Ukiah Daily Journal
9-22-2000

Woman dies in fire after refusing to leave

By JENNIFER COLEMAN
Associated Press Writer

PARADISE — A Butte County fire grew to more than 1,800 acres, but firefighters had 80 percent of the blaze contained late Thursday night, fire officials said.

The Concow Fire has destroyed about 14 homes and 12 auxiliary buildings such as barns. Five other homes have suffered minor damage since the fire started Tuesday near Paradise. Firefighters were battling hot, windy weather along with the flames here, where temperatures topped 100 Wednesday for the second straight day.

The fire engulfed a woman's home early Wednesday, killing her and injuring a firefighter who was trying to persuade her to evacuate.

"He stayed as long as he could .... She refused to leave," state Forestry Department spokeswoman Karen Terrill said.

Firefighters were helped by Thursday by higher humidity and lower temperatures, said CDF spokeswoman Suzanne Campbell. A voluntary evacuation order covering about 1,000 Paradise-area residents was lifted Thursday.

Authorities were withholding the names of the woman killed in the blaze and the fire captain injured while trying to rescue her. He received hand and face burns and was treated at Oroville Hospital.

The woman's house was located on hilly, wooded land far from any others.

Paradise Fire Chief Jim Broshears said firefighters couldn't force the woman to leave.

"Once someone has left an area we can close it and not let them in," he said. "Otherwise we can strongly advise that they leave and that there's an immediate threat."

More than 1,600 firefighters battled the wildfire, burning south of Paradise in the unincorporated, sparsely populated Concow area on the edge of the Sierra foothills.

Concow resident Robert Lunt said the sound of fire engines woke him about 1:30 a.m. Wednesday.

"I was putting my shoes on to go find out which direction they were going, when I saw the sparks start across the street," he said. "I figured if I could get across the street I could put out that little fire, but there was no way."

The flames encircled Lunt's 119-year-old farmhouse, but the building wasn't damaged.

"We lost a corral, a sawmill, a chicken house, but the barn was saved," he said. "Once it started, it created a lot of wind and started throwing its own sparks."

Lunt, who was home with his 16-year-old son, said he heard that a herd of his cattle was seen in good health, but not near the ranch.

Part of Highway 70 had been closed Tuesday, but was reopened Wednesday. Paradise schools closed Tuesday due to smoke were reopened Wednesday.

At least eight firefighters have been injured here, including one hit in the head by a falling tree. All were treated and released.

On the Net:
www.fire.ca.gov

Feather River Bulletin
2-28-2001

Jim Giles

Retiring as Caltrans maintenance leadworker

Jim Cox

has been with Caltrans since the early 1960s

Ken Fitch

is retiring after a long career with Caltrans

Three retire from Caltrans

By Victoria Metcalf
Staff Writer

Two supervisors and a maintenance leadworker in Caltrans District 2 are saying their farewells and making retirement plans.

Between the three men, they have spent a combined 104 years with Caltrans, working on the state's highways.

Jim Giles

It was 1962 when Jim Giles began his career as a seasonal worker with Caltrans. While the winter months found him busy removing snow from highways, the summertime found him working as a logger.

Eventually, Giles was hired permanently at Crescent Mills. When he reported to work on his first day, however, he was told the yard had been closed and his new position had moved on to the Mineral Maintenance Yard.

Giles made the move, and it added to his experience in snow removal and opening the Lassen Park Highway.

Eventually, Giles would work at Camp 41 on the Klamath River before transferring to Pulga in 1968.

And that's where Giles spent his career and raised his family, working as the maintenance leadworker.

Giles' family includes his wife, Earline; a daughter, Billie Jo; and son, Jesse.

In many ways, as Giles worked out of the Pulga Yard, he hadn't moved far from home. He was born and raised in Oroville.

Giles said he enjoyed his career at Pulga Yard, and that it's been a challenge. "You have a great variety of exciting things to do, such as chain control, snow and rock slide removal, accident response and of course responding to the mighty floods that come roaring down the heart of the Feather River Canyon."

In retirement, Giles plans to enjoy himself with more than a little bass fishing, a favorite pastime.

He said he might also try his hand at restoring a classic car.

Jim Cox

Beginning with the Division of Highways in 1963, in a temporary position as a highway maintenance worker in the Crestview Yard, Jim Cox has seen several transfers before ending up as a supervisor at the Quincy Maintenance Station.

From Crestview, Cox was promoted to Caltrans equipment operator and then leadworker.

In 1979, Cox accepted the position as supervisor of the Quincy Maintenance Station, where he has remained for more than 20 years.

Raised in Southern California, Cox is married and has six children, Kathy, Kim, Randy, Sharill, Maggie and Mitzie. His wife's name is Eileen.

In retirement, Cox is looking forward to having time to spend doing the things he likes, such as hunting, fishing, traveling and gardening.

Ken Fitch

The junior of the three retirees, but not by much, Ken Fitch is leaving after 44 years with the state.

Like Cox and Giles, Fitch, too started as a temporary worker on the highways in 1967.

His first full-time position came at Point Reyes Maintenance Station in April, 1968. A year later, he was promoted to maintenance worker II at Bodega Bay, and transferred to the Covelo yard in District 1 in 1975. In 1976, he was again promoted to leadworker in Eureka, and then was promoted to maintenance supervisor.

It was in 1985 that Fitch transferred to the Plumas County District 2's Pulga Yard.

Thinking back on his experiences, Fitch said, "My fondest memories are of the flood of 1986. Highway 70 in the Feather River Canyon was closed for six months. Without traffic to contend with, we were able to go out there and go to work. Life was good."

Fitch was born in New Hampshire and moved to California when he was three.

Fitch has two children, and four grandchildren.

Feather River Bulletin
4-18-2001, p 1 of 2

Site recovery expected to take awhile following accident

By Victoria Metcalf
Staff Writer

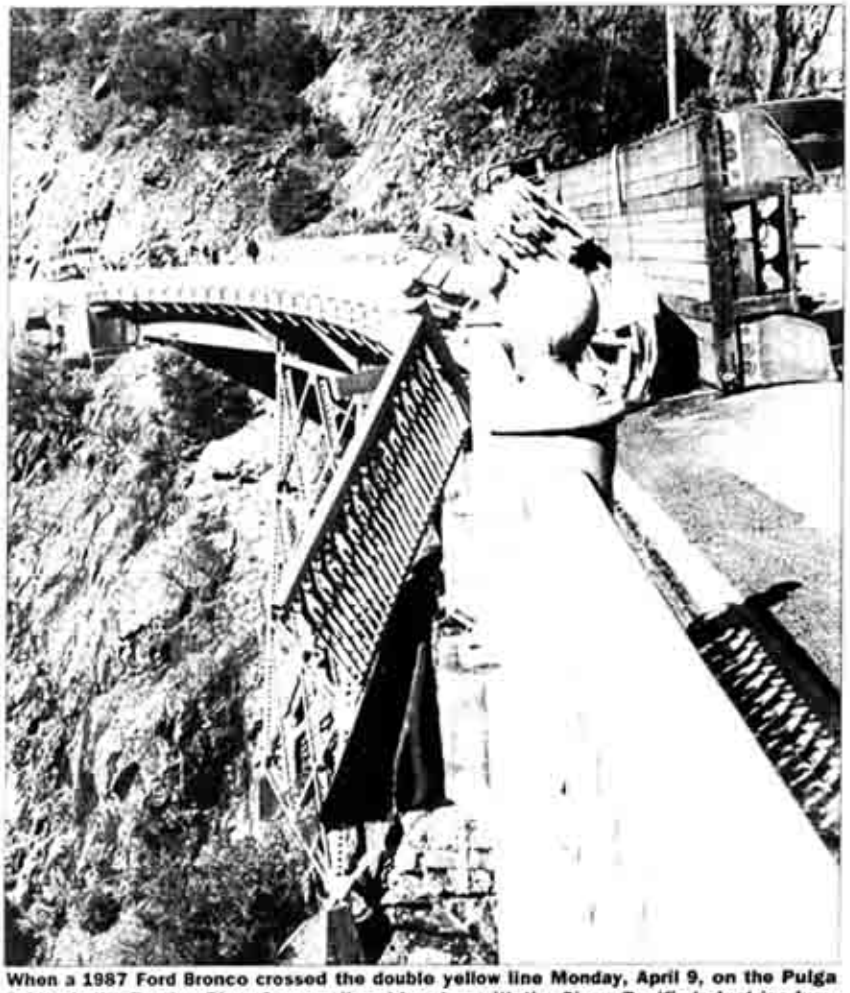
Reminders that a serious incident took place, taking the life of an Oroville man, still remain at the scene of a two-vehicle collision, on the Pulga Bridge in the Feather River Canyon.

Portions of a load of clean, new lumber still remain in the icy waters that tumble hundreds of feet below the picturesque bridge and railway trestle.

Sections of guardrail now stand in, filling gaping holes created as a Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) lumber truck was struck by an on-coming Ford Bronco, and spilled its load.

According to Caltrans Maintenance Superintendent Katherine Coots, the rails of the historic bridge will be replaced.

Existing rails were heavily damaged when tons of lumber snapped the iron loose from its fittings. And, at this time, it looks as though new sections will have to be created, Coots explained.



When a 1987 Ford Bronco crossed the double yellow line Monday, April 9, on the Pulga Bridge in the Feather River Canyon, it met head-on with the Sierra Pacific Industries lumber truck. It, in turn, dumped its load, taking out some of the railing.

Photos by Will Farris

Two men wrapped steel cables around the trailer of a Sierra Pacific industry rig and then used a larger wrecker to right it, in an attempt to open the Pulga Bridge. The road remained closed to through traffic from the time of the incident at 6:20 a.m. until it was finally cleared several hours later.

For now, sections of guardrail will fill in until bridge reconditioning is scheduled to begin at a later date, Coots said.

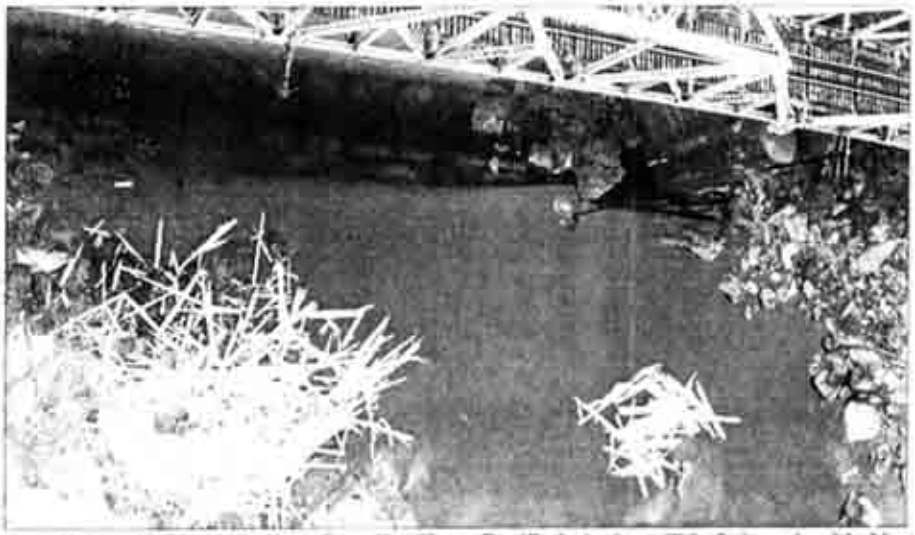
Lumber now in the Feather River will have to be recovered, Coots said. SPI officials were contacted by the Department of Fish and Game about overseeing the project.

Only a narrow hiking trail exists from the winding roadway high above the river, Coots said, making recovery efforts difficult. But, although Fish and Game isn't pressuring SPI at this time, the lumber will have to be removed to eliminate further damage.

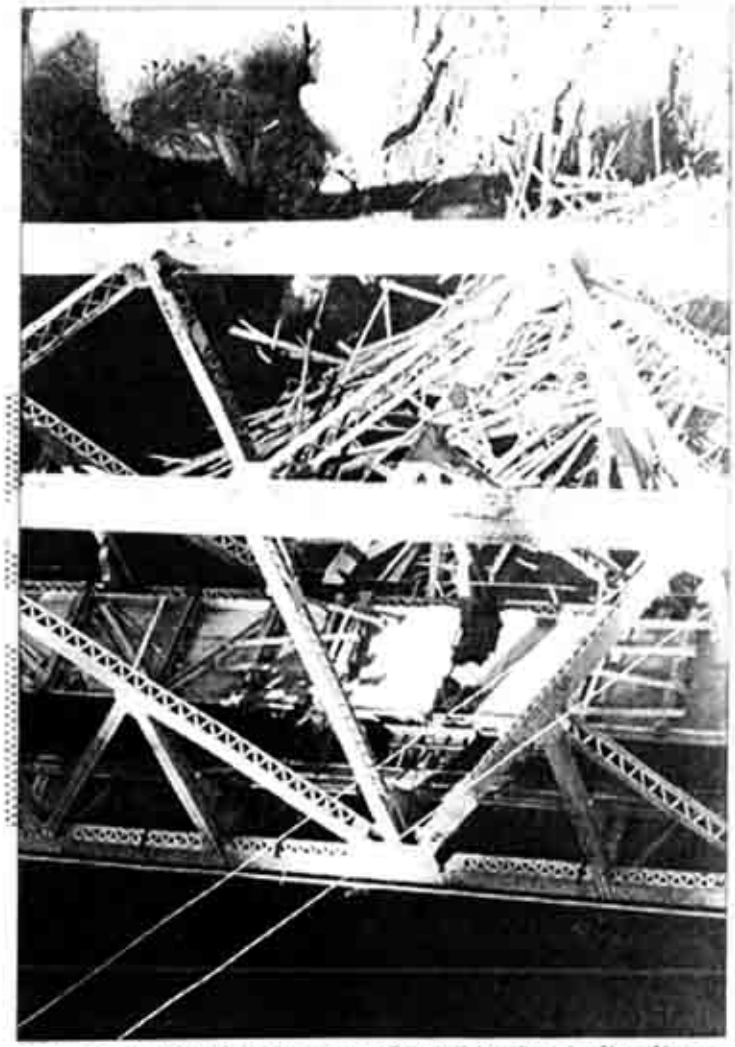
The incident that created it all happened at 6:20 a.m. Monday, April 9. An Oroville resident was traveling too fast for road conditions and the Bronco he was driving hit ice. It then crossed the double yellow lines on the bridge and met the SPI truck and trailer, traveling with a full load of lumber.

The Bronco's driver was pronounced dead on impact. Although the SPI truck received major damage, no reports of injuries to the driver were included in the California Highway Patrol report.

The incident blocked the highway, closing the Feather River Canyon at both ends to through traffic, until late morning, when the lumber could be removed from the highway.



A partial load of lumber, fresh from the Sierra Pacific Industry mill in Quincy, tumbled into the icy waters of the Feather River early Monday, April 9, where it will remain until the mill discovers a way to recover it.



As lumber spilled from an overturned lumber trailer, it narrowly missed hitting box cars as a train passed on the rail line beneath the bridge. Here, it is shown as lumber landed on some of the flat cars.

Part I: Courage in a land meant to burn

Feather River Bulletin
6-27-2001
page 1 of 5

By David Foster
Associated Press Writer
Special to Feather Publishing

Editor's Note: The following is an award-winning series on the Concow Incident in 2000. Concow is a small community located near the west end of the Feather River Canyon. It is being reprinted with special permission from the author by the California Department of Forestry (CDF) in spreading its fire prevention message.

"It's real life stuff," said Mary Huggins, CDF forester and agency representative in Plumas County. As a trained firefighter, who's graduated the CDF academy, she should know.

As a member of the Plumas County Fire Safe Council, Huggins said, "It can happen anywhere, anytime. We don't want to have it happen in Plumas County."

She encourages all residents to do their part in making their homes and property fire safe.

For more information on the Fire Safe Council, or on better preparing homes and property against wildfire, contact Mike DeLasaux, at 283-6125, or get on the Internet at <Firewise.org>.

The house is gone. Anything that could burn was swallowed up in minutes that night, and a bulldozer later scraped away the rest: a forlorn chimney, shattered dishes, the skeleton of a kitchen stove.

Everything, gone.

But Darryl Sanford still sees it all. The fire captain stands in what used to be the front yard, staring up at the charred limbs of a big oak tree.

It's his first time back since September, when wildfire unleashed itself across these hills and Sanford, trapped in a burning house surrounded by blazing trees, pulled off the narrowest of escapes.

He survived, yes, but he left someone behind.

"Every fireman's dream is to save somebody's life," he said. "To fail at that..."

He did everything he could, and still the fire won.

Last year was America's worst for wildfires since Yellowstone burned in 1988. Fires blackened 7.4 million acres of forest and grasslands, twice the annual norm, and killed 17 people in 13 states. Officials counted 92,250 separate fires.

This is the story of one of them, based on interviews with 35 firefighters, survivors and others, and on the findings of a government inquiry released Feb. 8.

They call it the Concow Incident. Scorching some 1,800 acres in the Sierra Nevada foothills 80 miles north of Sacramento, it was not the year's largest blaze. But it was one of the cruelest, and as things in California often are, it's a sign of what's to come.

Throughout the state and the West, civilization is spreading fast across a landscape meant to burn. As mansions and mobile homes sprout amid the pines, firefighters are drawn into a war that grows more dangerous with each victory.

Beat back nature often enough, they find, and people who live in wildfire's way come to depend on you. Even when they shouldn't.

Tuesday's newspapers lie on the brown lawns of Oroville. It is dawn, Sept. 19, 2000, the cloudless start of a sizzling day.

"A near-textbook recipe for disaster," declares The Mercury Register's front-page story. "With temperatures and humidities like those expected today, a passionate look could constitute a fire hazard."

Summer is having one last gasp in Butte County, where the farmland of the Central Valley rises into the dry, forested foothills of the Sierra Nevada and southern Cascades.

By noon, the thermometer is closing in on 100. Relative humidity is just fifteen percent. Sun-baked oak and manzanita leaves rattle on branches, their water content a third of what it was in spring.

In this weather, the threat of fire is a constant presence, coiled in the weeds, ready to bound free with any spark: a horseshoe striking rock, a tailpipe hanging low, a cigarette butt bouncing off the road.

For two days, the California Department of Forestry (CDF), and Fire Protection has declared a Red Flag Warning, urging no use of lawn mowers or other outdoor equipment after 10 a.m.

But none of this deters Jim Stewart, age 71. Under the noon sun, Stewart sits atop a bulldozer, clearing brush on his property in Concow, a rural, unincorporated community 15 miles north of Oroville.

Grinding toward his house, Stewart looks back at the gully where he'd been working. Flames crackle in the brush.

Stewart powers the dozer back toward the fire, but it's too late. Flames are scurrying up the steep ravine toward Concow Road, just above.

He rushes to the house and calls 911. It is 1:04 p.m.

A minute later, buzzers and bells are sounding at CDF fire stations throughout Butte County. From the start, it's a high-level dispatch: six engines, two bulldozers, two air tankers, one helicopter and two on-the-ground fire crews of 15 firefighters each.

They'll hit this wildfire fast and hard, before it has a chance to spread.

Battalion Chief Wayne Wilson arrives at 1:20 p.m., just behind the first engines, and finds a fire already displaying what he calls "an aggressive personality." Some brush fires fuss and fume, their smoke drifting lazily. This one has a smoke column that billows a thousand feet high.

It would be hard to design a more troublesome place for a fire to start than this brush-choked ravine. Wildfires love to climb, and the terrain ahead is like a napkin tilted over a candle, rising 700 feet to Miller Peak, a mile to the east.

Amid the wail of sirens, Wilson calls for reinforcements: 10 more fire engines, two more air tankers, two more bulldozers.

He also orders six more fire crews with 90 firefighters in all. They are the Marines of the firefighting world, toiling along a fire's flanks to etch out bare-earth corridors with chain saws, shovels and sharp-bladed hand tools called Pulaskis and McClouds.

Wilson hopes to contain the fire west of Concow Road, but his plan is obsolete as soon as he announces it. Flames are climbing into the tree tops and leaping across the road. In just 45 minutes, the fire has grown to 50 acres.

Air tankers swoop over the trees, at each pass dropping up to 1,800 gallons of water mixed with fire retardant and red dye. They can slow the fire's spread but not stop it.

Wilson's new plan: Use fire breaks to confine the blaze to a mile-wide corridor between two east-west roads—Pinkston Canyon Road along the southern edge, Deadwood Road to the north—then try to pinch off its head before it reaches Miller Peak.

It's a time-tested strategy. You don't stop wildfire so much as herd it, letting it exhaust itself within strips of land cleared of fuel by back fires, bulldozers and hand tools.

But with this blaze, as with many Western fires these days, there is a complication: protecting dozens of homes tucked amid the trees and brush. Engine crews that once might have tagged along with fire crews, lending their hoses to wet down a fire's flanks, now are ordered into a deadly zone once largely avoided.

As engines crowd onto narrow Concow Road, Wilson sends them up even narrower

dirt roads along the ridge above the blaze. Each crew is to find a house, lay out hoses and wait for the fire to hit.

2:40 p.m: CDF Fire Capt. Jeff Hawkins and Engineer Tony Brownell back their engines into the driveway of a mobile home off Tim Tam Lane, a gravel road traversing the ridge north of Miller Peak.

The fire, now covering 150 acres, churns toward them with the muffled roar of distant surf. It is a quarter mile away and closing fast, blown by a 10-mph westerly wind.

While two firefighters from each truck lay hoses in the yard, Brownell and Hawkins size up the house. Brush has been cleared back 20 feet from the eaves. The law requires 30, and prudence requires still more.

Borderline defensible, Brownell and Hawkins agree.

The old man in the yard tells them he's been here 40 years, and he's not about to leave now. By law, residents cannot be forced to evacuate, and this guy knows it.

Turn around and look, Brownell tells him.

Flames are clawing through the brush 200 yards away. Embers sail past. The home owner, suddenly quiet, hurries his wife and dog into the car, and they roar off down the road.

Hawkins and Brownell return to their task. They have measured this situation against the cardinal rule of firefighting: No house is worth a life. And they've reached the same conclusion as scores of other firefighters on this ridge today: They will stay.

The firefighters grab drip torches, metal canisters that dispense burning globs of oil and gasoline, and start laying down fire around the house. Their back fire chews through grass and weeds without leaping into trees above. Perfect, Brownell thinks. By replacing ground-level fuel with a layer of ash, this will slow down the main fire when it hits.

And just in time. The fire is at hand. Flames sweep through 15-foot-high manzanita brush near the edge of the yard. Smoke hides the sun, and the roar increases from surf to freight train. Sparks and firebrands pelt the men.

It was already 103 degrees. Now heat billows from the flame front. Sweat and soot stream down bodies encased in long-sleeved Nomex shirts and pants, neck shrouds, goggles, helmets, heavy boots and leather gloves.

The firefighters move slowly, taking shallow breaths to keep from searing their throats. The four crew members occasionally turn their hose nozzles to the mist position and cool the air over their heads. Brownell and Hawkins, without hoses, crouch low every few seconds to grab a breath of less smoky air near the ground, then straighten up and move on.

The firefighters aim short bursts of water at burning brush near the house. There's not a drop to waste. Each truck holds 500 gallons, and a hose open full bore would drain the tank in four minutes.

Flames melt through the home's outside power line. A chicken coop and shed catch fire. But the house itself is clear of flame. And the fire front, though nastier than Hawkins and Brownell would prefer, is passing by.

Things are going well, Hawkins thinks. Then he looks back—his engine is on fire! His crew rushes over, dousing the truck with its own hose, but not before plastic light covers melt.

And now the fire is making another run at them from a different angle. This is getting hairy, Hawkins thinks. They need help, fast.

He radios for air support, and within minutes hears the roar of an air tanker. He never sees the plane, but through clouds of smoke a red rain plummets. The soupy fire retardant smacks Hawkins, the house and the engine. A direct hit.

"Thank you!" Hawkins shouts to the sky.

The worst has passed for Hawkins, but its only begin-

ning for Brownell and his crew. Worried that the wildfire will ambush them from a ridge to the south, they walk east along Tim Tam Lane, laying down fire along the road's southern edge to bum out a safety zone.

Brownell, a brawny six foot, two inches, has fought wildfires for 12 years. He's known to colleagues as an aggressive firefighter, a quality that earns respect in the field but makes safety officers nervous. His two crew members are greener, but Brownell considers them sharp. Scott Martinez, 25, has been with the CDF for four years. Eric Zane, 21, is in his second season.

Their burn-out starts well, but 400 feet up the road, Brownell senses change. In roadside brush he'd thought was clear, two spot fires are bubbling. And their back fire, until now simmering through the underbrush, is getting lively. Roadside pine trees ignite like torches.

Let's get out of here, Brownell says. They drop their drip torches and start walking briskly back toward the engines.

Seconds later, their back fire leaps 40 feet into the sky. A wall of flame curls over them to become a fiery ceiling. Brownell looks one way up the road and then the other. It's orange both ways. There's nowhere to go.

"Deploy! Deploy! Deploy!" Brownell shouts, dropping to his butt.

All three men reach for their fire shelters, aluminum and fiberglass blankets that firefighters call Shake 'N Bakes. Carried on the belt, they are tools of last resort, like the seat cushion life preservers on an airliner. If you even start thinking you need one, you're in deep trouble.

Firefighters train until they can remove a shelter from its 3-by-5-by-9-inch box, rip off its plastic wrapper, unfold it and spread it over themselves in 30 seconds.

Brownell figures they have 10 seconds before they start to fry.

Adrenaline surging, Brownell quells the urge to panic. In tight situations, you fall back on your training: Yank shelter out. Rip plastic off.

Side by side, Brownell and Zane execute each step in sync. They're on their backs, kicking open the accordion folds of their shelters, when they hear shouts from Martinez, a few feet behind them.

"I can't get it out!"

(Note: text missing from original)

where. Share a shelter with Zane or Brownell? He'd just read a book about a Colorado fire in which two men died trying to share one shelter.

He keeps fumbling. There. The shelter's out of the box. But now he can't get the plastic off. The heat is unbearable. Brownell and Zane yell at him to hurry.

"I can't get it out of my plastic!"

Brownell hears a change in Martinez' voice, from frustration to terror. Without a word, he shuffles over and stretches his own shelter over Martinez.

