

# Marin Horse Council

2016 FALL/2017 WINTER NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 128



Monte and Odie at Ridge Trail cut off, Point Reyes



Monte Kruger

## FROM THE SADDLE

*Looking forward to seeing you on the trail in 2017!*

— Monte Kruger | President, MHC

## OUT ON THE TRAIL

### HORSE HILL OUTDOOR CLASSROOM CAMINO ALTO EVENT: TAILS & TIRES EVENT MILL VALLEY

This past October, Horse Hill, Marin Horse Council, MCBC (Marin County Bicycle Coalition), MCL (Marin Conservation League and Marin County Open Space) all joined forces and hosted a unique and wonderful Tails & Tires safe trail sharing workshop. Instead of holding this event in an arena or parking lot, we chose instead to hold it in a real-life “outdoor classroom” at a scenic spot on top of the Camino Alto Fire Road in Mill Valley. In addition to our special guests of honor —members from local high school mountain biking teams —we also invited the general public to attend.

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# OUT ON THE TRAIL

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COME ON DOWN TO RIVERTOWN

*Outdoor Classroom from page 1*

We started the morning with a little hands-on education in responsible land resource management. Under the enthusiastic supervision of Open Space Ranger Greg Reza, we decommissioned a couple of unsanctioned social trails (unsanctioned trails that were made years ago) and put the finishing touches on the new and more environmentally friendly, multi-use Octopus Fire Road. We even cut the barrier ribbons and officially opened this trail. This was hard, hard work—but all worth it because it fostered a real feeling of cooperation and team work between the various user groups.

Next, the highlight of the day came when Monte Kruger and Mike Willin (MHC) along with several Horse Hill boarders (and even a boarder from Miwok) arrived on the scene. They all rode their horses over from nearby Horse Hill to participate in the Tails and Tires safe trail sharing work shop. The horses enchanted everyone in attendance! Tom Boss (MCBC) and Curt Kruger (MHC) gave a rousing presentation on the flight instincts of the horse—and the consequent need for cyclists to pull over for oncoming horses and to slow way down and talk while they are cycling past horses. To better illustrate these points, Curt supervised the high school mountain bikers as they rode past our horses on the Camino Alto Fire Road. Curt and Monte even offered the kids the opportunity to sit on top of our safe and friendly horses. The kids' eyes all literally went wide once they realized how high off the ground they were. More than anything else this activity really drove the safety point home.

Everyone in attendance had a blast and, most importantly, learned a lot about safe trail sharing practices, responsible land resource management and the need to "Slow and Say Hello"!!!

We would like to extend a special thanks to local conservationist, Nona Denis (Marin Conservation League) for her insightful talk on the history of land resource management in Marin County. We would also like to thank Cassandra Fimrite (Marin Dog) for her informative presentation on the necessity of safe and responsible handling of dogs on Marin's Open Space trails.

— Amory Willis

Click here to see the map:

<http://www.marincounty.org/~media/images/departments/pk/open-space/alto-bowl/map-1-alto073114.pdf>

## MHC FALL RIDE FUN AT PRESIDIO RIDING CLUB

The October 2 Marin Horse Council (MHC) Fall Ride fundraiser at the historic Presidio Riding Club (PRC) in the GGNRA Headlands was a success for many reasons. We had a good turnout—over 30 riders and about 16 more people joining us for lunch. Another noteworthy accomplishment was the reduction of the ride's "wasteline"! We recycled and composted almost everything, with only a small trash bag heading to landfill. Most people signed up on-line, another way we minimized paper waste and streamlined the process! And, lastly, we feasted well: our day in the saddle required fuel, not just for our equine partners, but for us, their guardians. Riders and lunch attendees enjoyed Peet's coffee and teas, delicious freshly baked scones and cookies from My Sweetheart Wife's Vegan Kitchen ([www.mswvegankitchen.com](http://www.mswvegankitchen.com), head baker/owner Johanna Stefanski), and exceptional box lunches provided by United Market Deli, San Rafael.



# OUT ON THE TRAIL

Fall Ride from page 2




Riders: Monte Kruger (front), followed by Michelle Bevilacqua, Linda Tull, (all from Willow Tree) and a buckaroo from Five Brooks Stables at the Fall Ride at Rodeo Valley in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Riders came from Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Horse Hill, Dickson Ranch, PRC, Creekside Equestrian Center, Willow Tree Stables, Five Brooks Stables, and Sahar Bartlett and friends even left their Frank's Valley campsite to ride with MHC. Groups of riders in twos and threes, and a few larger groups of seven or eight, headed directly to the beach or chose to ride into the hills, which some riders said: "...felt like we were in Narnia" (see photo). Toward noon, riders tied their horses up in the large round pen, and lunch guests joined us for lunch in the charming PRC barn which was decorated with flowers, grape vines, pumpkins, and MHC photo banners. And, MHC board member, Constanza Perry, brought her signature drinks: blood orange punch and Arnold Palmer lemonade. Yum!

There was plenty of equestrian-style cross pollinating at lunch, something "Cowboy Dave" and his colleague Spencer, both from Five Brooks Stables ([www.fivebrooks.com](http://www.fivebrooks.com)), said is very much needed! Here are some of the high points we heard at lunch:

- Karen Johnson, a Director with Bay Area Barns and Trails ([www.bayareabarnsandtrails.com](http://www.bayareabarnsandtrails.com)), told us about their grant program and some recent projects they have funded.
- Kim Stoddard, PRC ([www.presidioridingclub.org](http://www.presidioridingclub.org)), updated the group on their outreach programs including one that honors PRC's military roots: equine therapy programs to those who have served their country in wartime. Kim also shared that several Parks' horses are moving into their barn in the near future with new stalls and paddocks under construction for them.
- Monte Kruger, President of Marin Horse Council ([www.marinhorsecouncil.org](http://www.marinhorsecouncil.org)), said the organization continues to focus on the Slow and Say Hello Program, supporting the Morgan Horse Ranch at Pt. Reyes National Seashore, and growing membership. Joel Bartlett, former President of MHC, was acknowledged for his past service, and the Tamalpais Trail Riders and their recent Trail Trial at Novato Horsemen's Association was mentioned!

