

# Costa Rica's Famous Volcano and Its Vinegar Lake

(Copyright, 1912, by Frank G. Carpenter.)  
**H**AVE just returned from the hardest volcanic trip of my life. As a boy, before the cog railroad was built, I climbed up through the lava ash of Vesuvius and came thin an ace of being killed by a change of the winds which threw some of the red-hot stones at my feet. I know the volcanic mountains of the Hawaiian Islands, and have climbed up the famous Tanager, the largest volcano in Java, which has the Bromo, another live volcano, in its crater. I have seen Stromboli and Etna in eruption and have made something of a study of seismic conditions in the earthquake land of Japan. My other experiences, however, were nothing like the climb up the Poas volcano, which included a ride of more than fifteen miles in the saddle of a Costa Rican pony over what I believe is one of the wildest and hardest mountain trails of the world.

**Poas and Its Geysers.**  
 I doubt if many of you have ever heard of old Poas. Nevertheless, it is one of the most wonderful volcanoes of Central America. It belongs to the volcanic belt of Costa Rica, which includes Turrialba, over two miles in the air; Orosi, at the extreme north end of the country, and Irazu, which is more than eleven thousand feet high and has had over a half dozen eruptions, accompanied by earthquakes, which have been felt in the city of Panama.

The Poas volcano has two or more craters, and each is over a mile in circumference. It has one which is on the very top of the mountain filled with a sheet of blue cold water and surrounded by semi-tropical vegetation. It has another which is as ragged and bare as the shores of the Dead sea and down which you look into a lake of acid, from which shoots up the greatest geyser on earth. At times this geyser spouts every few minutes. At other times it is quiet for a long period and again it will throw a column of sulphurous steam thousands of feet into the air. About two years ago it shot up a great volume of mud, vapor and rock to a height above its surfaces of more than two and one-half miles. The distance to which the column reached was estimated at over 13,000 feet. At the top the steam spread out like a mighty umbrella over the mountain and stones as big as cannon balls fell, breaking trees and limbs and going deep into the ground. At that time there was an earthquake which threw down many of the buildings in San Jose, and this was followed by a second earthquake several months later by which the city of Cartago was brought to the ground, and about 600 human beings killed in the ruins.

**A Night at San Pedro.**  
 The first part of our journey was not extraordinary for Costa Rica, but it would have been worth a description had it been made farther north. The party consisted of myself and stenographer, Mr. Carlisle Floeckher; my interpreter, Mr. De Soto, and a guide whom we picked up at San Pedro. We came from the capital, San Jose, to Alajuela on the railroad, a distance of about twenty miles, and there packed our outfit on horseback. We had raincoats, blankets and sleeping bags, for we were expecting to lie out in the open with the winds of the Andes howling about us. We wore heavy clothing and had on our pajamas over our underwear and also chamoliz jackets inside our coats. Our blood is thin from our stay in the tropics, and we needed all we had on when on top of old Poas to keep us from freezing.

Very fortunately, however, we were able to dispense with our sleeping bags by staying at a little inn at San Pedro, about two hours' ride from this point, and starting from there at 2 o'clock in the morning. I shall not soon forget that night at San Pedro. My flesh is soft from the spring mattresses which Upele Sam furnishes at Panama, and the San Pedro bed was a board. There was no light but a candle, and so we lay down at about 8 o'clock. I counted the hours rung by the church bell until midnight, and then dropped off by taking the covers and laying them under me to soften the boards.

**The Stars of Costa Rica.**  
 It was just 2 o'clock in the morning when the guide called us, and half an hour later we had had a cup of hot coffee and were on our way up the mountain. We rode at first through the starlight. We could see the Great Bear turned upside down as it seems to be here, at this hour, and also the Southern Cross at the other end of the heavens. The stars were wonderfully clear. The milky way shone brighter than at home, and the whole vault of the sky with its myriad points of diamond-light fitted close down over the mountains. Indeed, the night was so beautiful that it reminded me of that line where in Marlow's Dr. Faustus he speaks of the charms of his lady love:

Oh thou art fairer than the evening air,  
 Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars!  
 But had Marlow been on Poas he would have made that thousand millions. The whole sky was peppered with stars, and each one seemed a planet.

Shortly after we left the hotel we had a magnificent view of this valley of the upper Andes, in which Alajuela, San Jose and other towns lie. San Jose was lighted by electricity, and it seemed a great golden lake on the star-lit expanse below us.

For the first few miles the road was fairly good. We passed through sugar and coffee plantations, and by rude factories which with lamps or candles the men were already grinding the cane. They start at 1 o'clock in the morning and at about 3 have enough juice to boil for the day.

