotonous call. One evening just after dark we caught two young ones overhead on a branch in the beams of our flashlight.

Chickadees were constant visitors. We discovered that they would respond with a mass attack if a pygmy owl appeared. This owl is noted for eating birds and their eggs. Our imitation of a pygmy owl call would stir the chickadees into a frenzy, as well as bewilder any pygmy owl listening.

We noticed the careful shopping habits of the stellar jay who watched as a smug gray squirrel hid a nut at the foot of a fir tree. As soon as the squirrel left, the jay hopped down and stole the hidden treasure.

Evening grossbeaks sang an enchanting melody for us, and finches were there in many colors. The western tanager added a flash of color in the forest, and the shy water ouzel, dipper, built her nest on a rocky bank of the river. Occasionally the high shrill note of a brown creeper could be heard. Birds were Monte's companions. His powers of observation were keen, and our being with him greatly increased our awareness of the birds and animals around us.

We learned that rattlers and many other snakes swim. They immerse their body, hold their head and tail out of the water, forming a long flat U, and then undulate the entire body length to go forward.

Once Monte showed John a water snake swimming along with a fine grip on a ten-inch trout. More than four inches of fish extended on each side of the lethal jaws. John wondered how the snake would swallow something so large. They watched. After finding safety on a small rock, and by alternating upper and lower jaws, the snake shifted the fish little by little until the head was in line with its throat. Then slowly the snake swallowed the fish whole.

Monte and John killed an extra fat rattlesnake near camp one day, and when they skinned it they found that the bulge was a full-grown robin already partially bleached by the acid in the snake's stomach, but not yet digested.

When an unusual disturbance in a white fir tree attracted our attention, we found that a rattler had taken advantage of the close-growing branches of the tree and had worked his way up to rob a nest. A tiny nestling was in his mouth. A male western tanager was flying madly about, an egg in his bill, as the female fluttered above the nest uttering cries of anguish.

It was too late to help the nestling, but the snake was slain.

The ledge over the attic window in the lower cabin was a perfect place for two wrens to build their nest, protected by the overhang of the roof from wind and weather. We had approached the area as little as possible because the birds left the nest each time we entered the cabin. We had watched the nest-building and the incubating of the eggs from a distance.

When the eggs hatched and the young wrens noisily demanded care, they revealed their presence to a food-hunting coral king snake. The parent birds chirped in terror as the snake slithered over one log after another, always upward toward the nest.

We had devised a snake catcher earlier, a long stick with a controllable string loop on one end to slip over the head of the varmint and draw tight. We quickly put it to use, and the snake, being otherwise harmless, soon found himself across a series of creeks above our flat. The gratitude of the wrens was expressed in song and, of greater interest to us, by their sudden willingness to remain on the nest when we entered the cabin. Coincidence? Maybe.

The open shaded spaces around the cabin encouraged the growth of wild flowers. During the mid summer a brilliant and colorful garden appeared each year. Leopard lilies, honeysuckle and reinorchis were amassed in a moist area of partial shade, backed by a thick grove of young firs. It was alive with hummingbirds feeding on the nectar, their long bills darting in and out of the golden lilies. Yellow swallowtail butterflies, also attracted by the nectar, added flashing color to the picture. Everywhere we looked there was life and beauty to see, and Monte made sure we saw it.

Once, at the foot of the Devil's Staircase, we saw a porcupine near the top of a small incense cedar. John wanted to see it up close, so Monte said, "I'll shake him down." However, vigorous shaking did not dislodge it, and we hiked on. Looking back from a turn in the trail we saw the tree still rocking rhythmically; the porcupine was swaying the tree himself, feeling safe, with his quilled tail swinging back and forth below him.

Because of our frequent trips into the canyon that year, few letters were written the summer of 1937. Personal diaries and old calendars furnish the reminders. On July 3, Monte met Jim and John, Chick Linford and Garf Bastow at Hermit Valley, and they hiked to the lower cabin. River fishing was good, and Garf outfished everyone. Monte never forgot that record and was delighted when "my boy" John came in second.

On July 9, when Jim, John and Jack Blum met Monte at Nelson's they brought a gift for him, a homemade lemon meringue pie. The pie arrived at Nelson's in good shape, and Jim suggested that Monte eat it there. "No siree, I'm gonna eat it in my own home." Placing the pie on top of his pack, Monte carried it down the rough trail to his home, where he ate it, though by this time he had to use a spoon. He offered to share, but no one would take even a bite of his precious treat.

