

## Roosey the Elk

We were returning from a family trip to the Northwest when a patch of sunshine in a meadow filled with ferns caught my eye along Highway 101 through the Redwoods in Northern California. We had been traveling for several hours and it was time for a break, anyway.

The California State Department of Parks and Recreation had recently constructed a hiking trail along a small stream near a turn-out. The area enticed us to take a longer break than normal and follow the trail through the forest. The area in the middle of the redwoods was magnificent, filled with trees thousands of years old, hundreds of feet high, and dozens of feet in diameter.

We followed the trail made of redwood bark toward a bridge constructed from an eight-foot diameter log that had fallen across a stream flowing parallel to a gap in the trees. The Parks Department had sawn steps in the ends of the log and added hand rails, making the bridge safe for small children. All four children, my wife and I, clambered across the log, passing large, green ferns and a clear, gurgling stream to the other side. It was like a scene out the Hobbit.

On the other side of the stream the trail led several hundred yards through giant ferns toward a sun-dappled meadow. My son Daniel asked if he could run on ahead to find what was beyond the ferns. The entire scene in the early evening sun was so beautiful, I couldn't imagine anything could go wrong, so I gave him permission to run on ahead while the rest of us followed more slowly behind.

The gigantic trees began to thin somewhat as we made our way upstream. My family looked like a line of worker ants strung out along the trail. Suddenly, Daniel came rushing back down the trail yelling, "Dad, there's a monster out there! There's a monster out there!" He had passed our youngest daughter who had followed him into the meadow and had by now also reversed direction.

"What do mean, there's a monster?" I asked nervously, knelling down to get more information about what was out there. I wondered if it might be a bear or a mountain lion in the meadow ahead.

"He's gigantic, and has big horns, Dad! I ran right into the side of him, and he just turned and looked at me! And, he was munching on the grass!"

I wasn't surprised that Daniel might have run into something because he tended to run with his head down, not watching where he was going. He had a large head for his body when he was young. I was relieved to hear that whatever was out there, was eating grass. It apparently wasn't carnivorous. About that time Laura, our youngest daughter, about four, came walking through the ferns and rejoined the family. Good, at least we were all back together again.

I moved to the head of the line and began slowly creeping toward the meadow ahead, my family following behind. I tried to peer over the ferns, but they were too tall. As I cautiously snuck to the edge of the meadow and looked past the remaining few ferns, I could finally see the entire panorama before me.

Nearest to me was a large bull Roosevelt elk with a rack of at least a dozen points. Beyond him was his harem of about twenty female elk grazing contentedly beneath a grove of beautiful redwood trees. I didn't see a single monster in sight. But, if I had been a six-year old, who had run into the side of a twelve-point bull elk, I would have thought I'd seen a monster too!