



ROARING CAMP RAILROADS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A WILD AND ROARING CAMP

Until the arrival of Spanish explorers in the late 1700s, Roaring Camp and its vicinity were inhabited by Zayante Indians who fished the San Lorenzo River, hunted in the redwood forests, and gathered shellfish and acorns.

Near the end of the Spanish colonial era, most of land between Scotts Valley and Felton, including Roaring Camp, was part of the 4400+ acre Rancho San Augustin. The first non-Indian to reside in the area was a Russian sailor named Jose Antonio Bolcoff who left his ship in Monterey in 1815. In 1822, Bolcoff married Candida Castro, the daughter of Joaquin Castro of Branciforte. A year later, he became a Mexican citizen and Governor Jose Figueroa granted the Rancho San Augustin to Bolcoff who built a house in Scotts Valley to meet the requirements of ownership. The rancho was bounded to the south by the Rancho Carbonera, on the west by the San Lorenzo River, on the north by Graham Ridge and Vine Hill and on the east by a ridge of hills above the valley floor.

Mountain man Isaac Graham arrived in the area in 1833 and with other frontiersmen established one of the first "American" settlements west of the Rocky Mountains in the Zayante area across the San Lorenzo River from Rancho San Augustin. In 1834, the Rancho Zayante was granted by Mexico to Joaquin Buelna, however he let lapse his claims and gave his rights to Ambrose Tomlinson and Joseph Dye, thus officially establishing a settlement of "foreigners" in the area. In 1835, under the guidance of Dye, Graham constructed the first whiskey distillery in the American west near Roaring Camp. Trappers and traders came from miles around to drink Dye's brew.

Legend states that their boisterous antics soon caused local Mexican authorities to refer to Graham's locale as "Drunkard's Camp." Graham -- a fiery fur trader and nephew of Daniel Boone -- took offense to the description and, accompanied by a group of his rowdy mountain men, confronted the Mexican alcalde (mayor) in Monterey who diplomatically proposed that Graham's settlement be known instead as a "Wild and Roaring Camp."

Although the new name appeased Graham, a year later (1836) he participated in California's first revolution, expelling the government of Mexico and temporarily establishing an independent government in California. During the skirmish, Graham was captured and imprisoned on a ship in Monterey Bay, but released upon its arrival in Mexico. Graham received \$36,000 from the Mexican government in compensation for how he was treated. With that (more)

ROARING CAMP HISTORY

2-2-2-2

money, he purchased the Zayante tract.

In 1841, Graham built the first sawmill west of the Rocky Mountains near Roaring Camp. There, he constructed the first highway in the west (now known as Graham Hill Road), which ran from his sawmill to the beach in Santa Cruz. While building the mill (six years before discovery of gold at a saw mill being constructed in Coloma which resulted in the California gold rush), he found a single gold nugget worth \$32,000. In comparison, the flake that set off the California gold rush was no larger than one's little finger nail.

Although no meeting was documented, some believe Graham was likely to have met famous western explorer Lt. John C. Frémont near Wild Cat Ridge during Frémont's passage through the Santa Cruz Mountains in February, 1846. A few days later, Frémont was pursued by forces led by Mexican General Jose Castro for traveling through California without permission and retreated north. Soon afterward, the Bear Flag Revolt occurred, followed by California independence during the Mexican-American War. No record of Graham's involvement in any of these conflicts is documented, though it was known he was a supporter of independence.

California was annexed to the United States in 1846, the California Gold Rush began in 1848 and California became a state in 1850. In 1855, miners uncovered more gold along a small creek opposite the picnic ground at present-day Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, generating three to ten dollars a day for each miner. The area is now called gold gulch. Graham died in 1863.

Years later, John C. Frémont returned to Roaring Camp and its Big Trees on a sightseeing trip; he had since received a courts martial for ignoring direction from General Kearny during the war with Mexico, was California's first U.S. Senator, made a fortune during the California Gold Rush, was the first Republican candidate for President of the United States, served as a general during the American Civil War and gained distinction as being the first U.S. official to formally emancipate slaves.