Now he has Martinez' head in his lap, but the younger firefighters' legs are sticking out into the heat. Zane, spying the exposed legs, moves closer and shields them with his shelter.

Three big men. Two small shelters. This is not by the book. They should be on their bellies, faces in the dirt, hands and feet holding straps at each corner of each shelter to keep it firmly against the ground.

Instead, Brownell is sifting up, leaving a one-foot gap between the road and the edge of his shelter. Zane is on his back, his shelter riding up along the rear of his helmet.

All around them, the fire howls. Hot blasts of wind rattle the flimsy shelters, threatening to yank them from the men's hands. It's getting hard to breathe. Brownell can tell which way the wind is blowing by sparks flying past him under the shelter. He sees a tongue of flame lick in under one edge.

Then his left leg, pressed against superheated stone in the gravel road, begins to burn.

Feather River Bulletin
7-3-2001, page 1 of 4

Part II: Chaos in the hills experienced at Concow

By David Foster
Associated Press Writer
Special to Feather Publishing

Editor's Note: The following is an award-winning series on the Concow Incident in 2000. Concow is a small community located near the west end of the Feather River Canyon. It is being reprinted with special permission from the author by the California Department of Forestry (CDF) in spreading its fire prevention message.

The story is one strong example of why it's important to follow and respect red flag warnings, said Mary Huggins, CDF representative in Plumas County, and a trained firefighter.

Red flag warnings are issued when fire danger is so extreme that the use of a chain saw, lawn mower, heavy equipment or other implements that might create a spark, are banned.

The Concow Incident is an example of what can happen when red flag warnings are ignored. A fire that consumed 1,800 acres, cost lives and homes, was started when one individual ignored the warnings and decided to bulldoze a section of his property.

The purpose of the series is to help interest home and property owners in protecting themselves against wildfire.

For more information, contact Plumas County Fire Safe Council representative Mike DeLasaux at 283-6125, or get on the Internet at <Firewise.org>.

...Over the roar of the fire, Engineer Tony Brownell is shouting into his radio: "Task Force 2, emergency traffic! We're being burned over!"

More than a thousand firefighters have descended on this corner of the Sierra foothills, using bulldozers, shovels, fire engines and air tankers to battle a blaze that has now grown to 200 acres.

Radio chatter has been constant all afternoon. Now the air waves fall silent. Everyone listens. Many are friends with Brownell and the two firefighters huddling under aluminum fire shelters with him—Eric Zane and Scott Martinez.

Brownell knows that every air tanker and helicopter on the fire is at his disposal—if only the pilots can find him. Again and again, Brownell describes his position. Aircraft bank overhead, but there's too much smoke to see. They drop three loads of water, but each misses the mark.

Brownell, Zane and Martinez are on their own.

For what seems to them an eternity—15 minutes? 20?—searing gusts of wind buffet their shelters. With only a thin layer of reflective material shielding them, the three men squeeze under two small shelters and keep talking to fend off panic, their voices raised above the tumult.

Exhausting its fuel, the fire gradually eases, and the men shift into better positions. Martinez unfolds his own shelter and takes single refuge. Brownell, sitting up until now, turns over, though the road is so hot he stays on hands and knees.

But the fire isn't done. Lunging into brush across the road, it flares up and pins them down once more.

Five minutes later, the fire is finally spent, and the men peer out. Where brush once grew so heavy you couldn't see 20 feet, bare and blackened sticks now jut from smoking earth.

The firefighters rise dizzily and stagger down the road, wearing their shelters like tortoise shells. Capt. Jeff Hawkins sees them coming, ghosts through the smoke. They look scared to death, he thinks, nothing but big, white eyes.

Brownell has first-degree burns on his left leg. Martinez is weak, disoriented and so dehydrated there's barely any sweat left in him. Zane's left arm has second-degree burns from an ember that lodged between sleeve and skin.

Hawkins' crew offers them hits of oxygen and bottled water. But they can't stay here. The fire is heating up again, so both crews gun their trucks down the burned-over road, away from the fire front.

Brownell is not a man given to overstatement. He usually scoffs at talk of fire in human terms, as if it were alive. It's a natural process, Brownell has always said, and we just happen to be in the way.

Now he's not so sure.

"This fire," he tells himself, "is trying to kill somebody."

Less than a mile to the south, at the corner of Nelson Bar Road and Stagecoach Lane, three neighbors squint into the sky. Air tankers roar over the trees on their way north toward the fire.

It's more bad news for Ray McCarty, 74, a welder who retired here eight years ago thinking he'd found paradise: a mobile home with space out back for his hunting hounds. But life's been harder since his wife died of cancer last year, and now this wildfire is making him nervous.

Beverly Brooks, 67, McCarty's landlady across the pasture, is even more upset. Country life doesn't suit her. She came back to tend to her ailing mother, who died in 1992, and never got around to leaving. She likes her neighbors, loves her Chihuahuas, but chafes at the rural isolation. And wildfires like this, she says, scare the wits out of her.

You should be scared, Norm Williams tells her. Short and balding with a tuft of white chin whiskers, the retired logging truckdriver was raised on a ranch, across Nelson Bar Road from the Brooks place. At 74, he's loaded with opinions, and he's not afraid to share them.

This country was safer from fire before the government started meddling, he says. Used to be, ranchers burned the timberlands to make for better grazing, and cattle chewed down the dry grass. Not anymore.

"They won't let you burn in the wintertime when you should be burning," Williams said. "They claim the ozone and all that horse dootsie."

And now, these firefighters don't seem to fathom what any old-timer knows. After sunset this time of year, a northeast wind starts blowing off Miller Peak—opposite the way the afternoon wind is pushing the wildfire now.

Williams mentions this to a couple of firefighters. They nod and say they're taking the winds into consideration, leaving Williams to sputter to his neighbors.

"Beverly, you better take off and go down to Oroville or somewhere. We're liable to have fire before the night's over."

By evening, however, it appears they have little to fear.

The afternoon has been hellish for the firefighters. Two collapse from heat exhaustion. One is hit by a falling tree. But they've done their job. Fire damaged two homes, but firefighters saved a dozen others.

The westerly wind has disappeared now, and the day's intense heat is fading. At 8:45 p.m., an upbeat press release predicts that the 800-acre blaze, with fire breaks now completed around half its perimeter, will be fully contained by morning.

"This fire is over," said Capt. Darryl Sanford, relaxing by his engine. He even

has time to grab his cell phone and call his wife, just to say hello.

Fifteen minutes later, the wind begins to blow again.

Lightly at first, then steadily stronger, the hot, dry breeze presses in from the northeast. Against the black hillside, the red line of fire glows brighter. Embers fly.

Old Norm Williams was right. The fire is turning on its tail.

Around 10 p.m., Battalion Chief Wayne Wilson halts back-fire operations along the fire's southern edge after they start spreading in the wrong direction, to the south.

Firefighters douse those errant blazes, and bulldozers and crews wielding hand tools redouble efforts to gouge out a fire break ahead of the wildfire's suddenly active southwestern boundary.

By 12:30 a.m., however, a 15-mph wind is driving flames through a halfmile gap in the fire break and down the hill toward Concow Road, just a quarter-mile from where the fire started 12 hours earlier.

Wilson watches from Concow Road, waiting for the fire to hit. Then he turns around and sees that it already has. Wind-thrown firebrands have ignited at least 20 spot fires in the grass around a barn behind him.

An engine crew starts spraying, but they can't put out all the spot fires. Flames soon swarm around the barn, flying up walls and into the eaves. In a few minutes, the building is ablaze, and the crew retreats.

Southwest of Concow Road, along Nelson Bar Road, both the brush and houses are thicker than up on the ridge. As residents pile into cars and race away, engine crews race in. They dash from driveway to driveway, deciding which houses to defend and which to write off.

The wind increases to 20 mph, and flames blast into the woods ahead. In minutes, the fire explodes into a firestorm, a term for which no precise definition exists, Wilson said. You just know it when you see it, and he' was seeing it them.

Fire looms above the tree tops and crashes through the brush, everywhere at once. It pounces upon parked cars, leaving empty shells. It flings itself against roofs and walls, devouring whole houses in minutes. Gasoline cans boom inside garages. Windows melt to green globs amid the ash.

Some houses survive while its neighbors' go up in smoke. A house on Nelson Bar Road falls to smoldering rubble, yet a few feet away, its white picket fence is not even singed.

The fire takes Arthur Strain's house, painstakingly built with lumber milled from a single huge fir. But it spares the mobile home of Roy Clayton, who frantically sprays down his yard with a garden hose until his pump house burns down.

Just ahead, over the next hill on Stagecoach Lane, all is quiet.

Ray McCarty, Beverly Brooks and Norm Williams had watched the news a few hours before. They'd talked to friends and firefighters, and everyone had agreed: The fire was going the other way.

And so they'd gone to bed.

Feather River Bulletin
7-25-2001

Part V, flashover: Concow Fire nearly claims more lives

By David Foster
Associated Press Writer
Special to Feather Publishing

Editor's Note: The following is an award-winning series on the Concow Incident in 2000. Concow is a small community located near the west end of the Feather River Canyon. It is being reprinted with special permission from the author by the California Department of Forestry (CDF) in spreading its fire prevention message.

The purpose of the series is to help interest home and property owners in protecting themselves against wildfire.

For more information, contact Plumas County Fire Safe Council representative Mike DeLasaux at 283-6125, or get on the Internet at <Firewise.org>.

...Beneath swirling smoke, Capt. Darryl Sanford sees light at the end of the hallway—faint and orange, from the fire outside.

It means a window. It means escape.

He pushes the woman toward it. Beverly Brooks is fading fast, her emphysema aggravated by the smoke and sheer terror of being trapped in a burning house. Sanford is getting lightheaded himself.

He herds her into a bedroom and slams the door behind them to buy time. Yes, there's a window. The sill is high, about four feet up. It has a 4-foot-wide picture window in the center, bracketed by two sliding sections, each about two feet across.

It will be a heave to get Brooks out. Sixty-seven years old and just four foot, 11 inches, she's a heavyset 145 pounds. But Sanford figures he can help her squeeze through one of the sliding windows, if first he can get her across the huge bed in the way.

He'll have to try. Every other exit has been sealed by the wildfire rioting outside. Ten minutes ago, Sanford told Brooks he'd try to save her house. Now, with fire in the kitchen, attic and living room, they're desperate to save themselves.

Brooks is no longer talking. She leans against the bed, gasping.

"We've got to go out that window," Sanford yells.

No sooner does he say it than flames fill the window.

Their escape route is gone.

"Jesus help me!" Sanford cries.

He steps across the mattress to the window, slides open the left side and peers out. Wind-driven flames are eddying off the roof, circling down toward the ground and shooting back up along the outside wall.

Maybe they can make it after all, Sanford thinks. They'll surely get burned, especially Brooks in her nightgown. But it beats staying put.

He clambers back over the bed and seizes Brooks' shoulders. But she has gone limp, collapsing against the edge of the bed. He can't get her out without her help. Even if he can drag her across the bed and push her out the window, she'll land in burning grass, unable to save herself.

There are no more options.

Sanford stands paralyzed. A firefighter does not leave someone behind. Yet, if he doesn't leave her, two people will die here, not one.

"Cmon. We gotta go. We gotta go." He grabs her shoulders again. She doesn't move.

He cannot abandon her. He must not.

Suddenly the room brightens. The heat soars, and pain sears Sanford's face. This is flashover, when a room's materials, heated to the ignition point, spontaneously burst into flame. They are about to be cooked.

Sanford is no longer thinking. He is reacting. With a bounding step across the bed, he launches himself headfirst toward the window, diving through the screen like a swimmer into surf.

He lands on his hands and knees in the flaming grass.

Immediately, his fingers start burning through his leather gloves. His back and arm are blistering beneath his fire-retardant shirt. He bounces to his feet and runs. Under torching trees, across the burning lawn, he runs.

Back at the engine in the driveway, firefighter Will Krings is frantically trying to reconnect a hose. Just a few more seconds, he thinks, and he'll be able to break a front window and lay down some water to help Sanford and the woman escape if he can find them.

Now a silhouette wavers against the orange at the corner of the house. Sanford is streaking toward him, like an ember spit from the fire. His eyes are wild, his cheeks crimson. He fumbles off his gloves, and Krings can see the fingers are already blistering.

"Where's the lady?"

" I had to leave her."

Sanford stares blankly. Krings stares back, unable to think of what to say.

Sanford breaks the silence.

"I'm burned. I need water."

Krings pours bottled water into Sanford's cupped hands, then drives them both part way down the hill, where they wait out the fire in a black spot already burned over.

Rushed by fire truck, ambulance and helicopter to a hospital 20 miles away in Chico, Sanford is treated for second-degree burns on his back, face, fingers and elbow. Burned red into his back are the letters "C" and "F," branded there by the "CDF Fire" logo on his T-shirt as he sprinted through the flames.

By 7 a.m., less than four hours after his narrow escape, he's back at the fire station, lying on his bunk. All he wants to do is sleep, but he can't. The fire scorched his corneas, and it hurts too much to close his eyes.

The wildfire, done with Beverly Brooks' house, races southwest along Nelson Bar Road and toward Oroville Lake.

Norm and Lesta Williams flee in their pickup truck and motor home, driving past flaming houses and trees. Their own home survives, surrounded by fire engines. Just 200 feet away, the house that Norm's parents built in 1910 burns to the ground.

By midmorning, the wind has faded and the fire is losing power, burning through grass and brush more sparse than the timber and thicket that stoked its early-morning rage. By Wednesday afternoon, just 24 hours after it started, the fire slows enough to let firefighters rein it in again—this time for good.

The triple-digit heat sinks into the 90s on Thursday, then into the 70s on Friday, Sept. 22. Autumn has arrived, and firefighters turn to mop up, dousing spot fires and mending bulldozer-flattened fences.

Officials tally the numbers of the Concow Incident: 1,845 acres burned, 1,558 personnel assigned, 16 homes destroyed, 48 homes saved.

And one life lost. Beverly Brooks is buried in Yankee Hill Cemetery, a mile from home. Her son, Barry, hoping to erase the awful memories, pays a wrecking crew to cart away every last bit of rubble.

The county files charges against Jim Stewart, the backyard bulldozer operator, claiming that the dozer's blade or tread struck a rock to spark the fire. Stewart, facing possible liability for $4 million in property losses and firefighting costs, insists he didn't do it.

By and large, Stewart's burned-out neighbors don't blame him. Many direct their anger at the firefighters instead.

Rumors fly that firefighters' own back fires caused much of the damage, an assertion vehemently denied by fire officials. Some residents complain that more wasn't done to protect houses. The firefighters shrug and point to homes they did save, including pine-draped bungalows that, by all rights, should have burned.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection investigates Brooks' death and the fire-shelter deployment.

In a preliminary report released Feb. 8, investigators suggest that Engineer Tony Brownell should have notified supervisors before setting the back fire that blew up and pinned him and his crew beneath fire shelters.

Brownell draws a different lesson. Chastened by his close call, the man known for his aggressive firefighting says he'll be less likely to defend a marginal home next time.

"I think I'd just leave," Brownell told investigators. "I don't know, maybe we were too much at risk."

As for Capt. Darryl Sanford, the agency's top fire official says it appears Sanford went beyond the call of duty to stay as long as he did while fire engulfed Brooks' house.

"We don't expect our firefighters to give their lives for this kind of thing, and I don't think anybody else does," said Glen Newman, CDF's deputy director for fire protection. "We have to teach people to give us a defensible space. They can't expect us to do the impossible."

Honored by the American Red Cross as a "Real Hero," Sanford said he doesn't feel like one.

His burns are healed now, but that fiery night on Stagecoach Lane haunts him. Trusting that God makes things happen for a reason, he tries not to beat himself up over it. He knows there will be a next time. There always is.

On Nelson Bar Road, new homes are going up where the old ones burned down. Along Stagecoach Lane, the pasture is green again. Flowers soon will fill the field, and by July the weeds will be three feet tall.

They will be brittle, brown and ready to burn.

The Los Angeles Times
9-8-2001

26 Homes Gutted, Many More at Risk in Butte County Blaze

Associated Press

More than 260 firefighters battle a Friday blaze that closed about a 10-mile stretch of California 70 in Butte County.

Evacuation: Hundreds flee wind-whipped flames in Sierra foothills north of Sacramento.

By HECTOR BECERRA
TIMES STAFF WRITER

At least 26 homes were destroyed and 400 more were threatened as hundreds of people fled a raging wildfire in Butte County, north of Sacramento, that tripled in size Friday as strong winds kicked up.

"The fire was coming too far, too fast. . . . There was nothing but a big wall of fire," said Kenneth Renfrow, 65, who lost his home and car minutes after packing valuables and making a quick getaway.

At least four people, including three firefighters, have been injured since the 6,580-acre fire began near the town of Jarbo Gap, about 85 miles from the state capital. None of the injuries was life threatening, said Tom Sitter of the California Department of Forestry.

In addition to the homes destroyed, 10 buildings, including two warehouses, were incinerated. The burned structures, most of them within a three-mile area, were in the town of Yankee Hill near Big Bend Road.

The fire began Thursday morning when a dead tree fell onto power lines near a generating station, Sitter said. About 12:30 a.m. Friday, winds began to gust to 20 mph and the fire spread quickly. It consumed more than a dozen homes in a matter of hours, officials said.

About a 10-mile stretch of California 70, from Pentz Road to Jarbo Gap, was shut down, Sitter said. People were evacuated from Yankee Hill, Jarbo Gap and Cherokee, all on the east side of the state highway.

By late Friday, the fire was 20% contained, he said. More than 260 firefighters battling the blaze had only limited access to the remote, rocky ground in the Sierra foothills.

Renfrow, whose son's cabin was also destroyed on the family's 10-acre property, put photo albums, a coin collection, his first-edition books and his antique guns in his car. But the fire moved too quickly.

"All the treasure stuff I wanted to keep was in the car," said Renfrow, who escaped with only the blue jeans, red T-shirt and blue cap he had on. "They said I couldn't take the car. It was too hot. They said it would just blow up."

It is expected to take until at least Wednesday to fully contain the fire, Sitter said. In the nearby town of Paradise, about 60 people have been staying at a temporary Red Cross shelter set up in an elementary school.

"Some people have lost their homes," said Mary Lou Forgey, a Red Cross worker. "They're very upset and looking now at how they'll rebuild. Others are very concerned because they don't know what happened to their homes. The not knowing is what's very tough."

Despite the intensity and scope of the blaze, residents moved out of the area calmly, said Mike Campbell, an assistant information officer for the Butte County Fire Department.

"It's a lot more laid-back here than down in L.A.," he said. "The people have been for the most part pretty cooperative."

Times staff writers Richard Fausset and Miles Corwin contributed and Associated Press was used in compiling this report.

Poe Fire leaves trail of destruction

Feather River Bulletin
9-12-2001

Utility workers were on the scene in some areas heavily hit by Friday's destruction. New poles were brought in to replace those damaged or destroyed as the fire tore through the Yankee Hill area.

White smoke continued to rise from the Poe Fire Saturday morning. The heaviest part of the fire, which occurred Friday, was already past, but crews continued to work to contain the blaze.

By Victoria Metcalf
Staff Writer

Plumas County and the forest went unscathed, while 7,850 acres in Butte County were destroyed by fire.

While the Poe Fire may not have affected local property and homes, residents and visitors attempting to use Highway 70 Sept. 6, 7 or until very early on Sept. 8, were stopped and directed toward Highway 32 near Chico or the Quincy-Oro Highway.

Telephones rang at the Quincy area California Highway Patrol (CHP) office, from those who were planning to use Highway 70, or anticipating someone else's travel through that area, according to Craig Rude, public affairs officer for the Quincy area CHP.

Highway 70 was opened to traffic again by 9 a.m. Sept. 8.

Crews from the Plumas County Office of Emergency Services (OES) were dispatched to the Poe Fire.

On Thursday, Rod Powell, Cobey Brown and Sonny Bergum were on the first unit dispatched to the incident, according to OES Chief Andy Anderson.

Anderson and Tim Pitlock relieved the first unit, allowing them to return home. Bergum chose to remain on the scene, however. And on Sunday, Robby Cassou and Jim Mann were on duty.

Anderson said the crews served a variety of duties, from cutting fire lines to manning a district fire station and taking medical calls, while crews continued to fight the fire.

"To my knowledge, we were the only OES strike team," at the fire, Anderson said.

The Plumas National Forest sent two engines and their crews from the west side of the forest to the incident.

According to John Gay, PNF emergency command center manager, "We almost didn't have enough to send them anything."

Crews and equipment were already committed to two other incidents in the state, including the Star Fire, he said.

PNF crews were assigned to the initial attack in the Big Bend area, which was evacuated shortly after the fire started to spread.

As additional support arrived to the Poe Fire, PNF crews were released and allowed to return home, Gay said.

Forests threatened

When high night winds kicked up last Friday night, the PNF was on the alert that the fire could change directions and hit the forest's edge. But by Saturday morning, it was clear that this wouldn't happen.

Pockets of the Lassen National Forest also lie within the fire's vicinity; however, at last report, the fire hadn't traveled in that direction.

Poe Fire

A tree limb falling across a power line is being blamed for starting three or four small fires Thursday, Sept. 6.

Driven by southerly winds, dry conditions fed the flames, and despite intensive efforts by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) and area fire departments, it continued to spread downhill into the Yankee Hill area.

By Monday, the fire had claimed 7,850 acres, 36 structures, including 26 homes, and was 65 percent contained. By Wednesday, CDF anticipated the fire would be fully contained, but no estimate was given as to when it would be controlled.

According to CDF information, the area had been 80 percent investigated as crews began seeking out more structures and homes that may have been hit by the fire but not yet reported.

Evacuation centers were initially set up at the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Paradise and at the Little Spring School just off Highway 70.

The Paradise center was closed late Saturday or early Sunday, according to CDF information. And the Little Spring School evacuation center was moved to the United Methodist Church in Oroville Sunday.

Visiting the site

Smoke still clung to the not-to distant hills Saturday morning.

Roadside vistas and parking lots were filled with trucks and heavy equipment as the CDF, municipalities and private resources from throughout Northern California responded to the incident.

Traveling along Highway 70, toward Yankee Hill, the first roadside signs of the fire were seen near a small store and UPS stop on the left-hand

side.

Here, the fire had burned right up to the edge of Highway 70, but was stopped short of coming too near the commercial structures. A wide fire break had been etched into the earth by the blade of a bulldozer.

A small home in a nearby ravine had narrowly missed being consumed. According to an unidentified member of the CDF fire personnel, the metal roof on the structure, and the amount of work residents had done clearing brush away from the property, had helped enormously in saving the home.

"I've been threatened, swore at, and had people cry," the man said, as he joined others Friday, the heaviest day of the fire.

Following its traditional plan of attack, CDF crews once again decided which homes could be saved and which ones couldn't, he said.

The decisions were hard, but when people don't include metal roofs in their building plans and clear away brush and trees away from structures, there's not much chance of saving a building, he said.

Also stationed in the same area as last September's Concow Fire, which burned in a different region, but in the same type of country and with the same conditions, the firefighter said he wasn't sure what it would take to convince people of what they needed to do.

"We can hit them up alongside the head with a baseball bat," he said figuratively, and they still don't seem to understand the potential danger.

Moving further on down the hill, more signs of fire damage were noted, sometimes on both sides of Highway 70.

Approaching the area of Yankee Hill on the left side of the highway, a development usually heavy with trees and dried vegetation was in blackened ruins.

One home at the top of a hill had not escaped the path of the fire, but other structures in the vicinity were saved.

Recovery begins

CDF forester Mary Huggins, who serves the Plumas County area, was on the Poe Fire. On Monday, she was assigned to evaluate the damage, including evaluating why some homes were saved, some escaped damage, and some homes burned.

Parents encouraged to talk to kids about fire

Traditionally, juvenile fires are started right before school gets out for the summer, and then right before school starts in the fall. Even though school-age children, grades one through six, are taught about fire safety in Forest Service educational prevention programs every spring, sometimes children forget.

"A child playing with matches was the cause of Sunday's fire in the Greenville area. So far there have been a total of six fires attributed to juveniles in the Quincy/Greenville area this year," said Jim Hannon, fuels prevention technician for the Mt. Hough Ranger District.

"We would like to see parents continue to speak with their children at home, as there are still a couple months left in the fire season this year," said Sue McCourt, fire prevention officer at the Beckwourth Ranger District.

Parents need to talk to their children about the dangers and possible consequences of playing with matches, what to do when they find matches, and what to do if they see a friend playing with matches.

Parents of children involved in match-started fires have to pay the fire fighting costs and, depending on the severity of the case, a child may be referred for further action to the juvenile probation department.

"I can't stress enough the importance of educating your children about the dangers of playing with fire," McCourt repeated.

While nature's creations were destroyed, man's litter tossed along Highway 70 remained. Bottles, cans, shoes, and car parts were left exposed as the brush and trees were consumed in the Poe Fire.

A home, normally shielded from Highway 70 by brush, narrowly escaped the fire. A small store and UPS building also were saved as fire crews put in a wide fuel break. And across the highway, the dome store remained intact.

Lassen County Times
4-24-2002, page 1 of 6

Native American contributions continue major role in Northeastern California

The Maidu Indians

The Indians who lived in and around the Sutter Buttes were the Southern Maidu or Nisenan.

These Indians, like all American Indians, were descendants of the migratory peoples that crossed the Bering Straits from Asia and then spread southward into the North and South American continents.

There is no precise way to date the American Indians' arrival in what is now the United States, but by 15,000 years ago, people were living throughout the Americas.

Currently, the best guess at the number of Indians living in present day California at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans is during 310,000 and 500,000.

Authorities agree that the Indians of California made up about 10 percent of the entire Indian population north of Mexico. The greatest concentration of Indians within the state was in the Central Valley.

The Maidu, which simply means "the people," in English, lived in the Sacramento Valley and surrounding foothills. The southernmost Maidu were the Nisenan.

Maidu society was organized in tribes. A tribe was a conglomeration of villages numbering from two to 20 or more.

One village was the main village, sort of the capitol, and this would be the site of the ceremonial and religious buildings such as the temescals or sweat houses.

