I happened to be at the Visitor Center on Friday, September 18, the day the Park reopened after the Butte Fire closure. It was a slow day, as many did not even know we were open again. In fact, a few of our visitors did not even know there was a fire or that the Park had been closed. Imagine our surprise when fire engines from Redondo Beach arrived. Not to worry: they had been released from duty, were on their way home and just wanted to see what it was they had saved. The firefighters walked the North Grove trail and were impressed. We, of course, were impressed at the great distance they had come to protect us, and told them so.

I’m sure we all have our thank-you stories to tell about the heroic efforts of Cal Fire and fire departments local and statewide. But as this is the season of Thanksgiving, I want to say thank you to many more.

Thank you, Wendy Harrison, for almost three decades of service to the Park, both as a CTBA employee and as a California State Parks employee. You will be missed, and we will do our best to make sure your legacy continues. Come back and visit often, please.

Thank you, Sue Hoffmann, Debbie McGee, Jill Ogburn and Jill Micheau - our CBTA staff. You make CBTA run, and we couldn’t do it without you. You kept your heads during the evacuation, you saved important documents and you worked from home when they wouldn’t let you into the Park.

Thank you, George Leong, Joan Allday, Bunny Firebaugh, Dexter Hardcastle, Betty Watson, Vida Kenk, Marcy Crawford, Sanders Lamont and Rod Smith. You are truly a working board, and it is a pleasure and honor to serve with you.

And finally, thank you. You members and docents do the work of making this park a truly inspiring experience for young and old, for Californians and Americans and citizens of this world. Calaveras Big Trees State Park is a wonderful place to serve, and we all delight in what we do. Still, I thank you.

Happy Thanksgiving and Happy Holidays.
Winter Wonderland Carnival Returns to Big Trees

By Bunny Firebaugh

Calaveras Big Trees Association announces the 6th annual Winter Wonderland on Tuesday, December 29, 2015, from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., regardless of weather. Activities for this much-anticipated annual celebration will be centered around historic Jack Knight Hall.

Horse-drawn wagons will carry delighted riders around the Big Trees Meadow. Children can create craft projects and play snow-related games. Care to try some snowshoeing? Guides will show you how and take you on a tour. Come in from the cold, sit beside the blazing fireplace, sip hot chocolate or hot cider and snack on homemade cookies.

TICKETS:

Advance tickets are $12.50 for adults and $8.50 for children 12 and under. The ticket includes entrance into the Park if tickets are purchased online.

This event has been a sellout for the last few years, so make sure you buy your tickets early. We have a lot of fun, no matter what kind of weather Mother Nature gives us.

Tickets are available online at www.bigrees.org.

Tickets at the door, if available, are $15.00 for adults and $10.00 for children twelve and under, plus the $10.00 Park entrance fee.

Please call 209-795-1196 for more information.

Come enjoy this wonderful event!

What’s New in the Visitor Center?

By Jill Ogburn

Guess what, we have a new retail assistant! This one is a keeper! She is also a docent who has volunteered in the Visitor Center. Her name is Jill Micheau. So we now have two Jills in the Visitor Center, which should make it pretty darn easy for everyone!

We had a little excitement with the Butte Fire and had to close for six days, but we came out of it very well. Our new Visitor Center is quite resilient. Our numbers were still very good, even being closed for so many days!

Our Annual Docent Appreciation Sale, also known as the Annual Winter Sale, will be held on Friday November 20 this year. There will be hot cider and cookies over in the Warming Hut during the sale. The sale will continue through Friday, November 29, with a smaller discount than on that first day, for all our wonderful docents who give us so much of their time. We truly appreciate everything you do for our Association.
Docent Appreciation Sale!

Annual Winter Sale!

This year's annual CBTA Holiday Sale will take place on Friday, November 20, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in our Visitor Center. CBTA members, docents and State employees who shop that day will save 40% on most items and 30% off books.

The sale is open to the public on Saturday, November 21, and goes through November 29, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. CBTA members, docents and State employees who choose to shop those days will receive a 20% discount along with the public. This is CBTA’s way of saying “Thanks!” for all you do for Calaveras Big Trees State Park. So come and get great deals on all your holiday needs while supporting Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

There will be hot cider and cookies over in the Warming Hut during the sale. We truly do appreciate everything you do for our Association.

*Remember to bring in your canned or boxed food for the Annual Calaveras Resource Connection Holiday Food Drive!*

Park Update

By Gary Olson

The holiday season is quickly descending upon us. Are you ready?

The Park is experiencing a transition of personnel. Wendy Harrison, our long time interpretive person, is retiring; Patrick Caldwell, our maintenance supervisor, is retiring; our Park maintenance assistant position is still vacant; and many of our seasonal park aides are coming to the end of their seasons. We will be trying to fill these positions, but in the meantime, we will continue to maintain the Park operations with minimal disruption.

