

UCSC conference covers the history of lime kilns

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SANTA CRUZ — During the second half of the 19th century up until the early 1900s, lime production from limestone was one of Santa Cruz's most important industries and was critical to the early development of California's cities and towns. Today historic lime kilns at UC Santa Cruz, Wilder Ranch, Fall Creek and Pogonip are quiet reminders of Santa Cruz County's lime industry.

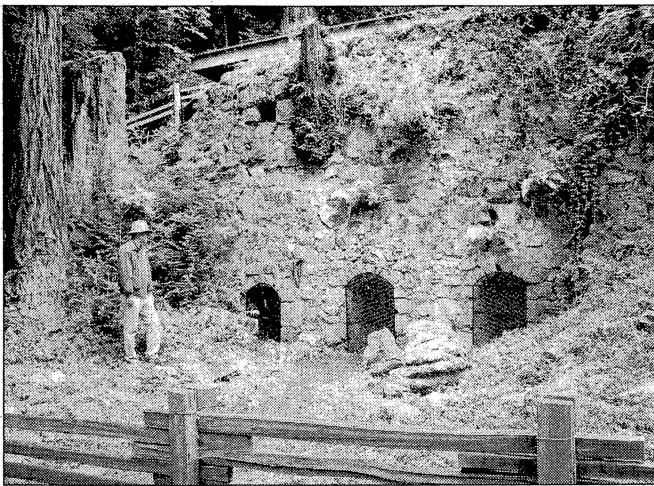
This weekend, the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works of the designated Historic District at UCSC will host a conference on the history of lime and lime production in California. Proceeds from the conference will benefit restoration projects in the Historic District on the UCSC campus, which was once the location of one of California's

largest lime works.

Frank Perry, who will discuss historical research on lime kilns, specifically in Pogonip, will speak on Saturday and lead a tour of six lime kiln sites Sunday.

The lime kiln was the key piece of equipment to make lime, Perry said. Chunks of limestone were loaded into these kilns around Santa Cruz County, where the rocks were heated up to 2,000 degrees using redwoods from the surrounding forest as the fuel.

In the late 1800s, lime companies acquired large tracts of land and cut many of the trees to supply fuel for the kilns, he said. However, because these lands belonged to lime companies, they remained undeveloped and a century later became parks and greenbelt areas such as Fall Creek, Henry Cowell Redwoods and Pogo-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Frank Perry, president of the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works Historic District, looks at a lime kiln built in Pogonip in the 1850s.

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Lime is produced by breaking down the chemical constituents of limestone, which is composed of the mineral calcite. The heating process, called calcination, results in the pro-

duction of lime.

Lime was used as the principal ingredient for mortar, plaster, whitewash and stucco, which were the building blocks for the construction of San Francisco, Perry said.

Santa Cruz was such a prominent spot for lime production because of its close proximity to San Francisco, which was the biggest city in the state during the 19th century, and because of Santa Cruz's access to the redwood forest as a means to fuel the heating of the limestone, he said.

"Lime production was second only to the lumber industry and was a means of employment for many European immigrants," Perry said. "Lime kiln workers spent a lot of time loading and unloading rock. It was really a bottom-of-the-ladder place for immigrants to get work in California."

The limestone industry brought many people to the area.

"During the 1890s a large percentage of the immigrants coming to Santa Cruz were Portuguese, from the Azores Islands," he said.

"The Cabrillo Civic Club, which is for Americans of Portuguese decent, has donated money for the restoration of some of the lime kiln structures."

The reminders of a time long past are still intriguing for many today.

"There are a lot of abandoned lime kilns tucked away in the forest, and it's fascinating how they were used," Perry said. "They're an interesting and important feature of local history."

The money raised from the conference will be put into restoring the kilns and preserving their history for future generations, he said.

The conference and field trip, held on Saturday and Sunday are sold out, but the Friends of the Cowell Lime Works will be holding others, Perry said. People can learn more by checking out the Web site at <http://lime-works.ucsc.edu>.