Some villages had populations of 500 or more and others were made up of one or two families. The villages were very loosely organized. Leaders of the villages were mainly advisors, not decision makers. There might be one leader for war, another for religious matters, but there was not a designated leader who could speak for the entire village on all matters.

Being hunters and gatherers, much of their energy went into food gathering and preparation.

As with most native Californians, the acorn was the staple of the Nisenan diet. It took a great deal of time to gather and prepare the approximately 2,000 pounds of acorns every adult ate in a year.

Acorn meal provides more calories per serving than either wheat or corn, an important factor in a hunting/gathering society's diet.

However, before an acorn can be used for food, it must be processed. Acorns contain tannic acid, and this must be removed prior to using them as food The acorns would be gathered in the fall, with some being prepared immediately while the rest of the supply was stored in cone-shaped baskets for use over the winter months.

After shelling the acorns and removing the membrane that surrounds the meat, the meat was ground into a meal in mortars.

The meal was then placed in a sand basin near a stream or river and warm water was poured over the meal.

This was repeated until the water leached the acid out of the acorns and left the Nisenan with a nutritious meal that they could eat as a mush, soup or bread.

Besides acorns, the Nisenan utilized nearly everything that nature had to offer as a food source.

A few animals were not eaten, such as the grizzly bear, coyote or owl, but for the most part, the diet of the Nisenan was varied.

Fish, game, seeds, insects, nuts, berries and grasses all had places in their diet.

The Nisenan were not farmers because there was no need to farm.

The valley and foothills provided enough food and shelter to meet their needs.

The Nisenan were followers of the Kuksu ceremony. This religion originated among the Patwin people and spread throughout the entire Central Valley.

Partially because of the abundance of food sources, the Nisenan had the time to develop and practice a very elaborate and intricate form of this religion.

The ceremonies consisted of dressing up in elaborate costumes and impersonating gods by performing ceremonial dances.

Death released a person's soul to travel west. A spirit might enter a coyote, an owl, a snake, a lizard or perhaps become a whirlwind and be transported to the final resting place.

If someone died in a home, the dwelling was abandoned, and the name of the deceased was never mentioned again.

Photo by Albert Bierstadt

This landscape was sacred to the local Maidu people. It is called, Among The Sierra Nevada Mountains, by German Artist Albert Bierstadt, 1830-1902.

The Nisenan cremated their dead and performed yearly mourning ceremonies to honor those who had died.

As with all Native Americans, the most deadly contact the Nisenan had with Europeans came in the form of microbes.

In 1833, a trapping party from the Hudson's Bay Company brought malaria into the Central Valley. Within a few short months, thousands of Indians had died. It is estimated that 75 percent of the Central Valley Indians died in this epidemic alone.

In a few short months villages that had numbered in the hundreds were empty. When the discovery of gold was made in 1848, thousands of men poured into the region to hunt for gold.

The fertility of the valley floor was soon recognized, and the farmers and ranchers began carving up the land.

The Nisenan's environment was altered forever, and those who remained were forced to live in a new society.

Information for this article can be found on the Internet at www.middlemountain.org

History of the ConCow Maidu

The "ConCow Maidu" as Euro-Americans call us, are the descendants of "Indians" located in the Feather River drainage.

All the tribes of the Feather River drainage spoke variations of the Penution language and are culturally and socially akin.

They lived in family groups up and down our water ways, amid great natural beauty. We are a stable and highly social people.

They participated in the annual gatherings with other tribes for social events, games, and to fish for salmon.

To begin the story of the ConCow Maidu we travel back in time to the year 1828. Summer was coming to an end and the ConCow peoples were returning from their summer camps around Grassy Lake.

Grassy Lake is about 25 miles northeast of their more permanent winter home in the KonKow Valley and surrounding foothills. The KonKow Valley is about 20 miles north of present day Oroville, in Butte County, California.

The ConCow migrated with the water up the hills in the summer and back down in the fall of the year.

That is when, in the year 1828 that Jedediah Smith first met the ConCow. Jedediah and a party of trappers stayed the six months of winter with our people.

In 1833, trappers Michael Lafromboise and John Work spent the winter in the ConCow territory.

And between 1828 and 1836 the Hudson Bay Company sent more trappers to the ConCow territory.

As a result of the contact with the Euro-Americans, a malaria epidemic swept through the ConCow villages in 1833 killing an estimated 800 people.

In 1848 gold was discovered and by the year 1849 the ConCow territory was overrun by gold seekers and accompanying settlers.

Traditional food sources quickly became scarce and conflicts broke out between the Euro-Americans and the native population.

In 1850, the government attempted to end the the conflicts between the Indians and the Euro-Americans by creating treaties to place the natives on reservations. During 1850-51, Indian Agent Oliver Wozencraft was sent to negotiate with all the Maiduan groups.

On Aug. 1, 1851, the headmen of the nearby ConCow territories were called to gather at the Bidwell Rancho on Chico Creek to conclude a treaty of Peace and Friendship with O.M. Wozencraft, U.S. Indian agent.

The treaties promised the Indians approximately 227 square miles of land roughly from Chico to Nimshew to Oroville.

Almost immediately after the federal Treaty of 1851, the California State Senate appointed a committee to look into the treaties and the governor decided to oppose any law that gave Indians exclusive right to foothill land that was high in gold bearing quartz or to valley land that was valuable to the settlers and farmers.

One year later, 1852, the U.S. Senate secretly rejected all the treaties.

In 1853 the Government authorized the Nome Lackie Resere.

In 1854 Indians from Marysville, the foothills near Chico and Yuba City were rounded up and driven to the Nome Lackie Reservation and forced to stay there.

During the 1850s diseases continued to decimate the ConCow peoples. It was estimated that by 1853 over 800 more ConCow died of pneumonia, influenza, tuberculosis, small pox, malaria or cholera.

The ConCow Maidu Trail of Tears.

In the fall of 1862, a large number of Indians were on the Round Valley Reservation. Because of over crowding, lack of food, and unsanitary conditions, disease spread rapidly.

Winter was approaching, and the swollen streams surrounding the valley would isolate it from the rest of the world until spring.

The ConCow Maidu Indians realized what their fate would be. So one morning in September, a large number, from 300 to 500, packed their meager valuables and said good bye to Supervisor Short, and started for their old home in the Sacramento Valley.

They were stopped at the Sacramento River near Chico. Headman Tome-ya-nem told the soldiers that his people were starving and asked for work to earn food for the winter.

The ConCow were granted permission to camp about five miles from Chico for the winter.

During the next year, more ConCow Maidu Indians were rounded up and corralled with the group from the Round Valley Reservation.

The remaining ConCow were ordered to be at the Bidwell Rancheria on Aug. 28, 1863, to be taken to the Round Valley Reservation at Covelo in Mendocino County.

If any Indians were found after that date, they would be shot on sight. And they were. Agents collected 435 Indians and placed them under control in Chico, as prisoners of war.

Captain Augustus W. Starr, Co F., 2nd Infantry, California Volunteers, in command of 23 mounted infantrymen, was assigned as escort to assist sub-agent Eddy in the removal of the Indians.

Fourteen wagons were commandeered from valley ranchers to carry supplies and many of the Indians as far as Thomas Creek.

This ill-starred trip has gone down in Indian history as an inhumane drive to a strange and inhospitable valley over a long, hot, dry trail through the Sacramento Valley and through the steep, rocky route of the Coast Range. Many of the Indians already were sick from being rounded up, marched, and corralled.

Leaving Camp Bidwell, about four miles north of Chico, on Sept. 4, 1863, the group spent the first night at Colby's Ferry. On the following nights, stops were made at the Kirpatrick Ranch and the James Ranch.

On Sept. 8, they reached the Laycock Ranch on Thomas Creek and the wagons were returned to Chico as planned. When the pack train from Round Valley did not arrive at Thomas Creek four days later, Captain Starr ordered all the Indians to walk approximately three miles to Mountain House where they met the pack train.

On Sept. 14, the few who were well enough to travel were put on mule back, their children into one big wagon, and the rest had to go on foot.

One hundred and fifty Indians who were too sick from poor drinking water, unaccustomed food, fever, and exhaustion were left with sub-agent Eddy at Mountain House.

On Sept. 16, 1863, the wagon was left at Log Springs. Some of the women and children were put on mules or on the soldiers' horses, but most had to walk the rest of the way to Round Valley Reservation.

Making one-night stops at government camps and on the middle fork of the Eel River, they reached Round Valley on Sept. 18, 1863. Four hundred sixty-one Indians started the treck, 277 finished.

When Captain Douglas at Fort Wright heard that the sick ConCow Indians were dying along the mountain trail on their way back to the Round Valley Reservation, he appointed Supervisor James Short to bring them in.

Short took a pack train with food and some teams and wagons to carry the sick Indians.

For 13 days he worked to bring in a " portion of them."

He later commented that "about 150 sick Indians were scattered along the trail for 50 miles... dying at the rate of two or three per day. They had nothing to eat... and the wild hogs were eating them up either before or after they were dead."

Information for this article was obtained from the official Maidu home page located on the Internet, www.maidu.com

Feather River Bulletin
8-28-2002
page 1 of 7

The land before time

The Maidu tended their own Eden

By Alicia Knadler
Indian Valley Editor

The Maidu, the first people of Indian Valley, knew no evil before the California Gold Rush brought floods of settlers into the garden created for them by the Creator, or Worldmaker, as he is known to Maidu.

Where the "white men" had the absolute good and evil of God and Satan, their religion was observed mostly on the Sabbath, or day of rest. For the Maidu, there was no absolute good or evil, and every aspect of their daily lives was surrounded in spiritual meaning.

The Maidu lived in the garden created for them by the Worldmaker. Any roughness in their world was attributed to Coyote, the trickster who enjoyed being mischievous and interfering with Worldmaker's creations.

Settlers brought their Bibles to read and learn about their religion and the "proper" way to live their lives. To the Maidu, stories passed down through families. Earth itself was like a Bible. Animals are related to the Maidu, according to their "Book of Genesis," and the Maidu watched and learned from them.

The Maidu was the largest of the Northern California Indian tribes, although each village was like a tribe unto itself. There were the Concow Maidu, the Taylorsville Maidu, the Big Meadow Maidu and others, although many village names have been lost over time.

And today, while the descendants of settlers are celebrating 150 years of family, industry and progress, the Maidu, whose lives were virtually unchanged for centuries before the new immigrants arrived, are struggling for their survival as a people. The Maidu story for the last 150 years is much different than that of the settlers. Theirs is a story of cultural genocide, bereft of the land that gave them life.

"We knew the land," Concow Maidu Frank Mullen said. "It was the garden the Creator gave us to care for—it's sad that history does not say this." Instead, written history highlights the exploits of explorers, like Peter Lassen, who was well known among the Maidu for his cruelty to their ancestors.

Written history taught to the nation's children has been going through drastic change over the last two decades, and some children are catching just a glimpse of what life was like for the first people of California.

"Before barbed wire, this must have been a beautiful place," Maidu Hallie Mullen said with a sigh.

Gone from the textbooks are the "red savage" stereotypes of popular western drama, but many assumptions made about the Indians survive. There are still people who refer to the Maidu story of creation as a myth, without giving it the same respect and freedom given to other religious beliefs, such as the tenets of Judaism or Buddhism.

Photo submitted

Thanks to the Joseph family of Indian Valley, Homer and Irene Joseph, and sons Darel, Dennis, David, Donnie and Dale, some pieces of Maidu heritage have been preserved. When their home burned down, the family saved the baskets made by Homer's grandmother Freida Davis Joseph. Her baskets were given to and are on display at the Indian Valley Museum in Taylorsville.

Louise and Seymour Smith were perhaps the most well-known Maidus to live and raise their family of 11 children in the Taylorsville area. Seymour was renowned for his prize fighting and long-distance running. Together, the couple were active in community and cultural affairs. Family members and friends hold an annual scholarship run from Taylorsville to Greenville, every September, in honor of Seymour Smith.

There are also people who gather their ignorance around them like a security blanket, refusing to think about things that might make them feel uncomfortable. Instead of trying to understand what happened 150 years ago, they disparage the Indians and their struggle.

Before the settlers came, the Maidu knew little of sickness, but less than 50 years after settlers arrived, whole villages were wiped out because of diseases they had no immunity to fight. Estimates are that almost 90 percent of the Maidu population has been wiped out in this way.

With their families dying out, the remaining Maidu were starved out by the settlers who moved in and took away their lands.

In Taylorsville, the local Maidu were luckier than other tribes. In neighboring areas, Indian men, women and children were worth a $5 bounty, for which they were hunted down and killed like animals.

Taylorsville founder Jobe Taylor frowned upon meanness to Indians. One time, he convened a jury that hung a settler for shooting an Indian in cold blood. Then too, Indians were killed if they were caught stealing. For the Maidu, ownership of land and animals was just one of many foreign concepts to learn.

Dead Fall Lane, just outside Taylorsville, is where an old Indian man was killed while his family was off hunting and gathering. A nearby rancher thought he had stolen a cow and quickly dispensed his justice. Later, it was discovered that another rancher had given the cow to the family.

Many Maidu and other Northern California Indians were terrified and tried to remain hidden in the forest.

Their whole way of life was shattered. The lands that grew all of their food and material supplies was drained for farmland. Waterfowl disappeared, the grasses and reeds used for baskets and tulle boats disappeared, and the list goes on. In this way, Maidu were forced to learn "white man's ways" to survive.

Settlers used Indians as laborers and servants. In some areas not far away, parents were killed and children taken as indentured servants until they were in their 30s. All remaining Indian children were rounded up and taken away from their families, even in Indian Valley, and sent to boarding schools. Many siblings were separated and sent off to different schools.

Master basket weaver Lilly Baker has taught thousands of people about the Maidu way of life through her basket-weaving lessons. "Dancing With the Bear," a video about Baker and her basket weaving is available through the Plumas County Museum. Her nephew and frequent companion, Ennis Peck, is now earning his living making baskets with the skills learned from his grandparents and from "Aunt Lilly."

"They were so mean," Hallie Mullen said. Her grandmother worked in the laundry. It was her job to iron sheets with an iron that was too heavy for such a small girl. If she was too slow, her load of laundry was doubled the next day.

Children were not allowed to speak their native language, and they were not allowed to be together in groups. Children of more than one generation were made to feel ashamed of their culture, and here is where much of that culture was erased by damaging the traditional ways in which knowledge was passed down through families.

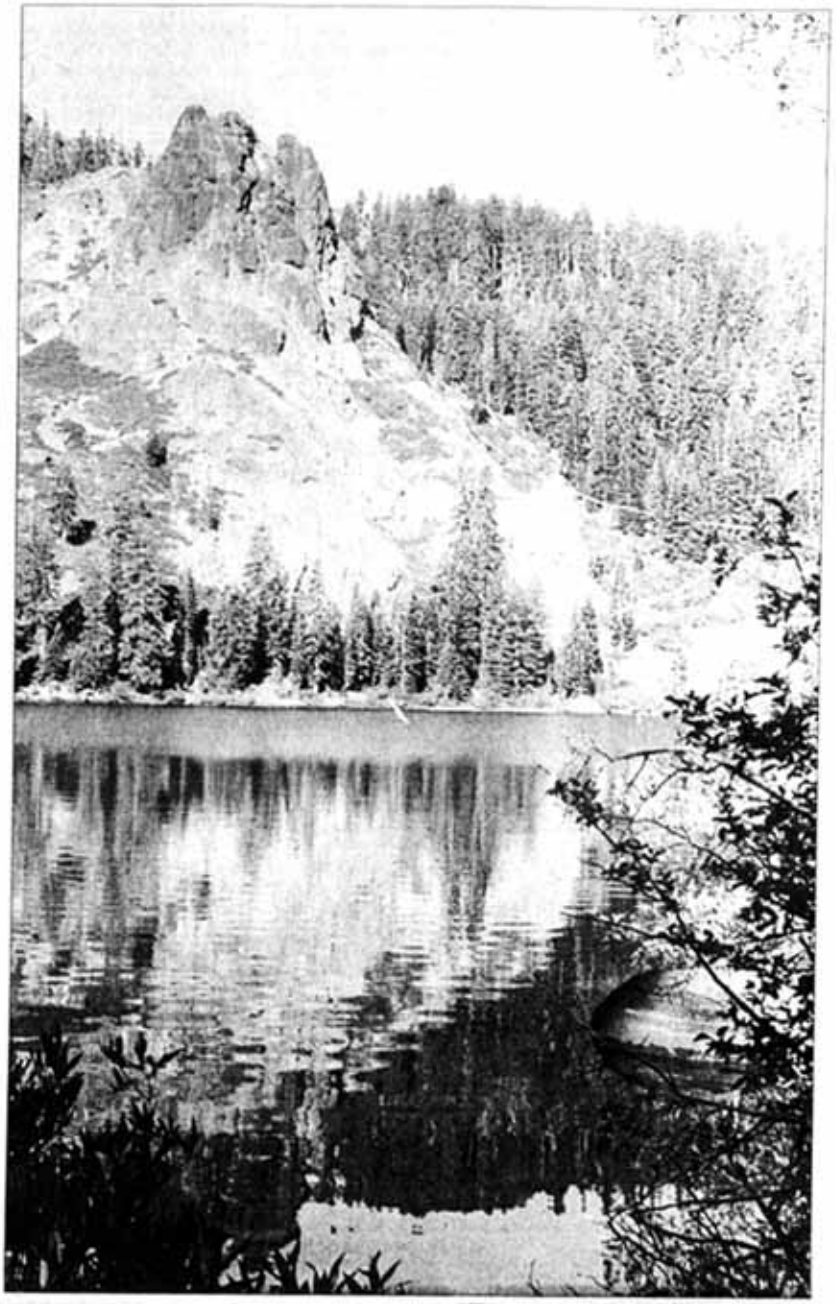
The list of atrocities committed against California Indians is a long one, with frequent rapes and murders among the top. While old traditions dictated that a conquering tribe pay a forfeit to the loser, the US. government has never paid for the atrocities committed against the California Indians.

Their land was taken away, and an attempt was made to pay them for it more than a century later. They were given 1800s prices, which amounted to about 25 cents per acre after hefty legal fees. Treaties were pigeon-holed and never ratified.

Some say the Maidu were weak, and that is why everything was taken from them. Not only were they experi-

Maidu babies are traditionally carried in cradle baskets, their weaving and decoration is done with spiritual significance. The baskets can be inserted into the ground in a standing position, so the baby can see what is going on in the world. Babies pictured are Heinie and Fritzie. No surnames are recorded for the photo.

Although these baskets were made after the settlers arrived, they were woven by the late Homer Joseph's grandmother, Freida Davis. Several of her baskets, including those of traditional design, can be seen at the Indian Valley Museum in Taylorsville.



Photos by Alicia Knadler

The silence that surrounds Homer Lake is almost tangible. Most Maidu have never seen the lake that is sacred to them, for their children are taught that only medicine people go there. In a newspaper clipping from 1896, a Maidu legend was printed that described how the whole valley was a lake, but when an outlet to the ocean was created, Worldmaker imprisoned a troublesome water spirit in Homer Lake. Once each year, the spirit is allowed to look around, and anyone unfortunate to be seen is drawn down into the lake and devoured.

encing a cultural death, they were faced with new upheavals in what amounted to multi-generational trauma. From first contact, their livelihoods were taken away; they were made to feel ashamed of themselves; they were forced to move away, literally ripped from the womb of their mother—Earth; and, after all this, they no longer knew how to be good mothers and fathers according to their traditions.

"Each time the government was forced to negotiate with the Indians, the Indians were treated unfairly," Frank Mullen said. Around the table, several Maidu agreed by nodding their heads. One says that government policies toward Indians were and still are designed for cultural genocide. "But we're not extinct yet," he said. More heads nodded.

Today, Maidu are trying to put the fractured pieces of their culture back together. Educational programs to help them rediscover their culture and history are offered through the Roundhouse Council in Greenville.

Most Maidu living throughout the state are not federally recognized because it is almost impossible to meet requirements and an estimated 80-year backlog of applications to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Other are not acknowledged due to their unwillingness to become members of a regional collection of tribes, or because they were not given the opportunity to join.

For many of these unrecognized Indians, recapturing their heritage has become a major goal in their lives, as well as receiving justice.

Justice would include free fishing and firewood gathering rights, among other benefits. While they were paid off at minimal prices for the land that was taken from them, they never settled for timber, water or mineral rights. If settled today, those rights would be worth millions of dollars.

Access to information is al-

so restricted for most of the Maidu. Because they are not recognized, they have no access to some archival information.

Why should Indians get benefits? Because the United States is responsible to native peoples, for the treaties, for social justice, one man answered. "This is our homeland, we are not immigrants."

They have upset others by wanting rights and privileges, but then others have already benefited from what was theirs first.

One of these others was upset at what seemed to be a lack of forgiveness among the Maidu.

"I am just relating history," was Frank Mullen's answer. He said he was not bitter, and that there was nothing for him to forgive. "Just what is our future, that is my concern."

Whatever the future holds for the Maidu, it will be tied to the land, for theirs is a land-based religion. That religion is not protected though, so words and applications must be framed as cultural, instead.

"Our cultural survival depends on the landscape," Farrell Cunningham, the Maidu stewardship program coordinator, said. "All the sites of power and other signs given by the Creator are bigger than we are—we can't just leave it and be the same people."

His sister, Trina, describes 150 years of development to be like watching a beloved grandmother slowly withering away. And, to the Maidu, their elders are treasured members of the community. "This is why we can't leave the land," she said. "We can try, we can turn our backs on it, but we always come back."

Hallie Mullen shared a memory of her father traveling over Hatchet Mountain with a woman friend one day. They stopped several times, so she could leave gifts and give thanks to the Creator for allowing them to cross the mountain, for allowing them to swim in the water.

She is happy that children are now being taught the old ways, with help and support from friends. Some of those friends include the Maidu Cultural and Development Group, the Pacific West Community Forestry Center and Forest Community Research.

Together, they are seeking to revitalize the Maidu culture and language. Children learn through activities that celebrate the Maidu's language and traditional ecological knowledge. And, Taylorsville is where the most recent celebration of knowl-

Words rediscovered: Remembering

Editor's Note: The following article written by Frank Joseph is quoted in Plumas Memories, Vol. 46, by the late historian Bob Cooke. Joseph, who was laid to rest in the Taylorsville Cemetery, was co-founder of the Spring Bear Dance held annually in Janesville.

By Frank Joseph
Dec. 8, 1900-March 17, 1981

It was Sunday in the month of June, 1980, when the ceremonial Bear Dance was given at the Mankin's Ranch in Lassen County at Janesville where I asked the morning prayer. In the afternoon I sang the Bear Dance song as they danced.

The Unforgotten Path

I walked very slowly to the path where I asked my morning prayers, and it is the same place each and every year. I walked with my two canes to guide me here and there on account of old age and sickness. The path is sparse with grass and the hard granite shows through.

My Prayer

The prayer of gratitude, joy and adoration. I am thinking of a morning a year ago in Janesville. I had risen early and walked to the sacred ground to see the sun rise over the mountains. A solitary bird sang over and over one note then it ceased and I was alone in profound silence. Out of great joy and awe I found myself repeating aloud: The Lord in His Holy Temple: Let all the world keep silence before him. Gladys Mankins, the noted person who gives the Bear Dance and barbecue on Sunday once told me that the essence of prayer is a song. She was right, we need to sing our thanks. "All is given unto me in heaven and earth." Obedience cannot be an absolute demand. If I am willing to do my best that is all that can be asked of me. Down the path I cannot retrace then my desolate heart will break with the tears that I cannot shed. I shall bow my uncrowned head. This is my Joy and Glory, winning a lost world back again. The world itself remains a place of awesome beauty and wonder.

It is the greatest pleasure of my life to ask the morning prayer and speak to my own people.

I shall remain,
Frank Joseph

edge took place.

During a summer day camp for youth, activities included prayers for good harvests, reenactments of traditional food gathering and preparation, and the singing of songs. Even with the varied programs newly established for Maidu youth and adults, it is a huge effort to recapture, remember and revitalize traditional ecological knowledge, according to Farrell Cunningham.

Other groups are helping them through the long and convoluted government and scientific processes, including Forest Service officials who are helping with land management plans for a degraded area of forest north of downtown Greenville and with negotiations relating to the relicensing of the hydroelectric project at Lake Almanor, which is where many Maidu lived prior to the 1920s.

Within the Maidu Cultural and Development Group, several ongoing projects are progressing. It is involved in teaching language, traditional archaeology at the college level, and they are involved in some local and federal decision making processes. Maidu are also working to protect their sacred sites, such as Soda Rock, where government officials had not explored the cultural significance prior to granting past mining permits.

Today, Maidu also face the same issues as other people, such as economic and ecological health.

"We are all responsible for how schools are run, how

workers are treated, and even how Maidu are treated," Cunningham said. "I am tired of hearing people say "that has nothing to do with me. We are all responsible. If we want to live in a just society, we are responsible for creating that society. If we live in a society that is founded on injustice, then until we fix that foundation, we shouldn't be surprised when we see injustices all around us."

Editor's note: Information for this article was provided by several local Maidu, some of whom were quoted; local historian Norman Lamb, who provided "The Archaeology and Prehistory of Plumas and Butte Counties, California: an Introduction and Interpretive Model" by Makoto Kowta and "A History of Indian Valley, Plumas County, California, 1850-1920" by Patricia Lindgren Krutz.

Other publications used include "Plumas Memories," volumes 8. 34 and 46, compiled by the Plumas County Historical Society; "The American Indian, Prehistory to Present" by Arrell Morgan Gibson; "Indians of the Feather River, Tales and Legends of the Concow Maidu of California," by Donald P. Jewell; "The Northern Maidu" by Marie Potts; "An Ancient Trail of the Mountain Maidu Indians," an automobile tour booklet sponsored by several local agencies and organizations; "From War to Self-Determination, a history of the Bureau of Indian Affairs" by C.L. Henson;" Fariss and Smith's "History of Plumas County, California;" and, the Summer 2002 Forest Community Research Newsletter.

local stories > news

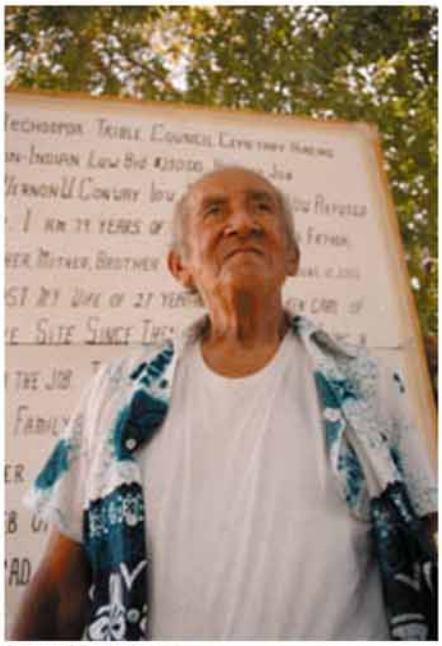
Caring for the Indian dead

By Kristina Seward

This article was published on 07.24.03.

