

DON'T KEEP FOREVER on a public road... following one after the other like a flock of sheep. Leave the beaten track occasionally and dive into the woods. Every time you do so you will be certain to find something that you have never seen before." Those words—written by Alexander Graham Bell, my grandfather, in a 1914 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC—ran through my mind like a prophecy as we made a "dive into the woods" from the rushing sparkle of California's Redwood Creek.

Miles from manicured parklands and trails, we climbed logs head high and mossy green. Fallen branches made uncertain footing, splitting explosively under a man's weight.

Quickly the forest changed to a somber mood: an almost subterranean dimness. I raised my eyes; like a limitless view of the ocean or a night sky filled with stars, this wilderness of great trees stretched upward and away to infinity.

Overhead, a bar of golden sunlight slanted into our wooded world, treating leaves like stained glass, etching the texture of ribbed bark, finding Gothic gargoyles in the burls. I reached out to touch the dry, coarse bark of a great redwood.

Visitors always want to touch the redwoods," said Howard A. Libbey, my host and president of the Arcata Redwood Company, owner of this grove in Humboldt County. Now I knew why: Only by touching them can we be sure that these marvels are real.

Apparently the wonder remains even for those who know the redwoods best. I watched as this man, a 40-year veteran of the forests, moved toward another big tree—and spread his hand across its bark.

Forest Giants Set New Records

A voice called us back to important business. "The surveyors have good news!" It was Dr. Paul A. Zahl, senior naturalist of the National Geographic Society, who had hurried ahead to talk with the team of surveyors measuring these giant coast redwoods for us.

The news was good indeed. It confirmed the National Geographic Society discovery that Dr. Zahl describes this month: finding the world's tallest known living things (page 10).

Here, in a hidden valley, Paul Zahl had found—just days earlier—the monarch of all trees, a coast redwood measuring an incredible 367.8 feet. Moreover, the forest cathedral that we now reverently explored also held the second, third, and sixth tallest trees—giants just as awesome as the world's champion (list, page 16). Two of these record redwoods were found by Chester



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World's Tallest Tree Discovered

By MELVILLE BELL GROSVENOR
President and Editor, National Geographic Society

Photographs by
GEORGE F. MOBLEY
National Geographic Staff

C. Brown, leader of a National Park Service—National Geographic Society research project.

Dr. Zahl's report offers us a sharp challenge: Within the United States, the Age of Discovery has not yet receded into history. Lewis and Clark, Boone and Frémont have left us an exciting legacy, but their explorations did not strip away all mystery from our familiar world.

I first began to wonder about taller, undiscovered trees when, with Conrad L. Wirth, then Director of the National Park Service, I visited the scene of a great natural disaster: California's

(Continued on page 8)

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A GREAT NAME IN



KODACHROMES, PAGES 2-7, BY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHER GEORGE F. MOBLEY © N.G.S.