We anticipate rain this winter, and with the rain we will begin burning the slash piles throughout the Park when we are permitted to do so. The Park will remain open during our pile burning, but there may be smoke in the air. Visitors will be informed of the burns, and we will do our best to help educate the visitors on the process to of restoring forest health.

We have installed temporary ropes around the base of many of the sequoias to prevent people from climbing on the base, which is harming the trees. We will be increasing ranger patrols on the trail to address the dog issues and educate people about the damage to the trees.

I look forward to the holidays and hope to see everyone as we celebrate with family and friends in the community, at the Park, and at our special events.

See you in the Park.
Wendy Harrison Retires

By Marcy Crawford

A winter in her parents’ cabin in Arnold thirty years ago turned out to be a crossroads in Wendy’s life. With a degree in environmental studies and biology and a teaching credential, she had spent five years working as a naturalist with the outdoor science programs for the Marin County Office of Education. She loved the work, but was ready to move on from living in a camp setting. Wendy took that winter off to step back and reassess her life.

Calaveras Big Trees State Park drew her to it like a magnet. She was about to apply for a job at the kiosk when someone told her there was an opening for an interpreter with the Calaveras Big Trees Association. She was hired and she spent the next twenty years as an interpreter with CBTA. In 1988 she started Family Day to give back to the community for their support of the Park. As Wendy said, “Back in those days there wasn’t much to do up here in the mountain communities, so Family Day was a boon to the area.” Even though today there are many activities available in the area, Family Day has continued to grow and remains a successful annual event.

Wendy met her future husband, Resource Ecologist Wayne Harrison, at the Park. They were married in the middle of Beaver Creek on a large flat rock with bagpipes playing. The reception was held at the group campground. Docents chopped, peeled and did all the prep work for Jenny Baxter, the caterer who put it all together.

Three years later Katie came along, and the family lived in Park housing until Katie was thirteen. Today Katie is a college senior studying environmental science and GIS (geographic information systems) who is planning on attending grad school in a few years. She wants to work with Helitack Rescue in Yosemite or maybe a fire crew in Washington before her next stint in school. Katie has worked for the last two summers for the US Forest Service monitoring fires on federal lands that are allowed to burn.

After twenty years with CBTA Wendy transitioned to a State employee and has been an Interpreter 1 with the State for the last nine years.

So what does Wendy want to do in retirement? She is learning how to play the cello, wants to do telemark skiing. (That’s skiing with alpine skis that permit the heel to go up and down.) She is doing yoga and wants to resume singing with the Mountain Melody group, as long as it doesn’t interfere with her travel plans.

Now that the nest is empty, it is the perfect travel time. Wendy and Wayne will spend Thanksgiving in Bellingham, Washington. They plan to be in San Francisco with Katie on her winter break and then travel to the Galapagos Islands in April. They want to backpack the John Muir Trail and do a raft trip on the Grand Canyon.

They both are spending time remodeling Wayne’s family vacation home that was built by his grandfather. His parents retired in the house located between Sebastopol and Bodega Bay. In their retirement Wendy and Wayne will lead double lives by living in both locations.

Wendy says when the dust settles, she wants to work as a docent on the Park’s trail maintenance crew. She also wants to stay involved with the California Naturalist Program.

Wendy has been a wonderful asset to the Park, the docents and CBTA. We will all miss our interpreter, but we warmly welcome her back as a docent.
The Impact of Drought on the Giant Sequoias

By Peter Ralston

The present drought in California is the most prolonged in nearly two thousand years. In a study of tree ring width of fallen giant sequoias (Sequoiadendron giganteum) in the central region of the Sierra, extending from Yosemite to Sequoia National Park, Hughes and Brown (Climate Dynamics 6: 161-167, 1991) found evidence for an average of about five drought years per century, with a maximum of twelve droughts in one century, over the past two millennia. Tree ring width that is less than 10% of average has been shown to correlate with extreme drought. The present drought is now in its fourth year. This, combined with the presence of higher than normal annual temperatures, has raised concerns about the potential for damage to the giant sequoias.

Drought stress has caused an increase in mortality in many conifers across the West, with ponderosa pine, sugar pine, white pine and incense cedar being major examples. In a recent study (Bennett et al. Nature Plants. 1: 1-5, 2015), the authors concluded that taller trees suffer most during drought in forests worldwide.

Vulnerability to drought stress increases with tree height because tall trees have to lift water to a greater height against the pull of gravity and therefore face greater hydraulic challenges. Large trees with crowns in or above the canopy are exposed to higher solar radiation than those in the understory. This may become a liability during drought, when lower water availability and higher evaporative demand make it more difficult for canopy-top leaves to regulate leaf temperature. Also, increasing drought stress can make trees more susceptible to insect attacks, particularly by bark beetles. However, unlike most conifers, giant sequoias are not usually subject to insect attack.

