

The Roads of Bonny Doon

By Robert W. Piwarzyk

A road network usually evolved as a means of opening up an area to residential, agricultural, and industrial development, and then connecting it to centers of commerce, shipping, and government. Initially, the main roads were likely to be through-roads (roads going from one major populated area to another, like "El Camino Real"), roads serving a geographical area (a coastal terrace, a drainage basin, a valley, or a ridgeline), and roads serving large land holdings (Spanish rancho or logging lands). Subsequent needs such as schools, churches, and sport and vacation activities further interconnected an area. As the demographics shifted, the importance of particular roads changed.

In California, land tended to be developed from the coast to the inland areas. Due to the rugged shore, roads along the coast were long and curvy, up and down, and in and out. Access by sea was more economical; even at the risk of losing chutes, wharves, landings, and schooners to raging storms and surf. Even so, being on the coast often gave an advantage. Inland also usually meant uphill. Inland owners were at the mercy of downhill owners for access to the sea. A profitable venture might be charged a toll for rights of passage, or denied access if a competitor. If shipping charges were too high, a competing landing might be built, as was the case in Davenport. A safer haven might cause a change, as was the reason for the shift from Williams' Landing in Bonny Doon to Davenport Landing.

Roads were generally constructed to serve industries from uphill to downhill to utilize gravity effectively. Logs to the sawmills, or ore and fuel to the limekilns were transported from above, whenever possible, and the product was transported downhill to the user, the railroad, or the wharf. Large wagons (sometimes two in tandem) carrying heavy loads could create dust up to a foot deep. This would turn into a quagmire with the first rains and often shut down an operation. Thus, road construction was an important investment.

It is difficult to trace infrastructure growth from the literature for several reasons. If roads were named at all, the name of the destination was likely to be used. "Bonny Doon Road" becomes the short way of saying "the road to Bonny Doon." Or a geographical feature might be used, as "Coast Road" for "the road up (or along) the coast." The name of the land owner, road builder, or maintenance man was often used. Different people might call the same road by different names, or use the same name for different roads!

The term "grade" was commonly used for steep, mountain roads and was used throughout the Santa Cruz mountains. It was sometimes used interchangeably with "road," or even in addition to road, as in "Ice Cream Grade Road." It was often used with "the," as in "the Ice Cream Grade."

Dimensions were in "rods" and "chains." A rod (rd) is 16.5 feet or 5.50 yards long. There are 320 rods in one mile. A chain is a measuring unit, or a tool made of 100 links, which equals 66 feet. The slope of a grade was given in "inches per rod."

Studying maps in chronological order may be the best method for determining how the growth of a road network occurred, but this is not without problems. Perhaps many earlier maps are unknown, lost, or destroyed. The sudden appearance on a new map of a road (or a new name) does not mean that the date of construction was the same as the date of the map. Nor does it mean that the change occurred subsequent to the date of the last map. Also, updates were not that frequent. In fact, many of the map references in "Santa Cruz County Place Names," by Donald T. Clark, are relatively recent when compared to the known age of a road. Regardless, this is a highly recommended source of information.

Many early roads crossed adjacent lands by agreement of property owners. They were used by a limited number of people and maintenance was minimal. These roads were not "county roads," which was the short way of saying "county maintained roads," and therefore might not appear on the "official map of the county." Further subdivision brought heavier use which, in turn, increased the amount of road maintenance needed. The questions of who "owned" the road, who should do the work to maintain the road, and who should pay for this work became more important. Each road had a unique history --- from neighbors banding together, to locked gates, feuds, and lawsuits.

Users might posture that the road was a "public" road when the owner locked the gate, but hold the owner to bearing the responsibility of maintenance and complain when lack of it resulted in a dangerous way. Some owners were reluctant to do or pay for work that was perhaps of no benefit to themselves, or to donate (i.e. "dedicate") their land to the county for a public right-of-way.

Road districts were formed by the county and a "road tax" was levied which was either paid or "worked off." Petitions to the board of supervisors were made to take over existing roads (or construct new ones) as "public, county maintained roads." A petition might be by the public against the will of the property owner, or by the owner against the desires of his neighbors. (In some ways, Santa Cruz hasn't changed much in 100 years!)

When a petition was submitted a committee reviewed the situation and submitted a formal "viewers report" to the supervisors. A summary of the costs and right-of-way acquisition recommendations were made. As in the 1901 case of the road across "Rancho Arroyo de la Laguna" from Bonny Doon to the Coast Road, the district attorney could make a finding that "--- the same route of travel has been, since the year 1870, used and traveled by the public, generally, for the ordinary uses and purposes of a public road, or highway, it is, without question, a county road, even though there was no dedication."

