

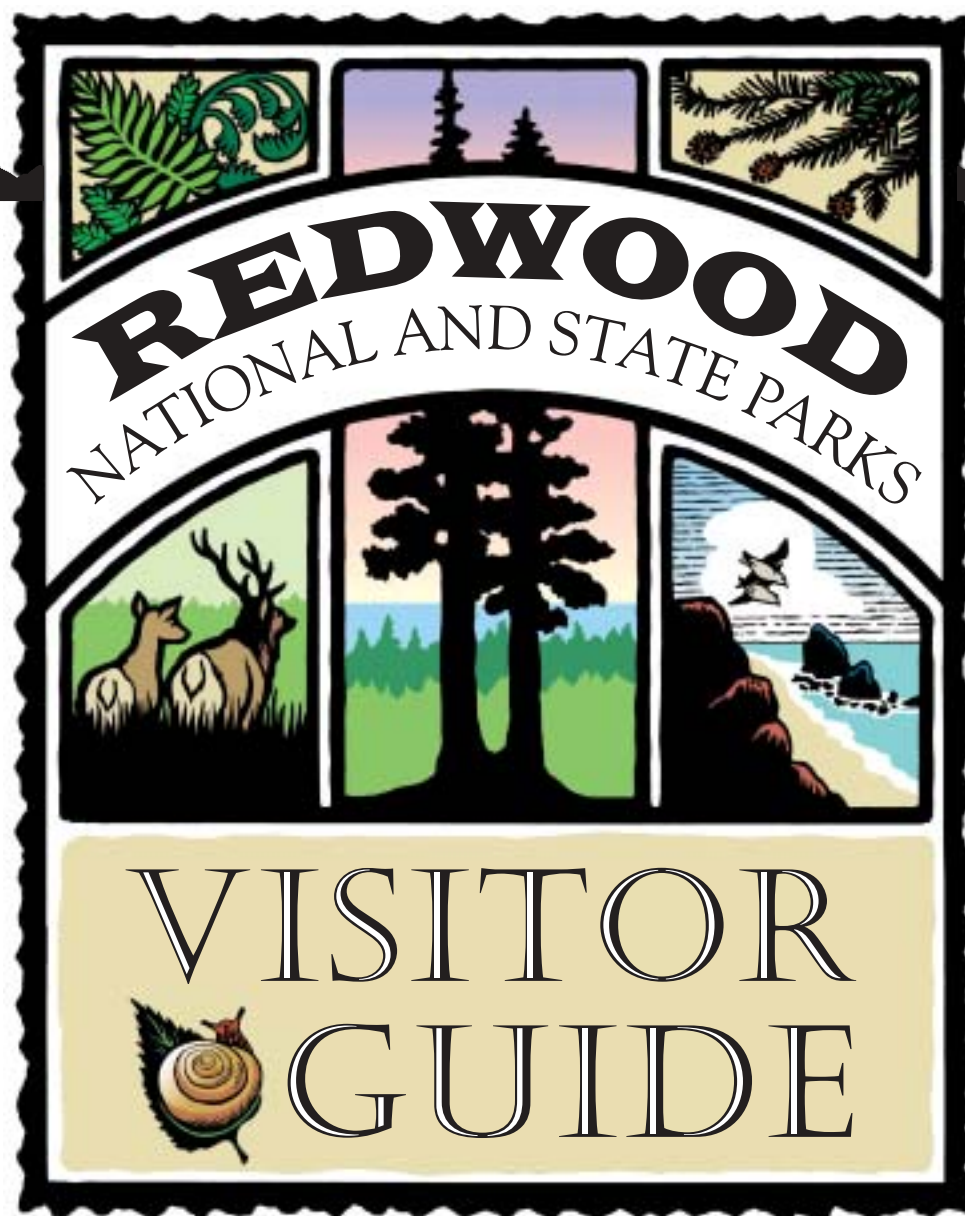
By Roy Richey and Jim Wheeler

GOLD ON THE BLUFFS. With the discovery of gold at Gold Bluffs Beach, miners were the first European-Americans to enter this area in the 1850s and later to use these valleys for pasture. Arthur Davison, whose family dairy occupied most of this valley for 100 years, came west in the 1880s to scout settlement prospects, work as a laborer at Upper and Lower Gold Bluff mines, and apprentice with a local dairyman. By 1890, he had purchased 90 acres surrounding the present-day Elk Meadow Day Use Area for a dairy. Grandpa Davison is said to have cleared the willows and alders from at least 35 acres for pastureland. The family often joked "where there's smoke, there's grandpa." Four generations of Davisons worked this land between 1890 and 1991.

