

Lisa Lieberman.

LOCAL NEWS

**A Bundled Selection of
Articles by Lisa Lieberman
Local Articles**

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Fire Forecast

"Park estimates vary as to how long it will take to restore the ecosystem back to its natural level of forest fuels... Some park experts project 15 to 20 years... others say 30 to 40 years of burning..."

by Lisa Lieberman

This is the first in a series on fire management in Sequoia and Kings National Parks.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are participating in cutting-edge research to study the effectiveness that prescribed fires have on reducing wildfires and their suppression costs. The federal government has slated the parks to expand its prescribed burn program.

Over the next five years, Sequoia-Kings Canyon will receive \$1.25 million — \$250,000 annually — to increase the number of acres burned in the park from 1,200 acres per year (prior to 1994) to as many as 20,000 acres annually by the year 2000.

According to Scott Williams, prescribed burn technician for the parks, the 20,000 acres will encompass wildfires, prescribed fires (fires ignited naturally by lightning strikes), and prescribed burns, which are ignited and managed by park officials and maintained within "prescribed"

boundaries.

The federal money will help pay for additional fire personnel, helicopters and monitoring equipment, and researchers who will be studying the effects of smoke and fire in the parks' ecosystem. If all goes according to plan, other national parks may be following this local example and seeing a similar increase in prescribed fires.

The plan to increase the burns in the parks has met with mixed reactions in the community. While park officials claim that managed fires will reduce the risk of out-of-control fires, Three Rivers residents fear the immediate and long-term health effects of additional smoke.

The problem in the parks right now, according to Bill Kaage, fire management specialist at Sequoia-Kings Canyon, is that too many forest fuels and dense brush have been allowed to build up to unnaturally high levels due to the old "Smokey the Bear" philosophy of suppressing every fire.

Kaage said that some areas of

the park haven't experienced fire in more than 100 years. As a result some mixed conifer regions that would normally have 20 tons of fuel per acre have accumulated 80 to 110 tons per acre.

Park estimates vary as to how long it will take to restore the ecosystem back to its natural level of forest fuels. Some park experts project 15 to 20 years. Others say as many as 30 to 40 years of burning on and off for at least six months each year.

"How much acreage we'll be able to burn in a given year will depend on funding issues and weather conditions," said Jeff Manley, natural resource specialist at the parks.

According to Manley, the smoke from the fires will become more "mellow" over time as forest fuels are reduced. Once the park burns its initial target areas and transitions to secondary and subsequent "maintenance burns," the smoke's intensity should subside.

Manley projects, however, that

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FIRE, SMOKE MANAGEMENT: An 'inexact science'

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it will take 10 to 15 years to get to the point where smoke generated from the park is half of what it is now.

The parks' smoke will continue to effect Three Rivers — designated a "smoke sensitive area" — as well as the popular tourist destinations of Grant Grove in Kings Canyon and Silver City in

Mineral King.

"There's no way that we can promise that Three Rivers isn't going to get any smoke," says Mike Tollefson, the parks' superintendent. "Our objective is to minimize smoke as much as possible."

The practice of trying to predict smoke behavior is an "inexact science," according to Kaage.

"The tools we have for predicting smoke aren't really efficient, and it (predicting smoke dispersal) is a developing science," he said.

The park relies on meteorology, historical records, wind patterns, and the discretion of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to tell them which days are burn days and which days are not.

According to Manley, the accuracy rate of predicting how much smoke a fire will generate and which way it will head is about 95 percent.

Normally, smoke isn't a problem, said Tollefson. "For every 20 to 30 fires we have, the public may only be aware of about one or two."

But one or two fires a year may be just enough to cause problems, such as the Castle Rock burn in the fall of 1995 and the Castle Rock prescribed natural fire last summer. The latter smoked Three Rivers out for days at a time.

When planning a prescribed burn, any one of a number of variables can go wrong. The ridge winds, which fire technicians hope will loft smoke over the mountains, may shift unexpectedly and allow smoke to drop into the canyons.

Or, if heavy forest fuels are being burned, park technicians might run into trouble when the smoke from the burns exceed the state's pollution standard index (psi).

According to Williams, "We can't just turn the smoke on and off like a faucet."

Both park and Three Rivers residents wished they could have turned the smoke off last November when the autumn rains arrived later than predicted. The Castle Rock prescribed burn in the Middle Fork drainage eluded control — lasting four weeks longer than the park had planned. It burned 2,700 acres rather than the 200 to 400 acres that the park had "prescribed."

"No one was more unhappy about the smoke than me," said Tollefson. "We could have spent a couple of million dollars put-

ting the fire out, but we decided to rely on statistics that the rain was going to come any day and end the fire event. Unfortunately what happened was completely unpredictable."

And the problem with the Castle Rock prescribed natural fire last summer was that the smoke went the wrong way, said Kaage.

"We predicted how much acreage the fire would burn, but we missed on predicting where the smoke would go," says Kaage. "We knew smoke would come down to Three Rivers, but we thought it would ventilate more efficiently than it did. We were relying on our experience and professional judgment. We guessed wrong."

The park hopes to have better luck with this year's "Mineral King Risk Reduction Burn" along the East Fork. Smoke dispersal should be easier along the East Fork drainage because it has steep canyons as opposed to the gentle, sloping canyons of the Middle Fork where Three Rivers is located.

Over the next five years, the park plans to burn about 5,000 acres annually in the Mineral King area. This year's burn, scheduled to be ignited next week, will encompass 1,500

acres. It will be burned 50 to 100 acres at a time.

Smoke from the Mineral King project will be present in Three Rivers. But, says Tollefson, the amount of smoke coming from elevations of 6,000 to 9,000 feet will be much less than last year's fire which burned at 3,000 feet.

"After two years of smoking Three Rivers out, I think it's safe to say that we won't be having any more burns in (parts) of the Middle Fork this year," said Tollefson.

But the problem of burning in the Middle Fork remains.

"We can't guarantee that we're never going to burn in the Middle Fork again," said Williams.

According to Kaage, the park is still hashing out plans that could limit smoke emanating from the Middle Fork during burns to no more than seven days at a time.

