

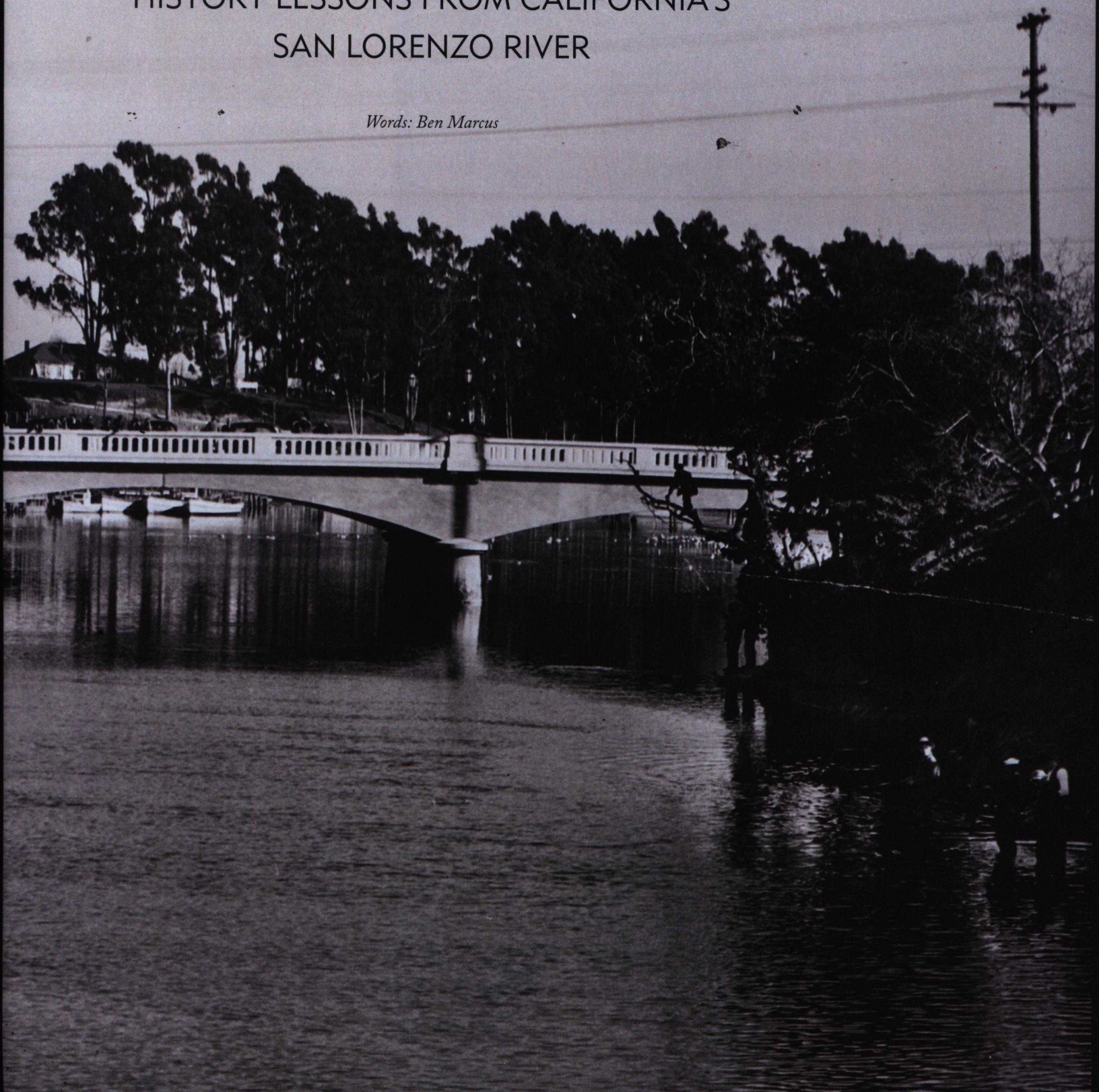
THE LOST BOYS

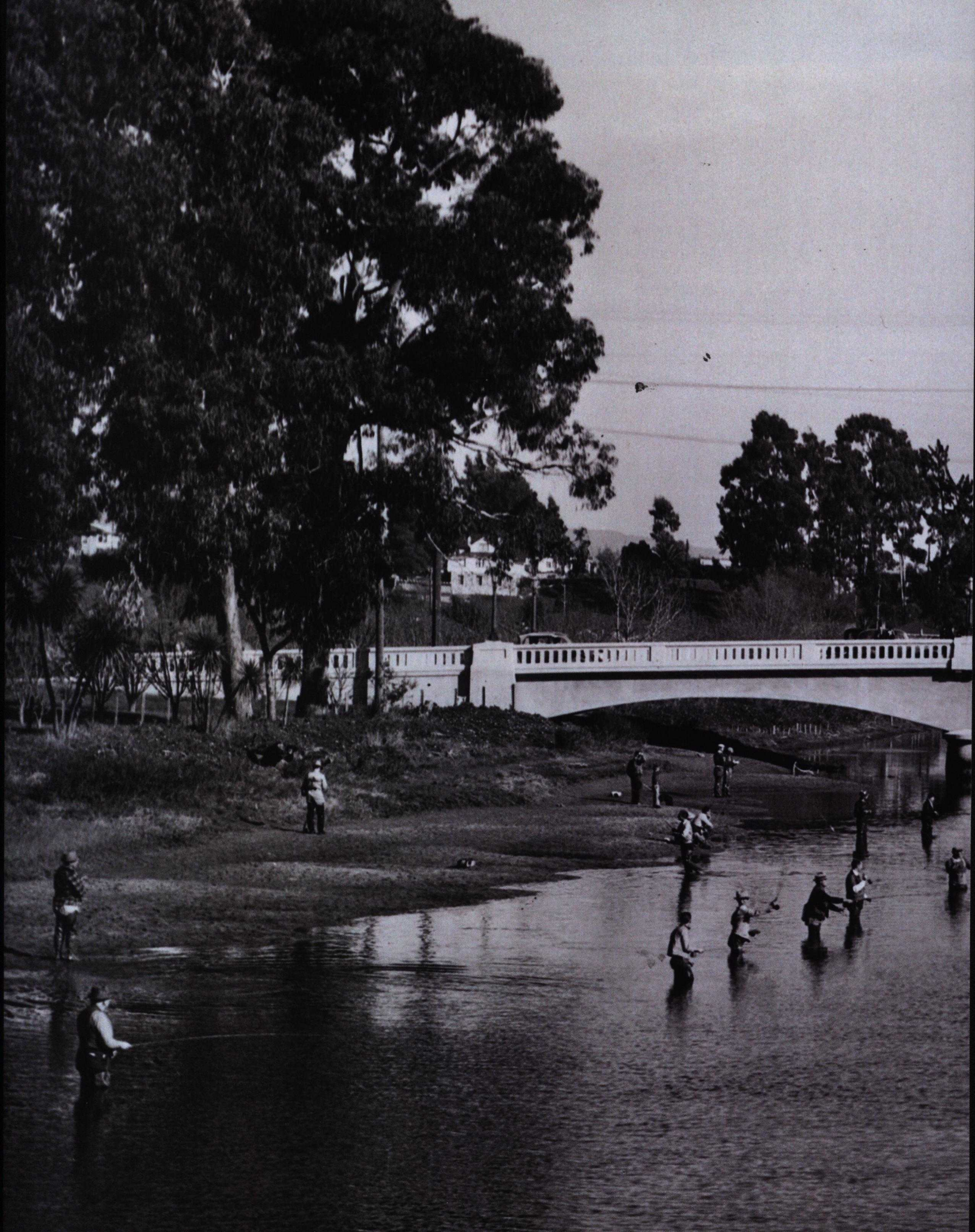
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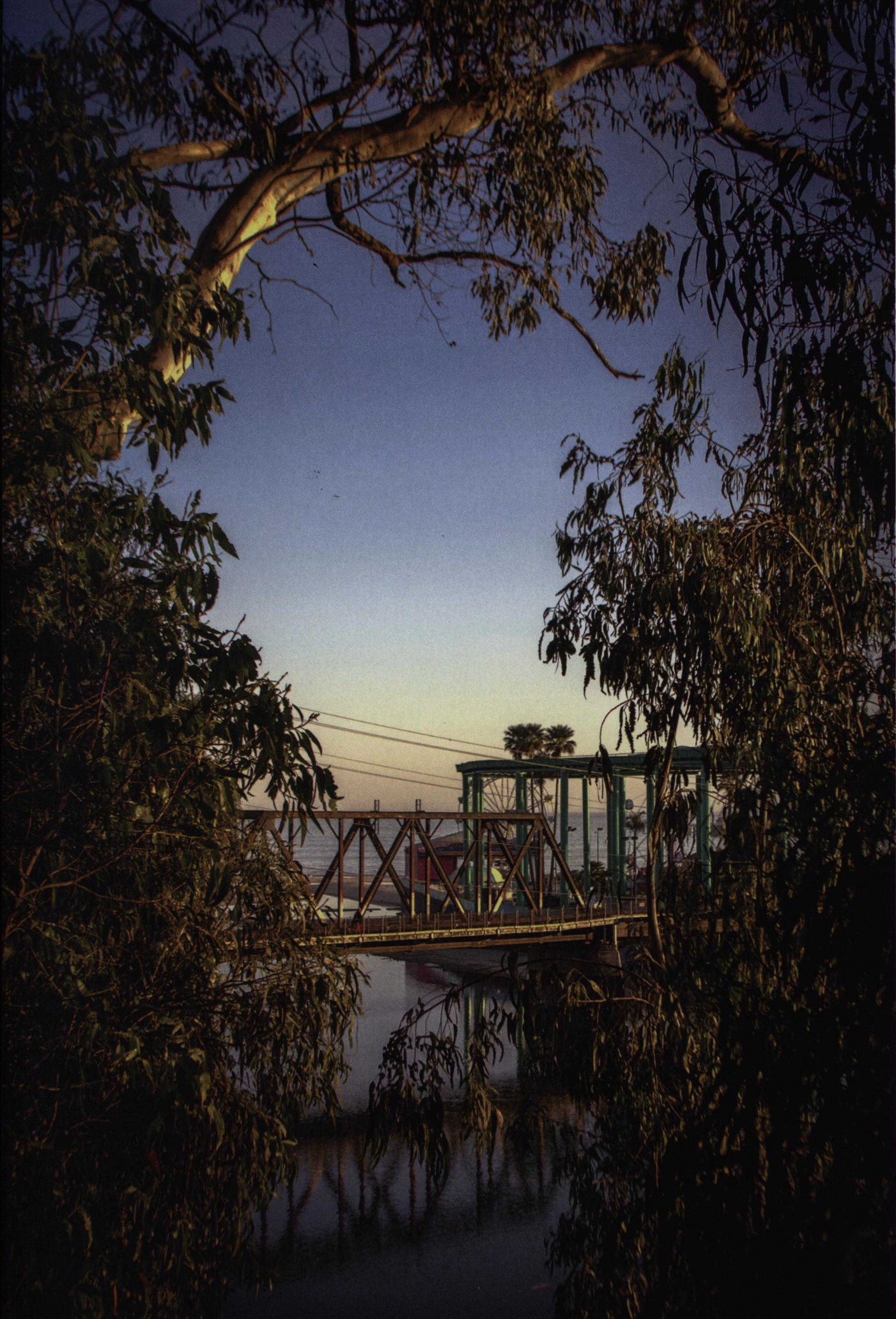
"Men fishing in the San Lorenzo River near the Riverside Avenue Bridge." Circa 1950. Believed to be prior to the flood of 1955. Photo Courtesy Santa Cruz Public Libraries

