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Charlie Leidig's Report of President Roosevelt's Visit
in May, 1903

Charlie Leidig stated that John Muir and Abner Mann, who had a travel office at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco for the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Co., arranged that Archie Leonard and himself were to be guides and escorts for Theodore Roosevelt. Muir came from San Francisco on the train with the Presidential party of eight, including Governor George C. Pardee of California, President Benjamin Ide Wheeler from the University of California, the President's personal secretary Mr. Loeb et al, was placed in an eleven-passenger coach of which Bright Gulispe was the driver. Under Lieutenant Mays thirty cavalry men escorted this stage from Raymond directly to the Grizzly Giant in the Mariposa Grove. Here, the party was photographed especially by Underwood and Underwood. Leidig and Leonard were not in the picture.

After some preliminaries, President Roosevelt dismissed the troops, thanking them for their services and calling out after them as they departed, "God bless you." The stage departed with all members of the President's party except Mr. Roosevelt, John Muir, Charlie Leidig, Archie Leonard, and an Army packer named Jacker Alder.

The President said to Charlie Leidig, "Leidig, please do not let anybody disturb me, because I am tired and want rest and sleep." Charlie did the cooking. He said they had fried chicken and beef-steak for supper that night. The President drank strong, black coffee and went to bed early that first night under the Grizzly Giant. The only shelter provided for the President was "shelter half" under which about forty blankets were piled to serve as a bed. The President got just as deep into these as he wanted for warmth and comfort. Four mules were used to haul this equipment.

On May ¹⁶ 3, 1903, Leidig states they broke camp at Mariposa Grove and were on horses at 6:30 A.M. The President directed Leidig to "outskirt and keep away from civilization." Leidig led the party down the Lightning Trail. They crossed the South Fork at Greeley's and hit the Empire Meadows Trail. They especially avoided approaching the Wawona Hotel for fear the President would be brought in contact with members of his own official party which had remained for the night at Wawona. They had a cold lunch on the ridge east of Empire Meadows. There was lots of snow as they crossed towards Sentinel Dome; they took turns breaking trail through deep snow. In the Bridalveil Meadows the party plowed through 5 ft. of snow. The President mired down and Charley had to get a log to get him out. It was snowing hard and the wind was blowing.

Muir proposed that they camp on the ridge just back of Sentinel Dome. Leidig's suggestion, however, that they travel

down to the approximate location of the present campgrounds at Glacier Point where water and better camping conditions in May could be found, prevailed. It snowed 5 in. during that night and everything was frozen in the morning.

Around campfire that night Leidig stated that Roosevelt and Muir talked far into the night regarding Muir's glacial theory of the formation of Yosemite Valley. Leidig stated they talked a great deal about the conservation of forests in general and Yosemite in particular. He heard them discussing the setting aside of other areas in the United States for park purposes. Leidig stated that during the trip Muir seemed to bother the President by picking twigs for the President's buttonhole. He also said that some difficulty was encountered because both men wanted to do the talking.

On the morning of May 4, the party went down to Glacier Point for pictures that had been prearranged. (The Museum has a good picture of Roosevelt and Muir standing on the overhanging rock). As they left Glacier Point, the President rode in front followed by Leidig, Leonard, Muir and the packer. They were all dressed in civilian attire. The rangers wore blue overalls, shaps and spurs. They went into Little Yosemite Valley for lunch. Here they encountered a considerable crowd of valley visitors, since it had been widely advertised in the papers that the President was visiting the park.

There was considerable disagreement in the matter of plans for the Presidential visit. The President wanted a roughing trip and through Pardee, Wheeler and Muir such a trip had been worked out. On the other hand, Mr. John Stevens, Guardian of the Valley under State administration, and certain of the commissioners, especially Jack Wilson from San Francisco, had made plans for a large celebration. The Chris Jorgensen studio home had been set aside for the President's official use. A cook had been engaged from one of the best hotels in San Francisco to serve a banquet. The commissioner had arranged a considerable display of fireworks, which John Degan claims amounted to some \$1800 worth. Degan said he was to have had some part in touching this off for the President's benefit.

So there was considerable party awaiting the President at the top of Nevada Falls and Little Yosemite. The President requested that all people be kept at a distance in order that he could carry out his desire for a "roughing trip"; so everybody was kept at a respectful distance.

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When the party reached Camp Curry at 2 P.M., they found a big crowd of women in front of the camp. They had formed a big line across the road in an attempt to stop the President. They all wanted to shake hands with him. Charlie Leidig states he was riding second in line with a Winchester rifle and six-shooter. His horse was a high spirited animal. The President said, "I am very much annoyed, couldn't you do something?" Leidig replied, "follow me." He gave spurs to his horse and as he reared, women fell apart and the President's party went through the gap. The President waved his hat to the group in the road.

At the Sentinel Bridge, the guardian of the valley and some of the commissioners along with members of the Presidential party were there to meet him. The President dismounted, and Charlie Leidig stood by his horse. The President was quite tired. The official party escorted him to Chris Jorgensen's studio where they all remained about 15 minutes. The President went in and looked at Jorgensen's paintings, and was served a glass of champagne by Chris Jorgensen. The President thanked the Jorgensens for their courtesy in offering their home and apologized for not accepting.

Accompanied by five or six members of his party, the President walked back across the Sentinel Bridge to his horse. Muir had accompanied the President to the Jorgensen studio. The original party of five mounted their horses and started down the valley to pick a camp site near Bridalveil Falls where Muir had suggested they spend the last night in camp. As they left the bridge, the President saw Ellen Boysen standing by her mother on the ground holding a flag. He reached down, picked her up under the pits of her arms and kissing her said, "God bless you, you little angel," and put her down. He waved his party off and started down the valley. He asked Charlie Leidig where Bridalveil Meadow was, saying that Muir had suggested it, and whether it was a fitting place. They went down the south side of the river followed by a big string of people on horseback, in buggies, surries, and others on foot. Leidig stated there must have been 300 or 500, or possibly 1000 of them in the crowd, filling the Bridalveil Meadows. As they reached their camping places on a grassy slope just south of the present road through the Bridalveil Meadows, the President said to Leidig, "those people annoy me. Can you get rid of them?" Charlie said he walked out and told the crowd that the President was very tired and asked them to leave. They went--some of them even on tiptoe, so as not to annoy their President.

When Charlie returned to the camp site the President said, "Charlie I am hungry as Hell. Cook any dam thing you wish. How long will it take?"

Charlie told him it would take about 30 minutes, so the President lay on his bed of blankets and went to sleep and snored so loud that Leidig could hear him even above the crackling of the campfire.

After dinner, Muir and the President went out in the meadow until way after dark. When they returned they sat around the campfire where the President told them of his lion hunting trips, etc.

People came again in the morning. Crowds could be seen all through the brush. Leidig kept them away. The stage came down containing the President's official party. After breakfast, the President and Muir got into the stage and as they left the President called Leidig and Leonard to him and said, "Boys, I am leaving you. Good-bye, and God Bless you."

Many times during his trip in Yosemite National Park Leidig related that President Roosevelt demonstrated his great love for birds by whistling and that they would answer him. He also knew most of them.
