

## Scotts Valley Area Curiosities

*By Marion Dale Pokriots*

### Remains of a Prehistoric Sea

When ocean waters receded many eons ago, some interesting features were left exposed in the Santa Cruz Mountains, one of which is a ridge of high grade sand on the western edge of Scotts Valley. In the same vicinity, thousands of tiny shark's teeth have been found and collected by school children, as well as scientists. According to naturalist Frank Perry, about 19 species of sharks are represented.

A mile or so beyond "shark's teeth hill", an unusual outcropping of low pillars march up another incline in two almost parallel lines. These hollow sandstone columns are cemented together by extinct sand dollars. Although they were thought to be the ruins of an ancient civilization by early settlers, scientists have concluded that they were formed by a natural geological process.

At the Olympia sand quarry, the fossil remains of an extinct sea cow were discovered in 1963. This 2,000 pound "Dusisiren jordani" lived about 10-12 million years ago in shallow near-shore waters. The fossil bones are at the University of California, Berkeley. Cast replicas of this ancient sea cow are now exhibited in a Japanese museum and at the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History.

Sand Dollar Hill near Weston Road is another interesting left-over from from a former age. This mound has a sixty meter crust composed of "Astrodapsis spatiosus" (extinct sand dollars).

At the north end of the valley the skeleton of a whale was unearthed on property now owned by Borland International.



*Photo courtesy of Frank Perry*

### Unusual Plant Life

Scotts Village, the Valley Gardens Golf Course and Spring Lakes Mobile Home Park are built on an ancient lake bed, which in more recent time was a marsh dotted with wild azaleas and swamp grass.

At one time, classes from U. C. Berkeley come to Scotts Valley to study its strange flora and fauna. Parts of the valley were like a slice off the Sierra Nevada Range. Ponderosa pines thrived, and kangaroo rats nested on the sandy west side. These unusual groves of ponderosa pines were noted by the botanist Hartweg in 1846. Ecologist Randall Morgan stated in a newspaper article that there are over 90 different plant species, uncommon or absent elsewhere, living in the valley's sand hills.

## Artifacts of Early Inhabitants

According to archeologist Dr. Robert Cartier, Scotts Valley has been inhabited by humans for more than 10,000 years. During one dig, 11,505 artifactual materials were uncovered. Now displayed at Scotts Valley City Hall is an "eccentric crescent" (a well-known scientific treasure), as well as other objects, such as hammerstones, utilized flakes, microliths, milling equipment, unfinished bifaces, and core tools.

The largest amount of cultural material which has been excavated to date [1995] is associated with early- to mid-Holocene (4500-9500 B.P.) levels.

## Tree Circus

Twentieth century humans have added their own creative curiosities to this unique area. Axel Erlandson had his grafted living trees, shaped like ladders, chairs, knots, hearts, and spiral staircases, transferred to Scotts Valley in the 1940s. Later, giant fiberglass dinosaurs were placed among the trees and the Tree Circus was renamed Lost World.

## The Only Russian to Receive a Land Grant

Scotts Valley's first landowner was Jose Antonio Bolcoff, a young Russian translator who was favored by Spanish Governor Pablo Vicente de Sola. He was the only Russian to settle permanently in Alta California and the only Russian to receive a Mexican land grant. Jose Antonio Bolcoff and his family lived on the Rancho San Agustin (Scotts Valley) during the 1830s.

## The Crown

One Scotts Valley mystery, waiting for a super sleuth to solve, involves the discovery of a small crown buried under many inches of dirt and humus. The sand cast brass or bronze crown, which once topped a small Catholic statue, was unearthed by homeowner Aldo Bussi while he was digging a drainage ditch after a storm. According to historian Norman Neuerburg, it could be a mission period piece which topped the figure of the Christ Child.

What is its story? At this point we can only speculate. The location of its discovery was not on any established trail nor was it near the Bolcoffs' adobe. Bolcoff's wife and her two sisters, who resided with her, were devout Catholics. Was the crown taken from the home chapel of the Bolcoffs? Or did the little headpiece fall off when Santa Cruz Mission treasures were being carted to the Santa Clara Mission at the time of pirate Bouchard's raid on Monterey in 1818? The crown remains in private hands until more is known about it and an appropriate place can be found to display it.



*Photo of the crown, which is about 6" across at the widest point. Photo courtesy of the author.*

## Sources

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