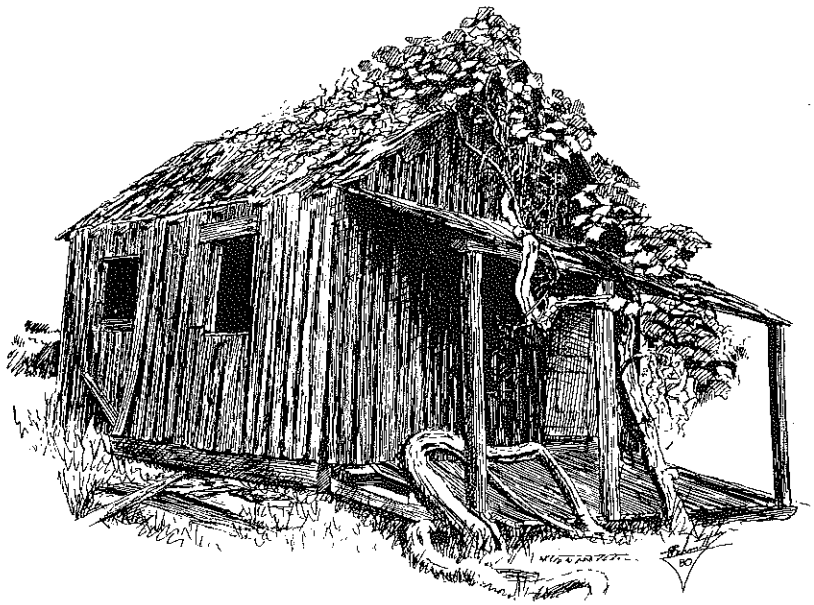
In The Rough Land To The South

An Oral History of the Lives and Events at Big Creek, Big Sur, California

by Susan E. Georgette



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Contents

Why does that place keep itself so remote, as if holding back a secret, brooding under the sun? It lies at the edge of the water, rising like a wall, gazing moodily over the same ocean, towards China and the other side of the world. And back of the wall there are the deep canyons, and the tall pines, and the hillsides of brush in the mysterious glare of noontime. What does it mean? How can a thing be so wild that is so full of life and charming variety, of young trees and deer grazing in the gay clearings, of the chatter of bluejays, and the red trunks of the madronyos. And yet it is so wild in there that you cry with the loneliness of it. . . . Perhaps it is because we are civilized and do not understand these things. We have other gods, and we can no longer pray to the tree.

de Angulo, The Lariat

Preface

The North American continent ends abruptly and dramatically on the Big Sur coast. Here, the slopes of the Santa Lucia Mountains plunge steeply into the ocean, leaving at the water's edge a rocky and precipitous shoreline. This boundary between land and sea dominates the Big Sur landscape and commands full attention. Yet interspersed along the coast, cutting the mountains, are canyons equally steep. Hidden in these canyons, out of sight of the road, is a world vastly different from the windy, storm-beaten shoreline—a dark, damp world of redwoods and ferns, clear streams, and quiet pools. On the ridges above these canyons is a different world again—a sunlit world of sloping grasslands. Here the seasons are most evident: the purple spread of spring lupine, the blazing summer heat, the bleached hillsides of fall, and the greenness that returns with winter rains.

Local residents have frequently described Big Creek as one of the most beautiful of the Big Sur canyons. It enters the ocean about fifty miles south of Monterey in a sparsely inhabited part of the Big Sur coast. As its name indicates, Big Creek reaches farther back into the Santa Lucia Mountains than most of the creeks in Big Sur. This expansive watershed gives rise to a large, rushing stream—never known to dry up—that over the years has

carved a steep and rugged canyon. Even though its redwood stands and open ridges are of the intense, undefinable beauty particular to Big Sur, it is the deep canyon, the rushing water, and the cascading falls that make Big Creek unusual.

In 1978, 4000 acres at Big Creek were made part of the University of California's Natural Land and Water Reserves System, a series of natural areas representing major California habitats for teaching and research. The new reserve was designated the Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve, and the managers set about gathering information on the natural and cultural histories of the land there. During the summer of 1978, a group of UC Santa Cruz students carried out a resource inventory of Big Creek reserve that included studies of the area's flora, fauna, and geology. To augment this effort, I undertook research on the reserve's land-use history.

My interest in Big Sur history originated during a summer spent at Lucia (a small resort on the coast) several years ago. During this time I frequently heard colorful stories about the local history. When the chance arose to write a history of Big Creek, I saw it as an ideal way to merge my personal interest in Big Sur with my academic interest in the relationship between humans and their environment. Also, the study would satisfy my senior thesis requirement for a joint major in Environmental Studies and American Studies.

I set out to gather information on some of the families who lived at Big Creek, their backgrounds and occupations, the origin of the cabins and structures on the reserve, the history of land ownership, and the changes in the natural environment including fires, floods, animal

populations, and the introduction of non-native plant species. While surveying the secondary literature on Big Sur, I found that no comprehensive history of the area had been written. I was surprised, because Big Sur has received national recognition and attention from the 1920s to the present. My research at the Santa Cruz City library, the UCSC library, and the Monterey County libraries in Monterey, Salinas, and Big Sur uncovered only a few non-fiction sources of information relevant to this project. I did find, however, much fiction, poetry, art, and photography on Big Sur, and these gave me insight into the history and society of the coast.

The scarcity of written documents on Big Creek and Big Sur history made interviewing individuals knowledgeable about Big Creek the only feasible method of collecting information. Most historical writing, especially academic history, has been primarily dependent upon written documents; oral history documents, until recently, have often been viewed skeptically by historians. The oral tradition, however, is by far the oldest method of recording and transferring historical information, and is valuable in many respects: it realistically recreates the past, challenges established accounts of the past by introducing new sources of historical evidence, and brings recognition to substantial groups of people who would otherwise be ignored. As British historian Paul Thompson has stated, "Reality is complex and many-sided; and it is a primary merit of oral history that to a much greater extent than most sources it allows the original multiplicity of standpoints to be recreated."[1] Oral history is perhaps most useful in areas where individuals are unlikely to write their own local histories. In the case of Big Creek, oral history was the only way to gather together and preserve a portion of the history of the people who

inhabited the canyon. This information would have been lost with the deaths of the first-hand participants.

There are definite limits, however, in the use of oral history documents. Oral history is most valuable when it can complement written sources; its limitations are most apparent when one must rely solely on interviews without supporting evidence. Although no less subjective than interviews, written documents on the whole have the advantage of not being distorted by the quirks of human memory. The memory is fallible and a person's retrospective look cannot really take the place of a document from the same time period. Hence, there were many questions to which I could not find answers; these included the history of land use before the homesteaders arrived in the 1370s and 1880s, the early property owners who did not live at Big Creek, the extent or location of mining claims, changes in the level of grazing, complete life histories of individuals associated with Big Creek, and unusual natural occurrences such as fires and floods. Information on this last aspect of Big Creek history was particularly difficult to gather, not only because people had difficulty recalling such instances, but because few people have lived on the coast long enough to become familiar with patterns in the natural world.

Because few written sources were available to verify oral history evidence, I could not always resolve the numerous inconsistencies in the information. Most of the people interviewed agreed generally about the origin of the cabins, the principal inhabitants of Big Creek, and the pattern of land use. Beyond this, however, many contradictory statements were made on the details of the lives and events at Big Creek. In writing this history, I have selected information that was confirmed by most of the

people interviewed or that was provided by a person who had been a first-hand participant in an event and was therefore more likely to have accurate information. Some single-source statements were included if they seemed to add particularly relevant or interesting dimensions to the Big Creek story. I consistently cross-checked information as much as possible. The spelling of early settlers' names is based on land title records in the Monterey County Recorder's Office; these spellings generally proved consistent with those recalled by local residents. Much of the information I collected was of dubious accuracy or peripheral value and was not included; certain important facts that are widely disputed are presented as such.

Because few individuals have a long-term perspective on Big Creek history, this story was pieced together with information gathered from numerous people. Knowledge of Big Creek history is scarce, though, particularly for the homestead era. Nonetheless, locating those people who knew about Big Creek was easier than I expected. Nancy Hopkins of Big Sur was immensely helpful in compiling a list of individuals likely to be knowledgeable about the area. This list expanded as each person I interviewed suggested other people directly associated with Big Creek or familiar with individuals who were.

With the excellent guidance of Randall Jarrell of the Regional History Project at UC Santa Cruz, I wrote or called these people to see if they were willing to be interviewed. Some, I talked with at length on the telephone but did not interview in person. People with extensive knowledge of Big Creek were usually interviewed in person, and a few of these interviews were recorded on tapes. I talked with some people on more than one occasion. All the interviews were

held between March and June of 1979.

It is difficult to characterize the people I interviewed. They represented a broad range of occupations, lifestyles, and involvement with Big Creek. Because of the many hours spent with them, the old-time Big Sur residents are the most vivid in my mind. These people are marvelous storytellers, and their intimate knowledge of the Big Sur landscape is impressive. Their hands and features show they have led outdoor lives, and they seemed extraordinarily long-lived. At one point, I realized that I knew little about their lives, other than those parts associated with Big Creek, but I could not document these rich and diverse life stories and maintain the study's focus.

Because of their proximity to Big Creek and their long-term perspective on Big Sur history, members of the Harlan family were some of my most valuable sources of information. Wilbur Harlan originally homesteaded at Lucia in the 1880s and a few of his ten children—all of whom were born on the coast—still live in the area. Lulu Harlan, born in 1892, provided useful information on family histories and on daily life on the coast from a woman's perspective. At one time Lulu ran the Lucia post office; she also operated the Lucia Lodge for a number of years. Her brothers, George (born in 1893) and Marion (born in 1908), have made their livings on the coast by raising cattle and by using their broad skills for other work. Both George and Marion worked intermittently at Big Creek; they provided much information on the successive inhabitants of the canyon and on the origin of the cabins and structures on the reserve.

The Trotter brothers are other long-time residents of the Big Sur coast; they are legendary for their tremendous strength. The two Trotters I interviewed—Roy (born in

1906) and Frank (born in 1918)—are both skilled carpenters, plumbers, electricians, mechanics, equipment operators, and engineers. Roy Trotter worked with his father on a construction project in Big Creek in the early 1930s. Frank worked on the same project and also on a logging operation in Big Creek in the late 1940s.

Harrydick Ross, another Big Sur resident of many years, first visited the Big Sur coast on a hiking trip in the 1920s. On a subsequent trip, he camped for several weeks at the mouth of Big Creek. Harrydick is an excellent and interesting source of information on the Indians and history of Big Sur. By trade, he is an artist—a sculptor, a printmaker, and a sign painter.

Wid Dayton, born in Sonoma County in 1898, first worked in Big Creek in the 1930s with the Trotters, and then again in the late 1940s. Although he now lives in Mendocino County, Wid is renowned on the Big Sur coast as a fine woodsman. He earned his living during his years in Big Creek by making split timber, and several houses in Big Sur are the result of his labor.

An excellent and unexpected source of information was Jack Dolan, whom I met by chance at a friend's house in Big Sur. Jack is the grandson of Phil Dolan, the first person to homestead in the Big Creek area. Although Jack has never lived on the Big Sur coast, he has a remarkable knowledge of the history of the Dolan family, derived from hearing his father talk about his Big Sur childhood.

These people gave extensively of their time and provided the bulk of information in this report. Tapes were made of the interviews with Lulu Harlan, Marion Harlan, Frank Trotter, Harrydick Ross, Wid Dayton, and Jack Dolan. (These tapes are being held by the Big Sur Land Trust.)

The success of this project, however, is owed equally to the numerous people who contributed specific details on the different periods of Big Creek history:

Helen Fife (Pebble Beach) is the widow of Jim Fife, who operated a sawmill in Big Creek with his brother in the 1940s.

John Dowdakin (Carmel Valley) worked for the California Division of Forestry as a forest practices inspector for many years. Through his work he knew the Fifes at Big Creek; he also has an excellent general knowledge of Big Sur logging.

Mary Hinrichs (Salinas) is the daughter of John Marble, a Big Creek landowner in the 1920s.

Priscilla Nesbitt (Carmel) is the widow of John Nesbitt, a Big Creek landowner in the 1940s and 1950s.

Fred Farr (Carmel) is one of the group of people who owned Big Creek in the 1960s and 1970s.

Edward Landels (San Francisco) is one of the group of people who owned Big Creek in the 1960s and 1970s.

William Stewart (Carmel Valley) is also one of the same group of people who owned Big Creek in the 1960s and 1970s.

George Gamboa (San Gabriel) is the grandson of Sabino Gamboa, who homesteaded near Big Creek in the 1880s.

Roland Hall (Big Sur) was the caretaker of the Big Creek property during the 1960s.

Emil White (Big Sur) regularly visited Big Creek in the 1940s and 1950s and has lived on the coast for many years.