RAILS TO THE REDWOOD HIGHWAY. In the 1800s, settlers choked on the dust of wagon roads, but the 20th century produced rapid change. In 1909, agents for Southern Pacific Railroad purchased a 100-foot right-of-way from Davison for a rail link from San Francisco to Grants Pass, Oregon. Construction of the railroad stalled. The Redwood Empire Highway Association, formed in 1921, begged the state legislature to improve the coast highway for better commercial access and tourism. When the rail line idea faded by 1933, the State of California purchased the land and improved present-day Highway 101.

STACK 'EM HIGH. World War II precipitated an upturn in the timber industry. By 1948, the new Arcata Redwood Company was constructing their Mill B and log decks at what is now Elk Meadow Day Use Area. A system of private haul roads connected four mill sites within a four-mile radius. There was nothing exceptional about the medium-sized mill except the size of the deck — eight acres of pavement, equivalent to six football fields — piled with logs in front of the ancient redwood forest.

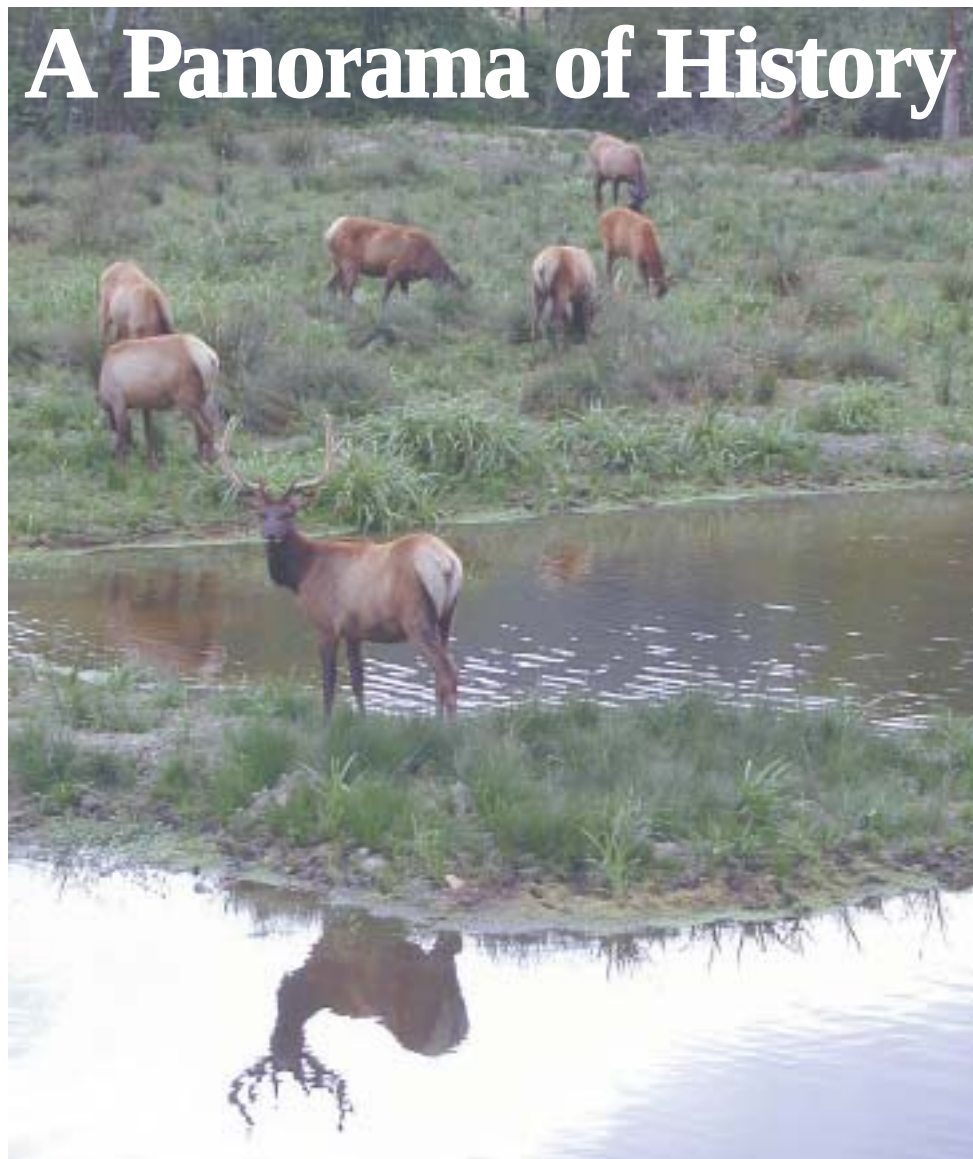
UNPAVE THE WAY. The mill closed in October 1970. With the creation of Redwood National Park in 1968, expansion of the park in 1978, and decline in the local timber industry, there was little need for a large log



S U M M E R E D I T I O N 2 0 0 1

ELK MEADOW

A Panorama of History



Roosevelt elk frequent the newly restored wetland area at Elk Meadow.

storage deck. The park acquired the Davison property in 1991 and the Mill B deck in 1996 and began to restore three acres of wetland and 650 feet of stream channel (buried under the former log decks) to their pre-settlement state.