"The public has become sensitized to smoke," said Williams. "A lot of people last summer thought the fire was worse than last fall's. But the fire last fall was worse. At this point, people are very sensitized, but I think that over time they may become de-sensitized and maybe not feel so impacted by the smoke. Hopefully, in time, it won't be so much of a problem."

Burn program for parks to expand

By LISA LIEBERMAN
Special to The Californian

The Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks have been slated by the federal government to expand their prescribed fire program and study the effectiveness that prescribed burns and fires will have on reducing wildfires and the costs associated with suppressing them.

Over the next five years, Sequoia-Kings Canyon will receive \$1.25 million to increase the number of acres burned in the park from 1,200 acres per year to as many as 20,000 acres by the year 2000, according to Bill Kaage, fire management specialist at Sequoia-Kings Canyon.

The 20,000 acres will encompass wildfires, prescribed fires (fires ignited naturally by lightning strikes), and prescribed burns, which are ignited and managed by parks officials within "prescribed" boundaries.

The southern boundary of the Sequoia National Park is approximately 30 miles north of the Kern-Tulare county border and is about 40 miles north of Kernville.

Parts of the Sequoia National Forest outside of Lake Isabella and Tehachapi border the park on the south side.

The federal money will help pay for additional fire personnel, helicopters and researchers who will be studying the effects of smoke and fire in the parks' ecosystems.

The idea behind the Sequoia-Kings Canyon Prescribed Natural Fire program is to burn small sections of the forest incrementally in order to reduce the heavy forest fuel load on the forest floor. Park officials say these preventive measures will cut down the risk of wildfires.

The decision to expand the park's fire program follows on the heels of the 1994 wildfire season which claimed the lives of 34 firefighters, including 14 firefighters in the Colorado Storm King wildfire, according to Tom Nichols, the regional fire manager officer who oversees National Park fire programs in California.

The 1994 wildfire season cost an estimated \$1 billion, Nichols said.

The extra funding for the Sequoia-Kings program comes at a welcome time for the parks, because, according to Kaage, the old "Smokey the Bear" philosophy of suppressing all fires in the parks has led to the dangerous buildup of unnaturally high levels of forest fuels and dense brush in the forest.

Kaage said that some areas of the park haven't experienced fire in more than 100 years due to fire suppression

damage to the park and threatening outlying areas in the valley, Kaage said.

The plan to increase the burns in the parks has met with mixed reactions in the valley. Some residents and medical experts fear the immediate and long-term health effects of additional smoke the prescribed burns will cause in the valley.

According to Jeff Manley, a natural resource specialist at the parks, it will take between 30-40 years of burning intermittently for at least six months out of the year to significantly impact the areas.

More fire in the park is going to mean more smoke in the park and in the valley, Kaage said.

"There's going to be more smoke in the future; whether we burn now (through the PNF) or we wait for the next wildfire."

Areas most likely to be directly affected by the PNF smoke include popular tourist destinations like Grant Grove in Kings Canyon and Silver City in Mineral King.

Scott Williams, the prescribed natural fire technician, says that despite increased burns last summer, tourism hasn't been drastically effected. Only a few trailheads were closed and a campground at Dorst was temporarily closed for a few days last summer because of smoke, he said.

But the challenge of trying to balance the parks' new program while preserving the tourist economy and maintaining good relations with the outlying foothill communities can be a tricky balancing act, according to Mike Tolletson, the park's superintendent.

"Our objective is to minimize smoke as much as possible. But

there's no way that we can promise that there isn't going to be any smoke."

The practice of predicting smoke dispersal is a science, but is an "inexact science" nonetheless, Kaage said.

The parks rely on meteorology, historical records, wind patterns, and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to advise them which days are good days to burn.

Any number of variables can go wrong when planning a fire.

The ridge winds, which fire technicians hope will loft smoke over the mountains out of the valley may shift unexpectedly. Or if heavy forest fuels are being burned, fire technicians might run into trouble when the smoke from the burns begins to exceed the federal pollution standard index.

But even in cases where the smoke exceeds the federal psi, it can take days or even weeks to extinguish the fires.

"You can't just turn smoke on and off like a faucet," Williams said.

The parks received a strong stream of criticism from residents in Three Rivers, a foothill community at the gateway of Sequoia National Park, when a fall 1995 prescribed burn in the Castle Rock area of the Middle Fork drainage of the park eluded control — lasting four weeks longer than the park had planned. It burned 2,700 acres rather than the 200 to 400 acres than the park had originally prescribed.

Ted Alexander, the Air Quality control Inspector in Bakersfield from the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District, said within the last two years he has received numerous complaints about smoky conditions in the parks.

"People (in Three Rivers) were dissatisfied with the smoke, and I can't say I blame them. There were days when you couldn't see across the street because there was so much smoke."

While people who live in foothill communities neighboring the parks are most directly impacted by the smoke, ultimately all valley residents stand a chance of being hurt by the smoke, said Dr. Deep Singh, a board certified allergist and director of The Singh Allergy and respiratory Center in Visalia. Singh maintains offices in Visalia and Fresno and sees patients throughout the valley.

"We already have very bad air in the valley," Singh said.

"When we pour more pollutants into the valley, the pollutants have nowhere to ventilate. The smoke comes into the valley, and it's like being in a smoky room." The fog inversion layers in the fall create a ceiling which helps seal in the smoke, added Singh.

Technically, the pollution levels of the parks burns have been within federal standards, except for three days last year, when the park went over the 150 level.

Park officials acknowledge that smoke from the burns do have health risks.

"You don't have to be (an expert) to see that smoke makes you sick," said Kaage, who lives with his family in the Sequoia Park. "I know that when we do the burns, it (sometimes) makes my wife and kids sick. But we know it's something that has to be done."


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July

Audit blasts enforcement for produce

LISA LIEBERMAN
Sentinel Staff Writer

Most people rely on the police to protect them when a burglar breaks into their homes and steals their valuables. Farmers rely on a little known agency — the Market Enforcement Branch of the California Department of Food and Agriculture — to protect them from crooked produce dealers who undersell or mishandle their crops.