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# OUT ON THE TRAIL



## WILDERNESS & MOUNTAIN BIKES

As printed in Marin Conservation League 2016 September/October Newsletter

By Nona Dennis  
1st VP, Marin Conservation League

On July 13, Republican Senators, Orrin Hatch and Mike Lee of Utah, introduced legislation —S. 3205, the “Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Act”—that could open lands protected under the 1964 Wilderness Act to mountain bikes and possible other mechanical devices. Similar legislation introduced in 2015 failed after more than 115 conservation groups urged legislators to reject any effort to introduce machines to wilderness areas: “The benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness would be forever lost by allowing mechanized transport in these areas.”

Four federal agencies —the Forest Service, National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service —administer about 110 million acres of wilderness designated by Congress. The clash between mountain bikes and the Wilderness Act began as the first produced mountain bikes were just becoming popular. In 1984 the Forest Service adopted a regulation prohibiting bikes from its wilderness areas. It hinged on a provision in Section 4(b) of the Act: “... there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport and no structure or installation within any [wilderness] area” (emphasis added). What “mechanical transport” does or does not allow makes this one of the most debated sections in this 50-year old foundational law in U.S. land preservation.

Does “mechanical transport” include bicycles?

What does the term “mechanical transport” mean? The Wilderness Act did not define the term or even mention bicycles. The Forest Service, after initially permitting bike use, in 1984 reinterpreted “mechanical transport” and prohibited “possessing or using a ... bicycle” in a designated

Fall Ride from page 3



The day felt like Narnia. Fantasy adventure! from left: Carolyn Jarvis on Diamond Lil, a buckaroo rider from Five Brooks, Monte Kruger on Odie, Linda Tull on Satin, Linda Hevern on Opie, Michelle Bevilacqua on Sierra—all from Willow Tree, and front right: Cowboy Dave from Five Brooks standing next to his horse.

- Amory Willis, now chair of Alto Bowl Horse Owners Association (ABHO, [www.horsehill.org](http://www.horsehill.org)) was in attendance. ABHO sponsored a trail work and Tails and Tires workshop the day before. **Amory was just selected as the Volunteer of the Year by Marin County Parks (MCP) – Go Amory!**

- Linda Novy mentioned Marin County Parks’ Road and Trail Management Plan —lots going on with that —(check out: [www.marincountyparks.org/depts/pk/our-work/os-main-projects/rtmp](http://www.marincountyparks.org/depts/pk/our-work/os-main-projects/rtmp)).

The whole group really appreciated having such great updates from our dynamic equestrian community!

These events just can’t happen without volunteers, so we’d like to thank and acknowledge: Dee Davidson, Robyn Dahlin, Barbara Lindsey from Creekside Equestrian Center ([www.creeksideequestriancenter.com](http://www.creeksideequestriancenter.com)), MHC board members Constanza Perry, Curt Kruger, Michael Willen, and Lauren Terk; volunteer at large, Laura Wais; and PRC’s Kim Stoddard, Robert Beifuss, Sherri Haskel, and Janelle Drouet. The work is fun and the rewards are great. Let us know if you’d like to help out on the next event!

— Linda Novy, Fall Ride Coordinator

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# OUT ON THE TRAIL

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## THE BOLINAS STAGE LINE



*"You could catch a stagecoach to Bolinas on Fourth Street in San Rafael. Then as now, it was a mighty long trip without the benefit of road signs." From SF Genealogy.com*

The road from San Rafael to Bolinas is notoriously narrow, steep, and twisting. Though it's less than twenty miles, a trip to Bolinas can be an adventure, especially at night or in the fog. Imagine what it was like a hundred years ago, when you would have made the trip by stagecoach.

Bolinas was a much busier place a century ago. Residents of San Rafael and San Francisco liked to get away to Bolinas on weekends to picnic, swim, fish, hunt, and hike. Bolinas was also a popular destination for longer vacations, with two hotels and an extensive resort and tent city called Willow Camp, now Stinson Beach. But for many years it was hard to get to Bolinas at all. You could take a schooner from San Francisco, ride a horse from Olema, or walk or ride over Mount Tamalpais from San Rafael on the old trail built by the Miwoks. A stage road was built in 1865 from San Rafael through Olema to Bolinas. In 1870 an engineer named Hiram Austin drove a road (now the Shoreline Highway) from Sausalito to Willow Camp, but Bolinas Lagoon prevented him from connecting the road to Bolinas. Passengers were deposited at McKenna's Landing on the sand spit, where they signaled for a launch from Bolinas to come pick them up. In 1875 the North Pacific Coast Railroad was completed from San Rafael to Occidental. Tourists could now take the train to Point Reyes Station and catch the stage to Bolinas, but it was still a long all-day trip. A shorter way was needed.

In February 1877, the County Supervisors requested Hiram Austin to survey a new route between Bolinas and San Rafael. Austin's proposal was approved, sealed bids were submitted, and on July 3, 1878, the contract for building the road was awarded to Jesse Colwell and J. H. Wilkins of San Rafael. They hired crews and started work two weeks later. There were complaints at first that the contractors were using Chinese labor when there were local lads that could use the work. Colwell replied that they would be happy to hire white men if they could find any that would work for a dollar and a quarter a day. The Chinese built the road.

They started from Bolinas and cut the road with many steep switchbacks up to the top of Bolinas Ridge, roughly paralleling the old San Rafael Trail a mile

*Wilderness from page 4*

wilderness area. The other agencies followed suit. Last year, bike advocacy groups, including Marin's Access4Bikes, formed the Sustainable Trails Coalition with the intent of breaking the ban.

Most conservation organizations unilaterally oppose S. 3205. Even mountain bikers cannot ignore the dismal environmental voting records of the two bill authors, who would also support opening wilderness areas to commercial exploitation were it possible. Notably, the bill would not amend the Wilderness Act. Rather, it would require the agency officials to determine what forms of recreation by non-motorized transportation methods would be permissible over routes within their wilderness jurisdiction. In addition to mountain bikes, this could open access to other mechanical, albeit human-powered, forms of recreation such as paragliders, kite skiers, or kite boarders. Not all mountain bikers support the proposed legislation. The International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) found that its members were roughly split down the middle. IMBA aggressively promotes bike access on all public lands. By partnering with the responsible agencies, IMBA also works to limit boundaries of proposed new wilderness areas so as to protect bike access to favored trails. In response to the legislation, however, IMBA stated that it "will continue to respect the Wilderness Act and the prohibition of bicycles in existing wilderness areas" (emphasis added).

