

Dove hunting on Cache Creek

There used to be this phenomenon that occurred on Cache Creek during opening day of Dove Season! Approximately 100 hunters from God knows where with shotguns would accumulate just east of the Capay Bridge. Back then, if you looked east from the old Capay Bridge you would see a row of trees to your right that separated Cache Creek from an almond orchard; then a 25 to 50 feet clearing; and then a cluster of trees and bushes which was about 20 to 25 feet wide; and then just clusters of bushes and trees as you look north. This row of trees were about 150 yards long or so, which made that narrow clearing feel like narrow corridor.

These hunters would post themselves in these trees because the dove had a tendency to fly down this long open area, as well as to the north of these trees. So, it turns out you have hunters posted in the trees facing hunters posted in the other trees 25 to 50 feet away with dove flying down the middle! Stupidity at its best! It was absolutely remarkable that somebody didn't get killed! One year, one crafty hunter, Leaf Hanson, set up a nice little refreshment area on the row of trees separating the almond orchard from Cache Creek. It was a nice little set up with iceboxes for drinks and sandwiches etc. I wasn't old enough to hunt, but I went down with Leaf and a couple other fellows and it was like a war zone; these poor birds would be shot by three different hunters and then the hunters would argue over who shot this pathetic little bird. One time a dove flew fairly low between us and the other row of trees and a hunter jumped out of the bushes and unloaded shots right into our camp! We ducked and heard the buckshot going through the trees just above us!

West of the bridge there was probably another 50 hunters doing the same thing. Generally, anything there was to do with Cache Creek I'd always considered fun--except for this activity! This I considered stupid--and this is from the viewpoint of the kid that was himself considered *crazy* in Capay. This hunters stupidity made for great and humorous conversation at Ike and Kay's Tavern, but I never ever spent another first day of Dove season on Cache Creek after that near miss with the buckshot--because I may have been *crazy*, but I'm not *stupid*! If you're going to be *crazy*, it should at least be fun--and 50 to 100 city-slicker drunks shooting at small birds all at once didn't seem fun to me.

Add to that the fact that doves are really cool, anesthetic birds. Oh, I didn't mind hunting them, but I didn't consider this kind of activity *hunting!*

Anyway, this sort of crazy activity lasted for some years until somebody, probably the owners of the property--because of the liability?--put a stop to it by posting no hunting signs. Happily, this meant we locals could just go hunting without the city-slicker crazies and that was actually fun—and a hell of a lot safer! My dad, who wasn't really a hunter, but running the local tavern he made a lot of money on activities like this—though he didn't care for this particular activity because he thought somebody was going to get killed. While nobody got killed, some had to pick buck shot out of their behinds!

Last time I was in Capay was in the late 1980s and the old Capay Bridge was still there, but the road on the north side of the bridge had a trench about six-foot deep and a huge tree trunk in front of it so you couldn't drive down Cache Creek anymore—not surprising, but it made me very sad because I learned to drive on that road; and drove and walked up and down that road a thousand times as a kid! You could almost walk all the way to the Esparto bridge some rocky-creek-bed two miles away.

This area of Cache Creek heading east of the bridge is where it really changed, as it was out of the Capay Valley and Cache Creek itself became far wider. Less trees; a huge grassy area great for Jack rabbit hunting, and to me, more desert like. What was extremely interesting to me was how different it was than west of the Capay Bridge. There was a huge dirt wall that stretched almost from Capay to the Craig's almond orchard and ranch. There was a field of theirs that seemed to constantly be falling into the creek—one time a fairly large hunk went when the water got so high it washed a fair chunk of that field away. In the springtime the water used to rush toward that dirt wall and divide up into different streams, and then meet again at the bottom of that wall. It was a glorious sight to me to see Cache Creek divide up like that into all those little streams and meet again. My friends Mossy, Rosendo, Gary Anderson and I called it *Clearwater* because it was so cool and deep and neat there. But *Clearwater* would only be there for short period of time before the water stops flowing that far as summer came on--which corresponded with the opening up of the canals and blocking the water flow from the Capay Dam and into the two canals for irrigation all summer. It was always heartbreaking to me because it was a natural water *theme park* that would be gone for another year.