HISTORY LESSONS FROM CALIFORNIA'S SAN LORENZO RIVER

Words: Ben Marcus







“AND THE STORY IT TOLD of a river that flowed, made me sad to think it was dead.”
—“*The Horse with No Name*,” an American song popular during a time when the San Lorenzo River still had fish in it.

Vampires are so *hot* right now, but think back to those ever-pale, never-dying vampires in *The Lost Boys* (1987) lead by bottle-blond Kiefer Sutherland (channeling Billy Idol). They’re sexy, they’re deadly, they’re *hot-blooded*, tempting and taunting the mortal Michael, swinging under a foggy train bridge in “Santa Carla.” As a rumbling train menaces the menacing vamps, they squeak and squawk at Michael to hang with them—so to speak. Teetering between cold human mortality and hot vampire immortality, Michael lets go, taking a symbolic drop of faith into a new, eternal, bloody life: “Never grow old, never die.”

HOT! But the fiction of that *Lost Boys* train bridge in Santa Carla in reality is the 115-year-old train trestle over the troubled waters of the San Lorenzo River, which runs through Santa Cruz, CA, and forms a boundary between the surf-arbitrary designations of “midtown” and the “west side.” The trestle connects Seabright to the Boardwalk with 300 feet of wood, steel, creosote, asbestos and other early 20th century toxicities, anchored on two concrete supports about 30 miles from the source of the river in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and about 1,000 feet from where those waters flow into Monterey Bay.

The bridge provides a pedestrian walkway that overlooks the estuary of the San Lorenzo River, a changeable body of water that warps and woofs with tides, seasons, sandbars, swell, heavy equipment, floods, droughts, sewage spills, civic needs—and little kids making dams. There was a time when the estuary was loaded with salmonids—fresh out of the salty Pacific blue and into the brack—shake, shake, shaking off the relentless ocean perils of sharks and orcas and ravenous pinnipeds, and now facing a different threat: humans in boots and boats using a wide variety of weaponry to claim them—dynamite, spears, salmon eggs, lures, flies.

All those silvery, strong fish holding in the estuary, waiting for rain, with one thing on their minds—swimming hard upstream to get some. The San Lorenzo estuary was like the waiting room in a bordello for steelhead, coho salmon and other anadromous fish—the river was famed around the city, the county, the state, the country and even the world as the finest fishing river south of the Golden Gate. From the Gold Rush circa 1848 to just before the Silicon Rush circa 2000, the San Lorenzo was renowned as home and habitat to tens of thousands of healthy, vital steelhead and coho salmon, according to everything from the San Lorenzo Valley Water District to Wikipedia to the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* to local legend.

But that was then and this is now, and well into the Silicon Rush of the 21st Century, the fish population is coughing up blood, growing old and dying, ceasing to exist, unwell and perilously close to no more, threatened by a tiramisu of tyrannies: overdevelopment, overpopulation, overfishing, water diversion, water pollution and climate change.

Home is not as sweet as home once was.

HEY NINETEEN 72

Way back when in 1972, I was a fresh-faced, eager, wide-eyed transplant from the Valley, moved by divorce and an adventurous, VW-driving, semi-hippie mom from Santa Clara to Santa Cruz. My younger brother and I were displaced from a solid, stable and happy '60s home to a whole new society—like Buck in *Call of the Wild*, and very much like Michael Emerson and his younger brother Sam in *The Lost Boys*.

Divorce and broken homes have driven more than a few depressed kids to find solace in the secrets of the sea, and I was one of them. Mom bought a house on Plum and Owen in the Seabright area—aka midtown—for about \$25,000, a house that is now worth a million and a half and maybe more. She had a touch of Madame Winchester and couldn’t stop renovating, so she employed Dennis T., a surfer who listened to KFAT alternative radio relentlessly and relentlessly smoked Camel Unfiltered and had the hacking death-cough to go with it. Dennis surfed the Yacht Harbor and the Rivermouth in the winter, and the Lane and up the coast the rest of the time.

◀LEFT▶

This railroad trestle spanning the San Lorenzo River was built in 1904 by the Southern Pacific Railroad. The foreground’s eucalyptus trees are a frequent resting place for raptors, great blue heron and cormorants drying their wings and searching for their next meal.
Photo: Crystal Birns

◀CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT▶

The good ole days:
when there were fish
enough to keep, and
waders that helped
you lose weight just
by wearing them.

