



MOONLETTER

Valley of the Moon Natural History Association, Spring 2005

Save the date!!

MARCH 5

Reading Group
Lou Leal 10 am

APRIL 2

Bouverie Preserve
Dave Chalk is arranging a tour of the preserve.

APRIL 23

Historic Sonoma Hike
Clay and Susan Drake are arranging a hike in the historic town of Sonoma.

MAY 14

Luther Burbank Home and Gardens
Laurie O'Hare is arranging a wonderful tour of Luther Burbank's home and gardens.

JUNE 18

Jack London Film with Barbara Spear at Old Winery Ruins,
view the film and enjoy the discussion, time to be announced.

FAREWELL TO TED MOGEL

~By Al Stumpf

Ted Mogel was the President of VMNHA in 2004, when he passed away after complications from surgery. Ted was one of our most active docents, leading nature hikes and school hikes. He was also very active volunteering for the Robert Ferguson Observatory at Sugarloaf Ridge Park.



On February 5, more than 100 people – family members, docents and former colleagues- came to Kenwood to say goodbye to Ted at St. Patrick's Church. After the service, the group met at the Kenwood Railroad Depot to enjoy a light supper in an elegant setting thanks to the hard work of Joyce and a group of volunteers she recruited to set up chairs and tables, decorate the tables and serve food and wine.

We will miss Ted and extend our condolences and best wishes to his widow, Janet.

PANEL PROJECT UPDATE by Al Stumpf

The design of the first three interpretive panels for the Beauty Ranch is nearing completion.

BEAUTY RANCH OVERVIEW panel will be just beyond the picnic area where the trail begins to descend towards the cottage. It will interpret Jack London's overall philosophy about farming and ranching.

BARNs panel will be placed between the Sherry Barn and the Manure Barn to interpret the use of horses and manure in the London period

PIG PALACE PANEL will be at the entrance to the Pig Palace and interpret the philosophy and history of the Pig Palace.

NEW EXHIBIT PLANNED FOR BEAUTY RANCH DISTILLERY

By District Interpretive Specialist Karen Barrett

California State Parks staff is working with an exhibit vendor on plans to open the Distillery to the public in order to exhibit original horse-drawn farm equipment used in the development and operation of Jack London's Beauty Ranch. The Distillery is a stone building dating to 1888 and located in Jack London State Historic Park. The project calls for exhibiting and interpreting at least ten pieces of London's farm equipment. The exhibit will include the massive Water Wagon which is now on exhibit in the Sherry Barn. An opening date has not been set but it is expected that the project will be completed this year.

The primary focus of the exhibit is to show the farm equipment and tell the story of its use in the development of the Beauty Ranch. The exhibit will consist of motion activated lighting that shuts off after visitors leave, ambient lighting in a style reminiscent of the 1905-1916 ranch era and lighting to highlight and facilitate the reading of six interpretive exhibit panels. Visitors will enter the building on an accessible route of travel with a barrier between the viewing area and the selected farm equipment.

The contract was awarded to the exhibit firm of Lewellen and Best. Project Manager, District Interpretive Specialist Karen Barrett is working closely with the Beauty Ranch Interpretive Panel team of Al Stumpf, Lou Leal, Sheryl Lawton and Greg Hayes on the project. State Park Maintenance Supervisor John Larroque and State Park Curator Carol Dodge and others are also lending their expertise. The voters of California passed Proposition 40: the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 in March, 2002. Proposition 40 funds were identified in the bond to fund this and other interpretive exhibit projects.

REFURNISHING THE COTTAGE MAY RESULT IN BIG CHANGES AT HOUSE OF HAPPY WALLS

By Al Stumpf

Now that the physical restoration of the cottage has been completed, a team of State Parks specialists from Sacramento has started the long-awaited re-furnishing of the cottage. Under this project, the cottage will be furnished with artifacts and furniture to appear as it might have looked when the Londons returned from a voyage around 1912. With the exception of the "video room" where we now have the television set, all of the rooms will feature exhibits. The video room will become the reception area, with a desk for a member of the staff or a docent, it will also feature some merchandise we sell. Some artifacts and furniture will be purchased – a piano has already been purchased and placed in the stone kitchen building; some will be recreated, and some will be removed from the House of Happy Walls.

Once the team starts to move artifacts, the cottage will be closed to the public until the project is completed. After the cottage reopens, the public will no longer be allowed to roam freely through the building; instead, we will organize guided tours in order to protect the building and the artifacts.

Obviously, the removal of artifacts from the House of Happy Walls will reduce the attractiveness of the museum to visitors. Unfortunately, there appears to be no funding or any plan to refurnish the museum to keep it a viable museum.

