

THE PINACLES OF SAN BENITO COUNTY

By *SCHUYLER G. HAIN*



ANCOUVER, in 1794, wrote of the rock pinnacles of what is now San Benito County, California, as, "the most remarkable mountain I have ever seen." At the present time there is a movement under way to have 15,000 acres, embracing the heart of this interesting region, set aside as a national park, that its beauty may be permanently preserved and guarded. The Secretary of the Interior has withdrawn the tract from entry, pending Congressional action.

The entrance to the proposed park is not unlike the doorway to the Garden of the Gods, but on a grander scale. Here the cliffs of many-colored rock rise hundreds of feet in sharply defined terraces, or great domes and pinnacles. Beyond, scattered over an area of some six square miles, is a mass of conglomerate rocks wonderful in extent and in fantastic variety of form and coloring.

Two much-broken water courses cut the northern and southern ends of the mountain, breaking into deep chasms filled with the debris of old slides, in which are dark, rock-covered caves, still for the most part of unknown extent, and pools of water of varying depth, left by the winter rains.



"HEART POOL," IN CAVE IN BEAR CAÑON

The main features of the entire region are the massive walls and towering rock-peaks, and the deep, narrow-walled cañons through which the foot-trails wind.

The two main gorges are more frequently seen by visitors and the trip through either of them can be made in a day with time to spare; but the explorer may wander for weeks among the side cañons and upper rocks, seeing something new each day. To the right of the northern water course, which is the one followed by the principal trail, rises "Palisade Rock," about fifteen hundred feet from base to summit; terraced back in great steps and ledges over which in rainy seasons swift little streams leap

