

A VERITABLE DESERT IN THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO



The great desert of San Francisco. How incongruous the words seem! As if there could be a desert in San Francisco. But there is, and it is as wild a piece of land as can be found on the face of the earth. It covers several thousand acres within the city limits, and beyond that stretches away in solitary grandeur into the hills of San Mateo County.

Most residents of this City will know that the piece of land referred to is that just south of Golden Gate Park, and say that there is nothing remarkable about it—that it is just the sand hills that have been there all the time. These are people who have seen the little sand dunes along the ocean drive, but have no knowledge of what lies beyond. They probably think there may be a few more dunes just like them, possibly a few that are even larger.

A visit to this desert, for such it really is, will well repay the effort required. To get into the heart of it is no child's play, and a person not a good walker and climber must give up all idea of ever doing so. Whoever should attempt it must also be careful to select a fine, clear day, as it is possible for one to get lost and wander about for hours should a fog come up.

It hardly seems credible that a person can get lost in a wilderness within a big city and suffer all the hardships that are supposed to belong to the outposts of civilization, but people have been lost there and in more than one instance the experience has resulted fatally. It is not so long ago that a woman from the Almshouse wandered into the desert and being caught in a fog was unable to find her way back. She was known to have left the institution at about noon and was missed at supper time. Search was made for her about the grounds, but it was not until the next day that she was found. She was lying dead close to a clump of brush, and footprints in the sand showed that she had wandered round and round in a circle until overcome by exhaustion and cold. From the way the sand was disturbed it was apparent that she had struggled along for hours before being finally overcome.

Of course such a tragic ending is not likely to come to a young person in vigorous health, nevertheless it is a good idea to take a compass when going into the desert. Fogs come up from the sea in remarkably short order and then all landmarks instantly disappear. The feeling when surrounded by the intangible vapor is a most unpleasant one and really is like being confined in a dungeon. There are the walls on all sides only a few feet away. But approach them and they at once recede. There is no way to get your bearings. What you think is north may be south, and if you walk in that direction you may be facing the east or west in a very few minutes.

The tendency to travel in a circle at once asserts itself. You cannot look back over your own trail for more than a few feet, as the fog obscures it. And so you will go round and round until the fog lifts, or you accidentally strike some landmark that will guide you in the right direction. However, as has been stated, there is much of interest in the San Francisco desert, and if a clear day is selected there is practically no danger of getting lost. Should all go well, few indeed are the nature-lovers who will not derive pleasure from the trip, for if it is taken in the proper way every moment some new beauty will be revealed and the mysterious voices of the wilderness will sing new songs.

The most picturesque and interesting route to get into this desert is by following the driveway that comes out of the park near the pumping plant. About 500 feet out of the park the road takes a sudden turn to the west, rising over a rather barren looking knoll. On the other side lies the desert with its mountains of sand stretching to the sea.

The road winds in and out among a few shanties and then ends in a sandhill. It does not really end, it simply blends off into nothingness. At this point the park is in plain sight and the surroundings do not look entirely unfamiliar, but the work of getting into the desert has just commenced. Keep on over the ridge and you will soon be out of the world.

It is hard walking. The sand gives way beneath the foot, and a few hundred yards are enough to put most people out of breath. There are several high places to be crossed, but the walking gets easier with each step. This is due to the fact that the sand is packed harder in some places than others by the action of the wind.

Over one hill and down another. Sights and sounds of civilization gradually disappear until at last the traveler is alone. If he has never been alone before he will know what it means now.

Standing on some of the highest sandhills it is possible to look over a large area, and it is seldom that a human footprint can be seen. In the very center of this region it is safe to say that not ten people venture from year's end to year's end. There is nothing to bring them there. Along the edges of the desert, which is about half a mile from the park, there are a few homes owned by people living there for their health. From the appearance of these places it is hard to believe they

are only a short distance from civilization. The general aspect is that of the barren lands of Arizona. These ranches, as the people call them, are comfortable enough, but living there would seem to be like spending one's life out of the world. A ranch owned by a man named Carr is really a prosperous looking place. The house is large and comfortable, but the surroundings are enough to make one die of loneliness.