He sits in a white plastic lawn chair, his pet Chihuahua, Chico, curled on a tattered blanket at his feet. He sits at the West Sacramento Avenue entrance of the Mechoopda Cemetery in the sweltering afternoon heat. He sits in protest.

The straight, rugged lines of his face and his brown, weathered skin reveal his Native American ancestry. Vernon Conway, 79, is five-eighths Mechoopda Indian, and several of his relatives are buried in the cemetery.



STANDING HIS GROUND
Vernon Conway stands in front of a homemade sign in front of the Indian cemetery on West Sacramento Avenue. Conway, 79, was protesting the decision by the Mechoopda Tribal council to hire another person to care for the cemetery, where many of his friends and relatives are buried.
PHOTO BY JOSH INDAR

His wife Charlotte passed away in 2002 after her fifth stroke and was buried there. Since then Conway has mowed and watered the lawn, pulled weeds and maintained the run-down cemetery grounds for free. But recently, he found out that the Mechoopda Tribal Council, the owner of the cemetery, was going to hire a groundskeeper. Conway offered to continue doing the job for $180 per month, but they hired someone else—for more money.

His next-door neighbor, Ray Leloup, 56, went to the Tribal Council office to question why the council had not hired Conway.

"They said he was too old to do the job," Leloup said, "which I know is not right. He's very active for 79." Leloup was very upset by the situation, saying, "This is discrimination against his age."

Conway was also bothered because the person they hired is not Native American. "It's in the [council's] constitution that all jobs be offered to members of the tribe first," he said.

On top of that, the council will be paying the person they hired $250 per month, $70 more than Conway had offered to do the job for.

Determined to fight for his cause, Conway set up camp at the cemetery entrance on July 18 and 19. When approached by passersby, Conway was friendly and shared his story, offering to show visitors his family's graves. On one such visit, he stopped first at his wife's grave, which doesn't have a headstone because he couldn't afford one. Instead, Conway has adorned her grave with things she loved —flowers, American flags, small plastic windmills, and a white statute of an angel. He also planted roses near her grave and propped up a small plaque that reads "Glory to God."

His mother's grave also lacks a headstone because he didn't have enough money. But, like his wife's, it is decorated with an assortment of items. The tour continues to his brother's, father's and uncle's graves, and along the way he points out several friends' graves.

"I know almost all the people buried here," Conway said. "I grew up with them."

Conway purchased small American flags for the Fourth of July and placed one at every single grave in the cemetery. But the council removed the flags, and he was told he could decorate only the graves of his relatives.

Conway has encountered frequent conflict with the council over his devotion to the cemetery. He said they consider him a "troublemaker" and want him to leave it alone.

Leloup stopped by frequently during Conway's two-day protest to keep his neighbor company and to make sure he drank enough water on the 100-plus-degree days. When asked why he is so devoted to helping Conway's cause, Leloup said, "We're veterans, so we kind of stand together." Conway served in the Marine Corps in World War II and Leloup in the Army during the Vietnam War.

Leloup said he respects Conway because "he is a very honorable man, with a deep-seated conscience of what's right and wrong."

The Mechoopda Tribal Council declined to comment on the situation.

Feather River Canyon News

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Gateway to the past

Mechoopda Indians continue thousand-year connection with Bidwell Park

By Mark Lore

This article was published on 06.30.05.

Bidwell Park is Chico's playground, serving countless people in countless ways. But there is one group for whom it is uniquely special. They are the Mechoopda Indians, whose presence in this area goes back thousands of years. To them, the park is their ancestral home preserved through time.

"The sites in the park are part of our reconnection," says Arlene Ward, cultural liaison for the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria.

Related website:

- www.mechoopda.nsn.us/

Ward is a soft-spoken woman who seems determined to make that reconnection with the park and her history. A recent Chico State University graduate with a degree in anthropology, Ward has direct lineage to the Mechoopda tribe, although her ancestors lived most of their lives in Tehama County.

BACK AT THE RANCHERIAOne of the last standing ceremonial roundhouses in the 1920s, located on the Chico Rancheria on what is now Sacramento Avenue. COURTESY OF MECHOOPDA INDIAN TRIBE

She explains that Bidwell Park is one of the few chunks of land in the area still untainted by shopping malls and congested intersections. And that "reconnection" with the park

and Mechoopda traditions, she says, allows her and other members to teach themselves and their families about the group's long history in the area.

Many locals who make use of the 3,670-acre park are concerned about whether Chico's 100-year-old "crown jewel" can continue to handle the wear and tear, but for Ward and the other descendents of the Mechoopda tribe the concept of preserving the park goes even further.

"How do we tell our children about our past if these sites are developed?"

RECONNECTING WITH THE PARKDelores McHenry, one of the Mechoopda tribal elders, shows her grandchildren, 13-year-old Mitchell Wilcox and his sister Allyson, 15, how to gather the willow used to make ceremonial headdresses.
PHOTO BY TOM ANGEL

Historical documentation paints a picture of the Mechoopdas using broad strokes—an unchanging people who lived a simple life at one with nature. But archeological records show that they were a thriving people who made good use of Bidwell Park's resources. The park served as their supermarket. It served as their hardware store. And the land is just as important to the Mechoopdas today as it was thousands of years ago.

Archeological records trace the Mechoopdas back at least 5,000 years, although their origins date back even further.

Greg White, director of the archeological research program at Chico State, says the Mechoopda way of life differed dramatically from what is portrayed in history books.

BAND OF BROTHERSThrough assimilation, many Mechoopda Indians were introduced to modern culture and modern music.
COURTESY OF MECHOOPDA INDIAN TRIBE

White said many of the cultural misconceptions of the Mechoopdas are based on the first official documentation from John Bidwell and other settlers in the 1840s. But by that time the Mechoopdas had already been in contact with European, Russian and American explorers, which ultimately disrupted the lives of the area's native population.

He explained that prior to the Indians' first contact with explorers, there were roughly 200 villages spaced a mile and a half apart between the Sacramento and Feather rivers in the Chico area. The Mechoopdas were hunters and gatherers with a far-ranging trade system. Families lived in large earth-covered structures with a larger ceremonial roundhouse located nearby. Acorns were one of the main food sources, and hunting and salmon fishing in Big Chico Creek were also common.

OFF TO THE ROUNDHOUSEJodie Conway (standing) and his brother Dewey wear the traditional ceremonial dress used for dances in the roundhouses.
COURTESY OF MECHOOPDA INDIAN TRIBE

"There was a dynamic human landscape here," White says.

The first European settlers began sailing up the coast to enter the area as early as 1808, when Spanish explorer Gabriel Moraga, who was searching for possible mission sites, led an expedition through the valley to the Sutter Buttes west of Yuba City. The expedition eventually headed east across the Feather River, passing just south of the Big Chico Creek watershed to what is now Oroville.

In 1821 another Spanish explorer named Luís Argüello passed just west of the watershed and discovered what

he called "cities along the river." Seven years later, in 1828, a group of American fur trappers led by Jedediah Smith entered the area.

Although fur trapping likely depleted much of the area's wildlife, it was a devastating malaria epidemic during the summer of 1833 that wiped out nearly 15,000 people. By the time John Bidwell arrived almost a decade later, White says, the once thriving civilizations looked more like refugee camps.

It wasn't long after Bidwell purchased land grants on Mechoopda territory in 1849 that he moved the native people to Rancho Arroyo Chico near First and Flume streets.

On an overcast rainy day in mid-June, Delores McHenry, a lifetime Chico resident and one of the Mechoopda tribal elders, is standing in a thicket of brush at the Five-Mile Recreation Area with her teenaged grandchildren Mitchell and Allyson Wilcox. They're gathering willow that will be used to make headdresses for a Ladies Dance Society event scheduled this spring.

BACK AT THE RANCHERIA One of the last standing ceremonial roundhouses in the 1920s, located on the Chico Rancheria on what is now Sacramento Avenue. COURTESY OF MECHOOPDA INDIAN TRIBE

McHenry explains that all the dancers are expected to gather their own willow for their headdresses. After they snip about a dozen branches, McHenry instructs Mitchell to drop a nickel on the ground. She explains that it is tradition to give something back to the earth upon taking. Nowadays coins are sometimes used in place of tobacco, an item considered sacred among the Mechoopdas.

Back at the Mechoopda Tribal Headquarters off of Mission Ranch Boulevard in Chico, Arlene Ward explains why gathering is still important to members of the tribe.

"The reason we gather today is to reconnect with our past," Ward said.

Ward said it is common to hold family gatherings in Bidwell Park and that members of the tribe are granted permission to gather willow along "Chulamsewi," the Maidu name for Big Chico Creek. Willow was used in the making of baskets used to gather acorns and headdresses used in dances, which were a way of showing thanks for a good harvest.

Once the Bidwells entered the area, the Mechoopdas became a modernized people who lost their culture. At the same time, the tribe was offered protection from Indian removal and members were offered work under Bidwell.

Ward says the tribe is discovering its voice again after essentially remaining a silent people for so many years. The Mechoopdas, named after the last major village of the Valley Konkow, became federally recognized in 1992.

The Mechoopda Tribal Council is now working with the city of Chico and the university in deciding how to manage and protect Indian sites in the area. Ward said everything is coming full-circle, and that the reconnection with her past is becoming a realistic endeavor.

"For me, Arlene Ward, being Mechoopda is starting to make sense."

Chico News & Review
7-6-2006

Resettlement

Lyn Batt wrote about 19th-century pioneers; now she's moved —and moving into—their old hotel

PHOTO BY MEREDITH J. COOPER

When Lyn Batt started researching the Messilla Valley region 20 years ago, she had no intention of living and making the history herself. She simply hoped to compile many sources into one and to leave a legacy for her family."I'm just so blessed."

That's Batt's catchphrase these days. And it's not hard to see why. She just published a book, *Conflicts Between Settlers and Indians in the Northern Sierra Foothills*. She purchased a historic hotel, which is featured in the book. And she moved it onto a piece of historic land that she bought just half a mile away. The parcel is in the heart of the Messilla Valley, four miles east of Butte College.

The Pence Hotel was moved from this original place on the Lucky 7 Ranch, on Durham-Pentz Road. According to Lyn Batt's book, the chief of the Concow Indians was hanged in a tree next to the hotel —Batt said based on position, this is probably that very tree.
PHOTO BY MEREDITH J. COOPER

Last year, Batt's father, Dale Dunlap, bought the Pence Hotel from Clayton Gunn, the owner of the Lucky 7 Ranch—now the Lord's 7 Ranch—off Durham-Pentz Road east of Clark Road. Gunn had planned to tear it down to build a church. That sent a shockwave through Batt. She thought: "Don't let them tear it down! It's history!"

And she would know.

She'd been researching the area for two decades—specifically the conflicts between Native Americans and white settlers in the mid- to late-1800s. The 1849 Gold Rush brought thousands of settlers to the area. One of them was Manoah Pence, the first owner of the hotel Batt now owns. She estimates it was built in the late 1850s to early 1860s.

She bought the hotel from her dad this year. The hard part was figuring out where to move it. She tracked down a family that owned land about half a mile east, where the old Messilla Valley School once stood, and after throwing a couple of offers back and forth finally was able to buy the two acres that will be her new home.

"I have to sell my house to finance this," she said. She plans to move into the hotel and restore it to its former glory. Climbing up into the old building—it's still standing on supports until the foundation is laid down, Batt walked into one of the rooms and pointed out at the valley.

"This is one of my favorite places," she said. "Just look at the view!"

A week earlier, the view was quite different, though you can see the old site from the new one. The last remaining building from the settlement of Pentz was moved by truck, over land, to its new location. Little wooden bridges had to be built over breaks in the ground, and fences had to be removed. It took the movers about four hours, including waiting time for power lines to be taken down (at a cost of $9,000 from PG&E and $3,000 from AT&T).

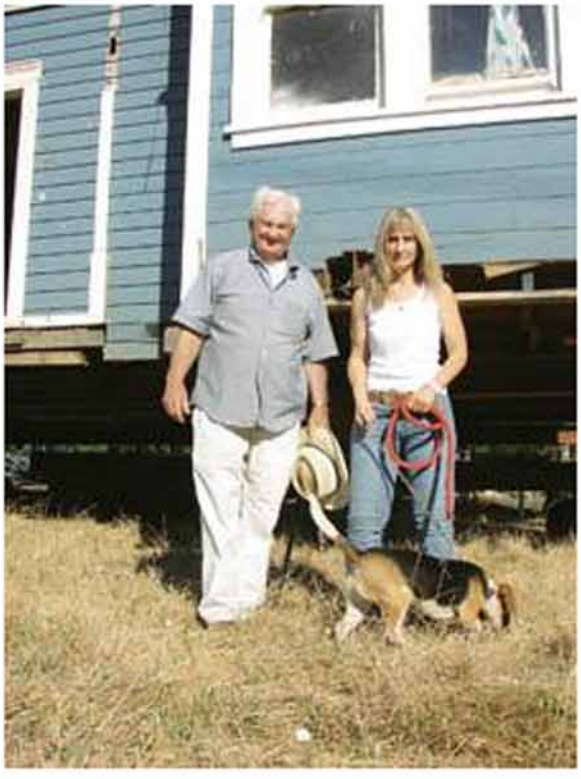
"We wanted to get rid of the house," Gunn said. A fire in the kitchen a few years ago had caused considerable damage that he wasn't ready to pour money into to repair. His father had bought the ranch in the 1940s from the Chico Meat Co., which once operated a slaughterhouse in the area, and they rented out the hotel to mostly couples, many of whom didn't stay very long. The Gunns remodeled and restored it a number of times, but after the fire it was no longer worth it for a rental house.

"I'm glad Lyn got it," Gunn said. "I hope she gets all the money she needs to fix it up."

The hotel needs considerable work. Many of the walls are crumbling, but Batt uses this to show that they are the original walls. "See the hair in the plaster?" she asked. She guesses that when the plaster was created, it was made with animal hair from the meat company nearby. She also found a good number of square nails on the property—an indication that they are the genuine, hand-made articles.

Batt has already ripped out some of the carpeting to reveal the wood floors beneath. The fireplace in the center of the building was removed in order to move the hotel to its current location. At the moment there are no exterior doors, though that is the first item on her to-do list. She has all of the originals, complete with skeleton-key locks. But she plans to install dead bolts.

Another project will be refurbishing the attic. It has such a high ceiling, Batt said, it could be a whole other room. Batt hopes that when the hotel is finished she can hold regular picnics and get the historical society involved.



Lyn Batt and her father, Dale Dunlap, and dog Bailey wait for the hotel to be moved. Dunlap, who had horses on the Lucky 7 Ranch for 20 years, bought the hotel from that property last year. Batt then bought the building from him to preserve it.
PHOTO BY MEREDITH J. COOPER

During her research, Batt learned quite a bit about the Pence family. She learned about Manoah Pence, who moved to California in 1849, made a good living digging for gold, and eventually bought out his business partners—they ran a store on what was then the Lyon Ranch—and made the ranch his own. He married Sophia Chase in 1857, a year after she arrived with her sister. She had already lost a husband and two children. At about the time of their marriage, the hotel was built.

In 1864, Pence applied for a post office in the hotel. The government approved it but spelled it P-E-N-T-Z instead of P-E-N-C-E—hence today's spelling. The couple lived in a house next door and had two children, one of whom, Watt, lived into adulthood.

Manoah Pence had a large ranch and was well-known in the community. In the 1860s it was legal to hunt and kill Indians. And Pence did just that. The biggest trouble came between the settlers and the Yahi, or the Mill Creek Indians. There was a constant back-and-forth between settlers killing Indians and Indians killing or raiding the settlers.

In her book, Batt writes that the chief of the Concow Indians was hanged from a tree next to the Pence Hotel. He had been accused of stealing Pence's cattle after being allowed to stay on the ranch. And one of the other settlers, Hiram "Hi" Good, apparently carried around the scalps of the Indians he killed. Good was eventually shot to death by an Indian boy he had raised.

The Pence Hotel as it looked originally, with Manoah Pence standing on the front porch. The balcony has since been removed.
COURTESY OF LYN BATT

In 1863, after the murders of a number of white children and raids on houses in the area by Native Americans, many of the settlers gathered at the Pence Ranch to discuss their removal. John Bidwell was among them, and he pleaded for his Indians—he was well-known, but not always liked, for his respect and good treatment of the Indians on his ranch.

Many of the men wanted to kill the Indians for what they had done to the children—some of them did. A round-up was arranged, and in August of that year more than 400 Native Americans arrived at the Bidwell Ranch and were marched 100 miles to the Round Valley Reservation, near Covelo, in Mendocino County. Half of them died en-route.

The conflicts did not end there, and Sophia Pence became very protective of her son, Watt. She was afraid that he would be kidnapped—after all, her husband was a widely known Indian hunter—so she didn't allow him to leave the ranch. She home-schooled him until most of the Native Americans had been sent to reservations. Then he was finally allowed to attend the Messilla Valley School, which was at that time located near Dry Creek, south of Durham-Pentz Road.

In 1880, the Pence Hotel had a very famous visitor—two, in fact. President Rutherford B. Hayes made a speech from the front porch. Hundreds of people from the surrounding area came to hear. With him was Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, hero of the Civil War. They were on their way to visit the Cherokee diamond mine and had also stopped at the Bidwell Mansion.

That was probably the most exciting event the hotel saw, though it had been the site of social gatherings and often offered a warm bed to weary travelers. In 1882, Manoah Pence died suddenly of a "congestive chill." Ten years later, Sophia and Watt, for lack of being able to afford the place, left the ranch for Paradise.

Batt spent 20 years researching and compiling the area's history. She collected diaries, journals, rare books. It took 15 years to track down one of her best sources, a book by Robert Anderson, *Fighting the Mill Creeks*. He had been an Indian hunter and became the sheriff of Butte County in 1888. She submitted request after request through a rare book search, and 15 years later someone finally located a copy in Grass Valley. It cost her $89 for the slim volume, but she didn't care.

When she was tracking down information about the Pence family, Batt sought the help of Paradise historian Lois McDonald in finding any living relatives. After a few months, McDonald called her back with a phone number of one of Sophia's descendents, Ed Knox.

Batt and Knox, who lived in the San Bernardino area, corresponded for about a year. They talked on the phone, sent letters back and forth. Finally, Knox said to Batt, "I want to give you this family scrapbook." It had belonged to Sophia. Jackpot.

"I've seen some of the photos here and there, so people have borrowed before," Batt said, flipping through the scrapbook ever so carefully. She doesn't allow anyone to touch it—when she opens the book, she uses a white glove or sock to protect the pages. "But that's the source right there. I feel like I am a keeper of the history."

Knox also sold Batt a carving set that he said came from the hotel.

"I want anything I can find that came out of that hotel," Batt said. So she didn't flinch at the $100 price tag. Knox's wife, Lee, donated a small clock that came from the hotel, saying she knew her husband wanted Batt to have it. She also owns an 1880s horse buggy, which she says will fit right in with its new surroundings.

"I sort of live in the past," Batt said, laughing.

She had hoped that Knox and his wife, along with McDonald, would be present for the big moving day. Sadly, Batt said, both Knox and McDonald passed away last year, within 10 days of each other.

Batt has lived in her present home for six years. It sits on four acres off Pentz Road and looks out over the Messilla Valley. Sitting on the back patio, you can actually see the hotel at its new location on Messilla Valley Road. "I come out and look at it sometimes," she said, smiling.

Batt keeps a lot of animals around the house—she has "8 1/2 horses" (one of them is just 4 months old), two pot-bellied pigs, two pygmy goats, 11 chickens, four guinea hens, two dogs, a cat and two goldfish. When she sells her house, she plans to bring most of them with her to the hotel. Only half of the horses will likely make the move. The horses, thoroughbreds, actually belong to her father. He kept horses on the Lucky 7 Ranch for 20 years until Batt moved into her present home.

Batt's parents live in Paradise, as do her son and one of her two sisters. She also has a brother, two daughters and four grandsons who call her their "tractor grandma." Her husband passed away about 12 years ago from leukemia. Batt raised their three kids, now in their 20s, and worked at the Feather River Hospital in Paradise—where she still works.

"My family supports me in whatever I want to do, though they'd like to see me live here," she said from the back patio of her current home. But when her family and friends ask her why, oh why, would you sell your beautiful home to live in that old hotel, she simply replies, "It's a dream. I'm living a dream."

Timeline

1848: California becomes U.S. territory.

1849: Gold Rush. Manoah Pence arrives in California.

1850: Butte County is created. California becomes 31st state.

1856: Sophia Chase (pictured left) arrives in California. Messilla Valley School—originally called the Oregon School—is built.

1857: Manoah and Sophia get married.

1859: Watt Pence born.

1860: John Bidwell founds Chico.

1861: Civil War breaks out, lasts until 1865.

1863: After murders of white children, settlers move Indians onto the Round Valley Reservation. Of 461 Indians who left Chico area, 277 survived the "trail of tears."

1864: Pence applies for post office; it gets spelled wrong in Washington, D.C.: Pentz. The post office operates until 1912.

1872: Chico incorporates as city.

1879: Messilla Valley School (pictured above) moves to the site where the Pence Hotel now stands. The school operates until 1964.

1880: President Hayes (pictured left), General Sherman speak on the front porch of the Pence Hotel.

1882: Manoah Pence dies.

1892: Sophia and Watt Pence (pictured below) move off the Pence Ranch.

1940s: Clayton Gunn Sr. buys ranch from Chico Meat Co. for $100,000 plus stock in Tucker Autos, which was worth nothing.

1990: Messilla Valley School moved to Pete Schwede and Becky Woods' property on the west side of Messilla Valley Road.

2002: School relocated to Concow, being restored by Yankee Hill Historical Society.

2005: Dale Dunlap buys Pence Hotel from Clayton Gunn.

2006: Lyn Batt buys hotel from father, buys land where Messilla Valley School once stood. Moves hotel onto that land.

—Meredith J. Cooper
meredithc@newsreview.com

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LYN BATT

Find the book

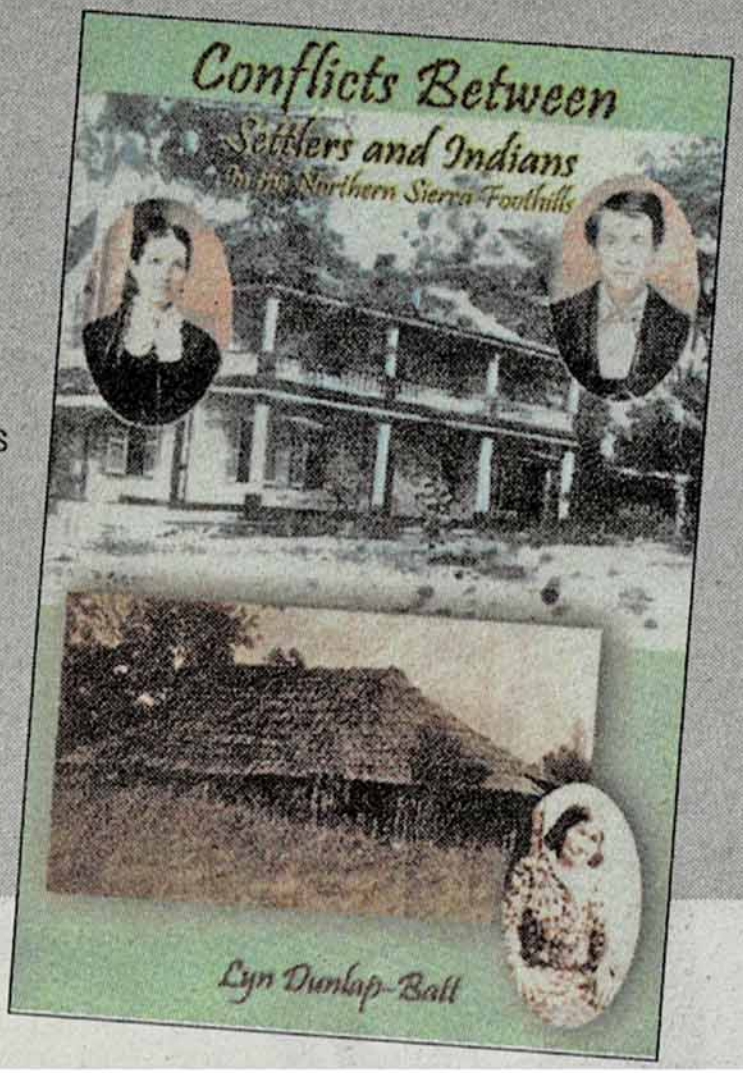
Lyn Batt's book, *Conflicts Between Settlers and Indians in the Northern Sierra Foothills*, will be available at most museums in the area, the author said. She has sold out of most of her first printing and will print a second batch. Some locations where the book will be available:

Barnes & Noble, www.barnesandnoble.com

Bookworm, 2310 Montgomery St., Oroville, (530) 534-1974

Gold Nugget Museum, 502 Pearson Rd., Paradise, (530) 872-8722

Pioneer Memorial Museum, 2332 Montgomery St., Oroville, (530) 538-2497



Oroville's own

BY PAULA M. FELIPE
Public Safety Reporter

Ernest "Ernie" Reynolds is a long-time Oroville resident who owned A-1 Masonry for more than 40 years after serving in the U.S. Coast Guard and Merchant Marines.

Ernie was born in Flea Valley in 1930, one of 10 siblings. "We lived about eight miles above Pulga and Lake Concow area," he said.

His dad was a heavy equipment engineer, who worked on the Feather River Canyon highway (Highway 70).

His mom, he said, worked hard being a homemaker and mother of 10 children.