Photo Courtesy of Barry
Burt Family Archives

Surfer Dog was a late
70s/early 80s Santa
Cruz institution on the
beach between the
Santa Cruz Harbor
and the San Lorenzo
River. Ben Marcus,
proprietor, worked all
summer, skimmed a
bit off the top and used
the proceeds for fall
surfing and fishing trips.
Photo: Mom Marcus

"The San Lorenzo from
the R.R. crossing, Big
Tree Station, Felton,
Santa Cruz Co., Cal.,
5009." Stereograph.

Photo: Carlton E.
Watkins, Courtesy of
the California History
Room, California
State Library,
Sacramento, CA.

Dennis didn't promise, "Never grow old, never die!" when he gave me a shaggy old two-tone seven-foot Haut Surfboard. Being a green kid from the Valley—as Valley as Valley could be—I bought a bad wetsuit, the wrong wetsuit, a quarter-inch diving long john with a purple spring suit over top, from O'Neill Surf Shop at the yacht harbor. It was basically a neoprene hazmat suit, but I was transmogrified by surfing. I was gone, and that was that. "See you mom. Love you. Goin' surfin'. Won't be home for dinner—for the next 10 years."

And like Michael in *The Lost Boys*, I was indoctrinated into a whole new world. A luscious world. All of a sudden, I was a surf vampire—mesmerized and hopelessly intoxicated by the feels and smells and challenges and emotions of the ocean, and surfing, and cold water and Santa Cruz in the 1970s.

Every possible day I would walk from Plum and Owen to Cowells, serenaded by Steely Dan and Maria Muldaur and Joni Mitchell and Linda Ronstadt and Elton John and all the rock and soul hits of the late '60s and early '70s. I walked over that bridge every possible day—looking left where the river and the ocean flowed together at the San Lorenzo River mouth, gauging the swell angle and the wind and the tide and factoring that complex equation into what would be happening within the shelter of Cowells Beach—beginner surfer Valhalla. The place to be.

This was 47 years ago, but seems like a blink of an eye, back to a time when that walk over the San Lorenzo would sometimes pass over an estuary full of salmonids. Like B52s on a bombing run, healthy heaps of large, energized fish swam in lazy formation in the lagoon, between the mountains and the deep blue sea, acclimating and waiting for something to happen—waiting for rain.

As a midtown surfer it was easy to feel an affinity with the steelhead, as we also went back and forth from land to sea to land, and we also prayed for rain—because when enough rain fell, a sandbar formed at the river mouth and created a beautiful little wave that shape-shifted with the tides and currents and sometimes broke all winter—or even into the summer like the El Niño sandbar of 1982. To this day, no matter where I am, when it starts raining a little part of my brain prays for "More! More! More!" because more rain means more sand moving downriver and out to sea, and more fish moving out of the sea and upriver.

When I wasn't learning to surf, I was learning to fish. The San Lorenzo is where I first learned how *not* to catch steelhead.

I have fruitlessly flogged famous waters from the Klamath to the Kispiox and all the way to Pennsylvania and Alaska for steelhead, and in all that time and millions of casts I have managed to hook exactly one—on the Kispiox in 2000. I was so shocked to have a steelhead on I went reaching for my camera and managed to break the borrowed fly rod of a Swedish guy who was part of a Viking crew invading northern British Columbia.

All of that fruitless flogging began in the San Lorenzo River in the 1970s. I tried. I had a go. When the wind, tide and swell were no bueno for surfing (or I was grounded by my not-hippie-enough mom for bad grades), I stood under *The Lost Boys* bridge with a '70s-vintage 7-weight Fenwick rod (that I still have). As wrong as that quarter-inch diving long john/spring suit/straitjacket combo was for surfing, for steelhead that was probably the wrong rod, the wrong reel, the wrong line, the wrong leader, the wrong knots, the wrong flies, the wrong approach, the wrong everything.

But I tried. On the San Lorenzo, usually poking around the estuary under the trestle, but sometimes driving far up into the mountains to hike into holes I had heard about and read about.

And in all that time: nada, rien, zilch, bupkis. I saw them hiding along the cracks under the bridge, and in spots like the Buckeye Hole. They were in there, and they were lovely, but I wasn't fooling them. The steelhead population of the San Lorenzo has never had anything to fear from me, but other forces and factors have reduced them from the thriving bomber squadrons of the early '70s to the trickles of fish we see now.

I don't like dead rivers. Malibu Creek is pretty close to a dead river. San Mateo Creek that runs down to the Trestles surf spot between Los Angeles and San Diego is close as well. The Tijuana River, where it runs down to the ocean at the very southern end of California, is a dead river, toxified and hopeless.

Dead rivers are sad.



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The San Lorenzo from the R. R. crossing, Big Tree Station, Felton, Santa Cruz Co., Cal.

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《TOP TO BOTTOM》

The California Powder Works, Santa Cruz County, Cal., office, San Francisco Lithograph. Artwork: Britton & Rey, Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, CA.

Branciforte Creek in Blackburn Gulch. Circa 1910. The gulch was named for William F. Blackburn (1814-1867) who served as alcalde, county judge and state assemblyman. Norwegian photographer Ole Ravnos owned a photo studio in Capitola from 1907-1915, and through his work played a prominent role in vividly reflecting the life and times of the area during the beginning of the 20th century. Photo: Ole Ravnos, Courtesy of Santa Cruz Public Libraries



SAN LORENZO (RIP)

When I walk over it now and think back to 1972, the San Lorenzo seems dead. It looks that way. It feels that way. Where once were squadrons of fish holding in large numbers, now are odd groups of fish—two and four and six, maybe—furtively swimming out of the sea, over the sandbar and through a deadly gauntlet of unshooable (by law) seals trying to eat them. The fish that make it hold in holes under the trestle, at the Buckeye Hole and in other redoubts—looking as nervous as the homeless population also hiding out along the river these days.

