The Sequoia Sun

Sequoia National Park, California

19 June 2015

Emily reaches the cliff edge on our hike on the Lakes Trail at Sequoia National Park. At this point, at about 9,000 feet, the forests the park is named for yield to the granite high country that covers most of the park's 630 square miles. Emily is about 20 miles as the crow flies – or a three-day hike – from Mount Whitney, which is the tallest peak in the 48 contiguous states at 14,505 feet.

Happy Fourth of July

A mother brown bear and her cub (middle of the main photo and at lower right) feed in the grasses along Wolverton Creek. We had kept up a steady conversation during our hike, so we wouldn't startle any bears along the way. She looked up at us once to check us out but apparently we didn't seem to present any danger to her cub, so she resumed her breakfast while I shot pictures.

Good hikes have some sort of scenic reward that pays for the work of getting there.

There's a problem though, when you get there and can hardly bear to look.

Our original plan was to hike the Lakes Trail in Sequoia National Park, which climbs along the southern edge of the Tokopah Canyon through Ponderosa pine and incense cedar forest – no sequoias – to Heather Lake, which fills a granite basin above the tree line at 9,300 feet.

Heather Lake is one of four *tarns* at the end of the

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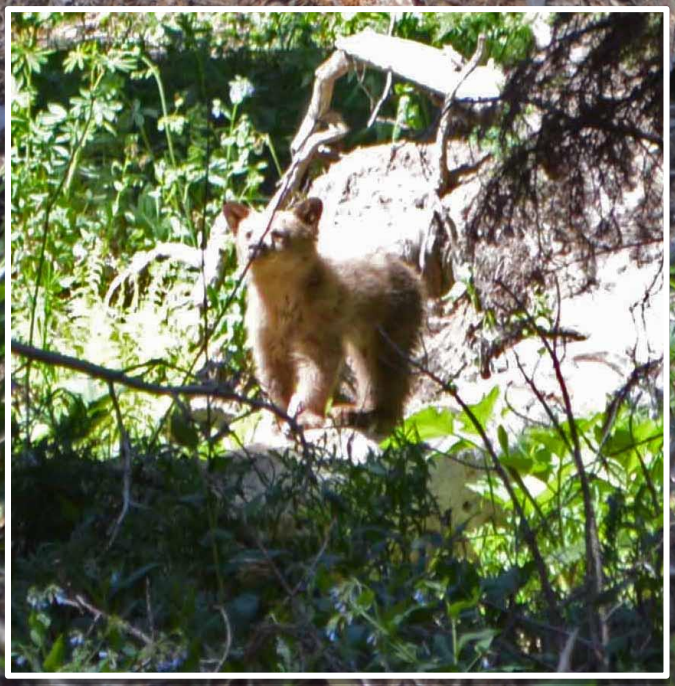

Happy Fourth of July

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trail, puddles left when the 500-foot thick glacier that originally dug the canyon melted away eons ago.

This was also our plan for my Fourth of July newsletter hike in 2010 but – unlike this year – there was still ice and snow in the high Sierra that made the trail dangerous. So we hiked along the canyon floor instead with our friend, Rayyan Khan, following the Marble Fork of the Kaweah River to the base of Tokopah Falls, where the trail dead-ends into the bare granite headwall of the canyon in this photo.

As was the case five years ago, our first interesting encounter came in the first mile when we met a bear along Wolverton Creek. She was with her cub, which

