

TABITHA SOREN

Lindsey, 2012
pigment print, 46 x 60 in



credit: Kopeikin Gallery, Los Angeles

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Into the Woods A Tale of a Trail in the Sierra

I rented one from REI. When I saw the size, I balked.

“You expect me to carry that? In my pack?”

The REI saleslady shrugged. It made no difference to her. The bear canister was squat and roughly twelve inches round, and intransigent in its inability to be folded or rolled or just squashed into my backpack. Packing for five days is difficult enough if you haven’t done it before; you take advantage of every unclaimed corner in your pack. The canister would have none of it. It sat there, stolid in the dead center of my pack, and forced me to work around it.

I was preparing for a five-day backpacking trip with four people I didn’t know well—or at all—to a place called Wheeler Lake located in the mid-belt of the Sierras. I did not have most of the equipment. I borrowed a one-person tent from my sister. My sleeping bag was intended for car-camping. My pack was a hand-me-down from a male friend who is much taller than I am. Now I was shopping for a bear canister.

“You know, that’s your food. Your food is *in* there,” said my husband cautiously. “It’s not ‘taking up’ room.” He arranged the food in the canister while I watched, feeling intimidated and overwhelmed.

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I left San Francisco and drove down Highway 4, which cuts through the Central Valley and the small towns left behind in the wake of the Gold Rush. Copperopolis, a town famous for having no gold, boasted a large sign just outside the city limits. “Copperopolis!” it read, as if that explained everything. A newly redone section of its downtown was visible, complete with the same set of historic attractions that Gold Country towns use to attract Bay Area out-of-towners: preserved apothecaries, an ancient Wells Fargo with iron shutters hanging on its crumpled exterior, dusty and rambling hotels, and the local history museum. These tourist attractions rehash the endorsed version of the mining culture that took root throughout the southern mine region of the California mother lode. The narrative proceeds like this: we found gold—or copper—and took all we could get. Now and then the elderly docents, who are less invested in the sanitized version of the Gold Rush, will go off script with refreshing candor.