Pine Valley in 1932

By WILLIAM M. BRISTOL

I am writing from my lodge in the forest in beautiful Pine Valley, at widely open cleft on the northern slope of Old Baldy (Mt. San Antonio) formerly known as Swarthout Valley—and the year is 1932.

Away back in 1922—a long time ago if measured by the marvelous development that has taken place hereabout—the mountainous region lying on the desertward slope of the Sierra Madre Mountains was discovered by the concourse of people in quest of summer homes. Myself had known it for many years.. I had known that, while the major portion of the range and especially its southern slope, was exceedingly precipitous, in many places evidently destined by the Creator for a premium summer city. Because the desert at its base is 2,000 feet higher than the valley at its southern foot it was not necessary that the north side of the mountain should run down hill so fast; but it was not until the early '20's that these gentler slopes attracted the attention of the nature-loving people of the California Southland.

Perhaps it was the year 1920 that marked the discovery of the fact that 90 per cent of the human race are nature-lovers. The year before, when I pitched my tent in Cajon Pass and began the construction of permanent tables and benches of concrete, and of stoves of iron and stone, for the use of those enamored of the outdoor life, I was surprised to find that men whom I had supposed were strangers to sentiment responded instantly when the strings of Nature's harp were swept.

Briefly, it had become apparent by 1922, that insofar as inherent desire to return at times to primitive life in the wilds is concerned, all men are brothers. There have been pageants beyond number to commemorate events in the history of the human race; but the outpouring of the Southlanders to their mountain fastnesses during the last decade has been at once an event and a pageant. It is a matter of history that the automobile, displacing the ox and the horse of pioneer days, began the great stampede; but only a few of the dreamers of 1922 seriously believed their own prediction that by 1932 the airplane would have become a serious competitor of the motor vehicle. Certainly it was not foreseen that by 1932 50,000 families would have summer homes in the mountains and that the breadwinners would go back and forth each morning and evening in but little more time than is consumed in going to and fro between their places of business and their city homes. It thus quickly does prophecy become history.

It should be recorded that the dramatic conquest of the northern slopes of the Sierra Madre was begun by the Board of Supervisors of the populous and wealthy county of Los Angeles. In spite of the fact that I am a resident of San Bernardino County, those people sometimes protest that Los Angeles prides to be "Southern California." In promoted, in 1923, the erection of a monument at Big Pines summit the face of which is set a metal bblet inscribed: "In the year 1920 e Board of Supervisors of Los ngeles County, composed of J. S. odge, R. F. McClellan, J. H. Bean, F. Cogswell and F. E. Woodley, gan the movement which resulted the purchase of this tract of 560 res of privately owned forest, hich is now forever dedicated to e public as a camping ground."

Following the purchase the Board whose personnel has changed hen Mr. Dodge resigned to be me State Superintendent of anks and was succeeded by H. W. right—arranged with the Forest ervice to take over and administer r the campers of the world a rge tract of forest to the westard of that purchased. Even before the purchase was consummated the board had set the county ison gang at work building a ad to connect the region with the ved highway at Palmdale; and it a matter of interest that the ison gang, in spite of its daily nd kaleidoscopic changes of membership, is still building roads in e surrounding mountain domain. e road leading up the Arroyo eco was completed long years o, as well as the one up the north rk of the west fork of the San briel. Another road starting om the Big Pines summit, at arly 7,000 feet elevation, reaches, 8,000 feet, the summit of the dide between the San Gabriel and e Mojave watersheds, and, swing- southeast, climbs the ridge separating Prairie Fork from Pine lley and reaches an elevation of 00 feet directly north of Baldy. that point it begins its descent o the north fork of Lytle Creek d, skirting the east slope of Baldy, connects with the road leading Camp Baldy, in San Antonio nyon. Of course these roads have ened up new camping places and ve added new vistas to an already majestic galaxy.

Perhaps the most striking development in the region is the summer city in Pine Valley. This exceedingly attractive gallery cannot be described in a sentence, for its natural charms are many. Its slopes are covered with forests of big pines and cedars, among which has sprung up within recent years a dense growth of young pines. Both deciduous and live oaks lend diversity to the coniferous forest. It should be explained that the upper end of this valley is at Big Pines summit, at an elevation of 6,863 feet and that its trend is southeastward. Six miles from Big Pines it bends abruptly to the north and descends to the Mojave desert. Its nomenclature is peculiar in that the portion above the bend is known as Pine Valley (formerly Swarthout Valley) while the portion below the bend is called Sheep Creek Canyon. Pine Valley ranges in elevation between 6,000 and 6,600 feet and has a climate all its own. It is carved and set in an elevated mesa surrounded on all sides by canyons which serve as air-drains and flood-drains. Nowhere else in all the mountain region can be found so mellow an atmosphere. There is almost never a fog and hardly ever a wind. When the great valley of the Southland is enveloped in either a high or a low fog Pine Valley is basking in sunshine; and when the orange belt swelters in the fervor of July or August weather the climate of Pine Valley is an elysian dream. Indeed that wandering Californian who is always bobbing up at eastern funerals where the parson has failed to appear and who, in the absence of anyone to pay tribute to the deceased, volunteers to pronounce a eulogy on California, never fails to weave Pine Valley into his peroration.

