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CALIFORNIA COAST REDWOODS

By R. St Barbe Baker

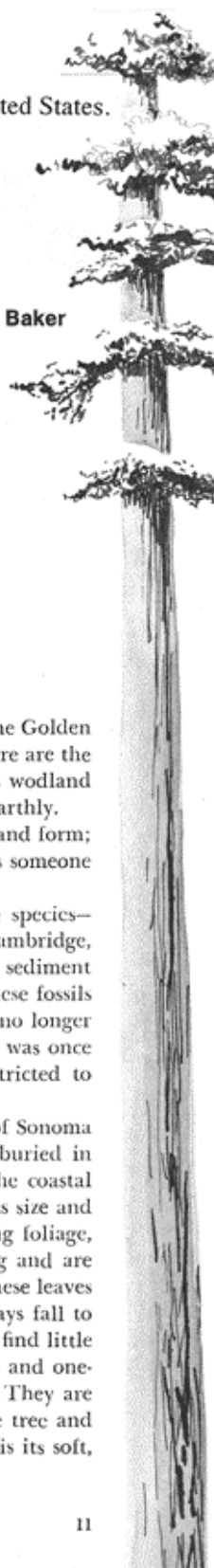
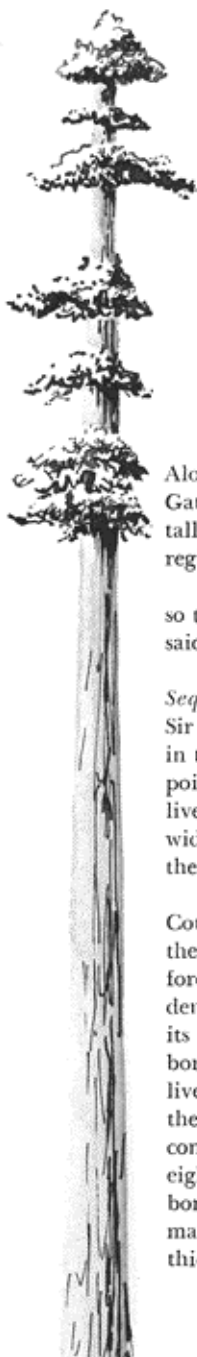
Richard St Barbe Baker has been a prime mover in the world of conservation for nearly half a century. He has made such important contributions to that cause as his successful fight against the encroaching sands of the Sahara and the establishment of the Men of the Trees in Kenya, where, due to his untiring efforts, six million trees have been planted. He is now engaged in the defense of the Redwoods of California against a projected six-lane highway. He is the author of Sahara Conquest.

Along the coast of the blue Pacific, from Monterey, California, through the Golden Gate to the Oregon border, stretches the Realm of the REDWOODS. Here are the tallest and most ancient living trees of unrivaled beauty. Through this woodland region, there is an atmosphere of calm that at times seems to be other-earthly.

In these woods the tallest trees rise in columns of perfect symmetry and form; so tall are they that one must look up more than three hundred feet; as someone said—"three looks high".

As a forester, I had long studied descriptions of this remarkable species—*Sequoia sempervirens*—always living. My old professor of botany at Cambridge, Sir Albert Seward, had led me to the study of petrified logs deposited in sediment in the remote past before man lived upon the earth. The evidence of these fossils points to the existence in California of a forest made up of trees which no longer live outside the tropics, but the Redwood has survived, and although it was once widely distributed throughout the western hemisphere, it is now restricted to the Californian coast.

The most spectacular of the fossil Redwoods is the petrified forest of Sonoma County, fifteen miles east of Santa Rosa, where giant logs have been buried in the rock and turned to stone. This, then, is the dominating tree of the coastal forest belt which gives a distinctive character to the region because of its size and density of growth. In contrast to its height it has rather delicate-looking foliage, its narrow leaves are mostly one-half to three-quarters of an inch long and are borne on the ultimate branchlets in such a way as to form flat sprays. These leaves live over three to five winters, when, after their work is done, the sprays fall to the ground covering the forest floor with a soft bedding. Here you will find little cones, oval in shape, reddish brown in color, from three-eighths to one and one-eighth inches long and three-eighths to seven-eighths of an inch thick. They are borne in clusters at the end of the branchlets mostly in the top of the tree and mature in the autumn. One of the most striking things about the tree is its soft, thick bark which is from three to twelve inches through.