Over time, bulldozers dug up the eight acres of asphalt, then recycled it as base material for the new parking lot and picnic area. Geologists directed excavators to dig down to the original soils on the hillside, where they retrieved enough soil to fill 3,000 trucks. Tree stumps unearthed in the process told the original contours of the land. With this knowledge, workers used most of the material to reshape the slope.

*The art of land
doctoring is being practiced
with vigor, but the science
of land health is yet to
be born.*

—Aldo Leopold,
A Sand County Almanac, 1949

Restoring the compacted landscape to its natural state has greatly enhanced wildlife habitat. Native Roosevelt elk can be observed grazing in the renewed wetlands and pastures along Davison Road. The wetland and revived stream channel of lower Davison Creek are already providing important rearing habitat for cutthroat trout and salmon species. The Davison Hike/Bike Trail bridge is an excellent place from which to observe fish as they migrate from Prairie Creek. As wetland plants reestablish themselves, the area will become a place where we can spot herons, egrets, a variety of ducks, and migrating songbirds.

YOUR PLAYGROUND. From Elk Meadow Day Use Area, you can compare old-growth ancient redwood forests, and second-growth, or formerly logged redwood forests. Looking east from the parking area, the uneven-aged old-growth forest of Lady Bird Johnson Grove stands in sharp contrast to the young even-aged forest below and to the north. The 2-¹/₂-mile Trillium Falls Trail passes through superlative old-growth redwood forest, including several Save-the-Redwoods League memorial groves.



EPIC JOURNEY

By Susan Davis

For almost 40 years Davison Creek's salmon heritage lay beneath acres of asphalt and tons of logs. Restoration of the creek will allow us once again to thrill to the ancient drama played out by coho salmon returning from the sea to begin the next generation in the creek.



Every year, as fall turns into winter, coho begin to sense, from miles at sea, the exact stream in which they were born. As soon as the creek swells from early winter rains, coho start their epic journey upstream. They need clean, clear-flowing streams for mating and quiet pools for resting in during migrations. Accompanied by males constantly fighting for the opportunity to mate, each female chooses a site for her nest, called a redd. She repeatedly heaves her body sideways, digging into the gravel, often scraping her tail raw in the effort to make a large shallow depression. Near exhaustion, she deposits thousands of eggs in the redd while an attendant male envelopes the eggs in a sperm-laden cloud; then the nest is covered with protective gravel. Death claims the pair in just a few days, but the fertilized eggs are thousands of packages of hope for the future of the species.

Today the restored Davison Creek holds the possibility of that future. The essentials for salmon survival have already begun. Falling waters stir in life-giving oxygen and move the gravel needed to safely shelter eggs. Decaying leaves feed insects and insects feed young fish. Towering trees shade the pools created by logs and fallen limbs — havens that protect juvenile salmon from predators.

In the winter of 2000, coho returned to Davison Creek for the first time in 40 years.