Jack Grissim (Hollister) was the executor of the estate of Marion Hollins, a Big Creek landowner

in the 1920s.

Olive Wollesen (Lockwood) is active in the San Antonio Valley Historical Society and has an extensive knowledge of Monterey County history.

Melvin Avila (Salinas) is a descendant of the Avila and Boronda families who were early homesteaders on the Big Sur coast. Melvin has researched much of his family history and geneology.

John Martin (Carmel) is the son of a landowner in Big Creek in the 1920s.

Ruth Morrissey (Big Sur) is a long-time resident of Big Sur who is knowledgeable about the history of the coast.

Katherine Short (Big Sur) has resided in Big Sur for many years and is the librarian for the Big Sur public library.

Catherine Bengston (Big Sur) is a long-time Big Sur resident familiar with the history of the area.

Jeff Norman (Big Sur) works for the U.S. Forest Service in Big Sur and is interested in Big Sur history.

Dean McHenry (Santa Cruz), former chancellor of UC Santa Cruz, is knowledgeable about Marion Hollins, a Big Creek landowner in the 1920s.

Jeff Kennedy (Berkeley) is a planner for the UC Natural Land and Water Reserves System.

Without exception, all the people I encountered were extremely generous with their time and knowledge. More than anything, their generosity made this a delightful project. I am thankful to all these people for their willingness to discuss the past so that succeeding generations might glimpse an earlier way of life.

Professor Kenneth S. Norris of the Environmental

Studies Board at UC Santa Cruz sponsored this project, and the staff of the Environmental Field Program at UC Santa Cruz assisted me in numerous ways. I am especially thankful to Larry Ford who provided encouragement when it was most needed, and to Randall Jarrell who gave an enormous amount of her time and skillfully guided this project from its initial proposal through its completion. Dan Warrick regularly offered valuable suggestions on the writing of this history, and contributed the text of the epilogue.

This study was funded by the Big Sur Land Trust; I am grateful to its Board of Trustees for the opportunity to do this work. Roger Newell was particularly helpful during the early stages of the project. I am most indebted to Nancy Hopkins who openly shared her home and freely gave me her time and ideas. Paul Kephart and Barbara Condon also kindly shared their home with me on repeated occasions.

John Schmitt drafted the excellent illustrations that appear in this publication, and Hulda Nelson of UCSC Graphic Services designed the cover and page layout.

1 Introduction

In the early 1900s Jaime de Angulo, a California anthropologist and linguist, asked a friend who was lyrically describing a recent hike along the Big Sur coast how it was that the Big Sur country had remained so wild. His friend, a professor of English and literature at Stanford University, responded: "I think it is because when the first expedition was sent out of Mexico with Portola to rediscover Monterey, they traveled along the sea-shore all the way up to San Luis Obispo, and a little beyond; well, there were about a hundred Spaniards and Indians and two or three hundred horses and pack-animals—quite an expedition to tackle a totally unknown country without roads or even trails! . . . and I imagine when they got into that tangle and labyrinth of mountains that fall plumb into the ocean without even a beach, they just got discouraged, and tried going around that clump of mountains; they turned east away from the sea, and found the Salinas Valley which led them ultimately to Monterey. That first trip of Portola established the route for the Camino Real and the Missions. Then Monterey became the capital of California Alta and the center for development—and as there was plenty of good flat land around it, north and west, nobody bothered with that rough land to the south."[1]

As de Angulo's friend describes, the history of Big

Sur has been influenced primarily by the ruggedness of the Santa Lucia Mountains, which kept the stretch of coast south of Monterey isolated for many decades. Captain Gaspar de Portola, whose overland expedition to Monterey in 1769 marked the beginning of the Spanish occupancy of California, is the first European known to have visited the Santa Lucia Mountains. His expedition was delayed in these mountains and was eventually forced to travel inland to more passable terrain.[2] Two missions were founded on the east side of the Santa Lucias in the Salinas Valley, and one was founded at Carmel, but no missions were established along the Big Sur coast. Spanish influence in California was confined primarily to the strip of twenty-one missions, and the Spanish era closed in California without the settlement of Big Sur. The Spanish, however, substantially affected the indigenous people of the Santa Lucia Mountains by forcing them into the mission life where their population dwindled rapidly.

In 1822 Mexico secured its independence from Spain, and California came under the jurisdiction of the new Mexican government. The most important political issue in California facing the new government was the secularization of the missions, which finally was accomplished in the mid-1830s. With the disintegration of the missions came the rise of the ranchos. About 500 land grants were given to private individuals during the Mexican period in California; only twenty land grants had been given during the Spanish regime. Most of the Mexican land grants consisted of land that had belonged to the missions and, except for a few in the Central Valley, most ranchos were located in a narrow strip along the coast. Because Big Sur was far away from any missions, little known, and extremely steep, only one land grant was located in that area. This rancho, located

at Point Sur, was given to Juan Bautista Alvarado in 1834 and comprised two leagues.[3] It is possible, though unlikely, that other land grants were given in Big Sur. The grants may have gone unrecorded because they were not brought before the commission set up by the United States in 1851 (according to the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo) to validate land claims under Mexican titles.

The lack of equipment, labor, and transportation in California during the Spanish and Mexican periods made cattle ranching the province's most substantial economic activity prior to 1848.[4] Hides and tallow were the chief commercial products of early California. Of lesser importance were sheep ranching and commerce from whaling ships and fur hunters.

The discovery of gold near Sacramento in 1848 brought to California a sudden and dramatic increase in population, as well as a great increase in commerce. With the huge number of miners creating a high demand for food, cattle ranching in California was expanded and the sheep industry was revived. The cultivation of grains, which had virtually ceased with the decline of the missions, was also revived during the gold-rush era, and the suitability of California for farming quickly became evident. A rise of industry and manufacturing also accompanied the gold rush: lumbering, sugar refining, cigar making, iron working, leather tanning, and banking were some of the businesses and industries that developed. Most importantly, however, the gold rush in California ended the region's isolation. In 1850 California received statehood—only two years after Mexico, in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ceded California to the United States.

Big Sur was far from the gold fields, and even though

the gold rush had an enormous effect on California, the new human influx had little influence on the still wild and uninhabited coast south of Monterey. The first organized groups of American settlers had come overland to California in the 1840s, marking the beginning of a steady migration to the region.[5] The first homesteaders in Big Sur, however, did not arrive until the late 1850s or early 1860s, at least a decade after the discovery of gold brought thousands of people to California. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth century, homesteaders trickled into Big Sur, but the inhospitable coast never became more than sparsely inhabited.

The availability of land in Big Sur encouraged the settlement of the area. The best land in California had been controlled by the missions and had entered private hands after secularization. Consequently, nearly all the land in the Monterey Bay and Salinas Valley areas was in private ownership by the time of the gold rush. During the second half of the nineteenth century, much of the land in California, particularly if it was fertile and located near transportation, was held by large landowners or by speculators. The extensive acreages granted to the railroads in the 1860s further aggravated the problem of land monopoly in the state.[6] The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 and the expansion of California agriculture in the 1870s caused the price of usable and accessible land to rise, making these areas even less available to homeseekers. Other lands were tied up in disputes over the validity of Mexican land grants, which in many cases were not resolved until the 1870s. This combination of factors forced those who had come to the Monterey area to homestead

to seek land in the Santa Lucias to the south. Because access to the area was difficult and the steep mountains were unsuitable for agriculture, land in Big Sur remained unclaimed and open to homesteading much later than land elsewhere in the state.

Cattle ranching was the most suitable economic activity for the early homesteaders on the rugged Big Sur coast. Cattle, however, required large amounts of land to graze, and settlers with insufficient acreages for cattle usually raised hogs instead. A small industry based on harvesting oak bark for leather tanning developed in Big Sur in the 1880s and 1890s. Yet the economic diversification and expansion experienced by California as a whole during the post-gold-rush era had little effect on Big Sur. As agriculture in the state broadened into the cultivation of fruits in the 1870s, Big Sur remained in the pastoral era that had dominated the state before the discovery of gold. The lack of transportation in Big Sur maintained conditions there because economic development in California was related closely to the development of transportation. Although cattle ranching sharply declined in California by the mid-1860s because of severe droughts, land title litigation, improved methods of farming, and oppressive state property taxes,[7] cattle ranching has remained an important part of the Big Sur economy.

The 1920s formed a decade of prosperity in California that was brought on in part by tremendous discoveries of oil in the Los Angeles basin area. This prosperity may have been responsible for the consolidation of land at Big Creek and other parts of Big Sur in the 1920s. Many of the people who bought land from the original homesteading families in Big Sur were financially successful and used the property

for recreation or investment rather than as a place to earn a living from the land. The proposed construction of a road down the Big Sur coast undoubtedly encouraged these land purchases by promising direct and more convenient access. The construction of the Big Sur road was part of a movement to build a network of paved highways in the state. Bond issues for this highway system were approved by California voters in 1910, 1916, and 1919. Federal grants to states for the construction of highways and the state gasoline tax also provided sources of money for the expansion of the road system in California.[8]

The completion of the road through Big Sur in the late 1930s substantially affected life on the coast by bringing the area much more in touch with the rest of the state. Although the Big Sur economy remained largely dependent on land uses such as grazing, logging, and scattered mining, the increased accessibility of the area to visitors stimulated the development of a small tourist industry.

The ruggedness and remoteness of Big Sur, which had originally deterred coastal settlement, became the area's primary attraction by the 1940s. Several of the early pioneering families still lived on the coast, but these were joined by others seeking isolation. Most prominent among these new residents was a small group of artists and intellectuals; some of these people, along with artists and intellectuals of the generation preceding them, had been spending time in Big Sur as early as the 1910s and 1920s. The area also became more appealing to the public for vacationing and sightseeing, and each year greater numbers of visitors travelled down the coast. By the 1970s tourism had become a central part of the Big Sur economy,

with millions of people passing through the area each year.

Although the history of Big Sur frequently diverges from general California history, Big Sur in many ways epitomizes qualities of California life that are nationally renowned. The isolation of this stretch of coast has kept Big Sur out of the mainstream of American life and has encouraged a kind of cultural bohemianism and maverick individualism. Because the Big Sur community is spread over many miles, an unconventional society has developed in which there is room for people of widely varied backgrounds, occupations, and lifestyles to live in a mutually tolerant and cooperative way. Big Sur was also one of the meccas for the new youth culture that originated in California in the 1960s.

The wild beauty of the Big Sur coast has been the source of inspiration for many California writers and artists. This wildness, though, has also in recent years stirred a controversy in the environmental movement, a movement that has its strongest roots in California. As pressures for development and public land access have increased with the state's tremendous population growth, many people have become concerned with preserving the few remnants of undeveloped land in California. Big Sur today is the site of one such conflict; proposals have been presented for varying federal protection designations for the Big Sur region. The outcome is not yet clear, and in many ways the future of Big Sur hangs in the balance.

2 The Esselens

The Esselen Indians are commonly believed to have been the earliest inhabitants of the central Big Sur region. Researchers who have studied the Esselens generally agree that their territory extended twenty-five miles along the California coast from Point Sur south to Lopez Point. The inland reaches of their territory stretched from the upper watershed of the Carmel River south to Junipero Serra Peak, encompassing the upper drainages of the Arroyo Seco River. The 580-square-mile range of the Esselens was bordered on the south by the Salinans and on the north and east by the Costanoan groups. Big Creek is situated in what was the extreme southwest corner of Esselen territory.

Specific details about Esselen history and culture are extremely scarce because this Indian group had virtually disappeared by the early decades of the nineteenth century. According to Alfred Kroeber, an authority on California Indians, the Esselens were the first of the California Indian groups to become entirely extinct.[1]

The Esselens had one of the smallest Indian populations in California. Kroeber liberally estimated that the Esselens numbered 1000, although he thought that 500 was a more accurate figure.[2] Two other anthropologists calculated the population figure to be near 750,[3] while a third used

mission records to deduce that 1300 was an accurate estimate of the Esselen population.[4]

The Esselen Indians are distinguished from adjacent tribes by the distinctiveness of their language and not of their culture. Linguistic evidence indicates that the Esselens may have had the most extensive aboriginal vocabulary on the continent.[5] The Esselen language has been classified as belonging to the Hokan family, which also includes the languages of the Pomo and Yana tribes who inhabited what are now parts of Sonoma, Mendocino, Tehama, and Shasta counties. Kroeber explained this peculiarity by theorizing that the Esselens were "a remnant of a people that once ranged over a much larger territory."[6] In ancient times the Esselens may have been a southern extension of northern Hokan tribes, a connection possibly severed by an invading group that forced the Esselens into an isolated southern territory.

The construction of Mission San Carlos Borroméo de Monterey in 1770 ended the aboriginal existence of the Esselen Indians.[7] Most of the Esselens were eventually taken into this mission where diseases and forced labor led to a rapid decline in their population and the disappearance of their culture.