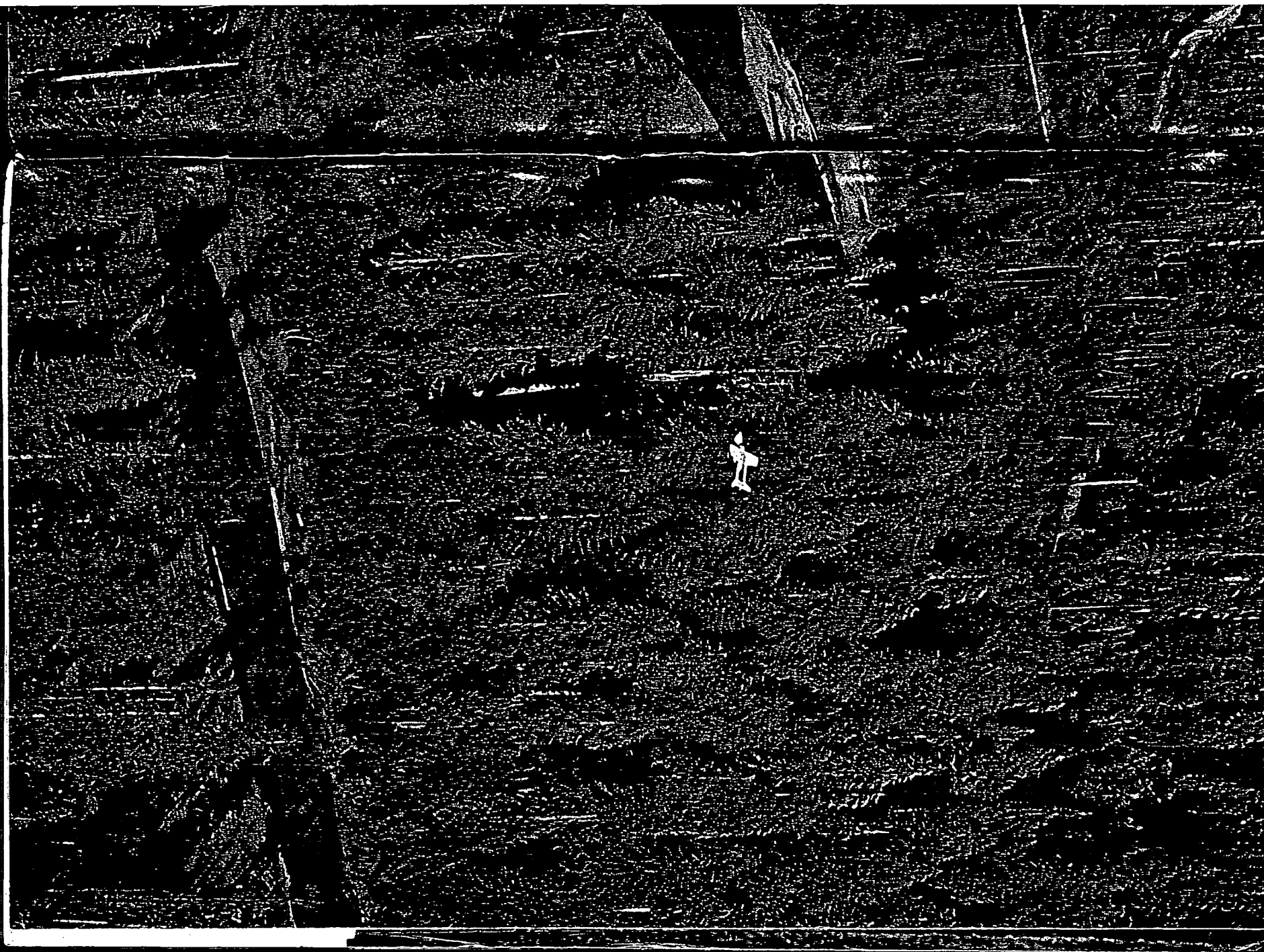
Glen of Giants

explored by Dr. Paul A. Zahl, naturalist of the National Geographic Society senior staff, lies along Redwood Creek in northern California's Humboldt County. Here coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) grow taller than any other living thing yet found by man. Crowns of the loftiest trees soar more than 367 feet above the rushing waters. The tallest lifts its slender spire from a clump that appears just to the left of the airplane. Third tallest also stands within the creek bend, and the second tallest rises a short distance downstream, just out of the photograph at top (map, page 8). The champion's trunk, still expanding, indicates it may be only 400 to 800 years old.

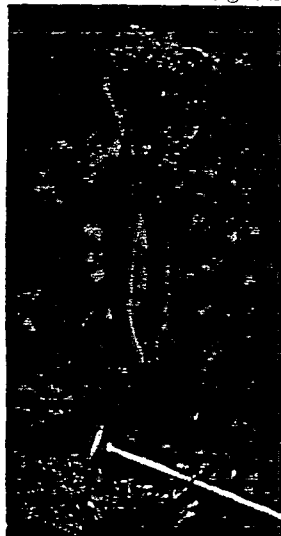
Though the trees grow within ten miles of the coast, their record height went unnoticed until Dr. Zahl spied them from the partly cleared slope at left. Georgia-Pacific loggers, who built the road, spared some trees. Seedlings and sprouts now are rapidly covering the slope.