Why protect Wilderness from mechanized travel? For over 50 years the Wilderness Act has protected wilderness areas designated by Congress from mechanization and mechanical transport, even if no motors were involved. In response to the 2015 legislation, The Wilderness Society wrote: "At a time when wilderness and wildlife are under increasing pressures from increasing populations, growing mechanization, and a changing climate, the addition of "all human-powered (mechanized) travel" would effectively prioritize recreation over all other wilderness values such as protecting clean air and drinking water, habitat for critical wildlife, and opportunities for solitude, to name a few."

A recent blogger concurred: "As both hiker/backpacker and mountain biker, I am conflicted about opening up trails in Wilderness areas to bikes. I don't think of Wilderness as being set aside for humans as the primary user but rather as a way of setting aside large expanses of unspoiled landscape that can support habitat and ecosystems."

*MCL agrees: Bikes have no place in wilderness!*

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Stage from page 5

or so away. The road crossed the ridge and descended Cataract Canyon to Lagunitas Creek, then followed the creek upstream through the willow groves and meadows in Lagunitas Canyon. It then went down near the old Shaver Grade and into Ross. From there it was only two more miles over the ridge to San Rafael and the Marin County Stables at Fourth and A. The new road was fourteen miles long, sixteen feet wide, and had 48 culverts and 29 bridges. It was completed on June 26, 1879, on schedule and under budget. It cost around \$16,000 and was famed throughout the area for its magnificent views. In 1884 a cutoff road was built from the railroad station in Fairfax to meet the main road at Bon Tempe Ranch, shortening the route by two miles.

The Bolinas-San Rafael stagecoach was quickly established by H. B. Gibson and it became popular and profitable. In 1882, Gibson sold the line to the county treasurer, Robert T. Cottingham, who also served as one of the stage drivers. In 1886, the line was sold to Leonard Knott, and in 1890 to Albert Sayers, whose brother Wallace's skill as a driver became legendary over the following decades.

At first it ran three times a week; later on every day but Sunday. The trip took three hours and cost a dollar and a half. San Francisco residents on holiday could now catch the early ferry to Sausalito and the train to San Rafael, and the stage could get them to Bolinas in time for a late lunch.

Conditions could be rugged. In the wet season the road became a mass of mud; washouts and landslides were common. In dry weather the mud dried into iron-hard ruts and the dust was terrible. Women often wore veils over their faces and long coats called dusters. Spring-fed drinking troughs were maintained at several points along steeper stretches of the road—several of these can still be seen. Often hunters or hikers would ask the driver to let them off at some likely spot and pick them up on the way back. On one occasion the passengers had to share their seats with a 221-pound bear two of the men had shot.

There were two regular stops where people could eat and stay the night if they chose. Liberty Ranch in the upper end of Lagunitas Canyon had been a working dairy ranch until the stage road was built past its door. Then Vincent Liberty enlarged his house, built some cabins, and turned it into a roadhouse. Mrs. Liberty was famous for her cooking and hospitality. Guests could fish in the creek or rent horses and explore the beautiful area around Little Carson Falls. Just downstream from Liberty's place were a number of cabins at Scott's Camp and the clubhouse of the Lagunitas Rod and Gun Club, which leased over 12,000 acres of land as a hunting reserve. Further downstream was Shaver's sawmill and a little settlement called Alpine where the sawyers lived.

The other stop was at Summit House on top of Bolinas Ridge (the site is just west of the intersection of Ridgecrest Blvd and the Bolinas-Fairfax Road). Summit House was a rustic hotel and restaurant run by Constantine deSella, a well-known chef. It was a popular starting point for hikers heading for the summit of Mt. Tamalpais.

The Bolinas coaches didn't look like movie stagecoaches. They were heavy open wagons with two wooden seats and a canvas roof that could be rolled back on fine days. Three passengers faced forward and three back. The driver sat on a high seat in front with two privileged passengers. A leather boot in back held luggage, guns, and fishing rods. Depending on the load, the coaches were pulled by teams of two or four strong draft horses and driven by some skilled and colorful characters.

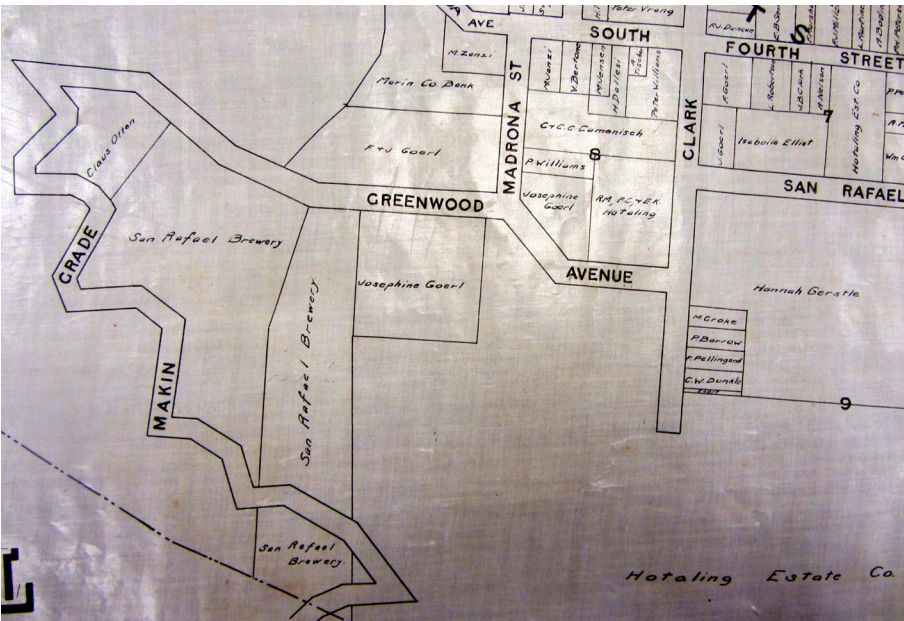
A good stagecoach driver was envied by men and admired by women. He sat up there on the high seat with a cigarette dangling from a lip, the

*continued on page 7*



# OUT ON THE TRAIL

Stage from page 6



top: Map of the Stagecoach route. Greenwood Ave, the San Rafael Brewery and up to Makin Grade.  
bottom left: San Rafael Brewery, both late 1880s. Photos courtesy of Jackie and Kurt Schmidt.

