

## Axel Erlandson's Trees

# A Fascinating Sight In Scotts Valley

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Sentinel Staff Writer

Some may think that Scotts Valley's Lost World, like the dinosaurs its huge figures imitate, has gone extinct, but there is an alive and fascinating attraction still to be seen at the site.

It's a lost world of trees — trees shaped and grafted into the most unbelievable forms by the late Axel N. Erlandson over 30 years ago.

The amusement park full of colorful dinosaurs and animated objects has been relatively idle for the past few years, but the trees that Erlandson planted there in 1946 continue to grow unheeded in their unusual shapes, despite the lack of gratification from curious guests.

In the past few weeks, the forest between Highway 17 and Scotts Valley Drive has been cleaned up and reopened by Fran Carruth and Agnes Lewis, who also are running a craft shop in the small building at the entrance to "The World Famous Tree Circus."

The brightly-painted dinosaurs, added to the spot in 1964 when the late Larry Thompson bought the property, are now for sale and will not be part of the exhibition, Lewis explained. Thompson's family still owns the site.

Erlandson's trees were world famous in their heyday. The unusual living shapes were featured 12 times in Ripley's Believe It or Not and appeared in many magazine features.

There's nothing unique about Scotts Valley soil which makes trees grow into the shapes of chairs, ladders, hearts and sl-

ingshots — it was all the expertise of Erlandson.

Known as a quiet man, the native of Sweden spent most of his life as a rancher and farmer in Turlock where he began his grafting experiments.

Upon retiring to Scotts Valley with his family in 1946, he brought along a few of his grafted sapplings and began a forest which grew to over 55 trees.

His first attempt was to take four sycamores and plant them in a six-foot square. When the young tips reaches about 15 feet, the bean farmer startled his family and friends by bringing the tops together and grafting them into a miniature cupola.

This four-sided arch now stands, over 50 years later, as an entrance to the revived exhibition.

The trees, which once decorated Erlandson's yard, today stand as a testimony to the ingenuity of the man. Their names tell something of the

shapes they permanently hold — the watertower tree, a country boy's slingshot, the single heart tree, the lightning tree, the "boa" constictor, the four-legged giant.

The forest of twisted shapes, with its thick rooftop of heavy leaves, evokes an eerie feeling to the amazed visitor. Birds chirp sarcastically overhead as if criticizing what man has done to their nesting places.

"This place really gets to you after awhile," Lewis commented.

A few of the trees were never completed by Erlandson, who died in 1964 at the age of 79. The frames which held up the young trees are still in place, leaving one only to guess what the tree wizard had in mind.

Some of the trees unfortunately have perished, but their dead trunks and branches still hold the identifiable shapes.

How did he do it? is the question that pops into most observers' minds. The trees are of all conceivable variety —

sycamores, boxed elders, acacias, cork oak, birch and willow.

Erlandson created his unusual garden using wood props and steel and wire guides. To make circles, he'd fasten young outshoots or branches to heavy

wire guides until they completed a circle. Then the branches were grafted to the trunk.

As the trees have grown over the years, they amazingly kept the original shapes Erlandson painstakingly guided them into.

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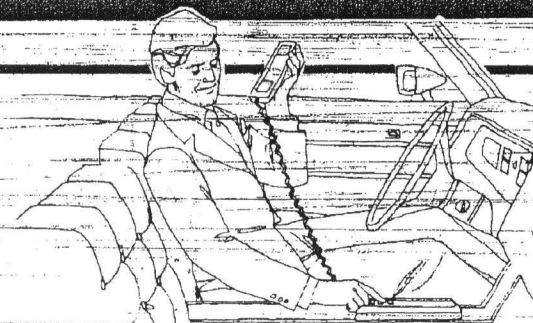
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"The World Famous Tree Circus" in Scotts Valley features such unusual trees as this braided tower... (left). Agnes Lewis (above), co-manager of the crafts shop at the entrance to the unique forest, points out some of the plants grafted into their unusual shapes by the late Axel N. Erlandson.

## Gen. Doolittle To Be Featured

Lt. Gen. James Doolittle, leader of the Doolittle Tokyo Air Raid of WW-II, will be one famous Air Force personality featured at a special banquet sponsored by the Monterey Bay Area Air Force Association Oct. 14 at 6:30 p.m. at the Salinas Elks Lodge, 714 Airport Blvd., Salinas.

Citizens of the area are invited to hear and meet world-famous aviation personalities including Lt. Gen. David Adamson, Col. Beirne Lay Jr. who authored books including "Twelve O'Clock High" and "I Wanted Wings," and Brig. Gen. Everett Holstrom.

Tickets are available from the Salinas Chamber of Commerce.

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