

Marin Conservation League
Walk Into (Conservation) History # 18
ROY'S REDWOODS
Sunday, August 9, 2015



David Marks/Flickr

Walk Leaders

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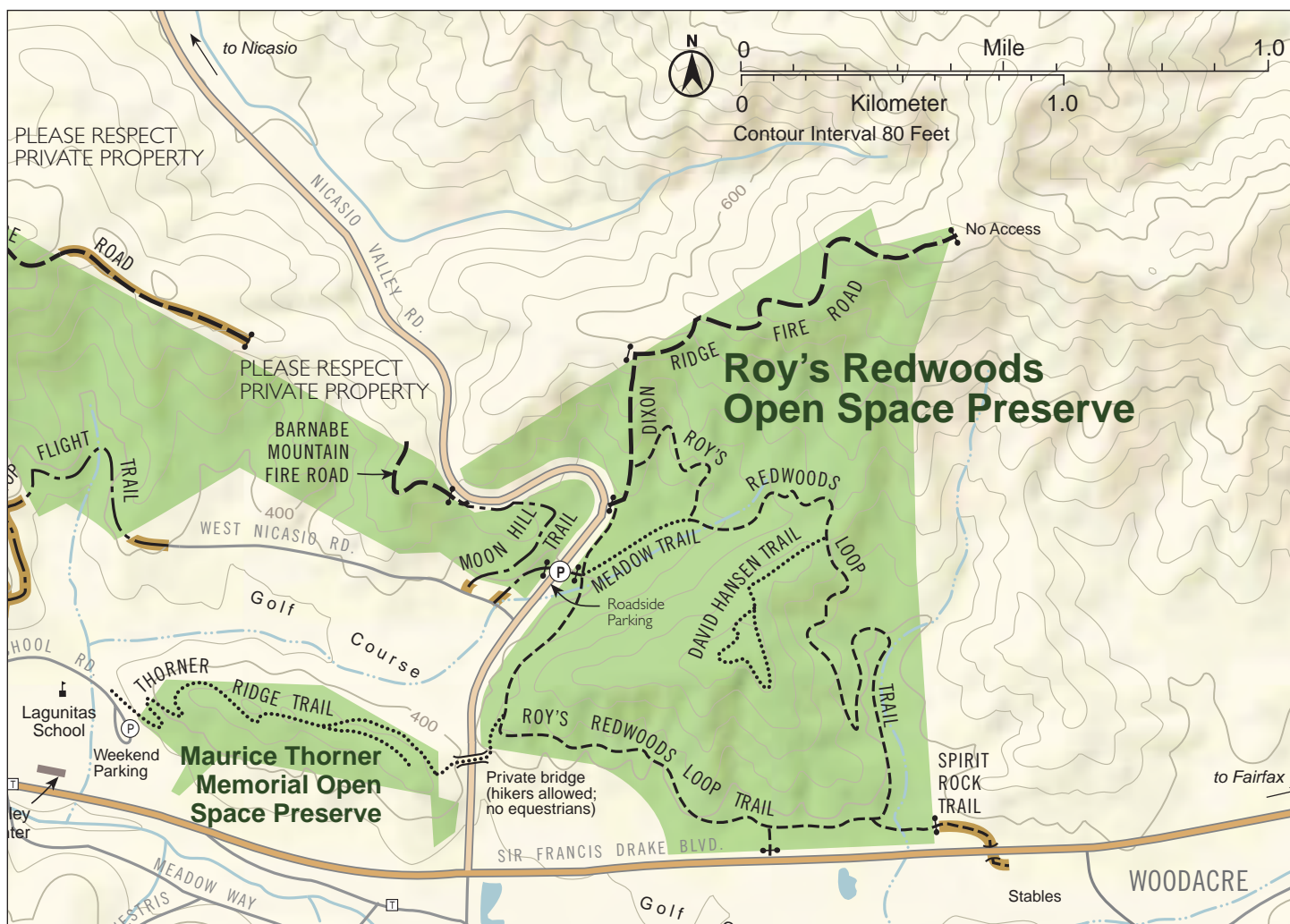
Former President, Marin Conservation League

Nona Dennis

Director, Marin Conservation League



Protecting Marin Since 1934



Marin County Parks, Detail from Map of "French Ranch, Roy's Redwoods and Maurice Thorner Open Space Preserves"

Today's Walk

Roy's Redwoods is a place for wandering among old redwoods that were somehow left behind in the 19th-century rush to log all of Marin. Our Walk begins at the open space gate on Nicasio Valley Road, meanders into the grove of redwoods near the gate, then heads north through a meadow into a second grove of redwoods. It then proceeds uphill on the Loop Trail, which takes us through Douglas fir/California bay/coast live oak woodlands – and back. (We will retrace our steps rather than walk the entire 2 + mile Loop).