Anyone who knows and loves California wonders what their part of the state was like when it was pristine, or close to it. Poking and prodding into history, many stories are told about a river that flowed. It's possible to get an idea of what the San Lorenzo was like in its heyday, and how the river has been shaped and warped by those tyrannies of population, water consumption, pollution, conservation and other goods, bads and uglies. I wonder and worry about the Lost Boys of the San Lorenzo: At what point were they full strength, and where did they go?

NAME THAT RIVER: 1769

A history lesson from Wikipedia:

The first European land exploration of Alta California, the Spanish Portolá expedition, gave the river its name when it passed through the area on its way north, camping near the west bank on October 17, 1769. Franciscan missionary Juan Crespi, traveling with the expedition, noted in his diary that, "Not far from the sea we came to a large river...It is one of the largest that we have met with on the journey...This river was named San Lorenzo." "Not far from the sea" indicates that the party probably crossed the river at one of what later became the commonly used fords. The fords, in turn, became the locations for the first two bridges across the river—at today's Water Street and Soquel Avenue.

The Portolá expedition named it and claimed it way back when, in 1769, but there is no mention of the fish population. Having been to Alaska a couple of times and witnessed with my own two eyes how nature mutates when it's left alone, it's not hard to imagine the newly minted San Lorenzo when it was pristine and most likely one silver streak of salmonids from estuary to source. Maybe they crossed the river along the backs of all those fish crammed together.

AFTER THE GOLD RUSH: 1848+

From 1542 and well into the 1800s, the Spanish and the Mexicans spent a couple of centuries poking and probing Alta California—mostly looking for gold—but they missed it by that much: Gold was discovered on January 24, 1848, and the war with Mexico ended 10 days later with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexico signed over most of the Southwest for \$15 million—the equivalent of \$450 million today, but still a bargain—and the Gold Rush broke a couple months later after California was under the wing of Uncle Sam.

Mexico could only shake their heads and curse as 750,000 pounds of gold (worth \$10 billion today) flowed out of the hills and into the red, white and blue in less than 10 years.

Some of that gold capital flowed south to Santa Cruz and Monterey Bay—which was then, as it is now, one of the most sunny, fertile, nature-blessed places to live in California and the world—between the mountains and the deep blue sea, where redwoods and palm trees live together in perfect harmony.

THE HISTORY OF SALMON 2.0

The first sawmills in Santa Cruz predate the Gold Rush, but the lumbering pace picked up after 1849 with the influx of people, need and capital. According to NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region's "The History of Salmon 2.0," milling lumber—and other practices—began to sully and silt up the San Lorenzo before and after the Gold Rush:

A common practice in the 19th century was to dump the waste into the same stream that powered the mill. As early as 1867, The Santa Cruz Sentinel reported that, "the sawmills on the Pescadero have... injured the fishing, from the sawdust running down the creek." Four years later, an article in the same newspaper described how the "impact of sawmills on trout fishing was always a matter of contention in the communities along the streams flowing out of the redwood-covered canyons of the Santa Cruz Mountains."

THE GOLDEN SPIKE: 1876

The second most significant event in California history—after the Gold Rush, historically and chronologically—was the coming of the railroad. Spurred by the Gold Rush and the reports of abundant, most-excellent soil and weather and just about everything else humans crave, the population of California mutated as folks came west to grow with the country. First to San Francisco, then Los Angeles and Santa Cruz the same year: 1876. The train made it to Santa Cruz to expedite the movement of machinery in and lumber out, and brought folks to fish the abundance of Monterey Bay—from rockfish to salmon—and the river that ran into it.

According to NOAA's "History":

"In the San Lorenzo River (Santa Cruz County), 'railroad workers... while building the South Pacific Coast Railroad in the late 1870s, often used explosives to "fish."' (Lydon 2003)."

TROUT OR SALMON: 1885

The first mention of "steelhead" in *The Santa Cruz Sentinel* was in the December 4, 1885, edition, and began a debate over whether steelhead were salmon or trout:

The question whether the "steelhead" belongs to the salmon or the trout family will soon be settled in court. Dr. David Starr Jordan, the renowned piscatorial expert, now at the head of the Stanford Jr. University, has declared that these fish belong to the trout family, but the fishermen, not those who fish for sport, but those who catch fish for a living, have decided that the steelhead is a salmon.

A few weeks later, at the end of the month and the year, Judge Low came to a no-decision:

An Unsolved Problem. San Francisco, Dec. 31.

Judge Low this morning held that the scientific distinction between steelhead salmon and steelhead trout was too fine for the law to recognize, and so dismissed the case against A. Pardini, arrested recently by Fish Commissioner Babcock. Pardini was arrested for unlawfully exposing trout for sale. He defended himself on the ground that the fish were steelhead salmon, and not trout. Experts from Stanford University testified that the fish were trout, but Judge Low had a doubt in his mind which he resolved in favor of the defendant.

Whether the steelhead was a salmon or a trout, they were good sport and good eatin' for the rest of the 19th century and into the 20th century.

