

Poetry Excerpts from

On The Stanislaus: A Stream of Life

Poetry & Photography
Celebrating the Stanislaus River
From the Sierra Crest to the Central Valley

by

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...Crossing Skunk and Wolf Gulch,

The canyon wider bisecting an ancient

River of fire turned stone

A thousand feet above on both ridges,

V's cut into lava and granite by an

Early Stanislaus

Then Parrotts Ferry

Early crossing by cable pulling timbers

Now on concrete almost natural

Tomorrow on high suspension over

Miles of stilled river

Parrotts: Favored spot for thousands yearly –
 White rapids in winter-spring to
 Slow green, blue currents in summer-fall
 Delicately changing fine white sand and obese
 Boulders ground in time to the sun and water's
 Dance of Mica: "fools gold" for happy fools in
 Love with non-gold

River fed yellow and gray pines

black and green live oaks

gold-lime willows

dragonflies mayflies butterflies

garter snakes kingsnakes gopher snakes

spiders ladybugs katydids

lizards crayfish minnows trout

bluejays robins sparrows

squirrels dogs

men women children raised or reduced to the

common use and need for

the stream of life at

Parrotts

Leaving

Smooth lipped reflections

Churned to white water

Scooping channels

Eroding, depositing new and old banks

Forming new paths past secluded beaches

Sheltered by rock walls -- million years old

Gray-blue sediments rayed white by

Aplite dikes

Flowing by crumbling concrete walls
Once capturing river water
For downstream mills long since faded
Into dry golden hills

Past Deadman's Bar at the mouth of his gulch
To Quail Gulch, Devils Canyon and
Horseshoe Bend's curving white fans of sand for
Spawning salmon before chains of dams
Choking instinct

Downstream to Norwegian Gulch and mine
Supplying Black Bart's folly and highwayman-poet's
Career to an end in Copperopolis shipment holdup

To Coyote Creek and the broken trestles of Melones --
Twenty miles of flumes for rock pounding stamp mills,
Crooked arms crushing ore for amalgamation, filtration of
It's wealth to waste pumped to a white mountain grave three
Million tons high --
Bleached dead earth from the
"Glory Holes" of Carson Hill

Melones Named by Mexican miners for its
 Melon seed-like nuggets
 “Slumgullion”, by Muddy miners
 “Roaring Camp”, by newcomer dudes the
 Likes of Bret Harte

 Its Robinson Ferry carrying
 Mark Twain from Jackass Hill to
 Angels Camp and
 The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

Melones Now shambles and shacks and
 Rusting iron on concrete ruins --
 From mining claim to
 The Carson Hill Gold Mining Company producing
 One hundred twenty six million dollars to
 A California State Historic Monument along a stream
 Immune to history but not
 Dams...

Why Dam

The eternal waters swirl over stone and
Bright fluid mouths spring to the silver tongues
of light rain;
A logging truck clatters across concrete bridge and
moans black trails up the canyon grade.

River grass reeds sway and play the current's music
in visual harmony;
A hiker stops, looks, then sprays hot yellow urine
into blue coldness, and watches the rising steam;

A rainbow trout jumps and flashes his colors proud
 against cloud broken sun,
 A B-52 jets through sound, creates its boom and
 rocks the river peace,

And my son Mark, age ten, building sand dams destroyed by a bucket's deluge, looks up and ask, "Dad, why are they damming the river?"

The River Revisited

I follow the familiar curves
To the first that
Shows the canyon,
Once a river canyon,
Now a backwater sink
Scaling limb and cliff –
No longer the riparian greens or
Mica dance in crystal waters

So different now
Just another pale brown-green
Ringed body of
Death

Today

Today another river runs gold.
The sun gains
Its loss to winter,
Glow the black oak's turn
And runs this river gold.

A light wind lifts
Water to the rhythms of
The quaking aspen,
The surface breaks its
Mirror to shake like
Fur on a scared cat, but

I hold today --
Hold the gold of
This offering to
Pay the balance of
Tomorrow.

At Parrotts Ferry

Sleek swirling stream
Flashing into white
Boiling your way
Into placid pools
Overflowing in foam
Roaming to running
Ripples chorusing your
Paths through fine
Polished stone,

I

bow

and

Drink your
Water

Rock Art Prayer

Bathed icons of
River/Sun Gods,

Glow hope through
eternal lined eyes,
Show the secret shared with
the grass spear's edge
and
the leaf's faint vein

Reflect your light bright
Burning through glass eyes,
Heat your skin noon heat white
Burning bare city toes alive

Grow gold-orange in late sun
Making the grass greener and
the water clearer,
Let none pass with
the arrogant stride of
ignorance

All Under

It's all under now
All under,
The white-green swirls
Around granite
Ground to mica sparkles --
The shimmers through lucent
Pools reflecting Easter
Grass banks lining
Trails to warm sands --
All under,
This Parrotts Ferry
Grown into my being
Like gold veins
Quartz

The nightmare death
Stares bold --
Its back water rings
Heavy around once
Live oak, pine and willow
Reaching for sun to
Dry rotting roots,
Leaves white-brown
Soon drifting
Skeleton
Limbs

White curves of sand
Sink to mud silt
Its stench replaces
Riparian scent

Ten thousand years of Indian
Life and lore vanish
Along century old gold rush
Ruins Above
A new bridge looms
High in triumph

The lower river drowns
The upper canyon waits,
Nine miles of river
Remains running free

Remembering Parrotts Ferry

We climbed, jumped the
Familiar shore upstream over
Giant Speckled Boulders as
Big as the energy that
Rolled them then
Waded hot burning feet into
Icy water churning white under
Parrotts Ferry Bridge

We glided bodies over
Slick rounded stones and
Dove into currents pulling
Deep under to see
Crystal water revealed riverbeds
Where a rainbow trout
Might glance an arm,
A red willow fern
May wave its color

We broke surface for
Breath above frothy caps,
Aimed toward rock
Islands shining sun to
Warm bellies and backs,
Allowed minds to wonder/wander
On the River's Song, its
Cyclic metaphors of life,
Till again too hot

And hands knifed cold rapids
Between submerged giants,
With legs kicking strong
Through rock channels to reach
Golden White Mica
Sands