WELCH'S BIG TREES

In 1867, arrangements were made to sell Graham's Roaring Camp holdings to local loggers. Prosperous San Francisco businessman Joseph Warren Welch intervened at the last moment, arranging to buy the property so that the Big Trees would be spared being cut. The deed was recorded on December 26, 1867, thereby making Welch the first man to preserve California's coastal redwoods (*sequoia sempervirens*) from logging.

The following year, a then unknown writer named Bret Harte visited the
(more)

ROARING CAMP HISTORY

3-3-3-3-3

Santa Cruz area and learned of a true story involving an infant who had drowned the previous December in Santa Cruz County. From this, he wrote *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, which chronicled the transformation of a group of rough and tumble gold miners who had come under the spell of an orphaned child. The short story brought Harte international fame.

In 1869, thwarted by Welch's purchase of Big Trees Ranch, local lumbermen hired George Wright to survey a railroad line from Santa Cruz to a point 100 feet beyond the Welch property. Here, Wright laid out a town site that he named "Felton" in honor of the lumberman's attorney, Charles Felton, who later became a U.S. Senator. Wright recommended that the railroad line from Santa Cruz be constructed to a more narrow width than the standard railroads in order to negotiate the sharp curves required in the San Lorenzo River Canyon. This was one of the first proposals for a narrow-gauge railroad in North America.

Welch opposed the construction of the railroad when it sought to condemn a right-of-way through his grove of Big Trees. Litigation followed, delaying construction of the railroad until 1874. Welch continued to fight the railroad and extensive litigation continued, delaying construction of the railroad until 1874 when the California Legislature granted a charter to the Santa Cruz & Felton Railroad Company.

On October 13, 1875, construction of the railroad was completed and the first passenger train steamed the six miles from Santa Cruz to Felton over the three-foot-gauge track. Newspapers reported that a crowd of 2,500 had gathered in Felton that day to picnic in the redwoods and celebrate the opening of the Santa Cruz & Felton.

Recognizing the interest that people had in seeing the redwoods, Welch opened his grove to visiting train passengers and established Welch's Big Trees Resort. To help pay for the continued preservation of the redwoods, he charged 25 cents to see or photograph them. In 1899, photographer Andrew Hill arrived at the resort, but refused to pay the 25 cents. He left after Welch insisted that Hill either pay the 25 cents or surrender his photographic plates. Hill later petitioned the state legislature for the establishment of state-owned groves of redwoods, prompting the establishment of California's first state park in 1902 at Big Basin, a short drive north of Roaring Camp.

Welch's grove of Big Trees became a prime attraction within Santa Cruz County's growing tourism industry. In 1930, the Welch family sold part of the grove to the County which was operated as Santa Cruz County Big Trees Park until 1953. That year, Samuel Cowell, the son and heir of Henry Cowell (a man who had earned a fortune from providing drayage services during the California gold rush and from timber and mining in Santa Cruz County)
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ROARING CAMP HISTORY

4-4-4-4-4

sought a suitable monument to his pioneering father. Cowell stipulated that he would donate over 1,600 acres of land to the State of California should the county also deed the Welch grove to the State and the new combined park be named Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park.

In a perverse twist, the park is named after Henry Cowell, a man whose wealth resulted partly from cutting redwood trees, whereas the man who actually saved the trees from being cut (Joseph Welch) has no memorial. More insulting is that Welch is often remembered as the man who charged to see coastal redwoods, rather than as the first person in California to have acted to save them from being cut. While Andrew Hill refused to pay a quarter to preserve the trees, he's remembered as their great protector. Yet, Welch invested a personal fortune to save them, and he's thought of as the profiteer.

THE PICNIC LINE

In 1879, control of the Santa Cruz & Felton Railroad passed to James Fair, a Bonanza millionaire who made his fortune in the Virginia City, Nevada comstock lode mines. Senator Fair had previously organized the South Pacific Coast Railroad Company as part of a plan to build a transcontinental three-foot gauge railroad eastward from the Pacific Ocean at Santa Cruz to compete with the standard-gauge Central Pacific and Southern Pacific Railroads.