Jim came home with three top quality pine marten skins, a gift from Monte to the pie maker. A pine marten, also called American ermine, has beautiful soft brown fur with a pink underthroat.

On August 21 Jim and John went into the mountains again. Monte guided them to Beebe Lake where the fishing was good. Many of the high lakes such as Beebe were stocked by plane, and once, as we rested near a lake on the Muir Trail, we had seen the operation. The plane flew low,

the water-filled hatch was opened, and hundreds of fingerlings, raised in hatcheries high in the Sierra, spilled out of their temporary home.

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WE WERE PLEASED to receive a letter from Monte on December 19, 1937 via Blue Lakes.

Dear old Jim;

Your letter of the 27th to hand You say you're working so am I A good fur season is on hand and I am VEREY BUSEY [am going out to Blue [Lakes) today so will drop you a line Was at lower camp 10th left 11th what a rainstorm we had Bridges all out Hermit Valley new bridge Pacific Creek. The road is terrible some flood Green goes out the last of every month so you can write me at that time. But send me nothing UNTILL Spring Never mind about Christmas I'll eat your box of grub instead. I got ten marten one bear three bobcats; one badger four ermine so far Tell Johnny to get busy on the sales department. [John was to sell the pelts in San Francisco for Monte.] I'll try to be down February or May THERES no snow at upper camp. Was about a foot before the flood The passes are closed with snow and if they werent the bridges and culverts are all out so there is no travel It is 50- 50 as to our out it is not cold so far; this year only 5 above so far and the days are beautiful so far [am quite well but my ankle bothers me some on long hikes Will try to write you each month I guess the fishing will be rotten next year after such a washout will let you know. Good luck Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all

Monte

Monte's "so far" in the letter seemed to be a philosophical acceptance of conditions facing him. On January 10th 1938 Monte wrote from the lower cabin via Blue Lakes:

Dear Jim:

On the way to Blue Lakes, so just a line to let you know I am well and on the jump Get me two 1938 calendars please Also get price lists on furs There are 5 or 6 buyers in San Francisco I havent their addresses but you can get them in the telephone directory We have no snow to speak of but it is pretty cold [was at Wheeler Lake yesterday Caught all the fish [could eat Wish I could send you some You wont know the river next summer at all The channel is changed The Summit City flats had water all over Drift logs everywhere Washed out most of the brush will be good casting if there are any fish So far I havent seen any in the river But they may come in from the lakes and reservoirs later I just been eating some of that jam your wife sent It is sure fine Must get underway for Blue so will close

Sincerely,

Monte

Jim wrote inviting Monte to come to Oakland in the spring. Monte answered promptly explaining why he had to delay his visit.

March 26, 1938

Your letter just received Was very glad to hear from you Will try to be down right away as soon as the storm slacks up I and mr green have just finished the months snow survey 125 inches average 40-1/2 water content and we still have two months to go How's that for water? Think you'll have enough to drink Since we got up this morning we have 11/100 of an inch more water content, about 6" of snow I have to measure from SNORA Pass to Lake TAHO I am now a Federal employee Want my Job 180 mile survey will finish in May Markleville was snowed in Four days without a stage Two weeks before real travel began First time since 1908 They worked 48 hours straight to get it open Our Game Warden lost his job Too much drink Will likely run for Sheriff against Brown so were looking for some grand excitement in the spring election I got a nice letter from the Whitesides Sure made me feel good I was afraid old Louie put the CYBOSH on my friendship there Bracy has sold out at Tamrack and B R has lost Lake Alapine Lodge
Monte Wolfe

Whatever it was Monte held against old Louie, the letter from Whitesides cleared him, and Monte was quick to acknowledge his error in judgment. Perhaps it was the thieving pack rat incident. We heard nothing more from Monte until May 26:

Dear friends:

Well I expect to get a call down from you when I get an answer to this I was four days in 'Frisco Got VEREY little for my furs Prices were low I got a ride from Jackson free both ways no fishing in the river yet Snow eight to ten feet deep I don't think you'll get over the pass until July The bridges are all out Can't use snowplows I went down to Salt Springs on skis Had to camp overnight both ways Such tough going you ever saw I caught ten trout in the lake smallest on 19" largest 28" Deer have just got to the lower camp Late this year Sorry I did not get to see you when I was down Maybe I can later Well I must close and see if I can catch a few fish to take home

Monte, Jim and John had several trips that summer. They hunted without finding a bear, did lots of fishing, and had the joy of being in the mountains. The last trip was on September 2nd. Monte gave them a new experience: a conducted tour of Markleeville and Woodford. He introduced them proudly to his friends as "my partner Jim and his son Johnie." They parted at Plasse on the Carson Pass highway with the usual promises, "See you in the spring."

