THE REDWOOD COAST: **AWE-some Adventure**

“The Redwoods, once seen, leave a mark or create a vision that stays with you always... It’s not only their unbelievable stature, nor the color which seems to shift and vary under your eyes, no, they are not like any trees we know; they are ambassadors from another time.”

—John Steinbeck

A visit to California’s northern coast, that remote stretch between San Francisco and the Oregon state line, renders the term “awesome” utterly inadequate. One of the most over-used words in our modern lexicon can’t begin to describe the level of wonder inspired by the world’s largest redwood forest. You simply have to be there to understand the grand dichotomy of the experience. The vibrancy of the planet’s oldest living things sparks an acute awareness of your surroundings—the cedar-scented air, the clear-running streams, the abundance of birdlife and, of course, the enormous trees. Even the undergrowth—ferns and bushes, mostly—are denser, taller, and more impressive than those in any other woods. Sensory overload sets in. At the same time the level of peace and tranquility is palpable. No wonder an encounter with these ancient groves ranks high on so many “bucket lists.”

In addition to offering a fresh perspective of where we fit into this universe, the trees provide a tangible link to the past. Redwoods date to prehistoric times and many of the California coastal trees have been standing for 2,000 years. The exact trees that inspired Steinbeck’s words render me nearly speechless today. Just try to wrap your head around that inspired Steinbeck’s words render me nearly speechless today. Just try to wrap your head around the level of peace and tranquility is palpable. No wonder an encounter with these ancient groves ranks high on so many “bucket lists.”

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The world’s first “motor home” was built in 1917 when California native and redwoods enthusiast Charles Kellogg carved a “home” from a piece of fallen redwood and had it mounted on a new four-wheel-drive Nash Quad truck. He drove it around America, criss-crossing the country four times to raise concern about the rampant logging of the magnificent trees. Dubbed the Travel Log, Kellogg’s home on wheels brought awareness of the giant redwoods to people who had no idea such trees existed. The Travel Log remains on display at the Humboldt Redwoods Park Visitor Center.

Hartley Ruskin, executive director of the Save the Redwoods League, knows that his organization cannot rest on its laurels—impressive as they may be. “The parks that we so enjoy, like Humboldt Redwoods, were created by people who believed that there was a higher and better use of these forests than to supply railroad ties and roofing shingles,” he said. “By individuals joining together, whether they were giving a dollar or in the case of Rockefeller, a million dollars, our organization was able to set aside more than 180,000 acres and establish the 62 parks and reserves that inspire countless visitors.”

However, the work is not finished according to Ruskin. “The trees are very resilient and yet they are very fragile. We know that they can be felled quickly and rapidly. They are timeless and yet we, as people, have the power to either protect or destroy them. An important part of the redwoods story is the story of people coming together to protect the places they care about.”

There are only 24 albino redwoods in the world. Six are located in Humboldt Redwoods State Park. (BTW, they’re really a parasite. Because they tap into the host trees for sustenance, they lack chlorophyll.)

Coast redwood bark is often more than a foot thick and is resilient when confronted with fire. Coast redwoods are susceptible to high winds and flooding. More than 70% of existing redwoods are not protected from land use conversion or aggressive forestry. Much of the work today is in the second-growth forest. Ruskin said the Save the Redwoods League works with private owners to responsibly manage the land. It’s also involved in reforestation, conservation, and research into the effects of climate change on the big trees and the planet.

To learn more visit SaveTheRedwoods.org.