The area now known as Bonny Doon was surrounded on three sides by four ranchos established from 1839 to 1843, during California's Spanish period. These were San Vicente, Arroyo de la Laguna, Refugio, and Canada del Rincon (refer to property owners map in appendix A [not included on this site]). Settlement began in earnest after the county, one of the original ones, was created in the new state in 1850. The close of the Civil War brought about changes that caused growth in the region for the next thirty-five years (to 1900). Most activities centered around farms, dairies, orchards, vineyards, logging, and manufacture of lime, and the roads developed to meet the needs of those settlers. Most of Bonny Doon was within the "Ben Lomond road district" to the east, and the lower "Coast Grade" (now Bonny Doon Road) was in the "seaside district" to the west.

Each road in Bonny Doon is presented in alphabetical order by its current name. An understanding of how these roads came to be constructed, and named, supports the discussion as to when, and by whom, the limekilns of Bonny Doon were operated (see "the Bonny Doon kilns"). Much new information was acquired from the interview of Mrs. Ruth Adams Trotts, which is presented under "Historical Background." [Not included on this site.] Reference should also be made to the maps, petitions, and viewers reports in appendixes A & B. [Not included on this site.]

Alba Road (also Ben Lomond Grade, or Alba Grade)

A steep road providing the farmers at the north end of Empire Grade with a route to Ben Lomond, their nearest place of trade. Originally built from Empire Grade in 1886 through what is now Summit Drive and the "old Alba Road" trail in Fall

Creek State Park. The upper part was so steep (10% grade) that there were reports of horses pulling driverless wagons into town. The driver had fallen forward off the wagon seat in one case, and was either injured or killed! (also see the excerpt about Empire Grade.)

Bonny Doon Road (also Coast Grade, and Liddell Creek Road, Lydell Creek Road, or Lime Kiln Road for lower section in the coast district; currently includes former Ocean View Avenue uphill of intersection at Pine Flat Road)

A part of the road from the "Coast Road" to Bonny Doon was probably built by George Liddell, who as a civil engineer had a sawmill on the creek in 1851. Later, in 1858, Andrew Glassell was reported to have "the use of an excellent road from his limekilns to Williams' Landing on the coast at the mouth of Liddell Creek." In 1901, this 3 1/2 mile portion of the road was declared a county road. The petition to do so was submitted in 1884! The road down to these limekilns from Empire Grade was already a county road at the time of the petition. The name "Bonnie Doon" is said to have originated around 1880.

The people of Felton originally referred to the Felton-Empire Road as "the Bonny Doon Road." This was natural, as this was the road to Bonny Doon for them. See also Felton-Empire Road.

Empire Grade (only known name)

Named after the Empire Mining Company, which operated during the 1850s, this road was constructed, in 1872, up Ben Lomond Mountain on the ridgeline between the Coast Road and the San Lorenzo valley. Unlike the present road, which ends at Eagle Rock and the Lockheed facility at the summit, about 21 miles from Santa Cruz, the original road went 35 miles north and served the Big Basin area. See the account in appendix B [not included on this site] taken from 1872 announcements of the opening of the road.

As the Pine Flat area grew, more property owners had to get to Ben Lomond and Felton to trade, or to the county seat in Santa Cruz city for business. The road up from Felton was completed to Empire Grade south of the present intersection. Traffic went up Pine Flat Road, down Empire Grade to this road, and down to the valley. One map designates this the "Felton & Ben Lomond Road." To repeat, the folks in Felton called it the Bonny Doon Road. The folks in Bonny Doon called that stretch of upper Empire Grade the "Felton–Empire Grade" to distinguish it from the lower stretch of Empire Grade, which they took downhill of Smith Grade on their way to the city of Santa Cruz, and called the "Santa Cruz–Empire Grade."

Smith Grade was built as a cut-off for the people of Pine Flat who had to originally go uphill to Empire Grade, and then down Empire Grade to Santa Cruz. This is 5.7 vs. 10.1 road miles on today's roads. See additional comments under Smith Grade and Felton-Empire Road.

Felton-Empire Road (also Felton Empire Road, Felton-Empire Grade, Felton–Bonny Doon Road, Bonny Doon–Felton Road, Bonny Doon to Felton Road, Felton and Ben Lomond Road, Bennett Street, Felton Grade, and Bonny Doon Road)

From the number of names listed, one would guess that this road has an interesting history. However it is not referenced on an early map by Clark and at this time the date of construction is not known. More research needs to be done!