Marion Harlan, a long-time resident of Big Sur, said that by the early twentieth century, "There were a few Indians here but they just lived like anybody else. There was one that had one eye called Old Levis, he homesteaded a hundred-and-sixty acres of land up here next to some of mine. And then there was an old guy that lived on Gamboa's and French Camp, his name was Tony Fontis and he was an Indian. And there were others when my dad first come here (1885) but they just all sort of disappeared really shortly.

Some lived out on the other side up around the mission."[8]

The first homesteaders on the Big Sur coast arrived after the disappearance of the Esselens, but they nevertheless found themselves sharing a common ground with their Indian predecessors. Places that the Indians had originally used for village sites and fish camps were frequently the same locations used by settlers for homesteads; the features characterizing Indian sites—favorable weather conditions, level land, and proximity to water—had equal appeal to homesteaders. Settlers were further attracted to the Indian sites by the fertile dirt of the shell middens, which provided rich soil for gardens and crops. The old skeletons that early homesteaders sometimes plowed up while cultivating their gardens provide evidence that the homesteaders and the Indians often occupied the same sites. Although numerous archaeological sites have been identified along the entire length of the Big Sur coast, few methodical excavations of these sites have been undertaken.

No thorough archaeological inventory has yet been done at Big Creek, although several shell sites have been located. Many more archaeological sites undoubtedly exist in the area, particularly near springs or streams and on south-facing ridges—the sites Indians most commonly used. Donald Howard, in Big Sur Archaeology, presents a list of archaeological sites in Big Sur.[9] Howard lists only one archaeological site near Big Creek. In 1972 the Monterey County Archaeological Society excavated a portion of this site. Howard has identified it as a cemetery and a midden of Esselen origin. During the excavation, the Monterey County Archaeological Society uncovered vertebrate and invertebrate remains as well as assorted artifacts including projectile points, scrapers, and awls. A

carbon-14 analysis dates the site at about A.D. 1300.[10]

3 Early Land Use

When in 1848 California was ceded to the United States by Mexico, all land in the territory became federal property, with the exception of those parcels that could be proven to be valid land grants from the Spanish or Mexican governments. After California received statehood in 1850, certain federal lands were granted to the young state by Congress for a variety of purposes, including education, reclamation, and internal improvements.

Although nearly ninety land grants were given in Monterey County by the Spanish and Mexican governments,[1] none is known to have existed on the Big Sur coast south of Rancho El Sur at Point Sur. Exactly who occupied the southern Big Sur coast after the Esselens and before the homesteaders (from the early 1800s until the 1870s) is indeed a mystery. Prospectors, explorers, and renegades may have periodically traversed the area, but apparently for a long time no one formally claimed or permanently settled this land.

The earliest claim at Big Creek is believed to have been made by the Soberana Maria and Buena Aventura Gold and Silver Mining Company, incorporated in 1863.[2] Two original certificates of shares in this mining company are owned by Fred Farr, a Big Creek landowner, who was told by a descendant of the mining company's owners that this company prospected in the Big Creek area.

About mining, Marion Harlan said, "There was none

really. There was quite a few test holes made but I don't think they ever found anything. I don't really know, that was before my time. There's a place over there in Big Creek—two or three places—that I know of where there's still holes in the ground where they dug, but all I could see was just shaly rock."[3]

These test holes mentioned by Marion Harlan are scattered throughout the Big Creek area. One is a long, tunnel-shaped hole cut into the rock near the head of Devil's Canyon; part of the creek now flows through it. Another test hole was dug horizontally into the side of the mountain near Devil's Flat, but its entrance is now covered by a landslide. A third, located on Mining Ridge, has a fifty-foot bay tree growing out of it, giving an indication of when prospecting may have occurred. Another test hole, located on Dolan Ridge, was filled in by George Harlan, an old-time resident of Big Sur, after several of his calves fell into it and died.

Other local residents agreed that any prospecting that may have taken place at Big Creek happened long before any of them were born. Although no written records or first-hand recollections exist to show that the Soberana Maria and Buena Aventura Gold and Silver Mining Company actually prospected at Big Creek, this mining company is probably responsible for the test holes found on the reserve. Lulu Harlan, a long-time resident of Big Sur and a sister of George and Marion Harlan, had no knowledge of any mining company that explored at Big Creek and thought that the prospectors were "just people that come in and thought they might find gold, but they never did. There was never nothing in these mountains."

"Do I know how it become Mining Ridge?" said Lulu

Harlan. "Because people used to make test holes for gold. That's how it got its Mining Ridge name."[4] No one I interviewed remembered Mining Ridge being called by any other name.

Because no Spanish or Mexican land grants were located at Big Creek, this area was open to claims by private individuals after California became a United States possession under federal land-disposal laws in effect at the time. One common way for an individual to obtain land was to claim it according to the provisions of the Homestead Act of 1862.[5]

"Land was not exactly free," said Marion Harlan about homesteading. "You had to put a certain amount of improvements on it, like a house and fences and corrals or just anything. You didn't have to fence the whole thing. I think it was a dollar-and-a-quarter of value of improvements per acre. They'd estimate your value if you told them how many miles of fences you had and a house—a liveable house it had to be—and all that. Then you had to have witnesses and you could go in front of a land commissioner, I believe they called it. You presented all the facts and everything and he'd put it all down on a piece of paper and you'd have witnesses and they'd all sign it and send it to the land office. Then in about a year, why, you got your title to it."[6]

The first homesteaders on the Big Sur coast began arriving in the late 1850s and 1860s and seldom settled farther south than the Big Sur valley. Homesteaders did not come to the area between Big Creek and Lucia until the mid-1870s. The Danis, who homesteaded the area near Lucia that is presently the Camaldoli Hermitage, arrived on the coast in 1880; Wilbur Harlan followed them in 1885. Several other men and their families also trickled into the area to homestead during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

A map in the Monterey County Recorder's office in Salinas denotes the names of the individuals who received the original land patents for each quarter-quarter section (forty acres) of land in Monterey County. To receive a patent to land, a person had to prove that he or she was the rightful owner of that property. Some of the names that appear on the Big Creek townships of the land patent map are familiar—Boronda, Gamboa, Dolan—while others are not recognized even by local old-timers. Most early homesteaders claimed four quarter-quarter sections, or a total of 160 acres—the limit set by the original Homestead Act. Until the mid-1920s the land at Big Creek generally belonged to several small landowners scattered sparsely across the rugged terrain. Most of these early settlers made their livings from the land. The consolidation of these homesteads into one large land parcel held by people not dependent on the land did not occur in Big Creek until nearly 1930.

4 The Homesteaders

Phil Dolan was the first person to homestead at Big Creek. Dolan probably settled near Big Creek in the late 1870s; he was already established there by the time the Danis arrived in the area in 1880.

Phil Dolan was born in the mid-1830s in County Cork, Ireland. During the severe potato famines in Ireland in the 1840s, Dolan's parents sent him to the United States, where

family friends lived in Boston. After living on the east coast for several years, Dolan departed for California. He is believed to have travelled west to escape the Civil War.[1]

Dolan came to California by crossing the isthmus of Panama and boarding a ship destined for San Francisco. Arriving on the west coast, he headed for the Salinas Valley where he found work as a sackbucker, a job that involved loading wagons with 100-pound sacks of grain dropped in the fields by a harvester. "Phil Dolan was a strong fellow," said his grandson, Jack Dolan. "Usually a sackbucker had a helper, but he didn't have a helper and that way he got double wages, four hundred and fifty dollars a season."[2]

At some point, Phil Dolan returned to San Francisco and was hired as part of a surveying crew establishing the township lines on the public lands in Monterey County. His familiarity with that part of the state and not his skill as a surveyor may have qualified him for the position. Although land surveying had been proceeding in California since early statehood days, it was not until the 1870s that a surveying team penetrated the remote Santa Lucia range.

When his surveying work was completed two or three years later, Phil Dolan travelled down the coast with John Anderson and Tom Slate to stake out their homesteads. Although Dolan already owned property in the Salinas Valley, he was interested in raising cattle and went to Big Sur where he could homestead land for a cattle ranch. His surveying experience gave him the advantage of being familiar with the geography of the coast and enabled him to select a superior site for a homestead. Dolan placed his original homestead on the north side of Big Creek in a sheltered hollow just below the ridge.[3] Nothing remains of it today.

Phil Dolan was about forty years old when he married

a young woman from Castroville named Elizabeth Mills. By the time he married, Dolan was financially well-established. Besides owning quite a bit of land around Salinas and Castroville, he had substantially expanded his ranch at Big Creek. According to Jack Dolan, his grandfather's ranch at Big Creek consisted of 4000 acres; George Harlan, however, believes the ranch totalled 2000 acres. Phil Dolan acquired this property in Big Creek by having his Irish friends and relatives file homestead claims on open land adjacent to his; he then purchased the land from them.[4] The original land patent map for Monterey County provides evidence that Dolan may have used this method, because many of the names on the map are unquestionably Irish—O'Toole, Fitzgerald, McWay—but the names of the claimants are not known to old-time Big Sur residents.

"He got his wife's brothers and sisters and brothers-in-law to homestead, too," Jack Dolan said. "And they wouldn't do no work on the place. My dad laughed at that because his father would be madder than hell, they wouldn't do a damn thing, they didn't even want to go down there. So my grandfather would have to do the work, clear this and do that. The agreement was for him to give them five hundred dollars. But in the meantime he got kind of well-to-do and they upped the ante. First it was seven hundred-and-fifty, then a thousand—that's the beginning of inflation—and anyways, the last one was fifteen hundred dollars and my grandfather just went to pieces. So anyways, he's wanting to beat them up and thrash them and everything else, especially the last one. Then his wife would intervene, you know. She's Catholic and she'd tell him it wasn't good to do this and that and beat up on people."[5]

Dolan became comparatively wealthy by acquiring sizeable tracts of land and investing his money in cattle.

His financial success was also partly the result of a conservative and unyielding attitude towards money that Jack Dolan described in the following story: "The price of bulls was twenty bucks a head. Evidently it didn't matter whether they were thin or fat. Well, you were selling them at a certain time of year, so I would assume they were half-fat. And they were twenty dollars, and the train had got to King City by then, and the damn buyer would only give my grandfather eighteen. So he stuck around there two or three days and he wanted twenty, he wanted his twenty bucks. The damn guy didn't give him the twenty. So he turned right around and drove the four bulls home. Took him over about nine or ten days to do it."[6]

Phil Dolan was also obstinate about things besides money. Marion Harlan described him as "a very stubborn, hard, independent man who always wanted to do everything by himself." Both George and Marion Harlan attribute the beginning of wild cattle in the coast range near Lucia to Dolan's stubborn nature. Evidently Phil Dolan insisted on driving cattle over the mountains alone—something few people dared do. On one of these trips he became so exhausted and hungry by the time he reached Bee Camp at the head of Big Creek that he deserted the cattle there and rapidly covered the final miles home. A rainstorm prevented him from returning to the cattle for a number of days. By the time Dolan finally arrived at Bee Camp again, the cattle had become too wild to herd to his ranch and he was forced to abandon all fifty head. For the next forty years, the cattle roamed wild through the mountains, defying several attempts to corral them, until the last one had been killed.

The Harlans also recalled that the Dolans produced butter and cheese in a small dairy behind their house.

Dolan built a big corral on the divide between Rat Canyon and Brunnette Creek as well as a trail leading to it from his house. The Harlans still refer to this site as "the old dairy."

The tanbark industry, which used tannin from the bark of certain oaks to tan hides, came to the coast in the 1880s and 1890s. Although most families in Big Sur were enough in need of money to sell their tanbark oaks, Dolan's financial stability made it possible for him to refuse to have his land tanbarked. "We were always proud that my grandfather was a conservationist in his own right," said Jack Dolan. "He didn't want them to wreck the trees. He liked the trees just the way they were, and evidently the money wasn't that big of a factor with him."[7]

Stories about individuals and families on the Big Sur coast were frequently passed among local residents as a form of entertainment as well as communication. Whether accurate or not, these stories added a rich dimension to each character inhabiting the coast. "You hear all kinds of yarns, but I don't know if they are all true or not, but I imagine a lot of them are," said Marion Harlan. "But one of Dolan's sons—my brother Paul used to tell some of the stories he'd heard about him and his father. 'Naw! Who told you that?' he'd say. He wouldn't believe it. Then Dolan's son would tell some others on his dad that were just as bad or worse. So they probably were, most of them, true.

