

Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation



Summer 2012

The Evolution of Our Restoration Projects

The Foundation's restoration efforts began in 1990 when Dick Daniel noticed that there were no young oaks in the Open Space, although there were plenty in his back yard. After some experimentation he, Ralph Kraetsch, and Dan Cather concluded the problem was cattle grazing. Cattle were excluded from part of Shell Ridge and the following year the Oak Habitat Restoration Project began under Ralph's leadership. Twenty years later, 700 oaks survive from the 2500 sites we planted and there are many more volunteer seedlings. By any measure, this is a success.



Planting native grass at Heather Farm, 2004

After a couple of years Ralph began to experiment with planting native grass at several sites in Shell Ridge. In 2003 Bill Hunt began planting grass in the Heather Farm Nature Area and a couple of years later, Lesley Hunt started another grass project at Sutherland. All these projects grew to be quite large but ultimately they failed to hold their own against the weeds. The most likely reasons are inadequate site preparation and follow up weeding.

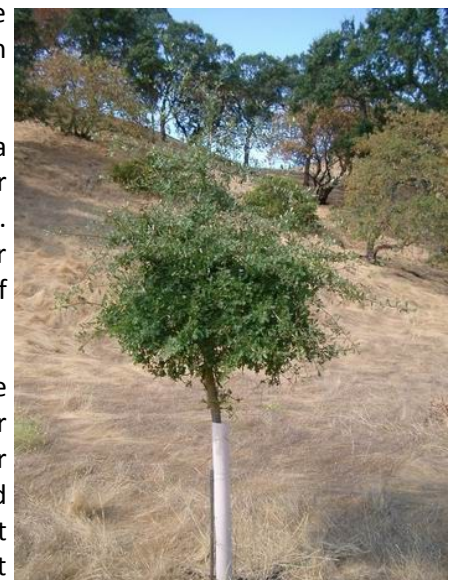
In 1996 Ralph turned his attention to mowing invasive weeds with varied success. One major factor was the nature of the seed banks at each site.

About that time, Bob Wisecarver began a project at Borges Ranch to provide increased cover and food for the quail. This was a resounding success – the quail have increased tenfold. However, efforts to replicate that success elsewhere haven't gone as well. We're still experimenting.

The thing that all these projects have in common is that they focused on a single habitat element. (Heather Farm actually included all the elements but the effort on grass overshadowed everything else.)

In 2008 Bob Simmons proposed deepening Bayberry Pond and restoring the area around it. This led to our first "all inclusive" project where we worked on all the major elements equally and at the same time (trees, chaparral, grass, flowers, and riparian). It has been successful. After his election to the City Council that fall, Bob moved over to Deer Lake and employed the same approach there in a low-key way. Sean Micallef is now doing the same at Indian Valley Pond.

We have also started three new limited-focus projects building in part on what we learned from the earlier ones. Phil Johnson has led an effort to remove yellow star thistle from the spine of Shell Ridge by doing very thorough weeding. It is labor intensive but successful. He, David Ogden, and Brad Heckman also started a mustard eradication project at Sutherland employing mowing and weeding. We have just started to plant grass there using methods Lesley Hunt worked out at Bayberry. Most recently, we applied our knowledge of weed seed banks to removing yellow star thistle below Twin Ponds.



A successful oak planting

Lesley Hunt

Open Space Upgrades

One goal in the Open Space Vision Report is to enhance open space entries and trailheads. Replacement of open space trail markers is underway and will be complete by the end of 2012. To date, 70% of approximately 400 new markers have been installed.

The majority of our trailheads and staging areas will be upgraded to compliment the surrounding well-maintained residential areas. Many entries, original gates, and fencing are still in place from the ranching days. Currently, there are no consistent design standards for fencing and gating.

Trailheads have several different generations of signs in place. Our regulatory signing is also in need of standardization, while retaining the ability to reflect specific regulations at each site or emphasize specific compliance issues.