An important and interesting factor in the development of Pine Valley was the San Andreas rift, that great prehistoric crack in the earth's crust extending from San Francisco even to Imperial Valley —and no one knows how much farther. When the original fracture occurred, extending downward at least to the plastic strata in the earth's interior, innumerable crevices through which water was finding its way downward to the subterranean basin of the desert were broken; and because the mountain mass south of the crack was heavier than the lower mass north of the crack the mass to the south settled—and the mass to the north was lifted, with the result that the streams discharging into the crack, and rising to find an outlet, were confined behind the northern uplift and compelled to flow southeast behind the barrier until a low place in its rim was reached. Immediately and for a long time after the upheaval there was a chain of little lakes along this line, some of which are lakes even at the present time. But the majority of the basins formed by the uplift in time became filled with sediment and debris and are now designated as swamps, or, in Spanish vernacular, cienegas. Wherever the fault has caused a stream bed or wash all depressions or other surface evidences or other evidences of it were soon filled, covered and obliterated. In Pine Valley there are a dozen basins which were filled just enough to become cienegas. One of the first tasks of the syndicate which, in 1922, took over Sumner B. Wright's principality of 1,100 acres, comprising the major portion of the valley, was to remove the debris from the basins and to convert them again into lakes. So successful was this work that it is still in progress, the enlarging process being now carried on by dredging instead of by the primitive method of using horse-drawn scrapers. It was not found necessary to use any masonry in enlarging the basins. The compact sediment removed was piled deep and wide in the low places in the rims of the basins and made dams well-nigh impervious to water. It was comparatively easy to clean out the trench-like crevasse along the fault-line and to make it carry the outflow from the upper lake to the second and so on down the chain. So deep—and high—and so distant is the source of the water rising from the rift that it suffers no diminution even during a cycle of dry years; and because the flow is constant the levels are constant and the conditions are therefore ideal for the silver-gray trout which abount in all the gem-like lakes of the chain. Of course it was necessary, after all this outlay, to make a charge for angling in these waters de luxe —but so fine is the sport and so delicious the fish that no sportsman has yet been heard to murmur.

Turning to the people of Pine Valley, it is plain that they are different from those of the average mountain community. Evidently they come here for physical rest and mental recreation rather than to be amused and to have a roaring time. Their architecture and their buildings, too, are different, for they have made use of the abundant stone to erect homes which shall defy both the flames and the elements. This is not saying, however, that it is a city of stone, for there are enough structures of lumber and of logs to break the monotony—but not enough to make fire risks. An interesting feature of the project is the fireproof and ratproof warehouses, divided into convenient sized lockers where householders may store their more valuable furnishings which they do not wish to transport back and forth to their urban homes. There are several of these structures at centralpoints and they are much used and popular.

When the Pine Valley syndicate announced its plans in the fall of 1922 the objection was raised that Pine Valley was "too far away." It was said that the distance, 32 miles from San Bernardino and 96 miles from Los Angeles, was too great. The objectors forgot, however, that going by way of Cajon Pass all but 11 miles of the distance was over smoothly paved highway; and it is an interesting fact that each year since 1925 each county has macadamized a portion of its road to the Valley with the result that today there remains only three miles of dirt road in the great loop drive—and that is to be macadamized next year. The distance from Los Angeles to Pine Valley via Palmdale is a trifle shorter than by way of Cajon and the grades are a little lighter. Most of the Angelenos who motor thither go by way of Palmdale and return via Cajon, while those who fly very their route according to fancy. With the exception of the "blue slide" in Cajon Pass there never was a precipice on the entire trip over which a timid motorist could fall; and the year 1932 finds even this "perpendicular hangover" safely guarded by concrete curbs. There is no other road in all the Southland over which an elevation of 7,000 feet can be reached with such a degree of safety.

It goes without saying that Pine Valley figures substantially in the assessment roll of both counties, the present valuation for taxation being nearly $1,000,000 — about equally divided because the line between the two counties falls almost squarely across the middle of the settlement. Had the Los Angeles supervisors purchased the Wright tract, as they long expected to do, it would have been added to the public camping ground, there would have been no privately owned lots and no buildings—and consequently no tax revenue to either county. It now appears that the desire and demand for mountain homes on privately owned ground rather than on Government leaseholds is so great that it was plainly for the best that the Wright property was thus used. And it is an interesting fact that there has developed among mountain homeowners in the various Southland ranges the practice of "swapping" cottages for a week or two and even for the entire season. Many cottages, also, are rented outright —a practice which is not permitted on Government leases.

My story would not be complete did I not tell of the picturesque retreat which the supervisors and a few other Los Angeles County officials of 1922 builded for themselves and their families in a nook high up on the western face of Table Mountain, the elevated and rolling plateau rising directly above and to the north of Big Pines summit. Having laid down the rule that there should be no permanent structures in the park purchased for the public they were compelled to go, like ordinary individuals, to the Forest Service and rent building sites for their cottages. It happens that there is a living spring of modest volume, the water from which is pumped to a tank on the mountain side above their little village. An excellent road half a mile in length and with a 10 per cent grade circles up from Big Pines. As I watched them at their task in 1922 I soliloquized: "How hard the human family will work for fun!" But the toil of their construction days has long since been forgotten in the dream-life of their elevated perch—and even their airplanes alight and take off from the broad landing place on the top of Table Mountain with no murmur or suggestion of effort.

If you, my reader, have never seen Pine Valley and the northern slopes of the Sierra Madre, my advice is that you hasten thither.