The little colony near the southwest corner of the park is, of course, well known in a general way, but many people who see it wonder why those living there ever selected such a spot for a residence. And the people who live there are content to let the other people wonder, although they do not object to telling why. Go to the doors of any of the houses—or streets, as the case may be, for many of the houses are old street-cars pressed into service—and ask the owner why he lives there. Only one answer will you get—"Health." It is really true that this bit of wild land is almost as curative to diseased lungs as any part of Arizona. In fact, to some of the few living there it has been almost miraculous in its action. "Colonel" Daly, who has about the most extensive establishment in the region, was literally saved from the jaws of death. He was broken down with numerous ailments and was scarcely able to walk. He was told by his physician to go to various places, but in some way made up his mind that the western edge of the San Francisco Desert had about as much in its favor as any other locality. He moved there something over a year ago and improvement at once set in. To-day he is as well as any man of his age.

The other people living on the desert have about the same story to tell. The strange thing is that the people, even after they have recovered, show no desire to move back to civilization. They have caught the fascination of the desert and like the howling of the wind, the weird sunshine and the loneliness, for even this place so near the park is lonesome the greater part of the year. During the winter noody ventures near and in the summer most of the people pass without stopping. But it is that portion of the desert far away from the edge, where nothing can be seen but sand and sky, that is the most interesting.

In many parts of the desert there are acres and acres without the least sign of vegetation. Just the smooth rolling sand that shows light against the dark blue sky, and has almost the appearance of snow. The general color scheme is of a light yellowish gray. Where vegetation does exist it is so covered with sand as to be scarcely distinguishable amid the general monotonous tone.

The places where there is any vegetation to speak of are in hollows between the sandhills, and for some reason it grows quite rapidly, although it is a mystery how it ever gets started. It will seem as if the winter rains soaked in deeply and so furnished the necessary water for the warm days of summer. Occasionally a patch a few hundred square feet in area can be found that is a perfect oasis. Grass grows long and luxuriant, willows and a few other trees attain a fair growth and weeds seem to thrive. There is always a tiny puddle of water to be found near these places. How large the trees might grow or

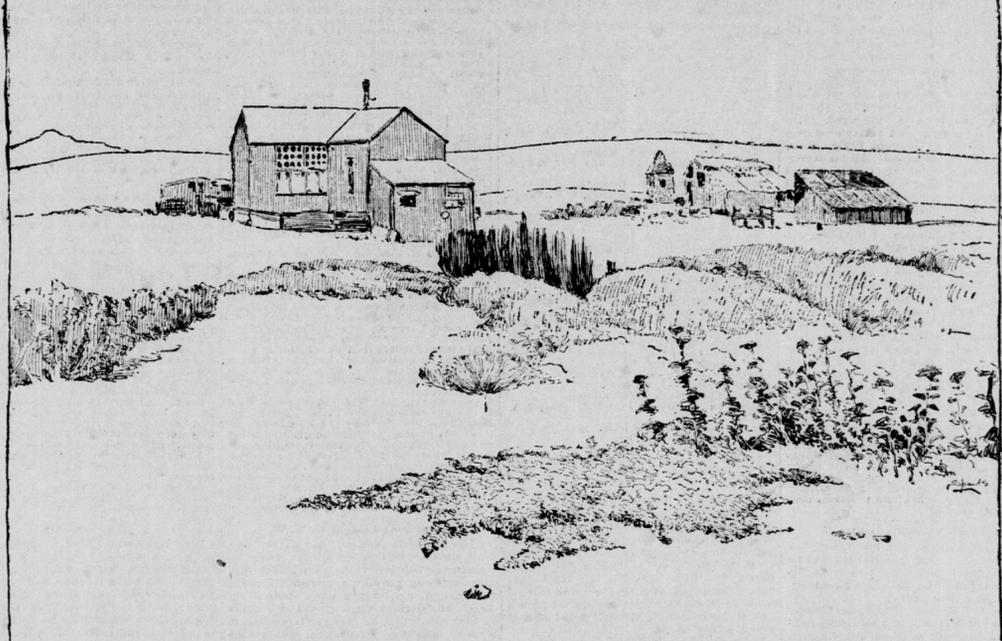
how far the oasis might extend itself is a question that will never be solved, for a peculiar phenomenon always wipes it out of existence. The phenomenon is the ever-shifting sandhill. The spots where the trees and weeds thrive for a short time are always sheltered beneath a sandhill that eventually proves their destruction. The west wind from the sea, ever blowing, picks up the sand on the upper slopes and causes it to roll down the eastern side of the hill. Consequently the hill is always moving like a monster billow. As the sand rolls on to the oasis it first covers the weeds and grasses and the lower parts of the trees. Higher and higher it climbs, at the same time rolling eastward.