But, the Market Enforcement Branch (MEB) apparently hasn't been doing its job and many farmers throughout the state have been suffering as a result, according to an audit released Tuesday by the Bureau of State Audits.

"The branch (MEB) does not enforce fair marketing practices consistently or effectively," said the audit.

In addition, the audit said, "The branch does not always pursue administrative, civil or criminal action against produce dealers when it learns during complaint investigations of their code violations."

The MEB was established in 1928 and was designed to enforce complicated agricultural codes and settle disputes among farmers and produce dealers. The idea was that agricultural issues should be settled within the CDFA without being turned over to the district attorney's office which, according to Dennis Prindiville, an ex-Market Enforcement employee, "won't take the (farm) cases seriously when they're (too busy) seeing rapes and murders go down."

The state auditor reviewed the MEB's handling of 44 cases of disputes between farmers and produce dealers in recent years. In at least eight of these cases, the audit determined that the MEB knew about produce dealers' violations of the codes, but did nothing to stop them.

Such violations included produce dealers underselling a grower's product, charging growers extra brokerage fees for sales the grower did not authorize in writing, and failing to provide the growers with a written and accurate full account of sales, as required by MEB codes.

The state audit was prompted by four irate Central Valley growers who started the California Farmer Advocates group last year. They claim they were shorted money from their produce dealers and then ignored by the MEB when they asked for help.

According to Joe Flores, a member of California Farmer Advocates, the MEB is often a grower's last resort when he is cheated by the dealer. "It's like the MEB are the police for us, and when they don't help us out, we have no one else to turn to."

Flores estimates that farmers throughout the state have lost mil-

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KINGS COUNTY'S DAILY NEWSPAPER
Sentinel

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Audit

Continued from Page 1

curate full account of sales, as required by MEB codes.

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Flores estimates that farmers throughout the state have lost millions of dollars because the MEB allowed crooked dealers to continue operating.

"It's not that the codes are bad,"

Flores said. "The codes are very good and do a lot to protect the farmers. It's just that the people in the MEB aren't enforcing them."

In one case, according to the audit, the MEB renewed the license of one produce dealer who had committed 11 violations.

When the California Farmer Advocates took its issues before the Senate Agriculture Committee a year ago, Assemblyman Brian Setencich and Sens. Quentin Kopp, Ken Maddy and Jim Costa helped push for the state audit. Setencich and Costa represent Kings County.

One reason the MEB may have been lax in performing its duties, said Lisle Babcock, president of the California Farmer Advocates, is that the system of MEB funding represents a sharp conflict of interest. The MEB receives 97 percent of its funding from the produce dealers whom they license.

In essence, the MEB investigators are receiving their salaries from the very people whom they are being paid to investigate, said Flores.

"It's like the fox guarding the henhouse," commented Babcock.

Rob Bassett, a former Hanford onion grower, estimated he lost \$70,000 two years ago in a deal that went bad with his Fresno-based broker.

When he found out about the MEB, not widely known about among farmers, Bassett said, "I was kicking up my heels. I thought I was going to get my money back."

But instead, MEB offered Bassett a small portion of the money he was due, and then referred his case to the district attorney's office where it was then shelved.

Bassett said he received no money and was forced to sell the land that was in his family for over 100 years.

"If you ask me if I'm bitter, I'll tell you. I'm a very bitter man," said Bassett. "I have a son who was helping me farm that land for seven years, who was going to take over after me."

According to Carol Chesbrough, director of marketing services at MEB, complex cases can take many months or even years to settle. The MEB gets more than 500 cases a year and has two only two auditors

to handle them.

Chesbrough said a single case can involve thousands of pieces of paperwork. Since the MEB often doesn't have the time or the resources to sort through all the evidence on the cases, the agency often does partial record examinations in reviewing disputes between growers and dealers.

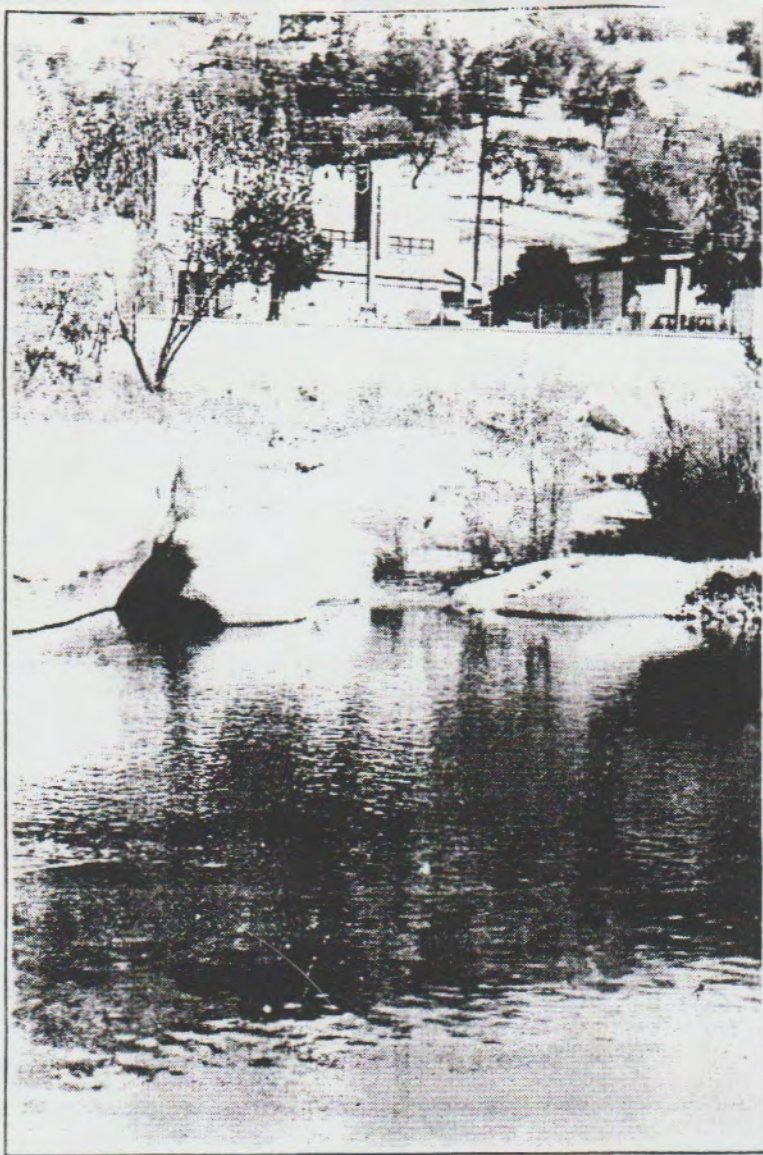
The standard, said Chesbrough, is 10 percent. "Nowhere in the state statutes does it say we are required to do 100 percent audits," Chesbrough said.

