



Photo by Frank Balthis

Photo by David Bagby

The power of these giant redwoods captures the imagination of anyone visiting Big Basin.

At right, a banana slug of Big Basin enjoys a stroll.

100 YEARS of sanctuary

Big Basin 9-12-02

Big Basin
State Park
celebrates
centennial

By WALLACE BAINE
Sentinel entertainment writer

The largest land owner in Santa Cruz County — where real estate rivals gold ingots in value — is the California state park system. And the largest jewel in the system's crown is Big Basin State Park.

So why not throw a party for the 18,000-acre tract of old-growth redwoods on its 100th anniversary?

If you've been paying attention, you may know that the park's centennial celebration has been going on all summer — some ambitious person decided "100 days for 100 years" was a fitting tribute.

But this weekend's event at the park

marks the big birthday party with food, wine and beer, live music and other enticements — all in the name of honoring the efforts of those people who, 100 years ago, worked to make Big Basin a permanent safe place for the redwood forest.

"I think a lot of people in Santa Cruz are thankful for Big Basin and kind of love it from a distance," said Virginia Wright, one of the event's principal coordinators.

Wright grew up in Santa Cruz, visiting Big Basin with her family. She will contribute to one of the event's more interesting ideas: People who visited the area in the near or distant past are encouraged to bring family photos of Big Basin, which



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will be arranged chronologically for all to see.

"I have some old pictures with my parents and my siblings from the 1970s," said Wright. "But I'm sure there'll be people with older photos."

Also adding to the historical significance of the event will be a display called "Camping Through the Ages," which will allow you to stroll through a series of campsites, each marking a different period of time — from the wood and heavy canvas of the 1920s to today's Gore-Tex and aluminum.

All this and two stages of live music featuring educational/environmental groups ZunZun and the Banana Slug String Band (along with the real banana slugs that populate the redwood forest), folk duo Alisa Fineman & Kimball Hurd, as well as Rick Walker's Loop.Pool.

Also on the live-music schedule is Sherry Austin, the Sadza Marimba Band, the Lunatic Fringe Bluegrass Band, the Tarantula Jug Band, Mariposa, Ingrid Noyes, Grace Hearn & Michael Savage and Tom Heasley's Ambient Tuba.

Keynote speakers include county supervisor and environmentalist Jeff Almquist and eco-celebrity and author Julia Butterfly Hill, known for spending two years in the boughs of a redwood tree she calls Luna in Humboldt County.

The invisible presence along for the event will be the people who, a century ago, lobbied and demonstrated to get 3,800 acres of what is now the core of the park set aside as a state park.

Chief among them is Andrew P. Hill, a San Jose-based artist and photographer who founded the Sempervirens Club, a grass-roots organization largely responsible for establishing Big Basin, which in 1902 became California's first state park. (Yosemite had already been established by then, but it was a national park.)

The campaign started in 1899 when Hill sought to photograph the redwood stands where Henry Cowell State Park now stands.

At the time, the tract was in private hands; and when the property owner refused to allow Hill to photograph the trees without paying a fee to do so, the photographer was so irked, he resolved to make the old-growth trees a public cause and to save them from the whims of pri-



Photo by A.P. Hill

Early visitors to Big Basin Redwoods State Park set up for a fairly elaborate photo around 1900.

vate developers and speculators.

"One of the things that has always impressed me," said Wright, "was the fact that these were normal, everyday people. This isn't Ansel Adams we're talking about here. This was A.P. Hill whose work is not hanging in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. All he had was this passion to save these trees."

To that end, Hill urged newspaper reporters to write about the plight of the unprotected redwoods. He pushed for resolutions asking Congress to set aside the land for public use.

By the next spring, the Sempervirens Club — the name comes from the scientific name given to coast redwoods — was established.

In 1901, the state assembly drafted a bill ordering purchase of the Big Basin property, and later that year California governor Henry T. Gage visited the site.

The governor's visit was breathlessly reported by Sentinel editor Duncan McPherson on the same day the Santa Cruz Morning Sentinel switched from being a weekly to a daily paper.

The deal with landowner Henry

T. Middleton was struck in September 1902. The park officially opened in June 1904.

Today, the park covers about 18,000 acres from the mountains outside Boulder Creek to the coast at the mouth of Waddell Creek. There are about 80 miles of trails, including the famed Skyline-to-Sea Trail; and the park is beloved for its numerous waterfalls and its wild fauna, including the cringe-inducing lemon-yellow banana slug.

Also slated for this weekend will be guided nature walks, original art works for sale, informal talks with rangers past and present, and even a salute to the surviving Civilian Conservation Corps workers who in the 1930s built many of the buildings that enhance the park.

Yet, the biggest attraction of all remains the thousand-year-old trees, the same trees that by their majesty goaded A.P. Hill and the Sempervirens Club to preserve them forever.

"When you get up there under the trees," said Wright, "it's really a transformational experience: to stand under trees thousands of years old that take 10 to 20 people

If you go

WHAT: Big Basin Centennial Festival.

WHERE: Big Basin State Park, Boulder Creek.

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

TICKETS: \$5, which includes bus transportation.

PARKING: No parking is available at Big Basin Park. Visitors are encouraged to take shuttle buses to the site.

Park and Ride locations include Metro Station downtown Santa Cruz, Metro Station Scotts Valley, San Lorenzo Lumber parking lot on Graham Hill Road in Felton and Redwood Elementary School, north of Boulder Creek on Highway 9. Extra buses will be on duty. Buses run from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. both days. Details: 335-3174 or www.mountainparks.org.

to put their arms around them.

"The trees really speak for themselves."

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