"One time two of the boys—I don't know, they were always playing tricks on the old man. They rode their horses and he was afoot. He didn't ride a horse hardly ever. The boys discovered a yellow jackets' nest, one of them paper nests with a lot of yellow jackets in it. They told him there was a dead cow down there. He went down there and

was looking around and says, 'Where at, m' son? I don't see 'er.' 'Oh, just a little bit farther.' And then pretty soon he got in there and the yellow jackets swarmed around and the boys rode their horses and ran and went back home."[8]

At some point, the Dolan family, which included six children, moved from the Big Creek homestead to a new house on a small flat near the ocean between Rat Canyon and Dolan Creek. The new house had one room, a sleeping loft, and a dirt floor.

"My grandfather, he baked a cake for these fellows one time they were down on the coast," said Jack Dolan. "And when he got it out of the oven, it was real hot and he was burning his hands, so he had to put it on the floor—which was dirt. Then he had to get it up and dust it off and he kind of had to crack a couple of jokes to overlook the floor."[9]

In 1900 the Dolans moved again, this time to their property in Salinas so the children could attend school. Phil Dolan continued to live in Big Sur for two or three months at a time, running the ranch alone except for the occasional help of his older sons.

Phil Dolan died in 1909.[10] He had fallen sick in Big Sur and had to be taken to town on a stretcher. He collapsed in his lawyer's office after making out a will. Dolan travelled to San Francisco for an operation that proved unsuccessful, and he never returned to Big Sur. His wife, Lizzy Dolan, had died in Salinas the year before.

After their father's death, the orphaned Dolan children were distributed to various schools and families. The six ranches owned by Dolan were given to his brother-in-law, Mr. Alderson, to manage until the children reached legal age. At the time of his death, Dolan had 400 to 500 head of

cattle on his Big Sur property; these were sold to a local rancher.

Jack Dolan's father became executor of the Dolan estate after returning from World War I. Because the Dolan children were fighting "like cats and dogs" over the future of the property, straws were drawn finally to resolve the land inheritance question. Jim Dolan and his sister received the Big Sur portion of their father's estate.

In the meantime, Phil Dolan's attorneys—Hudson, Martin, and Jorgenson—offered to purchase the Big Sur property from the Dolan children. None of the Dolans lived on the Big Sur ranch and much of it had been leased to George Harlan for cattle grazing. A deal was arranged, and in 1924 the Dolan children sold the entire ranch in Big Sur to the group of attorneys.

Sabino Gamboa came to homestead in the Big Creek area around 1880. The precise year is not known, but the Harlans believe that he arrived after Phil Dolan and before the Danis, who settled near Lucia in 1880.

Sabino Gamboa's father was a Spanish Basque who came to California "around the cape" on a sailing ship bound for Monterey. The ship was blown off course in a storm and anchored instead at San Francisco. Sabino's father headed south and settled in the mountains near Santa Cruz, where Sabino was born in 1850. Sabino Gamboa grew up in the Santa Cruz region, but seeking isolation he moved down the coast to Big Creek.[11]

Sabino's Basque ancestry must have confused his neighbors in Big Sur. George Harlan described Sabino Gamboa as "an industrious Frenchman," and others believed that he was Portuguese. His first house on the coast was built into

the hill on the ridge behind what are now called the Marble cabins.[12] Eventually, he homesteaded 160 acres of land on the ridge between Big Creek and Vicente Creek and built a second house.

After moving to the coast, Sabino Gamboa met and married Anita Avila, the youngest daughter of Vicente Avila, who lived on a ranch in a remote valley on the east side of the Santa Lucia mountains. The Gamboas had six children: Ellen, Lottie, Annie, Marie, George, and Jake.[13] The Gamboas fared well during their years on the coast; they had many horses as well as cattle and hogs, and they raised a garden, a vineyard, and a small orchard of cherry, peach, and apple trees. According to George Gamboa's son, George (Sabino's grandson), Sabino employed several Indians to help with the farm chores.

The Gamboas' old pumphouse, which stands over a spring in the canyon below their homestead, protected an ancient engine that was one of the most sophisticated machines on the coast in its day. The engine worked like a windmill to pump water from the spring to a cement tank above the homestead, where it then ran to the house by gravity. At a time when nearly every coast family carried its water from springs in buckets, the Gamboas' pump was considered a luxurious and advanced system.

At the time of his death in 1903, Sabino Gamboa owned nearly 640 acres of land between Big Creek and Vicente Creek. The property was divided equally among his six children. Three years later Gamboa's daughters sold their inherited parcels of land to their two brothers, Jake and George. Just after the turn of the century, George Gamboa acquired another 160 acres by homesteading a nearby quarter-section of land.[14] The Indian Tony Fontis worked breaking horses

for George Gamboa at about this time.[15]

George Gamboa continued to live for many years at the family homestead near Big Creek with his brother Jake, who eventually had a family. When the children reached school age, Jake moved his family to land he owned in King City, where public education was available. George Gamboa remained at the old homestead until the late 1920s, at which time he sold most of his land to Marion Hollins (a real estate agent from Pebble Beach) and moved to King City. He retained some of his own homestead land and built a hand-split redwood cabin that still stands. A redwood dance floor on the Gamboa property (also still intact) was hand-built in the 1930s by an abalone diver named Henry Porter.

Harrydick Ross, a Big Sur resident of many years, remembers George Gamboa as a "delightful informant." In the 1920s Harrydick and Shanagolden Ross camped during the summer at the mouth of Big Creek on George Gamboa's property. "We drove as far as McWay Canyon," Harrydick Ross explained. "That was the end of the road. They were having a big party or barbeque, and it was George Gamboa and Arbues Boronda that were there on horseback, and they volunteered to take our backpacks and leave them where the trail left to go down to Big Creek.

"We lived right there where that little caretaker's house is. Our camp was just across the creek from it and the reason it was across there was that it had been a survey camp and there was a table and a fireplace. George was the only Gamboa around at the time. They ran cattle there. They used to use that little flat around the survey camp for butchering the steers and the hogs. They'd run them down there when they couldn't get them back up to the house.

"We were there for six weeks, I think. We got lots

of abalones and we caught lots of fish out on the rock there. And if we wanted trout for breakfast, it'd take about three minutes to walk up the stream a hundred yards and get four trout for breakfast. Our only communication with humans was hollering back and forth at the abalone fishermen."[16]

George Gamboa died suddenly one day in 1948 on his way out of a hospital in King City, having just been told he was in fine health.

All that remains of the original Gamboa homestead is a ramshackle tool shed entangled with poison oak, a pile of lumber, sections of fence in disrepair, the cement water tank, and the old pumphouse. Across the creek to the north of the homestead is the Gamboa graveyard where Sabino and Anita Gamboa are buried with one of their sons, Angel, who died at an early age. A site on the Gamboa property bears the name "French Camp," in reference to a frenchman who camped there before Sabino Gamboa arrived in the 1880s.[17] The name Gamboa Point remains as a lasting reminder of the early pioneer.

Three Boronda brothers homesteaded different parts of the Big Creek canyon during the 1910s and 1920s. Their father, Jose de los Santos Boronda, was the first Boronda to settle along the Big Sur coast. He came to the coast in the late 1880s and settled on a piece of land a mile or two north of the Harlan homestead.

The history of the Boronda family is complex and misunderstood, primarily because the Borondas have been residents of Monterey County since the mid-1700s. Over the years the Borondas have branched into numerous separate but related groups. Jose de los Santos Boronda was supposedly a close relative of the original Boronda, Corporal Jose Manual Boronda, who came to California in the 1780s, but their exact

relationship is not clear. Marion Harlan said the Borondas in Lucia were related to the descendants of the original Boronda in Monterey. "They were related," he said, "because these Borondas used to go out there and visit those Borondas in Monterey once in a great while. Tim Boronda was just a little older than I was—oh, a few years—and he went out there to visit them and he said they were so high-class he didn't want to ever go back there. But I guess they were cousins or something."[18]

Each of the older Harlans tells a similar story about the origin of Jose de los Santos Boronda and his arrival in Lucia. "Jose de los Santos was direct from Spain," said Marion Harlan. "He was a real Spaniard. He jumped ship in Monterey. Now at what time, I don't know, but the only way I heard this was my oldest brother used to go up there and visit a lot with them and he said that Mr. Boronda told him. Somehow, Jose de los Santos enlisted in the Spanish army when he was just a teenager yet. Then when they got to Monterey Bay, why, somehow they'd quarrelled on the boat and everything and he was just ready to get off that boat no matter what happened. So he jumped ship and he went inland. He never did stop. The boat went on back to Mexico or wherever it came from, and he just kept going. He got way over in the San Joaquin Valley. Everybody was Spanish-speaking so he soon got a job and made a living. But when he left that boat he had just the clothes on his back. That was all he had. And then he worked around and he finally got back here to Salinas Valley and came over here. I guess he was still a little bit leery about getting picked up by the Spanish government. But he came over here where, well, the Lopezes were sort of renegades, and he was, and they were all dodging the law somehow or other."[19]

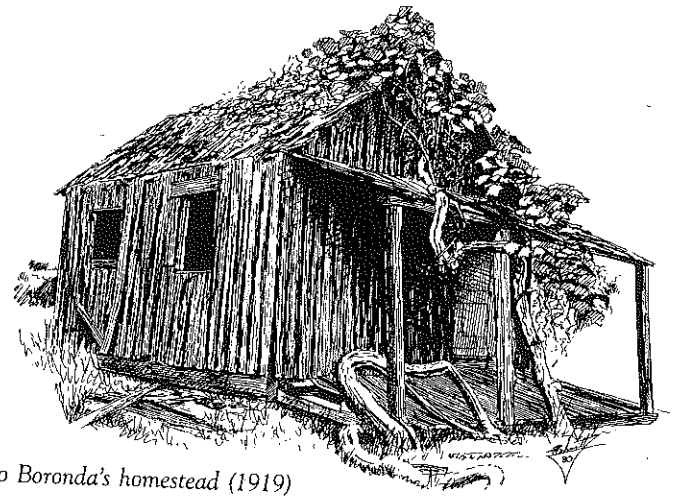
Jose de los Santos Boronda was married twice during his years on the coast and had a total of fifteen children. There is considerable confusion over who his wives were, although it is generally agreed that one was Loretta Robles from Lockwood. The other was either a sister of Anita Avila (the wife of Sabino Gamboa) or, as George Harlan believes, a blonde Castilian woman whose name he does not remember. The question of which woman bore which of the Boronda children is equally confusing. Lulu Harlan said that Santos, Edwardo, and Arbues—the three Boronda Boys who homesteaded in Big Creek—had the same parents and were brothers of Alley (who homesteaded in Torre Canyon), Lino, Joe, Lucy, Jose, and Maggie.

In the early 1920s Jose de los Santos Boronda sold his homestead to William Randolph Hearst, who in time purchased nearly all the land from Limekiln Creek to San Simeon. Jose de los Santos Boronda and his wife then moved to the King City or Jolon area.

Edwardo Boronda, son of Jose de los Santos, was born at the Boronda homestead near Lucia. In 1919 Ed Boronda received title to 160 acres of land that he homesteaded in a clearing on the west side of a canyon that enters Big Creek just above the hot springs.[20] Little is remembered about Ed Boronda; he was a solitary, unmarried man that few people knew well. Evidently, Marion Harlan's oldest brother, Aaron, was close in age to Ed Boronda and the two were stationed together in France during World War I.

Ed Boronda raised hogs and horses but owned no cattle. He killed many mountain lions and earned some cash by selling the hides, which occasionally were worth ten to twenty dollars each.[21] In the first half of the 1920s, Ed Boronda

sold his homestead to his brother Arbues and moved over the mountains to the Jolon area.



Edwardo Boronda's homestead (1919)

The cabin and barn at Ed Boronda's homestead are unmaintained and deteriorated but still standing. To the local old-timers, the cabin's distinguishing feature is the old grapevine that grows over the porch. The inside walls of the cabin are covered with torn and brittle newspaper clippings from the 1910s and 1920s. Although the wall covering appears to have been for information or decorative purposes, Marion Harlan said the newspaper was used to cover cracks in the walls, providing a primitive form of insulation. The clippings, however, have a remarkable sameness of topic: women's undergarments.

In the 1920s when he bought his brother's land, Arbues Boronda also purchased Patrick Avila's homestead, adjacent to Ed Boronda's place. Arbues Boronda homesteaded another 160 acres of land himself, bringing his total acreage close to 480 acres. He lived in the cabin with the grapevine that his brother had built several years earlier.

Harrydick Ross described Arbues Boronda as "one of these great natural storytellers." Like his brother Ed, Arbues had no cattle and raised only hogs. He had a dog trained to hunt mountain lions that preyed on his hogs.

