

In the Shadow of the Giants

In 2015 the National Meeting moves to September, heads west and goes native

By Sara Malone • Photos by Janice M. LeCocq

Coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) are the tallest trees and among the oldest living things on Earth, with documented heights of over 375' and lifespans in the thousands of years. Once they grew in Asia and Europe, but today their range is limited to a narrow band along the Pacific Ocean from southern Oregon to just south of San Francisco. Some of the most magnificent remaining stands are found in Sonoma County, California, where we will gather in September, 2015 for this year's national meeting.

The California Wine Country is one of the top vacation destinations in the United States. A poll by *Sunset Magazine* rated it the best wine country in California in 2012, by one vote over Napa. September is the prime time of the year in Sonoma; the grape harvest is finishing, and the crush has begun. The days are balmy and warm, and nights cool and mild. The valleys have a Tuscan feel.

The 2015 meeting showcases a few select gardens: two very large, private gardens and two ACS Reference Gardens, supplemented by lunch in an old-growth redwood forest, a keynote speaker who is a



Sara Malone in the shadow of the giant *Sequoia sempervirens* in Armstrong Woods State National Reserve in Guerneville



world-renowned expert on the ecology of the redwood canopy, and lunch on the shores of San Francisco Bay. We will also enjoy complimentary wine tastings provided by three Sonoma wineries and so much more.

Home on the Range

With this meeting, the usual practice of holding the dinners at our hotel will be substituted by meals at Circle Oak Ranch in Petaluma, owned by my husband and me. Not only will this give attendees ample opportunities to visit the Ranch's gardens, but we'll also be able to enjoy three completely differently themed dinners prepared by different chefs. We'll have cocktails and dine in the barn courtyard and the covered arena, surrounded by the auction plants. Because it requires a bit more planning and volunteer involvement, early registrations are particularly helpful and a boon to each registrant. (Web: visit www.circleoakequine.com to learn more about the venue.)

Our welcome dinner on Thursday night will be the first time that we visit the Ranch and view the auction plants. We'll have buses cycling from the hotel, roughly 15 minutes away, to accommodate differing arrival times.

Through the Garden Gates

Our first stop on Friday will be Hog Hill, the garden of Lew and Mary Reid, in Sebastopol. Lew and Mary's garden has been featured in many garden publications, including a cover story in *Fine Gardening* (June 2014) and a March 2008 article on marthastewart.com. Although they don't have many conifers, the Reids have one of the loveliest gardens in Northern California. A large, stately *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* graces the front entrance. Their garden is perched on a hilltop with panoramic views of Sonoma County, in a particularly mild microclimate which does not see freezes. Many of the choicest specimens are sub-tropical. (Web: Google "Lew and Mary Reid Passionate Pursuit" for an article and photos about the garden.)

We'll go from the sub-tropics to the most iconic of native California ecosystems, an old-growth redwood forest at Armstrong Woods, an 800-acre preserve in Guerneville, and we will wander there among the giants and have a picnic lunch. Armstrong is a perfect spot to take in the redwood ecosystem—a very fragile and unusual one. The most majestic *Sequoia* in Armstrong Woods are over 300' tall and are over 1,000 years old. Docents from the Stewards of the Redwoods will be on hand to assist us during our visit. (Web: Google "Armstrong Woods State Park" for information and photos.)

From Armstrong Woods, we'll head to Circle Oak Ranch. The garden, which is primarily woody plants, encompasses a little over three acres on reclaimed pasture. When my husband and I got here in the late 1990's, there were virtually no plants on the property, save a few ancient oaks and eucalyptus. Today, there are almost 500 different conifers. Native pine cultivars such as those of *Pinus ponderosa* and *Pinus jeffreyi* do particularly well here, as do *Cedrus deodara*, *Cedrus atlantica* and *Picea pungens*. We have over 50 Japanese maple cultivars. The garden has been featured in *Fine Gardening* and *Garden Design* magazines. (Web: see www.formandfoliage.net for articles and photos of the garden with links to other sources).

We will have the opportunity to enjoy complimentary wine tastings by three Sonoma County wineries, as well as an aesthetic pruning demonstration on some of the *Pinus* cultivars by Maryann Lewis, ACS member and President of the Aesthetic Pruners Association. We will also feature bonsai specimens from local practitioners. Dinner that evening will be

a fiesta Mexicana, and we'll hear from our keynote speaker, Professor Stephen Sillett. Professor Sillett teaches at Humboldt State University and is a leading authority on coast redwoods and the ecology of the redwood canopy. His research and experiences in the treetops have been chronicled in Richard Preston's book *The Wild Trees*. (Web: Google "Professor Stephen Sillett" for his resume, photos and videos of his tree-climbing and research.)