"We didn't have electricity and lived in the woods. Our homestead saw about six feet of snow, and this was during the depression," he said.

With no doctors available, a neighbor brought Ernie into the world. "Henry Gramps is the one who brought me into the world. He came to our house in the snow when I was born," he said.

His family grew their own vegetables and lived as subsistence farmers. "We made our own soap," he said.

As a youth, Ernie attended Big Bar grammar school in Pulga. When he was 13, he exaggerated about his age and went to work for the State Forest Service. The job paid $60 a month and provided him room and board.

"A bunch of us got jobs that summer," he said. "It was before we went to high school." Ernie used an ax and shovel to fight fires started by lighting strikes. "We didn't have safety equipment in those days, and we rode hanging on the back of the truck," he said.

Authorities were soon telling Ernie he had to go to high school. "I thought we had everything we needed at home at the time — a cabin, dog, and guns — but the authorities wanted me to attend high School," he said.

So, Ernie was first placed on King's Ranch in Biggs where he worked for room and board and attended Biggs High School. He then went to work for the Long Bar Road Chicken Ranch, where his day began at 4 a.m., and then walked to Oroville High School.

"I remember our high school gym trunks were 50 cents, and the ranch provided room and board, but you didn't make money," he said.

So, after graduating from high school in 1948, Ernie decided to seek out his future. He walked past the old Steiner's Lumber Co. in Oroville (where the Wal-Mart is today) and put out his thumb. "I

PAULA M. FELIPE/MERCURY-REGISTER

Ernie Reynolds

See **OWN** page 6A

Continued from page 1A

hitchhiked to San Francisco," he said. "I wanted to join the Coast Guard."

Ernie started out as a seaman and sailed on an 83-foot cutter. "I highly recommend the Coast Guard to anyone," he said. "We were like the highway patrol of the ocean."

Impressed with his eyesight, Ernie was assigned to search and rescue missions and sailed on the cutter for two years seeing many parts of the world.

After his tour in the Coast Guard, Ernie decided to join the Merchant Marines.

"I worked as a bosun in charge of the deck department," he said.

He spent the next 18 years in the Merchant Marines sailing to Europe, the Orient, and other places around the world.

During the Korean War, Ernie was stationed aboard ships that supplied ammunition, equipment, tanks, and trucks to the U.S. military war effort.

In 1951, he married his wife, Sally, and the couple went on to raise nine children. And, today they have 30 grandchildren.

The couple moved to Oakland for less than a year before returning to Oroville. It was 1962 when Ernie decided to quit sailing, settle down in Oroville and start his own business.

"Our family needed both parents and I came back to Oroville and took a test for a contractor's license," he said.

Ernie started A-1 Masonry, beginning with small jobs and hired two workers. "We built fireplaces, brick veneers, and stairs. We didn't have equipment in those days," he said.

Ernie enjoyed the masonry business. "I loved it. It was great. You can see the beauty of the work. And, we could do it better than anyone else and cheaper, too," he said. As the jobs came in, Ernie hired more people and had 20-25 employees.

Ernie learned a strong work ethic from his family, and especially credits his mother for instilling values in him at an early age.

A-1 Masonry went on to build many local projects, including brick work on banks; the historic Eagles hall; a sporting goods store; the Chinese Temple, and McDonalds, among many others. "We rebuilt the toll house for Bidwell Bar Bridge more than 40 years ago," he said.

A-1 Masonry also laid bricks at the Lott Home; local cemeteries; Sam Martello's Plaza, and built the restrooms at Bedrock Park in addition to donating the work at the snack bar of the Nelson Avenue Sports Complex.

Two of Ernie's sons, Chuck and Richard, continue to work in the tradition of the masonry business. Chuck owns C. Reynolds for Masonry and Richard owns Richard Reynolds Masonry.

Ernie is an active community member. He has served 35 years on the board of directors of the Thermalito Irrigation District and continues to this day.

Also, he continues to serve on the SCORE (Sewerage Commission Oroville Region) in Oroville and has for 30 years.

Ernie enjoyed helping to organize special districts in the late 1970s. He was the first president of the association now known as LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission).

"I worked with Ernie Hatch, who was a rice grower from the Reclamation District. I enjoyed it. It was very interesting," he said.

Ernie is especially proud of the solar project that utilizes a tilt solar panel system at the Waste Water Treatment plant on South 5th Avenue.

"Ray Souza thought of it and I supported it," he said. "That was five years ago. We were the originators of using solar panels and now the city, county, and Butte College are using them. It's great. In 12 years, it pays for itself and creates big savings and cuts costs in half. It's very rewarding to serve the public and make sure prices stay low with quality service," Ernie said.

One of his most memorable moments was testifying at a trial in the downtown courthouse on May 25, 1972.

"A man walked into the courtroom with an attaché case and opened it and then dropped the case to the floor. He took out a gun — a .38 Smith and Wesson with a 6-inch barrel — and starts firing," Ernie said.

People were running out of the courtroom and some, including the judge, hit the floor and crawled under the desk. The lawyer, Perry Farmer, was shot and killed and the judge was wounded by the gunman.

Ernie decided to stop the gunman. "Hey, shoot me!" Ernie called out after the gunman said to the judge, "I'm going to kill you."

"My feeling at the time was to keep moving, jumping, and dodging him to keep from getting shot. And I knew the police were coming. So, I called out again, "Hey, shoot me!" Ernie said.

At first, Ernie attempted to hit the gunman over the head with a stool, but when he raised it up in the air, it got caught on something overhead and lost its momentum. "It didn't hit him very hard," he said.

So, Ernie wrestled the gunman to the floor and took away his gun.

Captain Tom Butler of the Sheriff's Office arrived to find Ernie holding the gun on the gunman.

For his courage, Ernie was awarded a Certificate of Valor from the State Attorney General and the Mercury-Register published several articles about the incident.

Today, Ernie enjoys living in Oroville and has a huge vegetable garden and fruit trees. "It's very satisfying to plant and watch it grow. Once you've grown your own and pick it ripe, you find it's a different kind of taste and so much better," he said.

"I love Oroville. You can grow just about everything right here. The weather is great most of the year, and you can go fishing, hunting, and visit the snow if you want. Oroville is the best place all around. You can't beat it. With its rivers, lakes, and creeks, you have anything here you want," he said.

Yankee Hill 'matriarch' memorializes old town

By SARAH KINGSBURY
Staff Writer

YANKEE HILL — An 80-year-old woman considered the matriarch of Yankee Hill finally saw her dream realized to memorialize the old town Saturday.

Yankee Hill emerged north of Oroville in the 1850s when mining companies moved in during the gold rush. High in the hills, the miners turned the rural area into a small community with a post office, general store, hotel and school.

Most of the buildings eventually burned down or rotted away, and due to an economic downturn Florence Smith-Wilson was forced to sell the 260 acres encompassing Yankee Hill in 1964.

She and her husband, Skeet Smith, originally purchased the 260 acres from a mining company in 1949 for only $2,500.

In the following decades power and paved roads came to the community, but those who know the area say not much has changed.

"This is very close, with the exception of electricity and cars, to the way this was in the 1800s," said Larry Mauch, a historian with the Yankee Hill Historical Society.

Mauch moved to the northern hills of Oroville from the Bay Area three years ago and said the experience has been life changing.

Sarah Kingsbury/Staff Photo

Florence Smith-Wilson looks over the monument she financed in memory of the pioneers of Yankee Hill.

"You can live in the Bay Area in a condo and not know who your neighbor is," he said. "What I found out real fast is there's still a community spirit here. It's like the old community center where you'd go to find out what's going on in town — we still have that here."

Mauch helped Smith-Wilson, who moved to the area in 1932, obtain the rights to erect the monument that honors the old pioneers.

"It was my dream to have Yankee Hill recognized," said Smith-Wilson, who financed the monument herself, estimated to cost about $2,500. "I want the town recognized and the hardships they went through. This was once a thriving town."

Smith-Wilson struggled with the county to get permission to install the monument because she wanted it a few feet from the road, which is considered county land.

However, the current owners of the land, Terry and Dave Hilst, offered to allow the monument to be erected about 10 feet back, which placed it on private property.

The dedication gathering Saturday was like a class and family reunion at the same time, said Patsy Seek, who moved to the area when she was 10.

She lives in the southern, more developed part of Oroville now, but still feels a strong connection to the area.

"This is a part of me, a part of my life," she said. "Except for all the houses, it's pretty much the same."

The monument is made of quartz and granite and sits at the center of Old Yankee Hill, a few hundred yards from where the schoolhouse used to be.

Staff writer Sarah Kingsbury can be reached at skingsbury@chicoer.com.

The Sacramento Bee
7-13-2008

Hard work paid off – family home spared the flames

By Chelsea Phua
cphua@sacbee.com

Years of working hard to create a defensible space on their property paid off for Peggy Moak and her family.

Even as wildfire ravaged much of the Concow community in Butte County, turning its lush forest and rugged terrain into a hellish landscape of charred vegetation, burnt homes and twisted metal, Moak's 12 acres on Concow Road escaped the devastation.

It remained an oasis of green, with its well-tended lawns, flowers and pine trees – none of them singed by flames. The complex of buildings on the property, including Moak and her husband's cottage-style home, stood intact.

The Camp fire, one of 41 lightning-caused fires in the county, bore south into the Concow basin early last week, prompting mandatory evacuation orders in the early hours, but Moak and some of her family members, including her husband, 80-year-old mother and disabled sister, decided to stay on to defend their home with firefighters.

It worked. The fire came right up to their property line and stopped.

Surveying the tranquil scene under clearer skies Saturday, Moak said she has mixed feelings.

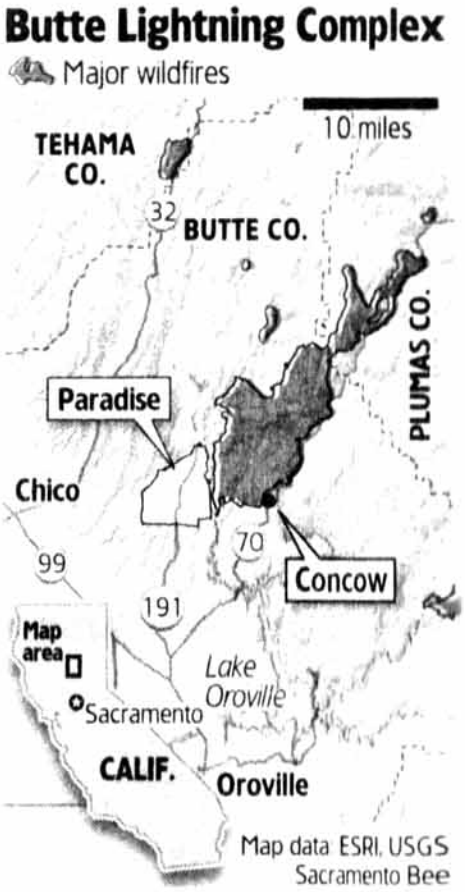
"We are delighted and relieved but devastated by the damage done to our community," Moak said. "It's hard to be happy when our neighbors and friends have suffered so much loss."

The series of fires, which began June 21, has scorched 50,700 acres, destroyed 50 homes – most of them in the Concow area – and claimed one life.

Authorities have not released the victim's identity or address. Butte County sheriff's officials said they found the victim's remains Friday among the rubble.

News of the death has hit the tightknit community hard

▶ FIRES, Page B4



"Things are looking a lot better, but we are not out of the woods yet."

Justin Scribner
Cal Fire spokesman

State's largest active wildfires

1. American River Complex (18,408 acres, 20% contained) 10 fires. Two homes destroyed, 37 threatened.

2. Basin Complex (114,694 acres, 46% contained) Two fires threaten 2,000 homes near Big Sur; 26 homes have been destroyed. Highway 1 is closed.

3. Butte Lightning Complex (50,700 acres, 65% contained) 41 fires. One fatality. 50 homes destroyed. Highway 70 is closed.

4. Canyon Complex (30,812 acres, 55% contained) 50 fires. One home destroyed, 1,500 threatened.

5. Iron Complex (37,354 acres, 44% contained) 23 fires threaten 477 homes.

6. Lime Complex (76,663 acres, 55% contained) 70 fires threaten 1,530 homes.

7. Mendocino Lightning Complex (52,290 acres, 65% contained) 87 fires. Two homes destroyed, 335 threatened.

8. Piute (35,076 acres, 49% contained) Six homes destroyed, 1,100 threatened.

9. Shasta Trinity Lightning Complex (74,641 acres, 50% contained) 158 fires. Three homes destroyed, 1,200 threatened.

10. Siskiyou Complex (26,200 acres, 34% contained) Five fires.

California fire totals

Total fires since June 20: 1,781
Total active fires: 322
Total acres burned: 801,726
Personnel committed: 20,443
Resources committed:
Fire engines: 1,516
Crews: 447
Dozers: 294
Water tenders: 423
Helicopters: 117

sacbee.com

For an interactive map of wildfires burning in Northern California, visit **www.sacbee.com**

Sources: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, U.S. Forest Service

Sacramento Bee

Fires: Hot spots doused in Concow

▶ FROM PAGE B1

where some residents knew the victim as their neighbor.

"I cried when I heard it was him," said Randy Totten, taking refuge at a Red Cross shelter in Oroville on Friday night.

The victim lived alone with his dog and liked to swim in the Concow Reservoir while his dog barked and watched from shore, neighbors said.

"He loved his dog," said Totten, who had 16 dogs, of which 13 survived the flames, including five puppies. "He's upfront. A solution-minded person."

"We figured the smoke got to him," said Cory Farris, another evacuee at the Oroville shelter. The victim once helped his sister after her pickup truck tipped and fell into a ditch as she was rounding a curve. He came upon the scene and drove her home, Farris said.

Fire and law enforcement personnel also were affected by the death.

"That hits the team very hard," said George Morris Jr., incident commander of the Butte Lightning Complex fires. "Everything that was done was done to get the person out of the area," said Morris, who said it appears that the victim wanted to stay behind.

Moak, who is also the county's assistant treasurer, does not recommend defying immediate threat evacuation orders, but said she and her family were confident that they could defend their home.

After torching Concow, the flames threatened the community of Paradise and continued to rage for nearly a week. On Saturday, for the first time in weeks, firefighters were aided by cooler weather and less gusty winds.

"Things are looking a lot better, but we are not out of the woods yet," California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokesman Justin Scribner said.

The Butte Lightning Complex fire was 65 percent contained Saturday evening.

The mandatory evacuation order was lifted for Paradise on Friday evening. It isn't clear when Concow residents will be allowed to return home, officials said.

Along roads in Concow on Saturday, utility and fire crews doused hot spots, removed precarious trees and tree limbs, and cleared dangerous debris.

"We're working fast to ensure it's safe for residents to return," Morris Jr. said.

Evacuation orders remained in place Saturday, but a few residents were spotted returning to their property.

"We're not supposed to be here," said Annie Donovan, who managed to drive pass the roadblocks with her boyfriend with no one stopping them. "But we had to find out."

They found the mobile home they were remodeling on Jack Dale Way reduced to a tangled mess of material.

"It sucks," Donovan told Moak and Moak's other sister, Dot Morris, as the sisters stopped to talk to the couple and offer their help. Morris' property also remained intact, with luxuriant foliage still framing the driveway to her house. Moak also defended her sister's home when Morris evacuated.

In their neighbors' absence, Moak and her family have stepped in to care for their neighbors' animals and protect what's left of their community. Moak's husband, Pete Moak, rescued a neighbor's distraught emu from the flames at the height of the fire.

When it was safe for her, Moak would drive along the dusty, winding dirt roads in a utility cart to keep watch on hot spots, alerting fire officials to any potential flare-ups. While on the road, Moak would also note whose property was still standing and whose was gone, so she could provide updates for her anxious neighbors by e-mail and phone.

Moak says if she had been in her neighbors' position, they would have done the same for her.

It's a sentiment echoed by Totten, who is planning to open his home to neighbors who have lost theirs.

"Nobody goes homeless in Concow," Totten said. "There's always been a door opened, and it's always been that way."

"We are a strong community and people care about each other and care about the history of the community," Moak said. "We will prevail."

■ ■ ■

Call The Bee's Chelsea Phua, (916) 321-1132.

BUTTE LIGHTNING COMPLEX

Location: Throughout Butte County
Started: 2 p.m. June 21
Acres burned: 50,700
Containment: 65 percent
Homes threatened: 0
Structures destroyed: 50 residences and 10 outbuildings
Injuries: 26
Fatalities: 1
Total fire personnel: 3,210 (1,433 Cal Fire)
Engines: 377
Fire crews: 60
Costs to date: $47.6 million

Source: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

'Concow Cabins' proposed for fire recovery effort

Chico Enterprise Record
8-25-2008

By GREG WELTER
Staff Writer

YANKEE HILL — You've probably heard of Katrina Cottages. Now make way for Concow Cabins.

A nonprofit group is proposing that small, affordable homes — like those created to replace thousands lost in Gulf Coast flooding three years ago — take the place of some Concow residences destroyed in the July firestorm.

Brenda Rightmyer, a private consultant and volunteer with the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council, said the plan is to have cabins replace about 20 homes in Concow, with an emphasis on making them fire safe.

"This area will burn again," Rightmyer said.

An estimated 202 occupied structures in the Concow area were lost to Butte Lightning Complex fires in July, but Rightmyer said the

See **CABINS**, 5A

BACKGROUND: An estimated 202 residences were destroyed in July when flames ripped through Concow.

WHAT'S NEW: As groups act to assist displaced residents with everyday needs, a plan is moving forward to build up to 20 replacement homes in Concow for full-time residents.

WHAT'S NEXT: Community groups hope to raise $1 million for the effort, with the first of 20 so-called Concow Cabins springing up within a year or two.

CABINS

From 1A

focus of the cabin program will be to assist those who lost their primary residence.

She said a lot of work lies ahead for the council and other groups working on the plan, but hopes cabins will begin springing up around the blackened Concow landscape within a year or two.

She said early estimates have placed the cost to build the cabins, which are available in kit form, at about $40,000.

Typically, they will range in size from 500 to 600 square-feet, have concrete foundations, and be easily expandable.

It's hoped, Rightmyer said, that donations of money, labor and materials may allow fire victims to get into the cabins with little or no out-of-pocket expense. She said opportunities may be available for owners to invest "sweat equity" by helping with the building process.

Rightmyer said about $1 million is needed to cover the cost for the cabins, including labor, materials and permits.

In the meantime, several groups are attempting to help displaced Concow residents with immediate needs.

Several displaced residents, including women and children, are still camping at Crain Park, on private property in Concow.

The owners want to reoccupy the land, and Rightmyer said it's hoped all residents can be back on their property by Sept. 10.

Cleanup is under way, and property will have to meet environmental clearances before they live on it, or begin to rebuild.

About $12,500 has been raised so far to provide residents with such things as gasoline and portable toilets and showers.

The money will also cover 500 bales of rice straw, figured to be needed for erosion control in the burned-over area when rains come. Rightmyer said the fire safe council has the bales on reserve, and got a good buy on them.

Still, Rightmyer said, more help is needed to help see residences through a long rebuilding process that could take two years or more.

"We want to do it right." she said. "We want to make sure everything we do makes the community more fire wise and fire safe."

Donations to assist Concow residents with rebuilding may be sent to Sierra Central Credit Union, 5175 Skyway, Paradise, CA, 95969, or Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council, P.O. Box 4153, Yankee Hill, CA, 95965. Make checks out to "The Concow Fire Recovery Fund."

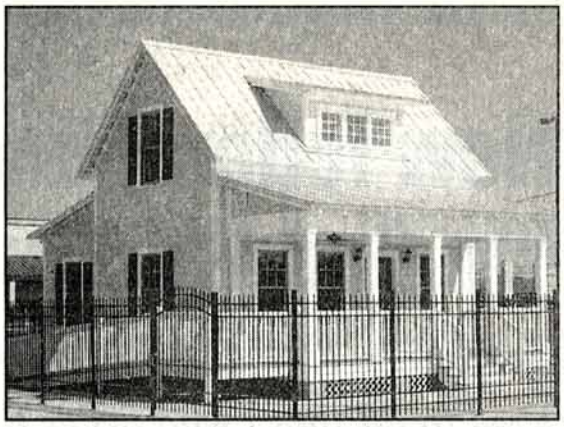


Photo courtesy of Lowe's

Homes similar to so-called "Katrina Cottages," shown here, are proposed to replace some residences destroyed by fire in Concow.

For more information about the recovery effort and the Concow Cabins program, Rightmyer may be reached at 534-4179.

Staff writer Greg Welter can be reached at 896-7768 or gwelter@chicoer.com.

Fire-ravaged areas of Butte County moving forward

Chico Enterprise Record, 9-14-2008

Oroville: People are making progress at lifting their homes out of the ashes of this summer's firestorms. Andy Picket with the Butte County administrative office, reported last week that 223 sites in the Ophir, Humboldt, and Butte Lightning Complex fires have been cleared of hazardous materials. Of that total, 149 of the hazardous materials cleanups, which were all conducted for free by state agencies, have taken place in the Concow area alone. Also 32 permits to rebuild homes destroyed in the fires are in process or have been issued. Another 78 demolition permits have already been issued to property owners.

Speaking Tuesday before the Butte County Board of Supervisors, Tim Snellings, director of the Department of Development Services, pointed out the county is waiving a range of fees on "like for like" projects for uninsured individuals in the fire-ravaged areas. For example, if an uninsured person lost a 1,300-square-foot home in the fire and is rebuilding another 1,300-square-foot home, the county would exempt the project from things like school fees, impact fees, demolition fees, and other assessments, with a combined value of about $13,815.

Supervisor Bill Connelly of Oroville said he is concerned about illegal dwellings that burned. "We have many people, in the Concow area particularly, who were in non-permitted structures. They would like to come back into the system and build in a permitted manner", said the supervisor. He said many of these individuals don't have the resources to pay for the various permits up front and he asked if a payment schedule could be worked out.

Making matters more difficult, according to Connelly, is that some of the lots they were living on weren't legal either. Connelly estimated there are 20 to 30 such cases. "We want them to clean up. We (the county) will assist them in cleaning up", said Connelly but he was unsure what can be done with illegal lots. Among the fees being waived is a permit to put a travel trailer on property as a residence during the rebuilding period. These permits are good for two years, explained Snellings, but they require both electricity and septic facilities.

In a telephone interview with the Enterprise-Record, Picket said such permits are for travel trailers and other self-contained set ups, but tent camping isn't currently approved. He said county staff is currently reviewing how or if camping could be accommodated given the circumstances.

Staff writer Roger H. Aylworth

CN&R
Chico News & Review

WHERE'S CONCOW?

Residents struggle to rebuild their burnt-out community

BY TINA MEYER

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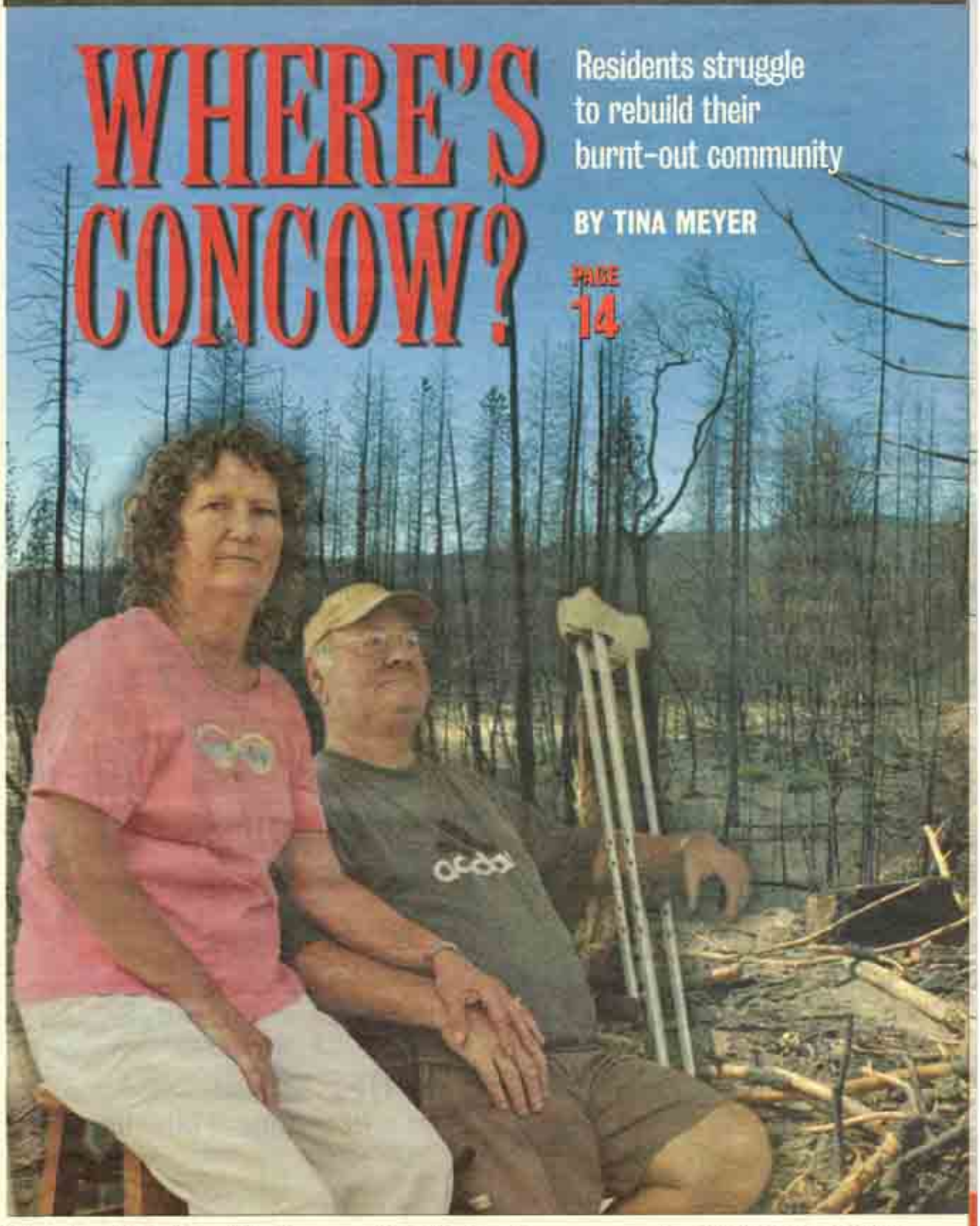


The Concow conflagration

Ten weeks after the fire, residents struggle to recover

by Tina Meyer
surfgirl@jps.net
photos by Meredith J. Cooper

DISPLACED
Margaret and T.K. Huff sit outside their current home, a small RV, in a quaint Paradise trailer park. All their belongings, save a precious few, were demolished during the Butte Lightning Complex fires.