Soon half of the trees are covered, and frequently only the upper branches of a tree can be seen protruding from a smooth stretch of sand without anything to indicate where the roots might be. Still the sand rolls along, higher and higher until the last trace of the oasis is blotted from sight. While this is going on in one place the dead branches of trees will be coming to light in another place. As the sand piles up on the eastern

side of the hill it naturally flows that it must go down at some point further to the west. The dead trees that are thus brought to light are the remains of an oasis that may have flourished twenty years ago. And so it goes on year after year. The wind builds one hill by tearing down another and obliterates one oasis that another may come into existence. The vegetation that exists on the sheltered slopes is much the same as can be found in the Mojave Desert. It is all of the same nature. The desert sage is plentiful and seems to have the faculty of keeping on top of the sandhill no matter how high it grows. Sometimes there will be a stretch of several acres of sand as smooth as a floor with only a tiny bunch of gray creosote in the center. Of birds and animals few can be seen. Occasionally a rabbit strays from somewhere to starve to death. Once in a long while a seagull can be seen flying eastward at a great height, as if on its way to the bay. But it might be said that the desert is devoid of animal life.

There is no more desolate spot on earth than the heart of this region. Sand mountain after sand mountain rise on all sides and stretch away in the distance until they melt in a soft haze of pearly gray. The silence is almost absolute, except for the muffled beating of the surf that comes monotonously over the dreary dunes. In the desolate solitude it seems like a voice from another world.

And how tirelessly the wind blows from the sea, ever building and tearing down the great sandhills. In its breath there is a moan of madness as it rushes over the wastes carrying myriads of particles that are dropped for a moment in a certain spot, and then whirled on again until at last they find a resting place where they must remain for ages. Hour after hour, day after day, year after year, century after century, the wind sings its weird song in the desert.



CARR'S RANCH, ON THE EDGE OF THE SAN FRANCISCO DESERT.

The lonesomeness of many parts of this stretch of country is appalling. There is nothing for the mind to grasp. On all sides only an expanse of sand and above the impermeable, limitless sky. Only a few weeds with the wind whistling through them relieve the eye, and then the mind becomes oppressed with longing. There seems to be everything in the desert and there seems to be nothing. There is everything, because there is nothing to quicken the desires. Something is surely lacking,

that might puzzle a person when he experienced the lonesomeness of the desert for the first time, but an old hunter will tell you that it is the "want of companionship."

In spite of all its desolation there is much in the desert to please an artist and enough material for hundreds of pictures. What tender sunrises and what precious sunsets! What poetical moonlights. In fact every moment of the day is beautiful, and to many the night will appear more beautiful.

In one sense the desert is at present a useless waste, but it is not destined to remain so very long. The march of improvement is going that way and soon it will be cut up into building lots. This knowledge may cause the nature lover, as he turns his back upon the desert, a feeling of regret, which can only be compensated by the knowledge that the innovation will mean the greatest good to the greatest number.