Just for Reference

On Saturday we'll visit two ACS Reference Gardens—Quarryhill Botanical Garden and San Francisco Botanical Garden—and enjoy lunch on the shores of San Francisco Bay. While Friday will have been all about cultivars, this leg will focus more on species plants at two world-class botanical gardens with very different collections and missions.

Quarryhill Botanical Garden, in Glen Ellen, has one of the most important collections of Asian plants in the world. Founded just over 25 years ago, it is dedicated to the conservation of and education about threatened Asian plant species. Virtually all of the plants in the garden have been grown from seed collected in the wild in different Asian countries. The garden is not only a testament to conservation, but proof that a couple of decades are all it takes to create a garden with mature trees and extremely diverse flora. The Garden's director, Bill McNamara, staff plant professionals, and a group of knowledgeable docents will host us.



Quarryhill

QBG has fully-grown specimens of *Taiwania cryptomerioides*, *Tsuga chinensis*, *Keteleeria davidiana*, *Glyptostrobus pensilis* and *Fokienia hodginsii*. (Web: see www.quarryhillbg.org for lots of photos and information.)

We'll break our drive to our next garden at McNear's Beach Park, where we'll picnic on the hillside under ancient oaks and enjoy views of San Francisco Bay. For those wanting to explore a bit, there are large grassy lawns, a long rocky shoreline and a fishing pier over the water. (Web: Google "McNear's Beach Park, Marin County" for photos.)

San Francisco's mild temperatures—it almost never freezes in winter and average summer temperatures are in the mid-60's—provide climatic conditions which exist in few other botanical gardens in the world. This microclimate is able to recreate conditions of tropical cloud forests of Central and South America, New Zealand, Australia and also temperate Asia. San Francisco Botanical Garden boasts a lovely California native garden and a redwood grove. Conifers are some of the cornerstone plants at SFBG, and the collection numbers over 250 species, with the most important conifer families being Podocarpaceae (13 genera), Araucariaceae, represented by *Araucaria*, *Agathis* and *Wollemia* species. The Garden began as an arboretum in the 19th Century. The dwarf conifer garden, planted in 1960, contains over 100 different species. Dr. Don Mahoney, SFBG's Curator, will host us, along with the Associate Curator and two former Directors. (Web: www.sfbotanicalgarden.org for photos, history and info on the conifer collection.)

Our two days of garden visits will culminate in the silent and live plant auctions held at the Ranch after a cowboy barbecue. Pacific Northwest growers promise a lineup of offerings which will have coneheads in a bidding frenzy. Shipping services will be provided for those who can't carry their treasures home with them.

If you're a national meeting regular, or you've never attended one; no matter your geographical locale; conehead or just learning; get yourself registered, book your hotel room and join us in September in the shadow of the giants!

NOTE: You may register online and see much more detail, photos and links on the ACS website, www.conifersociety.org; so, make sure to check there for additional information and any changes.



A magnificent *Dacrydium cupressinum*
in heaths and heathers at MCBG

Post Meeting Tour to Mendocino

After the national meeting, we'll be leaving Sonoma's sheltered valleys and head to coastal Mendocino, where the ocean's proximity means nearly frostless winters and cool summers. September is the warmest, sunniest month there, with the least coastal fog, making the dramatic ocean vistas easy to enjoy.

En route to Mendocino, we'll stop in the town of Occidental, where you'll have a choice of activities. For those not afraid of heights, there is ziplining in the redwood canopy, which allows you to experience conifers in a very different way. The sights and smells from the treetops are unique. There is also a spiral staircase around one of the trunks and a treetop swinging bridge. Ziplining does not require physical strength or athletic prowess, just a strong head and stomach. (Web: for photos and information visit www.sonomacanopytours.com.)

For those inclined to stay on terra firma, you'll visit the nearby Western Hills Garden, which began as the private garden of Marshall

Olbrich and Lester Hawkins, who in the early 1960s began to collect seeds and plants from other Mediterranean climates such as South Africa, Chile and Australia. The garden writer Wayne Winterrowd wrote in *Horticulture* in 2005 that “from around 1970 to the present, no garden in North America has had a greater influence than Western Hills”, and called it a “trove of knowledge”. *The New York Times* once called it the “Tiffany” of plants. (Web: visit www.westernhillsgarden.com for information and links to articles.)