**Salomy Jane**, a 1914 American Western feature film based on Bret Harte's 1898 novella of the same name. It is the only known surviving complete work of silent film era actress Beatriz Michelena (shown here in a publicity still with actor House Peters). California Motion Picture Corporation, of San Anselmo, CA 1914. Mt. Tam is in the background!

"ribbons" and a rawhide whip held casually in special calfskin driving gloves. One driver, Frank Page, later became a congressman and stated that the carefulness and skill required as a driver served him well in his political career. Quick runs were expected, and the drivers had to judge the curves and road conditions carefully. The steel tires would skitter to the very edge on the many sharp hairpin turns. It was not a ride for the faint of heart, but the drivers were skilled and experienced and the line had an excellent safety record. Nevertheless, there were incidents over the years.

In June of 1892 the stage was descending Fairfax Grade (Bollinas Avenue) when it was passed by a painter's wagon dragging a ladder. The lead horse shied at the ladder bouncing in the dust and fell over the cliff, slowly pulling

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Stage from page 7

the other horse and the wagon to the edge. Three of the passengers jumped clear, but the stage with driver Thad Lewis, three women, and three children, plunged down the embankment. The horses were caught by a wire fence and the stage somersaulted over them to land on its side in the bottom of the canyon a hundred feet below. One little girl was thrown clear, only to have a horse land partially on top of her. Unbelievably, neither humans nor horses were injured. After everyone was brought up to the road, Lewis apologized, saying, "In fifteen years of driving, this is the first time this has happened."

Anything could startle the team and start a runaway. Another driver, Leonard Nott, left the stage to deliver mail to one of the homesteads along Lagunitas Creek. The team suddenly bolted, leaving Nott behind. A lady passenger managed to scramble to the driver's seat, seize the reins, and stop the stage. She complained bitterly that she'd pulled so hard she'd skinned her hands. One team bolted at the sound of a train whistle in Fairfax. Most of these runaways did not result in injury, but there were occasional tragedies. In September 1883, a runaway team struck the carriage of Mrs. Jesse Colwell, the wife of the man that built the road, killing her mother, Jane Ingram. And the day before Christmas, 1887, driver James Steele was killed when his team ran away with an empty stage.



William Kent's Stagecoach on trail with Mt Tam in background, photo courtesy of Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library

By far the most famous incident on the stage line was not a runaway but a holdup. On the morning of September 19, 1898, driver Wallace Sayers had just left Liberty Ranch on the way to San Rafael when a man with a mask and gun jumped out from beneath a bridge and ordered him to halt. Sayers and his three male passengers were robbed of their cash and gold watches, but two women passengers were allowed to keep their belongings. The robber told Sayers to "Drive on, and if you look back I'll blow your head off." But Sayers had recognized the robber's voice as that of Victor Colwell, the son of the road-builder. Sayers highballed into San Rafael and notified the sheriff, who quickly organized a posse and rode out after the robber. He caught up to Colwell on Ross Valley Road (now Sir Francis Drake Boulevard), making for Ross Landing (now Larkspur). They searched him and found a gun and the loot, and he quickly confessed. Within two hours of the holdup, Colwell was in jail. He went to trial in February 1899, pleading insanity. His family and friends testified that he had frequent spells of intense melancholy and peculiar

continued on page 9



# OUT ON THE TRAIL

Stage from page 8

behavior, but the stage passengers stated that he appeared sane during the robbery and Colwell was sentenced to seven years in prison. His own mother was the court clerk. His father Jesse had lost both his mother-in-law and his son to the road he had built. His son's conviction must have broken his heart. Less than six months later, Jesse was dead.

The old stage road started a slow decline in the 20th century. Both the railroad and the Coast Highway bypassed Bolinas and the town became a smaller, sleepier place. Tourism to Bolinas declined. Willow Camp was closed and in 1904 Summit House burned down. Both big hotels in Bolinas, the Dipsea and the Flagstaff, had been toppled into the lagoon by the 1906 earthquake, centered just a few miles away at Olema. After 1906, Phoenix Dam inundated part of the old road and a bypass was built. In 1919 the water district built Alpine Dam, flooding the settlements in Lagunitas Canyon, and the road was moved up onto the side of the valley—the present Bolinas-Fairfax Road. In 1911 the stagecoaches were replaced by Stanley Steamers, and in 1920 by busses. When the last owner of the line died, his wife drove the run in a station wagon. Greyhound bought the line during World War II, until gas rationing finally did it in.

Much of the old stage road is under water now, but parts of it can still be seen. The Bolinas-Fairfax Road from Bolinas nearly to Alpine Dam is the original road as surveyed by Hiram Austin. The first hundred yards of the trail to Cataract Canyon follows the stage road down to the lake. The road reappears from the head of Alpine Lake at Liberty Gulch. When the lake is low you can still walk along the stretch of road where Victor Colwell held up the stage in 1898. Just beyond the gate at Bon Tempe Lake parking lot, the old cutoff to Fairfax is now the road past Sky Oaks Ranger Station. The main stage road goes down Shaver Grade to Five Points and under Phoenix Lake. Emerging again in front of the old Porteous Ranch caretaker's cabin on the north shore, it then plunges under the Phoenix Dam, ending up as the path through the picnic area at Natalie Coffin Greene Park. The stages continued down Lagunitas Avenue to Ross, then up Laurel Grove and over the Makin Grade to San Rafael. They came into town down Greenwood, Madrona, Clorinda, Clark, and Ross Avenues, then went up D Street to Fourth. The only portion in San Rafael that has not been paved over is a short steep grade between Upper Toyon and the cul-de-sac at the end of Evergreen.

