



Bridgeport News

South Yuba River State Park
South Yuba River Park Association

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Brief Calendar

Volunteer Picnic –September 18, 5pm
in grassy area next to Visitor Center

SYRCL – Restoration at Bridgeport
Saturday, September 19, 8:30 am
to 1 pm. Meet at main parking lot with
work shoes, gloves, filled water bottle.
Light pickup along river and serious
pulling of invasive plants. Party after-
wards from 1 to 4 pm at Family Beach.

Bird Walk – Sunday, October 11 at 9 am
Meet with Bill Cortright in the north
parking lot with water, good shoes and
binoculars for this 1.5 to 2 hour walk.

Fall Festival – Sunday, October 25,
10 am to 4 pm at Bridgeport

President's Message

These are uncertain times, but we are determined to continue our efforts to support and improve our Park until such time as we find out that we must change our approach. The board is operating on a business as usual basis and we are proceeding with our projects and plans in accordance with our recently approved Strategic Plan.

The recent fires in the area of the Park provided some excitement and also an opportunity. As a precautionary measure, when the fire approached the Kneebone Ranch complex we mobilized and removed irreplaceable displays, murals, records and the like from the Visitor Center and moved them to Empire Mine for safekeeping. After it was clear that we were no longer in danger from the fire, advantage was taken of the opportunity to clean the display area prior to replacing the evacuated items. Many of our display critters were also given a careful cleaning before being redisplayed. The Visitor Center looks better than ever. Many thanks to all those who responded to this crisis.

Of course, on everyone's mind is the question of what is going to happen in terms of park closures.

Jean Wilson and I met with Pam Armas, our District Superintendent, and discussed the Association's willingness to help as much as possible. She has been given a budget and staffing target and has made recommendations to the State with regard to her district. Obviously, she was not at liberty to disclose what they were and they may be modified as the Statewide plan is formulated. She and her counterparts are very aware of the impact of closures and cutbacks and are not making their recommendations lightly. The Statewide plan is expected to be released in the third week of September. Until then we continue to hold our breath. Depending on the final outcome, our Association may have the opportunity to further assist our park and ensure that it remains the beautiful and enjoyable place that we so dearly love. I continue to be optimistic.

I encourage those Volunteers who are not Association members to join the Association so that you can support the Park from both perspectives, and I thank all of you for your efforts.

Dave Anderson
on behalf of Ron Ernst

Message to New Volunteers

As this will be the first newsletter to be sent to all twenty of you volunteers who will be engaged with serving on our Greeter/Information Station (formerly the History Station), just let me say a big Thank You! for answering the call and to be there to meet and greet our visiting public (even if only to direct them to the nearest facilities). And while on this subject, more important than any degree of articulation, or storehouse of knowledge on the history of the place, is the fact that you are serving best by just being there! Your commitment of once a month on the station provides us with the continuity that is so necessary for our park guests to start their "Bridgeport Experience" in a positive and friendly fashion. Note: Several of you have indicated that you'd like to do two per month and BLESS YOU! But one is all we ask for.

As a greeter myself, I never cease to be amazed at the diversity of the folks who come to our park, from those who have just moved up here from other parts of California, to others who have resided in the area for decades and who have never been to Bridgeport until you went "on duty" for the first time!

Hopefully, each time you serve you will pick up a wee bit of our history, and in so doing you'll find that in about a year's time you will have considerably augmented your repertoire of anecdotes, facts and events (along with your docent training "stuff") and that you would feel comfortable leading a thirty minute session when the Visitor Center has booked a local school group and needs a volunteer to tell them about the rich (and exciting!) history of our niche here in the Sierra foothills. (cont. p3)

Next Project for the Beautification Committee

The plants in the two planter boxes by the VC are growing nicely, and so far the deer and squirrels have left them alone. Each time I go down to the VC I continue to keep my fingers crossed that the critters haven't nibbled or pulled the plants out.

The Beautification Committee (BC) is now looking at the Native Plant Garden, to the right of the VC and in front of the restrooms, to rejuvenate. The garden was established several years ago but Mother Nature and the ground squirrels have overtaken the area. The area has many plants that are well established – plants that the Native Americans in the area relied upon for their sustenance. We want to see the NPG as a focal spot for visitors to wander through, learn more about native plants, and perhaps just be a pleasant spot to sit under the walnut tree to have lunch and enjoy the sounds of the park.