This much, you probably know A huge, fast-moving fire devastated the mountain community of Concow, a few miles east of Paradise. Uncounted hundreds of residents became homeless, most in a matter of minutes in the pre-dawn hours of July 8. When the fire, one in what was dubbed the Butte Lightning Complex, was finally controlled on July 29, thousands of acres were burned, including about 200 "dwellings" of all types (including vehicles and tents).

This, you may not know: Only one person died—a man who may have resisted evacuation until it was too late—but all the survivors found their lives fractured.

This, you probably don't know: Ten weeks later, some fire refugees continue to harbor in friends' homes. Many are overwhelmed or in despair, most are consumed by dirty, sweaty labor on their lands, and all are financially decimated and embroiled in paperwork, regulatory minutiae and community meetings.

But that is mere purgatory. The approach to hell is through the formerly verdant hillsides and meadows, now totally bereft of live trees for miles in some areas of the Concow basin, the ash six inches deep, the wild animals gone farther afield to find water, food and forest.

Hell itself is returning day after day to your property to sift through charred trees and metal, trying to find someone to log it or haul it away and wrestling with county codes. The depth of hell is waking in the middle of the night, remembering yet another fragile material possession that you will never see again, irreplaceable and invested with our memories and

About the author: Tina Meyer is a local writer and journalist (and longtime CN&R contributor) who once lived in Concow.

MAKING DO
Margaret Huff sits at the kitchen table inside her trailer, which she and her husband, T.K., took out a loan to buy. It's so cramped that nothing is more than a few feet away.

dreams—your son's baby book, your collection of 242 antique frying pans, a hillside of trees.

The vocabulary of your pain is your own private language, and you speak it even when you sleep. What is no more is always there. You have to hold unequivocal loss in one hand, the life that keeps running in you in the other.

Some folks had insurance. Some couldn't get covered. Some lost their homes. Others lost all their tools and inventory. Some kept the house, lost all the out-buildings and every tree and vehicle on the property. Many saw their entire neighborhood reduced to black and white, not a home standing.

In the diverse social mix that is Concow, the survivors include libertarians and conservatives, Grange members and marginalized alcoholics, county employees, retirees, loggers, an ex-Chico city councilman, professionals and the illiterate. Violent crime has been uncommon, with people getting along amazingly well. They will all tell you they've loved living in Concow. That love of the land has been the community grace note. Now, 10 weeks later, they ponder how to rebuild their land and community.

When 59-year-old Margaret Huff heard acorns hitting the side of her house "so hard I thought someone was shooting bullets" at approximately 1:30 in the morning on July 8, she told her husband, "T.K., you better get up." She walked outside, where the cement on her driveway was so hot it was difficult to stand on.

Woken from sleep, T.K. Huff, who is 61, came out on crutches, his leg prosthesis left by his bed, and they watched as flames a quarter- to a half-mile away suddenly shot skyward, and the landscape nearby "seemed to explode," Margaret recounted, remnant fear still in her voice weeks later.

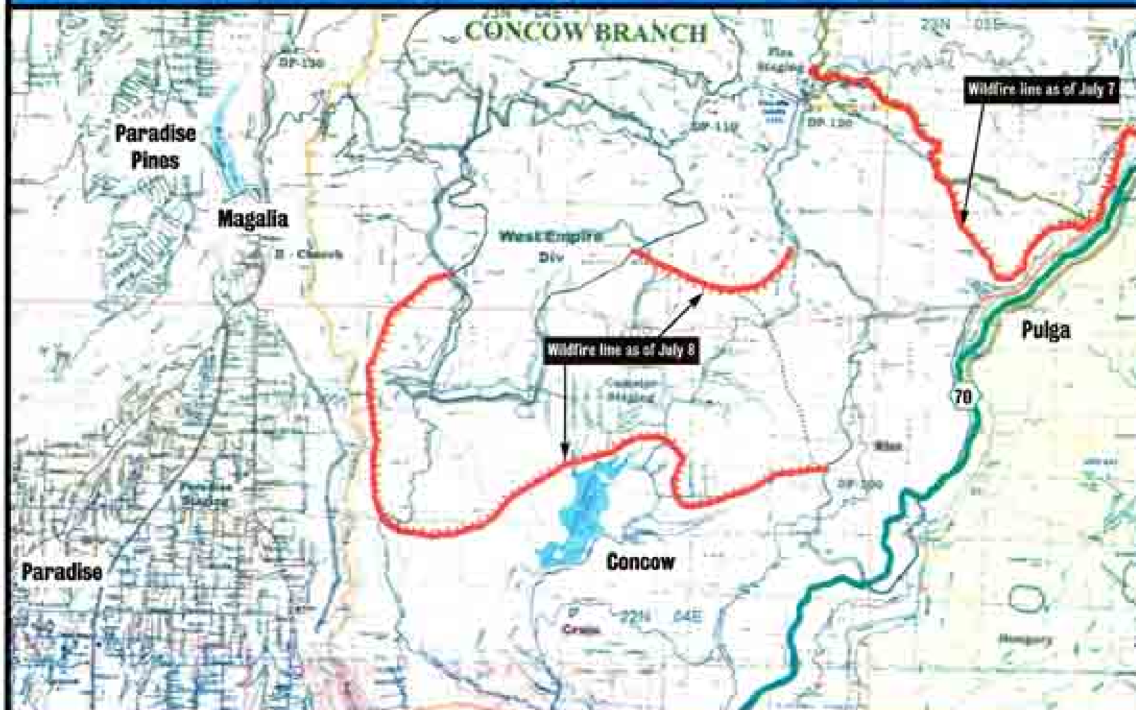
"A tree in our back yard caught fire, and I just fell to my knees and started crying. My husband threw me the keys, and I grabbed the birdcage and the cat jumped on my chest. He left in his underwear; he didn't even put his shoes on. I swear I thought we weren't gonna get out."

Before retiring that night, the Huffs had unpacked all the valuables that they had taken from their home when CalFire had asked them to evacuate two weeks earlier, on June 21, when lightning strikes in the Sierra ignited numerous fires north of Concow and in other mountain locations. Concow residents were allowed to return home on June 29, and most had been home a week before they were forced from their beds in the wee hours of July 8.

CONCOW continued on page 17

'Like a freight train coming'

CalFire: It was wind, not a backfire, that destroyed Concow



FIERY FRONTIER
This map shows just how quickly the fire spread into the Concow area. By July 10, the wildfire had engulfed almost the entire region, leaving only patches of trees and structures untouched.

One of the issues that gnaw at [illegible]

As was true in many parts of Califor- [illegible]

—Tina Meyer

CONCOW continued from page 15

VIEW FROM ABOVE
The Concow basin is a massive forest, but these days most of the trees are burned or dead, and many will be cut down in the coming months.

That night—in a second, much hastier evacuation—the Huffs left behind the family Bible, T.K.'s extensive gun collection, oil portraits of their children, Margaret's grandmother's heirlooms, legal documents, 13 vehicles, a canoe and dinghy, all their tools, and all of T.K.'s medical equipment, upon which this unilateral, above-the-knee amputee is dependent.

Driving down Concow Road in the smoky night, they passed at least 30 fire vehicles heading north, toward the fire. "We were the only ones in our lane going out," Margaret said. They arrived in Paradise around 2:30.

Later they would discover that every tree on their 4.9 acres, their three-bedroom mobile home, another trailer, and several outbuildings and shops were burned to ash and whatever metal scraps remained.

Melissa Hill and John Jewett—he a lifelong Concow resident and she a "local" since 1973—also had been home only a week after evacuating on June 21. For three nights, Jewett had gone out on his porch at bedtime and noted that the wind was increasing. Both had a sense of impending doom but thought that "everything was under control, since the county had allowed us to return," remembered Hill.

> **"A tree in our back yard caught fire, and I just fell to my knees and started crying.... I swear I thought we weren't gonna get out."**
>
> **—Concow resident Margaret Huff**

At 1:15 a.m. on July 8, Hill answered her phone to hear her neighbor reporting that an official had advised him to leave his home because of fire. At 1:30 they received a reverse-911 call advising them to evacuate, and at 1:45, a uniformed official came to their door to inform them that they had less than an hour to vacate their house.

When they drove away at 3 in the morning, burning embers were falling on their property, and they could see "that horrible glow to the northeast." As they drove out on Concow Road, sharing their lane with bumper-to-bumper evacuating traffic, they passed 30 or 40 fire trucks coming in. The smoke was so thick that they could hardly see the car in front of them, Hill remembered.

The Jewett-Hill property was insured. Their manufactured home survived, and after several weeks in a Chico hotel, they have returned home to "a moonscape." Sixty percent of the trees on their almost five acres burned, and 100 percent of the pine trees. All vegetation and shade around their home is gone.

They have already replaced their air conditioner and well pump. Their roof needs to be inspected, and Hill said they will wait until spring to replace the carpets, because of the incessant ash and dirt that enter from the now unfamiliar environment outside. Every other night, Hill puts a fresh pillowcase

CONCOW continued on page 20

on her pillow so she can go to sleep without the smell of smoke in her nose.

Five out-buildings, including a shop, tools and five cords of firewood, are gone, as well as 25 years' worth of teaching supplies accumulated by Hill, an early childhood educator.

Although Jewett and Hill appear to be progressing well, their days are fraught with minor and major difficulties. A typical list of current priorities for fire survivors includes:

- find a temporary home;
- arrange for hazardous-materials cleanup by the county;
- request building permits;
- confer with insurance companies;
- sink new utility poles;
- arrange for logging of burned trees;
- get the well and septic systems functioning;
- haul eligible debris into waste bins;
- fell trees for erosion control;
- attempt to secure tools onsite;
- replace items (as basic as pants and a shovel);
- make seemingly ceaseless trips to town to meet with county officials or to gather supplies.

It is grubby, painstaking, expensive and heart-rending work, and nothing goes as smoothly as this list might imply. Many residents, of course, continue to work full-time jobs or try to restart their businesses.

"God bless those Baptists!" say Melissa Hill, Margaret Huff, and many other fire survivors. Members of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Volunteers (SBDRV) have worked for eight weeks with many residents to clean up and log their properties.

Concow was the recipient of a serendipitous blessing in that Pastor Doug Crowder, of Magalia Pines Baptist Church, is also an administrator with SBDRV. His church members and the SBDRV crews provided feeding stations in June and July and on-the-ground labor since June to the Paradise and Concow fire survivors. The Magalia church, which has covered more than half of the expenses for these projects, with the Southern Baptist Convention funding the balance, additionally houses and feeds the volunteers and pays for fuel and other cleanup expenses.

Crowder reported that volunteers, many of them retired people, had come from as far away as North Carolina and included an "80-year-old lady" who works on a cleanup crew in Concow. "But we're overwhelmed," Crowder said. "This is the largest cleanup we have ever done. ... Our volunteers are wearing out. Many of them have developed lung symptoms," presumably from inhaling ash.

The Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council was contacted for this story. Susie Hefferman, vice-chairwoman of the council, declined to comment regarding the organization's recovery efforts at this time. The organization has stated publicly that it is raising money to help locals buy "Concow cabins," similar to the Katrina cabins designed after Hurricane Katrina.

Meanwhile, fire survivors live with friends or on their burned home sites and try to hold onto their sanity. Like Hill, many would add "cry" to the to-do list—it is an inescapable necessity.

How do they cope? "You keep going," Hill said, "and look for any tangible signs of progress. Maybe you see green shoots at the base of your oak tree, maybe some bureaucrat returned your phone call. Visit with a neighbor—share tears and beers."

Both Hill and Margaret Huff cried occasionally as they told me their stories. Numerous others I spoke with over the past 10 weeks—men and women—stalled in mid-sentence, walked away or stood helpless as their eyes reddened and welled over with tears. Hill and other residents believe the county should be providing case management to help the many survivors who say they continue to feel overwhelmed and confused regarding how to obtain assistance and comply with county requirements.

A FEW PRECIOUS THINGS
Among the items the Huffs were able to save were two of their cockatiels.

NEIGHBORS NO MORE
Melissa Hill stands in her backyard with her granddaughter, Avery. Before the fire, Hill said, she could see 10 houses back there. They're all gone now.

Concow Phoenix Project and North Valley Catholic Social Services (NVCSS) have offered mental-health information and counseling to Concow residents. The $10,000 grant provided by Catholic Charities to NVCSS to provide psychotherapy for survivors of the Humboldt and Lightning Complex fires will be spent within two months, reported Laura Best, clinical supervisor at NVCSS. She noted that NVCSS now has a wait list for these services.

Currently, most residents are occupied with debris cleanup and clearing burned trees. Steve Rodowick, who runs the Butte County bin program, estimates that the county will lend 90 large Dumpster bins to residents. Like many others, Jewett and Hill discovered that the county could not provide them with a free debris bin because their dwelling had not burned down, a criterion imposed by the state Office of Emergency Services. Their insurance covered less than half the cost of renting the necessary bins.

Nor is it easy to remove the burned trees. Hill and Jewett contracted with a local logging company, but it eventually could not honor the terms because too much lumber was being cut in Concow weekly. They have since found another logger.

Sierra Pacific Industries, the sole lumber company buying Concow timber, is limiting the amount of wood that it will buy each week. The SPI mills are already full of wood from the company's own burned land, reported Dave Whittier, a state registered forester and the owner of Whittier Consulting Forestry, which is currently logging some residents' properties.

Whittier pointed out that drought-induced pine-beetle infestations are causing pine wood to rot within weeks rather than months, and mills will not take wood that shows the blue stain that indicates the first stage of this rot. As a result, many residents will not be able to find loggers willing to take out their dead pines before they begin to rot.

Whittier added that "blue stain" wood carries the larvae of various beetles and, if not kiln dried, can continue to infest the lumber of homes built with it for decades, causing structural weakness.

> **"You keep going and look for any tangible signs of progress. Maybe you see green shoots at the base of your oak tree, maybe some bureaucrat returned your phone call."**
>
> **—Concow resident Melissa Hill**

The alternative for Concow landowners is to chip the wood on site. Covanta Energy's cogeneration plant in Oroville, which converts wood chips to electricity, plans to start taking Concow wood in the next few weeks, reported plant manager Francisco Barriga. Assuming Covanta's price is adequate, Whittier believes that chipping and hauling companies may find it economically feasible to remove wood from Concow by chipping it this winter. He noted that the BTUs in standing dead wood decrease after a year.

Some residents and fire restoration experts predict that the forest environment will return to native oaks and manzanita, until the natural forest succession cycle evolves to predominantly conifers. Many predict that two or three human generations will pass before Concow's forests return to their pre-fire, forested state. Completely burned deciduous trees were, in fact, starting to sprout green shoots several weeks after the fire, indicating live roots. Whittier believes that resprouting oaks will remain bushy and could create fire hazards, although other forest experts disagree.

Hill came home from work last week to see that logging on her property had begun. In the largest cedar stump on her land, 3 ½ feet in diameter, she counted 108 rings.

Butte County will waive the well, septic and building permits for fire survivors whose lots, easements and prior structures were legal, if they were uninsured. District 1 Supervisor Bill Connelly says the board is undecided on whether the county will forgive the permit fees for those who resided in unpermitted residences prior to the fire. "I'm leaning toward not waiving the fees," Connelly said in a Sept. 2 phone interview. "We may waive them on a case-by-case basis."

Connelly noted that the county is waiting for President Bush to decide whether to extend the disaster designation for Butte County to the earlier date of May 22, which would allow greater options for fire survivors, such as low-interest loans and additional county funds. In that case, county supervisors will be discussing whether to waive, discount or allow timed payments of fees for those with unpermitted, burned homes as well.

Sang Kim, county deputy administrative officer, noted that as of Aug. 20 the county had incurred $4.7 million in costs for running its Emergency Operations Center and for fire recovery. They will be paid from its discretionary budget.

Concow residents since 1989, the Huffs now live in a 25-foot trailer, "the cheapest we could find in Paradise," said Margaret. They received $300 from the Red Cross for rent but now are trying to make do on their meager fixed income.

T.K., who lost his right leg above the knee in a tractor accident seven years ago, has not yet ascertained how to replace his medical equipment. He has fallen several times in his unfamiliar surroundings and is now experiencing complications of his pre-existing medical problems.

The Huffs' mobile home was built in 1966. For $500 per year, they could have purchased home insurance, but it would have covered only $5,000 in damages, and most of that would have been for their shop, Margaret said, so the policy did not seem worthwhile. They did have legal permits before the fire and, like most, hope to rebuild.

Ten weeks after, the effects of the Concow fire remain everpresent and inescapable. It is difficult to imagine, in the scale of human time, hills covered with oaks and a rebuilt, fire-safe community.

Margaret Huff, like so many others, hopes and prays for gentle winter rains, no flooding, and a return of the green.

Oroville Mercury Register
11-27-2008
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Concow residents thankful despite fire

By TONI SCOTT
Staff Writer

CONCOW — For the first time in almost 35 years, Laurel Paulson-Pierce won't be celebrating Thanksgiving in her Concow Road home.

That's because like the countless other survivors of this summer's wildfire storm, Paulson-Pierce doesn't have a home to bring her family and friends to.

Paulson-Pierce's house and the large log cabin where she celebrated Thanksgiving succumbed to flames in early July, when the Camp Fire swept through the mountain community of Concow.

Nearly 4½ months later, she — like so many others in Paradise, Concow and Palermo — is still without a stable place to call home.

She has been living with her daughter in Chico, and just last week brought a motor home up to the property where she used to live.

But Paulson-Pierce will still spend the holiday away from the place where she spent so many years eating Tofurkey, cranberry sauce and stuffing made with her home-grown green tomatoes.

"This year I do not have an oven. Or tomatoes. Or a home with room for such a large celebration," Paulson-Pierce said.

Thanksgiving used to bring anywhere from 20-70 of Paulson-Pierce's friends and neighbors to her home, and as she recently recounted, the holiday had special meaning for her.

"It was a very important annual event for us," Paulson-Pierce said. "Thanksgiving is about the time that we first purchased land up here."

Now her home is little more than ashes and the land is blackened. Charred trees replace the once lush forest that defined Concow.

Despite this, Paulson-Pierce said she and other fire survivors in Butte County have much to celebrate this holiday season.

"This Thanksgiving is going to be much more intense," Paulson-Pierce said. "I have tried to remember every day since the fire that I do have a lot to be thankful for: my life, my health, and my friends and family who have survived the fire."

Virginia Beaudry is one fire survivor that also counts her blessings.

Beaudry lost her Yellow Wood Road home in the fire that also stole Paulson-Pierce's home.

On July 14, just days after the blaze hit, she stood among the ashes of her charred two-story home and shop, full of tears about her loss.

But on a recent visit with Beaudry, she remained upbeat about her life and grateful for the new life she and other fire survivors are building for themselves.

"We've been starting this community over again from the ashes up," Beaudry said.

Beaudry is still living in a tent trailer in the Lake Concow Campground, waiting to move into a new manufactured home on property up the road from where she used to rent her now-destroyed home.

Despite her situation, she said she is grateful for the perspective the fire gave her on life.

"It makes you look at everything differently," Beaudry said. "Everything. There are little things everywhere that I now know happened for a reason."

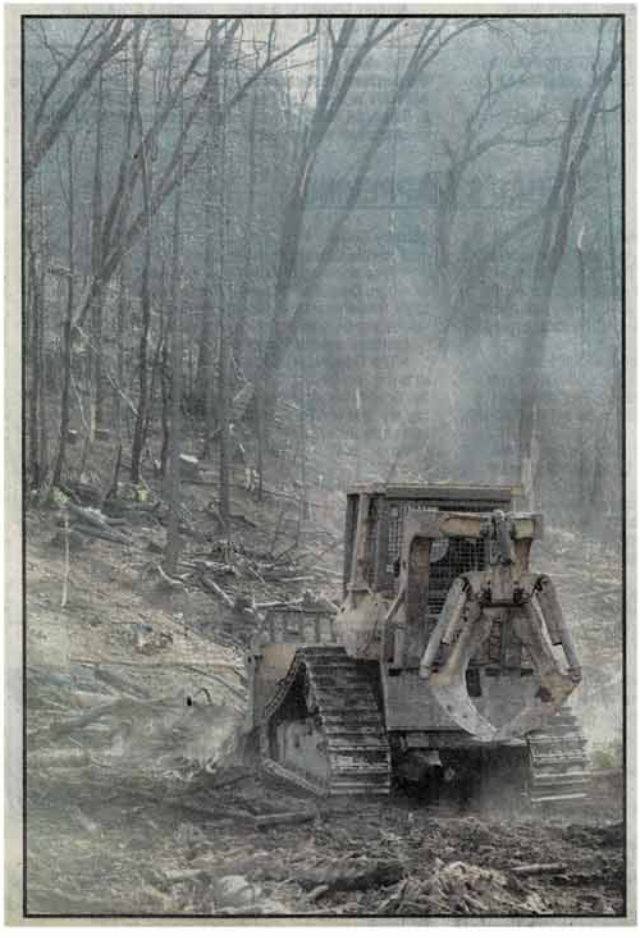
But while she is thankful, the reality of her circumstances still exist and sometimes cut through the heart.

As she talked about spending Thanksgiving with her sister, Beaudry said the meal will be a welcome change from her normal eating habits.

"It's a chance to not eat out of a can," Beaudry said, adding that she has neither a kitchen nor household supplies to cook with.

And not being able to cook is just one thing that Beaudry has had to live without. She has electricity, but not much other comforts that most people rely on on a daily basis.

"Ever since the fire I feel like I'm living in a Third World country," Beaudry said. "I beg, borrow and almost break into bathrooms. I haul my water everyday. People



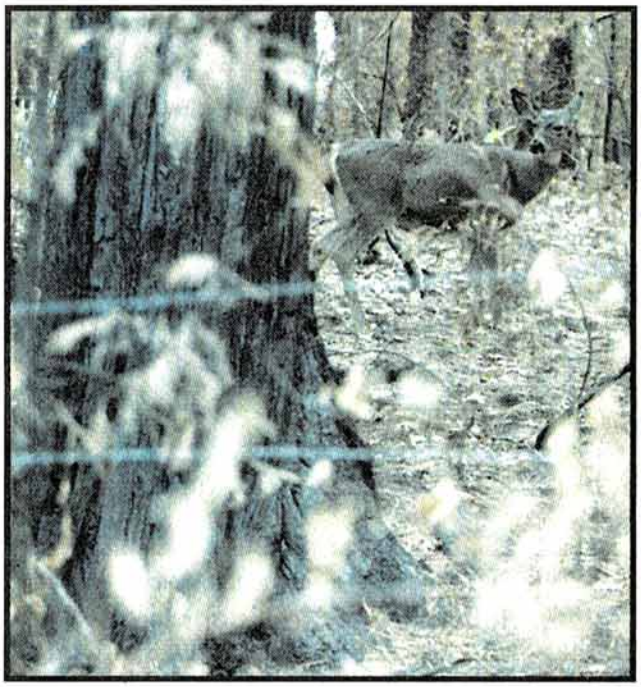
Bill Husa/Staff Photos

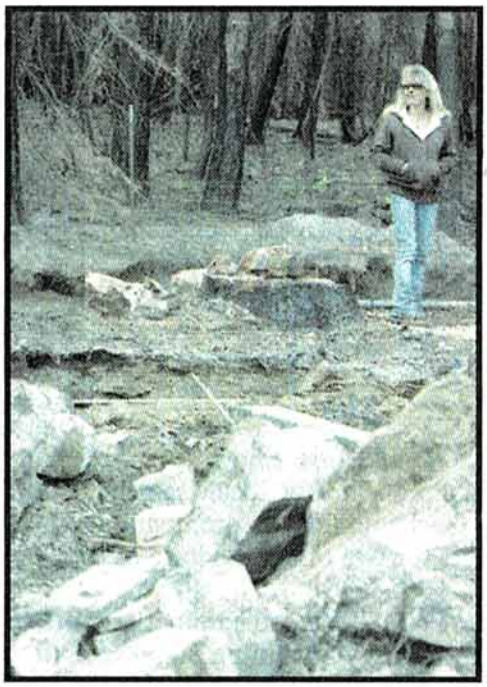
ABOVE: Virginia Beaudry talks about surviving the summer wildfires in Concow.

LEFT: A skidder used for logging works in the area around Yellow Wood Road in Concow on Tuesday. Concow residents are continuing to reclaim their lives following the summer wildfires. Many remain thankful this Thanksgiving.

If you can help

Two nonprofit organizations are still raising funds for fire recovery projects in the Concow area. The Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council and Concow Phoenix Project are both accepting donations to aid in the community's recovery process. Donations to both organizations are tax deductible. For more information on how to donate visit www.concowphoenix.org or www.buttefiresafe.org/yhfsc.php





FAR LEFT: Wildlife has returned to the Concow area as evidenced by this doe seen along Yellow Wood Road next to a burned tree.

LEFT: Ruth Joyner talks about how she and her husband, Henry, will rebuild and live on their property off Yellow Wood Road that was destroyed in last summer's fire.

Bill Husa/Staff Photos

don't think about going 4½ months with no phone."

Beaudry said she hasn't slept a single night straight-through since the blaze. She spends much of her days cleaning up the site of her old home and preparing a place for her new home. Her nights are spent in her trailer, trying to stay warm as the brisk fall weather creeps into the area.

"We're refugees, that's really what we are," Beaudry said. "We're not victims anymore. We're refugees."

But through all her pain there is a message of thankfulness and gratitude: that her beloved Concow community still exists.

Although it make look different, Beaudry is committed to staying in the place she says truly is home. For her, four walls and a door don't make a home— the people who accept her do.

"They are my mountain family," Beaudry said. "And they've helped me through."

While she could leave and begin her life anew in a different place — in a town that hasn't experienced the pain of a devastating fire — Beaudry said now more than ever she feels a connection to the people and the land. And that's something worth being thankful for.