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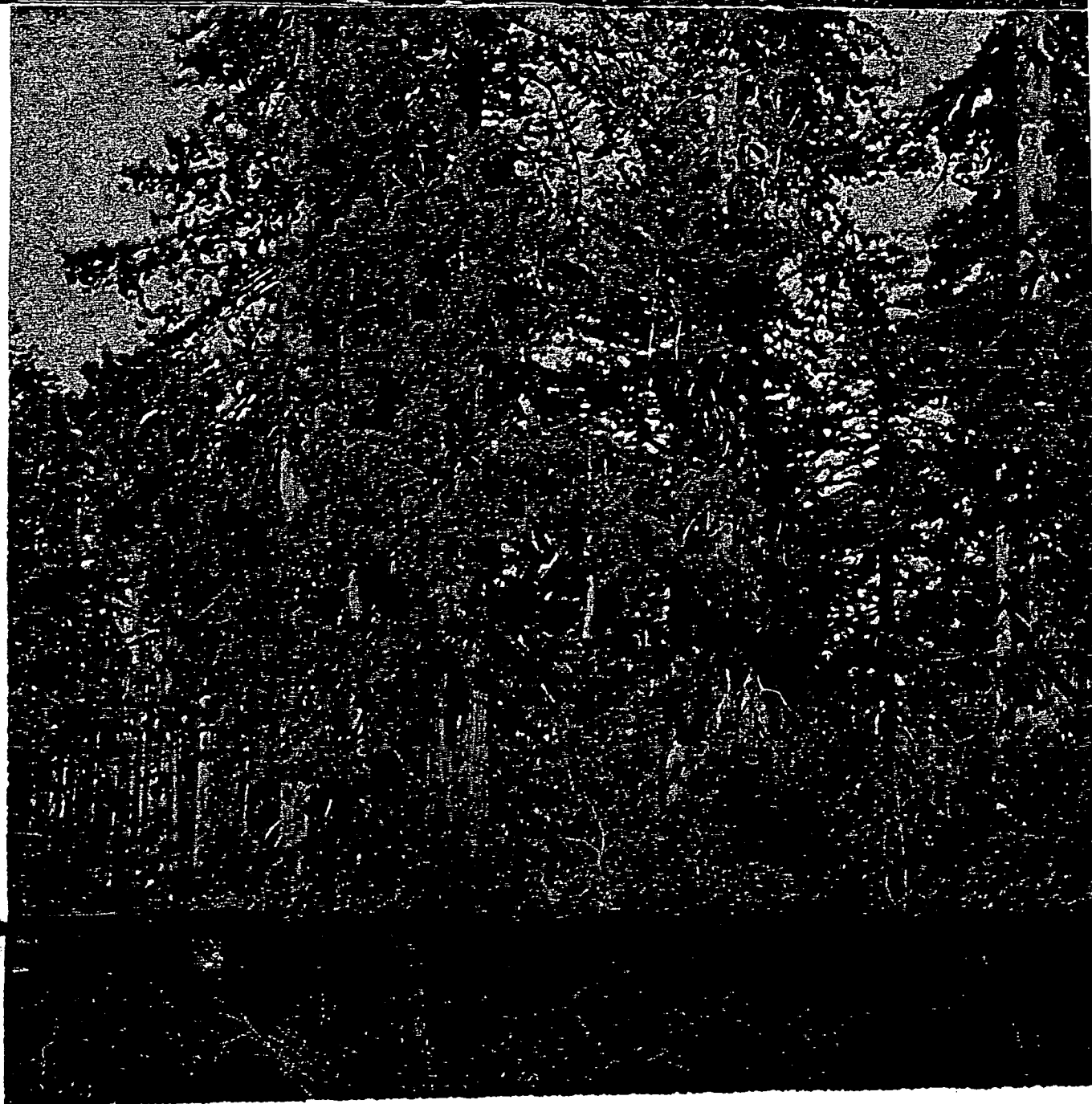
KODACHROME BY PAUL A. ZAHL © N.G.S.



Redwood seedling, a few weeks old, is not much bigger than the common pin at its roots. It still wears the blossomlike husk on whose wings the seed fluttered down from a cone high above.

NEW CHAMPION, 367.8 feet, soars well above its fellows. Until discovery of the Redwood Creek titans, the 356.5-foot Rockefeller Tree in Humboldt Redwoods State Park claimed the record.