10

MONTE'S FIRST LETTER of 1939 was dated May 14, Little Hell Hole of the Mokelumne.

Dear Jim and family:

Just a line to say all is well Road open April 27th earliest in the history of the pass Fishing will start early better make your first trip about the first of june and not later than

the middle But of course come any time you can you are sure welcome Will be glad to see you any time Best wishes for everybody Hows the Fair Bring some papers, please, so I know what's going on when you come Dont try to pack in too much if I'm not out there Ive got plenty Got 400 pounds of potatoes I'll feed them to you The garden is fine so far Spring onions and lettuce already

On June 15 Jim and John drove to Hermit Valley and hiked to the upper cabin, bringing the papers Monte had asked for and a message. The Mrs. said we will be looking for you to visit us in Oakland and to see the Fair. Your room is ready. "By cracky I'll come at the end of summer. Couldn't miss that for anything."

Arrangements were made to meet Monte in Hermit Valley June 30.

Arrival would be late. It was after ten o'clock when Jim and John arrived, but Monte was there waiting. Monte's winter furs were ready to go to the tanner. He had carried them out, and Jim locked them in the car and would deliver them to Nordquist for tanning. Monte would pick them up when he came to the Golden Gate International Exposition. Monte was very happy to see them and was ready to shoulder a pack and lead the hike to the upper cabin. A short night's rest and then a search for good fishing. The river was in flood, but they made a good catch in Summit City Creek. Monte had to leave them to meet a 4th of July party he had promised to guide, so John had a chance to prove that he could find the trail. Thanks to Monte's teaching, John really had learned to feel the trail with his feet. It was dark when they left the creek, but soon they intercepted the trail to the cabin. It was overgrown, but John followed it unerringly. They returned home with a nice catch of Eastern Brook trout.

Summer's end: Monday, September 4 was Labor Day. No school in Oakland. Our street was filled with shouting boys playing ball. They stopped the game and stared as Monte walked toward our house. The sudden silence alerted me, and I stepped to the front door just as Monte came up the front steps. He was wearing his fringed deerskin jacket. His pants were relics of World War I, as was the stiff-brimmed Army hat with the snakeskin band. The bright green tops of his wool socks were folded over his boots and gave ample proof that pack rats relished the taste of green wool. Monte's hair was shoulder length, a conspicuous rarity in 1939. He was clean shaven and smiling.

Monte was here to see the Fair and to delight in the astonished glances cast in his direction. He tasted avocados for the first time (too rich) and had a special memorial penny stamped for small Robert. Monte walked through the art exhibits but passed up Sally Rand's Nude Ranch. Johnny Weissmuller thrilled him. "Oh boy, he can sure cut water!" He marveled at the four-hundred-foot Tower of the Sun and the gardens of the Court of Honor with their brilliant blooms. He asked me later if I had received a package from Treasure Island, so I wasn't too surprised when a three-pound box of candy arrived, a gift from Monte.

One happy evening we took him to see the movie "Stanley and Livingston", a fine film, he said. He visited with Jack Blum and other fishing and hunting companions. My sister, a natural musician, came in for a short visit, and Monte had a wonderful hour leaning on the piano providing her with bits of melody from his collection.

Monte made excellent use of his eleven days. Between excursions and parties he took the tanned furs to San Francisco fur dealers. "Prices were so low I sure didn't make much this year." Since the crash of 1929 the fur market had been depressed, and a pine marten pelt, for example, might bring Monte only three or four dollars. An entire year's trapping might yield only one hundred dollars or so.

The hunting season was open, and Monte's vacation was over. Jack Blum drove him back to his mountain retreat, returning with a venison roast for us from Monte.

On September 28 Monte met Jim and John at 11 p.m. and they had a good venison stew at the upper cabin at two in the morning. They hunted for two days but saw no game. The weather closed in, and they came home in the rain.