It is haunting to stand on some lonely arm of Alpine Lake today and imagine an Atlantean scene down below the still water; old buildings with fish swimming through the windows. They're not there, of course; all the structures were razed before the lake was filled. But seeing the old road winding through the thick brush one can almost hear the rumble of wheels and the crack of a whip. One half expects to see the stage flying around a turn in the dusty road with gentlemen in frock coats and ladies in long dusters and wide-brimmed picnic hats staring at the oddly-dressed stranger standing in the road. Perhaps they'd think you were the ghost of Victor Colwell, returned to hold them up again.

— Brian K. Crawford

**The trail the Stage traveled:** The Horse Livery Stables was on Third Street in San Rafael. The Stagecoach went from San Rafael over D St. to Mahon trail to Ross Landing, out to Lagunitas Road in Ross, through Phoenix Lake land (before there was a lake up there), through that area and town which later became Alpine Lake.

On January 15th, 2017 a portion of the Old San Rafael-Bolinas stagecoach trail became a protected part of Greenwood Open Space Preserve in the Gerstle Park neighborhood in San Rafael! For more info. click here: <http://www.marinij.com/general-news/20161004/san-rafael-vacant-lots-preserved-as-open-space>

— Marcie Miller, Save Marin's History

## NEWS AND UPDATES

### SMART TRAIN TRAIL CLOSURE!

#### Historic horse crossing near Rush Creek is now un-ridable!

Our letter went unanswered. You can help us by writing letters to save the crossing! *Any lawyers out there?*

Write to:

Mr Felix Ko  
Senior Utilities Engineer  
R&R Crossing and Engineering Branch  
Sonoma Marina Area Rail Transit  
5401 Old Redwood Highway  
Petaluma, CA 94954

and to:

California Public Utilities Commission  
505 Van Ness Ave  
San Francisco, CA 94102

See our letter below. Please add your voice!

Re:Pedestrian/Cycle/Equestrian  
Crossing at Binford Rd.-Rush Landing Rd.

Dear Sirs and Madams,

We are writing as a coalition committee with the following members: MarinHorse Council, Novato Horsemen, Inc., the Marin Conservation League, and the Marin County Bicycle Coalition to request that a long-established historic horse path, pedestrian and cycle crossing at the railroad crossing in Novato at Rush Creek and Atherton be maintained in your upcoming plans to create a public use pathway between the San Rafael Civic Center Station and the Santa Rosa North Station.

Our request is prompted by the April 6, 2016 Press Release issued by Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) addressing SMART's receipt of a "key environmental approval for bicycle and pedestrian pathway." We first wish to applaud your efforts to create the envisioned 36-mile long pedestrian and bicycle pathway. Undoubtedly, it will not only succeed at satisfying the stated goal of presenting opportunities for the public to view some of the area's most beautiful wetlands, but will also provide the public greater accessibility to other North Bay attractions and outdoor activities. Because we understand that pathway construction is already scheduled for several areas in Sonoma and Marin, including the section between Rush Creek Place and the Novato San Marin Station in Novato, we believe that time is of the essence to address a method of preserving the railroad crossing between Binford Road and Rush Landing Road long-used by pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians to connect the extraordinary multi-use trails located within the Rush Creek Open Space Preserve to those found within the Olompali State Historic Park system.

Members of the Marin Horse Council and Novato Horsemen (established in 1942)

*continued on page 10*

# NEWS & UPDATES

Trail Closure from page 9

as well as the numerous private horse owners on Atherton Avenue, Bugeia Lane and the surrounding neighborhoods oneach side of Hwy. 101, have been utilizing this route for nearly 75 years! Other equestrians have transported their horses to either the Novato Horsemen's facility, Olompali State Historic Park, and Mount Burdell and have enjoyed this route to access the numerous trails in these areas for decades as well. Likewise, hikers and other outdoors enthusiasts have enjoyed this crossing for nearly as long. What's more, since the birth of "mountain biking" in Marin County nearly 20 years ago, cyclists by the thousands have joined the pedestrians and equestrians in taking advantage of this route to safely connect the trails on the east and west sides of Hwy. 101. While pedestrians and cyclists can utilize the Atherton Avenue —San Marin Drive freeway overpass, it is far too busy of a motor vehicle crossing (with 4 lanes of traffic in each direction and continuous large truck usage) for even the very best trained horses and experienced riders to safely navigate. It is for this reason we collectively believe that it is imperative to preserve this crossing.

Thank you in advance for considering our request. We look forward to receiving your response at your earliest convenience.

I just spent the morning with John Mac Donald who is filming a documentary about the 3 Mules and their handler, a 68 year old nomad, traversing the western states on foot and riding his three mules. Below is a link to the 11 minute clip of the documentary that John MacDonald is making, Mule-Living on the Outside.



We are writing to let you know about this because all of us are interested in protecting our open spaces. This project brings a different perspective to the public lands and open spaces and the access to them that we are losing. It also brings to light the need for the various groups we are involved in to push for multi use paths within city limits and connector paths that allow people to get out of their cars and into open space. An example would be the bike/bridle path in Mill Valley.

As we push CalTrans to create a crossing over the SMART tracks in Novato to connect Mt. Burdell, Olompali State Historic Park with Rush Creek this movie trailer could be part of a bigger conversation.

<http://3mulesmovie.com/>

## NEWS & UPDATES

### UPDATE ON ROADS AND TRAILS —IMPORTANT READING!

The Marin Horse Council has been actively monitoring and engaged with land managers to ensure safe equestrian road and trail riding opportunities. Toward the goal of participating with public land agencies and their work, it is important that equestrians report their experiences on public lands in Marin —MCOSD, MMWD, State Parks, Pt. Reyes National Seashore and Golden Gate National Recreation Area. We encourage you to report your concerns, suggestions, and praise to the appropriate land managers so they can better understand recreational use impacts on other visitors, wildlife, and the natural landscape. Please note the Park Watch (Parkwatchreport.com) reporting contact for some State Parks. This is a GPS enabled application that gives the public and the land manager a lot of tools to track road and trail issues. A list of public land agencies and contact information is available on the FootPeople web site: [www.footpeople.org](http://www.footpeople.org). See something, say something!

At the Marin County Parks Department (MCP) the Road and Trail Management Plan (RTMP) is moving along fairly quickly. For updates please refer to: [www.marincountyparks.org/depts/pk/our-work/os-main-projects/rtmp-projects](http://www.marincountyparks.org/depts/pk/our-work/os-main-projects/rtmp-projects). The RTMP is organized by Regions.