Shortly, I will be sending out a call to all docents who would like to help with the cleanup of the NPG. It will be similar to last year's cleanup of the area in and around the Visitor Center, but should be less intensive. You will be rewarded for your effort should you volunteer for this task – stay tuned to your computer for an email soliciting your abilities.

Mickey Springer

Strategic Plan Approved

Your Park Association has approved our new Strategic Plan for the next five years. The plan includes our Vision Statement, lists fifteen important projects, and identifies five major goals with a plan for each. The Strategic Plan is to be a living document with formal reviews and updates every two years. Below are excerpts from the plan:

Vision: Advance the vitality of and the public's enthusiasm for the South Yuba River State Park by providing engaging and educational recreational opportunities, imparting the excitement of observing nature in action, and bestowing a profound appreciation of the park's history and culture.

Goals:

- Assist State Parks in obtaining historic designation for the Historic Ranch area of the Park.
- Complete the Strategic Plan and formally implement the strategic planning process.
- Complete restoration of the Shell Station.
- Expand Association Membership, review membership benefits, establish a Business membership program, and grow financially.
- Increase Park Visitation/Public Awareness and emphasize role as an historical transportation center.

Dave Anderson

Arriving at this point in our learning journey is made all the easier as we are blessed with a bountiful array of local resources at hand (e.g., The Union, libraries, etc.). For example, just a week ago there was an article about Black Bart and his heists along the Yuba, and when added to another story on Black Bart located in our Green History Book in the Visitor Center, one can piece together a rather fascinating yarn on this most polite bandit of our past (Stick 'em up, please!).

For right now your appearance at the GI Station is mostly to welcome and direct the folks to the VC, the trails, Bridge or Barn, and if you're lucky, to get in a few comments on our history. In the meantime, just keep looking at the green History Book, in the VC, review the notes from your docent training, and start building up your stories to share with your park visitor guests, and most of all enjoy your time while on "duty" here.

P.S. Near the end of the History Book is a fascinating story of the first Long Distance telephone line, which was set up right here in Nevada County in 1878 (just up the road in French Corral). That was the first question posed by the Lions Club Poker Run group last year (never know when a bit of knowledge will come in handy!).

Don Denton, Coordinator,
Greeter and Info. Station

Letters to the Editor

In future issues of this newsletter we would like to include comments and news from readers. All letters will be published as space is available. Material of lasting interest that doesn't make it into the current issue will be included in the next issue. Please send your ideas and news to the editor, herb@lindberglce.com.

A Bit of Bridgeport Project/Park History

About 17 years ago rangers set up a presence at Bridgeport in a small single-wide modular "trailer" at the side of the river just southeast of the covered bridge. Their purpose was to conserve the bridge and encourage use of the beautiful river gorge as part of a South Yuba River State Project, which included plans to create a more permanent headquarters in the old "caretaker's cottage" on the Kneebone ranch. They gathered a volunteer group to help them move from the trailer to this old cottage.

The volunteers started as a group of six to eight, who helped with visitors and built projects much as we do today. Their first project was to create a Visitor Center in half of the old cottage. Rangers developed the other half as a ranger station. As years rolled by more and more features were added to the Visitor Center until it became the interesting center we have today. During these formative years the greeting sign at the park entrance read "South Yuba River State Project."

Our goal was to become a full-fledged state park. We understood that we had to meet certain requirements to attain that goal. Mark Michalski was our docent trainer, and we were starting at 'square one'—we volunteers knew very little about anything. We met in what was then the 'caretaker's cottage' or what remained of it after years of being a flop/drug house...who knows what? It must have been late 1992 or early 1993 because I remember huddling in our heavy jackets at those first organization/planning meetings...no heat.

We would walk around the area using what little information we had about the place. We had discussions about having different colored vests—blue maybe, for the river—which I would have loved. I even sketched a patch 'just for our group'. But it was decided that it would be easier to go with the gold vest and regulation patches that were already in the pipeline.

I think our wildflowers walks started in 1994. Mary Miller, an active member of the local chapter of the Native Plant Society, was our mentor. I had long visited the Poppy Preserve in Lancaster but didn't know much about wildflowers. I remember having lunch with Mary at the little cafe in Wildwood. Then we'd strike out for the Buttermilk Bend Trail. I'd trail along with the Peterson book, taking notes. I can't remember who else was in that first group, Judy Nichols I think, maybe Pat Hall. Mary and I later put the first Trail Guide together in 1998 and, with Pat Hall, put it onto a PC.