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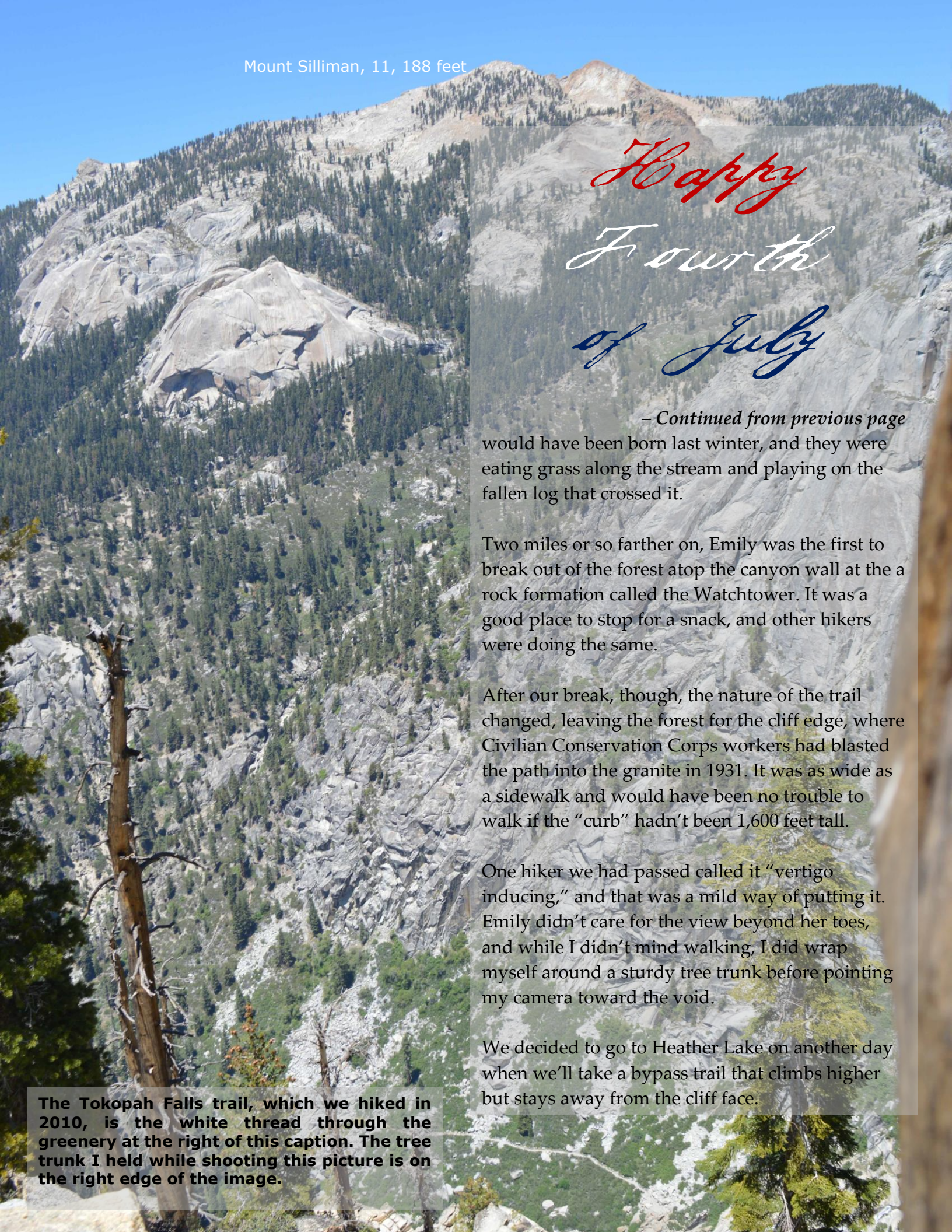
At our turn-back point, the trail had gotten a bit dicey, but we got the full view of the Tokopah Canyon. Alta Peak is in the distance with a bit of snow still clinging to its flank.



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would have been born last winter, and they were eating grass along the stream and playing on the fallen log that crossed it.

Two miles or so farther on, Emily was the first to break out of the forest atop the canyon wall at the a rock formation called the Watchtower. It was a good place to stop for a snack, and other hikers were doing the same.

After our break, though, the nature of the trail changed, leaving the forest for the cliff edge, where Civilian Conservation Corps workers had blasted the path into the granite in 1931. It was as wide as a sidewalk and would have been no trouble to walk if the "curb" hadn't been 1,600 feet tall.

One hiker we had passed called it "vertigo inducing," and that was a mild way of putting it. Emily didn't care for the view beyond her toes, and while I didn't mind walking, I did wrap myself around a sturdy tree trunk before pointing my camera toward the void.

We decided to go to Heather Lake on another day when we'll take a bypass trail that climbs higher but stays away from the cliff face.

The Tokopah Falls trail, which we hiked in 2010, is the white thread through the greenery at the right of this caption. The tree trunk I held while shooting this picture is on the right edge of the image.

Emily descends past a bed of Baby Blue-Eyes. You can read this and all previous Fourth of July newsletters at my website archive at http://www.jodymeacham.com/#!newsletter-archive/ceho.