REGION 1: During, and after the August 25 community workshop meeting, equestrians, hikers, environmentalists, and many neighbors in the region of Alto Bowl expressed concerns to the MCP staff to change their plans which would allow mountain bike use of the traditional hiking and equestrian activities on the Bob Middagh Trail. You can refer to the Road and Trail System Designation webpage for more information about the workshop and the RTMP.

Suggestions have been made by an equestrian/environmentalist to MCP staff about rerouting of the Gasline Trail, which will remain a hiker and equestrian trail, in order to reduce impacts into the adjacent natural landscape, as well as offering suggestions for the Octopus trail connector, now changed to multiple use, to shorten the length of trail incursions.

REGION 2: Work in Gary Giacomini Preserve has been completed, but opening the two new dual use biker/hiker trails will not take place until post-rainy season, 2017. This one time seasonal closure allows the new trails to naturally stabilize. In addition, the Audubon Society has filed a law suit expressing concerns that the Candalero and Contour Trails pass through Endangered Spotted Owl nesting sites. These impacts may likely extend to other wildlife. Equestrians and environmentalists have concerns that there may be unintended consequences arising from the new designation of "dual use." Not only does this category exclude equestrians, but it remains to be seen if hiking and mountain biking are compatible and safe. In addition, this new trail complex (more are coming) may become a regional mountain bike magnet, attracting more bike riders to the area, which is a favorite hiking and horse riding area.

Restoration and decommissioning work on the "Knee Cap" and "Green Hill" trails in Gary Giacomini Preserve has begun. These trails will be actively monitored to ensure there is no illegal use of these trails. Also there will be a sign saying that MCBC supports this closure. Importantly, the decommissioning of these and other trails are part of the mandated RTMP goal of reducing environmental impacts in their road and trail system.

REGION 3: Many equestrians, hikers and neighbors attended the August community workshop for this region which includes: Lucas Valley, Indian Valley,



# NEWS & UPDATES

Roads & Trails from page 10

Ignacio Valley, Pacheco Valle, and Loma Verde. The meeting was better organized than prior meetings, and trail designation maps included vegetation management zones so participants could more clearly understand where fire roads and trails impact Legacy and Sustainable Natural System Zones. This regional plan proposes narrowing fire roads to trail width in several areas to reduce erosion; however, the 5' width and sight lines must be maintained for safe multiple recreational activities. The local fire department has signed off on these changes to the fire road.

MCP's has proposed decommissioning several trails whose gradients (some up 50%) make them highly unsustainable. Some in the community have objected to the loss of these steep trails, but, they are truly "erosion nightmares."

There will be approximately 1000' of the Pacheco Fire Road converted to a narrower 5 foot width with a gradual gradient for multiple recreational activity. The MCP expects this section of trail to "grow into" a width based upon its use, but current site lines need to be maintained to offer safe visitation.

The good news is that the status of existing hiking and equestrian trails in the Indian Valley Preserve will not be changed, reflecting Policies SW 16, and SW 17. MHC worked with MCP land managers to affect some of these positive changes!

At the Marin Municipal Water District, they, too, are making improvements to reduce erosion and sediment, as part of the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed Road and Trail Management Plan <https://www.marinwater.org/DocumentCenter/View/268> . Currently, the MMWD is proposing restoration of the Azalea Hill Trail, which will remain a hiker and equestrian trail, and the creation of a new multiple use trail open to mountain bike riders. Azalea Hill and the proposed Liberty Gulch Trail connect Pine Mountain with the Bull Frog Road. Environmental groups are studying the proposal and many equestrians, hikers, and mountain bike riders have hiked the proposed route.

Azalea Hill Trail is an important connector for equestrians linking MMWD to MCP Preserves and improvements are warranted to eliminate the many social (non-authorized) trails, and to protect the plant communities. From a safety and compliance perspective, there are concerns in the equestrian and hiking community that bike riders may continue to ride Azalea Hill Trail even after a new trail is constructed for their use.

At our State Parks there are some changes in "use" designations that bare watching closely. Under pressure from the mountain bike community, in 2006-7 State Parks initiated a change in use policy to increase more diversified "use" on the public lands under their stewardship. Several trails were targeted: Bills Trail, Easy Grade, and a trail in Olompali Historic State Park. Currently Bill's Trail is still under construction to become multiple "use" with logs and pinch points being installed. At Olompali State Historic Park, where there is already illegal bike use, there may be a push to allow legal mountain bike access. Mountain bike use in this park is incompatible with the historic nature of the park, and unsafe for the hikers and equestrians, children and families, who are the frequent visitors to the park. You can express comments now to Danita Rodriguez [Danita.Rodriguez@parks.ca.gov](mailto:Danita.Rodriguez@parks.ca.gov). We will advise you of further actions you can take.

Thank you for your interest in Marin County's public lands, roads and trails. We encourage you to report your experiences, help with restoration work, and get involved in the road and trail management plans of each agency.

— Linda Novy



## RUSHEENAMANAGH PRINCE

My name is Maike Mieritz, I just turned 13 years old and I am horse crazy! I've been riding English since I was 8 years old. I started learning to ride in Pony Club and now am in my 3rd year as a member of the H-Lane Vacqueros 4H club, at the barn of Pat and Mike Duffy. I leased a Connemara Pony named Angel and then a Welsh Pony named Molly, all the while begging my parents for my own horse. Since my parents had no background experience with horses, they were hesitant to take on this type of adventure. Then, my sister and my brother began riding in the past year. We were all starting to get hooked, yet my parents kept on insisting that a horse was not going to become part of our family.

One evening a few months ago, I got the biggest surprise of my life when my parents showed me a picture of a horse and asked me if I'd like to go meet him, in Ireland!!! Was this a dream? No, it was real and it was decided that our whole family would make the trip during the Thanksgiving break.

With the help of the Duffys and my trainer, Sierra Valencia, we went on a 9-day trip to Ireland to meet Tom McNamara ([horsesinireland.com](http://horsesinireland.com)) and a beautiful and sweet, 15 hand, Connemara named Rusheenamanagh Prince. We had an amazing trip and the McNamara family were wonderful hosts. I rode and spent time with "Prince," and now he's making his way across the world to his new home to become part of our family. I can hardly believe it!