«RIGHT»

"Just in from fishing, two beautiful steelhead," and a sweet fishing rig. Photo: Courtesy of Barry Burt Family Archives

JUST IN FROM FISHING



TWO BEATIFUL STEELHEAD



THIS LAND IS MY LAND: 1905

Way back when, in 1905, there was concern about sections of the San Lorenzo being privatized, excluding the public from access to the river and the fish now thriving in it.

On August 3, 1905, *The Santa Cruz Sentinel* published an article from a concerned citizen titled:

"OBJECT TO RESERVED WATERS: OWNERS IN SANTA CRUZ CO. WHO RESERVE FISHING WATERS ARE IN DISFAVOR."

The article expressed concern that "the owners of land through which flow many inviting trout streams in Santa Cruz Co., are attempting to preserve or contemplating preserving those streams for their own personal enjoyment." It also expressed hope that a new hatchery at Brookdale would keep the population alive and kicking:

The anglers of San Francisco will, in the near future, find the streams of Santa Cruz Co. ideal for fishing. Last week I spent a couple of days at Brookdale, a beautiful spot in the heart of the redwoods. Brookdale is a comparatively new resort, and the genial proprietor, Judge Logan, tells me that he can not accommodate with cottages his many guests.

Ground was broken for the hatchery last February and today a suitable and commodious building marks the spot. In the hatchery at present are 800,000 rainbow and steelhead fry, all lively and healthy and growing under the most suitable surroundings. (Next spring several ponds will be added to the plant and the hatchery people will then be in a position to plentifully supply every river and creek in Santa Cruz Co.)

The Southern Pacific Co., I am told, is largely interested in this enterprise in a financial way, which will be appreciated by anglers in general.

Stocking the San Lorenzo with fresh fry for future generations was taken so seriously that on February 18, 1906, *The Santa Cruz Sentinel* did the math relating weight to quantity in a story called "How Fish Eggs Are Counted":

By careful counting it has been ascertained that the average ounce of salmon or steelhead spawn contains 220 eggs. Therefore, by simply multiplying the number of ounces of eggs taken from the fish, or a number of fish, by 220, gives altogether accurate results. Two fish were taken in the Soquel Creek recently from which 86 ounces of eggs were taken. This number of ounces multiplied by 220, gave the product of the two fish at 18,920 eggs, or 9,460 for each fish. Pretty good ratio of increase that even if only one-half are propagated and raised. But the hatchery results are much better than that, as something like 80 or 90 per cent are hatched and raised, when taken for hatchery purposes.

GOING BACK TO THE '70S AND '80S—the 1970s and 1980s—there were fishermen at the base of the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf casting into swirling bait balls of anchovies and pulling out steelhead who hadn't yet moved into the river, a weird way to catch a steelhead, but still a way. (A way of catching steelhead I also failed at.)

But apparently catching steelhead while they were all at sea was nothing new. On December 2, 1908, *The Santa Cruz Sentinel* reported:

BIG STEELHEAD CAUGHT OFF SHORE:

Tuesday was the Game Warden's day.

Mr. Welch was in great luck.

While fishing in the bay off Capitola, not more than 300 yards from shore, he hooked a steelhead that weighed 7 ½ pounds. The fish fought for his life, but the spoon bait was too much for him. The Game Warden was proud of his catch. He also hooked a silver salmon weighing 2 ½ pounds. Recently there have been caught in the bay a number of salmon of a variety not known, but which it is thought are from the Brookdale Fish Hatchery. Some of the fish were sent back to the hatchery for examination by Prof. Gilbert, the fish expert of Stanford University.

◀ LEFT ▶

Opening day on the San Lorenzo River, Dec. 8th 1940, San Lorenzo Boulevard, Santa Cruz, CA. Photo: Ed Webber/Covello & Covello Historical Collection.

SPORT FISHING AND SUBSISTENCE PEAKS: 1920S

California boomed in the 1920s, along with the rest of the country. Outsiders were attracted by the weather, the wealth, Hollywood and even fishing, according to "History of Salmon 2.0":

«TOP TO BOTTOM»

One of the many unheralded uses of the simple, lowly sawhorse.

Photo: Courtesy of Barry Burt Family Archives

Two steelhead a day keep the cabin fever away.

Photo: Courtesy of Barry Burt Family Archives

San Lorenzo steelhead are some of the coolest in California. They live in Monterey Bay where they frequent some of the best-known surf breaks in the world, bump into humpback and orca whales, and dodge sea lions under the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. From there, they swim right under the lights of downtown Santa Cruz, past a gauntlet of homeless camps and potential poachers and up into a beautiful redwood forest. Some stop at Henry Cowell's redwood park to enjoy the scenery. Others continue on, like this crew pictured having a singles mixer in some rich dude's backyard in Ben Lomond, CA. Photo: Michael Wier

By the 1920s, California's salmon and steelhead streams had earned worldwide acclaim, and the "economic value of the sport fishery exceeded commercial fishing by two-to-one" (Lufkin 1991). Special trains brought anglers from the San Francisco Bay Area to fish for adult Coho salmon in Lagunitas Creek (Brown and Moyle 1991). By one account, "the San Lorenzo River became the number one fishing river in northern California and remained so for half a century."

During the Depression, the fish populations in the San Lorenzo were thriving, even if the people on land were not. Some were fishing for sport; others were fishing to eat.

LIFE DURING WARTIME

Ask anyone who was around in 1941, and they will tell you how dramatically and quickly American life—and particularly Californian life—changed after the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor.