"I don't mind living where the earth is healing," Beaudry said. "Because we're all healing with it."

Staff writer Toni Scott can be reached at 533-3131 or tscott@orovillemr.com.

Oroville Mercury Register
1-23-2009

Students help build sheds in Concow

By TONI SCOTT
Staff Writer

CONCOW — As rain poured from the sky above Concow Thursday morning, another outpouring could be witnessed on the ground — that of service and giving.

Nearly 50 Chico State University construction management students, still in the midst of their winter break, spent all of Thursday clad in trashbags and rain gear, building 12 sheds for those hit by the devastating Summer 2008 firestorm that ravaged Butte County.

By mid-morning, the students, along with some members of the Chico Noon Rotary Club, were hammering and raising the walls of sheds, with the wet weather doing little to damper the activity of the day.

"Everyone wanted to stick with it," said Adam Geyer, a recent Chico State graduate who helped to coordinate the project. "I thought we would lose a few people but everyone just put trash bags on, grabbed a hammer and got to it."

Geyer himself spent the wet morning helping to construct a 96-square-foot shed on fire survivor Dennis Butler's property.

As he stood next to the only remaining structure on his property — a kiln — the potter said the much-needed shed will help to secure the few belongings of his that weren't claimed by the flames of the Camp Fire.

Butler lives in a small fifth-wheel trailer on his Green Forest Lane property, with the majority of his belongings stored under the front of the trailer.

"This is the first real cover that I've had," Butler said. "I'll have somewhere to put my tools and boxes of stuff."

The shed's roof will keep his belongings dry and out of the cold, Butler said, until he is able to rebuild on the land, now surrounded by charred trees and blackened soil.

Despite the ever-present reminder of the fire's devastation, the Concow community was one full of life and hope Thursday, feelings Concow Phoenix Project member Sherry Butler said the shed project will help to spread.

The grassroots organization partnered with Chico State once students and staff began looking for a community-service project in lieu of working in New Orleans. In years prior, the school constructed projects for victims of Hurricane Katrina, but with a natural dis-

See CONCOW, 9A

Bill Husa/Staff Photo

Chico State University construction management students work to construct a shed in Concow on Thursday.

Continuing the mission of giving

Although Chico State University students built 12 sheds for Concow residents, the fire-ravaged community is still in desperate need of future construction projects. The university is planning to host another construction project in the Concow area over spring break and is currently seeking donations to aid in their efforts. To contribute to the project or learn more information please contact Terry Battle at 898-5963.

CONCOW: Learning to give

From 1A

aster in their own backyard, they decided to turn their attention toward their neighbors.

"It's incredible that people still remember us and have the fires on their minds after all these months," Butler said. "For Concow this means so much and we are so appreciative. Our little group couldn't have done something of this magnitude without Chico State."

The partnership between the college and the community is one that Chico State President Paul Zingg said he is always striving to foster.

As he stood in the rain near one of the construction sites, Zingg said there is a unique interdependence between the college and community-at-large — a relationship the Concow project exemplified.

"The university and the community are one," Zingg said. "This is a reminder of that. We want the community to know they can count on us and depend on the university for the talents and resources it has."

The university itself depended on the guidance of several leaders in the local construction industry to build the $1,500 sheds, including Howard Slater of Slater and Son Construction.

Slater, along with representatives from Modern Builders, Conroy Construction and Webb Homes, helped the students plan the logistics of the shed construction, giving them a "real-world" glimpse into their future careers.

But more than learning about metal roofing and wood beams, Slater, who financially-contributed to the project as well, said the students are learning what it means to be a part of a larger society.

"Giving back to the community is an important part of education," Slater said. "You've got to give back to people."

Teaching about giving is what construction management Professor Jim O'Bannon said is the cornerstone of any student's education.

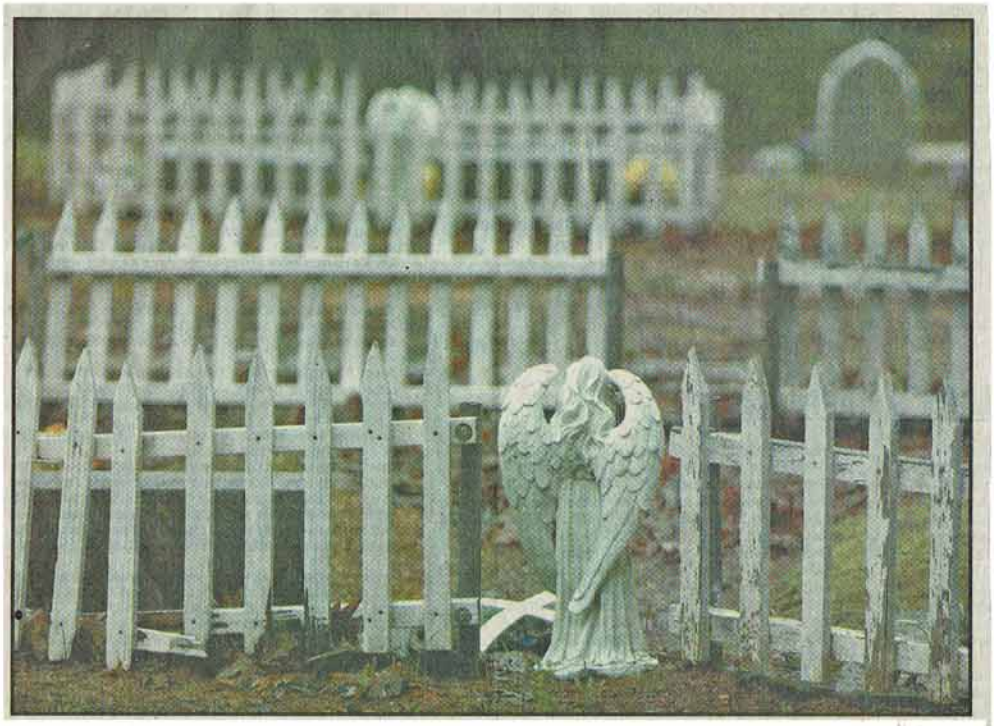
Although the students are contributing to a community in need, O'Bannon said the benefit to the students is far greater.

At the Lake Concow Campground where the students have stayed since Tuesday — even building a four-stall shower facility that will remain at the campground — O'Bannon said the lessons learned from this week's project will last a lifetime.

"This will carry with them forever," O'Bannon said. "Once they experience the joy of giving it's something they will have with them the rest of their lives.

"You've got to do it to feel it, but once you experience giving, it's a feeling you'll never forget."

Staff writer Toni Scott can be reached at 533-3136 or tscott@orovillemr.com.



Bill Husa/Staff Photos

The Yankee Hill Cemetery, where a Concow resident paid for a plot for his wife and was denied use of it.

Concow man fighting Yankee Hill cemetery over refused burial

By MARY WESTON
Staff Writer

CONCOW — When Kerry Rush's wife died, he planned to bury her in Yankee Hill Cemetery where he said they had bought a plot.

He found out that wouldn't be allowed, but it's a long, long story.

"They took my money for burying my wife in the cemetery, but when the time came, they refused her body for burial," Rush said.

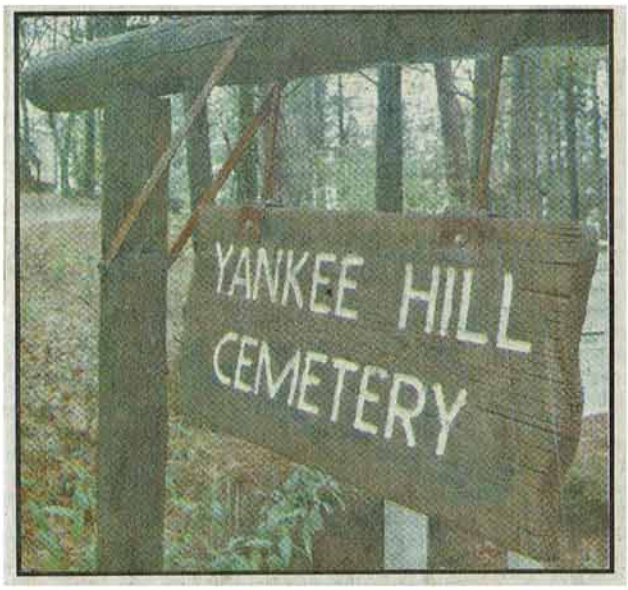
Despite several phone calls to board members and two letters to the cemetery post office box since January, Rush didn't get a refund until he filed in small claims court on Feb. 24.

But Rush said a $350 refund won't compensate for suddenly having to find a burial site 40 miles away from his home after his wife died.

"I just don't want this to happen to anyone else," Rush said. "They hit me at the lowest point in my life when my wife of 33 years died."

After Rush's wife, Audry, died at age 51, he called the telephone number of a committee member who sold him a plot. It was disconnected.

Rush finally located another committee member, told him his wife died and she had a plot in the cemetery.



He was told he couldn't have bought a plot because they aren't for sale, and that they hadn't lived in Concow long enough for Audry to be buried in the cemetery.

Rush, 54, said he is disabled and lives on a limited income. When he found out he couldn't bury his wife in the local cemetery, he had to find another burial spot and come up with more than $2,000 within a few days of her death.

Rush said he and Audry had met cemetery committee member Clifford Nimz, 80, in the cemetery in August 2008, when they knew she was dying. They both wanted her to be buried in the cemetery near their home.

Nimz showed them a plot where Audry could be buried, marked it off and took a check for $350, Rush said. Nimz also

told Rush he would have to pay to have the grave opened and closed, and he gave him the name of a couple of people authorized to use backhoes in the cemetery.

However, Nimz told them sometimes when they dig a grave, they find someone else buried there, so they have to move over to the next plot.

Audry died on Jan. 31. Rush called Nimz, but his phone had been disconnected. So Rush went to the hardware store owned by Gene Miller, 72, another committee member.

Rush asked Miller's son, Ralph, how he could contact his father, as his wife had died and she had a plot in the cemetery.

Ralph Miller asked Rush how long Audry had lived in Concow. Rush said six years. Ralph Miller told him — and two weeks ago told this reporter — Audry couldn't be buried in the cemetery because she hadn't lived in Concow at least 10 years, and plots aren't for sale, Rush said.

Still, Rush's receipt states, "Yankee Hill Cemetery gives permission to place Audry J. Rush to be buried in Yankee Hill Cemetery." The receipt is written for $350 for "Audry J. Rush's Resting Site."

Nonetheless, Gene Miller also said by telephone the Rushes didn't buy a plot.

"There's no plots for sale there," Miller said.

The cemetery that has been in existence since the 1800s has limited space and doesn't receive tax dollars, Miller said. They have to save space for longtime residents.

"No one is interested in the cemetery until they want to bury someone there," Miller said.

He said Rush had been too demanding.

"He's just one of those young fellows who thinks they get what they want and get it right now," Miller said.

Miller said the Rushes' money was a deposit to ensure a marker was placed on the grave within a year. In the past, Miller said someone had graded down the mounds of dirt showing where people were buried, and many graves don't have markers. So sometimes buried bodies are accidentally dug up, he said.

That's why they require a marker deposit and only let certain people dig graves.

But, Miller insisted Rush could get his money back by contacting Nimz. However, it was unclear how to contact Nimz. No one had his home phone number, and he didn't answer his cell phone.

At least that was the case until Feb. 29, when Nimz received notice that Rush had filed a suit in small claims court against the cemetery for $7,500.

That day, Nimz called Rush and offered a refund. Rush refused.

Nimz also returned this reporter's phone calls, saying plots aren't for sale, and the $350 was a donation for maintenance and a deposit for a marker.

However, Nimz said people only have to live in Concow five years to qualify for burial, so he doesn't know where Miller got the 10 years.

He had marked off a plot for Rush's wife, and she could have been buried there, Nimz insisted, except Rush and Miller got into argument.

"When he told Gene he had bought a plot, that got him into a dither," Nimz said. "None of the people on the mountain own this cemetery, and we can't sell plots because it's on private property."

But Nimz had reasons he had just contacted Rush. He said his home telephone was disconnected because of the fire in June, and then the storm knocked out his phone in February, and after that he went out of town for a while.

Additionally, he does n't get reception on his cell phone in Concow, he said, which is why he didn't return messages left at that number.

When Nimz got back into town, he said he received Rush's letter, and he called him that day. Then he mailed him a check.

Only Nimz and a .. older committee members are left to oversee the cemetery, he said.

"I'm 80 years old, and I'm tired of it," Nimz said. "I just want to retire and go fishing." I've been donating my time for 12 years, and I'm tired of it.

Nimz said people put up big tents and "party hearty" after a funeral. He thinks it good to celebrate rather than grieve, but he and a few committee members have to clean up afterwards.

Nimz said he is trying to find younger people to take over, but so far, no one is interested.

"No one wants to get involved, but when they want to bury someone, they get like a banty rooster," Nimz said.

Nimz said the woman who owns the property now is willing to give it to anyone who wants to maintain it as a cemetery.

"It should be preserved," Nimz said. "It has historic significance."

Russ Heimerich, public information officer for the California State Funeral and Cemetery Bureau, said the state regulates all private cemeteries that aren't special districts or city cemeteries, but Yankee Hill Cemetery isn't listed under the board's jurisdiction.

Heimerich said if a person believes they have been defrauded by a cemetery, they should report it to the local district attorney and file a complaint with the Cemetery and Funeral Bureau of the California Department of Consumer Affairs at 1-916-574-7870.

Rush's case will be considered in Butte County Superior Court small claims division on May 8.

Staff writer Mary Weston can be reached at 533-3135 or mweston@orovillemr.com.

Oroville Mercury Register
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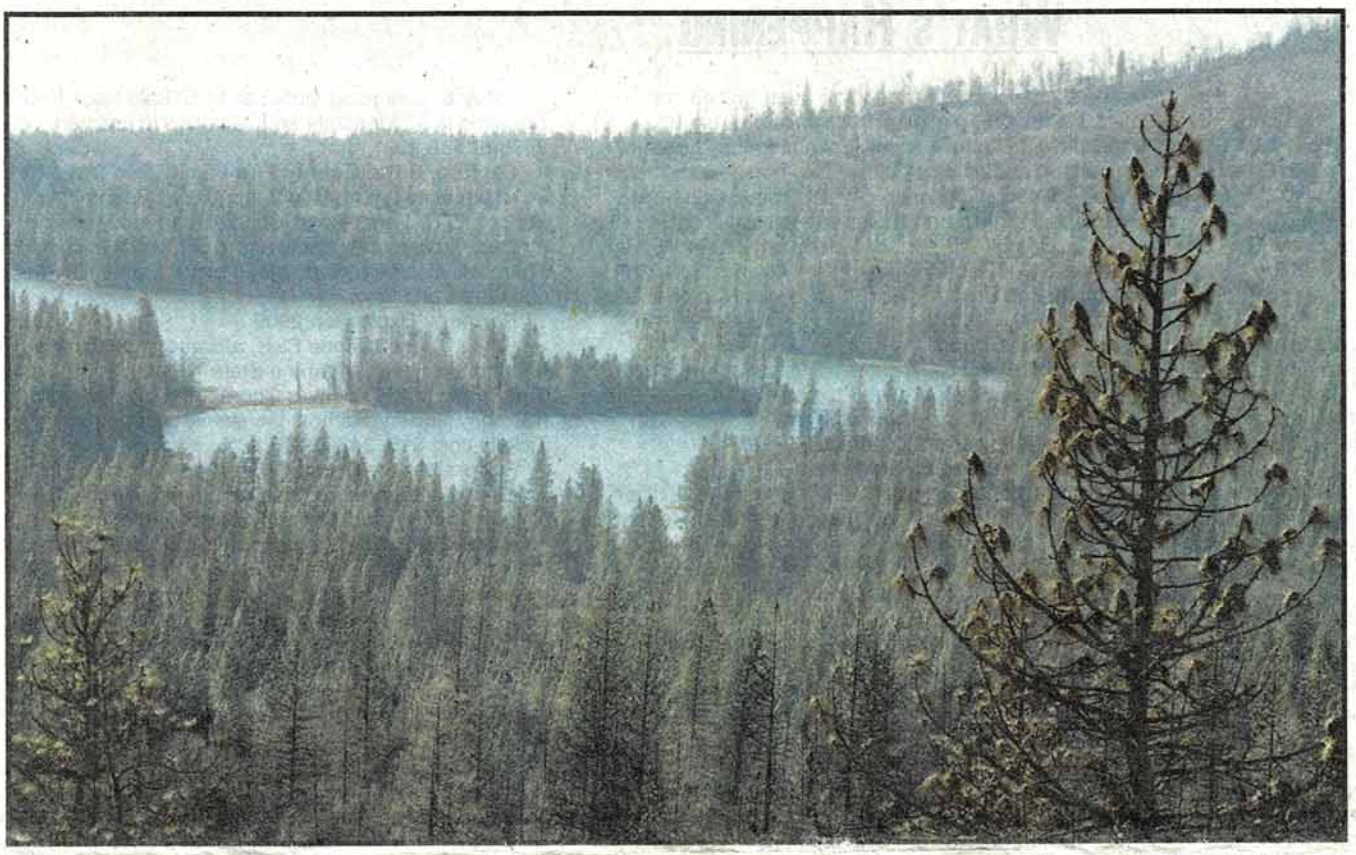


Bill Husa/Staff file photo

The Thermalito Water and Sewer District is talking about opening Lake Concow to recreation, but is also considering an option to possibly sell it.

Water district looks at recreation for Lake Concow

By MARY WESTON
Staff Writer

OROVILLE — The Thermalito Water and Sewer District is looking at the options for providing recreation at its Lake Concow, as well as the possibility of selling the lake.

Both items, although listed on the Tuesday board agenda, are still in the first stages of exploration with no specific plans, said General Manager Jayme Boucher.

At the meeting, Tony Salzarulo of the Lake Concow Campground said community members would like to have input in recreation plans for the lake.

"I want to be a part of it," Salzarulo said.

Salzarulo said he had been in Concow since 1960, and he and other residents have emotional ties to the lake. Additionally, Salzarulo said there are sensitive American Indian sites around the lake.

Salzarulo said he understands there are restrictions for swimming and recreation on the lake, and the district would have to meet a lot of regulations.

However, Salzarulo said he would like to operate swimming and possibly canoeing areas, if the district decides recreation can be provided.

The board voted to meet with the Paradise Recreation and Park District next week to discuss options for the park district to manage recreation facilities at the lake.

The board members postponed moving forward with plans to sell the lake until they explored recreation options.

The water district's attorney, Jeff Carter, said the lake is very expensive to operate, so the district had been discussing selling the lake.

Carter said the first action to sell the lake would be to appraise its value. However, he said the district would retain water rights to the lake.

Currently, the district owns land around the lake's perimeter. Only one other parcel of land owned by Sopper-Wheeler Co. has lake access, Boucher said.

Water stored at Lake Concow is piped to Lake Oroville, then released to the district's water treatment facility before it's delivered to homes and businesses in the Thermalito district.

Boating is restricted and swimming currently isn't allowed on the lake.

Staff writer Mary Weston can be reached at 533-3135 or mweston@orovillemr.com.

Chico Enterprise Record
7-7-2009

Counseling, individual efforts helping Concow 'move forward'

Staff Reports

CONCOW — After the Camp Fire that hit hard in Concow, a recovery fund was established.

Among the services offered through the fund is group counseling, with participants meeting about twice a month, explained Brenda Rightmyer, chairwoman of the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council.

Post-traumatic stress is still very high among residents, Rightmyer said, "which is why we're still offering the services."

The fire council formed 11 years ago, before the fires, she explained.

"They turned to us and said 'help,' so we did," Rightmyer said.

The Fire Safe Council set up community meetings and began helping residents network for resources and other things "to help people move forward."

She said there have been many residents, like Jim Hart, who have come out of the remains of the fire to help others.

"That's where Jim hit a really good project and a good theme that hit strongly with the community.

"It was great to see him grab onto something that gave him the strength to move forward. It brought out something new with him," she continued.

Other people, such as Amanda Pyle, of Concow, helped make other things happen. Pyle had knowledge of rules that could allow special building permit rules for owner-built home in rural areas. The county adopted the rules, called Title 25, for Concow and Yankee Hill for the next three years.

Other major concerns in the area include soil erosion. Residents were able to get rice straw bales through the Butte County Resource Conservation District.

"What you aren't seeing are the hidden heroes, people behind the scenes who have been real instrumental in helping things happen."

She said, in a way, the community has really blossomed.

The Concow/Yankee Hill area has long had community groups such as a historical society, ladies club, Fire Safe Council, etc., and these too have become stronger after the fire, Rightmyer said.

People came to the area for a variety of reasons. Many liked the solitude, living with nature, wanting to be alone.

After the fires, "there are a lot of people who need guidance or a push along, or a support that they can do this," she continued.

"That's why we've been having these meetings. People want to talk about it," she said.

Chico Enterprise Record
7-7-2009

SUMMER of FIRE
An ongoing series about the firestorm of 2008

A year later, Concow remains a changed place

By HEATHER HACKING
Staff Writer

CONCOW — Concow doesn't look or feel the way it did when Jim Hart and others decided this was where they wanted to make their home.

A year ago, trees filled the sloped hillsides along the winding roads, sparsely spaced with homes, creating a blanket of privacy.

Today, the trees are gone, their blackened trunks only a reminder of the past.

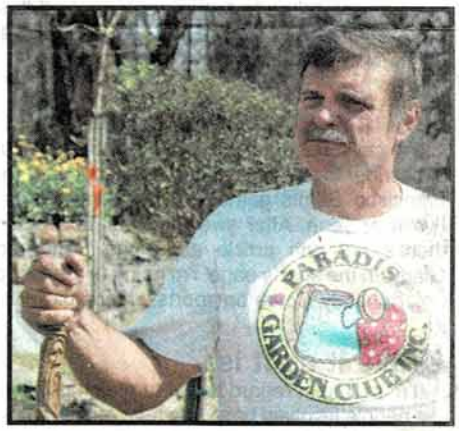
When flames hundreds of feet high bullied their way through the area in the wee hours of July 8, 2008, people literally fled for their lives.

Now they're rebuilding, bit by bit.

While more healing is yet to be done, plants that were blocked of sunlight are springing back, covering up the ash.

From Hart's property he can now watch as neighbors slowly reconstruct their homes. In the past, the view of his neighbors had been

See CONCOW, 9A



Bill Husa/Staff Photo

Concow resident Jim Hart continues to battle back from last year's fires near his home.

CONCOW

From 1A

blocked.

Hart, like many, had no insurance money to rebuild.

A year later, he has been able to find a trailer for his two acres near Cirby Creek, which he bought in 2005.

Down the way, on Yellow Wood Road, is a man who has been sleeping in his car.

Others who lived in Concow before the fire spent time living in a nearby campground. A few are still there this summer.

Several other residents stayed for months with neighbors.

But within the collective tragedy, the absence of the trees that made Concow isolated has opened up a new sense of community.

Hart's big effort has been in working with the Concow Garden Club, which became affiliated with the state and national garden clubs.

When members of the Magalia Pines Baptist Church spent weeks helping residents clean up after the fires, Hart became inspired and thought he and other members of his fire-scorched community could rally to help each other.

He took a landscape design class at Butte College to learn how to replant for fire prevention.

Now the Concow Garden Club has 20 members, who get together for potlucks and garden chat.

Spring Fever Nursery in Yankee Hill helped the group plant hundreds of coffee berry plants, known to be fire resistant.

Other plant donors include Sierra Gold Nurseries in Yuba City, Home Depot in Oroville, Little Red Hen Nursery and Ord Ferry Gardens.

SUMMER of FIRE
An ongoing series about the firestorm of 2008

Box Brothers Nursery donated about 300 15-gallon trees.

"I think the trees and plants give at least the illusion of hope," Hart said.

While most trees are still dead, "people's yards are starting to look better," he noted.

In his own yard, he has spread rice straw for erosion control and some trees have come back. He's planted fruit trees and a summer vegetable garden.

But that certainly doesn't mean the fire-burned area is anywhere near whole.

Hart said about a third for the former residents just "packed up and left."

Of the 275 houses in Concow, 202 burned, he said.

Other projects that didn't exist before the fires is the Rural Sprouts Program, where schoolchildren in the Concow area planted school gardens. Each student made two trays of sprouts, and took some home for their families.

For Hart personally, working with his community and being in the media spotlight has also brought him closer to his own family.

In late March an article appeared in the Enterprise-Record featuring Hart.

Among those who saw the article was Hart's stepbrother. The two hadn't seen each other since the funeral of Hart's dad about nine years ago.

Hart said his stepbrother called "and he gave me everybody's phone number."

This summer, the family came for a reunion over the Fourth of July weekend at Five-Mile Recreation Area in Chico's Bidwell Park.

"I saw my sister, who lives in Reno, (and) haven't seen her since 1988 when I lived in Hawaii," Hart said.

Hart said the next step is to increase fundraising to help residents rebuild. The Concow Fire Recovery Fund has been established, with a goal of raising about $1 million. So far donations total around $31,000.

Bill Husa/Staff Photo

A decorative frog in Jim Hart's garden in Concow offers an inspirational message as he rebuilds from last summer's fires.

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Chico Enterprise Record
7-8-2009

Becoming a fire survivor

By TONI SCOTT
Staff Writer

SUMMER of FIRE
An ongoing series about the firestorm of 2008

CONCOW — There's a saying that time heals all wounds.

For Virginia Beaudry, a year isn't nearly long enough to heal the trauma she still endures from last summer's horrific firestorm.

Though she has come far since the Camp Fire furiously swept through her small mountain community 12 months ago, Beaudry said she and the rest of Concow are still healing.

"It's only been a year," Beaudry said. "We're all still going through the healing process."

For Beaudry, that process started when she was let back in to see the devastation of the place she called home for so many years.

On July 14, 2008, Beaudry reached the pile of ash that was once her house, digging through the charred mess of the two-story cabin that stood on three acres on Yellow Wood Road less than a week before.

At that time, it took all the strength Beaudry had to contain her tears.

Sobbing at the loss of her precious buckskins that she was accustomed to wearing daily, as well as the

See SURVIVOR, 7A

Concow resident Virginia Beaudry surveys land near her property as she continues to battle back from last summer's fires in the foothill community.