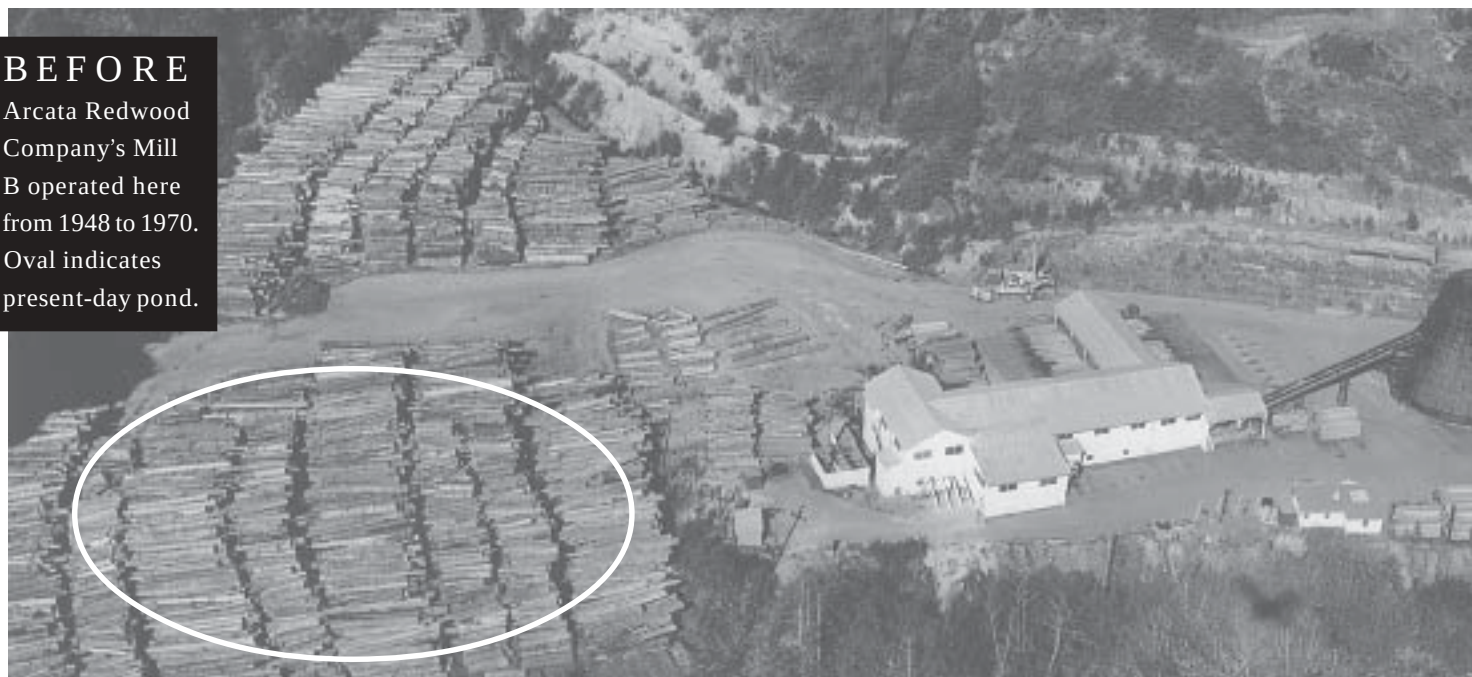
There's a New Place in Town

Imagine driving by a vacant lot on the outskirts of town year after year, glancing at acres of cracked, debris-strewn asphalt and remarking, "I wonder when someone is going to clean that up." One day, you drive by, and an amazing transition is underway: The lot is clean, debris removed, and bulldozers are busy pulling up the asphalt.

Over the next few years, the site slowly changes. Bulldozers sculpt a hillside on the west side of the lot. Just east of the hillside, a pond materializes. A once-buried stream channel is recovered

BEFORE

Arcata Redwood Company's Mill B operated here from 1948 to 1970. Oval indicates present-day pond.



DURING

The asphalt and debris left behind by Mill B is bulldozed and the landscape recontoured from 1996 to 1999.



AFTER

By June 2000, succulent grasses and willows of the restored wetland attract Roosevelt elk.



...Elk Meadow Day Use Area

and enhanced with the addition of logs and human-formed pools and waterfalls. A green hue emerges over the newly exposed soils by the pond as slough sedge, salmonberry, and willow are planted, take root, and flourish.

Finally, the heavy equipment is gone. A small parking lot, restroom, and walking trails invite you to explore the area and marvel at the recontoured, healing terrain. Elk Meadow Day Use Area — a work in progress — has truly become “a new place in town.”

R I P A R I A N R E V I V A L

By Jim Wheeler

Many of us know a family who has lost their home. The restored wetlands of lower Davison Creek are much like a home that has been rebuilt from the ground up after a fire or flood. These wetlands lay smothered under landfill and asphalt for over three decades. Ironically, the heavy equipment that created the log deck and buried the wetlands was required to uncover and restore the original ground.

Once the site was prepared, California and Youth Conservation Corps and volunteer crews blanketed the barren ground with downed logs, decaying leaves and twigs, and topsoil — building a foundation for growth of a new wetland forest. Next, as if setting a cornerstone for the new home, volunteers planted slough sedge

and red alder. Slough sedge, the most common plant of nearby wetlands, anchors the soil. Red alder, another key species in native riparian woodlands, grows rapidly. This provides vertical structure to the wetlands, like walls in a house, creating nesting habitat for birds. Alder also shades and cools the creek, providing stream habitat for salmon and trout. These trees replenish soil nutrients, preparing the way for other woodland plants and trees. A canopy of big-leafed maple and Sitka spruce will grow over time, providing a roof to the renewed home.