About the Preserve

The 309-acre Roy's Redwood Open Space Preserve was one of the purchases made after the voters passed a bond measure that established the Marin County Open Space District (see below: Parks and Preserves). Purchased in 1978, the preserve was formerly part of the Roy Brothers ranch and became the first public preserve in San Geronimo Valley. Sometimes referred to as "Muir Woods without the tourists," Roy's Redwoods is unusual for having retained a small virgin stand of redwoods, a rarity in the Bay Area. The primary grove has redwoods about 500 years old that approach the size of the famous trees of Muir Woods.

A "thumbnail" history of development in San Geronimo Valley

(Summarized from a history by Brian Dodd and Jean Berensmeier)

19th Century – Early settlement

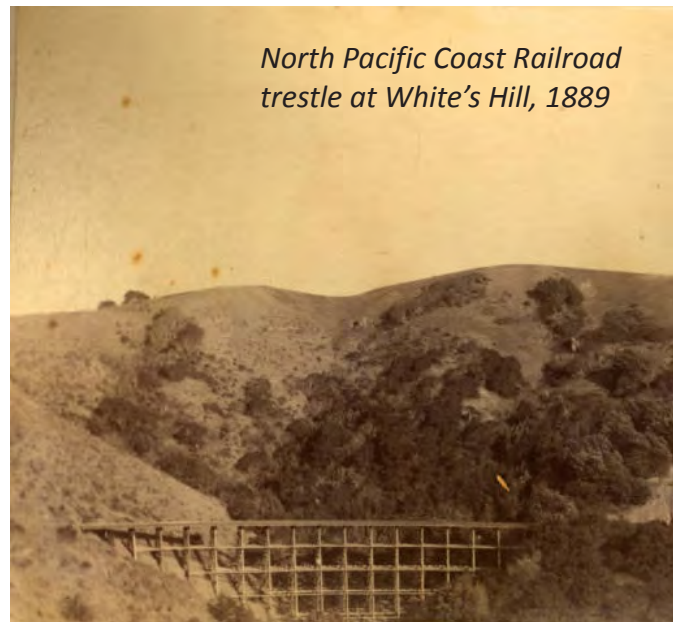
The first Europeans' contact with indigenous people who had occupied the Valley for thousands of years came in about 1877, but actual settlement did not begin until the middle of the century, when the 8,800-acre Rancho Canada de San Geronimo was awarded to Rafael Cacho, a military officer, in 1844. Title to the Rancho was sold several times – ultimately to

Adolph Mailliard, who first lived in San Rafael, where he engaged in horse breeding and railroad construction, and then settled with his family in 1873 near Castle Rock in today's Woodacre. (The home later became the Woodacre Improvement Club, which subsequently burned down.) Other than Mailliard's transferring title to tracts of approximately 400-600 acres each to James and Thomas Roy in San Geronimo, and to James Dickson and Calvin Dickson in Woodacre, there was little other division of the rancho through the end of the century, and settlement in the Valley was sparse.

In other respects, West Marin after mid-nineteenth century was as active economically and politically as East Marin. It was the center of old-growth redwood logging and milling. Paper mills were dotted downstream along Lagunitas Creek. Samuel P. Taylor's mill is the best known of these. Taylor built a hotel as housing for mill workers, and later opened up

Camp Taylor as a popular tourist destination, visited by over 1,000 people during the summer. Other enterprises in the vicinity of San Geronimo Valley included an attempted (and failed) gold mine, a powder works, a shingle mill, a fur tannery, and a creamery. A productive water system, precursor to San Geronimo Valley Water Company and MMWD, was developed from springs and from Lagunitas Creek in the 1860s.