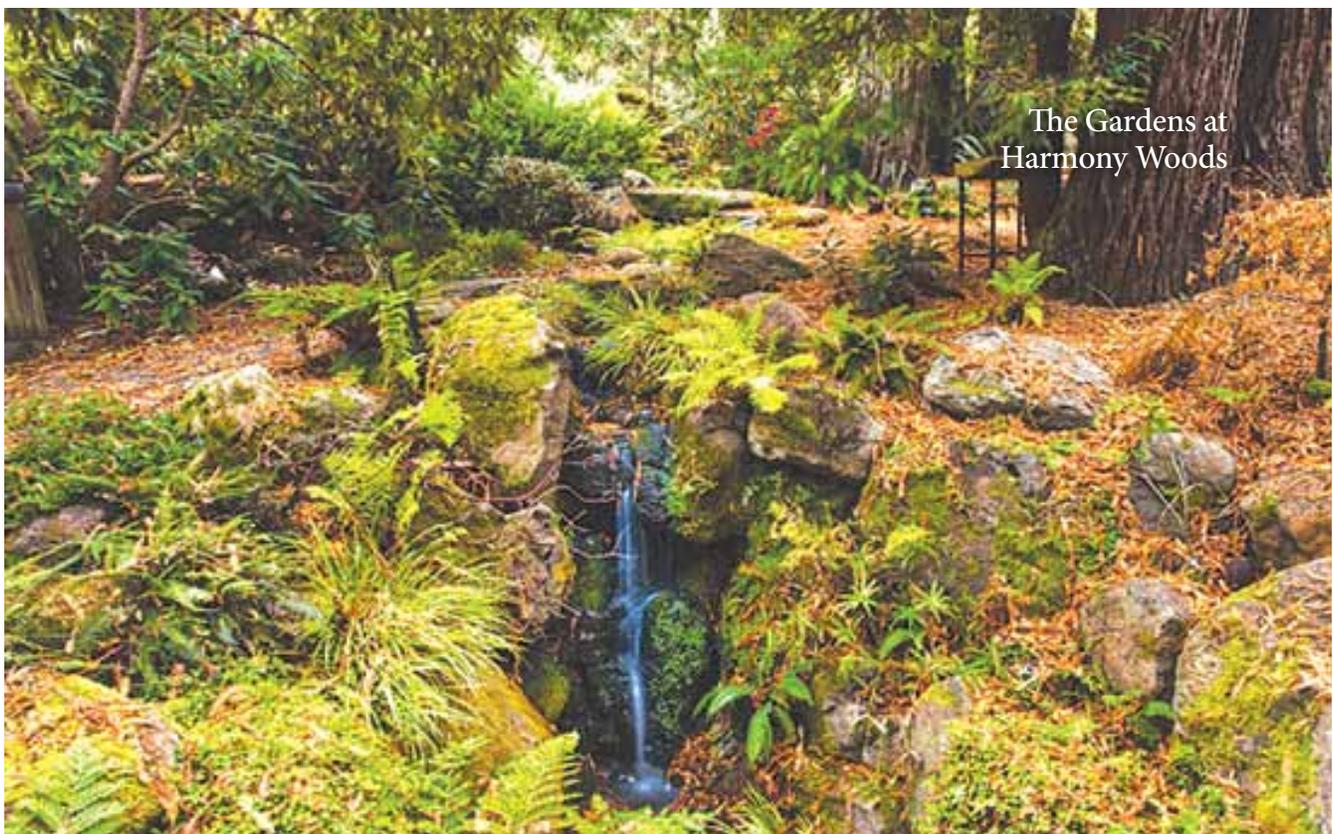
From Occidental, we’ll head up the coastal highway to Frog Song Farm, the private garden of ACS member Sandy Scott in Point Arena, our first stop in Mendocino County. Sandy, a lifelong gardener and plant collector, has created an estate-style garden in view of the ocean. The plant collection focuses on genera which grow well in this maritime climate. We’ll enjoy a leisurely visit and have lunch in the garden. (Web: Google “Frog Song Farm Point Arena” for more information and photos.)

We will next travel farther up the coast to Little River to our hotel, where we’ll relax and have dinner overlooking Mendocino’s dramatic seacoast. This part of the County is one of the State’s prime tourist destinations, with its stunning ocean vistas, thundering waves, many rivers and stately redwood forests. The weather is considered mild due to lack of temperature extremes, but the ocean-borne fog and wind often create a dramatic accompaniment to the charming inns and towns which dot the countryside. (Web: www.littleriverinn.com for more information and photos.)

On Monday, we’ll focus on two gardens with ample time in between for beachcombing at Van Damme State Park, relaxing at the Inn, or visiting the nearby Victorian village of Mendocino.