Additional staffing has been requested: a Museum Technician and a State Park Guide. The positions are under consideration by the State. We will have to wait and see where volunteer staffing will be needed.

GRANDMOTHER REDWOOD

by Deborah P. Collins

Once upon a time, years before I became a docent, I bought an annual state park pass. It was a super deal that year, less than \$40. So that was the year we tried to go to as many parks as possible, and I remember one time going up to Jack London and happening onto a guided hike. We walked past the Beauty Ranch, up to the lake, and the guide asked us if we wanted to continue the hike just past the park boundaries to see something really special, a big old redwood.

This tree was somewhat of a secret because, although the coast redwood is the tallest living thing in the world, this particular tree was more wide than tall. The guide speculated it may have lost its top to a fire or what-have-you, but the result was that it didn't tower over the forest canopy and make its presence known from far away. Still, he said, lots of people liked to come and pay their respects to "Grandmother Redwood." The irony was, however, that if too many people came up to the tree, compacting the ground over time could kill this magnificent specimen. (As he was saying this, a group of horse riders came by, which reinforced his point).

Our guide also mentioned a further 'secret' hike that led to an abandoned orchard that supposedly still bore fruit. Now this orchard and the 'Big Tree,' as I have heard it called, are part of Jack London SHP.

After hearing about that acquisition from the Sonoma Development Center, I immediately thought of what our guide had told us. Fortunately, steps had already been taken and the Big Tree is now fenced off and has the following signage:

Ancient Redwood, "Grandmother Redwood"

Please honor this ancient tree by not walking under it and compacting its root zone. Shallow rooted redwood trees create their own sponge-like forest floors to take advantage of fog drip in the dry summer months; walking in the immediate proximity of these trees results in compaction damage that can endanger the health of the trees. Thanks you for your consideration of this tree's well being.

At the most recent cottage training session, new docent Zelda Bettman proposed leading a hike up to the Big Tree on March 5, stopping to have lunch at the lake. You don't have to attend the training to go on the hike, but a session is scheduled for that morning. Low Leal suggested that we read London's short story "Told in the Drooling Ward."

The title of London's story tells a lot about how attitudes toward the Developmental Center shifted over time. I was privileged to sit in on an interview that Lou and Joyce Moldovan did with Milo Shepard concerning the old orchard. Milo said the orchard was originally created as a way for the developmentally disabled residents to have meaningful work, which they enjoyed. Later, such work was considered 'demeaning' and the residents were no longer allowed to work in the orchard, which entered a state of decline. Maybe as part of the park system the orchard will eventually be cleaned up again.

As an aside during the interview, Milo mentioned there used to be a waterfall trail that is probably unsafe now or no longer exists. He said if you look up at the trees on the mountain, which used to be logged out, now that they are left in their natural state they grow to become so heavy they can slide off the mountain, changing the landscape and possibly destroying former trails.

When I look at our state parks, I tend to think of all the ways humans interact with nature. Some trails have been used for thousands of years. Some of the farms, ranches, and orchards are more recent, and shift purpose over time in interesting ways. Sometimes we are interacting with trees that have been alive for hundreds of years and support ecosystems that have nothing to do with humans but give us pleasure to be around. Whether we change a natural landscape, or nature overtakes something manmade, eventually everything changes. We try to preserve old ways or they pass into legend. The parks make me very aware of that ebb and flow.



Here are some facts about redwoods, to help with interpretation:

I love all the careful thought that went into the Wolf House design, including matching the color of the redwood material to the color of the stones they chose, reddish volcanic tuff (an opportunity to mention the Sonoma Volcanics to those guests interested in geology). Redwoods get their color from a high concentration of tannic acid, which makes them resistant to fungus, insects, disease, and even fire.

If the main tree is destroyed by one of these causes, or by logging or being undermined by a stream or toppled by wind, the coast redwood will likely sprout up genetic clones of itself around the base of the plant. Some guests may wonder where the ancient, towering redwoods are when they are seeing mere babies.

All redwoods are coniferous and can reproduce by seed. Male pollen cones and female seed cones are borne on separate branches. The coast redwood is unique, however, in that its main form of reproduction is sprouting. The sprouts that may have encircled to whole tree grow up into what is charmingly referred to as a "fairy ring." You can see one of these rings at the Wolf House.

Redwoods may have many resistant powers, but they are vulnerable to toppling because of their shallow root systems with no tap root. In a redwood forest, the roots of many trees will intermingle to provide a stronger base. Stepping on the springy forest floor will cause compaction and eventually root damage.

Conifers usually shed needles, but redwoods shed three-year-old branchlets, contributed to the forest floor's springiness and slowing the rate of decay. The ground layer is called litter, which decays to duff, then humus, then soil. As the spongy layers can be several feet thick, seeds rarely find their way to the soil.