"Arbues used to raise nothing but hogs," Marion Harlan said. "He didn't have any cattle although he did run into a man that did put cattle on his pasture. But he had those hogs every year and the lions would catch them. So he had to hunt lions. He'd kill an average of about thirty lions a year to keep them from killing all his hogs. But they killed the hogs anyhow. He lost lots of them. So in order to compensate for what the lions killed, he'd hunt the lions. He had a big hound dog, half bloodhound and half something else or two-thirds something else. Anyhow, he used to kill a lot of lions. They averaged about thirty a year. Some years he only got fifteen or so, and some years he got fifty."[22]

In the late 1920s Arbues Boronda sold his land to Frank Horton and Warren Gorrell through Marion Hollins. "Arbues borrowed money to buy his land from a man in King City," explained Marion Harlan. "And the man never did press him for it. But somehow he just couldn't pay it all off. So I guess he thought, 'Well, I'll just sell out.' He didn't last long. Very short life after he left here."

Santos Boronda was the third son of Jose de los Santo Boronda to homestead in Big Creek canyon. The homestead cla filed by Santos Boronda, which he received title to in 1921, included the lower half-mile of Devil's Canyon and part of B Creek below its confluence with Devil's Canyon.[23] Santos bu a cabin of hand-split lumber on the high bluff overlooking t mouth of Big Creek.

Santos Boronda's homestead (1921)

All that is known about the personal life of Santos Boronda is that he was married to a Mexican woman. Some time during the 1920s his wife deserted him, and Santos sold his land to George Gamboa and moved over the mountains to King City.

When Harrydick and Shanagolden Ross camped at the mouth of Big Creek in the 1920s, they explored Santos Boronda's abandoned cabin. "There was a cradle there," said Harrydick Ross. "Do you know a song of my wife's,

'Ballad of the South Coast'? Well, there's a line in it that said, 'My heart and the cradle are still empty.' And that's where she got that idea."[24]

In about 1920 Patrick Avila homesteaded 160 acres of land on the north side of Big Creek, a little northwest of Ed Boronda's place. Pat Avila was the son of Bautista Avila, the first of the Avila family to homestead in Big Sur. Bautista Avila arrived on the coast a few years after Wilbur Harlan came in 1885. He claimed a piece of land north of the Harlan's place and built a house there.

Bautista Avila, in turn, was a son of the legendary Vicente Avila who had moved his family to a remote mountain valley on the east side of the Santa Lucia Mountains that he named Rancho Salsipuedes, meaning "get out if you can." At least two stories explain why Vicente Avila took his family to the isolated ranch; both are based on Avila's hatred for the encroaching American settlers in California.[25] The Avila family has a very long history in California and it is believed that Vicente Avila's father was Francisco de Avila who came to California with the Portola expedition in 1769.[26]

In addition to Bautista, two other children of Vicente Avila made their homes in Big Sur. One was Anita Avila who married Sabino Gamboa, and the other is believed to have been a wife of Jose de los Santos Boronda.

Pat Avila built a cabin on his land in Big Creek and, like many of his neighbors, earned cash by raising hogs. He married Manuela Boronda, daughter of Jose de los Santos Boronda. As far as it is known, they had no children. At some point in the 1920s, Pat Avila sold his homestead to Arbues Boronda and moved out to a ranch on Jolon Road.

After Pat Avila moved, an abalone diver named Henry Porter used the homestead to keep bees. Porter stored equipment and slept in Pat Avila's cabin until it was flattened in a wind storm. In place of the cabin, Porter erected a frame tent.

"There was a man named Henry Porter that used to be an abalone diver out here for years," said Marion Harlan, "and he had bees there, he had hundreds of bees. And he just went away and left them. They all rotted and sunk in the ground and they're all gone now. There's just a few pieces of hives laying around there and an old extractor—the wind blew it down in a ditch—and big honey tanks. He used to have a great big boat and he used to haul hives down here and have Arbues Boronda carry them up on horses and mules. And then he'd rob the bees and take the honey back down to the boat and put it on and take it to Monterey and sell it. He made good money. He had sage honey, the best in the world. Water-white. He gave it up. I don't know why."[27]

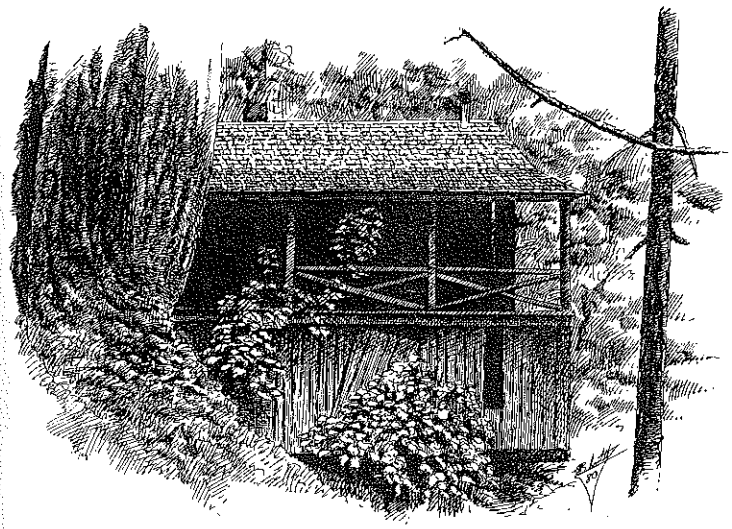
Henry Porter had a hundred-gallon container on a platform below the extractor from which he would fill five-gallon cans of honey to take to Monterey. George Harlan believes that this bee-keeping enterprise lasted until about 1930. At some point after the bees were abandoned, a fire burned the remainder of Avila's cabin as well as the frame tent and much of the honey equipment.

Henry Porter is known by some to have been a rum-runner during Prohibition. His occupation as an abalone diver made it possible for him to retrieve bottles of rum dumped into the ocean and smuggle them ashore under the abalone packed in his boat. In the early 1930s Porter hid

from authorities who were after him for his rum trade by working for Sam Trotter on a construction project at Big Creek.[28]

Henry Porter died in a diving accident during the 1940s. "That's what took his life—diving," said Lulu Harlan. "Whoever put his skull cap on had it crooked, and the water seeped in and drowned him."

Rooth Brunnette received a patent to forty acres of land in Big Creek in 1917. (The unusual spelling of her name is verified by county records.)[29] It was not until the early 1930s, however, that she had a cabin built on her property. Wid Dayton, a woodsman working in Big Creek at the time, built Brunnette a hand-hewn cabin deep in the redwoods as she requested. The small creek on which the cabin is located is now known as Brunnette Creek.



Rooth Brunnette's cabin (1931-32)

No one I interviewed knew Rooth Brunnette well, although Lulu Harlan remembered that Brunnette came to Lucia every week during the summer to pick up mail. Wid Dayton thought she ran an auto camp on the highway north of King City. Marion Harlan recalled vaguely that Brunnette's husband, Chico, managed a grocery business in King City, but that they separated before she built her Big Creek cabin. She is thought to have had a son or two.

"I think she only had forty acres—just a very small piece of land," said Marion Harlan. "She used to come over from King City and stay at Gamboa's and camp down in Big Creek many a summer for two or three weeks or a month sometime. And then when the highway was built and this road joined it going up Big Creek—it ended right at her place. So then she built the cabin and stayed there but she died very shortly after that. She used to spend the summers in Big Creek just camping over here in what they called Devil's Canyon. She never did stay on her own place until after that road was built."[30]

In 1924 John Marble bought about 400 acres of land in Big Creek from George and Martha Gamboa. Although Marble did not receive the original patent to this land, he owned it before most of the landholdings in the area were consolidated into one large parcel in the late 1920s. Mary Hinrichs, daughter of John Marble, recalled much about her family's trips to Big Creek, although she was a child at the time of the visits.

John Marble bought the land in Big Creek for a fishing and hunting area and had no intention of developing it for resources or profit. Marble graduated from Stanford University and owned a ranch in Carmel Valley, but lived with his

family in Pasadena in southern California. In the summer of 1924, the Marbles packed in on horseback to Big Creek to camp and fish for several weeks. The women of the family, who seldom went to Big Creek, went along on this trip. Mary Hinrichs remembered riding out from Big Creek once a week to pick up mail at the Lucia post office.

Mary Hinrichs described her father as a great outdoorsman. To get to Big Creek, John Marble usually travelled to Tassajara and crossed the mountains from that direction. He never hired a guide even though the trail was obscure, steep, and treacherous.

Although the buildings on the bluff overlooking the mouth of Big Creek where Santos Boronda homesteaded are often called the "Marble cabins" or the "Marble palace," Mary Hinrichs insisted that her father had nothing to do with these buildings. The origin of these names is not clear, but Mary Hinrichs first heard the site called "Marble cabins" by Marion Hollins, who purchased the property from John Marble in 1930. The only structure Mary Hinrichs remembered her father building on the bluff was a one-room shed constructed with materials shipped in by boat and landed at Big Creek beach. The shed contained metal bins for storage.

When Marion Hollins offered a large sum of money for the Big Creek property in 1930, John Marble asked his children whether he should sell the land. Fearing that the pending completion of the coast highway would ruin the character of Big Creek, the children agreed to the sale.

5 Life on the Coast

The early residents of the Big Sur coast were extremely self-sufficient and resourceful. Typically, they arrived to homestead in the Santa Lucia range with very little: a gun for hunting, a few essential tools, and perhaps a horse. A crude shelter was constructed that served as a house until a more permanent dwelling could be built to accommodate a growing family. Brush-covered fields were cleared by hand or burned, and a garden was planted immediately.

"The Danis did it just about the way we did," said Lulu Harlan. "They came here, they were poor, and they had to plant everything that they ate, like peas and corn. I think my mother said they made peabread and cornbread until they were sick of it. But then, when we were growing up, the cornbread and everything tasted so good. And then instead of raising peas, my dad used to raise beans.[1]

Hunting was the only way to obtain fresh meat during a family's first few years on the coast. Deer at the time were extraordinarily abundant, and a family usually shot one every few weeks in summer and more often in winter when the supply of vegetables diminished. Grizzly bears, however, were rare in the Santa Lucia range by the time the homesteaders arrived. Wilbur Harlan saw grizzly tracks around his pond in 1885, the year he arrived on the coast, but the

last actual sighting of a grizzly in Big Sur was made in the late 1870s.[2]

The children of the early pioneer families attended grade school at the one-room Redwood School located near the Harlan's place. Schoolteachers were alternately boarded in the homes of each of the neighboring families; many married local young men. Both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking families sent their children to the school, and some youngsters learned to speak both languages.

Supplies and materials that could not be produced on the coast were packed in on horses from King City of brought in by boat. Homesteaders of the Big Sur coast south of Dolan Canyon seldom travelled north to Monterey for supplies but instead made the easier trip over the mountains to King City. One of the trails to King City started up the divide between Vicente and Limekiln creeks and headed in an easterly direction until it widened into a road on the east side of the Santa Lucia range between the Avila Ranch and The Indians. At the place where the trail turned into a road, Wilbur Harlan kept a wagon hidden in a cave. He hitched his pack horses to the wagon and used it to haul supplies between there and King City.

Although the trail to King City was well worn, this overland route to bring in supplies was used only as a last resort. A boat brought down from San Francisco or Monterey was a far more efficient and desirable means of delivering goods. Although only four or five pack horses or mules each bearing two hundred pounds of supplies could be brought on the trail from King City,[3] a nearly unlimited quantity and variety of provisions could be shipped down the coast by boat.

Wilbur Harlan usually organized these boat trips,

which took place annually from the late 1890s to the early 1900s. He would compile the orders from neighboring families—the Borondas, Gamboas, Danis, Avilas, Twitchells, Harlans, and Lopezes—and then travel to King City or Soledad, where he would catch a train to San Francisco. After obtaining the requested items, he'd charter a boat to bring the goods south. Lulu Harlan remembered the arrival of the boat as the highlight of her life at that time. As it rounded Gamboa Point, the boat would whistle to signal the local people to come to the landing for their supplies. Most of the items that could not be produced on the homesteads arrived on the boat; these included rice, macaroni, sugar, flour, salt, coffee, raisins, dried fruit, and hardware.

Other trips were taken to King City each year to drive cattle or hogs to market. Each was a long and difficult journey over the mountains, although cattle were easier to drive than hogs. Hogs constantly had to be enticed to move with corn, frequently refused to cross creeks, and bloodied their feet on the rough trail. Nearly a week was needed to drive hogs to King City; cattle took only a few days. Because of the heavy work load at home, the women of the families rarely accompanied these cattle and hog drives.

The sale of cattle and hogs provided the early coast families with a source of cash to purchase the goods they could not produce. At an early age, children began to acquire animals that would provide an income in future years. Lulu Harlan explained the way the Harlan children learned about money: "When we were kids, our father used to tell us we had to earn our money. The place was just overrun with gophers, and he'd give us five cents for every tail of a gopher that we caught. And that's the way we made our start

of money. And then when we got enough, we'd buy a sow and then that sow would have pigs and that way the thing increased a little. And that was the same way we got a cow. We had to buy our cow. And when we got enough money we bought the cow and then she'd produce and it kept increasing."[4]

Because Lucia was designated a post office, mail was packed in on mules over the mountains from King City each week. Mail day was an important social occasion in the area because it provided a regular opportunity for local inhabitants to exchange information and remain in touch with the other isolated individuals and families along the coast. Although large social gatherings in Big Sur were infrequent, Marion Harlan said about the early coast families that "all they used to do was visit. No one visits anymore."

