

Sonoma Mountain Journal

Volume 23, No. 1

30th Anniversary Issue!

November 2023

This year's Journal celebrates the mountain's tangible gifts and the idea of reciprocity.

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Oona-pa'is, or Sonoma Mountain, occupies the unceded ancestral lands of the Coast Miwok people, who are closely related to other Indigenous peoples of southern Sonoma County.

We are grateful for their ongoing stewardship and take inspiration from the idea that the mountain has occupied a central place in the world since time immemorial.

Our mission is to preserve the Sonoma Mountains' scenic, agricultural, and natural resources by cultivating a sense of place, engaging people in the landscape, and inspiring them to become mountain stewards.

FORAGING ON THE MOUNTAIN

Arthur Dawson

"We often talk about...our love for places, but seldom of how places love us back."

—Rebecca Solnit, *The Far Away Nearby*

One of our family's summer traditions is to go blackberry picking and bake a crumble for dessert that night, served with homemade vanilla ice cream. Lately, our usual spots on the valley floor have been compromised by zealous management along roadsides and developed areas—the blackberry vines cut down to virtually nothing and producing a meager harvest of small berries.

Years ago, as we waited for our son to be born, Jill and I predicted he'd arrive when the first blackberries ripened, in mid-July. Sure enough, on July 11, she went for a walk and picked her first ripe blackberry of the season. Eight hours later, at one a.m., she went into such a rapid, 'precipitous,' labor that we barely made it to the birth center before he entered the world.

The act of gathering and eating blackberries together is a repeating thread in our family story, one that stitches the years together in a reassuring and delicious pattern. Summer would not be summer without it. As it has grown more difficult to collect enough berries near home to make a crumble, I feel compelled to visit a patch halfway up Sonoma Mountain. It requires bringing a daypack full of containers and two hours of walking. It's more work than it used to be, but the effort makes the results even more precious (and no, I'm not going to tell you where it is!).



Foraging is one of the most ancient human activities. "Living off the land," even for an afternoon, harkens back to a whole different relationship with the world. It allows you to step outside our market-driven economy. Gathering blackberries, or any 'wild' food, involves no exchange of money. Human beings often express affection for each other through the offer of food, whether it's a holiday meal or a simple cup of tea. To go foraging is to experience the mountain generously offering a tangible gift, as if an unseen host knew I was coming, set the table, and offered me a seat at the feast.

I find that foraging inspires a sense of abundance and trust in the world, that the earth actively supports my physical being. Buddhist monks follow the practice of putting out their begging bowls each morning, trusting their daily needs will be provided for and that tomorrow will take care of itself.

Returning home laden with pints of fresh blackberries or, sometimes, oyster mushrooms, it can be a shock to realize how much of what we do,

continued on page 4

Letter from the Chair

Arthur Dawson



CELEBRATING THIRTY YEARS!

After ten years as Chair of Sonoma Mountain Preservation (SMP), my friend and colleague Meg Beeler stepped down at the end of 2022. On behalf of the Board and the organization, I'd like to express our tremendous gratitude for the leadership, vision, and passion she brought, and continues to bring, to SMP.

A lot has changed since our founding in 1993, but the issues our founders sought to address are still with us. There have been many challenges since that time and we have grown dramatically over the last thirty years. What hasn't changed is our passion for the mountain and our advocacy for open space, wildlife habitat, and public access.

For thirty years, a core of dedicated volunteers has been the heart of SMP. What keeps us going? We like and respect each other and enjoy working together. The results have been rewarding and worthwhile, and truly remarkable. Engagement and collaboration with people and organizations around the mountain energize us. Our many successes inspire us to keep growing our vision.

We've introduced thousands to the mountain through hikes (eight in 2023!) social media, classroom presentations, and fairs (see page 4). Hundreds of subscribers receive our regular e-newsletter. Our local bestseller, *Where the World Begins*, is still popular five years after its initial publication. This is our twenty-third issue of the *Journal*, printed annually since 2000.

We've collaborated with government agencies and organizations to add thousands of acres to the mountain's protected lands. We worked with Sonoma County to codify and enforce the "Sonoma Mountain Development Guidelines," to address visual impacts. More recently, we've advocated for protection of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor and responsible development on the mountain.

Earlier this year we created SMP's first-ever Strategic Plan to guide us for the next two to three years. Over the decades, SMP's volunteer time has easily run into the tens of thousands hours. Yet even as our ongoing efforts continue, new ideas and opportunities keep popping up. It's become clear that we are reaching the limits of an all-volunteer organization.