The cones of the Big Tree, *Sequoia gigantea*, are larger, about the size of pullets' eggs. Both trees are Redwoods in the sense that the heart-wood is red in each, but the term "Redwood" belongs by long usage to the coast tree. Both are Big Trees in the sense that they outclass others in size and height, but the term "Big Tree" has always applied to that of the Sierra Nevada. Both trees have thick bark, but that of the Coast Redwood is softer, more spongy and not so thick as that of its cousin. The Coast Redwood vies with all others in importance because of the place that it has held in the development and settlement of California, for in the past its wood has been abundant and cheap. It is highly useful for all sorts of building and industrial purposes and in the arts.

A Coastal Redwood that has lived five hundred years is still in its early youth; one that has rounded out a thousand summers and winters is only in full maturity. How old the oldest trees may be is not yet certain. The age of a tree can only be determined when it is felled, cross-sectioned and its annual rings are counted. So we know only the age of those trees which have been felled in the course of lumbering or have been blown over by wind storms. There can easily be counted with help of a lens.

The Coast Redwood is a lover of the sea mists, and dominates the rainswept flats in the coast valley and the seaward and landward slopes of the coast range. They grow in their native state only here and nowhere else in the world, although in New Zealand in the Whakarewarewa State Forest there is a grove, set aside in 1947, as a memorial to men of the New Zealand Forest Service who lost their lives in the first and second World Wars.

Those were planted in 1901. The tallest trees are already 180 feet in height. Although only covering an area of 12 acres these introduced Coast Redwoods will be of great interest to visitors from California where they are indigenous.

Through the realm of the Redwoods there runs the Redwood Highway, often winding among the trunks of these beautiful trees, between whose sunlit boles you glimpse the Pacific. Further inland however, so dense is the growth of Redwood branches, that the sunlight never penetrates the sombre aisles below, but more often the light filters through the tree-tops, sending down slanting shafts of radiance as the sun shines on the coast mists that pervade the space between earth and the crowns of the trees. The bark of the tree changes in shade from moment to moment; sometimes it is of a rich purplish hue, which turns to a lighter rose color. At other moments it is pink or pinkish grey. There seems to be a rose-colored glow which lingers among the tree trunks.

Sequoia sempervirens needs a rainfall of twenty-five inches to exist, but it does not grow to great height unless it can enjoy double that, or even more. The fogs from the sea are needed to check evaporation from the leaves and lower the temperature of the atmosphere of the tree tops.

At Eureka I stayed at the inn of that name. It is situated about thirty miles north of Scotia, a center of the lumbering industry, and I found it one of the most comfortable inns in the region, kept by a real host and hostess. All round are numerous places of interest, but the Redwoods to the north will lure you on. From Eureka I once again hit the trail for the north, and about eight miles beyond Orick I came to the Humboldt Pioneer Memorial Grove, also called the Russ Grove, of one hundred and sixty acres. This is a beautiful area, preserved through the efforts of the Redwood League. Some years ago this grove, as well as the Roberts tract near by, belonged to the Prairie Creek Park project, and eventually was made a State Park.

Travelling northwards along the Redwood Highway the forests become more

and more impressive and spectacular, until at thirty-five miles north of Orick is the Del Norte Coast Park, approximately two thousand five hundred acres, and one of the many units of which is the Henry S. Graves Redwood Grove with further additions to north and south. Here there are spectacular vistas of the Pacific from the Highway framed by the trunks of the Redwoods themselves. Professor Graves, after whom the grove was named, was one of the pioneers who laid the foundations of forestry in the U. S. A. His deep interest and clear insight into the needs and problems of their State Parks is known by all. The saving of this grove was made possible through the generosity of George Frederick Schwartz of New York, who upon its dedication sent the following message:

"I would express what I think those present may feel—that it is our hope that this lovely work of the Creator may continue for many generations to bring happiness, health and inspiration to those who may linger for a while among these remarkable trees, looking out here over the great Pacific, so noble in stature, of great age, but still so beautiful. Sometimes it has indeed seemed to me as if a strange mystery lay hidden within their sunlit crowns and among the deep shadows of their massive boles, as if they were too great for us fully to understand."

As I emerged from the Graves Grove, I had the first glimpse of the bay of Crescent City. For a while the Redwoods were left behind; traveling was in open country in full view of the Pacific. Turning off the main road to the right, two miles south of Crescent City, I soon entered what I have always felt to be the most enchanting groves of all. They are in Del Norte County on the Smith River, with Mill Creek Grove as the center, the very heart of the finest trees. After long years of striving, these groves were at last saved for all time and included in a great State Park, the greatest of its kind, including the finest trees of the world. For eight miles there is a winding road through the great columns which tower overhead to an even height of three hundred feet. Massive ferns clothe the forest floor. Here a great silence pervades the groves and mere words fail to describe the beauty of the scene.