For several decades, transportation through most of the Santa Lucia range was only by foot or on horseback. The coast trail running the length of Big Sur had been built out gradually from the homesteads until it was a continuous path.[5] Although the trails in the coast range traversed private property, travellers passed freely through the private land without trouble and were usually put up for the night at homesteads along the way in exchange for a bit of labor. Photographers, peddlers, and hobos occasionally passed through, but in general, there were few travellers.

The first wagon road down the coast from Monterey went as far as the Little Sur River. Eventually it was extended to the Post homestead in the Big Sur valley. In about 1920 the Castros hand-built the road a few more miles to their place in Castro Canyon. For many years a wagon could not be taken farther south than the Big Sur valley.

In 1924 the State of California began constructing

a coast road through the Santa Lucia Mountains, supporting the project with funds that had been authorized several years earlier by a $1.5-million bond issue. The road was constructed as far south as Anderson Canyon and as far north as Salmon Creek before the project ran out of funds. "You could have taken a wagon over it right after they first finished it," said Harrydick Ross. "Then there came a very wet winter and it all washed away."[6]

Construction of the coast road resumed in 1931, at which time much of the labor was done by convicts. The road was originally unpaved and circled back into the canyons, where it crossed the creeks over one-lane wooden bridges until permanent bridges could be constructed. The large concrete bridge at Big Creek was the last one built, and its completion in 1937 marked the official opening of Highway 1.[7] "By and large," said Harrydick Ross, "the Big Sur skipped directly from the horse to the automobile culture. With all these trails on the coast, there was no damn use for wagons."

6 Consolidation of Land Ownership

In the late 1920s the scattered homesteads and pioneering families that had characterized Big Creek since the 1880s began to disappear. In their place appeared wealthy individuals who consolidated the small holdings into one large land parcel. Those who had earned their living on the land moved out or died, and the new owners

used the land instead for recreation, business ventures, or vacation homes.

Marion Hollins initially purchased and consolidated many of the homesteads in Big Creek into one large land parcel. In the 1920s Marion Hollins reaped millions of dollars from investments in a wildcat oil-drilling venture in California's Central Valley. She lived in Pebble Beach and was a champion polo and golf player. Because she had always been interested in real estate and land development, Marion Hollins worked as a salesperson for prime real estate. She sold the earliest Pebble Beach homesites and was responsible for the development of the Pasatiempo country club in Santa Cruz.

Marion Hollins began purchasing land around Big Creek in the late 1920s. Her reasons for buying the Big Creek property are not known, but she apparently was associated in some way with two men, Frank Horton and Warren Gorrell, who ran a guest ranch in Wyoming and wanted to start a similar operation on the Big Sur coast. The three of them purchased much of the land from Limekiln Creek to Rat Canyon, including property belonging to the Gamboas, Borondas, Marbles, Danis, and Avilas. Horton and Gorrell formed the Santa Lucia Corporation for the venture.[1] Russell Fields, who developed the Coastlands residences in Big Sur, may also have been connected with the project.[2]

Roy Trotter, who worked for Horton and Gorrell in the 1930s, recalled that the purpose of the proposed guest ranch was for people to visit the coast on horseback, spending the nights at comfortable cabins and campsites along the route. George Harlan believed that Horton and Gorrell intended to prohibit hunting on the Big Creek property and to use it instead as a kind of park where guests could admire and

enjoy the wild setting.

Several construction projects had to be completed before the proposed ranch could function. To direct the construction, Horton and Gorrell hired Sam Trotter, a local resident who had supervised the Big Sur portion of the Notley Company's lumber and tanbark business for a number of years. The construction program included three separate projects: a log house at the hot springs in Big Creek, a hewed-timber and split-lumber house near Lucia, and roads going up Big Creek to the hot springs and up Devil's Canyon to a planned campsite.

Sam Trotter's first task was to gather a crew of competent craftsmen. Trotter searched extensively for the appropriate people and eventually selected a core team of seven men, plus a married couple who took charge of the cook tent. Wid Dayton, one of the men hired for the project, recounted the way he became involved: "I was making ties and split timber in Santa Cruz County at the time. And one of the Trotter boys came up. He didn't know me, but he knew this George Ross who was working with me there. We were working on the same job—making ties. And they wanted somebody to hew timbers down there, the Trotters' dad did. So they sent the boy up to get somebody and then this fellow, George Ross, wanted me to go with him. So anyways it sounded like a good job, so I went down with him. That was Twenty-nine. I went down on the fifth of July in Twenty-nine."[3]

The first construction project Horton and Gorrell wanted completed was a log cabin near the hot springs in Big Creek. William Wurster, an architect from the Monterey Peninsula, is believed to have designed this cabin as well as the one Horton and Gorrell built near Lucia. These cabins were supposedly some of the first buildings designed by Wurster, who later became a prominent architect at the

Berkeley School of Architecture. Others contend that the architect who designed these cabins was not Wurster but Bernard Maybeck.

The log cabin at the hot springs was constructed exactly as the blueprints depicted it, although the men on the work team thought the site selected for the cabin was too dark and damp. According to Roy Trotter, considerably more sunshine would have been available had the cabin been built fifty or sixty feet higher on the hillside instead of in the low spot under the redwoods where it now stands. Moreover, the windows of the cabin were small, further compounding the problem of too little light.

Except for the water pipe, fixtures, hardware, fastenings, and nails, all the materials for the cabin came from the building site. Those materials that could not be manufactured at the job site—as well as tools and supplies—were packed in on mules from the end of the road at Anderson Creek, a trip that took nearly all day. Because the steepness and ruggedness of Big Creek made it impossible to get pack mules up the canyon to the hot springs, a two-and-a-half mile trail was built from the coast trail to the building site. This temporary pack trail was constructed up the south side of Rat Canyon to the ridge between Rat Canyon and Big Creek and then down the north side of Big Creek to the hot springs.

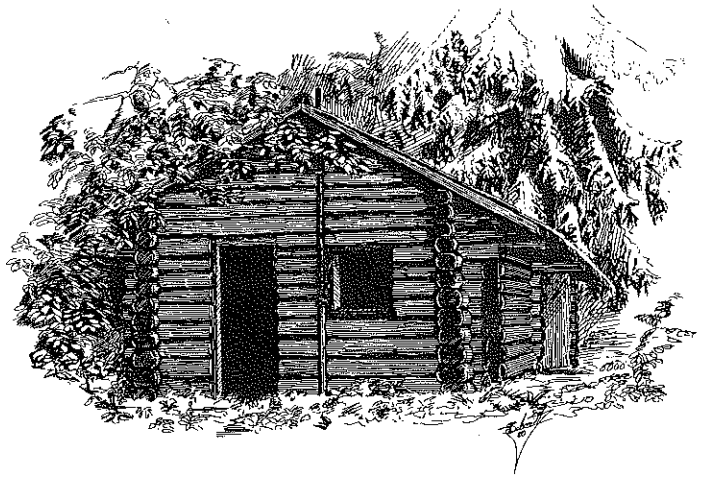
In a brief paper describing the construction work his father supervised in Big Creek, Roy Trotter explained the method by which the log cabin at the hot springs was built:

> The ground floor was constructed of patio rounds cut from local redwood trees 9 inches thick and squared to fit together checker board fashion and set in a sand cushion.

The window and door frame, doors, counters, and other wood items were constructed by hand on the job site. The lumber for these items was split from local redwood logs using a sledge and wedges for the large pieces and a maul and froe to make thin boards. All wood materials were smoothed using the broad axe, adze, drawesknife, and plane.

The roof on the log cabin was constructed of shakes manufactured on the site, split by hand with a wood maul and shake froe.

A rock outcrop was located upstream a short distance from the building site. Several well-placed charges of dynamite in the outcrop provided ample rock that could be transported on a sled pulled by horses over a down-hill road to the log building. The cement for the cement and sand mortar needed to lay up the rock fireplace and chimney was packed in on mules from the end of the road at Anderson Creek. The sand was gathered from small deposits located along Big Creek and packed to the job site on mules.



The hot springs cabin (1929)

The pipeline supplying water to the house was approximately 600 feet in length. The pipe was cut into 6-foot lengths at Anderson Canyon, packed on mules to the site where all cut ends were threaded for installation.[4]

George Harlan remembered vaguely that Horton and Gorrell intended to improve the hot springs, but never did so. Sam Trotter and his work crew used the hot springs daily and rigged up an outdoor shower by punching holes in the bottom of a bucket that hung from a water trough.

The second job undertaken by Sam Trotter and his work team was the construction of a hewn timber and split lumber house near Lucia, at the site where the Camaldoli Hermitage is now located. This cabin was intended to be used as an overnight accommodation for guests.

When the house near Lucia was completed, the work team returned to Big Creek to build a road up the canyon, the third and last phase of Horton and Gorrell's construction program. The road was to start at the mouth of Big Creek—where it would presumably connect with the coast highway then under construction—and follow the creek to the junction of Devil's Canyon and Big Creek. Here the road would divide, with one fork continuing up Big Creek to the log house near the hot springs and the other fork going up Devil's Canyon a little more than a mile to a planned campsite, probably at Devil's Flat.

Building the road was the most difficult of the three construction projects. Most of the road work was done by hand using picks and shovels. To get a road up Big Creek, a shelf was blasted into the rock and then widened into a road with the help of a retaining wall. Two bridges were constructed; the largest straddled Big Creek and required that huge timbers be dragged to the site by horses and

raised with ropes. This bridge remained intact until the 1960s when it was damaged by a falling tree.

The work camp for the road project was set up at the junction of Devil's Canyon and Big Creek once the road reached that point. From this site the men had easy access to both forks of the road under construction. Supplies and equipment for the road project were brought in by boat to Big Creek beach, a far more convenient method than packing them in by trail. A dory was used to ferry the supplies from the boat to the beach, where they were then loaded on a sled with wooden runners that was pulled by horses to the campsite.

While on the job, the men slept in tents or lean-tos. A shaded dining area was set up at the campsite with poles and shingles. Lillian Trotter, daughter of Sam Trotter, and her friend did the cooking and kitchen work during the last construction phases of the project. Two other children of Sam Trotter, Frank and Walter, helped around camp during summer by wetting down the dirt, hauling water, and keeping the wood box full.

"My sister and her friend baked a lot of cakes and pies," remembered Frank Trotter. "And that's what I'd heard had broke my father. They'd just had beans and spaghetti before that. The girls worked real hard but the men enjoyed and ate everything they cooked. Men working ten hours a day with pick and shovel can eat like hogs, you know."[5]

The road work in Big Creek was never completed. The one fork of the road that was to go to the log cabin at the hot springs was constructed only as far as Brunnette Creek. "We gave it up for some reason," said Wid Dayton. "I guess it was costing too much. It was running pretty expensive. They were paying pretty good wages. Six dollars a day. That was big wages then. Ordinarily they were paying about

three."[6]

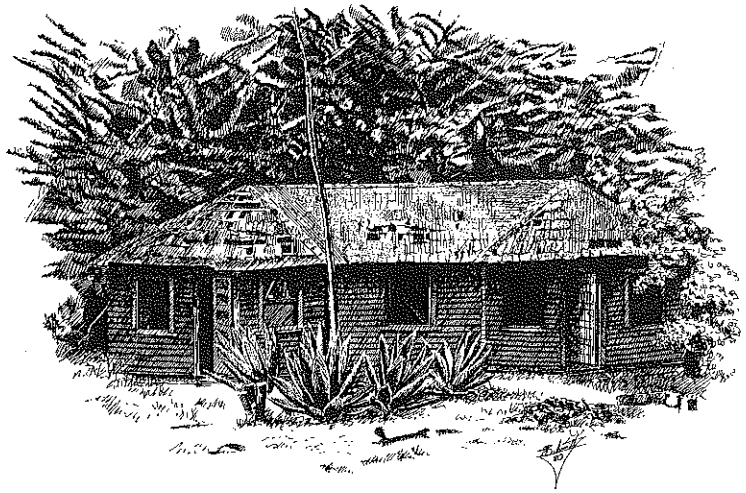
Horton and Gorrell's construction program in Big Creek lasted almost a year before running out of money in 1931. When the construction work closed down in Big Creek, most of the equipment and remaining supplies were loaded onto a fishing boat and transported north where they were beached at the Big Sur River and hauled to their destination by road.

Horton and Gorrell apparently had other projects completed or in progress besides those for which Sam Trotter was responsible. Some of the Harlans were involved in building a house at the site known as the Marble cabins and in gathering data on the water sources on the property. The relationship between this work and Sam Trotter's project is not clear, but much of the construction work involving the Harlans was probably completed just before work on the log house near the hot springs began.