Jim was able to make one more trip that year before the road was closed for winter. On November 10th he and Bestor Robinson met Monte at Mike Hunt's cabin in Pacific Valley where they spent the night. The next morning they drove to Hermit Valley, parked the car and set out to hunt bear on the way to the lower cabin. They didn't even see a bear.

As usual, Monte had prepared to have his guests sleep inside the cabin. He had made up the beds with care, and was proud of his refined accommodations for guests. But Jim and Bestor preferred to sleep out of doors where the air was fresh. The night was beautiful and clear. Trees were outlined against the shadowed sky, and soon there would be more stars than they could count. So the two men pulled the beds to pieces and remade them out of doors. Monte was furious. The next morning when Jim and Bestor started down the canyon, Monte would not go with them. This was the only time Jim saw Monte angry.

When the men returned empty-handed, however, Monte relented. He gave Bestor a fine black bear skin "so you won't think the Mokelumne and Monte Wolfe let you down." This act was typical of Monte. Individual freedom was his avowed creed. He believed he had no right to interfere with the other fellow's wishes. Besides, he liked to sleep out of doors himself.

When the men left Monte at Hunt's cabin where they had found him, Jim noticed He was not wearing gloves. Monte said he had lost them, so Jim gave him the buckskin gloves he was wearing. As they parted, Monte promised to report on the fishing just as soon as the road opened in spring.

Because we did not expect to hear from Monte until spring, we did not begin to worry until April, then May came and went with no report on the fishing, no letter saying he was all right. Monte had not seemed as vigorous in November, and Jim remembered his falling down several times while fishing last summer. Monte had refused to see a doctor when he visited in September, nor would he go to an eye doctor, even though it was evident that his eyes were not as sharp as they used to be. He said he'd spent all his money, and he would not accept Jim's offer to stake him.

A phone call on June 24th from a friend of Monte's gave us real cause for concern. "I have just returned from Hermit Valley," he said. "No one has seen or heard from Monte Wolfe this year."

Four days later, on Friday, June 28th, Jim and John, now 18 years old, left for the mountains. They hiked the five miles to the upper cabin in moonlight. The door was closed but not locked.

Entering cautiously, they found Monte's pet cat lying near the empty food pan, starved to death. The winter's take in furs hung from the ceiling ready to be carried out. Obviously, Monte had intended to return. It was after midnight, and they needed rest before hiking the additional seven miles to the lower cabin.

Concern made sleep almost impossible, and at first light they set out again. Soon the rosy glow of sunlight was on the high peaks. The trail felt unused. Spring storms had obliterated the usual signs of travel. Flowers stood perkily in the middle of the trail. At the Devil's Staircase, John remembered waiting for a big black bear to pass, and wondered whether Monte's threat, "Come winter, I'll have his hide," had ever been carried out. They took no rest stops; worry drove them on. They passed the rock Monte had christened with Dago Red, and recalled Monte's stories of his exploits. Rattlesnake Flat reminded them of the dependability of Old Bess, his favorite shotgun, and the dependability of Monte himself. When Monte made a date, he kept it, no matter what, and he had promised to write. What could have happened?

They thought of Monte's steadfast devotion to "Dear Jim, old pal of mine," and his respectful admiration of "the Mrs." who made him think of his own mother. As they approached the cabin flat they gave the familiar signal: OWOY-YIP-YIP-YIP. After the echoes died, the silence was ominous. Even more alarming, the cabin door stood ajar with the spiked bear guard resting against the wall in its usual "at home" position. Pack rats scurried away as the men entered cautiously.

Mildewed remains of an uneaten meal lay on the table. A pan of biscuits was on the open oven door. The last date crossed off his Norman Rockwell Boy Scout calendar was April 20th, over two months ago. His good fishing rod, reel, and creel were missing. His good Keds and the gloves Jim had given him in November were gone, and a seed flat of sprouted, dried out tomato plants was near the window. Outside, potatoes, turnips and corn were thriving in his garden. Sun-bleached washing hung on the line.

At both cabins it was clear that Monte intended to return very soon.

For us, all this evidence was conclusive. He had gone to the river for a fish or two for dinner and left everything for a few minutes. We can only guess about what happened at the river, but only the river could have swallowed both the fishing gear and Monte and carried them away without a trace. At this time each year the river is in flood, melting ice and snow swelling the flow, dislodging rocks and even moving huge boulders. Perhaps Monte's failing eyesight betrayed him. Perhaps he was the victim of carelessness that comes when one is too familiar with danger. We will never know, no trace of him has ever been found.