On returning to civilization the feeling is an odd one. It seems as though one had been to a far-away country for many days. There appears to have been a great change in the people on the street, and the clang of the streetcar bell has a queer tone. The mind seems crowded with ideas, and yet the day was spent in looking at only sand, weeds and sky.

One of the most remarkable natural wonders of Arizona is Boulder Park, about eighty miles north of Phoenix and eight miles from Congress station. And the most wonderful thing in this wonderland is Balancing Rock. From a distance the formation resembles two huge eggs, one lying upon the top of the other. The egg-shaped pieces are masses of solid granite, and so huge are they that a man may walk upright between them to the very point of contact.

Boulder Park is usually described as being near the famous Yarnell gold mine, and this lies at the summit of Antelope Hill. But the trail is a rocky one that leads from the Yarnell mine into Boulder Park, for the park begins almost at the base of Antelope Hill. Boulder Park is strewn everywhere. At first they are comparatively small, but as one descends the trail they grow larger until they assume almost the proportions of mountains.

They are granite boulders, and none of them have rough corners. Some mighty mass, as heavy as a world, it would seem, has moved over what was once a range of granite hills, and around them into separate blocks that vary in size from a cobblesize to a mountain. Nearly all the boulders are separate pieces, and the manner in which they are scattered about is a marvelous sight to behold. Many of them are balanced, one upon another, apparently in such a manner that a very slight jolt would cause a big crash.

Boulder Park is clearly the handiwork of the glacial period. Worlds of ice have moved over this region of the earth and left their pathway as one now beholds it.

The most curious and symmetrical work of the glaciers is shown in the illustration, which represents Balancing Rock. Both of these boulders are quite smooth in contour, and the summit of the upper one is fully 200 feet from the base of the lower. The upper rock is almost of a perfect egg shape, while the lower one is a projecting bluff or bulb like end of a very long, round slab of granite. The two rocks are entirely separate pieces, though the wind of long ages has swept in several tons of earth all around at the point of connection, until now there seems to be a connecting shaft between them.

What remarkable convulsion of nature could have tossed high this mountainous mass of granite and left it balancing upon the apex of the lower rock not even the most learned of geologists who have visited the spot dare hazard a guess. But there it has rested through the ages, and many travelers who have seen it consider it one of nature's greatest and most inexplicable marvels. LUKE NORTH.

THE MOST PICTURESQUE CANAL IN NORTH AMERICA

The Viga canal, one of the most beautiful sights of Mexico, is never shown to visitors by the natives. It must be conceded to be one of the oddest canals in the world, and certainly the most picturesque on the American continent, and yet a person might live in the Mexican capital for months and not a single hotel proprietor would ever think of directing attention to it. They all will gladly point the way to the new brick railroad depot, "like they have in the States," but the quaint beauties of La Viga have evidently grown to be considered commonplace.

The date of the building of the Viga canal has been lost in the mist of ages. The marvel was there when Cortez came, and from all that can be learned it is of Aztec origin. Certainly Montezuma has traveled on it and may be countless generations did likewise before his time.

But it is the Viga canal of the present day that we are interested in, and, indeed, many parts of it look now exactly as they presumably did several hundred years ago. It is different from any other canal in the world and in point of picturesqueness rivals any of the famed artificial waterways of modern construction.

From the plaza of the City of Mexico a short walk through the poorer quarters of the city brings one to this quaint waterway. The first sight of it at this point is not particularly interesting. The buildings that line the banks are cheap and dirty and altogether forbidding in appearance, but, as one enters one of the many boats lying along the banks and takes a trip up to the headwaters at Lake Xochimilco and every foot of the journey will be full of interest.

