

ON HER WAY TO RANGER'S SHACK

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VIRGINIA BALLENGOES TO MOUNTAIN RETREAT

With Snooky Journey
to Sierra Cabin
Is Begun From
Woodhills.

By Virginia Ballen
II

WITH anxiety and an aching arm I took Snooky with me into the passenger car. He was as quiet as a mouse.

How often have I watched people in trains fussing over little dogs or cats or parrots hidden in baskets and thought such folk fools. That was before the day of Snooky.

Contempt is a boomerang that generally flies back to strike oneself with a sore hurt in the very place thought to be the least vulnerable.

Yet I cannot say that I felt any great sensitiveness to the glances of fellow travelers, but continued acting like an idiot over my old cat, stolid to flying shafts.

Food was pushed into the basket. Snooky kept his head down and, with a cramped hind leg, kicked the stuff compactly into a corner. A small cup of water was managed in, to spill, of course. But he received my voice with a grateful and weak mew.

"This is terrible," he said. "Will it ever end? Do you know where we are going?"

"Somewhere in the mountains of Fresno, Snooky. Somewhere in a Ranger Station high in the pines. There is a stove in the house, Snooky, and an open fireplace, and if our furniture isn't broken into kindling wood we shall be very comfortable.

"And, Snooky, unthinkingly I told you a fib about the stream otter. I remember now that it never paws fish out of the water, but pursues food swimming after it under the surface, and a cat would never learn that method.

VIRGINIA BALLENGOES, who for several years has charmed Bulletin readers by her fascinating nature studies, is braving the rigors of winter in a forest ranger's shack in the Sierras and will report to the United States Forest Service the result of her studies of insect life and problems of forestration.

Mrs. Ballen will send out by courier, across the waste of snow, a series of articles to The Bulletin. Her thousands of readers may be assured that they will constitute a nature and adventure serial of absorbing interest.

Mrs. Ballen's work, which possesses both scientific value and popular interest, came to the attention of the United States Forest Service and arrangements for her to spend the winter in a ranger's cabin in the mountains near Auberry, in the western section of the Sierra Nevada forest, were made. With the great wilderness stretching about her, Mrs. Ballen is now busily at work searching out the secrets that lie under the snow and in the heart of the deep forest.

Never mind, the little Spotted Skunk may, if you keep yourself hidden, show you how to paw up fish; for once in the Santa Cruz mountains the little Spotted Skunk dipped all the trout out of a pan on the porch and left wet forefoot tracks to tell of his thievery."

The cat had had some experiences with skunks. A disgusted sneeze from him at this moment must have meant that the skunk left more than tracks to tell of his presence.

A stop overnight at San Francisco was necessary, partly to rest and feed the harassed cat. But a reunion of relatives and friends in a small room on Post street was not soothing to Snooky's nerves. Two young girls shrieking and laughing sent him crouching wild-eyed under the bed. And some older girls acted no saner. We got

Much Difficulty Has
to Be Overcome
at Outset of
Journey.

him a chicken bone and milk. With much petting and coaxing he politely sniffed and licked, one or two laps, then looked up. "Was the journey ended?" No—"then he would not feast."

Snooky had harked back to the instinct of the wild, which is to eat sparingly or not at all while traveling. He did not have to hark very far.

He was always a woods cat, only coming into the house for an hour or two to visit with his mistress, only flying into the shelter of her rooms during his first thunder storm, only sleeping on her bed in the rainiest winter nights.

He played a little and purred sonorously and stretched his tired limbs and complained good-naturedly about the discomforts of traveling.

Yet the adventure of the thing was getting him. A basket was a safe place after all.

Snorting monsters hadn't caught him. Teeth-loosening bumps hadn't broken his bones. His teeth were still in, his claws were in good condition and loving hands had brushed his ruffled fur smooth with an old hairbrush.

He went to sleep dreaming of pines and little new mammals playing over rocks and white rivers and wonderful scenery and an open fire in a lone Ranger's cabin and of the good things his mistress would feed him with when they were settled and at home.

(To Be Continued.)

BEET GROWERS