Our Strategic Plan addresses these limits in several ways: We've already recruited three new board members, who bring fresh perspectives and expertise to SMP. We're beginning to explore creating a dedicated staff position. And we're focusing on improving our financial resources to support the many things we hope to do.

30TH ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN! \$30,000 GOAL

Support our continuing work to preserve, share, and celebrate Sonoma Mountain's treasures—for wildlife, for our human communities, and for the future.

Donate securely through www.sonomamountain.org, or use the attached envelope to mail a check to PO Box 1772, Glen Ellen, CA 95442.

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SMP on Facebook: www.facebook.com/sonomamountain

SMP on Instagram: www.instagram.com/sonoma_mountain

A BIG WELCOME TO OUR NEW BOARDMEMBERS!

Anaïs Morris has a background in international policy, which has shifted toward local policy and environmental resiliency. She lives in the Roseland area and hikes at Mount Taylor with her two kids, 5 and 8 years old. She currently works on an innovative CalFire grant assisting landowners address fire prevention and watershed resiliency.



Miranda M. Hansen is a graduate student in Ecopsychology. She brings experience in nonprofit development and communication, as well as writing and editing skills. As an advocate for public lands and well-being, her interests include promoting yoga and mindfulness in green spaces.

Suzanne de Coursey lives and works at Fairfield Osborn Preserve as the Education Manager for Sonoma State's Center for Environmental Inquiry (CEI). With degrees in English and Ecology, Suzanne worked with the National Park Service and the Nature Conservancy before coming to CEI. She has many ideas for promoting collaboration, especially around education.



RECIPROCITY: Giving back to the Mountain

Tracy Salcedo

So many want so much from this mountain.

On the east side, on the grounds of the former Sonoma Developmental Center, we want the mountain to host a thousand homes, or half that many, or something between. We want it to support workspace for a thousand people, or more, or less. We want it to be a resort hotel. We want it to be a climate center. We want it to be an historic district. We want it to be a park. We want an agrihood, a community center, a maker space, playing fields, a beer garden...

Elsewhere on the mountain the demands are different — not as drastic but just as persistent. We want our trophy mansions. We want access to open spaces. We want connections to the Bay Area Ridge Trail and connections for wildlife corridors. We want to ranch. We want our privacy.

We want, and we will take. It's what we do. We have parceled out the mountain and now we fight over what we want and where we want it. The mountain is not land; it is commodity.

We want, and we will take, but what do we give in exchange? The land doesn't take money.

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer, author, scientist, and teacher of Indigenous wisdom, shares what she knows about reciprocity (and more). A member of the Potawatomi Nation, she writes about how the Potawatomi give back to the plants and animals and earth that sustain them. When they harvest, they harvest only what they need. When there isn't enough, they don't take. They choose with care, and seek connection with the one who gives. They ask permission. They receive and then they reciprocate, sometimes planting, sometimes tending, sometimes with prayer and ceremony, always with gratitude.

Reciprocity gives voice to the flower and the soil and the jackrabbit. Reciprocity asks us to respect their right to be and to thank them for their gifts. Reciprocity demands that we refrain from abusing them and overusing them. Reciprocity acknowledges the give and take between people and all the others who share the planet. "It is an odd dichotomy we have set for ourselves," Kimmerer writes, "between loving people and loving land."

So here we are, gifted with an ancient, beautiful mountain that centers our towns and cities and villages. We tug at it with our desires and think only of how it can serve us. In our selfishness we are hurtful, and in our selfishness we see that hurt as being inflicted only on ourselves, not on the land and all that it nurtures. We don't think about how this place is hitched to everything else in the universe.



What would it look like if we reciprocated at the Sonoma Developmental Center? What would it look like if we abandoned the idea that this land's future is best decided by economic feasibility? What would it look like if we abandoned the idea that only by building more homes can we build more homes we can afford? What would it look like if we changed our politics and stopped calling each other names? What would it look like if we left behind the climate center, the historic district, the maker space, the beer garden, the park?

What would it look like if, instead of being needy and demanding, we were simply grateful? Would we temper our demands? Would we look with new appreciation at what is already here? Would we bring buckets of water to dampen the roots of thirsty trees? Would we sweep the sidewalks? Would we bring paint to the old buildings, to revive their tired walls, inside and out? Would we open the windows to let the fresh air in?

And elsewhere on the mountain — what would it look like if we reciprocated there? What would it look like if we tore our fences down? What would happen to our cattle and our homes; to our picnic tables and pit toilets? Would we be dispossessed? Would we be frightened of the renewed wildness? Would we recognize our kinship with the hiker passing through, or the cougar? Would we foster renewed connections?