Coast redwoods (Monterey to southern Oregon coast) are taller; sequoia redwoods (Sierra Nevada mountains) are thicker; and dawn redwoods (China) are deciduous.

When our docent class hiked up at Annadel, the guide pointed out redwoods halfway up the mountain due to a "vernal pool environment." The definition of vernal pool is "a contained basin depression lacking a permanent above ground outlet." That doesn't sound as romantic as something to do with spring rain, but there you have it. I also learned that redwoods are "better adapted to flooding than other trees. Repeated flooding builds up the soil level at the base of trees. Redwood adapts by putting out new roots higher up in the soil while other trees are killed."

Generally, coast redwoods will share a forest with an understory of ground cover such as ferns, sorrel, and poison oak; a lower canopy of hardwoods such as tan oak, madrone, and California bay laurel; an upper canopy of mature redwoods and Douglas firs (which you can also see at Annadel); and the towering ancients in the emergent tier.

There is so much more to learn about redwoods that doesn't necessarily apply directly to our parks, but it is all fascinating. Did you know, for instance, that redwoods create their own rain, and they can also create soil high in their canopies to make "branch-borne gardens"? I recommend a visit to Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve in Guerneville. Although it is not in our district, you don't have to pay a day use fee if you park at the Visitor's Center and take the short walk into the park. Also, here is one great internet address if you want to read more:
<http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/departments/espm/extension/REDWOOD.HTM>



RACCOONS

by Chuck Whatford

The raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)—easily recognized by its bushy tail with alternating black and brown rings and a black mask outlined in white—belongs to the Family of mammals known as Procyonidae. Membership in this Family requires a long tail with dark and light banding and blunt cheek teeth, rather than sharp ones, [indicating that although these mammals are carnivores they have adapted to eat a wide variety of foods], 5 clawed toes on each foot and (except for the Ringtail members of the family) walk flat on the soles of their feet as do bears and humans.

Native only to the Americas, raccoons are nocturnal and tend to be solitary—except when breeding or caring for its young. If you've ever camped at Sugarloaf Ridge SP, you've probably heard the snarling and growling of raccoons fighting over some scrap of food or territory. They also make a variety of other sounds, including purrs, whimpers, hisses screams and whinnies.

Raccoons sleep and give birth to their young in hollow trees (often making a nest of leaves there), but also den in culverts, caves, hollows in the rocks, and even beneath fallen trees. Females have litters of 4-7 young between April and May, each of which weighs only 2 ounces at birth. While they're very small the mother carries them by the nape of their neck (the way a cat carries kittens). When they're 3 weeks old their eyes open and they remain in the den about 8 weeks, at which time their mother takes them out of the den on foraging expeditions. By fall the young leave the den and begin life as adults.

Raccoons eat just about anything edible: nuts (including acorns), grapes, crickets, grubs, grasshoppers, voles, deer mice, squirrels, birds' eggs, young birds still in the nest, crayfish, frogs, worms, fish, dragonfly larvae, clams, turtles, turtle eggs. In residential areas they frequently tip over or climb into garbage cans in search of food. Raccoons are not only curious (which is probably why we see them so often at campgrounds at night) but they are clever. Although they are mostly nocturnal, one afternoon when my family was camping at Sugarloaf we were sitting around in a circle about 20 feet from the picnic table. On the table was an open package of cookies. Even though we were talking loudly and it was afternoon, a raccoon climbed onto the table, grabbed the cookie package and took off back to the woods. My wife, Beth, who does not like to exercise—took off after the raccoon, yelling and waving her arms. The frightened creature dropped the cookies and took off up a tree. Afterwards when I reminded my wife that raccoons could be very dangerous, she replied simply: "But those are my favorite type of cookie!" Their cleverness is also shown in how they can use their nimble fingers to undo the fastenings on the food storage cupboards at campgrounds and help themselves—they've even been known to easily turn doorknobs and open refrigerator doors!

The species name of the raccoon—*lotor*—means "washer" in Latin. This name comes from its habit of appearing to "wash" its food. Actually what they're doing is not cleaning/washing the food, but kneading and tearing at it to remove what's not edible (wetting their paws improves their sense of touch). Their common name—Raccoon—comes from the name the Algonquin Indians of what is now Virginia gave these animals: *Aroughcoune*, meaning "he scratches with his hands."