— Maike Mieritz

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# AT THE BARN

## THE FLYING Y RANCH

Located in Mill Valley, near the top of the Dipsea Stairs, this property was once part of the Throckmorton Ranch. By the time Mill Valley was formed, it was sold off as "Ranch 5" on the Tamalpais Land and Water company's map. It later became the Hillside Dairy.

In the 1950s, it became an 11-acre horse boarding ranch. The 4-H Valley Riders fixed up the buildings on the rundown dairy on Sequoia Valley Road, turning it into the Diamond 4-H Ranch.

In the mid 1960s, Rena Yates leased the ranch and began operating a lesson and boarding program. She named it the Flying Y Ranch.

The ranch had 7 horses when Rena took over, and she started a lesson program with horses that had been given to her. The property had a lower barn with a hay room attached, an upper barn, a ranch house, an arena made out of old tires, a feed silo, several pastures and other structures.

In the 1980s the property was developed as Walsh Estates.

## MEMORIES OF THE FLYING Y RANCH

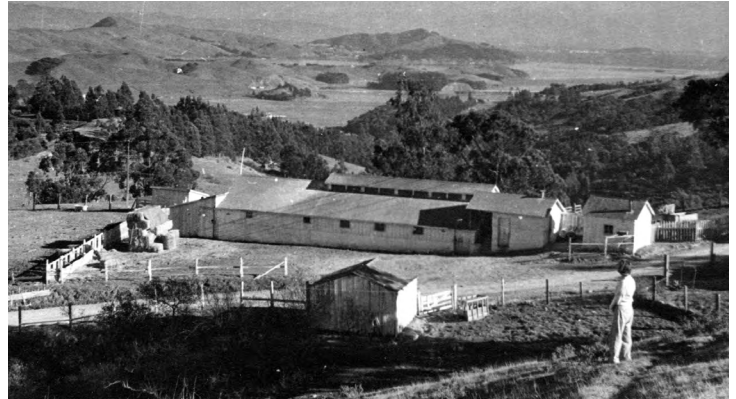
What I remember most about the Flying Y Ranch was a feeling of excitement. I began riding with Mrs. Yates when I was about 10 years old in the early 1970s. Despite the weather, usually howling winds and fog, it was always an adventure to be there. Part of the adventure was not knowing which horse was your ride that day; it might be Lucky (a descendant of Man o' War), Tinak the naughty pony, Sniffer, Holy Smoke, Feather, Risha, September, Thunder, Ajax, April or maybe Rolls Royce the former racehorse!

Straight from school, our crew of horse crazy girls would race to the ranch by any means available —by foot, car or bus (not always available), occasionally by thumb. Mrs. Yates ran the lesson program with a firm hand. I still marvel at how she kept us all in line, completely outnumbered by our wild band, but she did! We learned to ride quickly —if you didn't fall off at the trot, you advanced to the canter. Stay on at the canter and move up to Quadrille lessons.

At 13, I wore my parents down and we went looking for a horse. We visited one in Muir Beach, a very skinny untrained 5 year old Arabian gelding named Sonny. Sonny hadn't been handled much, never ridden, but he seemed docile and sweet. It was a rainy winter and he was living in a small muddy paddock with no shelter, he had lice and a bloated belly. We felt badly for him, so that day my Mom and I drove to Point Reyes to buy him some hay. Over the next few rainy nights I couldn't stop thinking about him, and convinced myself he'd be the perfect horse.

Later that week, along with a posse of kids led by Mrs. Yates's daughter Blanche, we rode down to Muir Beach and Blanche ponied Sonny back to the Flying Y Ranch. We began ground training with Mrs. Yates's leading the way. After several months of groceries, Sonny was back in good health but not so sweet and docile. His true nature was quite high spirited, thus my riding education began in earnest!

From left: Tamara, Mrs. Yates and Karen Johnson, summer 2016; Original Flying Y Ranch sign; Tinak in front of the hay barn, 1970s



Top photo 1937 by Richard O'Hanlon, courtesy of O'Hanlon Center for the Arts and the Lucretia Little History Room, Mill Valley Public Library. Photos of "Lucky" at the lower barn and "Lucky" jumping courtesy of Rena Yates from 1966.





# NEWS & UPDATES

*Flying Y from page 12*

It was a different time for kids, with much freedom and sparse supervision. No helmets or adults required. Often we would breeze out Dias Ridge to Frank's Valley or Muir Beach, jumping our horses over the coyote bushes and galloping full out up the hillsides. A favorite was riding the treacherous Pipeline trail to Mountain Home Inn where we could tie up and head to the bar for lemonade and potato chips. From there we continued up Mount Tam's steep Hogsback trail to Westpoint Inn, or the Double Bow Knot trail along the old Gravity Car tracks.

Linda and Mike lived at the ranch house with their kids Sandi and Scott. Their house was like eternal summer camp and our gang would often migrate into the house before or after our rides. Games to be played, stories to be told. When they moved away, playwright Sam Shepard moved in with his family. Mrs. Yates had met Shepard through their interest in the philosopher Gurdjieff.

I met up with Rena Yates recently, I hadn't seen her since the late 1970s. We shared stories, and the longer we talked the more interesting details she recalled. I was surprised she still remembered which stall my horse Sonny had, "2nd to the left"! We spoke about the adventures of Billy the Goat, Tinak, Lucky, Ghariseyn the stallion, and many other fondly remembered horse and people. She still has the old Flying Y Ranch sign, and now lives with her sons in Petaluma.

— Karen Johnson

## **Nostalgia: The Flying Y, Ralph the Crow and Billy the Goat**

For me, in my twenties, it was an age when I knew more animals than people. In the early 1970s I lived at the Flying Y Ranch with Scott, Sandi and Linda. The Flying Y consisted of 11 acres of hillside, the occasional eucalyptus tree, a tottering goat shack and a three bedroom home that was apparently designed and constructed by the same firm that built the goat shack. You got there by navigating a steep, unpaved road, a good portion of which turned into a sinkhole in the winter.

