

Rosa-Maye in the Bighorns

Edited by Trail End State Historic Site Superintendent Cynde Georgen; from *Trail End Notes*, April 2011

In September 1926, John Kendrick campaigned throughout Wyoming in support of Democratic Governor Nellie Tayloe Ross, then running for reelection. Much to her own surprise, Kendrick's daughter, Rosa-Maye, was enlisted as driver. The following excerpts related to the Big Horn Mountain portion of the trip are from her memoirs and diary entries.



Rosa-Maye Kendrick at Trail End, c1918 (Hoff Collection, TESHHS)

“It all happened at the breakfast table this morning, and ‘I’ve only myself to blame’ for any disastrous consequences that may arise. We had planned (Father and I) to go to Jackson by train, a trip involving two days and nights duration. We had discussed the possibility of going by car (the tang of autumn in the air and the brief beauty of autumn weighed heavily in the balance), but there were mountains to be crossed, long stretches of gumbo roads to be traversed (bottomless in rainy season) and an iron-bound schedule to be observed which brooked no delay. The train was safer, and besides: who would drive for us should we decide in favor of the car?

“It was at this juncture, when wisdom and necessity seemed to point conclusively to the train, that I, with the smell of two days’ dust and train smoke already in my nostrils, proclaimed: ‘If the year were younger, and if I had any experience with country driving or with the minor mysteries of the car, I would drive for you!’ That was all I ever said or needed to say! A gleam in my Father’s eyes gave eloquently his decision: ‘We take the car!’

“Our decision to cross the mountains at Buffalo, instead of proceeding along the highway to Casper, was as sudden and reckless as our decision to come by car. We left at noon, skimming along the base of the Big Horn Mountains on a broad white road that bespoke assurance. But when in mid-afternoon we headed up a Canyon with intent to traverse the grim old Giants,

range by range, before nightfall, I experienced my first misgivings. The breeze had an ominous feel that I didn't like and the clouds were marshalling their hosts.

"They stood in battle array against the great top range, shielding them from the gaze of mortals. They pressed down and leered at us as we skimmed across broad mountain meadows, where cattle grazing knee deep in tawny grass lifted their heads to gaze in slow wonderment as we flashed by. We couldn't feel entirely discouraged because of the Aspens. Against the dark timbered slope and valley side the little Aspen thickets gleamed like sparks; so intense a yellow that their foliage seemed verily to give off light and heat as we passed by. They were the only bright spots of the cheerless landscape.

"Our little car wound its way over rocky ledges and across steep valleys lined with pine and fir, making its way painfully toward Big Muddy Pass [now Powder River Pass]. On one high curve we caught a glimpse of the Basin slope of the mountain gleaming a faint luminous pink in the evening sunshine. We accepted this vision as an omen of fair weather and were encouraged. [Big] Muddy Pass is in itself an adventure. A pile of rock (shattered into fragments by the elements) blocks the way, and on its slope against the skyline stands a single tree; a dwarf pine, its back to the torturing winds lifting its deformed branches in a gesture of despair.

"Night put us in Tensleep Canyon. One moment she allowed us to marvel at its cliffs multihued like the rainbow, then softly she spread her mauve veil over this masterpiece of nature and we felt our way down in [the] dark, toward a cluster of lights on the plain marked Tensleep.

"The next day we left the Big Horns a blue haze on the horizon behind us and headed into a picture book country of badland hills; patterns of yellow, pink and grey like a vast crazy quilt spread over innumerable knees. This was beautiful country but desolate, devoid of all vegetation but the Salt Sage and of life but the jackrabbit. Down again into the purple valley of the Big Horn River – not just any ordinary river, but verily a chieftain among rivers with a chieftain's reward. In the home of its birth far up on the Rockies' side it is known as the Wind River and nurtured by their mighty snows it leaps toward the plain like a young brave eager for battle and there encounters the Big Horn Range coiled like a giant snake disputing its path.

"A lesser river might be turned aside to seek a circuitous course around the mountains. Not so this young river; furiously it cleaves its way twice through the body of its adversary; it splits through the tail of the serpent in a narrow and terrible canyon, but the head it severs entirely to form Pryor Mountain standing aloof from its parent chain.

"[It] now has recognized its powers, and from the moment that the river surges victorious from its first encounter with the Big Horn Mountains, it proudly bears their name."



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