These boats are peculiar to the Viga. Flat-bottomed and unwieldy, they are nevertheless capable of being propelled with a pole in the hands of an Indian at a good rate. They are of all grades, from the rough, unpainted box-like affair, used for carrying sand, to the elaborately decorated barge, capable of holding several people. But the motive power in all is the same—an Indian and a pole—and the prices of passage range from 5 cents to half a dollar, according to the distance traveled and the style of boat used. Some boatmen will charge half a dollar an hour, but for that they will paint the boat freshly and fill it with rugs of many colors until it looks like a Venetian gondola.

There is very little current in the Viga canal, as its source, Lake Xochimilco, is only four feet above its termination, the two points being nine miles apart. As a consequence, the expert Indian can "pole" the light boat almost as fast up stream as down.

That part of the canal that passes through the city becomes more interesting as the suburbs grow nearer. Picturesque buildings come close to the water's edge and many quaint stairways, covered with soft green moss, wind upward among the most mysterious looking structures. Color is everywhere.

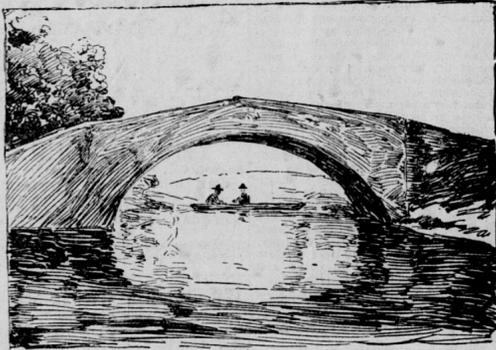
As the boat is poled along, stirring up ripples that reflect the bright trees and flowers that line the bank, the sensation is one of dazzling brilliancy. Other boats fit and their bright colors only add to the indescribable confusion of reflection. The sunshine is clear and bright, and the blue sky over all is most suggestive of the Mediterranean. Surely, one thinks, this cannot be in America and only a three days' journey from San Francisco!

As there is a little current in the Viga the water is remarkably clear for a canal. If it were not that the mud on the bottom is constantly stirred up by the boatmen it would be like crystal.

Out in the country the canal is a little smaller than in the city and its banks are simply the mud dredged from the bottom piled on the sides. But the mud is covered with a growth of grass and flowers, and trees grow on both sides of the stream. In one place the canal passes through an avenue of palms as beautiful as anything to be seen on top of the earth. The bright green, fronded trees throw a most refreshing shade over the water and are reflected like emeralds on the clear, limpid surface.

About two miles above the town there is what is known as the "resting place," although it should have been selected in preference to many others is not quite apparent. It is here that the boatmen tie up and take their siesta, which is sometimes all day and sometimes many days in succession, or as long as the beans and tortillas last. To see these boats lying peacefully on the water one would not think there was a living person near. But look over the gunwale, and there on the bottom, with the hot sun beating down on his unshorn face, will be the owner, sleeping the most contented sleep possible.

Of course a few of these boat-owners have little adobe homes located not too far from the canal, but the greater number of them live in their boats from year's end to



BRIDGE OVER VIGA CANAL.

year's end. To be sure the life is not what would be called luxurious, in the civilized sense of the word, but the boat-owner certainly enjoys himself the greater part of the time. All is not work in Mexico, you know, and besides they have a great deal of regard for "to-morrow," which is most effective in preventing fatigue.

In the summer time the boat-owner leads a jolly life. He does but little work—possibly an hour or two in the forenoon. Then he cooks himself a light meal, rolls a cigarette and goes to sleep in the bottom of his boat. What cares he how the sun beats down or how the flies buzz. For him the heat is simply the warmth of paradise and the buzzing of insects perhaps the singing of some celestial choir.

All through the long afternoon he snores and dreams and when evening comes prepares to attend a "balle" or dance. This is not much work, as his toilet is very simple. Many of the boat-owners only have to shake themselves and put on their sombreros to be dressed up. These men dislike to have any superfluous clothing

lying around—there is not room enough in the boat—so they have only one suit, and wear it all the time.