But, says Babcock, partial audits can be detrimental to the growers. A 10 percent audit on 100,000 boxes of plums, for example, means that if the MEB determines a grower was shorted \$1.50 a box by his produce dealer, the MEB offers the grower a \$15,000 settlement based on 10,000 boxes rather than \$150,000 based on 100,000 boxes.

"It's like the police coming into someone's house that was burglarized, and saying the homeowners lost only 10 percent of what they lost," says Babcock.

In the case of Fresno-based

Sequoia Set, 20



"Slicky." A point of contention between local teens and private landowners. *Photo by Chris Smith*

Speaking Out About Slicky

by Lisa Lieberman

Summer, it seems, could just about last forever. The sky is a bright blue. The day is hot, except for an occasional breeze which floats along the Kaweah River, bringing with it the undercurrent of a slight chill, foretelling of an early autumn.

Four young teenaged boys stand atop a rock overlooking the river. After hours of sitting in school classrooms, the cool, clear water swirling beneath their feet beckons to them invitingly as the boys shuck off their shirts and jump in, washing away all the world's worries for awhile.

About 500 yards behind them stands a six foot high chainlink fence topped with barbed wire and a sign that says,

in unmistakably large red letters, "No trespassing."

Located across the street from the Three Rivers Elementary School, behind the Chevron Station, the swimming hole, known as "Slicky" is surrounded by a majority of private property holders who say that the boys are unwelcome and that they are trespassing.

"I don't want to seem like a mean, old lady," says Mary Grady, who owns property near the swimming hole. "I love Three Rivers and I love the people here. But I work hard all week and I just want to be able to come home and have some peace and quietude in my own backyard."

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Slicky cont.

But to the boys, it isn't so much private property as it is their favorite swimming hole. They say that there is no place like Slicky.

"This is where our parents came to swim. It's where some of our grandparents came to swim," says 16-year-old Winston Cook. "Coming here to us is like a religious experience."

"Nothing's like Slicky," said 16-year-old Tim Collette, who works at the Three Rivers Market and says he's been coming there since he was 12. "I like to come here after a hard days work and just relax and meditate."

Slicky is different from any other swimming hole because of the slick grooved rock which acts as a natural water slide when water cascades down it's surface, according to the boys.

There teens spend hours swimming, doing hand stands, snorkeling, playing leap frog, king of the mountain and most of all, practicing a special sport unique to Three Rivers, "mountain rock surfing."

Surfing, they say, is an art.

"It's a combination of balance and getting a lot of bruises," explains Hans Radmacher with a laugh.

Gabriel Daly, who's known as one of the best surfers on the rock, says that Slicky is the only place where the locals can go to practice surfing.

"Slicky's got soul. It's where everyone who grew up here went when they were young. It's really great here. We slide down it, walk up, run, do 365 degree jumps and catch air (a trick done by catching pockets of air to increase speed)," Daly says.

Landowners say that there are other places for the youth to swim. There's the Park, the North Fork, and the lake for instance.

But Jenny Eyre, a mother who lives up the North Fork, says that the teens need some

Slicky cont.

place local to swim.

"Not everyone has access to the river," she said. "Local youth need some place in town where they can meet and socialize, and ride their bikes to."

"It's a good place because you can always go there and see if your friends are there," said Colette.

According to local Resident Deputy Kevin Bohl, one of the main problems with teens using Slicky is the drinking and smoking that goes on. "In all my 14 years here, I've never been down there once when kids weren't drinking and smoking."

Bohl indicated that if it weren't for the drinking, smoking and littering, they wouldn't have a problem finding access to the river.

Despite landowners' reports of broken bottles, soiled diapers, and empty beer cans, the local teens deny leaving trash. They say that they pick up after themselves and collect the "out-of-towners" trash at the beginning and the end of swim season.

As for the drinking and smoking, "If they're going to do it there, they are going to do it anywhere. But if they do it there, then at least we know where they are," says Billy Radmacher, Hans' father.

Some of the parents say the teens have rights to swim at Slicky because the Three Rivers Elementary School owns ten feet of river frontage in the area.

According to Superintendent Larry Horton, just because the land is owned by a public institution doesn't necessarily mean that it's open to the public.

"Most schools around the country lock their school doors at night and don't open them to just anyone who wants to come in. Some schools even close down their campuses. But we leave ours open because we don't want it to look like a prison."

Horton says that liability is the main reason the school doesn't grant permission to the public to use the property for river access.

"It's just like if someone's using a structure on our playground and injure themselves, we're liable," says Horton.

Both Larry Jules, who has owned river frontage property near Slicky for three years, and Mary Grady, who has owned her property for 18 years, say they have never been sued. But they still worry about liability.

"I have no trespassing signs all over the property, and still the teens keep coming. They come on the property. They come around the property. Some of them have even climbed over my fence and gone around that way," says Grady.

Scott Thompson, a local attorney, says that liability isn't as much of an issue as some people might think.

According to Thompson, "If you own property and you put up no trespassing signs, and someone injures himself on it, you're not liable."

The reasoning, Thompson said, is that if people put up fences or no trespassing signs and have done the best they can do deter the public coming on their property, short of "putting up armed guards" to stop them, there's nothing more they can humanly do.

In addition, Thompson said, there might be such a thing as "prescriptive easement" which would allow trespassers to continue trespassing.