By July 2000, a healthy cover of plant life had returned to these wetlands, with thousands of naturally



California Conservation Corps and other volunteer crews plant slough sedge.

seeded sprouts boosting what volunteers had planted. Now resident Roosevelt elk visit the site regularly. In time and through continuing efforts, we will see hawks, otters, ducks, and all manner of wildlife return to this small portion of our common home.



TRILLIUM FALLS TRAIL

By Lynne Mager

Trillium Falls

Trail leads you through the misty hallways of an ancient redwood home; a home where coast redwoods, standing straight and tall, dominate the skyscraper canopy and provide shade for the rest of the forest. Along the path, families of Douglas-fir, western hemlock, and Sitka spruce reside underneath the world's tallest trees.

Near the waterfall, the heavy, sloping limbs of a big-leaf maple reach out in every direction; its golden leaves carpet the forest floor. The sun's rays attempt to blaze a path through the barren branches and foggy sky, sprinkling beams of light upon one of the parks' few waterfalls. A 10-foot cascade over deep green moss-covered rocks, the falls is a place where you may find red-legged frogs, Pacific giant salamanders, or banana slugs close by.

The forest floor, covered with wet leaves, needles, and limbs, creates a moist sanctuary for red tree voles, black-tailed deer, and other rain forest creatures. Listen for the high-pitched hoots of the spotted owl or the rapid trills of the ever-present winter wren.

The trail is named after a delicate white flower of the Lily Family. Trillium has a whorl of three dark green leaves with three velvet petals nestled inside. Scattered across the shadowy forest, trillium patches seem to glow in their white or pink color phase. They blossom early, March to May; redwood violet and mountain iris can be found through June; western bleeding heart through July; and inside-out flower through September.

As you walk the primeval corridor, you will encounter 19 redwood memorial groves, colossal redwoods — pillars of life, heartbeat of the forest — saved from the ax by you and others who understand their inspiration and their place in nature's family.

Trillium Falls is a newly constructed trail located in the Elk Meadow Day Use Area.

Where the Elk Roam

By Kath Fuller

One evening after work, I stopped at the Elk Meadow Day Use Area to see the changes in the new Trillium Falls Trail.

In the adjacent meadow, there were nine Roosevelt elk bulls. They watched me — and I watched them. After a snort or two they went back to grazing. With the false security lent by the pond between the bachelor bulls and me, I cautiously proceeded down the trail. I walked noisily so I wouldn't surprise any of the massive herbivores and thought about their presence here over time.

Only 75 years ago, Roosevelt elk numbers dropped to as few as 15 individuals because of over hunting and habitat loss. The last herd lived protected in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, just three miles from here. In 1948, 1,600 acres were added to Prairie Creek in an area we now call Elk Prairie. The herd began to grow. In the 1880s this area was cleared and burned for dairy cows. The dairy operation closed in 1991 and the elk moved in. Now Elk Meadow Day Use Area has expanded their living and grazing range, and their population is stable at about 1,000 elk. Nearly extinct, Roosevelt elk have come full circle and so I had I. When I returned to the meadow, the elk were still there — home on their range.

Wetland Smorgasbord

By Cathleen Cook

An eye-catching assortment of birds perch, preen, and search for prey in the newly restored

great blue heron

the newly wetland of Elk Meadow.

A great blue heron moves slowly and deliberately through the shallow water of the pond. Its daggerlike bill poised for action if a fish or frog is spotted. With a loud croak, the heron spreads its blue gray wings and rises awkwardly from the water. Eyeing the open water for fish, a kingfisher hovers over the pond, its bushy crest and spear-shaped bill silhouetted against a bleached gray snag. A gleam of scarlet on black exposes a male red-winged blackbird flashing

red-winged blackbird

his shoulder badges to a brown streaked

female, as both balance on the swaying sedges at ponds edge. Sallying forth from the top of a newly planted willow, a black phoebe hawks an insect out of the air and returns to the willow tip. Perched on a tree stump, a green-winged teal basks in the afternoon sun, its iridescent green eye-patch highlighted against the chestnut head.

The restored wetland with its open water, succulent water plants, flowering shrubs, and surrounding gallery of leafy trees has been transformed into a smorgasbord for birds.

Redwood National and State Parks' new *Checklist of Familiar Plants and Animals*, published by Waterford Press, is available at all visitor centers.

black phoebe

kingfisher

green-winged teal

Artwork courtesy of Waterford Press from Nature of California.