**Climbing Up the Volcano.**  
 So far all was peaceful enough and as we rode rapidly along on our Costa Rican ponies, I thought of the remark of the British consul at San Jose that the ride was a hard one and I rather sneered at his judgment, saying to Floeckher, "Why, my boy, this is a cinch. It is like riding a rocking horse over the Washington asphalt."

I was soon to find my mistake. We shortly left the road and took a trail over the mountains. Senor de Soto, who I venture is a descendant of the man who discovered the Mississippi, and the guide, a peon named Rojas, agreed that we had better take a short cut over the hills as it was look dark to go through the woods. We did this and came at once into a thick forest of ravines and gorges, so deep that we could not see our horses' heads in front of us.

In the meantime the clouds had obscured the stars, a light rose, and the cliffs seemed to extend up on all sides. We forded several streams and I was warned to put only my toes in the str-

ings, lest in case of a fall I should be dragged. We climbed up hill and down and finally came into a canyon, which seemed exceedingly perilous. Out of this we crawled up into the open, where a stiff wind was blowing. The region was wild and hillocky. It was seamed with earthquake cracks and gullies down which the horses would almost go on their noses, and up which they would climb like the ponies of the Alps.

**Lost on Mount Poas.**  
 All this time it was growing darker and darker. The land was full of stumps and down timber, and the guide, who was scrambling along upon his bare feet, fell again and again. I could keep track of him only by his white straw hat, which he carried in his hand. This made a faint light for a time, but at last even the hat was invisible. Then to crown it all the man stopped and said he had lost his way. He advised us that we had better wait there until daylight, as some of the earthquake cracks were exceedingly dangerous. He said, however, that the path could not be far off, and I insisted on our trying to find it. I got off my horse and tried to make my way over the gullies and the fallen trees and stumps, but I was more often on my face than on my feet. I soon became winded and then concluded I would rather die on the back of a horse than on foot. So I got on again and threshed my steed into action. Then the saddle girth broke and I slid down to the ground. Floeckher lost first his hat, and in trying to find that his horse disappeared, and he went along for a time upon foot.

After a while we got the horse and started on again, finally reaching a path on the edge of the woods after many climbs over logs. The wind had now died away and the guide used a candle by which he finally pushed us through gullies to a shed known as the Lecheria, perhaps two hours from the crater.

It was now daybreak, but the clouds were thick on the volcano and the mist fell in drops like rain. It is strange how one's mind works at such times. My memory went back to the lessons of my boyhood, the committing of which one of my ancestors, a sainted United Presbyterian doctor of divinity, enforced upon his children to the second and third generation and I found myself rehearsing parts of the xviii Psalm, Rouse's version. You may remember the verse.

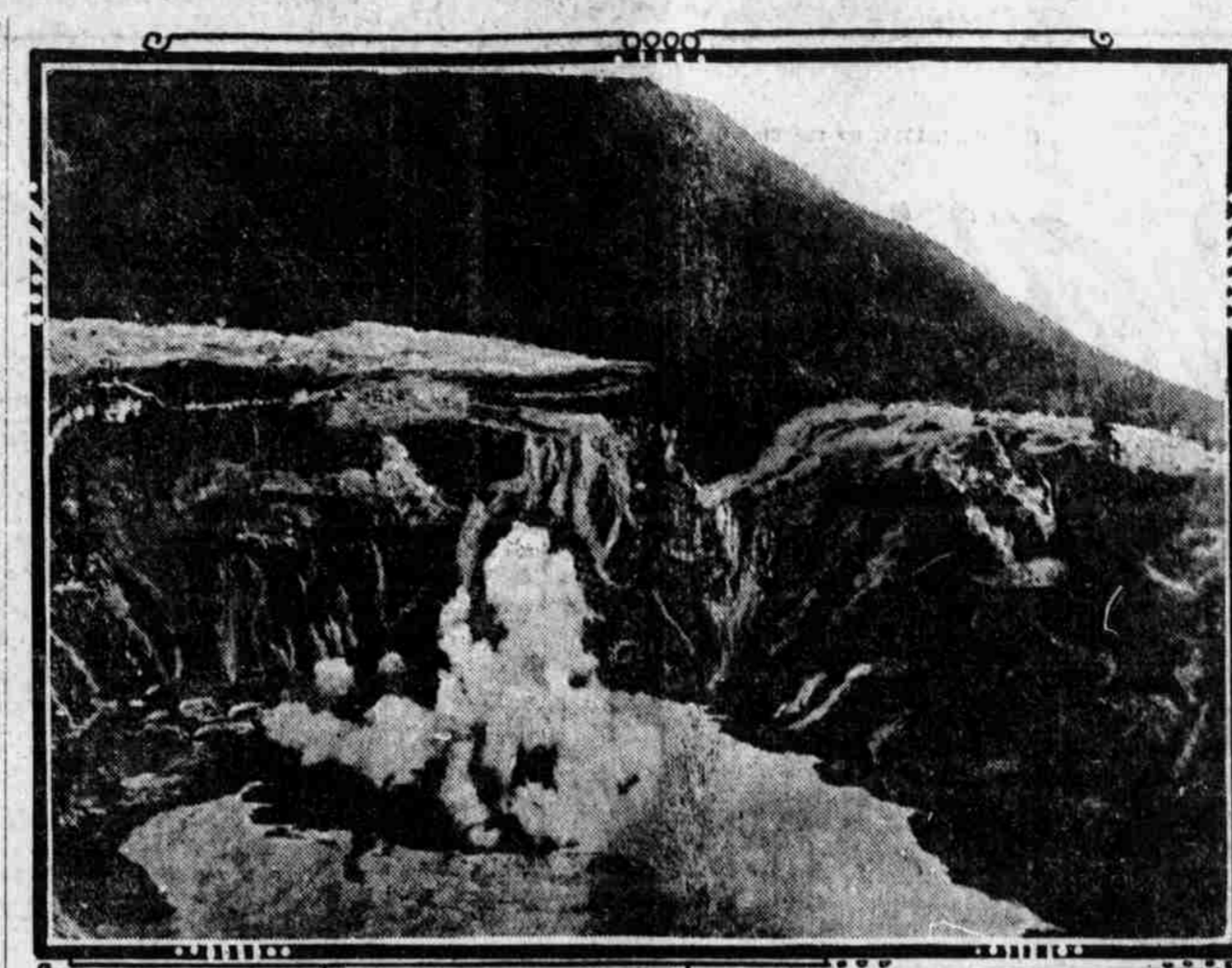
Yes, though I walk through death's dark vale,  
 Yet shall I fear no ill:  
 For Thou art with me, and Thy rod  
 And staff me comfort still!