In the canyon the wolf call still announces the arrival of our friends and family. Always the echo returns to remind us of Monte. And the cabin still stands, a monument to Monte Wolfe, the lone trapper of the Mokelumne.

Afterword

B O T H C A B I N S B U I L T by Monte Wolfe were in Alpine County and in the El Dorado National Forest. After Monte was gone, I wrote the County Recorder's Office at Markleeville in Alpine County asking about the possibility of Monte's having recorded his mining claim. They answered that they had no claim for either Ed McGrath or Monte Wolfe. I phoned Forest Supervisor Edwin Smith of Placerville and made a date to see him. I gave Mr. Smith a copy of the document from the cabin door wherein Monte had designated me as his partner, a copy of correspondence with the Alpine County Recorder's Office, and a copy of a letter to my attorney, Bestor Robinson, listing in detail our findings in the cabins.

Mr. Smith was very cooperative and promised to write me after he could talk to the ranger who covered the portion of the forest where the cabins were located. I told Mr. Smith that our interest was only in the lower cabin and that we would keep the cabin in good repair. He asked me if we intended to build a trail to the cabin. I answered that not only did we not want a trail to the cabin, but that on each trip in we would follow Monte's habit of covering our tracks.

Upon my return home I wrote to Mr. Smith, telling him that I thought the upper cabin should be disposed of. I enclosed keys to each cabin and told him there was food and bedding in the lower cabin for the rangers if they had occasion to use it.

On July 31, 1940, I received a reply from Superintendent Smith. A copy of the pertinent portions of the letter follows:

In the matter of the upper cabin, Ranger Young believes this cabin is a dangerous fire hazard, and probably at some future date should be disposed of, and with your consent, he will dispose of such cabin some time late this Fall or during the Fall of 1941. It must be understood that we have no intention of exercising any of the foregoing acts until such time as we are fully convinced that Monte Wolf is dead, because any action by the Forest Officer in connection with these two cabin would be in the manner of a personal trespass unless Monte Wolf were dead and you had given your consent.

I appreciate the fact that you would like to continue the use of the lower cabin from time to time and I have discussed this entire matter with Ranger Young and this is our conclusion. That Ranger Young will put a government lock with your private lock on the lower cabin and will use such if needs be in his administrative work and he is perfectly willing that you continue the use of this cabin as long as you wish but that when you no longer desire the use of this cabin that such privilege will not be granted to any other person.

Ranger Young and I wish to thank you for sending us the keys to the two cabins, and we will make use of them if convenient on regular administrative work. If the above arrangements do not meet with your approval, kindly advise.

Yours very truly Edwin F. Smith Forest Supervisor

I answered Mr. Smith's letter, giving him permission in writing to dispose of the upper cabin. There was little of value in it, but we removed what we thought should be saved. On August 6, 1974 (34 years later!) our son Robert saw two Forest Rangers burn the upper cabin and return the area to its natural state.

Why did Monte want a partner? Why did he want me for a partner?

We had spent considerable time together, and both Veda and I always treated him with respect. He recognized that both cabins were on Forest Service land and that he could get title to the land only with a verified mining claim. He possibly thought that another name on the door would help legitimize his being there.

Being a loner, Monte was blamed for anything mislaid, lost or stolen from cabins in the area, but we never saw any evidence of his not being totally honest or of not paying his debts. Little is known about his life before he showed up in the Mokelumne, giving rise to rumors that he was hiding out from the law. Had he been hiding, however, we believe he would never have spent several happy relaxed days with us and with John at the Golden Gate International Exposition.

The evidence we found in both cabins on that day in June 1940 was clear: Monte had left voluntarily with the intention of a quick return. The only objects we identified as missing were his fishing tackle, rough jacket, hat, and gloves. All his guns and skis were as he had left them. The evidence was so strong that he had either fallen in the river or suffered a fatal fall that we were immediately convinced he was dead. We did search extensively then and later for evidence of any accident or problem, but in the forty years since his disappearance we have found nothing.

On the first trip after finding Monte gone I spent a whole day using his washboard, galvanized tub, and a package of detergent, and washed every blanket from the cabin; more bedding that we ever would use.