Says Thompson, "If one person or hundreds of persons trespass on a piece of property when there's clear evidence like a fence or a sign showing that it's trespass, the argument could be successfully made that after a period of five years, there is a prescriptive easement or an implied public dedication that

establishes the right for non-property holders to continue using the property."

While different lawyers could argue different points of view regarding prescriptive easement, when it comes to water law, according to one Visalia lawyer, everybody has rights to all parts of the river.

"The public has a navigation easement across any navigable lake, stream or water within the state even though the land is in private ownership," he said. The Kaweah River is classified on property deeds as being a "navigable stream of water."

"In reference to land that is adjacent to tidal waters which by definition are navigable, the littoral property owner holds title to the mean high-water mark", he quotes from California Real Estate and 15.12 by Miller and Starr.

This means that even though the public may not necessarily have rights to cross private property to access the river, once they are on the river, they have the right to be in the area between the low water mark and high water mark.

In the midst of all the complexities regarding rights to the river, one thing's clear to Rod

Simonian, who's lived across from Slicky for ten years and who says he "hasn't missed a year of swimming there" since 1971.

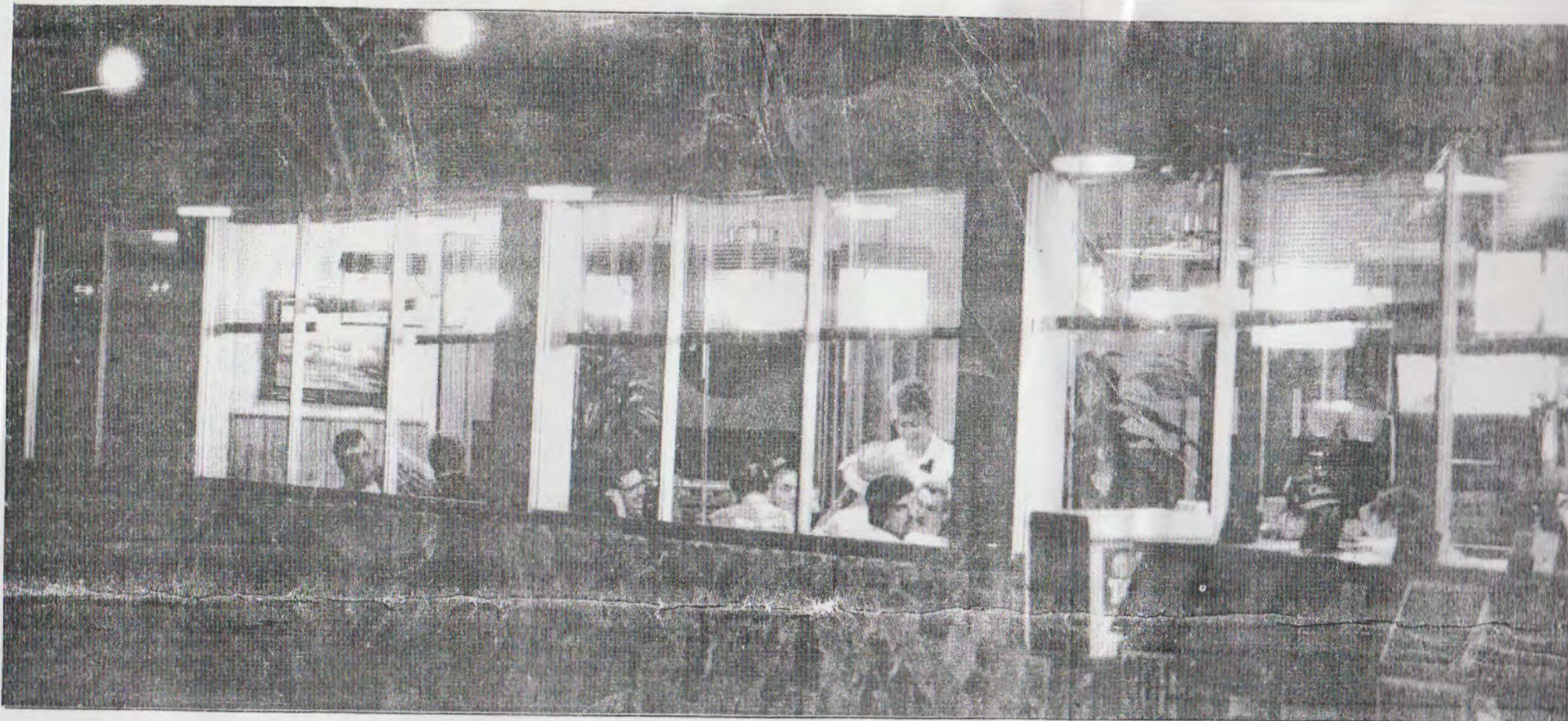
"Kids have rights to the river. And if they don't get it one way, they'll get it another. It'd be a missed opportunity for kids not to go to the river. You don't get too many opportunities in life to have fun."

"I always feel sad when I have to leave town and go to the city," says Cook. "The first thing I do when I get back is jump in the river. I don't know what it is. It's just a special feeling I get from it."

Back at Slicky, the sun's sinking and the water's going down. The nights are getting cooler and swim season is coming to an end. As the kids pack up their bags to go home,

they say they'll be back again next year.

"We always come back."



Valerie Reyna, a waitress at Hanford's Golden West Pancake House, works through the night.

Gary Kazanjian/Sentinel Staff Photographer

Waitresses: Long distance running around

LISA LIEBERMAN
For the Sentinel

Magicians amaze us by juggling many things at once. Marathon runners cover 10 to 15 miles every day. Actresses must keep on their toes and smile no matter what all day long.

A waitress does all that and more.

Just ask Vickie Sanders, who waitresses at Country Waffles on Lacey Boulevard, as she carries a piping-hot order of eggs and bacon and a platter of chicken-fried steak in one

hand, grasps two orders of hotcakes in her other hand and balances two plates loaded down with blueberry waffles and piled high with whip cream on the same arm. Six plates in all.

"Actually, I can carry nine," she explains. "The trick is to carry two plates in one hand, put three plates on your arm, balance two little side plates on top of those and carry two plates in your other hand."