The History Station was then-Ranger Chuck Scimeca's idea. I worked with him when it was first started. Of course, our docent numbers were quite small those first couple of years, but what we lacked in numbers, we made up for in enthusiasm. John Tremani did so much and was so instrumental in discovering the Kneebone and area history, even deeds etc. Trails were cleared—the boy scouts even did campouts in front of the VC and helped out with larger projects, for example building the picnic table that

Have you noticed that we now have a beautiful map of the entire park, extending from Bridgeport to just south of Malakoff Diggins State Park? I suggest that volunteers have a copy of this map in their pocket to help explain to visitors the total scope of the park, which is difficult to explain simply with words because it is broken into seven widely separated parcels. The most-used parcels surround the bridges at Bridgeport, Hwy 49 Crossing, Purdon Crossing, and Edwards Crossing.

The foldout also includes a brochure of important features and things to see and do at the park: *Park History* (native people, gold, Kneebones, river crossings, covered bridge), *Natural Resources* (geology, flora, fauna), *Recreation* (wildflowers, swimming, bird watching, gold panning, fishing, river watching, living history days), *Historic Sites and Bridges* (Bridgeport mining camp, Hoyt Crossing, Virginia Turnpike, Illinois Crossing, Bridgeport Covered Bridge, Purdon Crossing Bridge, Edwards Crossing Bridge, Old Hwy 49 Bridge), *Ditches and Flumes*, *Interpretive Programs*, *Wheelchair Accessible Features*.

Just as it is important for visitors to know that there are *three* state parks in the local area (Empire Mine, Malakoff Diggins, and South Yuba River), it is important to emphasize to visitors and the news media that the South Yuba River State Park does not begin and end at Bridgeport. In particular, Independence Trail, supported by Sequoia Challenge, has many of the accessibility features of Bridgeport and will be of interest to visitors at Bridgeport.

Thank you to Ranger Jeremy McReynolds for initiating this brochure and pushing it through to a finished product.

overlooks the river, as a badge requirement

Gold panning was done, until recent years, right in the river, which I still like better. Ah well. Before the caretaker's cottage was renovated we worked out of the modular 'trailer' which stood just to the right of the parking lot as you drive in, where a picnic table and sign with a park map along the river gorge are now (the trailer mentioned in the first paragraph). In the 'great flood' of '97 we almost lost it. We worked like crazy to save our records that awful night! We thought we'd lost the bridge, and that June (of 1997) we were scheduled to finally achieve our goal of becoming a state park. We thought the goal would be jeopardized by the loss of this jewel in our crown. Fortunately, thanks to David Woods and the engineers who came in, it survived. State funds were used to repair and restore it, and that June we had dedication ceremonies in which the South Yuba River *Project* sign was replaced with the South Yuba River State *Park* sign—Hooray!

But—NO potties—only 'Andy Gumps'—which weren't replaced until "Holloway's Head" was built. This was another huge volunteer project, headed by Bob Holloway with contributions by many others. Sadly, Bob had a stroke before it was completed. We had a dedication party complete with cake and balloons. We had been pleading for a REAL potty for SO long...it was embarrassing! We didn't even get the one in the north parking lot until last year...good grief!

Anyway—back to the early days. We started getting the word out about training new docents and our numbers grew as did our programs. It's interesting that a lot of newer docents have come and gone, but so many of the 'old timers' have stuck around to help keep it all going.

Ghosts of Bridgeport was also Chuck Scimeca's idea...and I still think it should be a part of our programs...Sorry, "A Fall Festival" just doesn't cut it. Ghosts was unique—we were known for it! All of us have stories about our experiences while 'docenting'—the emus running around the parking lot, Mike and Kahn confronting the really 'smart' guy breaking into a car in the parking lot, the obese woman who broke her ankle on the Buttermilk Bend Trail, so we had to call out the Fire Department Rescue—so many others. Mark Michalski and another ranger were called to the Buttermilk Bend Trail by reports of a drunk, had a confrontation, the drunk pushed off the trail, down the hill, was injured and out of commission for a couple of months.

I would like to see another article on the very early years during which the South Yuba River State Project was set up, perhaps by Mark Michalski.

Barbara Pixley

Self-guided Trails Update

The Bridgeport Historic Ranch SGT was completed in time for the Spring Festival in April. Up to 50 brochures were being taken on busy weekend days. Judy McAuliffe and Steve Pauly are finishing the SGT for the Buttermilk Trail Trees and Shrubs brochure. Look for this new brochure on 24 species.