

MOUNTAIN NEWS

Spring/Summer 2013

MOUNT DIABLO INTERPRETIVE ASSOCIATION



The Biannual Membership Newsletter

Frank's Favorite Hikes: Bob's Pond

by J. Frank Valle-Riestra

In 1998, the Save Mount Diablo organization completed purchase of the Silva cattle ranch land, some 430 acres of beautiful, hilly landscape in the upper reaches of Riggs Canyon. Five years later, the acquisition was incorporated into the Mount Diablo State Park. It remains today a sparsely visited corner of the park in its eastern extremities, a hidden treasure well worth exploring.



• Mike Woodring

The centerpiece of this extraordinary landscape is Bob's Pond, a man-made stock pond cradled in a hollow on the flanks of Windy Point. It is named after Bob Adams, an erstwhile director of Save Mount Diablo and a guiding presence during the procedures to acquire the land. (For more detail, see Rich McDrew's book, *Mountain Lore*, available in our Visitor Centers.) The lovely green pond, with its ring of magnificent sycamore trees, stands like an emerald jewel among the undulating meadowy hills, a welcome focus to the area's wildlife.

A relatively new trail, the Tassajara Creek Trail, forms a grand loop encompassing the pond. It was built at the time of the land acquisition by the East Bay Trail Dogs, a group of volunteer trail enthusiasts. This well-laid-out and engineered trail lies in pretty remote country, and it takes some effort to get to it. It

is most readily reached from two park trailheads. One is located at the end of the paved Finley Road, which runs north from Camino Tassajara east of the Blackhawk development in Danville. The other trailhead is at Red Corral, my own preference.

Red Corral is reached from the town of Clayton by following Marsh Creek Road to

its junction with Morgan Territory Road. Turn right onto Morgan Territory Road and continue on it for 4.2 miles to reach twin one-lane bridges. Red Corral is 0.5 miles beyond, and you will spot it on your left, still red after all those years. There is very limited parking at the trailhead on the right edge of the road; be sure not to block off the entrance gate to inholdings. Before you start your hike, take a quick look at a stone memorial to Jeremiah Morgan, first settler in this area (1857), placed there by the Save Mount Diablo organization. It is located behind a locked gate in the Red Corral (to discourage vandals); the inscription on the memorial is reproduced in the *Mountain Lore* book.

After passing through the well-marked park gate, continue straight ahead and upward on Morgan Creek Road. The steadily rising road parallels Jeremiah Creek, in a dense deciduous forest, which brings

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welcome coolness during the hot summer and fall months. It is part of a pattern you will experience during your hike: tree-less high meadows in full sun, interspersed with picturesque, gentle oak groves and deep, dark forested canyons.

At a sharp bend of the steeply rising road, look for a post to your right announcing the start of Jeremiah Creek Trail. The trail is just a delight: a narrow, single-track path meandering through an unspoiled wilderness, rising gently up to the crest of Highland Ridge. It is here, in the midst of an oak savannah and along the banks of Jeremiah Creek with its pools and ponds, that you may experience that peace of mind engendered by a truly remote corner of nature.

When you reach the crest at Old Finley Road, stop for a moment to take in the magnificent view of Riggs Canyon far below you, a panorama that expands to include many distant Bay Area highlands as you ascend Highland Ridge Road to your right. The road climbs toward the park boundary and is quite steep at times, but you will find some welcome rest stops on mossy rocks under venerable old oaks. Be on the lookout on your left for a post marking the beginning of the Tassajara Creek Trail.

At first the trail follows an old farm road but soon veers off as another intimate single-track path. After all of the climbing you have done, it is a pleasure to march along this gentle path as it follows contours in its descent toward the headwaters of Tassajara Creek. Here you are mostly in the midst of meadows. The tall grasses do not favor great wildflower displays,



but California Poppies manage to push through during a good part of the year, golden explosions to gladden the eye. Eventually, Bob's Pond comes into view, in a hollow below the trail; the path then slowly circles around to an overlook marked by, of all things, a nice picnic table. It is

not something one might expect in this remote location – clearly a labor of love to drag it all this way. It is a good place for a little picnic, to sit and rest and admire the panorama.

A short way beyond, the trail plunges into the depths of the canyon carved out by Tassajara Creek, a silent, mysterious world of a dense riparian forest. The trail builders did a fine job of negotiating the complex stream topology. You will delight in the ever-changing scenery and the cool air – and the forest flowers, particularly in spring: Giant Trillium and Checker Lilies bloom in profusion. At its end, the trail breaks out again into open country and rises steeply to meet Old Finley Road. A left on the road brings you back to the junction with Jeremiah Creek Trail after another short climb. Retrace your steps along Jeremiah Creek Trail and Morgan Creek Road to Red Corral – mostly downhill! – to complete one of the park's great hikes.

A word of caution: On the Jeremiah Creek Trail in particular, there are luxuriant stands of poison oak at trail side, but these are easily avoided with some care. Long stretches of Tassajara Creek Trail in the upper meadows have been badly churned up in wet weather by horses, stray cows, and wild boars. The total distance covered is about 5.5 miles; expect to climb some 1,870 feet and to spend four to five hours, with a few rest stops. ■

Bob's Pond Hike