I also hummed that other fine psalm, which seemed to just fit into the occasion:

I to the hills with lift mine eyes,  
 From whence doth come mine aid,  
 My safety cometh from the Lord,  
 Who heaven and earth hath made.  
 Thy foot He'll not let slide,  
 Nor will He slumber that thee keeps,  
 The Lord that keepeth Israel!  
 He slumbers not nor sleeps.

Indeed, it would need the Lord to keep any man's foot on the mountain of Poas, if he had not one of the little Costa Rican ponies to lift him up and down.

**Ride Would Surprise Roosevelt.**  
 I should like to see Theodore Roosevelt try that ride. I am accustomed to the saddle and usually make an aggregate of 1,600 to 1,500 miles every winter over the bridge paths about Washington or in the mountains of Virginia. They are the smoothest of polo grounds compared to our scramble up this volcano. The ride by daylight was even worse than that in the dark, for here we could see the



Poas Volcano - Column of Steam 500 Ft. High - Sometimes two and a half miles

dangers before us and the trail was far rougher. It was right through the mighty woods and the greater part of it consisted of steps cut out of the precipitous hills, so slippery and muddy that the ponies at times put their feet together and slid going down them. No American horse would have risked it, but these Costa Rican ponies are like goats and they seem to use their heads in their climbing. I verily believe, with the aid of Bedouin guides, that they could easily make their way up the pyramids, and Floeckher, who has never ridden before, says that he will bet money he could ride his horse up the steps inside the Washington monument or go on the trot down those of the national capitol. I doubt not he could. In some places the steps up and down are of the height of a table and often they equaled that of a chair.

**At the Crater.**  
 Nevertheless, the only time the horses held back was when we came near the crater. The air there was full of brimstone and they objected to the sulphurous fumes. Many people do not ride near the crater for that reason, but we kept on the edge of the abyss and made our way along it over a path covered with white volcanic ash. At the same time a strong wind was blowing from the lake of sulphur below. It sent the brimstone into our faces, and it was only our raincoats that kept us from being drenched by it.

Indeed, we did not have the best view of the crater, and there was no eruption during our stay. The crater is about 1,900 feet deep as we could see when the clouds lifted. Its walls are steep, ragged and seamed. At our first coming it was one great bed of clouds. A little later we could see the gorges and volcanic ash, and could make out the lake of sulphurous acid lying below. This lake is yellow at the edges and a yellowish green scum

covers the center. There is always some smoke coming out of its surface, and an eruption from near the middle of the whole lake seems to burst into the air. The noise is accompanied by rumbling, and as I have said the volume of vapor often carries with it mud and stones. The vapor often assumes the shape of an

umbrella, and the ashes have been carried out far out in the Pacific ocean. On five days it is possible to get down into the crater lake, but this was not so during our stay.