What would it look like? What would the mountain do? Everything and nothing, would be my guess. It would just be. It would continue to do the unappreciated things it does for us right now, in this moment. It would breathe for us, slow us down, let us sit and walk and play and work and just be ourselves, on it, with it, without judgement, without knowing us or labeling us or determining our value.

And in this moment — a moment that stretches back to when a shovel first broke the earth to sink a fencepost on Sonoma Mountain, and stretches ahead to when someone drives a shovel into the earth and breaks it again — we can reciprocate. We can look closely at what we want and why we want it. We can be thankful; grateful. Then, maybe, instead of taking more, we will see a way to borrow only what is offered.

(A version of this essay appeared in the *Kenwood Press*.)

as individuals and as a society, is based on the idea of scarcity. Anthropologists have observed that hunter-gatherers commonly see the world as a giving environment. Accumulation makes little sense because there will always be more. A Tanzanian hunter-gatherer, questioning the logic of agriculture, asked, “Why should we plant, when there are already so many nuts to eat in the world?”



California Bay Nuts

Sonoma Mountain also has lots of nuts to eat, including hazelnuts, acorns, and bay nuts. You can also find elderberries, strawberries, manzanita berries, rose hips, native grapes, and buckeyes. In the fall, apples and pears sweeten to ripe in the old orchards. As a forager I’m less interested in the distinction often made between native and non-native plants. Foraging provides an alternative framework, with “edible” vs. “not edible” and “poisonous” categories.

People have been foraging on Sonoma Mountain since time immemorial. In the modern world, we forage, or harvest, “wild” plants from places that haven’t been cultivated. But that definition doesn’t really fit what was going on in the old days. Indigenous peoples tended the land and the plants on it intensively, with cultural burning being the most widespread practice. Places where traditional practices continue today generally have a higher degree of biodiversity and ecosystem health than nearby lands, even those within national or state parks.* In Indigenous thinking, as I understand it, humans do not have control over the world, but we do have a role in maintaining a healthy landscape.

Which brings us full circle back to the joys of foraging. For me it’s a way to deepen my relationship and become more intimate with the mountain. I have to pay attention to the seasons, discover the places that sustain me spiritually, emotionally, and physically, and return to them again and again. I love the mountain for lots of reasons. When I go foraging, I feel the mountain loving me back.

* Rundle, Hannah. 2019. “Indigenous Knowledge Can Help Solve the Biodiversity Crisis.” *Scientific American*. May.

FORAGING GUIDELINES

Gather a reasonable amount. Many foragers set a limit of ten percent. And if there’s fewer than ten of what you’re collecting, leave them be.

Leave the soil and other vegetation undisturbed.

Express your gratitude. This may be as simple as a spoken thank-you, a silent prayer, or a song.

Share the harvest. Pass along the gift.

PERMISSION

Whether you are gathering on public or private land, it’s important to have the landowner’s permission. When in doubt, ask.

In general, California State Parks allow non-commercial gathering of fruits, berries, and nuts in small quantities. Sonoma County Regional Parks are more restrictive and generally don’t allow foraging.

Neither park system allows leaves or other vegetative material to be collected.

CAUTION

Elderberries, buckeyes and many other plants require cooking or processing to make them edible. A forager needs to know both the plants and how to prepare them.

This knowledge can be gleaned from books or the web, but ideally is learned directly from an experienced forager. This is doubly true for mushrooms and other fungi, where mistakes can be serious and potentially deadly.

Avoid areas that might have been sprayed with herbicides, such as roadsides.



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COOKING WITH BAY



You can simmer California bay leaves in spaghetti sauce, just as you would Turkish bay. Then remove before serving.

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Bay nuts can be gathered right off the ground. The flesh ranges from green to brown, depending on how long the nut has been sitting.

Peel off the flesh and keep the hard-shelled nut inside, discarding any that are rotten. Wash the nuts and lay them on a towel to dry. Store in a paper bag or bowl in a dark place for at least two weeks.

Roast at 350° on a baking sheet in a single layer for 1 to 1½ hours. The insides turn brown or black when done. Break the shells with a nutcracker and enjoy straight or incorporate into various recipes. Visit www.Edibleeastbay.com/2015/08/16/roasted-bay-nuts/



WILDLIFE FAIR

On May 20, SMP helped stage a Wildlife Fair at Jack London Park that was attended by hundreds of guests.

SMP Boardmember Nancy Kirwan worked closely with Park staff and organizations like the Sonoma Land Trust, Living with Lions, and Sonoma Ecology Center to pull off this very popular event.

Thank you Nancy!