What is known is that the road was different things to different people. Starting out in Felton it went up the grade to Eben Bennett's lime kiln located below his quarry on the east side of Ben Lomond Mountain. Eben started producing lime, in 1867, on Bennett Creek with his brother Stanley. His friend, Thomas Bull (AKA Bohl), had a kiln next door on Bull Creek and they shipped their product down the mountain together. This road appears on maps of Felton as "Bennett Street." It was also known as "Felton Grade" as it went uphill out of Felton. Many times more than one road out of town

was given the same name! To avoid confusion, it became the "Felton-Empire Grade," denoting that this Felton Grade went up to Empire Grade.

Until the date of construction is known, it cannot be said with certainty whether the road extended up to the Ben Lomond Mountain ridgeline and into Bonny Doon before Empire Grade was built. However, it did eventually connect to Empire Grade and was called "the Bonny Doon Road" by the people of Felton. Thus the phrase "the road to Bonny Doon" gets shortened to "Bonny Doon Road." This same road was the route the people of Bonny Doon took to get to the trade centers of Felton and Ben Lomond, so they called it the "Felton and Ben Lomond Road." As Felton took the lead this name disappeared, but up to recent times "Felton-Bonny Doon Road" and "Bonny Doon-Felton Road" have been interchanged.

The junction with Empire Grade was originally about 0.1 miles south of its present one at the intersection of Ice Cream Grade. The cut-off was constructed later (date unknown) to get alignment with Ice Cream Grade. Until then, according to Mrs. Ruth Adams Trotts, the stretch of Empire Grade between Ice Cream Grade and the road to Felton was called "the Felton Empire Grade." This was done so as not to confuse your listener with "the Santa Cruz Empire Grade," which you took to get to the city of Santa Cruz. To a Bonny Dooner from Pine Flat, Ice Cream Grade and Smith Grade were "cut-offs" that were used to get to Empire Grade and then to Felton or Santa Cruz respectively.

Ice Cream Grade (also Adams Road)

According to Mrs. Ruth Adams Trotts, her grandfather, Reverend Phelps R. Adams, was assemblyman for Bonny Doon in 1893. He had a ranch in Bonny Doon on Ocean View Avenue. On October 3, 1893, a petition to the County Board of Supervisors "to lay out, open, and maintain a public road in Ben Lomond road district" was submitted by a P.R. Adams with a bond and plat of the proposed road attached. The petition stated that the road started "on the Coast Road, about 400 feet north east of the San Vicenta school house." Apparently that meant "on the road to the coast," as the plat shows the road starting on Pine Flat Road. It also says that the road crosses Laguna Creek and goes through the lands of Duffey and Langley, "intersecting the Empire Road at a point about 200 yards north east of Duffey and Langley lumber yard."

A committee was formed and a viewers' report was submitted on October 6, 1893 (!), estimating the cost of grading at \$1145.00, construction of two bridges (one across Laguna Creek, the other across the unnamed creek) at \$500.00, and two small bridges, or culverts, across Mahan Gulch at \$50.00, for a total of \$1735.00 with fencing. The report stated that "this road will be of great benefit to all the residents along the Pine Flat Road to the Bonny Doon school house and also all those residents between the Pine Flat Road and the San Vicente Creek," meaning those on Ocean View Avenue, and continues "being a saving in distance to Felton or Santa Cruz of one and one half miles, besides being a road with much lighter grades." A profile of the steepest grades are given in "inches per rod." The present road conforms very well to the centerline proposed on the plat.

The report does not mention Martin Road or any existing road between Pine Flat Road and Laguna Creek. This is not to say that there wasn't any. Nor does it mention any logging or use of existing logging roads in the lower Laguna Canyon from the Empire Grade side. No intent to quarry or make lime was mentioned. It does state that "it will also give an outlet to all the timber of the upper Laguna Creek, being 8 or 10 million feet: besides a large quantity of wood."

None of the documents name the proposed road, but it is reasonable to conclude that the road was called Adams Road after Reverend Phelps R. Adams, who was the "prayer of said petition." The stories of how the road got the name Ice Cream Grade are told by Clark. Ruth Adams Trotts was quite sure that her story was the true story (see transcription of her interview [not included on this site]). She said that the road didn't go through until the bridge was built by her father and uncle. It seems that if an existing road was proposed to be upgraded, the petition or the viewers report would have said so!

In any event, raising \$1735.00 by selling ice cream in the year of the "Panic of '93," a nationwide financial crises (i.e. a depression) must have been a formidable task for the citizens of Bonny Doon. It is not known at this time when the road was actually built, but by the end of 1899, the Holme(s) Lime Company announced that it was building a new kiln on the "Ice Cream" Grade in Bonny Doon.