The lower house at the Marble cabins site was built in 1929 or 1930 as a guest house for the ranch visitors. Marion Harlan referred to the building as "the dormitory" because it had no kitchen facilities. The meals were to be prepared and eaten at the upper house, the old Santos Boronda homestead.

The lumber for the guest house was brought down the coast from Monterey by boat and beached with dories at Big Creek. A rough trail for hauling the lumber to the building site was constructed up the ridge from the beach. George Harlan, who was working part-time for Horton and Gorrell, packed the lumber from the beach to the construction site on the same mules he used to carry mail over the mountains from King City to Lucia. Because the trail was extremely steep, the lumber had to be cut into lengths that were

short enough for the mules to carry around the sharp and narrow curves. George Harlan recalled that two carpenters put the house together as quickly as he could pack the lumber up from the beach, and the building was finished in less than two weeks.



The "dormitory" at the Santos Boronda homestead site (1929-30)

George Harlan also planted the cypress and cedar trees that shelter the two cabins on the bluff. He remembered bringing the cedar saplings down from the mountains in five-gallon cans and transplanting them around the cabins. He watered and weeded the trees for the first year.

The spring below the upper cabin from which Santos Boronda had hand-carried water to his homestead was improved by Horton and Gorrell. George Harlan constructed a cement tank for the spring while Marion Harlan assembled a pump and engine to transport the water uphill, where it flowed by gravity to the cabin.

The lower cabin at the Marble cabins site was never used for its intended purpose as a guest house. For about six months, however, it was inhabited by Frank Horton and some of the men working for him. A married couple from Seaside, named Foster and also employed by Horton and Gorrell, lived in the upper cabin for awhile. Mr. Foster did various outdoor tasks while Mrs. Foster cooked for the working men. Paul and Alice Harlan lived in the upper cabin after the Fosters and did similar work. Pencil lines from the early 1930s marking the heights of Paul and Alice Harlan and their children are still visible on a door frame in the upper cabin.

In the late 1920s Marion Harlan was employed by Horton and Gorrell to collect data on the water supplies on the Big Creek property. Horton and Gorrell wanted to know the amount of water that was available and the water improvements that were needed for the guest ranch. During this time, Marion also stocked fish in some of the side creeks in the Big Creek watershed.

"I used to ride once a week and measure water," said Marion Harlan. "We had a weir. There was one in Limekiln Creek, Vicente Creek, and each of the Big Creeks, and I used to go once a week and ride my horse and go to all those places and measure that water, whether it was dropping or raising or what it had done. I had a temperature gauge that said how hot it was in the daytime. A little piece of steel would sit up there and wait until you pulled it down with a magnet and it was ready for the next day. At night it would go down the opposite way and tell you how cool it was. And I had all those records to keep and measure all the springs in between up at a certain elevation on that whole piece of property and I'd done that for three years.

Horton and Gorrell sent an engineer down here and George and I installed all those weirs and stuff and got it all set up. Then I used to measure it once a week."[8]

The last construction project George Harlan remembered working on for Horton and Gorrell was a proposed "auto court," or motel, at the pines on the point near the Gamboa homestead. No actual construction took place, but George Harlan was doing preliminary groundwork when the entire operation came to a sudden halt. They had planned to lay a four-inch water line from Canogas Falls in Devil's Canyon to a low, marshy depression that would be dammed and transformed into a small lake.[9] Another water line would then have run from the lake to the auto court on the point.

The Great Depression of the 1930s put an end to Horton and Gorrell's ambitious plans at Big Creek. The work did not end immediately with the stock market crash, but within a year Horton and Gorrell had gone broke. According to George Harlan, all construction work abruptly ceased one day. Frank Horton returned to Wyoming, and Warren Gorrell is believed to have killed himself.[10]

According to the Monterey County title records, Horton and Gorrell's land in Big Sur was purchased by Edward S. Moore in 1931. Some Big Sur residents, however, recalled the man's name as George Moore, C. C. Moore, and Charles Moore. Moore was described by George Harlan as "a Wall Street man from New York" who owned considerable portions of the National Biscuit Company and Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company. He was evidently acquainted with Marion Hollins and through her became interested in the Big Sur property. At the same time he purchased Horton and Gorrell's land, Moore also bought land from Marion Hollins, George

Gamboa, and Hudson, Martin, and Jorgensen, who still owned the old Dolan ranch.[11]

"Moore was a millionaire, a very nice-natured man, but he was an awful drinker," said Marion Harlan. "He used to come here and we took him around on horseback all over the land and everything so he could look it over. He was just rolling in money, there was no two ways about it. But he was an awful heavy drinker. Every time we'd come to a place to stop overnight, why, the first thing he'd have to do was get himself some cold water and he'd have a drink of whiskey."[12]

Moore apparently had no plans to develop the 8000 acres he owned between Big Creek and Limekiln Creek. After the coast highway was completed in the late 1930s, Moore did build a huge house on Point 16 for which he hired eight gardeners to cultivate the grounds. His work crew stayed in the house built near Lucia by Sam Trotter for Horton and Gorrell. With his influence in the telephone company, Moore even had a telephone line installed between Cambria and his house at Point 16.

Moore did not use the Point 16 house much except during the winter when it was cold on the east coast. Jack Grissim, former executor of the Marion Hollins estate, said that Moore bought the Big Sur land as a place to escape to if the Depression became so serious that people had to return to the land to survive.[13] Marion Harlan had a different perspective: "Actually it was a big front of expense, that's all it was. Moore never even got a cent out of it the way they were doing it. He owned practically from Limekiln Creek to Rat Canyon, excluding ours. We kept ours. We didn't sell."

For nearly fifteen years Moore retained his Big Sur

land, which he called the Circle M Ranch. Moore's house on Point 16, however, had been constructed on a shifting and unstable piece of earth. After each winter, the house had to be jacked up, leveled, and have its plumbing restored; one year it finally cracked in two and nearly toppled. Understandably discouraged, Moore decided to sell the property. His wife whole-heartedly agreed to the sale because she was afraid the Japanese were intending to bomb the Big Sur coast during World War II.[14]

Moore's property remained on the market for several years before it was finally purchased in 1944 by John Nesbitt. At the time of the sale, the Monterey Peninsula Herald reported that the Circle M Ranch sold for well over $100,000 and was "the largest real estate transaction in this part of the state in several years."

During the years Moore owned the Circle M Ranch, the only activity at Big Creek was cattle ranching. Since the late 1920s George Harlan had been leasing the grazing rights to Big Creek, where he kept about one hundred head of cattle During the time construction work was underway for Horton and Gorrell, George Harlan rode the Big Creek property to care for his cattle and to act as an unofficial caretaker for the ranch.

George Harlan made various improvements during the years that his cattle grazed at Big Creek. The most noticeable improvement is the road up Dolan ridge from the coast highway that George and his son Donald created with a bulldozer. George remembered building this road during the 1930s; most likely it was built after the coast highway had been constructed to that point. "The road was going to no particular place," said George Harlan. Instead, the road was

built so they could haul hay up the mountain and drop it for the cattle at scattered points. The road ends at Ed Boronda's old homestead. George also improved a spring near Pat Avila's old homestead.

Marion Hollins was responsible for selling the Circle M Ranch for Edward Moore in the early 1940s. She was acquainted with John Nesbitt and persuaded him to look at the Big Sur ranch.[15] Nesbitt became enchanted with the property after seeing it and bought the entire 8000-acre parcel in 1944.

Harrydick Ross described John Nesbitt as "one of the great storytellers of early radio days." Nesbitt made his money in the 1930s as a radio star and was known to many as "The Golden Voice of Radio." His most famous radio program, "The Passing Parade," was broadcast nationwide. During this time Nesbitt bought the Circle M Ranch.

Nesbitt lived with his family in Carmel but spent quite a bit of time during summer at his Big Sur ranch. Instead of living at Point 16 where the earth was unstable, the Nesbitts stayed at a house above Point 16 where the Camaldoli Hermitage is now located. Priscilla Nesbitt said that her husband constantly mulled over what to do with his Big Sur property. Nesbitt had a genuine appreciation for the land and the natural world and was not interested in developing the property. He apparently used the ranch only as a retreat from the busy radio world; seldom did he take people there with him.

A few years after buying the Circle M Ranch, Nesbitt sold some of the timber in Big Creek. He probably needed the money at that time, because (it is generally believed) he otherwise would not have allowed logging on his land.

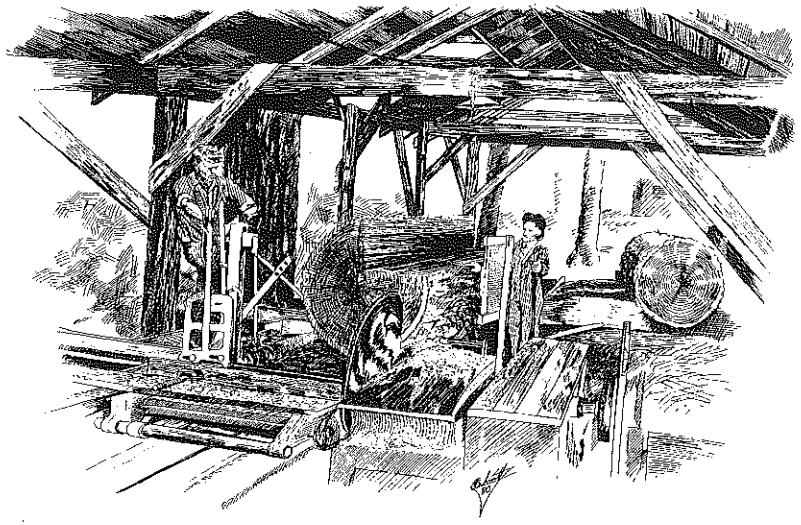
A man named Emerson, who lived at Point 16, was the first person to buy timber from Nesbitt;[16] however, he logged in Big Creek for only a short period of time. After Emerson, two brothers, Bud and Jim Fife, bought timber from Nesbitt and started a logging operation in Big Creek. The Fifes set up a small covered mill in Devil's Canyon at Devil's Flat, where the old coast trail crossed the creek. The mill was portable and had two circular saws powered by a diesel engine. A generator to provide electric power was also installed at the mill site and was used to weld and to repair tools and equipment at night. A few cabins, which still stand in Devil's Canyon at the old mill site, were built to house the men working for the Fifes.

The Fifes are known to have had a clean logging operation in Devil's Canyon. John Dowdakin, a forest practices inspector for the California Division of Forestry, recalled that the Fifes were cooperative and friendly, and their logging practices did little damage to the forest. Regulations at the time made selective logging mandatory and slash was permitted to be burned daily.[17] The Fifes kept their tools sharp and their equipment in good condition.

"In 1946," said Frank Trotter, "my brother and I just bought a new International TD9 (buildozer) and the Fifes wanted us to go down and log for them. We had this friend of ours, Freddie King, who had been working for us for years. So my brother Walter and Freddie felled and bucked the logs up into lengths and I skidded all the logs into the mill. I built roads and kept the mill supplied with logs. Now this was through a lot of the winter. I don't remember how many months offhand. We probably did this for six or eight months."[18]

While the Trotters felled and skidded trees for the

Fifes, George Harlan's son Gene was hired by John Nesbitt to build roads on the property. The road along Big Creek constructed in the early 1930s for Horton and Gorrell had been extended to the mill by the Fifes. Gene Harlan bulldozed a road that connected the road in Devil's Canyon with Nesbitt's house above Point 16, making it possible to drive from the south end to the north end of Nesbitt's property—passing near French Camp and the old Gamboa homestead—without using the highway. This road is no longer passable the entire distance.



The Fife brothers' lumber mill in Devil's Canyon (1946)

"Gene built roads for years," Frank Trotter said. "Now after he built roads on top of the hill, my brother took the truck and was hauling pine logs down to the mill for them to saw pine also. When we first started it was all redwood, but after they got access into the pines on top with the roads, they hauled it in."

The Fifes cut redwood almost solely from Devil's Canyon. Although pine was also logged, they more often cut redwood because it was in greater demand. Redwood at the time sold for $80 per thousand board-feet; the same quantity today would bring close to $1400.[19] John Dowdakin estimated that the mill in Devil's Canyon processed 15,000 board-feet per day. (One thousand board-feet is equivalent to a log thirty-seven inches in diameter and sixteen feet long.) Some of the lumber produced at Big Creek was sold to local people, and the rest was shipped by truck to Monterey. Many of the buildings constructed in Big Sur during the late 1940s, including Nepenthe, were built with redwood lumber from Big Creek. A small slash mill was also set up in Devil's Canyon by a person who sawed scraps of wood into lathes and bean stakes.[20]

At some point after the Trotters finished working for the Fifes, Wid Dayton returned to Big Creek with his wife and small son after serving in the Army for a few years. He worked for the logging operation until about 1950 when the Fifes closed their mill in Big Creek and opened a lumber yard in Pacific Grove. Although the mill had brought in decent earnings, the work was difficult and dangerous. The lumber retailing business was more profitable and less strenuous.