Men standing on the bank

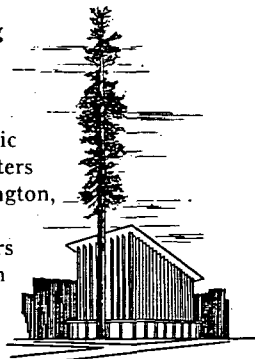


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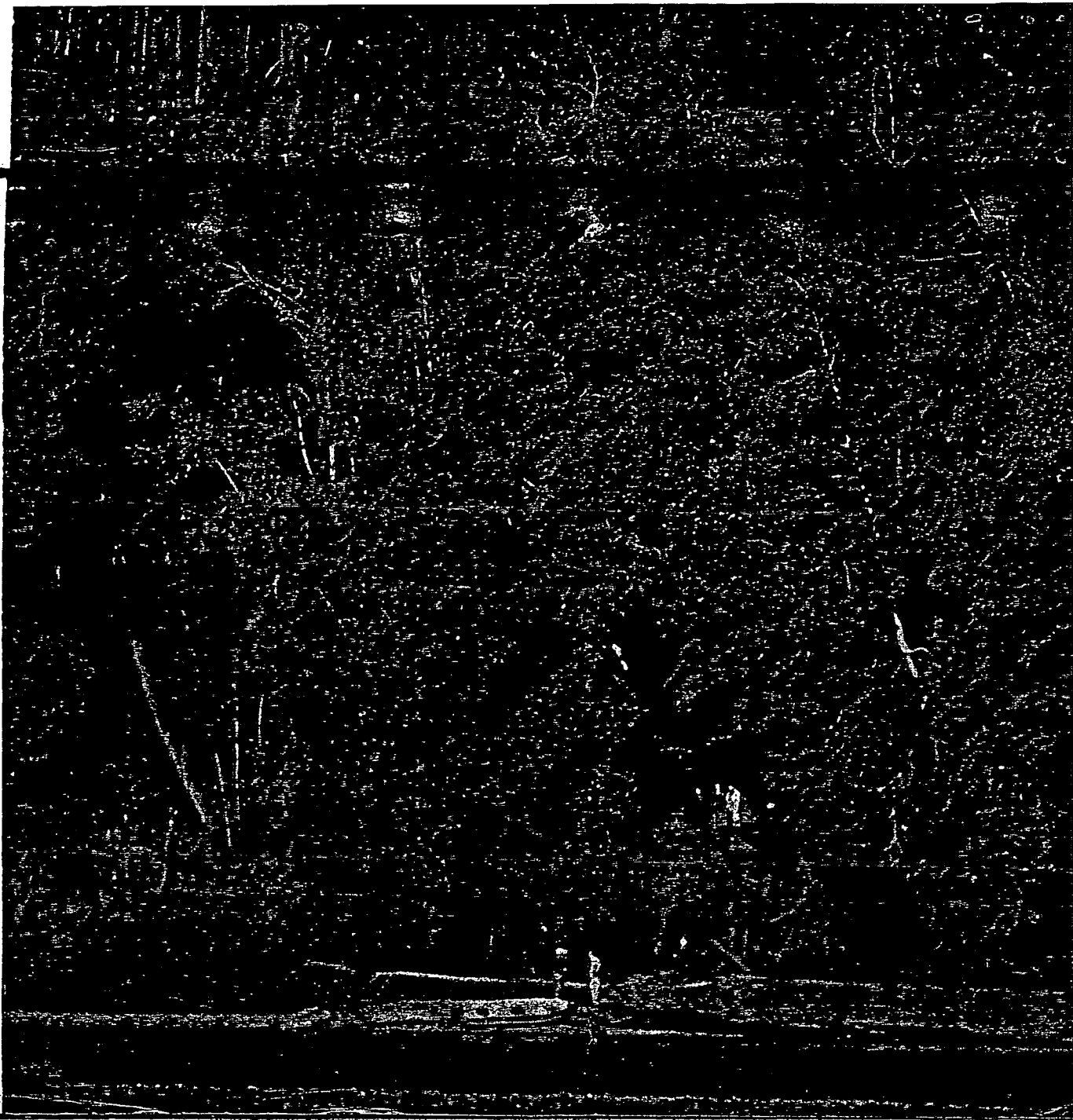
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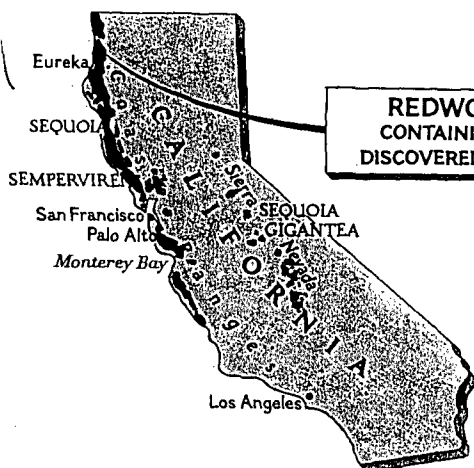
Men standing on the bank 75 feet in front of the giant include Howard A. Libbey, President of Arcata Redwood Company, owner of the tract, and Dr. Melville Bell Grosvenor, National Geographic Society President and Editor. The two discussed means of preserving the grove.