Within the next few minutes, Sanders does warmups on coffee, takes an order, clears, wipes and resets a table, pops some toast into

the toaster for her next order, takes some money from a customer at the register, calls cheerfully out the door after him, "Have a nice day!" Her legs seem to have been pumping a mile a minute.

"And today's a slow day," she says with a laugh. "It looks easy while you're sitting down (as a customer) but when you're doing it — that's another story," she says.

It's a hard life — the almost constant hustle and bustle, having to keep track of a hundred things at once, trying to please the customers as well as the managers, coming home with

swollen feet and tired legs at the end of the day. But Sanders says she loves waitressing.

"I like people, and I like meeting new people. You never know who's going to be walking in that front door," she says.

Sanders, who started out as a waitress 30 years ago when she was newly married and studying to be a home economist at the College of Sequoias, never thought she'd be waitressing this long.

"I don't know what happened. I just fell in

See WAITRESSES; Page 4

love with it and stayed with it," she said.

Still, there's no doubt that waitressing is stressful.

"Not everyone can be a waitress," says Marie Hogan, another waitress at Country Waffles. "You always have to know what's coming up next. And you have to be physically ready for it when it comes. And you can't tire too easily, either."

Salt and pepper shakers have to be filled, ash trays have to be emptied, creamers have to be put out, biscuits have to be cut, orange juice, hot chocolate, coffee, and tea have to be continually made. Waitresses are responsible for wiping down their own tables and sweeping and vacuuming their own stations.

"You have to be quick and willing to work your butt off," says Debbie Kimon, a 20-year veteran in the business. "If you can do that, you'll have a job as a waitress wherever you go."

But the real key to being a successful waitress is patience, patience, all the waitresses say.

"You can't ever be rude," says Kimon. "If it weren't for my customers, I wouldn't have a job."

Still, in a world where everyone has their bad days and the "customer is always right" and waitresses get blamed if the cook makes the steak well done instead of medium rare, and screaming kids throw food all over the floor, being patient all day long every day isn't always easy.

Jessica Aguayo, who works at the Irvin Street Inn, says she loves her customers, but the only thing that really bothers her is when five or six tables are all trying to get her attention at once.

"I know that when customers go out to restaurants they like to be waited on, but I just wish that people would realize that they're not always the only table being waited on."

To Aguayo, waitressing is an art; one that's best practiced when there's the time and a relaxed enough atmosphere to do it properly.

"It takes a lot of patience," she

'It doesn't matter what kind of mood you're in when you come in that front door. You have to put on a smile and you can't stop smiling as long as you're here.'

'Sometimes it gets really hard, though. Just like any other business, when you're really hot and tired and you've been running around trying to please everyone at once, and someone turns around and starts yelling at you for something that isn't even your fault.'

— Vickie Sanders

says. "When it's really, really busy, you need speed, and you've practically got to run, but you've got to look relaxed while you're doing it."

"I like dinner time best, when it's calm and slower (than lunch) and it's easier to give good service."

Good service means not only greeting the customer in a friendly manner, telling them about the product and how it tastes, and taking their orders, but it also means anticipating their needs.

"You've got to cover all bases," says Aguayo. "You have to bring them stuff they didn't ask for, like steak sauce if they're having steak, or extra lemon if they're having fish."

"You have to be able to concentrate and remember things. Sometimes if I blank out for just a second I get off track, and that's when I forget to bring someone their milk."

A one-second lapse in concentration can also mean forgetting to bring a customer his coffee, during and not before his meal, bringing out strawberry jam instead of cherry, or overlooking a customer's persistent gaze waiting for help at the cash register.

The smallest of mistakes can cost a waitress in her all-important tips, which she relies on for the bulk of her income.

"Sometimes I don't know if people realize just how much we rely on our tips," Kimon says.

"Sometimes I bust my butt for a table of eight or nine people and I don't get a tip," says Kimon. "They walk out and I rack my brains trying to figure out what I did wrong. But then I think about it, and I think, 'Well maybe they just don't tip anywhere' or 'They don't know that they're supposed to tip.'"

Almost as draining and exhaustive as the physical and mental demands of waitressing are the less obvious emotional challenges that go along with the job; the constant smiling and joking and chit-chatting with the hundreds of people who come in each week.

"It's a lot like being an actress," says Belinda Williams. "You just get on stage and smile and joke around a lot. It's just all a part of the job."

"It doesn't matter what kind of mood you're in when you come in that front door," says Sanders. "You have to put on a smile and you can't stop smiling as long as you're here."

"Sometimes it gets really hard, though. Just like any other business, when you're really hot and tired and you've been running around trying to please everyone at once, and someone turns around and starts yelling at you for something that isn't even your fault."

"There's pressure from all sides," says Hogan. "You have to (get along with) the customers, the managers, and the other waitresses. There are some days when I don't even want to come in to work. But then the pressure builds up and then goes away."

It's the little things that keep them all going, they say; things like laughing and teasing and playing practical jokes on each other, like putting salt instead of sugar in each other's iced tea. Dishwashers pitch in to lend a helping hand busing tables when things get really frantic. Waitresses and cooks try to be understanding of each other when things go wrong.

Compliments from the managers and customers especially help, too, all the waitresses say.

"It's like we're all a team here," says Frank Ray, the manager at

Country Waffles. "And if one thing goes wrong with one person, it can ruin the whole day for everyone."

Individually, all of the workers have their own ways of coping with stress. On weekends, Sanders spends time in her garden weeding and pruning her walnut and fruit trees. Hogan saves up quarters from her tips to go with her husband to Disneyland. Kimon's husband rubs her tired feet at night sometimes.

"Sometimes I cry on the way home," says Kimon. "Or when I'm at work and I need to cry, I go in the bathroom and cry, and that helps."

"Most people don't realize just how stressful being a waitress is," Kimon says. "People who work in office jobs don't realize that they could be doing this kind of work, too."

But all in all, Kimon gains more than she loses from waitressing.

"I love all my customers," says Kimon. "But I remember this one time this man came in and he looked so sad, and I went up to him and said, 'Sir, I just want to let you know that if you feel like talking, I'm here for you.' And then he burst into tears, and he started telling me about a problem he was having with his sick wife."