Expending \$32 million in a short time, Fair extended his narrow-gauge railroad from Felton north across the Santa Cruz Mountains to San Jose and Fremont and then along the eastern edge of San Francisco Bay to Oakland and Alameda. The new railroad was opened May 15, 1880 with a special excursion train from Alameda to Big Trees that culminated with a grand picnic and official opening ceremonies.

The huge cost of building the South Pacific Coast Railroad (four tunnels - some almost a mile long - were bored through solid rock) diminished Sen. Fair's interest, causing him to abandon his plans to build a transcontinental railroad. In 1885, however, a branch line was extended from Felton to Boulder Creek to serve the growing number of sawmills in the San Lorenzo Valley, which had become one of the largest lumber-shipping points in the United States. Sen. Fair sold his railroad to the Central and Southern Pacific group in 1887 and the railroad was renamed the South Pacific Coast Railway, a three-foot gauge subsidiary of the Southern Pacific Company.

One of the mysteries of this era was not uncovered until 100 years later when a work crew on the Roaring Camp & Big Trees Narrow Gauge Railroad in the late 1990s discovered the remains of a woman atop Bear Mountain. They were clearing brush when their dog was seen playing with a human bone. The crew (more)

ROARING CAMP HISTORY

5-5-5-5-5

investigated and found skeleton with the remnants of clothing, a leather vest, several gold coins, a .32 cal pistol, monocle and knife. A .44 cal. slug was later found where the chest would have lain. A subsequent investigation by University of California Santa Cruz anthropologists determined that the skeleton had laid there for approximately 125 years. The body was missing boots, skull, hands and feet, presumed to have been taken away by animals and thus Roaring Camp's mysterious Jane Doe was never identified.

During the 1880s, '90s and early 1900s, so many people rode the little steam trains to "Big Trees" that the railroad became known affectionately as the "Picnic Line." Among the passengers on the narrow-gauge line were two United States presidents, Benjamin Harrison and Theodore Roosevelt, as well as a number of nobility and royalty, including Hawaiian King Kalakaua. Teddy Roosevelt visited on April 9, 1903. It is said that as TR toured the Welch Grove of Big Trees (now within Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park), he objected to the practice of people pinning their business cards to one of the redwoods. As he returned past the tree, the cards had been removed. In another instance of Teddy teaching respect for nature, locals had named a tree after the President. Teddy expressed appreciation for the honor but suggested that the sign not be nailed to the tree, but erected to the side. Again, it was moved.

By 1906, the Southern Pacific had decided to convert the three-foot-wide track to standard gauge (4' 8-1/2"), laying a third rail to the wider gauge. Plans were to operate the first standard-gauge trains on April 18, 1906. At 5:12 a.m., however, the great San Francisco earthquake shook those plans asunder. Tunnels collapsed and roadbeds shifted from the force of the 8.3 Richter-scale earthquake, closing the railroad. The line was not reopened for three years. Thousands gathered in Santa Cruz to welcome the return of the trains from across the mountains. During the hiatus, Santa Cruz County had been isolated and deprived of the revenues brought to it by the railroad.

At the peak of narrow-gauge operations, a dozen steam passenger trains would stop at Felton and Roaring Camp each day. By 1935, however, business had declined to the point that the railroad was torn up to Boulder Creek. In late 1939, a severe winter storm washed out the track across the Santa Cruz Mountains, causing the main line to the San Francisco Bay Area to be abandoned and leaving the Felton to Santa Cruz railroad as an isolated branch line.

A popular rumor still persists today that the tunnels between Felton and Los Gatos were dynamited shut during World War II to prevent Japanese soldiers from using this invasion route to the San Francisco Bay Area. While tunnels were closed, it was not for that reason. Some of the tunnels had begun (more)

ROARING CAMP HISTORY

6-6-6-6-6

leaking dangerous gasses and others were converted to be used for record storage. The rumor about the Japanese army was simply Pacific Coast war hysteria colliding with the obsolescence of the tunnels.

ROARING CAMP & BIG TREES NARROW-GAUGE RAILROAD

In 1958, F. Norman Clark arrived in Santa Cruz County from the Los Angeles area. After reading about Fair's railway line, Clark began his own dream of reinstating passenger service on the route through the redwoods. With only \$25 in his pocket, he made plans to build and/or restore two railway lines through the historic trees.