Californians feared—for good reason—that the Japanese Navy was simply going to appear on the horizon, so all focus was on the war and protecting the shores. Recreations like surfing and fishing took a backseat to war but did continue at a depressed pace.

The Santa Cruz Sentinel reported on steelhead season almost daily through November and early December of 1941; then there is a significant gap of 12 days between December 5 and December 17.

And then this:

STEELHEAD ARE STILL DRAWING CARD LOCALLY

Despite war, blackouts, rain, muddy water and a perennial lack of fish, Santa Cruz' piscatorial army of steelhead anglers continue to whip the pools of the San Lorenzo for finny gamesters who like the navy seem to have important

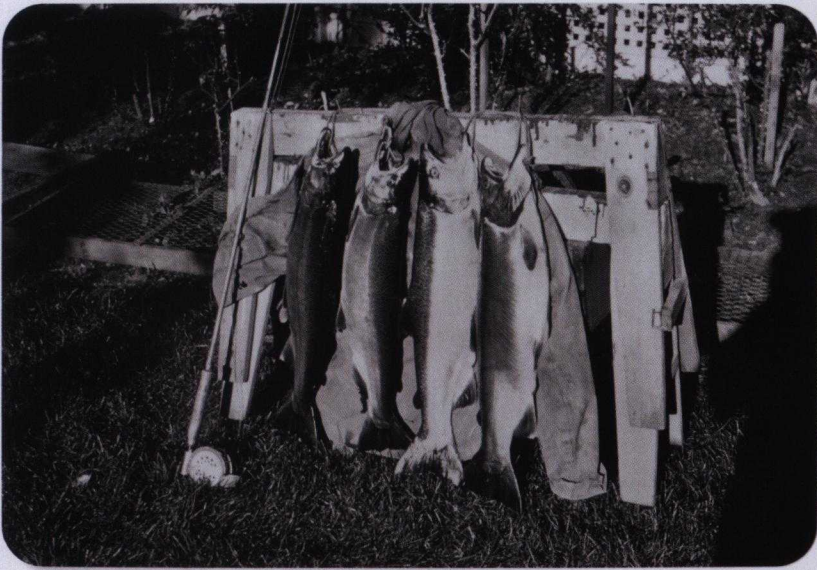
business at sea. The largest crowd of rod and reelers of the season, braving a freezing temperature ranged the river from the tannery to Boulder Creek last Sunday. Parking space for cars along the drive above the gorge was almost at a premium. Fishing results were far from encouraging for the rank and file of sportsmen. It is safe to estimate that not more than a dozen legitimate steelhead were caught. There are few holes above the city limits where spinner addicts can operate to advantage. Popularity of the neighborhood fronting the rivermouth still draws the faithful to its sand and mud banks. Since the opening day, catches at this point have been on the decline. Veteran "prophets" predict a turn for the better should be in the offing within a few weeks. But good or bad, the San Lorenzo will never lack for fishing gentry.