Wid Dayton remained at Big Creek after the mill was dismantled and hauled to Monterey. Buying timber from Nesbitt, he went into his own business splitting wood for posts and pickets and hewing timber for houses, all of which he sold both locally and wholesale. Like the Fifes, Wid Dayton cut his timber primarily from Devil's Canyon. He built a temporary dwelling for his family near the site of the sawmill and lived alternately there and in Palo Colorado Canyon until the late 1950s.

Wid Dayton's wife, Marian, was a "college girl" who had forsaken her academic background for a life in the woods. Marian Dayton was from New York and had received her undergraduate education at Syracuse University. She then continued on to study law for two years at Yale and landscape gardening for one year at UC Berkeley.

"My wife used to hike all over these mountains," Wid Dayton said. "She'd go out hunting. She almost got a panther there one time. She shot at him a couple of shots, but she didn't get him.

"She broke her leg way back in the hills there one time. Broke her ankle. She slid down the hill. It got night and I and Birney, my son—he was big enough then to hike around pretty good—we took off to see if we could find her. I knew about the direction she went. I took off and got over by the Brunnette cabin there and she could see our light coming up the trail and she hollered at us. She was over on the mountains up in that opening up above the Brunnette house coming down through there. So we made a splint out of some boards there down by the Brunnette house. She could walk to get home with us helping her a little bit. We got her down to the road where I had the car."[21]

The Daytons' son, Birney, was an unusually bright child with a remarkable mechanical aptitude. He received his entire grade school education in Big Sur from his parents. When he was eleven years old, the Daytons consented to send him to school after local authorities "kept hollering about it a little."

Birney Dayton's most legendary achievement was the construction of an electrical system to power his Big Creek home. "No, Birney didn't build it," explained Wid Dayton. "He just connected it up. A fellow loaned it to us, he

lives up on the mountain there—Hopkins. I had it there for two or three years. But it gave us electric lights. It was DC lights but then they worked all right. We wouldn't have light too long, it'd last about three hours or four hours on a tank full of water. Then the tank would fill up through the day and it'd be good for the next night. But Birney understood electricity a little bit then. He was only about eight or nine."

The Daytons left Big Sur permanently in the mid-1950s and moved to San Benito County. Wid Dayton gave up his life as a woodsman and turned to making jade jewelry. Eventually, he and his wife returned to northern California to live.

While the Daytons were living in Devil's Canyon in the 1950s, John Nesbitt's brother Phil and his bride were honeymooning in Big Creek canyon in the log house near the hot springs. This cabin, which for some unknown reason had acquired the name the "hunting lodge," had been used for only brief periods by Marion Hollins's brother, and was not in good condition. Although Phil Nesbitt and his bride were both sickly and frail, they nevertheless cleaned up the cabin and packed their supplies in from the end of the Big Creek road. The woman was a sculptor and Phil was a cartoonist, and both stayed in Big Creek for four or five months.[22]

Toward the end of his life, John Nesbitt began having financial difficulties. In 1955 he sold most of his property south of Vicente Creek to two ranchers from King City, John Smart and Bill Earl. When his financial situation failed to improve, Nesbitt put his Big Creek land up for sale with the stipulation that he retain a twenty-five percent interest in the property. Several prospective buyers looked at the

property but no one was interested in purchasing only a seventy-five percent interest in the land.[23]

In 1959 Bill Stewart, a lawyer in Carmel and a close friend of Nesbitt's, asked Nesbitt for the option to buy the Big Creek property; Nesbitt agreed. Fred Farr and Malcolm Millard, Nesbitt's attorneys, joined Stewart in the deal to buy a seventy-five percent interest in the property. Together these three men formed Big Creek Ranch, Incorporated. At some point, Malcolm Millard dropped out of the deal and three others joined in. These five people—Bill Stewart, Fred Farr, Ted Stotler, Will Shaw, and Ed Landels—in conjunction with Priscilla Nesbitt and her two children eventually became the owners of the 4000-acre Big Creek Ranch. John Nesbitt died in 1960, shortly after the incorporation of Big Creek Ranch. The owners of Big Creek Ranch established a scenic easement over most of their Big Creek for a twenty-five-year period. In effect, the scenic easement prevented the value of the property from rising as quickly as it would have risen ordinarily if, in turn, the owners agreed not to develop certain parts of it.

A year or two after the incorporation of Big Creek Ranch, Roland Hall became the caretaker of the property. Roland had been living in San Francisco when he happened onto Big Creek during one of his trips down the coast. Because he was looking for an isolated place to live, Roland proposed to the owners of Big Creek that he would clean up the old sawmill site in exchange for being able to live on the property as a caretaker. The deal was arranged and in 1960 Roland moved with his wife Irene into Wid Dayton's old cabin in Devil's Canyon. Roland recalled his first years at Big Creek as difficult ones. Although there were plenty of fish to eat, it was virtually impossible to make any

money. The sawmill site was piled with worthless debris, discarded equipment, and dead cars that took Roland four years to clean out.

In 1965 a caretaker's cabin was constructed at the mouth of Big Creek. Will Shaw designed the cabin and both he and Roland built it. When his family moved into the new house, Roland burned down the old cabin in Devil's Canyon where they had lived.

Roland Hall lived at Big Creek for almost ten years. He said that during this period of time "generally nothing much went on." A falling tree splintered the trestle bridge across Big Creek that Sam Trotter had built in 1930, and another old bridge near the mouth of Big Creek (presumably used before the concrete highway bridge was completed) washed out during a storm. Of greater excitement was the day a sheriff's rescue squad practicing at Big Creek became trapped for a night in the canyon.[24] A tragedy occurred when a Boy Scout drowned while swimming at the waterfalls in Devil's Canyon.

But perhaps the most mysterious and remarkable event was the death of Roland Hall's father, which occurred on the day Roland's daughter was born. Soon after the baby's birth at the caretaker's house, Roland's father set off for the waterfalls in Devil's Canyon to relay an important message to Fred Farr's son, Sam. Upon receiving the message, Sam took off for the caretaker's cabin ahead of Roland's father. When the older man did not return, Roland and Sam went to search for him. They found him dead of a heart attack on the trail to the waterfalls. Roland carried his father out of the canyon and buried him in an oak grove on a ridge. When Roland later told people what had happened, the authorities came and dug up his father to perform an autopsy. His

father was cremated after the autopsy, and Roland scattered his ashes around the grave, filled in the hole the coroner had left, and covered the surface with stones.

In the late 1960s Roland and his family left Big Creek, and Horst Mayer moved in with his family as caretaker of the property. A photographer from Austria, Horst had been living on Partington Ridge in Big Sur before he received the caretaker's position in Big Creek.[25]

The owners of Big Creek Ranch frequently visited the property to hike, fish, camp, and relax. Some of the owners took responsibility to restore and maintain a few of the old cabins on the land. The caretaker's house was the only new building constructed on the ranch, although it was during this period that the Haida cabin was moved to Devil's Canyon. A replica of a traditional Haida Indian dwelling, this cabin had been built by authentic methods (without nails) for the 1939 World's Fair at Treasure Island in San Francisco. The builder was a man named Dudley C. Carter who had lived for a number of years among the Haida Indians in British Columbia. The Shaws purchased the cabin and eventually had it moved to Big Creek. They asked Carter, who was by that time over eighty years old, if he would dismantle the cabin and reassemble it in Devil's Canyon. Carter agreed and under his direction the job was accomplished.[26]

One of the social activities at Big Creek throughout this time was the annual Buckeye Club gathering that Fred Farr originated during his term in the State Senate. The tradition began when, in an attempt to resolve a conflict between commercial and sports fishermen, Farr invited members of both groups to Big Creek for the weekend. Over the years, the Buckeye Club gatherings expanded to include judges, lawyers, doctors, cattle ranchers, prison wardens, government officials,

and others. The fishermen traditionally prepared a fish dinner on Friday night, while on Saturday the ranchers cooked steaks. The Buckeye Club celebrations continued for many years, bringing people of divergent interests together in a congenial environment.

7 Epilogue

Despite the activities and development at Big Creek over the years, the land remained essentially in its primal state. A network of small roads and trails was spread over the area, but vegetation had long since stabilized the disturbed slopes. Logging and home construction had taken trees from some of the virgin stands of redwoods and pines, but the forests had recovered, filling the gaps with vigorous new growth. Hunting had influenced the native animal populations, particularly those of deer and mountain lions; however, the rugged mountains provided ample refuge, and healthy populations survived. Cattle trampled trails into the steep hillsides, but the watershed's streams continued to run clear and pure.

Overall, the land around Big Creek had been sympathetically maintained by its residents. The earliest inhabitants—the Esselens and the homesteaders—exploited the natural resources, but because of the low numbers of residents and their simple lifestyles, the disturbances were comparatively minor. The consolidation of small homesteads into large land parcels further limited disturbance by restricting

access at a time when public awareness and use of the Big Sur region were increasing dramatically. From about 1950 to the mid-1970s the Big Creek Ranch was used primarily for recreation by the principal landowners, their relatives and associates.

The University of California came into the Big Creek picture in 1975 when landowner Ed Landels toured the property with UC professor of zoology Starker Leopold and Save-the-Redwoods League director John Dewitt. At that time the Save-the-Redwoods League was considering acquiring the property and transferring the title to the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Professor Leopold suggested that the university's Natural Land and Water Reserves System might be a more appropriate manager.

In 1977 the owners of the Big Creek Ranch, seeking to ensure the long-term protection of Big Creek's natural qualities in the face of rising property taxes and development pressures, sold the property to The Nature Conservancy, a nonprofit conservation organization. The property was subsequently transferred to the University of California to become part of the UC Natural Land and Water Reserves System. The purchase was made possible by grants from private donors including the Save-the-Redwoods League, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Hill, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and by several of the former owners substantially reducing the price of their interests below market value. The university also provided funds for the purchase.

In 1978 Big Creek Ranch was renamed the Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve, and was formally designated as a cooperative scientific and conservation venture of The Nature Conservancy, the Save-the-Redwoods League, and the University of California. Although responsibilities for managing and

maintaining the reserve were given to the university, certain land parcels or use rights were retained by the Big Creek Ranch owners, the Save-the-Redwoods League, and The Nature Conservancy. A faculty member at the University of California, Santa Cruz, was assigned responsibility for day-to-day management concerns, and a committee consisting of UCSC faculty, members of the cooperating organizations, and former Big Creek Ranch owners was appointed to oversee the major decisions regarding use of the property.

The Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve, like the other components of the Natural Land and Water Reserves System, was set aside as an undisturbed sanctuary for research and education. The land now serves as an outdoor classroom and laboratory to be used by students, teachers, and researchers from any legitimate institution of higher education. The new users, maintaining the land ethic established by the homesteaders and subsequent owners, are taking advantage of the exceptional features of the Big Creek terrain, tuning their efforts to the cycles of nature.

At a ceremony at Big Creek in April of 1978, reserve manager Professor Kenneth S. Norris spoke to a small gathering about the purposes of the new reserve: "Experience teaches us that scholars of many kinds will come here. . . . There will be naturalists, botanists, geologists, entomologists, and many other disciplinary scientists. I hope we keep our doors open to people who are more diverse than that. Writers, photographers, and poets should feel free to apply. I hope that all of these people will take away with them some of the magnificent nature of this coast, since it is one of the most remarkable areas in all of the United States. . . . It should become a place for science to uncover facts about nature and also a place for other human connections with the natural world to be nurtured."[1]

Notes

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3. Interview in Big Sur, 7 April 1979.

4. Interview in Big Sur, 21 April 1979.
5. The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed a person to claim 160 acres of surveyed public domain. Title to this land could be acquired by continuous residence and improvement for five years and a minor filing fee. Title to the land could also be received after six months residence and suitable improvement by paying the regular price of $1.25 per acre for the land.
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Chapter 4. The Homesteaders

1. Jack Dolan, interview in Moss Landing, 3 May 1979.
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3. Marion Harlan, interview in Big Sur, 5 May 1979.
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11. George Gamboa (Jr.), telephone interview, 4 December 1980.
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25. William Stewart, telephone interview, June 1979.

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Chapter 7. Epilogue

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For more information about the Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve or for an application to enter the reserve write to:

Manager
Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve
Environmental Field Program
231 Kerr Hall
University of California
Santa Cruz, CA 95064

A brochure describing in detail the holdings, management, and use of the Natural Land and Water Reserves System is available from the system's office in Berkeley. Write to:

Director
Natural Land and Water Reserves System
2111 Bancroft Way, Room 544
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720