The amount of money that these men earn is infinitesimally small—not over \$100 a year—but most of them are absolutely happy, which after all may be the reason that they add to the picturesqueness of the Viga canal. But why should not they be happy? They have all they can eat and drink and all they wish to wear. Fatigue and hardship are unknown to them. They work just enough to obtain the necessities of life and the rest of their time they spend enjoying themselves in their own way. A charming feature of the canal is the many bridges that span it. Some of these are of wood and some of stone, but all are picturesque in the extreme. The stone ones are said to be very old and they certainly look it. But they fit into the landscape of



RESTING-PLACE BENEATH THE PALMS.

this land of dreams and give the most delightful color accents. No two of these bridges are alike, although some of them indicate that they were designed by an architect. A few of the older ones show a trace of gothic in their general design.

Winding in and out and between other boats and under the low hedges your Indian poles you along toward the lake, past little islands that look hardly large enough to stand upon, and yet are vegetable gardens that supply edibles to the big city a few miles away. The gardens are as light in color as it is possible for a luxuriant vegetation to make them, and the owners are as happy as can be. They live in their boats and have no more care than a babe asleep in the sun.

The Viga canal, in its course, passes many interesting and historical spots—Santa Anita, Ixtalapa, Mexicalingo and the Hill of the Star, where Montezuma met Cortez. At the lake the banks are covered with the huts of the people who make their living from the canal. Here they lead listless but easy and contented lives.

During the heat of the day there is little life on the canal, but when the sun goes down the fun begins. But it is only a repetition of what goes on all over Mexico each evening. The people are the happiest on the face of the earth, and love music, singing and dancing. They spend their evening that way and next day take a siesta. To be sure, there are people who say that the life of the boatmen of the Viga is all siesta—and to a casual observer it appears as if they are right. But when these men do work they attend to their business.

Whoever takes a trip over the Viga canal will store in his memory some of the brightest scenes this world affords, and when he has returned to civilization can turn back to them and get glimpses of beauty inconceivable to those engaged in the mere speculation of business. WILL SPARKS.



BUFFALO BILL IN NEW YORK.

One of the most picturesque figures among the many that congregate about the corridors of the New York hotels at the present time is, perhaps, that of the famous scout and warrior, the handsome Brigadier-General William F. Cody.

He was, and is, a hero. When only a boy, a mere lad, he was one of the first riders of the pony express that was established to carry letters across the plains. That was in 1860, and when in 1863 he enlisted in the Seventh Kansas Cavalry, he gained distinction and promotion for his daring and fearless deeds. He served in the late civil war until peace was declared.

Aprons, the sobriquet of "Buffalo Bill" was earned by General Cody when in 1867 he entered into a contract with the Kansas Pacific Railway Company in Western Kansas whereby he was to furnish all the wild buffalo meat necessary as food for the hundreds of laborers employed. In eighteen months the record showed 4280 buffaloes killed by Cody. From that time on he was known as "Buffalo Bill."

General Cody is in New York now because his Wild West show is open at the Madison-square Garden. As I looked into General Cody's rugged, healthy face the other afternoon, I tried to find some trace in the clear-cut features that would tell in some way the history of the frightful Indian massacres he had seen, or the tale of his hand-to-hand conflict with the notorious Cheyenne chief, Yellow Hand, whom he killed in the Sioux war of 1876 but no sign remains. There is not one cruel line in his face, and his splendid clear eyes reveal no shadows of unhappy memories. TRILLA FOLTZ TOLAND, New York, May 18, 1897.

The President's Home.

In some respects it would be better to build a home for the President entirely distinct from the executive offices. Then the privacy of his home life could be protected and he could feel that at some hours of the day or night he could escape entirely from contact with office-seekers, sightseers and curiosity-hunters. Or if a combination of official and private residence be preferred, there might be an addition to the present White House which would not mar its symmetry and would give the enlarged accommodations needed. The American people are not disposed to be niggardly in these matters, and they would be glad to see the President properly housed in a manner befitting the dignity and importance of his high office.—Syracuse Post.

Wooden sleepers on railways last about fifteen years.