Mid-day we’ll head to The Gardens at Harmony Woods, the home of ACS members Judy and Bob Mathey. The emphasis is on conifers and rhododendron, with over 300 specimens of each, but the Matheys are a small part of a vast array of plant material gracing over twenty beds. Water and stone are uniquely integrated into the landscape so that the bridge and waterfalls appear to have existed for ages. We will have lunch on the lawn, once again in the shadow of the giants. (Web: Google “Gardens at Harmony Woods” for articles and photos.)

Next we will visit the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, our third



ACS Reference Garden of the meeting. Perched on the sea cliffs of Fort Bragg, just north of the village of Mendocino, the Gardens were highlighted in *Conifer Quarterly* Summer 2014 . (Web: visit the ACS website.) On Tuesday, we'll begin with a visit to a pygmy forest, an oligotrophic plant community, dominated by severely dwarfed Bishop pine (*Pinus muricata*), Bolander pine (*Pinus contorta* ssp. *bolanderi*) and Mendocino cypress (*Cupressus goveniana* var. *pigmaea*), the latter two of which are endemic to the pygmy forests of California's North Coast. This forest has "natural bonsais", the product of complex ecological conditions associated with underlying marine terraces and their unusual soils. (Web: Google "pygmy forest Mendocino" for photos and information.) From the Pygmy Forest, we'll head to Golden Eye Winery in Philo, for lunch and a garden tour. Known for its award-winning Pinot Noir, the winery also has a lovely garden and, once again, we'll find ourselves in the giants' shadow. (Web: visit www.goldeneywinery.com for information about the wines and photos.)

After lunch we'll head inland, to a much harsher gardening environment, to Walt and Ginger Valen's Stoney Bottom Gardens in Boonville. Walt (the former Director of Strybing Arboretum & Botanical Gardens in San Francisco) is a plant collector extraordinaire. He consistently pushes the limits of plants: too much sun, freezing valley temperatures,



Stoney Bottom Gardens
Photo by Walt Valen

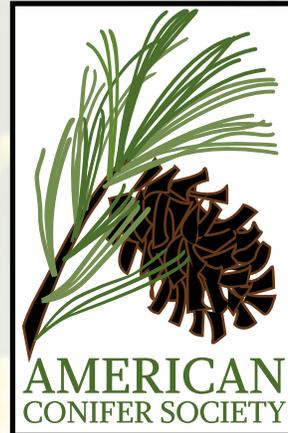
windy exposures, and the “reality” of growth rates and size have all played a role in the development of the gardens. Many conifers make their home there, alongside numerous other ornamental trees and specialty plants. (Web: Google “Stoney Bottom Gardens Boonville” for information and photos.)

Finally, we will arrive back at the DoubleTree, where you may catch the shuttle to SFO, stay the night and catch the shuttle in the morning, or stay the night and rent a car to continue your vacation! If you have driven to the meeting from your home, we will make sure that there is a secure place to leave your car while we are in Mendocino.

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Important Information:

2015 National Meeting and Post Meeting Tour



- ▶ This meeting will be held later in the year than is typical. We chose September because it is the most reliable weather in coastal Northern California.
- ▶ Registration is open earlier in the year than is typical. We began receiving requests to book hotel rooms a year ahead of the meeting date and roughly half of the block has been booked at this writing, so we urge anyone who plans to attend to register for the meeting and book hotel rooms without delay.
- ▶ Our hotel is the DoubleTree by Hilton, Rohnert Park (707-584-5466) and you must make your hotel reservation yourself. Because we have seen such early demand for hotel rooms, we are poised to secure more if needed. If you cannot book a room at the meeting hotel at the preferred ACS rate of \$127, call/email Sara Malone at 707-486-0444, webeditor@conifersociety.org.
- ▶ Registration forms will NOT be mailed separately, as has been done in the past, in order to save the Society postage and printing costs. Registration forms are provided in this issue of the CQ and the next issue as well.
- ▶ We are using electronic communication whenever possible in order to save the Society money and volunteer hours, and

to be environmentally conscious. If you have not provided your email address, please send an email to Steve Courtney, ACS National Office Manager, at acsnationaloffice@gmail.com so that he can add it to your record. The ACS respects the privacy of your email (and all of your personal information) and will never share it with others. Updates to the meeting schedule and additional information will be delivered via email and web postings.

- Our dinners will not be held at the hotel; they will be held at the Circle Oak Ranch, about 15 minutes away.
- The price of the post meeting tour does NOT include hotel rooms. This is different than in past, when it often did. You MUST make your hotel reservation yourself. Our hotel is the Little River Inn in Little River (707-937-5942—you must call; cannot book online). We have a preferred rate; mention the ACS when booking.
- The post meeting tour will include the optional activity of ziplining in a redwood forest for an additional cost (see registration form). No athletic prowess or special talent necessary, just no fear of heights and a desire to soar among the tree tops!

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