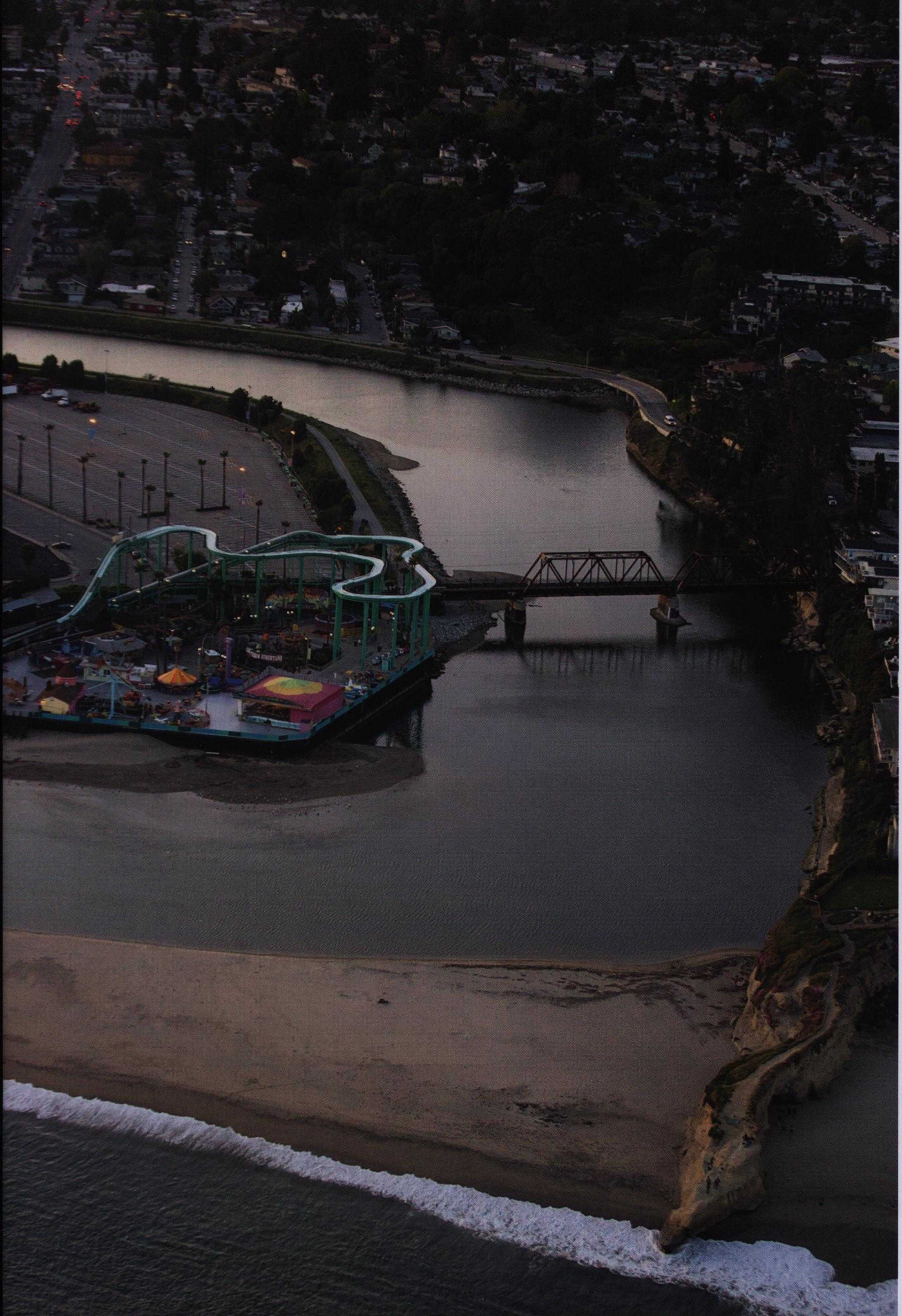
THE GOLDEN AGE

Over the years I've interviewed a lot of famous surfers who were born in the 1930s and 1940s, and they all agree the best time to be a surfer in California and Hawaii was the 1950s. Those were the golden years, according to Miki Dora, an (in)famous surfer who made a name for himself at Malibu in the 1950s and into the 1960s, until Gidget and the Beach Boys and surf music and surf culture inspired the hordes to overrun the place.

The '50s were also the golden years of fishing in California's coastal rivers, and the San Lorenzo was one of the shiniest rivers at the end of the rainbow. "The History of Salmon 2.0" cites the recollections of California flyfishing legend Hal Janssen:

In places, Coho salmon were still abundant. Hal Janssen, who grew up on Alameda Creek on San Francisco Bay in the 1950s, has spent a lifetime on the central coast, fishing "300 days a year... for thirty-five, forty years." Hal called the fifties "an amazing time to live." Speaking of Coho salmon, he recalls the abundance of Coho salmon in Big River, Ten Mile River and other coastal streams. "Huge schools and schools of them in California in the fifties and sixties in the San Lorenzo River and Pescadero" he has said.





LOGGING AND FLOOD CONTROL: 1970S

Old-timers—which is to say anyone who fished the San Lorenzo before 1972—talk about those '50s heydays and how much better the river looked then. And fished then. The face of the lower river—and the nature of the entire river—was changed by El Nino-inspired floods in the mid-'50s. Again, from "The History of Salmon 2.0":

[T]he river was leveed for flood control and "all river-side forests were stripped and the river was straightened by the Army Corps of Engineers." These actions "transformed the river from a tree-lined and very scenic part of town, to a sterile drainage ditch..." Where before, "trout and salmon had been routinely caught in the city," now "the river was barren of most wildlife," and "the fish populations declined" (McMahon 1997). Today, although the San Lorenzo River runs right through the center of the City of Santa Cruz, most buildings face away from the river, no restaurants overlook its banks, and it is generally viewed as more of a nuisance than an attribute.

IF BUILDINGS NOW FACED the river and restaurants overlooked the banks, what would they see? During the winter of 2018/2019, I borrowed a fancy electric bicycle from a surfer/attorney friend who lives in Santa Cruz and cruised around town. It felt like that long-ago episode of *The Outer Limits*, where an entire neighborhood is cut out and transported to another planet, where everything is different.

Forty-seven years after walking across *The Lost Boys* bridge with Elton and Joni and Steely Dan in one ear and the ocean roaring in the other, the winter sea and surf and land and light show was as spectacular as ever—the Monterey Bay is physically blessed and casts those blessings on Santa Cruz—but the vibe on land was too different.

It was weird and sad and beautiful to ride that fancy bike around. Walking it across the trestle, I looked out to sea for a river-mouth sandbar that had almost formed in all the drought-breaking rain of 2018/2019, and then down into the San Lorenzo estuary for fish.

I didn't go look at the Buckeye Hole, over toward the Boardwalk. The river looked dead and felt dead and that did not improve the mood.

I was listening to Pandora's '70s hits on my smartphone, but the fates didn't synchronize with what I was seeing and feeling, so that line from "Horse With No Name" didn't bubble into my head: "And the story it told of a river that flowed/made me sad to think it was dead."

I wonder if there is any chance the San Lorenzo could be brought back to life, protected, restocked, as it had been for more than a hundred years, going back to the Gold Rush and beyond.

Thomas Wolfe summed the feeling up pretty well in 1940:

You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood ... back home to a young man's dreams of glory and of fame ... back home to places in the country, back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time—back home to the escapes of Time and Memory.

Or as Heraclitus (535–c. 475 BCE) said before him: "No man ever steps in the same river twice." ☞

◀LEFT▶

Escaping the flood-control levees that shape its course upstream, the San Lorenzo River meanders as it meets the Pacific Ocean. This location was the birthplace of surfing on the North American continent, when three Hawaiian princes first floated redwood planks to surf the river mouth. Today it's home to the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. Like other estuaries on the coast, the lagoon where freshwater and saltwater meet is a critical zone for anadromous fish. Photo: Crystal Birns