

Upper Lake Interpretive Walk



1 Native Reptiles and Amphibians

Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve is home to several species of native reptiles and amphibians. In Upper Lake, you might catch a glimpse of a western pond turtle basking on a floating platform. These turtles are threatened by habitat loss and the invasion of nonnative competitors, such as red-eared slider turtles. You can tell the species apart by looking at their necks: red-eared sliders have a streak of red, but western pond turtles do not. Red-eared sliders are popular as pets; you can help protect natural ecosystems by never releasing pets into the wild. Amphibians found here include California giant salamanders, Santa Cruz black salamanders and California newts. Watch for newts making their way toward water on cool, wet mornings in fall and winter.



Western pond turtle

California giant salamander

California newt

2 Ohlone Mortars

For thousands of years, this region was home to groups of Native Americans, now collectively known as the Ohlone. The Ohlone made bread and porridge from acorns and grass seeds, which they ground into flour at milling stations like these boulders. Over generations, the grinding process wore deep holes, or mortars, into the rock. During the estate period, these boulders were moved from an unknown location and used as a landscaping element.



Grinding rock

3 Redwood Logging

The slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains were once covered with old-growth redwood forests with trees several hundred years old, and commonly more than 200 feet tall and 10 feet across. Between 1850 and 1900, the rapid growth of San Francisco and San Jose fueled a high demand for lumber, and most of the old-growth trees in the region were felled. One large redwood could provide enough wood to build 20 houses.

4 Aquatic Innovations

People began heavily altering this site's natural water systems in the 1850s, when a logger named James S. Howe dammed Webb Creek and expanded Upper Lake — then a natural sag pond — into a millpond. Later, estate owner Dr. Harry L. Tevis made Upper Lake deeper and more round, and constructed cisterns, dams and pipes to store 11 million gallons of water to keep his gardens lush. Tevis also built water features for enjoyment; his estate boasted a massive aqueduct with an artificial waterfall, a swimming pool in stately Roman style and a lily pond for quiet reflection.



Tevis' "Roman Plunge" swimming pool

5 St. Joseph's Shrine

This shrine once included a statue of St. Joseph holding the infant Jesus and was built in the early days of Alma College, the Jesuit school of theology that operated here from 1934 to 1969. St. Joseph is the patron saint of Italians, and the shrine was likely erected by Italian Jesuit immigrants who built much of the Alma College complex.

6 Significant Geology

A cultural landscape is a place with both a unique natural setting and important human history. At Bear Creek Redwoods, the cultural landscape lies on a pressure ridge formed by the San Andreas Fault. Here, the fault is not a single fissure, but rather a wide band of small fault lines, or *traces*. Both the ridge and Upper Lake were formed by the movement of the land along the fault. This fault activity also influenced how humans shaped the landscape. The 1906 earthquake destroyed James L. Flood's mansion, and inspired Tevis to construct his estate with impressive seismic engineering. For example, the retaining walls he built to expand the flat

top of the ridge are stabilized by massive ship anchor chains. These walls survived the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and still exist today.

7 Exotic Versus Invasive Species

Native and nonnative plants grow alongside one another throughout this site. Some are remnants of the grand gardens that were planted during the estate and college periods. Others, like French broom and Eurasian blackberry, are invasive and must be carefully controlled to prevent damage to native habitats. Midpen has chosen to keep a few culturally significant ornamental plantings, while restoring native species across much of the site.

8 Tevis Roses

Dr. Harry L. Tevis was a dentist by training but a horticulturalist by trade. He worked alongside 43 full-time gardeners to grow crops, breed prize-winning blooms and experiment with rare and exotic plants. Tevis' flower gardens included dahlias and lilies, but his favorite plants were roses — he cultivated 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving fruit, flowers and plants as gifts. In 1916, he donated 400 rose bushes to be planted on public lands in Los Gatos.



Tevis with one of his extraordinary plants

9 Partnerships and Collaborations

Preserving a regional greenbelt is hard work, and Midpen can't do it alone. When a developer wanted to build a golf course and luxury homes here in the 1990s, organizations like Committee for Green Foothills supported creating a preserve instead. Advocates sent letters, made phone calls and spoke at public meetings, voicing their concerns about environmental damage from the proposed development. Meanwhile, Midpen and POST worked together to buy the property so it could be protected in perpetuity. In 1999, thanks to state grants and generous private donations, Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve was created at last.

To learn more, visit our interactive story map: www.openspace.org/bcrstory.