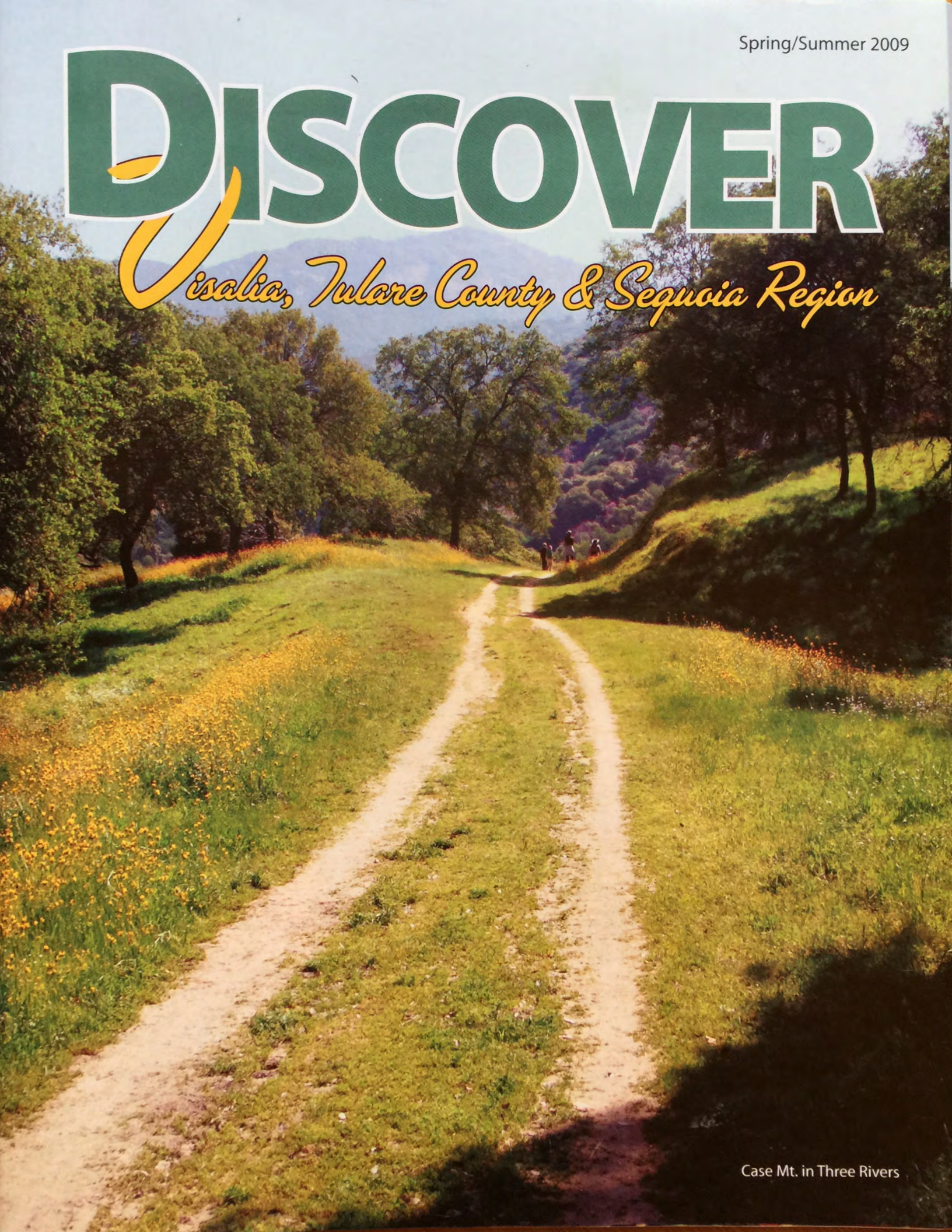
Kimon who is now completing her 20th year in the business, never thought she'd be waitressing for as long as she has. Originally, her dream was to be a nurse. Now her dream is to work part time and spend more time with her daughter at home.

"I like waitressing, but my dream for my daughter is for her to go to school so she doesn't have to be a waitress... I wish just everyone could be a waitress for a day, a busy day, and then they'd never think of waitressing in the same way."

Spring/Summer 2009

DISCOVER

Visalia, Tulare County & Sequoia Region



Case Mt. in Three Rivers

Visit Three Rivers

by Lisa Lieberman

In ancient Greek mythology, there's a tale about these beautiful sirens who once lived on a desert island. Whenever sailors at sea would travel by, the sirens would try to bewitch them with their singing. Even though many of the sailors tried to cover their ears and ignore the sirens, there were those who fell prey the sirens' songs and ended up spending the rest of their lives on the island, never making it to their final destination.

In some ways, Three Rivers is a lot like that. There are many tales of people just passing through or who had come up for the weekend, falling in love with the town and never leaving.

Founded in 1889 as an idealist colony of people who wanted to live off the land and march to the beat of their own drums, Three Rivers still retains a similar mix of idealism and adventure.

Three Rivers is home to an eclectic mix of artists, musicians, writers, religious figures, outlaws, hippies, retirees, movie stars and cowboys.

"It's the land of misfit toys," said one resident. "Everyone fits in because no one fits in."

Nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains at the gateway of the Sequoia National Park, Three Rivers offers the best of several worlds. At its 4,000 ft. elevation, Three Rivers is high enough to avoid the Tule fog that plagues the Valley each winter. At the same time, Three Rivers is low enough so it rarely snows. Yet, residents can see the snow on the mountain tops in the Sequoia National Park.



North Fork Kaweah River Photo by Ryan Oliver

Three Rivers was named after the three forks of the Kaweah River which crisscross the town. If you follow the forks up far enough, eventually you'll reach the Sequoia National Park.

South Fork

One road relatively untraveled is the South Fork. Take this 60 to 90-minute, twisting-turning drive up to the end of South Fork. Be sure to drive slowly. At the end of this road, take a hike up Lady Bug Trail.