Clark contacted Joseph Welch's descendents and obtained a 99-year leasehold on 170 acres of the original Big Trees Ranch surrounded by Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park. By 1963, he'd succeeded in building a half-mile stretch of narrow-gauge track on which he operated a steam locomotive and four passenger cars.

On April 6, 1963, the Roaring Camp & Big Trees Narrow-Gauge Railroad made its first scheduled run, pulling 44 revenue passengers that day. The steam train pulled out of the original Felton Station built in 1880 by the South Pacific Coast Railroad. This depot still stands and continues to be used as RC&BTNGRR offices. Word of Clark's historic steam train in the redwoods spread worldwide. Each year, about 200,000 people ride the Roaring Camp line to Bear Mountain.

SANTA CRUZ, BIG TREES & PACIFIC RAILWAY

In the winter of 1982, Norm Clark moved closer to realizing his original dream when nature badly damaged the Southern Pacific's freight line through the Santa Cruz Mountains. After severe storms lashed the tracks between Felton and Santa Cruz, the Southern Pacific closed the route and began negotiating for its sale. In 1984, Clark and John Poimiroo (Roaring Camp's Vice President of Marketing) traveled to the Southern Pacific offices on Market Street in San Francisco. They presented a business plan to the giant railroad that showed how Clark's company would operate both passenger excursions and freight services on the line. At the end of the meeting, an S.P. executive shook their hands and said, "It's nice to meet real railroaders. The rest of us just pretend to run them." On Valentine's Day in 1985, Clark announced that the Southern Pacific had agreed to sell the track to his new company - the Santa Cruz, Big Trees & Pacific Ry.

One day prior to the 110th anniversary of the opening of the Santa Cruz & Felton (Oct. 12, 1985), passenger service was reestablished on the historic line from Felton to Rincon. Tragically, three months later (Dec. 2, 1985), F. (more)

ROARING CAMP HISTORY

7-7-7-7-7

Norman Clark died of pneumonia resulting from his selfless work to open the SCBT&PRY. His wife, Georgiana, the longtime V.P. of Operations and corporate board member, was elected chief executive officer by the respective boards and continues in that role today. Mrs. Clark continues her husband's life's work, solidifying the business, restoring historic engines and rolling stock, expanding group and corporate sales, and overseeing the development of a major event facility called Bret Harte Hall.

On July 4, 1986, the Santa Cruz, Big Trees & Pacific Ry was opened to Santa Cruz, and on Oct. 12, 1986, a year after resumption of service on the line, passenger trains returned to the beach at Santa Cruz for the first time in 27 years. On April 11, 1987, service was extended to the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, which is the current terminus of the line. Passengers may board either at the Roaring Camp depot or the Boardwalk. And, in 1990, commercial freight service was reestablished on the line between Felton and Santa Cruz. The Big Trees & Pacific hauls lumber, cement, and in an historic twist, the old railroad has been contracted to carry sand out of the Santa Cruz Mountains for conversion into silicon ingots used in the manufacture of microprocessors, Silicon Valley's famous product. And so, more than 125 years after it began railroad operations, this old line is still relevant and serving the economic interests of the region.

Through the years, several buildings have been constructed or refurbished at Roaring Camp, including the 1880 Felton Depot, the Roaring Camp Depot, Engine House, General Store, Chuckwagon Barbecue, a one-room school house (which actually operated as one at Roaring Camp, for years), a covered bridge, and Bret Harte Hall, a 6,120 sq. ft. meeting hall and opera house.

Roaring Camp continues to make history. Among the many historic superlatives the area claims are:

- the first coastal redwoods to be preserved in California,**
- the first highway formally constructed in California,**
- one of the first "American" settlements west of the Rockies,**
- the shortest covered bridge in California,**
- the smallest school house in California,**
- the steepest narrow-gauge passenger track in North America,**
- the first sawmill west of the Mississippi,**
- one of the first narrow-gauge passenger railroads in America,**
 - a location where railroads have operated since 1875,**
- Origination spot of the first revolution in California,**
- a wild and roaring camp that boasted the first whiskey distillery in the American west**
- and, a tourist rail attraction that has taken passengers on historic excursions since 1963.**