Large entry signs, at various locations, are damaged and in disrepair. We will be looking for a sign format that is aesthetic, durable, and reasonably priced. The size and scale of the entry signs will need to be adjusted for individual placements.

Development of Open Space entry standards for fencing, gating and signing is in process. New standards will be implemented within the existing budget over the next few years.

Mike Vickers, Open Space Manager



Playing with acorn tops made with the help of Ranger Art Janke



Rabbitsticks made by Ranger Bruce Weidman

Ancient Ways at Sugarloaf - August 11th

Atlatl Competition comes to Sugarloaf. Join us for our third year of competitive primitive technology contests, games and activities. Try your skill at tossing the Atlatl, "The Atom Bomb of the Stone Age." International competition rounds -- the Atlatl Olympics -- will be scheduled. Throw the rabbitstick, the American Indian boomerang that doesn't come back. Make and spin an acorn top or play stick dice and other games. Make simple crafts from cattails, tules, pine nuts, and more using only primitive tools. Exhibitors will have more to share. Make this a family day at Sugarloaf and bring a picnic lunch to enjoy following the competition. The event goes from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. More information is available by contacting Ranger Bruce at 943-5899 x2665 or by e-mail to weidman@walnut-creek.org. Volunteers are needed to staff this event; please contact Bruce if you can help.

Nancy Dollard

New Gates for Borges Ranch

In 2008 WCOSF member Barbara Morse left us a bequest to be used at Borges Ranch. At the same time, City budget constraints shut down many of the programs staff had conducted at the ranch, leaving the public with less access to the artifacts at the site. Supervising Ranger Nancy Dollard found the perfect solution in these handsome wrought iron gates, custom made by Lafayette Iron Works. The design on the bottom incorporates the Borges brand, and the horseshoes at the top evoke both the ranching heritage and Barbara Morse's interest in horses.

The gates are installed on the blacksmith shop and the carriage barn. They will allow the public to see the artifacts inside when staff is not present but still keep them secure. Staff will develop interpretive material which can be read from outside the gates.



Scat full of crayfish shells

Otters Everywhere

Otters are everywhere this summer, it seems. In addition to their usual haunts, one has been spotted in Alamo on San Ramon Creek. At least two otters spent a month living – and fishing – in Civic Park. A pair has had young at Heather Farm's natural pond. There was another den at Heather Farm about three years ago, so perhaps this will become a regular event. Certainly Heather Farm is a major stop on the crosstown wildlife corridor. Otters can be hard to see, but they leave signs like slides, partially-eaten fish, and scat.



Partially eaten crayfish - a sign that otters have been to dine

Open Space Briefs

Floating Islands

In the never-ending quest to control the unpleasant side effects of geese at Heather Farm, Mike Vickers is pursuing a new idea – floating islands for the concrete pond next to the community center. Planted with the right species, these islands will process excess nutrients in the water and provide cover for fish (yes, there are actually fish in that pond). Mike has ordered the islands and expects to get them assembled and planted over the course of the summer. Improved conditions in the concrete pond should also benefit the natural pond in the Nature Area.

GIS Project – Help Welcome

As part of our planning for future restoration, we instituted a GIS project to map and organize information about native plants and other important features in Shell Ridge. If you have a smart phone or other GPS and would like to help, write to us at contact@wcosf.org.

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Yes, I want to help protect and preserve Walnut Creek's Open Space

We invite all who share this goal to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation. Memberships and contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. There are numerous areas where you can help. If you are interested, please drop us a note or email, or visit our website at www.wcosf.org.

I would like to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation

Name _____
Address _____ City _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ Email (*we never share*) _____
Skills I am willing to share _____

I would like to volunteer!

_____ Oak Restoration Project
_____ Native Grasses
_____ Quail Habitat
_____ School program

MEMBERSHIPS

Patron.....\$500
Benefactor.....\$250
Sustaining.....\$100
Sponsor.....\$50
Family.....\$40
Individual.....\$25

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