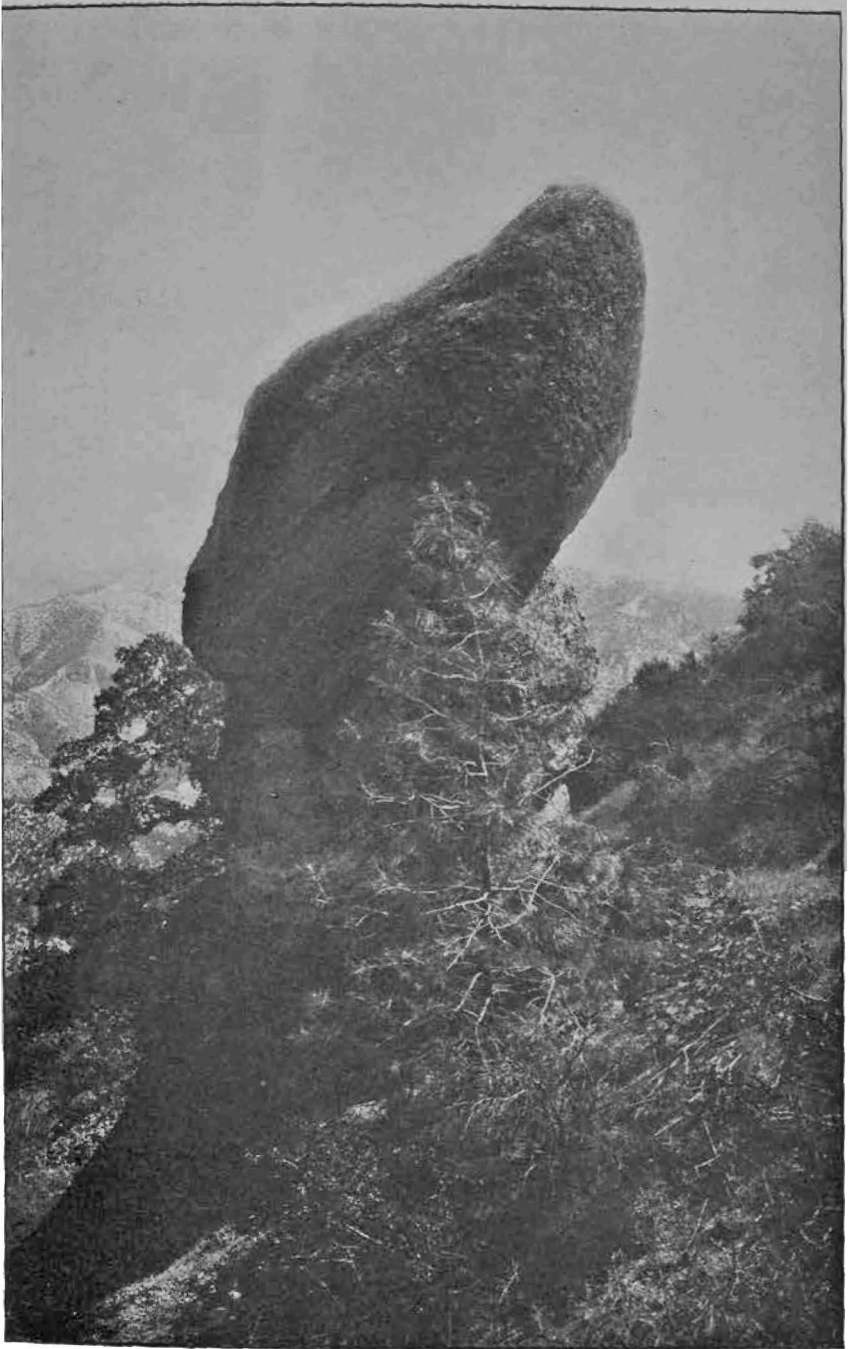


ABOVE PINNACLE CAVES
(Rock in foreground 250 feet in diameter.)

and plunge and are beaten to white clouds of spray along the cliffs below. From one spot eight of these brief, beautiful waterfalls may be counted without turning.

A little distance beyond this pass the cañon widens out to a small valley, and fronting the valley is the cliff-ringed amphitheater named for President Jordan of Stanford. Here Nature seems to have taken the most methodical care in setting on end hundreds of rock pinnacles, rising tier on tier till the topmost procession, nearly a mile away, is 1,800 feet above the little valley.

Opposite "Painted Rock" is the "Bridal Chamber," a circular

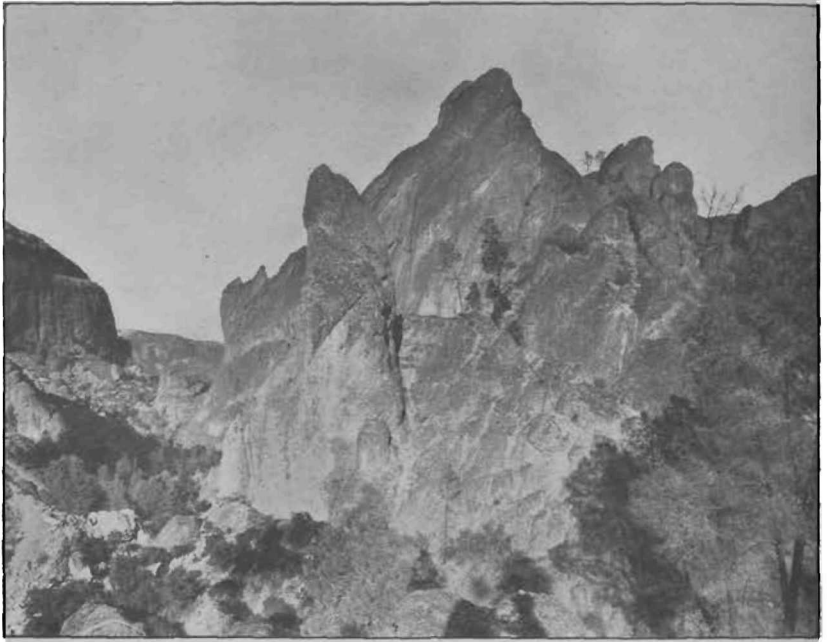


A MONUMENT NOT MADE WITH HANDS

area entered through a narrow gorge. The perpendicular walls are from 150 to 300 feet high, and in the rainy season a small stream sweeps over the highest point and is dashed along the ledges in a veil of filmy mist, covering most of the enclosed space.

Beyond the little valley and the "Jordan Amphitheatre," the rocky walls assume strange and fantastic shapes and each turn in the trail reveals some new beauty and wonder.