Dwarfing the new 10-story National Geographic headquarters in Washington, the tallest tree towers more than twice as high.

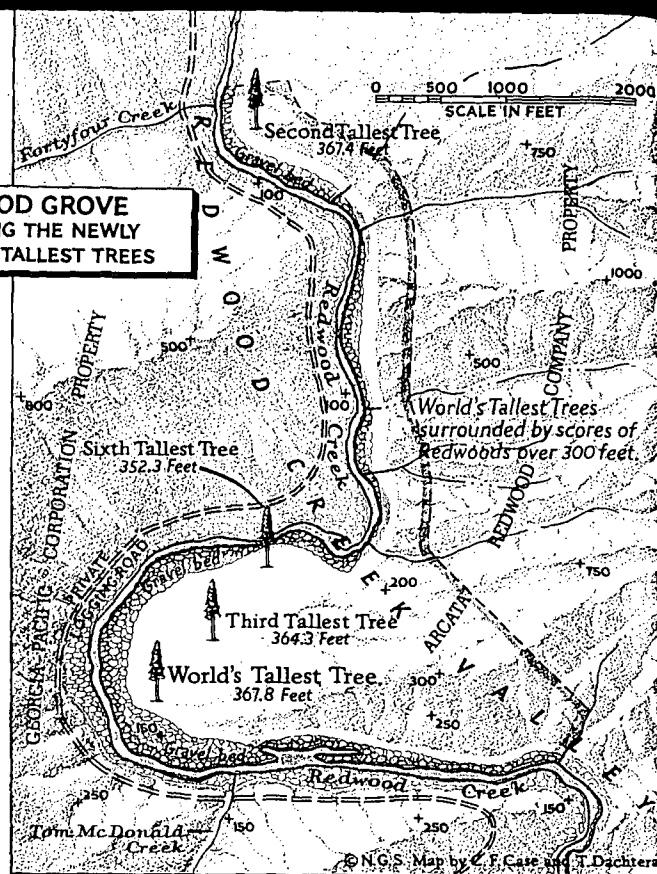


*The Tallest
Tree
in the World*





Home of tall trees, a heavily forested tract on the east bank of Redwood Creek in northern California contains the world's first, second, third, and sixth highest specimens. Private logging road of the Georgia-Pacific Corporation provides the only way in.



Bull Creek, in Humboldt Redwoods State Park. There a single flood in 1955 caused the loss of hundreds of towering coast redwoods. Disasters of this sort had prompted Dr. Wirth to obtain, in March, 1963, a grant from the National Geographic Society to study the coast redwoods and their environment. All of us hoped that knowledge gained from this survey would help prevent similar losses in the future.

Study Sparks Search for Taller Trees

To launch the study, several of us from the Park Service and National Geographic Society made a survey trip through the redwood country and visited Rockefeller Forest along Bull Creek. There I gazed upward at the overwhelming 356.5-foot tree, considered then to be the tallest in the world.

"Do you think this really is the tallest tree?" I asked park rangers. "Could there be others even taller?"