Just across the house from the top of the road there was an old dairy barn where we kept the horses who merited stalls. Next to that there was a horse riding area ringed entirely by discarded automobile tires. On a hot day the tires heated up. The scent of the hot rubber mixed with the omnipresent and pungent stink of horse manure created an unforgettable summer bouquet.

When we moved into the Flying Y we inherited an ancient, shaggy, oversized, off-white goat named, with a singular lack of originality, Billy. Billy had the disposition of a Stoic, a stomach made of iron suitable for digesting everything from bramble to stones. Also, a taste for poetry. The way it worked was, I'd write a poem, go out to Billy's shack, read the poem to him, then submit it to his literary tastes. As near as I can figure, Billy ate the poems he liked.



From top: Sandi Soarse with Ohyhee Brave, Scott Goldberg on Kitty, Maureen Pinto with Rogue River Mist who was born under the fence, all from 1970s

# AT THE BARN

*Flying Y from page 13*

We also had a wild talking crow named Ralph who would come to visit us regularly. He didn't have an extensive vocabulary, but the fact that he had a vocabulary at all was most impressive. His vocabulary consisted of the word "ralph". I'd listen while he poured out the chronicle of his day, dreams and aspirations he somehow managed to cram into his tiny little crow heart. And he did so using just his one word, which he combined with an astonishing array of gestures and intonations. Just so, can one sound become an encyclopedia or a symphony.

And there were horses... an endless herd of horses, each unique. My own horse, Tennyson, was a roan Tennessee Walker with a splashy white blaze and three white socks. Tennyson was good friends with Mocha, the floppy eared goat who inherited Billy's shack, but not Billy's position as editor. Mocha loved to ride with Tennyson and me as we cantered across the Dias, dropped down the valley near the slopes of Mount Tam and trotted through Tinkerbelle's Ranch, on the way to Muir Beach.

— Michael Metyer

**Scott Goldberg:** The ranch was a great place to live. You could ride anywhere on your horse. We did this as kids without adults. The house was always wide open with kids and animals running through it. As kids, we would walk down the Dipsea steps to downtown for the heck of it although it was a lot of steps coming back. I can't imagine parents letting their kids do that today.

Some things about the ranch that I remember are the saddle soap parties where everyone cleaned their gear while sitting around the house. We also slept out in the shavings/rice hulls quite a bit with everyone spending the night. There were dance hops in the house, charades, playing lots of card games, and the hair brushing line where everyone sat in a line and brushed the hair of the person in front of them.

I also remember the kids who would streak topless, or shirts open, in front of the Dipsea runners as they practiced for the run.

The daily riding lessons (and some life ones also) that Rena taught and we joined in whenever we were allowed was a lot of fun. Rena had a voice that could carry forever and you would never want her yelling at you. It was really fun when she had the quadrille class.

I don't know how the adults kept the ranch running as smoothly as it did because when I think about it, I think it was held together with gum, string, and baling wire. In wintertime, the driveway turned into one big mud pit with holes that could swallow a car. I remember quite a few cars getting stuck.

Sam Shepard boarded his horse Red Cloud there and eventually lived there for a while after we left.

Reflecting back on it, it was amazing place at the time. It was a melting pot where everyone was there because of their love of horses. The Flying Y puts its stamp on all of us by the people who were there and the lessons we learned.

**Tamara DeBarssi:** I think of the good times at Flying Y every time I drive up Mt Tam. Mrs Yates was eccentric and amazing. I learned some important life lessons from her. Like how to squeeze 9 people, 1 dog and 2 saddles in to a VW bug. And how to sweet talk your way out of a driving ticket when never stopping at a stop sign.

**Kathy Balmes Kiefer:** It was a magical place for me because it was where the horses lived. At first, my family could afford one lesson every other week. If it rained on my day, and lessons were cancelled, I cried. After several years, a miracle happened. Mrs. Yates let me ride a three year old named Chantilly. Only problem was there were not enough saddles. I fell off regularly and that wind blown ring was not soft. Many years later, Hilda Guerney, an Olympic dressage equestrian, commented that I had "an elegant seat". All due to Mrs. Yates, Chantilly, and all the other horses.

Other than the horses, what I remember most was the cold blowing fog. After an afternoon at the Ranch, I usually ate dinner in my jacket. But when it was clear, the "million dollar view" from the Ranch was spectacular.

When I think back, it amazes me how Mrs. Yates kept the Ranch going. Once a group of us painted the lower barn as a surprise for Mrs. Yates. But she pretty much ran the place by herself. My experiences at the Ranch shaped me, and I am so very grateful. It was everything to me as a horse crazy child (who still rides five days a week as she nears 60).



## Flying Y Ranch Celebrity Tidbits

- Linda & Michael Metyer met **Lawrence Ferlinghetti** at a feed lot in Point Reyes. He accepted their invitations to go trail riding from the Flying Y Ranch up Mt. Tam.
- Rena Yates recalls giving riding lessons to actor **Sterling Hayden** in preparation for a movie role. Sterling learned to ride, but did not get the role.
- **The Doobie Brothers** rented horses at the Flying Y Ranch for the album cover shoot of Stampede. The photos of them riding horses were taken on Dias Ridge.
- Actor/playwright **Sam Shepard** and his family lived at the ranch house for several years prior to it being developed into Walsh Estates.



# AT THE BARN

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 Government Affairs,  Horse Course,  Eq Evac,  Events committee,  Marin County Fair,  Volunteer Co-coordinating

Your membership in the Marin Horse Council helps support the Council's many activities on behalf of Marin's equestrians and equines.  
 Donations are also welcome. Fees and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Thanks for joining! Mail your check to Marin Horse Council | 171 Bel Marin Keyes Blvd. | Novato, CA 94949-6183

**More Flying Y Ranch Photos (online only!)**



Clockwise from top left, 1970s: Tamara DeBarssi with Sugar, Suzie Olsen and the old ranch house, John Yates, Maureen Pinto at Lower Hay Barn, Scott Goldberg and John Yates in arena.

**THANK YOU!**

The Marin Horse Council depends on the continued generous support of Marin's horse lovers. Thanks to all members, and in particular, thanks to those who join or renew at Lifetime, Golden Horseshoe, or Silver Buckle and Business/Club membership levels.

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