This approximately three-to-four-mile hike doesn't



The smallest Post Office in the country. Photo by Richard Houts

disappoint, especially in the spring and summertime when the ladybugs in their full regalia literally cover the plants and trees along the river.

If you're driving up South Fork in the summertime, stop along the road and try sampling some of the region's native blackberries.

North Fork

On a different day, take a trip up the North Fork and check out Flora Bella Farms and the Kaweah Post Office. Flora Bella Farms grows organic citrus, tomatoes and vegetables, as well as a plethora of other fresh fruit and vegetables.

A little further up the road is the Kaweah Post Office, the second smallest post office in the country. After more than 120 years, the post office, which can barely fit three people in the whole building at a time, is still fully operational. In addition to sending and receiving mail, local residents have a book exchange at the Kaweah Post Office.

For another taste of Three Rivers history, take North Fork all the way to the end where you'll run into the Old Colony Road which was built by the original founders of Three Rivers who



had hoped to transport timber up and down the road.

For a look at the more modern Three Rivers, drive by the old Apple House, also on North Fork, which serves as a studio for resident artists.

Every spring, the community sponsors an artists tour where for a small donation, locals and visitors can get a map of many of the artists' homes in Three Rivers and visit them in their studios for a day. If you're into the arts, try visiting the Cort Gallery on Highway 198 in the middle of town.

See **Three Rivers** on page 54

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Museums & More

SPECIALTY SHOPS PRODUCT NEWS

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An exclusive interview with Mary Engelbreit- Page 10



Agricultural art packs them in

Tulare Historical Museum in California creates traveling Art of Agriculture exhibit

Most curators know that the way to draw crowds into the museum is to find a way to tie special exhibits in with the unique interests and history of the local community it serves.

The Tulare Historical Museum, in Tulare, Calif. found a way to do this with its traveling Art of Agriculture exhibit.

Located in the heartland of California agriculture, Tulare County produces a healthy chunk of California's \$30 billion agricultural income.

"That's why we thought local residents would have an interest in an agricultural art exhibit," said Ellen Gorelick, director-curator of the Tulare Historical Museum.

The traveling art exhibit, which ran from May 30-July 21 and attracted more than 700 visitors, depicted the bold, visual art of fruit and vegetable crate labels that were developed by produce growers from the 1880s through the 1940s, Gorelick said.

"These labels were a kind of enticement to call attention to a particular vendor's fruit and vegetables. It was also a way to promote California farming," Gorelick said.

With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1880, California producers who primarily sold their produce to local markets began to export their produce out East. Growers relied on colorful labels as a form of advertising in eastern markets.

"Brightly colored crate labels became a means of distinguishing one packer's shipment from his neighbors'. They were also a mark of a grower's success," Gorelick said.

All labels were registered with the Department of Agriculture and told buyers not only the brand name, but the grade and quality of the produce they were purchasing.

"There was a rare humor among many of the labels. Some seasons were bad, and therefore the fruit inferior, so there were labels with sad looking dogs with names like Mutt,

Mongrel, and Fido," Gorelick said.

As the first shipments of California citrus began arriving in St. Louis in 1877, labels became more sophisticated, catching the eyes of produce buyers.

While the labels were costly to produce, many packinghouses had their own in-house artists or hired Los Angeles or San Francisco lithographers to design and print unique images for their product.

According to some history buffs, these labels made with stone lithography and rare inks were some of the first commercial art in the country.

The Tulare Historical Museum was able to procure the traveling art exhibit through the California Exhibit Resource Alliance (CERA), which works with smaller museums throughout the state.

The traveling art exhibits, which change about every two months, add interest and flair to the museum, keep visitors coming back to the museum, Gorelick said.

As a way to benefit both the museum and the artists, the museum sells art exhibits on display at the artists' requests.

"We'll keep 20 percent of the sales and pay the tax for the artists. The artists will keep the rest. It's a win-win for the artists and for the museum. Their work gets exposed to the public and people get a chance to see it and maybe buy it," Gorelick said.

Some art exhibits have been so

successful that one artist was able to sell \$18,000 worth of paintings after an exhibit.

In the recent agricultural art exhibit, most of the art labels, which were procured through CERA, came from the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas.

Since many of the labels depicted agricultural scenes from Salinas,

Gorelick wanted to add a splash of Tulare County history to the exhibit by augmenting it with local Tulare County agricultural labels as well. Some of these labels were put on display along with the Salinas labels while other Tulare County labels were sold in the museum's gift shop.

Since Tulare County is one of the largest citrus producers in the world, citrus labels were a big component of the museum's local agricultural labels.

When the first California oranges went out East, the paper labels on the ends of the wooden crates announced "California Oranges" to eastern buyers. It is said that during the 70-year era of citrus labels, over 8,000 distinct designs were developed and used on more than two billion boxes of oranges and lemons.

Some of the more famous labels from Tulare County and throughout California made their way to such elite places as the Waldorf Hotel in New York, Gorelick said.

"The sad part of this history is that we don't know who a lot of the artists were. They were considered commercial artists back then, so they didn't sign their work," Gorelick said.

Three different forms of labels evolved over the 70-year period in which labels were in fashion. From 1885-1920, the labels evoked scenes of naturalism. Advertising images of brand or family name dominated the look of labels from 1920-1935. And from 1935-1955, the labels took on a commercial art form with representations of current events such as the Olympics, war and fashion trends, Gorelick said.

Label art reached its peak in the period of 1910-1940. But label art declined with the onslaught of World War II when wood shortages forced packers to ship in cardboard boxes. By the early 1950s, cardboard boxes virtually replaced wooden boxes and signaled the beginning of the end for crate labels, Gorelick said.

Since the 1950s about 90% of the unused labels were destroyed.

"The fate of many of the labels is that they were destroyed. But the ones that are still around are considered antiques, and some of them sell for hundreds of dollars," Gorelick said.

"We haven't had anything quite like this exhibit before. And it's really perfect for us considering we're one of the number one agricultural valleys in the world. This has been a good exhibit for people to come out and see, because it's something they can relate to, and it's something in their own backyard," Gorelick said.



Ellen Gorelick, director-curator of the Tulare Historical Museum.