The physical barrier that separated activity in the Valley – and West Marin in general – from East Marin in the mid- 19th century was White's Hill. An early cart trail over the summit became a stage road from San Rafael to Olema in 1865, wide enough for teams to pass. Later it would become the



North Pacific Coast Railroad trestle at White's Hill, 1889

Marin County Free Library. Anne T. Kent California Room

paved Sir Francis Drake Highway in 1929. Narrow-gauge rail came to the Valley (and West Marin) with the construction of the North Pacific Coast Railroad in 1873 and '74. Two tunnels were bored through White's Hill, each called "Roy's Tunnel." A later tunnel bored at a lower elevation, would carry modern broad-gauge trains to the Valley until rail service was shut down in 1933 as travel by automobile replaced it.



Samuel P. Taylor's first paper mill, 1889

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Settlement changes the Valley

Changes to the Valley began slowly in the early 20th century. The Mailliard heirs subdivided much of Lagunitas and then sold their remaining interest in the Valley to the Lagunitas Development Company, which subsequently subdivided Forest Knolls, San Geronimo, and Woodacre. Most homes built prior to World War II were used as summer cabins; by 1925, the 20 early families had only become 30! It was not until the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937 and the coming of WW II, when Sausalito shipyard workers needed housing and the

bridge opened up access from San Francisco, that many summer cabins became permanent residences.

Still, little changed in the Valley until 1961, when the Board of Supervisors adopted a Master Plan for the Valley that envisioned 20,000 new residents, and 5,000 new homes that would cover the entire Valley planning area. The land around the present Spirit Rock would be the site for a shopping center, and multifamily residences. Even a heliport was planned! A freeway would proceed from San Anselmo over White's Hill and through the center of the Valley, with an interchange that would cross Roy's Redwoods on a diagonal, go over the ridge and into Nicasio Valley. The only elements of this plan that were actually developed were the golf course and 18 adjacent homes. In 1968, the Summer of Love turned the Valley into a magnet for "flower children," who set up camps and other unconventional shelters, including hollowed-out redwoods.

When resident Jean Berensmeier heard about the 1961 Master



Jean Berensmeier

Plan, she organized a community meeting to review the plan, and out of this embryonic beginning, the Valley Planning Group was born. Fortunately, others in the county, observing the onslaught of post-WW II development, took their concerns to the ballot box. The pro-development majority of supervisors was overturned. At the same time, the County prepared a report that changed the face of planning in Marin – "Can the Last Place Last." It cautioned against the loss of Marin's beautiful spaces to rampant development. Thus, the 1972 Countywide Plan adopted a more modest growth regimen for the entire county and established three "corridors" that continue to generally guide the county's growth pattern. (A fourth corridor – "Baylands" – was added to the Plan in 2007.) In the spirit of the Countywide Plan, the Valley Planning Group worked to create the Valley's first Community Plan, which defined the four villages and preserved the Valley's rural character, ridgelines, and streams. 20-acre zoning was adopted to preserve open space and land for agricultural use outside the village borders.

After the adoption of the Community Plan, a major subdivision, Sky Ranch, was approved after five years of controversy. Several years later, due to lack of property sales and financial problems, the 130+ unit development that would have added homes to Woodacre, San Geronimo and Forest Knolls boundaries, was offered (almost 1,600 acres) and pur-



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Above — 1965 aerial view of the San Geronimo Golf Course and Roy's Redwoods. Below — The golf course today.



Jeff Archer/Flickr

chased by the Open Space District. It is now known as the Gary Giacomini Open Space Preserve. In the 1980s, a 411-acre parcel was purchased by Insight Meditation West to support a small Buddhist Center (Spirit Rock), in lieu of the 20 homes that zoning would allow. A portion of that land was dedicated to the Open Space District and added to Roy's Redwoods (see below).

In recent years, development in the Valley was halted by a two-year moratorium, and progress on

a long-awaited Salmon Enhancement Plan also was halted. There continues to be potential for limited residential and remodeling development in the Valley.

Parks and Preserves in the Valley

About the same time as the first Countywide Plan – the early 1970s – the voters of Marin passed a bond measure that established the Marin County Open Space District. This opened the door to beginning the acquisition of lands that would become today's 34 open space preserves, totaling 16,000 acres. These preserves separate and define Marin's communities, protect special habitats, and preserve other treasured natural and cultural resources. They also provide opportunities for varied forms of recreation.