SDC UPDATE

Sonoma Mountain Preservation has long been concerned about how urban redevelopment proposed for the 180-acre campus of the former Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) will affect the viability of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor, the integrity of Sonoma and Mill Creeks, access to surrounding open space, protection of the viewsapes, dark skies, and rural qualities that enhance the property.

Those concerns were amplified in August when the developer chosen by California's Department of General Services (DGS) did an end run around the already problematic SDC Specific Plan, submitting a new plan to build 930 homes (an increase of 310 units), relocate the proposed resort hotel in the wildlife corridor, and include a conference center as part of 410,000 square feet of commercial development.

The plan was submitted under the so-called builder's remedy legislation that allows developers to skirt environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The new submission adds complexity to an already complex situation, but the upshot is that the SMP remains committed to the lawsuit challenging the SDC Specific Plan's Environmental Impact Report. SMP also remains diligent in its call for immediate transfer of ~750 acres of open space to California State Parks.

Whether 620 or 930 homes, redevelopment must be significantly scaled back to protect Sonoma Mountain's natural and cultural treasures. Our advocacy on the SDC front remains steadfast.

Follow a New Road to the Ancient Redwood

Tracy Salcedo

Many paths lead to Sonoma Mountain's Ancient Redwood. The most established trails lead up through Jack London State Historic Park, including the Vineyard Trail, which roller-coasters alongside vines and down across Asbury Creek before climbing to the junction with the footpath leading to the grand old tree, and the Fallen Bridge Trails, which lead into the Old Orchard and hitch up with the Ancient Redwood path from there.

But climbing through the state park isn't the only option. Many paths to the Ancient Redwood also traverse the open space adjoining the campus of the former Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC). This park-that's-not-yet-a-park is worthy of exploration and needs the love and support of people who understand all it has to offer, including access to the mountain's touchstones. The best way to build that constituency is with (hiking) boots on the ground.

Passage through the SDC open space can be confusing: It needs trail signs, maps, guides, and stewardship. The maze of trails can lead the unfamiliar hiker astray — which is not necessarily a bad thing, but something to prepare for. If you're not into wondering where you are while you wander, there's a simple and straightforward way to reach the Ancient Redwood through the SDC: Stick to Orchard Road (*trailhead directions on page 7. Distances are from the gate at the base of Orchard Road*).

The brilliance of Orchard Road is its accessibility. It's a paved, all-weather route that leads up from the abandoned campus to abandoned Camp Via and the Old Orchard, where all tracks become dirt. Some people aren't fond of Orchard Road because it is littered with signs of civilization; I'd argue these help tell the complicated story of the place, showcasing patches in the landscape where nature has given way to the needs of people — people with developmental disabilities who were sequestered here because nature helped them thrive.

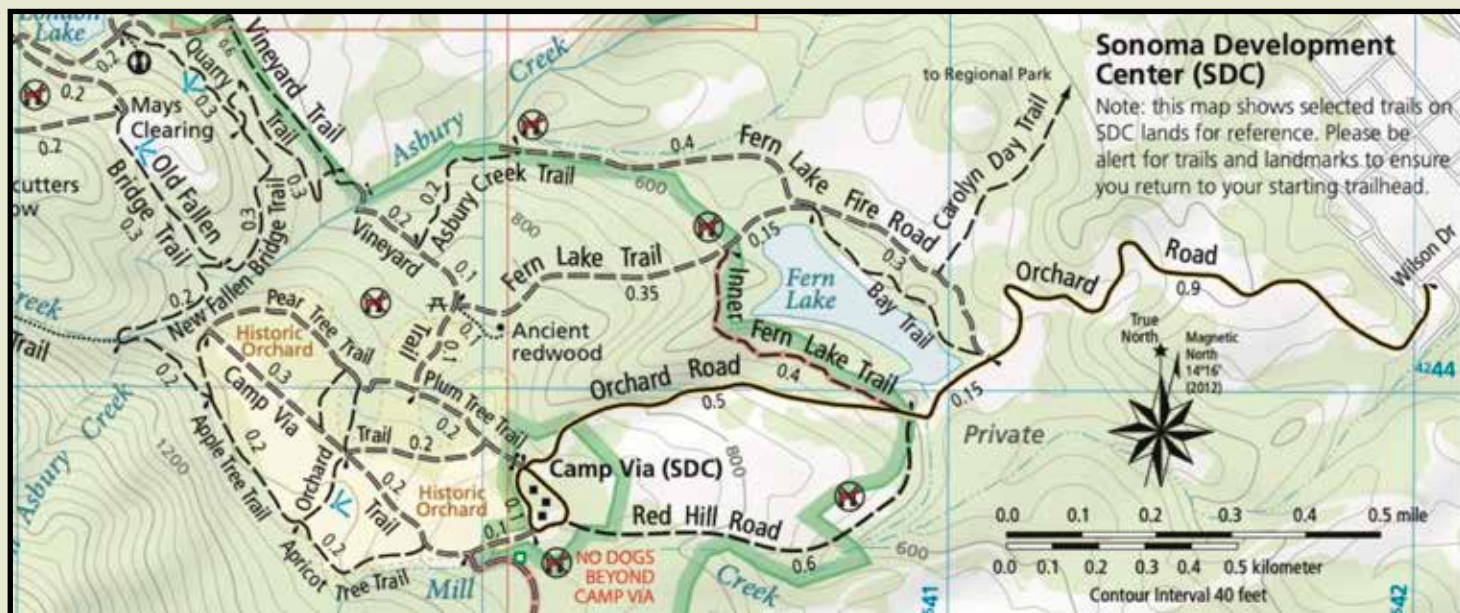
The Eldridge Cemetery, where 2,000 souls rest in unmarked graves, is a perfect example of this juxtaposition (**0.2 mi**). A newly completed memorial overlooks the burial ground, with the names of the interred carved in granite panels on the viewing platform. Sonoma Mountain's forested upper reaches are framed by the memorial's side panels, which tell the story of the institution and map the graveyard.