Monte himself was a pack rat. He collected anything he thought might be useful someday. So after he disappeared we were faced with what to do with the bottles, cans, old metal parts, and other things he had collected. It was a year or so later that we entered the loft to start a cleanup. There was an open one-gallon jug lying on its side that probably had had some grain in it. Inside was a nearly full-grown brown hairy tailed pack rat. We carried it out into the daylight to better see and were amazed. How could the little animal have grown so large in a jug? Either there must have been a large amount of grain of some kind in the jug when he entered, or else his parents must have fed him once he got in. Either way, he grew too large to get out again.

We released him from his prison. He was seven inches of body with an equally long hairy brown tail. He seemed blinded by the daylight, was unable to walk and did not appear to have any chance for survival. Perhaps the shock of our breaking the jug had temporarily stunned him, but since his chances seemed dim, we dispatched him humanely.

Zoologists tell us that many rodents make all the water they need by converting carbohydrates into energy and water and so can survive without anything to drink. And since rodents grow very quickly, it is probable that his stay in the jug was only a few weeks.

We burned a lot of accumulated junk and generally set up the cabin to serve more as a summer vacation home for our families than as a year round home as Monte had used it.

During the summer of 1940 we had the luxury of Monte's garden.

That fall I pitted a wheelbarrow full of good quality potatoes. They came through the winter in good shape. We continued to collect a few small potatoes each summer for several years, but

were unable to replant successfully. According to Monte's calendar for 1940, he had planted his garden before April 20th. Because we seldom got in before the first of July, the season was too short for planting, and the garden soon reverted to its former covering of grass, flowers and weeds; later, to a forest of young firs.

In August of 1940, Emery Ranker, my doctor, friend, and fishing companion, went with us to the cabin. He was surprised Monte had never smoked fish. He built us a smokehouse, which we used for years. Smoked trout hors d'oeuvres became a special treat for our guests. While Emery was there, he examined some medication on the shelf by Monte's bed and concluded that Monte had had a heart condition.

John, and later his wife Louise, their children, Veda and I, spent many happy days in our canyon home. Because Robert was 13 years younger than his brother, he lost out on our years with Monte. But he was with us on most visits to the area after Monte. One of my happiest experiences was a week alone with Robert in the canyon during World War II.

During the War, our older son John was in the Air Force. He loves to fly. As soon after the war as he could, he bought a surplus Howard D.G.A. single-engine plane and some parachutes from the Air Force. Owning them was a good excuse to drop supplies to stock the cabin. He made drops in two successive years. His drops were accurate, but we did have to climb two trees to retrieve parachutes and contents. One sack of cement broke free of its parachute and exploded on impact in a spectacular fashion, but another sack and two housemover's jacks came down all right. They were essential to the anticipated repairs to the cabin footings. Cases of canned fruit, vegetables and meat survived well, so for many years we carried in only perishables.

One summer about 1952, John and Robert brought in a roll of half inch copper tubing with fittings and a torch. (Thanks to Monte we already had a sink.) They built a stand for the sink, and we soon had water piped from the spring.

The outside stove Monte used was a cast iron stovetop supported on a base of loose rocks. A small part of the smoke went up the stovepipe chimney. We tried rebuilding the rocks, but that helped very little.

One day when Veda and I were at the cabin, John and Robert came in with two pieces of a new stove on their backs at about sixty pounds each, over twelve miles of rough mountain trail. The stove, when assembled, consisted of a welded metal box twenty-four by twelve inches, about three feet long, with a heavy steel plate for a cooking top. There was a door in the front and a four-inch smoke pipe collar on the top plate at the rear.

Next they brought in a heat exchanger, a copper tank with water connections and six one-and-a-half-inch copper fire tubes through the center. By setting the tank over the smoke pipe collar on the stove and placing a stove pipe on top of the tank we had hot and cold running water at the sink. They then set up a shower with hot and cold water beyond the work space.

My sister Zilla and her family built a three-sided shower stall from long slabs of cedar bark cut from a fallen tree, the open side facing into the forest. They also gathered flat stones and paved the floor. Pretty nice to have a hot shower after an evening's fishing! Zilla was alone in camp one evening and used the shower. A black bear came along investigating what was happening to his domain, and we were never sure which "bare" was more startled.

On our trips we often found fallen trees on the trail and occasionally in the cabin flat. One spring we found Monte's outdoor rustic table smashed by a large fir tree. On our first trip another year we found an incense cedar lying across the cabin roof. Fortunately it was not one of the larger trees and had done only minor damage to the roof. We placed a movable brace leaning sharply toward the cabin, and by our using a rope and pulling the tree away from the cabin, the brace lifted the tree and dropped it clear of the cabin. The only damage was to the shakes, strong testimony to Monte's cabin-building ability. There was little evidence

of leaks inside. We cut a couple of lengths from the fallen cedar to use for shakes and repaired the roof.