Leaving the active volcanic lake, we climbed 1,000 feet further up the mountain to the Laguna Fria or cold lake, and

there stopped for our lunch of jam, crackers, canned tongue and biscuits. The upper lake is of about the same size as the acid crater below, but the water is as pure as that of the Adirondacks, and without a sour taste. The water of the first crater tastes like strong vinegar.

**In the Tropical Mountains.**  
 I wish I could show you the vegetation through which we rode on our way over Poas. The mountain is covered with magnificent trees, some of which are as big around as a hoghead, and 150 feet high. They are mostly hardwoods, and are knotty and gnarled, with limbs twisting about in every direction. The air is so moist that the trunks are covered with moss of bright green an inch or so thick, and great boards of frosted silver moss hang from some of the branches. When the sun shines upon these they seem incrustated with diamonds.

And then the bamboos, the ferns and the palms! There were ferns of a hundred varieties, some as fine as the maiden-hair and others tree ferns, each a single stalk as big around as a man's arm at the biceps, rising to a height of fifteen or twenty feet and bursting out into lace-like green fronds at the top. There were gorgeous flowers the names of which I know not. One made me think of a cross between our golden-rod and the sunflower. The blossom of this on its long stalk was even with my eyes as I sat on my pony. I pulled some now and then. The scent was delicious.

Among the floral beauties were the orchids and other air plants. There were tens of thousands of bushels of these aristocrats of the plant world to be had for the taking. They covered the dead limbs and nestled in the joints of the live ones. Many of the trees were entirely covered by them and in some places the orchids were in flower, forming a mass of purple, yellow or white blossoms of the most exquisite shapes. There were also lianas, which fell straight from the branches hundreds of feet and rooted

themselves in the earth. There were thick vines which wrapped themselves around the huge trunks as the snakes wrap the Laocoon in the famed statue at Rome. Some of the vines had varnished leaves like the holly and some bore flowers.

The mist added to the beauty of the woods, and the perpetual dripping from the trees reminded me of the wonderful rain forest of the Victoria falls on the Zambesi, the African Niagara. There were also open places during the ride, and at these the sun came behind us and painted little rainbows on the mist. Some of the rainbows were not more than 300 feet long and I felt like whipping up my pony to find the bags of gold at their ends.

**At a Costa Rican Dairy.**  
 Coming down the mountains, we stopped at the Lecheria, outside which we had expected to sleep in our bags or, in case of rain, to have taken a bed on the boards within. It is lucky that we chose San Pedro. The rooms were filled with dirty cows and the floors were unpeppable. A sucking calf was tied on the porch of the shed, and near it a razor-backed hog sipped slop while we sipped our coffee. The milk was scarcely sanitary and the shed was not as good nor as clean as the ordinary pig pen of our country.

We made our way from here down to San Pedro and there had a fairly good dinner. It consisted of soup, an omelet, a roast chicken, a custard and a cup of hot coffee. The soup was of cheese, macaroni, rice and eggs all mixed up together, and the omelet was somewhat flat and a bit leathery. The meal was sauced with hunger, however, and it was not at all bad after our long, long day in the saddle. We slept there that night, the boards in some magic way changed by the fatigue of the ride into comfortable beds, and in the early morning rode back to Alajuela, where we now are.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

## One of Dippell's Song Birds



ALICE ZEPPELL, In the "Secret of Susanne" at the Auditorium Thursday, October 17.

## ANGRY SURF UPSETS BAPTISM

Atlantic Waves Hand a Lively Time to Pastor and His Convert.

Members of the Mount Carmel Colored Baptist church at Arverne, Long Island, met at the foot of Remington avenue, in Arverne, to see the baptism of Denmark Ford, of 21 North Carlton avenue, by Rev. I. T. Harrell, their pastor. Members of the Shiloh Colored Baptist church of Rockville Centre met at the same place for the immersion of Lucy Clary of Rockville Centre by her pastor, Rev. J. W. Dudley.

Until the time appointed for the baptismal ceremony the two converts and the members of the two congregations waiting to give them the right hand of fellowship strolled in the sunshine along the boardwalk. The candidates retired to a bathhouse and changed their garments for long, flowing robes. Their pastors then led them under the boardwalk out into the water.

Pastor Dudley, holding the hand of his candidate for baptism, went first. They encountered a heavy sea, combing the beach under the boardwalk, where ordinarily the waves lap gently. But, fearing naught, they proceeded out to where the water was waist-deep. The pastor immersed the woman once and then again, but the second time he dipped her both were caught on the crest of a big wave and the preacher lost his hold of the woman. The woman, having lost her footing, was swept seaward on the outgoing wave. After a desperate struggle the pastor caught hold of her robe and dragged her to land. — New York Times.

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