These coast Redwoods, *Sequoia sempervivens*, rise from the ground like the pillars of a cathedral, massive, with aisles innumerable, transepts multiple, arches complex, and over all, the grandest Gothic tracery enlivened with intricate fern-like patterns.

In the Cathedral of the Redwoods, the light filters through the lightest of leaves, thus causing the vast columns to change hour to hour, from moment to moment, as the kaleidoscopic scene unfolds. Sometimes the boles are brown or grey, with innumerable variations, at times they show pink but more often they take on a darker hue of more sombre red. For this they are named—"the Redwoods".

Nowhere in the world do mature woods attain greater perfection than in Northern California among the Redwoods of Mill Creek in Del Norte County. The groves here are of great antiquity, and while many of the outstanding trees may be two thousand years old, their parentage may be traced back to trees that were standing nine thousand years ago. Here it seems, is life unending, and if protected now, the Redwoods of Mill Creek will endure through the ages, if man will but put aside his dangerous "toys" and "Learn such calm as they".

If the visitor is lured on to explore the inner sanctuary of the woods, he will experience a sense of awe and reverence. Here he may find an ancient tree long dead, but still standing after a thousand years or more, with its trunk draped in emerald green moss as far as the eye can see. Farther on he may find a prostrate veteran with rings that show close to two thousand years of growth and anchoring

it to the ground, another of the same age that had been felled for lumber.

The old coach road by Mill Creek winds through a forest of primeval character and virgin beauty. From the sea not four miles away come the morning mists, reflecting the sun as it touches the openings in the forest canopy. Shafts of light stream through the foliage lighting up the mist and enhancing the glory of the ferns and wild irises that deck the forest floor.

We cannot find words to describe our feelings. It is then that we turn to poets, who are a race apart, for they live as it were between two worlds, and, while mingling with us on earth, their thoughts aspire to heavenly places. Let the words of Robert Southey describe the Temple of the Redwood:

And through the leafy cope which bower'd it o'er
Came gleams of chequered light,
So like a temple did it seem, that there
A pious heart's first impulse would be prayer.

The appeal of these Redwoods of Mill Creek is not only for their recreational and spiritual value or for their unsurpassed beauty and primitive grandeur on a scale found nowhere else in the world, but they are indispensable to the very life and well being of Del Norte County and California. The essential contribution they make is to the climate, filtering out the sea mists which would otherwise be wasted, transpiring moisture into the upper air to be carried inland to fall as rain or dew over the gardens and orchards, and thus provide food for man while at the same time satisfying his soul and spirit as nothing else can. They are majestically described by Stanton A. Coblentz, the greatest poet of the Redwoods...

I think that could the weary world but know
Communion with these spirits breathing Peace
Strangely a veil would lift, a light would glow
And the dark tumult of our lives would cease.

To mark the 21st Anniversary of the setting aside of the first area of 12,000 acres at Mill Creek, the Men of the Trees convened a Redwood Reunion in the Grove of Understanding hard by the Stout Grove, the first area to be dedicated and which formed a nucleus, as it were, for the much larger area, which with the National Tribute Grove to those who fell in World War Two, brings the total preserved to about 17,000 acres.

There is a strong bond of sympathy and understanding among those who appreciate our elder brethren, the trees, for their own sakes and for the esthetic and spiritual contribution they give to life. Any conservationist, Man of the Trees, or friend of nature must be aware of the dependence of man upon the trees, for the many and vital contributions that they make to our very existence on this planet. And so it is not only foresters interested in the silvicultural characteristics of those noble trees who were drawn to this reunion, but biologists, ecologists, researchers in tree genetics, botanists and arboriculturists all of whom found some particular field of study which was their own.

There is much in these unspoiled groves to appeal to nature associations, conservation foundations, conservation committees of the garden clubs, horticultural societies, wilderness societies, members of the Wild Life Management Institute, and members of Outdoor Clubs, students of the National Parks Association, and it is earnestly desired that Redwood Reunions may serve as a point of focus to bring as many as possible together in association from every land so that they can learn from each other.

In these days of world tension it is good that we have in conservation, reforestation, and earth-healing by tree-planting, *one* of the most promising

fields for world co-operation and understanding. Addressing humanity Baha'u'llah declared: Ye all are leaves of one tree, the fruit of one branch. Theodore Roosevelt, that great conservationist said: If a nation saves its trees, the trees will save the nation. And may it not be that in uniting as a World Society to save our trees and in fighting the deserts of the world we shall enjoy prosperity and peace, saving not only our soils but our souls and while healing the scars of the earth we shall heal the scars in our own hearts and in the hearts of all men everywhere.