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John Muir at 74 Back From Quest For Queer Trees. Veteran California Naturalist Climbed Mountains of South America and Africa. Found What He Sought in the Two Continents. 'He is More Wonderful than Thoreau,' Ralph Waldo Emerson Once Said of Him.

John Muir

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A SECOND MUIR CONFERENCE

Plans are well advanced for the second Muir Conference at the University of the Pacific, to be held April 12-13, 1985 in conjunction with the 38th Annual California History Institute. The tentative program includes presentations and papers by more than a dozen Muir scholars, including Millie Stanley (Muir in Wisconsin), Bart O'Brien (The Muir-Whitney Controversy), Paul Sheats (Muir's Gospel of Glaciers), Peter Palmquist (Muir's Wilderness Photo Collection), Richard Fleck (Muir's Homage to Thoreau), Ron Limbaugh (The Nature of Muir's Religion), Kathleen Wadden (Muir and the Community of Nature), Lisa Mighetto (Muir and Animal Rights), Frank Buske (Muir in Alaska), P. J. Ryan (Muir in the South Pacific), Abe Hoffman (Muir and Mono Lake), Linda Moon Stumpff (The Quotable John Muir), Michael Cohen (The Impact of Muir's Philosophy on the Modern Sierra Club), and Fredrick Turner (The Book I Didn't Write: Prospects for Further Muir Biographies). This will be a banner event, so make sure you have early reservations!

CLIPPING FROM THE MUIR COLLECTION

Editor's note: Muir disembarked at New York in the spring of 1912, having just returned from a ten-month journey, his last great nature excursion. This interview, published in the New York World March 31 and prompted by an unnamed reporter with a thirst for adventure, reflects the restless state of Muir's psyche both during and after the trip. He hurried from place to place like a man driven by deadlines and desperation. More worrisome still was the bookmaking agony that awaited him back home and that prompted the remarks quoted in the last paragraph below.

JOHN MUIR AT 74 BACK FROM QUEST FOR QUEER TREES

Veteran California Naturalist Climbed Mountains of South America and Africa.

FOUND WHAT HE SOUGHT IN THE TWO CONTINENTS.

"He Is More Wonderful than Thoreau," Ralph Waldo Emerson Once Said of Him.

A man, who is seventy-four years old, took a fancy to a strange tree that exists in the wild mountains of Brazil and went all the way to see it. Then he went to Africa, by way of Europe, to have a look at another tree that he wanted to see.

He is John Muir, the California naturalist, who spent the most of his life travelling in strange and remote mountains and forests studying the mysteries of nature. He knows every valley, mountain, rock, stream and tree of California, as a New Yorker knows the places of interest along Broadway. Although he has travelled far and wide, his name can never be dissociated from the Yosemite Valley, over which he is the overseer and guardian.

Last May he left California to make a trip to South America and Africa to look at the araucaria and adansonia trees, and he has just reached New York after locating the mountains where those trees exist.

"You wish me to tell all about my trip? But I can not tell you all. There are so many things and it would take me one year to go through my notebooks," he said, smoothing down his long white whiskers.

"But you can tell me something particularly interesting and wonderful?" asked the reporter.

"Well, everything was interesting and wonderful. I once saw a picture of the araucaria, and I wanted to see it. All I could learn from books was that it exists somewhere in Brazil. It is the most wonderful species of tree in existence. It has survived many geological periods. We found its leaves on rock formation."

"I left New York on Aug. 12, last summer, and went directly to the Amazon River. And I sailed up the river 1,000 miles to Manoa. The Amazon is the mightiest flood of running water in the world. It is not so long as the Mississippi, but it carries more than twice the quantity of water. And the forest along the Amazon--it is the heaviest and most impenetrable in the world, the largest piece of wild forest in existence. But the soil in the basin is very fertile, and some time it will be cleared for the benefit of the human race."

"I made a general observation along the Amazon, and then came down to Rio de Janeiro. I entered the beautiful harbor and saw the beautiful city, but I don't care for cities, and passed through it to the mountains. I travelled almost four hundred miles in the mountains. I found the araucaria in great abundance. Its leaves are about one inch at the base, but the point is so sharp that no animal can climb the tree without injuring itself, and that's why it is called 'monkey puzzle' by the natives."

"Then I went to Buenos Ayres, and from there I crossed the Andes by train and went to Chili. At Santiago I made inquiries of botanists as to where I would find the araucaria. I learned that in the southern part of Chili the species exists, but nobody could enlighten me, and I started out with only the information that it is somewhere in southern Chili. I travelled over 500 miles south from Santiago, and I found a forest of the araucaria imbricata. And I saw enough of the araucaria, and I sailed to Europe to take a boat to South Africa."

"From Cape Town I went through the mountain district of Rhodesia. The general foliage and mountain formations there greatly resemble those of the Yosemite Valley. At Victoria Fall I found adansonia, which is called 'baobab' and also 'digitata' because its leaf looks like fingers stretched out. This tree grows sometimes to over thirty feet in diameter and the leaves are like those of a horse chestnut tree. I wanted to see this tree for a long time."

"Then I went to the East Coast of Africa and to Victoria Nyanza, which feeds the Nile River. The lake is almost three thousand feet above sea level, and although it is right under the equator I saw snow on top of the mountain peaks that surround the lake. And then I came back."

"As soon as I look over my new book, 'The Yosemite,' which will be published next month, I go back to California."

"I have material to write almost a hundred books, but I feel I am wasting my time when I write books. If I keep on writing books I will have no time to climb mountains. This is only my sixth book. I lived five years in the Yosemite Valley--that is, including five winters--but I did not write any book about it before this."

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