This road became a "cut-off" for traffic from Bonny Doon to Felton. It took Ruth's grandfather five hours for this round trip; two down and three back! See also the transcriptions of the interviews of Ruth Adams Trotts and Ernest Wildhagen [not included on this site] for their recollections of Ice Cream Grade around 1910.

Appendix B presents copies of the petition [not included on this site, consult paper copy in the Library] to abandon a portion of Ice Cream Grade, submitted on April 29, 1902, with a copy of the original plat of the grade attached. The document references the original petition to build the road, filed with the Board of Supervisors on November 7, 1893. Construction must have occurred between these two dates.

Martin Road (only known name)

This road was named after the Martin family, who were early residents of the area between Smith Grade and Ice Cream Grade. The date of construction is not known, but the road does not appear on the 1905 property owners map. It may follow old property lines as it has left-right-left-right 90 degree turns as it goes from Ice Cream Grade to Pine Flat Road past "the rocks" and through what is now the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve. It comes into Pine Flat Road at the old school house, about 0.2 miles from where Pine Flat Road "joins" Bonny Doon Road. In spite of its many turns, it is 0.3 miles shorter than going up Pine Flat Road and over Ice Cream Grade. According to Mrs. Ruth Adams Trotts, the people who lived on the lower Ocean View Avenue used Martin Road to get to Ice Cream Grade to take that cut-off to Felton, and they used Smith Grade to get to Santa Cruz.

Ocean View Avenue (now the upper part of Bonny Doon Road)

Part of an early subdivision of the lands between Mill Creek on Pine Flat Road and San Vicente Creek to the west, it generally makes a "u" from the south end of Pine Flat Road and back to Pine Flat Road at the Bonny Doon Presbyterian Church. Anyone who has ever driven up Bonny Doon Road from the coast knows that the main road goes past "The Lost Weekend" (now a wine tasting room) and turns into Pine Flat Road!

The original name described the area, but conflicted with another road in the county by that name, causing the name to be changed. "Bonny Doon Road" had a certain ring and logic to it. The area always gave mapmakers trouble. Some designated the road from Empire Grade to the coast highway as "Pine Flat Road, others as "Bonny Doon Road."

Pine Flat Road (only name known)

It is not known exactly when this road was built, but it is shown on an 1861 map. Generally running uphill from Bonny Doon Road to Empire Grade. A relatively flat area with many ponderosa pine trees is east of this road. To say that "Pine Flat" is named after them may not be correct, as the early settlers tended to call all conifers "pines."

There were three schools near the downhill end: San Vicente School, Bonny Doon School, and Ocean Avenue School. The first two were merged into the Bonny Doon Unified School District, which currently has its school on Pine Flat Road at Ice Cream Grade.

Smith Grade (only name known)

According to Mrs. Ruth Adams Trotts, her maternal grandfather, Mr. Ormand Jenne, arrived in Bonny Doon, in 1882, with his wife Emily and bought 160 acres in the Martin district. "He was the one who donated land from Bonny Doon Road back (east) to another farmer's land. That was farmer (John) Smith. And then the Smith Grade was continued through Smith's property. I have the deed here where it was sold to Grandfather Jenne. Then Grandfather donated it to

the county. Went down by Reggiardo's, out by Bald Mountain, and then over to the Empire Grade—Santa Cruz Empire Grade."

This narrow, curvy road runs generally from the west, from Bonny Doon Road, to slightly south of east to meet Empire Grade. It drops about 740' down into the Laguna Creek canyon and comes back out 480' to meet Empire Grade at the saddle of the ridge. There is no reference to it being on an early map, and it is not known at this time when it was built. Ruth's recollections would date it around the early 1900s at the latest, as her grandfather sold the land and moved to Santa Cruz.

("Ormand Jenne" was pronounced clearly by Ruth. She never used Orman D. Jenne, which is most likely in error, as used elsewhere, unless his full name was Ormand D. Jenne?)

Bald Mountain School was located at the bend in Smith Grade at Back Ranch Road. It burned down in September of 1903, and was replaced. The new school burned down many years after the school closed. Mr. Jenne also donated the land to build the first Bonny Doon School on Pine Flat Road across from Martin Road, so that his daughter Emma, Ruth's mother, could attend.

What was once considered a "short cut" is now considered a "slow road"! Just like Ice Cream Grade, the narrow road, sharp curves, and steep grades of Smith Grade limit speeds with today's vehicles, compared to other routes. However, the early settlers, in horse and buggy or springboard wagons, considered these roads a blessing compared to the "old days" when they had to "go the long way." On a cold, rainy, windy day one might be reluctant to go to Santa Cruz on the Coast Road in an open buggy! Fallen trees and rock slides were as much a problem then as they are now.

Sources

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