

exploring

Celebrating with Green Foothills Wickett Ranch Neil Wiley

This wasn't an ordinary hike. It was a day in September when over 300 supporters and friends of the Committee for Green Foothills met to celebrate "because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do."

Wickett Ranch was an appropriate venue, because this beautiful 400-acre property near Skyline is a celebration of nature that will someday be a protected preserve. The audience represented government, non-profits, and other champions for the environment.

Those of us who came early were treated to a short hike down through redwood forest, to shaded rest areas, a visit to a rustic cabin, and looking up to a sky platform that suggested something from a Costa Rican cloud forest. We emerged from the shade into a giant meadow overlooking a wide-angle view of coastal mountains.

As I walked through another meadow to reach our luncheon site, I was passed by two beautiful horses running free. They were beautiful, but even more surprising were two emus, also running but safely behind a fence in a large enclosure. Nearby, a pair of friendly, non-running donkeys were enjoying food and much attention.

Around the corner, I discovered an imposing rusty steel cylindrical tower perhaps more than sixty feet tall. It was once a sawdust burner, also called teepee, wigwam, or beehive burner. Curious, I walked up a long ramp to the top to see what was inside. At the top was a sunlit dome, perhaps to be expected, but several stories down below a string quartet was playing lovely classical music to a rapt audience. Although the acoustics were amazing, the venue was even more spectacular.

I could have listened all afternoon, but the buffet was open. I enjoyed lunch. It was



a great experience to hear so many people who shared a common cause—protecting our environment.

The emcee was congresswoman Jackie Spier, a fearless fighter for the environment. You know she is influential when she receives an "F" from the NRA.

A special honoree was Joseph Cotchett, a tough-talking attorney who has invested more than fifty years representing underdogs against powerful anti-environment interests.

The hosts, Jim Wickett and Magdalena Yesil, devote their property and time to environmental and other social causes. Not everyone would allow 300 people to tramp through their backyard.

The executive director of Green Foothills, Megan Fluke, energized us with a powerful call to action—joining in the fight with a lawsuit to protect the Cargill salt ponds from development that would destroy restorable natural resources, and threaten new homes and businesses from rising water and potential earthquake liquefaction.



The Committee for Green Foothills has worked for the environment for over fifty years, protecting wildlife corridors in Coyote Valley, blocking shoreline development, stopping privatization of coastal beaches, protecting 20,000 acres of open space, and advocating for nature.

I remember my first meeting with Green Foothills. A few of us sat around a small table to discuss how we could stop the development of a country club, which is now Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space. I thought this little group couldn't save this natural resource for the public good, but they did, "because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do." They are worthy of our support. For information, visit www.greenfoothills.org.



Excerpted from Sandy Lydon's
Central Coast Secrets

The Myth of the Railroad Tunnels and the Japanese Invasion, 1942

Sandy Lydon

There are a number of myths that have their origins in the early weeks of World War II following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The myths that have persisted include Japanese sailors coming ashore in Capitola armed with shotguns, and a Japanese submarine hidden in a cave on the coast north of Davenport. And, perhaps the most pervasive one is that the Southern Pacific Railroad blew up their trans-Santa Cruz Mountain tunnels to prevent a Japanese invasion.

Myths grow from small seeds of truth watered and fertilized by hysteria and fear. There were Japanese submarines operating along the California coast in late 1941, and in one instance, the submarine I-23 surfaced off the coast on December 20 and chased an oil tanker into Monterey Bay as local residents watched in horror. The tanker was damaged, but escaped.

The image of that submarine stayed in the local consciousness for many years, fueling stories of invasions and submarines hidden in caves. Neither the U.S. military or Japanese military records support those stories. (See my book, *The Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region*, for a more complete account of the December 20, 1941 submarine incident; see also *Silent Siege III*, by Bert Webber. Webber has done the most extensive work on the Japanese naval attacks on the coastline of the United States.)

One event that got woven into this Japanese invasion business was the destruction of the Southern Pacific Railroad's two long tunnels in the Santa Cruz Mountains in early April 1942. Constructed almost entirely by Chinese railroad workers between 1876 and 1880, the tunnels had served as the primary railroad connection between Santa Cruz and San Jose for sixty years. Declining rail traffic and the severe winter storms of early 1940 brought the over-the-mountain railroad to an end. The last train through the mountain ran on February 26, 1940.

For the next two years the tunnels sat, open and abandoned. The Southern Pacific Railroad became increasingly concerned about the potential liability should the tunnels collapse, so in the early months of World War II they invited the U.S. Army to practice their demolition work and collapse the ends of the tunnels. On April 4, 1942, the explosions were heard throughout Santa Cruz County and were strong enough to be recorded on a seismograph at Santa Clara University.

In the public's mind, the collapsing of the tunnel mouths was somehow connected



with the continuing concerns about a Japanese invasion, and the myth developed that the tunnels were destroyed to prevent their use by invading Japanese. It wasn't so, but the myth does reflect the very real fear that residents of the Pacific Coast felt during the early years of the war.

Submarines off the coast? Yes. Tunnels blown up? Yes. Connected? No.

And the local folks looked up and asked, "Who was that dude who came and set our historic record straight?"

It was the History Dude!





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