Thus, the evidence shows that tall trees are particularly susceptible to drought and abnormally warm temperatures. Less clear, however, is the effect on the giant sequoias themselves, partly due to the fact that few studies have included them. Experienced observers have noted some localized pockets of limb die-back in a few giant sequoia groves, but there are, as yet, no reports of unusual giant sequoia mortality.

We do not know the reason for their apparent ability to survive major droughts. A possibility is that the vertical extent of their root system may be much greater than previously described. One researcher, Todd Dawson of UC Berkeley, observed that a small landslide in the southern Sierra Nevada exposed giant sequoia roots about 70 feet below ground level. If this is more generally the case, it would give giant sequoia roots a reach into the water table much deeper than that of many other species.

As of the fall of 2015, the present severe drought and abnormally high temperatures have not been found to have a lethal effect on the giant sequoias. The reasons for this are not known. These magnificent trees have survived many severe climate changes over the millennia. We do not yet know how well they will survive this present assault.

I wish to thank Wayne Harrison for the information that he provided for the preparation of this article.
Butte Fire and the Big Trees

By Sanders Lamont

The Butte Fire, which threatened but did not harm Calaveras Big Trees State Park, provided a learning experience for Park and CBTA staff members.

When the fire first erupted 25 miles or so away, it seemed a long distance, and was watched with interest but little real concern for the Park. But by the second day, with strong winds blowing flames across the Moklumne River and mountainous ridges, and the fire marching swiftly southward toward the Park and the entire Highway 4 corridor, all of a sudden things looked much more serious.

Most of the territory north of Highway 4 immediately came under a mandatory evacuation order. Translation: get out right now. The property south of the highway, including the historic North Grove area and most of the Park’s facilities, was placed under an “advisory evacuation.” Translation: be ready to leave on a moment’s notice.

Heavy smoke and falling ash were present, and the discomfort level climbed quickly. Residents surrounding the Park began leaving, jamming the only escape route to the point that the drive to Murphys -- normally about 30 minutes -- took some evacuees as much as three hours.

CBTA President Paul Prescott kept in touch by phone with the staff in the Visitor Center, sensed the growing danger and directed them to grab moveable vital records and cash registers, close the Visitor Center and head for safety immediately. They all got out promptly.

Meanwhile, Park Superintendent Gary Olson ordered the Park closed. Rangers checked all the parking areas and trails, cleared the campgrounds, and made sure no stragglers were left behind. Once the people were out of harm's way, Park staff, augmented by help from other districts, immediately began doing what they could to protect the giant sequoias by clearing brush back from the base of the trees, making sure no “fire ladders” would be available to carry fire into the crowns of the rare trees if flames made it into the Park.

Meanwhile more than 4,000 firefighters were on the lines a few miles away. Scores of bulldozers cut new large firebreaks just north of the highway, and dozens or aircraft were dropping retardants all along the most active spots. That massive effort, and a brief change in wind and weather conditions, helped bring the fire under control over the next few days.

As things returned to normal fairly quickly, the Park and Visitor Center reopened, but the lessons learned by CBTA include the following:

- The need for a clear procedure in such emergencies needs to be discussed, coordinated with Park staff and understood ahead of time;
- All staff members of CBTA need to be fully informed of what to do before there is an emergency, how to be safe and react appropriately.

Plans to make sure that is done are already under way at CBTA.

Quick action by Park staff in the emergency will have a lasting beneficial effect upon the North Grove trees in terms of fire safety. The events made clear the need for the current underbrush clearing project and a continuing need for controlled burning to reduce the impact of wildfires in the future.

For CBTA and everyone who cares for the Park, it was a learning experience. Next time we’d prefer it not be quite so scary.

The area around the giant sequoias was cleared of brush and forest litter to prevent any flames from climbing to the branches.

Photo by Claudia Beymer
It’s Time to Renew Your Membership

By Paul Prescott

Thank you for being a member of the Calaveras Big Trees Association this year. Our sources of funding are the bookstore and gift shop in the Visitor Center, your membership dues and donations, and fun fundraisers. With your support we fund the interpretative and educational programs of the Park, especially throughout the summer, with programs for youth and adults alike. We pay for seasonal park aides, who work at the Visitor Center. We bring out two interns for the summer. We provide free educational seminars. We awarded five scholarships this year, including a new one in honor of Steve Stocking. In addition to all that, we pay four part-time employees, who run the store and handle the day-to-day business of CBTA.

We also save up funds to spend on big projects. We raised $500,000 over several years to help build the Visitor Center. Now that it is built, (Can you believe that it’s been open two years now?) we are setting our sights on other projects. Would you like to see a new kitchen in Jack Knight Hall? A new campfire center? A camp store?