"Perhaps," said one chap. "We just don't know what may be hidden in those valleys to the north and east. I would bet there are taller trees."

The prospect was tantalizing. I knew that the men engaged in the study would be visiting those little-known valleys in future weeks. Paul Zahl had already been assigned to range

the Redwood Empire for an up-to-date article and pictures for your magazine.

"Keep your eyes open," I advised. "It would be wonderful to find a record-breaker."

They did. A few months later Paul Zahl called me from California with extraordinary news: "I think I've found the world's tallest tree," he said.

Dr. Zahl had come upon a great grove with a number of contenders for the record. Preliminary measurements indicated heights well over 360 feet. These trees stood beside Redwood Creek on an Arcata Redwood Company tract. Professional surveyors soon would be making final, definitive measurements. I promptly caught a plane to see for myself.

Our first business was to notify Howard Libbey of Arcata. Like other farsighted lumbermen, Mr. Libbey and his associates had been cooperating with our redwoods study.

"Mr. Libbey," I said, "we believe that your company owns the tallest tree in the world—the Mount Everest of all living things."

The response was electric: "On Arcata property?" With enthusiasm he called other Arcata executives.

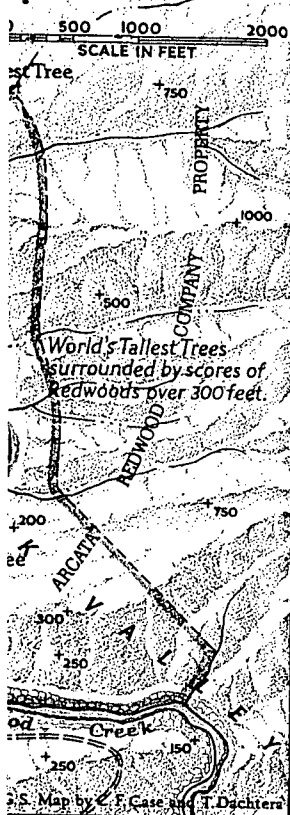
And when should we visit the grove to take final measurements? "Right away! How about tomorrow morning?"

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ging roads, through miles of mountainous timber, then across open spaces of young second growth. Finally, with dramatic suddenness, we came to the bright waters of Redwood Creek.

The view inspired pure silence.

Throughout the world, it has been my good fortune to see many dramatic panoramas: Fuji by moonlight, the Grand Canyon, the Taj Mahal—each is superlative in its own way. Yet for sheer impact, the view of the magnificent grove and Redwood Creek Valley compares with any one of these.

Viewing Easy Along Redwood Creek

Here crystal waters flex into a sweeping bend of stream with a margin of gravel beach. And from the rich flatlands just beyond rise the heavy red columns of living trees that soar up, up—as eyes and spirits lift—into the deep sky itself. Other groves of coast redwoods present a viewing problem; the higher trees often crowd far into the forest, where it is impossible to see them from base to crown. But here the redwoods stand forth in their full vertical splendor.

We crossed the stream on bobbing rubber

rafts and scuffed ashore. The tallest of the grove's trees was a curiously forked redwood. Perhaps the shorter trunk had braced the taller one for its prodigious growth. Watery ripples of reflected sunlight danced on the massive lower trunk, and blackened bark told of long-dead forest fires and the healing force of nature.

All day we explored the idyllic grove. When the surveyors' computations were complete, we returned to the great forked tree: It was the new world's champion—367.8 feet tall!

I learned much about forests that day. Howard Libbey told of his company's tree-farm techniques: the way helicopters are used to reseed logged land, the building of dams to prevent erosion, the new milling techniques that make better use of each log.

Unsurprisingly, it was Mr. Libbey who provided one of the truly stirring moments of that memorable day on Redwood Creek. After a long view of the grove, he turned to me with great feeling.

"Someday," he said, "I hope this grove can be opened to the public and preserved for future generations." * * *

Sunlight and shadow dapple forest foliage beside Redwood Creek as Arthur B. Hanson, General Counsel of the National Geographic Society, emerges from the grove of giant trees.

KODACHROME BY MELVILLE BELL GROSVENOR © N.G.S.

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