The Valley was already close to setting aside more public lands to add to those that had been acquired in earlier decades of the century, each with a story to tell: the watershed lands of Marin Municipal Water District in 1912, Samuel P. Taylor State Park acquired by the State in 1945 (with help from MCL) due to non-payment of taxes, and farther west, Pt. Reyes National Seashore in 1962, also with the help of MCL. Over the ensuing years (from 1972), five open space preserves would be added to the County's preserve system in the Valley: the 309-acre Roy's Redwoods in 1978, formerly part of the Roy Ranch; the 30-acre Maurice Thorner Preserve, donated in 1982, with a trail link to Roy's Redwoods; the 1,600 Gary Giacomini Preserve that extends for five miles along the southern edge of the Valley and abuts lands of

MMWD, in 1995; and the 383-acre French Ranch Preserve, which was acquired through development process in 1999. Nearby are the 390-acre White's Hill Preserve, which also abuts MMWD lands and links Giacomini OSP and Cascade Canyon Preserve with Loma Alta Preserve. Taken together, the public lands accessible within and from the Valley include a wealth of biological diversity in habitat types, wildlife, and plant species.

Keeping watch over these public lands, the Planning Group helped establish the Trails element in the updated 1984 Countywide Plan and contributed to a 2008 Strategic Plan for the Open Space District. Their vigilance over the sensitive resources of these Preserves, which are very popular for recreational pursuits, will continue as the County's recent Vegetation and Biodiversity Management Plan and the Road and Trail Management Plan are implemented on the ground.

Roy's Redwoods (as summarized from the marinparks.org website)

Located in the heart of San Geronimo Valley, Roy's Redwoods Preserve offers either a quick

escape on a warm day to meander in the deep shade of the redwood groves, or more strenuous hikes to higher elevations through Douglas fir and California bay. The Loop Trail leads to a side-trip on the David Hansen Trail, named for one of the district's early and prominent open space planners who negotiated the purchase of Roy's Redwoods. The Loop Trail continues on a contour through California bay, buckeye, and coast live oak, before descending to grassland for the 1-mile return to the entry gate. For a more strenuous excursion, climb up Dickson Ridge Fire road, which ends at 1,200 feet and affords expansive views that stretch from Mt. Tamalpais to the south, to Mt. Wittenberg on the Pt. Reyes Peninsula.

The county's website tells more: "The primeval groves of bay and redwood were once the setting for a George Lucas movie, the Ewok Adventure. Prior to becoming an MCOSD preserve, a couple of the great rings of redwoods were inhabited by members of loosely organized communes in the late 1960s." The redwoods here are among the largest remaining old-growth trees in the county. These



A movie theater lobby card for the 1984 film "Caravan of Courage: An Ewok Adventure"

are the offspring of more massive trees that once stood at the center of the rings of 200-foot-tall “juveniles.” The native understory one expects beneath the redwoods has been largely replaced either by bare ground, from many years of foot traffic, or by non-native blackberry and poison oak. Where native understory does exist, it includes sword fern, snowberry, and shrubs like elderberry. Grasslands in the Preserve are welcoming in the spring with many species of wildflowers.



@Cole Slater/colestrailtails.blogspot.com



Don Laurie/Flickr



Audubon.org



Dru Parker

*Fauna found at Roy's Redwoods
(clockwise from top left)*

*Common Buckeye (Junonia coenia)
Grey Fox (Urocyon cinereoargenteus)
Common King Snake (Lampropeltis
getula)
Pileated Woodpecker (Hylatomus
pileatus)*

MCL welcomes your suggestions for future Walks—contact us at 415.485.6257 or mcl@marinconservationleague.org.

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Join Marin's most effective advocate for Marin's natural places and receive advance notice of Walks Into (Conservation) History, reduced prices on our Business-Environment Breakfasts, invitations to our summer picnic and holiday party, our bi-monthly Newsletter and advance notice and analysis of pending issues that affect Marin County. Memberships start at only \$35 per year.

Join at marinconservationleague.org.

MCL Walks into Conservation History

Permanent protection of land does not happen easily; every piece of parkland and open space that the public can now enjoy in Marin came at a price in human effort and persistence as well as in funds from many different sources.

To commemorate its 75th Anniversary in 2009, Marin Conservation League initiated a series of Walks into the park and open space lands that have come to define almost 50 percent of Marin's landscape. This year is MCL's 81st anniversary, and we continue to commemorate the visionaries who recognized many decades ago that Marin's significant natural lands and waters and cultural heritage would not survive for future generations unless they were permanently protected.

Since its founding in 1934, MCL, working with many other organizations and thousands of individuals, has played a significant role in many of these stories. The Walks have been generously funded by the following, who donated to MCL's History Book Fund in 2009:

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Notes