Bill Husa/Staff Photo

SURVIVOR

From 1A

loss of her tools for her sandal-making business, Beaudry said at the time she didn't know how to pick up the pieces of her life.

"How do you start over again when everything is gone in one night," Beaudry said.

Remarkably, the 52-year-old artist has started over again, along with the hundreds of Concow residents whose entire livelihoods were destroyed in a matter of minutes that early morning of July 8.

Although she said she felt alone and distraught in those first few months following the fire, Beaudry realized she didn't have to mourn alone.

With an entire community reeling from the Camp Fire's devastation, Concow was able to unite, and continues to stand together, facing their troubles as one.

"We're like a big old quilt now," Beaudry said. "The fire is what sewed us all together with solid stitching. There's a bond now that will last forever."

That bond has been created from attending group counseling sessions together to deal with post-traumatic stress, rebuilding homes alongside one another and simply serving as a support group to each other when the reality of the immense tragedy they all endured comes to light.

Beaudry said that reality is sometimes hard to bear, even now, and through tears she said she "still has hard days," especially when she looks at the now blackened landscape she and her bull mastiff Cami once loved to explore.

"I really miss the trees," Beaudry said. "I can't even talk about it now without breaking down. I miss the land so much."

Much of the landscape looks the way it did when the fire came through a year ago today. Blackened trees lie fallen on several of Concow's roads, ash can still be seen on the ground and the once thick vegetation now exposes ruins and rubble of countless homes.

But Beaudry refuses to leave the land despite the dreary view.

"Nature is my sanctuary and I love it. When something you love so much gets really, really hurt, you don't just leave it," Beaudry said.

Instead, Beaudry has embraced the positive aspects of the devastation, including the plethora of wildflowers and lupines that now mark the charred earth. The new life gives her motivation to move on.

"It's all how you look at it," Beaudry said. "I look at it every day and now I see new growth. It's joyous to see the wildflowers, to see the mushrooms. And without the trees blocking the view I now see the most awesome sunsets. There's always good and there's always bad. Your whole journey is about making choices. I choose to focus on the good."

That journey has included sorting through the ashes of her possessions, living in a trailer for nine months in the Lake Concow Campground, suffering countless sleepless nights, volunteering with recovery efforts, dancing out her trauma at classes in Chico and even writing poetry to cope with the devastation of the fire.

Soon after the blaze, Beaudry wrote several poems through group counseling, with one of the poems revealing a woman struggling with her identity following loss of all that she once knew.

"The last time I saw me, I was there. Now I look but see me nowhere," the poem, entitled "The Last Time I Saw Me," reads. "So sure I would return to myself standing there so strong. Now I look in the ashes, I look in the broken bits and pieces. I look at burnt bits of years gone by, but I see me nowhere."

Yet a year later, Beaudry said she has found herself once again, a strong woman, who is a fire survivor, rather than a fire victim.

"I've chosen to be a fire survivor," Beaudry said. "It's a choice everyone has to make. I was a fire refugee, a fire victim and now I am a survivor and am moving forward."

Moving forward means living in a new home, built just feet away from the house and possessions she lost. It also means starting to rebuild her sandal-making business — only under a new name that demonstrates Beaudry's transformation.

"I used to do all my art, for 20 some odd years, under the name Earth Girl Art," Beaudry said. "I changed that name to Woman of the Woods a few months ago. I'm no longer that girl. I've transformed through all of this into a woman."

That transformation includes a renewed outlook on wildfires, Beaudry said, and a different approach to the way she will respond, if and when another fire comes through Concow.

"I'm more prepared now," Beaudry said. "I think differently."

Beaudry said when she evacuated July 8, 2008, she grabbed very little of her personal belongings, leaving behind precious jewelry, her birth certificate, passport and more than 300 CDs — something she said she dearly misses.

"When you live without cable, music is really all you have," Beaudry said. "I lost all my music. Now I don't store them in their cases. I take them out and put them in a carrying case, so if I have to leave, they are all going with me."

Beaudry also stores all her medicine in a plastic travel bag, and no longer hides money in her home, like she used to.

And although the fire has left deep scars, Beaudry said she has a sense of peace about any future wildfires.

"I don't fear it," Beaudry said. "If it's going to happen, it's going to happen."

Beaudry's outlook is perhaps a testament to her strength and the strength of the Concow community.

Though many thought they could never fully recover, they have risen above the devastation with a renewed sense of community and courage.

Indeed some have left for less fire-prone areas. Some are still living in the campground, without a home to call their own. Some have rebuilt homes. All have survived a remarkable test of the human spirit.

Beaudry may not have known her own strength when she sorted through the remains of her home nearly a year ago, but today she sees herself scarred by the Camp Fire, but certainly not destroyed.

The flames may have consumed all that she once knew and all that she once lived for, but Beaudry said the fire also took away any insecurities she had about living alone, and gave her a family that continues to help her grow, learn and heal from the tragedy that has touched all of their lives.

"I'll carry this with me forever," Beaudry said. "I'm still hurt. But I'm not afraid anymore. I don't have to do it alone. I have a whole family of brothers and sisters now with me. It's all about rebounding. And I'm doing that."

Staff writer Toni Scott can be reached at 533-3136 or tscott@orovillemr.com.

Chico Enterprise Record
7-9-2009

RIGHT: A house is under construction along Yellow Wood Road in Concow where fires ravaged the area a year ago.

BELOW: Brenda Rightmyer of the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council talked about lessons learned from last summer's fires.

Bill Husa/Staff Photos

Lessons learned

Fire safe council's approach changes after Camp Fire

By TONI SCOTT
Staff Writer

CONCOW — Though some may see fire safe councils as entities that simply pass out informative pamphlets or brochures, the residents of Concow know all too well that the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council is so much more.

In the wake of the tragedy the July 8, 2008, Camp Fire brought to the small mountain community, the council has continued to rise to meet the needs of Concow residents — learning lessons along the way — and continuing to implement programs that help lessen the impact of wildfires.

Before July 8, 2008, the council was focused on fuel breaks and dooryard education to help prevent wildfire destruction. Today, those activities are still a vital part of the council's mission, but council members have also learned what it takes to help a community after a wildfire disaster.

"We've become post-fire recovery experts," said Brenda Rightmyer, managing director for the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council.

See LESSONS, 7A

Chico Enterprise Record
7-9-2009

LESSONS

From 1A

Rightmyer and her all-volunteer staff were among the first to arrive in Concow following the intense firestorm that claimed one life and 206 homes last July.

Hitting the ground running, the council immediately began hosting community information sessions to let residents know where to find food and water, where the fire had hit and how to begin to pick up the pieces from the lives they once knew.

"We had an immediate response," Rightmyer said. "We knew we had to get in and help our community."

That help has been ongoing this past year, with the council organizing cleanup efforts and other recovery resources while still focusing on fire prevention.

In the midst of raising money to help provide propane, fuel and food to fire victims and offering grief counseling services, Rightmyer said the council has continued to promote defensible space, visiting Concow homes and encouraging residents to clear vegetation around their houses.

> *"We're focusing on becoming a more fire-wise and fire-safe community."*
>
> **Brenda Rightmyer**
> *Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council*

In addition, Rightmyer said much attention has been spent on the materials used to re-build new homes, ensuring that they are less fire prone than others.

"We're focusing on becoming a more fire-wise and fire-safe community," Rightmyer said.

The council has also continued to focus on building fire breaks, with crews currently working on a break on Crain Ridge Road.

Rightmyer said several of the council-created fuel breaks successfully halted flames in the Camp Fire while untreated land adjacent to the breaks saw a 100 percent tree mortality rate.

"We had the ability to influence the fire trail and how the fire behaved," Rightmyer said. "People can see that and see that fuel breaks do work."

Rightmyer also counts the water source identification as a successful point of the Camp Fire.

Since Concow does not have a fire hydrant system, firefighters are forced to find other water sources to fight flames.

Following the 2001 Poe Fire, Rightmyer said Concow recognized the need to identify water sources in their area, marking them with big "W" signs.

"They have paid off in several fires," Rightmyer said. "Having those made a difference. They're so small, but so significant."

Even with the success of the fuel breaks and water sources, though, 60,000 acres in the Concow area succumbed to flames, showing Rightmyer the council needs a stronger presence in the fire-prone community.

"The fire hit the hardest in an area that we didn't have the strongest influence," Rightmyer said. "It made us realize that there were places where we needed to build more relationships."

Rightmyer said perhaps the biggest lesson Concow learned is that fire is inevitable in their community.

Rightmyer said the Camp Fire was "definitely a situation where firefighters needed to fight fire with fire" when they started the burning operation to keep flames from jumping the West Branch of the Feather River.

Unfortunately, winds picked up, humidity dropped and the flames escaped the control of firefighters with the blaze ripping through Concow.

"It was a real eye-opener," Rightmyer said. "We learned we need to be prepared to fight fire suppression efforts as well. It made us look at how much more we need to take responsibility to protect our own community and what we can do better to lessen the impact of any fire."

And though Concow is still suffering from the impact of the Camp Fire, Rightmyer said the blaze only strengthened the community, and the fire safe council that seeks to serve them.

"The positive of the fire is that it did bring all of us closer together," Rightmyer said. "We've been in the community a long time and people know now even more to look to us for help."

Staff writer Toni Scott can be reached at 533-3136 or tscott@orovillemr.com.

Council still needs help with fire recovery

The Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council is still in need of financial donations to help fire recovery efforts from the July 2008 Camp Fire. Donations can be made electronically at: www.buttefiresafe.org/yhfsc.php or sent by mail to P.O. Box 4153, Yankee Hill, CA, 95965. For more information contact the council at 534-4179.

Still smoldering

One year after the fires, Concow is just starting to rebuild

By Jason Cassidy

A full year has passed since wildfires devastated the tiny community of Concow. But if you drive up there today and stand on the slope of the foothills on the north side of the Concow basin, you would think the fires had just happened yesterday.

Little is left of the dense forest that once dominated the countryside. In its place, in every direction, are sad groves of charcoal poles that offer no protection from the summer heat.

Scattered about this depressing landscape are people trying to hang on. Some are living in trailers amid the destruction, while others are beginning to rebuild on sunburned parcels that have been almost completely clear-cut.

This was the frontline. This is where last summer's Camp Fire started devouring Concow on the morning of July 8. By the time the flames died down, the firestorm had taken one man's life, wiped out 202 homes and destroyed 60,000 acres.

The Concow fires were far from the only ones in California last summer. In fact, by early August more than 6,000 lightning strikes had conspired with drought and wind to create 2,006 fires that took 15 lives, destroyed hundreds of homes and scorched 1.2 million acres up and down the state.

DEVESTATION
June McClane stands in the spot where the home she hand-built over seven years was wiped out during the 2008 wildfires.
PHOTO BY JASON CASSIDY

On the cover
Concow musician Garr1son took 30 years to build his home and studio by himself, and progress has been slow as he works alone to clean up.

Singling out Concow isn't meant to suggest that the loss of homes in that one small area caused any greater suffering than did the loss of the 21 homes destroyed in Oroville's Ophir Fire or the 87 burned down in the arson-sparked Humboldt Fire in lower Paradise.

But as a community, Concow was hit harder than any other in the North State. More than half of this small community's residents lost their homes. A year later, the vast majority of them have barely begun

rebuilding.

Last summer's smoke has cleared out of the valley and out of the minds of many in the North State. And residents and volunteers have done a Herculean amount of recovery work in the fire's aftermath. But, in ways both glaring and subtle, the fire is still burning for the people of Concow.

"I just had to come back."

Sarah Salisbury was in Beijing when the winds changed. She remembers sitting in a hotel room in early July 2008 reading e-mail updates from a fellow Concow resident about the status of the wind and the fires.

"[I came] back four days after the fire," she says.

We're in her dusty Suburu station wagon winding back and forth down Concow Road with the windows down. It's a fairly hot Sunday afternoon in late June, one year after the Camp Fire. As she drives, Salisbury talks about moving to this rugged area during the 1970s—building her own home, birthing her daughter in it, and happily living off the grid with her fellow "Mountain Family" back-to-the-landers.

As we head deeper into Concow on what Salisbury calls the "Devastation Tour," it's striking how bucolic the scenery is. There are signs of fire, for sure: some charcoal-covered trees felled back from the road in spots, and farther on huge swaths of brown cut into mountain slopes in the distance. But the immediate environment is surprisingly lush. The houses along the first few miles of Concow Road are intact and surrounded by green, and the area around the southeastern shore of Concow Reservoir is pristine.

NEW FRONTIER
The Concow wilderness that Green Forest Lane used to wind through won't be fully regrown for generations.
PHOTO BY JASON CASSIDY

As we turn right onto Yellow Wood Road and drive away from the main road, however, the view changes dramatically. We make our way up the bumpy dirt road, and the fire's wrath shows itself. Grasses, a few seedlings and some wildflowers are poking up, but from this valley up toward the small mountain pass where Yellow Wood comes to a T with Kakini Road, almost everything is dead.

Only two homes back here survived, thanks to various factors that included maintained defensible space, fire-resistant metal roofs, fire gel (a last-minute retardant applied to the outside of a structure) and what can only be called pure luck.

The naturally effusive Salisbury's voice sobers as she surveys the condition of properties belonging to friends and neighbors. One man has restored a fire-damaged section of his house, and down the road a car is parked in the middle of burned-out pad. One surprisingly shady lot has "don't cut" marked on a tree, while a particularly devastated parcel is marked by a giant pile of burned-out logs.

"Look at the size of her tomato plants!" Salisbury says, astonished at how a friend's garden is flourishing in the midst of so much burned-out vegetation.

Salisbury points to the property of a friend, 17-year Concow resident June McLane. Save for a few scorched trees and an out-of-place-looking newly built shed (one of 13 sheds built for community members via the Concow Phoenix Project/Chico State Construction Management Department's Adopt-a-Shed program), the lot is bare.

Salisbury reverently remembers McLane's woodworking expertise and how beautiful—inside-and-out—her carefully hand-built little cabin was.

McLane is currently house-sitting for friends near the entrance to Yellow Wood Road, and on our way back down Salisbury and I stop in.

"It was kind of like my masterpiece," the plain-spoken McLane says about her 200-square-foot home. With arthritis taking hold, the 59-year-old woodworker had saved the best for last, creating an exquisite retirement cabin for herself. "I wanted to hang up my hammer."

McLane is not going to rebuild. She just paid her deposit and first month's rent on a rental in "the city," meaning Chico.

"I gave myself a year to make my decision. I wanted to be realistic, rational."

While McLane seems open to a new adventure in a new environment, she knows she'll be starting her life over again: "Down there, I don't have anything."

The fire and losing her home weren't the hardest part of the past year—"I didn't really feel a lot of emotion," McLane says. "It's just gone." The real challenge for her has been dealing with the frustrating aftermath, particularly with insensitive loggers who took her trees and left her property a debris-strewn, rutted mess, and with Butte County.

The county has waived fees for residents who had permitted homes before the fires. But for those like McLane, whose homes weren't permitted, pulling together the thousands of dollars in permits to start over is prohibitive, especially given costs of having to clean up one's property and paying for life's essentials while doing it.

In March, with input from community members and the Concow Phoenix Project (of which Salisbury is a founding member), Butte County adopted Title 25, a limited-density owner-built housing code, for the Concow area for a three-year trial period.

Tailored for rural areas and already in effect in places with housing in similar terrain, such as Mendocino and Humboldt counties, the code relaxes the requirements for things like hiring a contractor, required room dimensions and acceptable materials, thus allowing owners to design and build their own homes as well as mill wood from trees damaged during the fires. In addition, it gives homeowners the option of choosing not to be connected to an electrical power source.

CONCOW RISING
Chico State Construction Management students erect sheds for fire victims.
PHOTO BY ANTHONY SALZARULO

Of course, applicable permit fees are still required, making the new code of minor consequence to property owners whose destroyed homes weren't up to code in the first place.

After talking to McLane, Salisbury takes me further up Concow Road. We pass more dirt roads—Ishi Trail, Cirby Court, Green Forest Lane. Down each country back road, as soon as the main road is out of sight, new catastrophes reveal themselves. It's a testament to a reality of fighting fire in wilderness areas: the more difficult the approach—especially when there's only one escape route—the more difficult it is for firefighters to protect property.

Salisbury's cabin was destroyed as well. All that's left are remnants of a stone wall and some sheets of aluminum siding. She hadn't been living in Concow for awhile when the fires came through. Now retired, the former drama teacher lives in Paradise, drawing income from a Chico rental. She has no plans for her Concow property at this point, other than clearing out burned trees and milling and stockpiling some lumber.

"These mountains used to be places of great mystery," she says, surveying a transformed panorama that will take generations to regenerate. "It's not just the house—the whole basin is our home."

Of the 138 destroyed residences about which the Concow Phoenix Project has been able to collect information, only one owner has rebuilt, another two or three have begun construction, five have erected manufactured homes and 13 have opted to move out of the area. That leaves at least 117 families living in temporary housing of some sort—rentals, trailers, campgrounds or with family or friends.

During last summer's wildfires, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger secured a presidential emergency declaration, bringing much-needed federal resources to aid firefighting efforts. Then, in the aftermath of the fires, he requested the fire zones be declared major federal disaster areas to qualify for funding to help with reconstruction. Based on findings of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, however, President George W. Bush denied the request.

FEMA doesn't release details of denied requests, but the agency pointed out the determination is based on a state's ability to provide resources and that the agency is there to assist with unmet needs. Given California's empty coffers and the obvious unmet needs of Concow's residents, it's hard to understand how both the request and two appeals were denied.

As a concession, the Small Business Administration made available low-interest, disaster-assistance loans for fire victims in the months after the fires. So far, 15 Concow applications have been approved, for a total of $1.6 million in loans.

With little financial assistance available, especially for low-income residents with no insurance benefits and no credit to secure SBA loans, Concow residents have had to rely heavily on themselves and the Concow Phoenix Project and the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council to fill the gaps in recovery assistance.

It should be noted that in the immediate aftermath of the fires, the county, community volunteers, local businesses and especially Southern Baptist Church disaster relief volunteers led by Magalia Pines Baptist Church pastor Doug Crowder were crucial in helping people clean up and attempt to get their lives in order.

The Concow Phoenix Project, a grassroots group of energetic residents, hit the ground running with a mission "to facilitate and support sustainability, rebuilding, community and fundraising" and has been a consistent force in the community since.

In addition to drumming up support for the Adopt-a-Shed project and the Title 25 building code, the group created a tool-sharing bank (located at the Lake Concow Campground, a hub of the community's recovery activity), established a recovery donation fund, and set up a Web site (http://concowphoenix.org) with an exhaustive list of information and resources for everything from land restoration to permanent housing to fire bulletin links.

For the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council, the Camp Fire marked a shift in its activities. Previously, the council was involved primarily in prevention and education, but as post-fire realities developed the group and its energetic leader, Brenda Rightmyer, saw a gap in addressing basic human needs, as well as restoration and reforestation. Since they were already established in the community, Rightmyer says, "that allowed us to take immediate action."

Brenda Rightmyer of Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council (left) and Sarah Salisbury of Concow Phoenix Project. PHOTOS BY JASON CASSIDY

The group set up a fire-recovery information center, organized regular community meetings, facilitated a California Department of Corrections chipping program, and set up the Concow Fire Recovery Fund. Money from the fund was used to install a mobile three-shower bathroom for fire refugees and to provide gas and propane vouchers for residents.

To date, the more than $30,000 raised has also been used for counseling services for residents, and plans for a youth-mentoring program are under way.

"Doing this stuff helps keep me moving forward," Rightmyer says while tending the YHFSC booth at the recent Wild Mountain Faire at the Lake Concow Campground. The 15-year Yankee Hill resident is handing free Western redbud saplings (donated by PG&E) and talking about the big item on the council's agenda.

"My wish is that we can find a sponsor or donor so we can start building Concow Cabins," Rightmyer says. Modeled after the Katrina Cabins constructed for displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina, the cabins would provide modest, 500- to 900-foot, fire-safe and code-compliant homes for those who can't afford to rebuild. To build 20 Concow Cabins, YHFSC is going to have to raise $1 million.

Less than a mile up Concow Road from Yellow Wood, George and Meralee Cox have been trying to start over. Each day of work over the past year brought new challenges.

"There certainly were days where I felt like I just wanted to walk away," says Meralee. "Every time we turn around, there's something in our way."

Sometimes the problems are huge, like when they had to sell approximately $30,000 worth of damaged trees to loggers for $1,700 because they weren't able to cut and truck them to the mill themselves.

Most of the time, however, the problems are more subtle, though no less challenging. Today, the neighbor across the way is doing some burning, and the air is getting smoky. Even inside the new modular home the Coxes erected in May, a faint campfire smell sneaks in, and Maralee confesses that smoke—in addition to sirens and helicopters—is an emotional trigger for her. "As fire season got closer, we all got a little stressed," she says.

Meralee has been attending the regular group-counseling sessions funded by the YHFSC since last fall.

"We were all a pretty big mess in November," she says about that time right after the county's Oct. 20 deadline for cleanup had passed, and the last of the huge donated bins was trucked away.

She guesses that, at its peak, when the group was meeting weekly, there were 15 or so participants. Now, a core of six or seven continues to come together every other week.

"It's our hope that as we learn about this recovery process," Meralee says, "we'll be able to help [others]."

Of course, the recovery process manifests in different ways for each person. George, a Vietnam War veteran, doesn't say much about the after-effects of the devastation, admitting that, like his painful wartime memories, he's just keeping his feelings inside.

The Coxes are relative newcomers to Concow. George, a recently out-of-work cabinet maker, moved here in 1998, and soon after tracked down Meralee—his former high school sweetheart—in Texas, moved her

out to California and married her in 2002.

The Cox property is up a driveway off the main Concow Road, just a half-mile from a fire station and one of the firefighter staging areas, and yet the couple still lost everything. They had insurance, but like many who live in secluded fire-prone areas with no fire hydrants, they were underinsured.

The Coxes are among the handful approved for one of the low-interest SBA loans. They were able to augment their insurance reimbursement (what was left after paying off the mortgage on the burned home) sufficiently to be able to put in the modular home, do some landscape rejuvenation and, in the near future, replace George's shop.

While the Coxes are relieved to be out of the trailer they had been living in for nine-plus months, they don't yet feel like they're at home.

Meralee and George Cox hold a shovel that survived the 2008 fires in front of their new home. PHOTO BY JASON CASSIDY

"It's sort of difficult to put your own personal stuff back in your home," Meralee says, explaining how it's hard to add the traditional touches—something as simple as curtains—that make a place a home. "You don't want to put too much emotional feeling into it."

A week before the Wild Mountain Faire, a benefit for the Concow Phoenix Project and the YHFSC, Salisbury steers the station wagon into the parking lot at the Lake Concow Campground. Volunteers are putting the finishing touches on some colorful, oversized insect decorations for the three-day live-music and camping fest to take place at the campground.

When the group realizes that we're on the "Devastation Tour," they gradually draw around and start telling their fire stories. Sue Evans, a boisterous, raspy-voiced blonde, didn't lose her home, but she recalls stepping out of the car and into the hot ash with a friend of hers, and fighting off aggressive pine beetles as they surveyed her friend's destroyed home.

Meralee Cox is there, and so is Troy Dewey, one of the campground's managers. He and campground co-manager Anthony "Tony" Salzarulo (a 49-year Concow resident and "unofficial mayor of Concow") lost two homes—the mobile they were living in down Ishi Trail, and the dismantled pieces of the house they'd recently moved to reassemble on their current property.

I return later in the week to sit in with Salzarulo and Dewey, both of whom were at the service of the community during the evacuations, serving meals and providing a safe place to stay. Soon, the rest of the volunteer crew joins us.

While every person has a different story, there's one thread that comes up in each one: As much as there is plenty to worry about in this still-early point in the recovery process, frustrations surrounding the circumstances leading up to and during the July 8 evacuations are still at the forefront of everyone's minds.

The two main issues are: the fact that, with typically strong down-canyon winds forecasted for 3 a.m. on July 8, there was backfiring happening between Concow and its northeastern neighbor Pulga on the night of July 7; and that, with wind and backfires on the horizon, residents weren't given more time to evacuate.

Unfortunately, the strong winds (gusts of 20-40 mph throughout the morning) came earlier than expected, causing spotting across the backfire line and sending it and the Camp Fire behind it roaring uncontrollably

toward Concow in the early morning hours. A zero-hour evacuation ensued, forcing residents, many of whom had started unpacking from a previous evacuation in light of assurances that the fires were coming under control, to flee their homes again.

Later, I talk with CAL FIRE spokesman Scott McClain to get a response. "Winds weren't acting up for a long period of time," says McClain, adding that backfire or not, "Camp Fire was coming down.

"You have the stigma of the backfire," he says, acknowledging the community's concern. "We do not take this lightly."

Stigma or not, there are many who disagree with the tactic.

Dancing at 2009 Wild Mountain Faire.
PHOTO BY JASON CASSIDY

"I don't think it was a good idea," says Rightmyer, voicing the sentiment of many Concow residents. And, if the backfiring hadn't occurred, "[the evacuees] probably would have had a little more time."

A couple days later, on the second day of the Wild Mountain Faire, Salzarulo, Dewey and the rest of the volunteers stay very busy keeping the fest's engine running. Those locals in attendance don't seem to have devastation on their minds. In fact, for one weekend at least, their burdens are being lifted by several hours of food, drink and music under the green canopy of this preserved campground.

Salzarulo seems genuinely at peace. "Me and Troy are the luckiest people in Concow," he says. "I'm done with the fire—I'm over it."

When it's suggested that a possible title for this story might be the Phoenix Project's own slogan, "Concow Rising," the unofficial mayor suggests instead, "'Concow Rising!' With an exclamation point."

After the fire:

Concow Phoenix Project
Fire survivor resources and info, plus recovery-needs survey (beginning August 10).
(530) 877-2381
http://concowphoenix.org

Phoenix Fire Story Project
Recording project of stories from the 2008 Lightning Complex Fires
Contact Rebecca at (530) 588-6175 to share.

Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council
Fire prevention, evacuation plans, chipper program, resident assistance www.buttefiresafe.org/yhfsc.php

You can help:
Donate money to the recovery effort at Concow Phoenix and YHFSC sites.