Raccoons are found throughout most of the US (except parts of the Rocky Mountain states, central Nevada and Utah) and the southern edge of Canada. You can encounter raccoons at all 3 of our local state parks and not infrequently at your backdoor or in your garbage cans if you live in one of our many rural neighborhoods. I've even seen them in San Francisco—when I worked at the Presidio during its transformation from military base to National Park I would often see them coming out of the storm drains and meandering down the sidewalks in the early morning hours!



MAU NEWS

By Gayle Lash



Bibs and Vests Needed!

We have a wonderful group of new volunteers eager to patrol with MAU. We are in desperate need of unused Bibs and Vests. If you no longer actively patrol, would you return yours? If you are on a temporary leave, could we borrow it until we get some new ones? We'll make it easy. Just call Gayle or Norm at 707-795-7759, or email me at glash@sbcglobal.net. We'll figure out a way to pick them up from you.

Announcing!!!! MAU Internet Group Site http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mau_sonoma_county/

It is in the early stages, but this will be a wonderful way to stay up on the latest with our organization. Eventually it will have an event calendar, forms, bi-laws, and even the hours-log online. Check it often.

Horse Testing

Congratulations and welcome to Amy Heil and her Arab, Shasta, plus Karen Sherrill and her Morgan, Winston! They breezed through all nine-test items at Spring Lake and Annadel on Saturday, February 12. Shar put together a very professional package for each participant. Many thanks to Lynn H. and Diane B. for helping Shar with the testing.

We are expecting another 8 horse and rider teams to test on February 27.

Training

With all these new members, you may well ask, "But what about the once a year training delay?" Well, Joyce Moldovan, our State Park Volunteer Coordinator is working to make a change in the requirements for decent training to make it available year-round. We are meeting with her, to put the finishing touches on it for MAU, and then we can start using it immediately. Watch for more on this in the near future.

Recruiting

There is a recruiting poster available at the aforementioned MAU Group Site. Will you please print it and post it at your local tack shop, or feed store, the next time you visit?

Norm is working with VOMNHA to get more of the business cards printed. These are the cards that can be handed out to potential MAU people you encounter on the trails or at your other club meetings. If you need a supply get a hold of someone on the Board and let them know. We'll figure out a way to get some to you.

If you know of someone who is interested in joining, get their name to Sharmaine. She'll follow-up and make it happen. Her email is shar@nuforestproducts.com, and her telephone is 829-5540.

Sonoma County Horse Council

The SCHC is trying to bring all the horse owners in the area together. On Tuesday, February 1st, Norm, Shar, and I had the honor of attending President's Night. Almost all area horse clubs and organizations were represented; different breed clubs, discipline organizations, and even social clubs. MAU was the only volunteer organization. One of their goals is to organize event dates between all the clubs to avoid overlap. As Shar said, "Last night's Sonoma County Horse Council meeting was the best horse group organization meeting I've been to in a very very long time." After the meeting several of the attendees stopped us and told us they were interested in joining MAU. It was a very worthwhile meeting.

Correction – Our May 14th Spring Meeting will be at Oak Knolls Picnic area in Spring Lake Park

CALIFORNIA PARKS CONFERENCE

This is a wonderful opportunity to network with a variety of Park staff and get great training as well.

The California State Park Rangers Association and the Park Rangers Association of California, both professional associations for park employees, are hosting the annual California Parks Conference in Rohnert Park on March 7-10.

The conference begins with an overnigher on Angel Island on Sunday night, followed with a behind the scenes tour of Alcatraz or a Kayak trip on the bay. An evening reception with the State Parks Foundation follows. A variety of sessions are scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday, with special training day on Thursday. The cost of the conference is just \$135, including lunch on Tuesday and Wednesday, a banquet on Wednesday evening.

Please check out our website at www.CSPRA.com

**To volunteer contact Angy Nowiki at
nowicki@napanet.net or 707-538-8743**

State Parks Foundation will be hosting a special session **PARKS ADVOCACY DAY TRAINING** on March 10, in preparation for Advocacy Day, held March 14 at the Capitol ~an organized opportunity to walk the halls, visit with legislators, and make your views heard! For more info visit www.CSPRA.com

Valley of the Moon

Natural History Assn.

California State Parks, Valley Sector

Jack London State Historic Park

2400 London Ranch Rd.,

Glen Ellen, CA 95442

Basic Membership: \$20 per year

New Officers elected at January meeting:

Board of Directors:

Norman Lash, President

Greg Hayes, Vice President

Lou Leal, Vice President, Projects

Mary Catherine Doherty, Secretary

Al Stumpf, Treasurer

Matt Atkinson

Cookie Hirn

John Felton

William Murray

Joyce Moldovan, Volunteer. Coordinator

Phone or Fax: (707) 938- 4827

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Articles submitted for publication are welcome and should be received by the 15th of the month, unless prior arrangements have been made.

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