Over the years we have made other important improvements and some necessary repairs. One year we lined the floor, walls, ceiling and door of the storeroom with quarter-inch wire mesh to make it mouse and rat proof.

Before Monte had assembled the cabin in 1933, he cut four-foot lengths of a large incense cedar for pilings. These were well charred, then buried at each corner and in the center under the cabin. These pilings proved to be the weak point, because they settled into the ground, allowing the base logs to contact the ground and start to decay. John had anticipated this when he dropped the cement and housemover's jacks from his plane. He and Robert raised the cabin and replaced the rotting pilings with rock footings. It was heavy work, but necessary. Later they cut shakes and replaced most of the roof.

One year we had a dilemma. We found the interior of the cabin the cleanest ever. Normally a day of the first trip in each year is spent clearing out mouse and rat droppings and nests. When these little beasts have late fall, all winter and early spring to carry in scraps of cloth, fern leaves, acorns, grass, twigs and mushrooms, the volume is huge. But that year, nothing. Had we left an over-supply of warfarin for the previous winter? Had the winter been so mild the rodents felt no need for the protection of the cabin? We think not. On the second day of our stay, John was walking toward the front door when a fat, obviously well-fed rattlesnake slithered under the cabin. He had apparently done such a good job of rodent abatement that we decided as long as there were no children with us, he could stay. But this was not to be. Later that year we found a note pinned to the cabin: "Killed a rattler here, 7-16. JRC." Mr. Rattler's good works endured, because the next year there was somewhat less rat evidence than had existed in earlier years. We did not learn whose initials were JRC.

In 1961 Veda and I decided that the twelve-mile hike at that elevation was too much for us. Veda had not missed a summer since Robert was three years old, and I had gone in at least once every year since we met Monte in 1933. It has been a delightful place to enjoy and appreciate our wild areas.

In 1961 Veda and I did not go to the cabin at all, but in 1962 we flew in by helicopter. I took my Bolex 16mm movie camera and tripod and made a record of our happy vacation. Louise and their three children were there. John came in for a few days. Of course I enjoyed the fishing, but my main interest on this trip was making a film record of the children. We flew in again in 1963 and added to our film. On May 15, 1964, we were informed by the Forest Service that as of September 30th, 1963, the forest area, including our cabin, was officially designated the

Mokelumne Wild Area. That stopped the use of helicopters. I hated to know that I would never again see the cabin, but on my last fishing trip in 1963 I had noticed my balance was bothering me, so I decided that if I tried fishing that very rugged river again I might disappear in the river as Monte must have done.

I edited the film, Veda wrote a script, and the children narrated it. We not only have a story of fishing, swimming, cutting shakes and firewood, but we have the happy sound of the children's voices. This film brought us several trophies from amateur movie clubs, and a silver medal from the Bolex company's contest "How America Lives." We are fortunate to have such a valuable record.

Now in 1980, many changes have occurred affecting the cabin. One by one John's children have moved away and married, so there are fewer family members to use the cabin. From the beginning we have been bothered by vandals. One party of three men came down repeatedly without bedding, expecting to break into the cabin and use ours. During the last few years vandalism has increased, until the boys can no longer leave anything of value in the cabin. Monte's guns, old Victrola, and the assortment of old records with historic value have been stolen. Some of the troublemakers do not even make the effort to return the blankets and mattresses to the cabin storeroom and have left them out in the weather, or have just pushed them inside the main room for the mice to work over. The advertising resulting from wilderness designation has increased the number of hikers and fishermen. It is no longer a little-known place, and food and sleeping bags have to be carried in every trip. It has lost some of its charm.

We have caused the Forest Service no trouble except for the criticism they get for allowing us the private use of the cabin, but if we had not been maintaining the cabin it would now be a sorry wreck. One tree across the roof, leaking shakes, broken windows, and failing foundations, all of which we have corrected, would have made the cabin an eyesore today.

We hope that the cabin will be saved as an historical landmark and a tribute to the workmanship and hardiness of Monte Wolfe. As far as I know, there is no other cabin as well-built in the Sierra. It was built by Monte Wolfe alone, one of the last of a vanishing breed.

- James B. Linford

1980