Pause here a spell with the souls and the views before continuing up Orchard Road, passing more unsightly man-made architecture: the radio tower, the cyclone fence around the water treatment plant and its decrepit outbuildings.

But even here, in springtime, the hillock opposite the fallen-down buildings comes alive with daffodils. Up around the bend, spreading oaks shade the roadway, which winds up past the spot, just below the switchback, where I once encountered a fat rattlesnake stretched across the pavement soaking in the last of the day's heat.

Fern Lake (**0.9 mi**) lies above the switchback, and this is where the trail maze comes fully into play. You meet the Eldridge Trail, which also connects the campus to the reservoir...and more than that, the lake opens the door to the Asbury Creek Trail, Red Hill Road, and the Fern Lake Trail, all of which offer access to the Ancient Redwood. Other paths — social paths better left unused in this part of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor — also intersect. Even with map in hand, it can be confusing.



But stick to Orchard Road and you'll only need to hitch a few more links to reach the goal. Above Fern Lake you may find yourself alone, in quiet so thick you can hear the woosh of the wings of crows flying overhead. Pass the slide (**1.5 mi**), marked by vivid orange markers, where you can look down into a steep ravine.

Then round the last bend into decrepit Camp Via (**1.6 mi**) where Orchard Road ends in its eponymous historic orchard.

Now well within the boundaries of the state park, take a right around the gate onto the Plum Tree Trail. Follow it to the Vineyard Trail (**1.8 mi**) and bear right again, dropping to the junction with the Ancient Redwood Trail (**1.9 mi**) This short footpath ends at a bench overlooking the base of the iconic tree (**2.0 mi**). Only the first hundred feet or so are visible, buttressed and burl'd, with the top tiers lost in the sky.

I've spent a lot of time with the Ancient Redwood over the years. It wasn't always guarded by the low fence; it didn't always have an interpretive sign. But these things are important because they educate and protect. The tree is sometimes called the Grandmother Redwood, and when visitors to the SMP booth at the Glen Ellen Village Fair were asked to vote for their favorite hike on Sonoma Mountain, this destination was the winner, far and away.

The redwood welcomes visitors but those visitors must tread with care. It is both massive and fragile. The old tree's roots are close to the surface, knitted into a complex system of soil and biome and mycelium. It's impossible to know what lines of the communication we break or what static we create when we hop the fence to leave our remembrances or to give the tree a hug. Better, instead, to take a seat on the bench and contemplate which of the many paths to take on the return.

DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEAD

The former SDC campus is at 15000 Arnold Drive in Eldridge. Best parking is along Harney or Sonoma Streets near the iconic brick Main Building, which can be accessed from the intersection of Harney and Arnold Drive (gates close at sunset). From the Main Building, follow the sidewalk south along the raised green to Sonoma Street and turn right. Follow Sonoma up past the historic fire house to its junction with Manzanita Street at the Motor Pool building. Go left and up the hill, staying straight at the junctions with Eucalyptus and Shady Lane to the gate at the base of Orchard Road. The walk begins here.



Sonoma Mountain Preservation

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We greatly appreciate hike participants and others who donated smaller amounts.

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