

Big Basin

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Pioneers At The Root Of Fight To Save The Redwoods

By Margaret Koch

California gained its first state park because determined citizens would not hear to the Big Basin redwoods being cut.

Through the years since the State of California was born in 1850, there have been flurries of "Save the Redwoods." Californians have always heeded the cry—and opened their hearts and pocketbooks.

The first Battle of the Redwoods began in 1900, when Henry Middleton, a Santa Cruz county lumberman, announced he was going to move his largest saw mill into the area known as Big Basin. The words were no sooner out of Middleton's mouth than Californians had joined ranks for the first skirmish.

Up until 1880, Santa Cruz county redwoods marched in a nearly unbroken line from Aptos to Santa Clara county line. But by 1900 most of this first growth was gone. Big Basin was an exception because of its remote location and inaccessibility. But now it was threatened and the people were aroused.

Middleton, who no doubt

wished he had kept his mouth shut, immediately received a visit from members of the Sempervirens club. And before they left he had signed an agreement to sell 3800 acres of Big Basin property to the State of California for \$200,000.

Then a group got busy. Mrs. Phoebe A. Hearst donated money for campaign expenses; Duncan McPherson, editor-owner of The Sentinel, presented a resolution to the California Press association urging its support; Mrs. Joseph Clifford McCracken, a writer for the Morning Sentinel in the early 1900's, wrote articles. Many helped, including the widely known San Jose arist, Andrew P. Hill. Hill's anger had been fired when he wanted to photograph redwoods at Felton's Big Trees (now Henry Cowell Redwoods state park) and was driven out by the owner.

A lot of people were for saving Big Basin and making it into a public park. But there were others who weren't. And when George S. Walker of Vallejo introduced the Big Basin bill in the state legislature, he was greeted with

remarks like: "200,000 for a park! Foolishness!"

So the enemies were rallying too.

But Big Basin had powerful friends. Hill passed his spectacular photos around; the Rev. Robert E. Kenna SJ, an original Sempervirens club member and president of Santa Clara college (now University), spoke before the ways and means committee. Attorney D. M. Delmos of San Francisco, noted orator, spoke.

The University of California and Stanford University also gave their official support. And after 60 days of struggle, the State of California owned its first park. It was known at first as California Redwood Park, sometimes as Sempervirens Park.

In the summer of 1901 a large group of Sempervirens club members camped in the Basin before it was opened to the public. Three state officials also visited it that summer: L. J. Gage, former governor of California, Gov. George C. Pardee, incumbent, and Gov. West of Utah. Their stopping place became known as Governors' Camp.

But the new state park's struggles were not over yet. On September 7, 1904, a forest fire broke out. Teams of men under the direction of Park Warden J. H. B. Pilkington fought a 20-day battle. Rain fell on September 27 to finally put out the fire which had done great damage. One giant redwood tree, smoldering inside, burned for 14 months after everything else was out. The tree's height was gradually reduced by the fire in its innards.

In 1908 another Battle of the Redwoods was fought at Big Basin. A state forester decided (unwisely) that the burned redwoods should be removed from the park.

Now, Sequoia Sempervirens has its name for an excellent reason: Sempervirens — "always living" or "ever living." Badly burned Sequoias will come back and



The old-timers were so impressed with Big Basin's natural wonders that they fought to have it preserved permanently as a public state park. Visitors there at the turn of the century included Sempervirens club members and The Sentinel's owner-publisher, Duncan McPherson, shown above with the beard. Today, the park which is one of the most popular in California's system of state parks, is visited by as many as 12,000 people in a single day at the height of the season. This month the amount of \$437,000 has been budgeted by the state to develop approximately 100 new campsites, extend sewer, electric and water lines and improve the road leading to Sky Meadow area, in which the campsites will be established. (Photograph from the collection of Roy Boeken-oogen.)

In 1912 Arthur A. Taylor, editor of Santa Cruz Surf and secretary of the state park commission, published a book "California Redwood Park," now a collectors' item.

In 1917 Senator Herbert F.

Jones of San Jose, whose mother was a leader in the Sempervirens club, introduced legislature to build access roads and add 1200 acres to the park.

A fountain in the park also was dedicated to Hill, the first "man behind the camera," who died in 1922.

The park's first trail guide and map, entitled "Redwood Trail," was printed in 1923 by Roy Fulmer who operated the park curio shop for 21 years. Proceeds from sales of the pamphlet went toward trail upkeep. Unable to obtain redwood gift items for the shop in the Basin, Fulmer set up a redwood factory and turned out his own, also supplying shops all over California.

Fulmer originally was hired by Hill in 1921, but he also served as Big Basin postmaster for 20 years. Later he operated the dining room, lodge, store and gas station. He retired from the Basin to run for mayor of Santa Cruz — a post in which he served two terms.

In 1941 a CCC camp (Civilian Conservation Corps) was established at the Basin and operated during winter months. Hand-hewn bridges and new camp stoves were built by the 180 men.

In 1945 — even with wartime gas rationing — park figures show it was loaded during August.

In 1962 an unusual snowfall damaged tan oaks and small trees in the park — this unique report was made by the current Park Supervisor Anton Trigiero. Walter F. Martell serves as assistant supervisor.

Last year an editorial in The Sentinel stated: "Santa Cruz county has one of the better systems of parks and beaches in the state.

For more than 10 years they have attracted three million visitors annually..."

This year more campsites are going to be constructed in Sky Meadow to meet the ever growing demands of the American public.

Next year?

TRACED TO THEM

Students of folklore believe that the popular customs of Halloween exhibit traces of the Roman harvest festival and of druidism, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

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