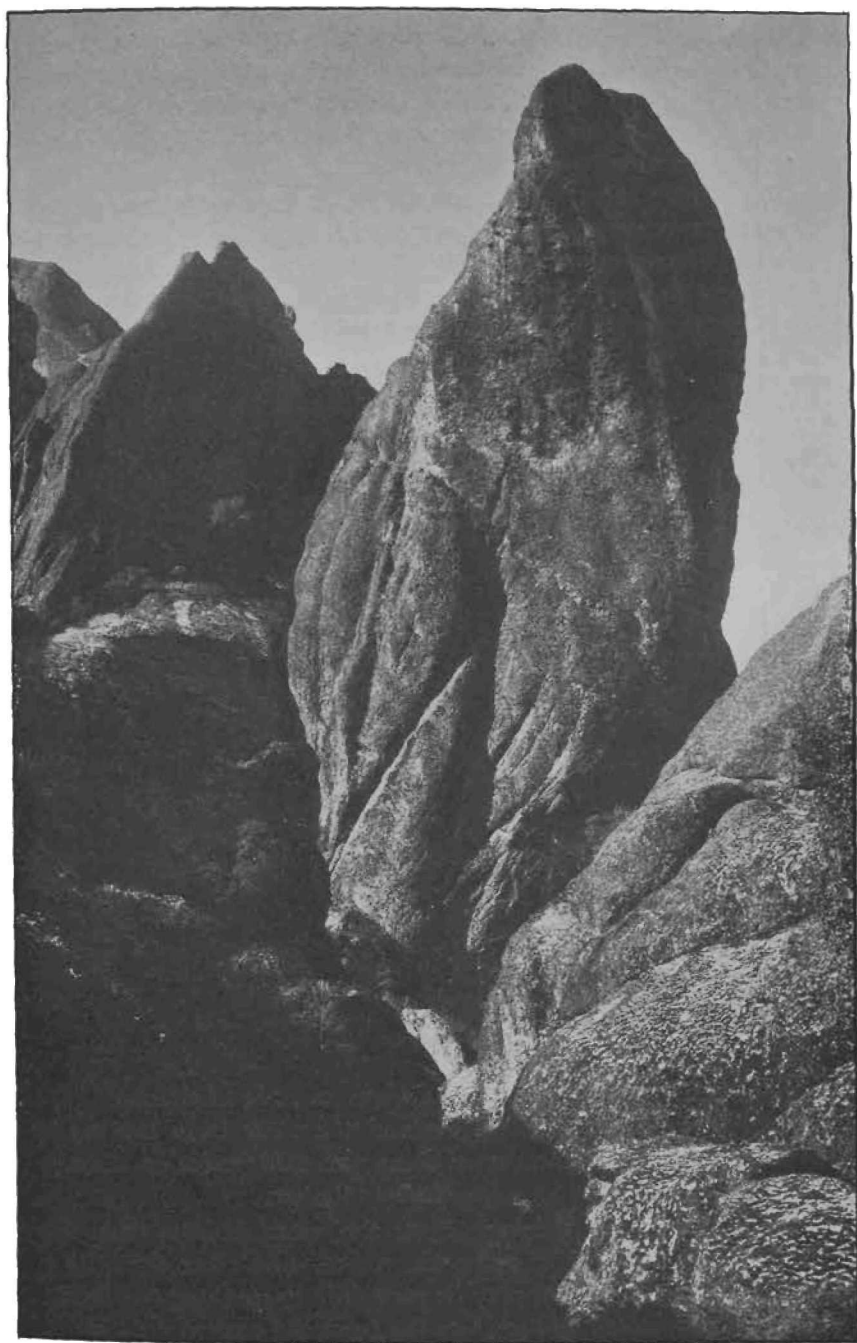
The southern water course, called Bear Cañon, is less known than the northern one, but not less beautiful. A mile from its junction with Cholone Creek the stream bed is entirely filled with



AMONG THE PINNACLES

fallen rocks and the trail turns to the left and comes by a steep and difficult grade to "Inspiration Point." Here the explorer looks down on the tops of tall trees growing far below, while above the great cliff-walls are capped by slender spires and pinnacles and groups of weather-worn rocks like statuary.

From Inspiration Point the trail descends again to the creek bed; winding under rock-slabs caught roof-like in the narrow walls, over logs and boulders and through underbrush, ending at last in a little dim-lighted cave beyond which there is no passage except by retracing part of the way and climbing out to the right over a narrow ledge to the gorge ahead.



AT THE HEART OF THE PINNACLES

Here is the largest cave yet discovered, some sixty by one hundred and twenty feet, and roofed over by a cube-shaped rock two hundred feet in diameter, on the top of which a tall pine tree is growing. Beyond this largest cave are others, some dimly lighted, some dark and damp—the home of night birds and innumerable bats.

The winter rains leave pools of water here and there in the caves, the largest being "Heart Pool," lying in a deep, heart-shaped depression worn in rock of adamantine hardness.

Beyond the caves the gorge widens to open country dotted with rock groups in many interesting and suggestive shapes,



PIVOT ROCK

among them "Pivot Rock," like a huge anvil of sandstone.

A few of these are accessible and the view from the top is worth the climb, but most of them are still unscathed, though seldom impossible to an experienced climber.

From the top of Cholone Peak the view reaches from the Coast Range to the blue of ocean, where, on a clear day with a good glass, the breakers may be seen rolling in along the beach. Between mountains and sea lies the beautiful expanse of Salinas Valley, dotted with farms and towns, with the Salinas river winding the whole length of the view.

Pinnacle Park is thirty-five miles by wagon road from the

town of Hollister, and is easily reached from that point. It has much to offer all comers; for the camper; sheltered nooks, great trees, wood and water and grass in convenient reach; for the hunter, quail and occasional deer; for the scientist of whatever mind, strange rocks, many flowers, and birds in variety; and for the nature-lover, varied beauty at every turn, from deep banks of fern in the hidden places of the cañons to the great rock domes and pinnacles that give the place its name.

Cook, Cal.