Calaveras Big Trees Association is committed to providing Park visitors with the best interpretive program possible. This has been done with support from all of you, and we hope you will consider renewing your membership for 2016. There are many membership categories with various incentives, including a 20% discount at the CBTA gift shop.

And so, I ask you to renew your membership in CBTA. You may fill out the form on this page, complete a CBTA brochure and mail it in, or renew online at http://bigtrees.org/get-involved/cbta-membership/.

Thank you for your continued support.
The newly formed CBTA Advisory Council has already met twice this year, first in May and again in October. In our spring issue of the Big Tree Bulletin Marcy Crawford wrote about the formation of this group and how important it will be in helping connect CBTA with the wider community. We Board members need to hear from people who see the bigger picture of the issues that affect State parks and can provide suggestions on how to reach outwards.

Our first four Advisors were Merita Callaway (former Calaveras County District 3 Supervisor), Bob Doten (past president of the Greater Arnold Business Association), Gail Kautz (owner of Ironstone Winery in Murphys and board member of the California State Parks Foundation) and Peter Ralston (Professor Emeritus of UCSF School of Medicine and long-time supporter of the Park through the Daly/Ralston Intern Fund and funding the building of the classroom in the Education Building).

An additional Advisor has recently joined the Council. Bret Hewitt is a finance and management professional with 35 years of experience with non-profit organizations. He also has a strong connection to the Big Trees. He and his sister Lauren Hewitt spoke at the CBTA annual meeting in June about their amazing mother. In her honor, the family established the Emily M. Hewitt Memorial Scholarship, which is administered by CBTA.

The initial Advisory Council meeting held May 23 was attended by the four Advisors and the entire CBTA Board. The purpose of that meeting was to meet each other, describe the purpose and structure of the Council, review the current status of CBTA and the Park and begin a discussion of Park issues, including possible future plans.

The Advisory Council met again on October 10. The Board described the Park response to the Butte Fire threat, various personnel changes and CBTA fundraisers this year. Bob Doten presented information about a smart phone app that could inform visitors about the Park. Peter Ralston shared information about the possible effects of drought on the sequoias. (See his bulletin article on this topic.) As a result, the Council decided on several action items and specific people to pursue them. A committee was formed to produce an emergency plan in case of a disaster such as the Butte Fire.

The next meeting of the CBTA Advisory Council is scheduled for Saturday, March 5.

Welcome to New Members!

June 30, 2015 – October 26, 2015

Bob & Sherry Neis, Tehachapi, California
Lee Terkelsen, Visalia, California
The Zuniga Family, Hollister, California
Andrea Esty, Murphys, California
Lorrie Gervin, San Jose California
Amy Chastain & Rob Martin, Oakland, California
David & Karen Furst, Livermore, California
Radio Drama a Hit!

By Claudia Beymer and Joan Allday

The third annual fundraising dinner held by CBTA was a big success. The original radio play *KCBT-August 1945* was great fun for the players and the audience. The Saturday, October 3, dinner performance was sold out with many in the audience dressed and coiffed in 1940s style. The Sunday matinee was attended by a smaller but enthusiastic crowd.

Tim Laddish, a Park docent, wrote and directed the original play set in Calaveras Big Trees at the end of World War II. It included the Bob Hope Show with guest Bing Crosby, the dramatic Shadow program and classic commercials, all accompanied with sound effects and music. There were suspense and laughs and a surprise visit from the Andrews Sisters.

CBTA Board member and coordinator of this event Joan Allday thanks Tim Laddish and the actors, many of whom are docents. Volunteers did a great job of serving up an authentic ‘40s comfort meal. CBTA was very proud to donate extra tri-tip and side dishes to victims of the Butte Fire. We had docents collecting donations for our beautiful raffle baskets, docents directing traffic and docents tending bar. A big thanks to all!

All proceeds from the KCBT event were donated by CBTA to the Park’s Visitor Center for refurbishing the museum.
CBTA Board of Directors:
Paul Prescott               President
George Leong                Vice President
Joan Allday                 Vice President
Bunny Firebaugh             Secretary
Dexter Hardcastle           Treasurer
Marcy Crawford              Bulletin
Vida Kenk                   Director
Rod Smith                   Director
Betty Watson                Director
Sanders Lamont              Director

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Claudia Beymer              Editor
Sue Hoffmann                Circulation/Mailing

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Sue Hoffmann                Administrative Officer
Debbie McGee                Bookkeeper
Jill Micheau                Assistant Retail Manager

Visit us………………
Web Site…….www.bigtrees.org
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The Board meets monthly the last Wednesday at 1:00 p.m., and the meeting is open to the public. Please call the office at 795-1196 to confirm meeting date, time and place.

The CBTA dues year is the calendar year. You may renew your membership by mailing a check payable to CBTA or renew/donate through our website www.bigtrees.org. Your membership/donation is tax deductible to the extent allowable by law.