Supervising Ranger
Don Schmidt
Returns to Malakoff

Twenty-some years after patrolling the South Yuba Canyon and The Diggins, Don Schmidt has come home as Supervising Ranger for those two park units.

Don will also act as the Cooperating Association Liaison between State Parks and MDPA, replacing Jeremy McReynolds who has promoted to Superintendent at Marshall Gold Discovery in Coloma.

Most recently, Don has served as Supervisor for Donner Memorial SP and Plumas Eureka SP in the upper Sierra District.

A member of an elite fraternity of individuals who were actually born in Yosemite National Park, Don has nearly thirty years of ranger and law enforcement experience with State Parks, U.S. Forest Service and Nevada County Sheriff.

From all at MDPA, welcome home!

Claim Jumper Shot

November 3, 1860

Man named LeBlanc was shot and killed in mining claims of Chas Hakell near Arnolds Ranch (Lake City) last Wednesday. Shot by S.T. Nipher, night watchman. Accomplice arrested at Humbug. LeBlanc, native of Canada, was 28 and had been living around North Bloomfield for six or seven months without visible means of support. Entered tunnel equipped with flour sack, scoop, brush, candles, matches, bowie knife and pistol. Nipher questioned and released.
Excitement is in the Air!
President Wes Nelson

Yes! Excitement is in the air, will the warm weather hopefully accompany it soon? Our 45th Annual Humbug Day (June 12th) is right around the corner and we’re all looking forward to yet another fun-filled family day of games, excellent entertainment and yummy food! We’ve added a few additional local musical talents, plus a Humbug Raffle to enhance our traditional event! For those of you that may remember the old Alpha Beta grocery store commercial line, “Tell a friend”! I look forward to seeing all of you there!

Your MDPA Board of Directors has been busy bees so far this year! We’re preserving our Mission Statement in increasing and protecting the cultural history and interpretive education of our beloved Park. Here are just a few of our accomplishments thus far this year:

- Elections - We’ve assembled an All-Star team of competent, energetic and compassionate Board members
- Annual Report - Researched, completed and submitted to the Department of Park & Recreation
- Budget - Composed and approved!
- 5 Year Strategic Plan - Prepared and ready for final Board approval to reflect our future short and long term intentions to further enhance the interpretive goals and mission of the MDPA for Malakoff Diggins SHP
- Seasonal Aide - Contribution of $ 9000 to insure our Park Aide (the wonderful Debbie Pfanner) is on staff for misc. park duties and to assist our illustrious Environmental Learning Program for elementary school students
- Website - Looks fantastic and now includes our “Doin’s at the Diggins” Newsletter (feel free to download and/or forward to a friend!) and continued up-to-date park information
- Landscape Funding - We hired a local arborist to save our historic English Black Walnut trees and also purchased Heritage Fruit Tree rootstock to revive our cultural landscape.

These items are just a few of our completed duties for the Park and you, our valued MDPA members! We’ve engaged in developing a sturdy foundation for our future and I eagerly look forward to all we’ll accomplish in the upcoming months and years!

TIME TO ROLL UP OUR SLEEVES! - So… you’d like to help at Malakoff, but you’re not quite into the meeting, fundraising, elbow rubbing thing? How about the power tool, hammer swinging, working up a lil’ sweat idea? I know… I know… now you’re asking yourself, where do I sign up! We’re in the infancy stages of forming the “Malakoff Monitors” which is a team of individual volunteers that will participate in restoring, repairing and constructing North Bloomfield buildings, signs, fences, etc. Pick up the phone and contact our volunteer coordinator Jennifer Stark at (530) 265-5679 if you’re interested in joining us!

As always, I hope all is well for all of you and yours! We look forward to seeing you at Malakoff soon!

Kids Catch Lotsa Fish

Approximately 75 youngsters turned out for the May Kids Fishing Derby at our idyllic Blair Lake setting and a successful park event it was. The CA. Dept. of Fish and Game made the initial plant of Rainbow Trout. A special plant of large fish from Mt. Lassen Trout farm was made possible by approximately $1000 in donations from the Nevada County Fly Fishermen, Brendan Brooks, Kevin Fassino DVM, and Tammy Anderson-Wise. Ranger Mike Smittle and Debbie Dahas capably handled the organization and logistics while park volunteers made things work on event day. A hearty, “well done” to everyone involved in helping the kids land big ones of all sizes. Ed.
Rattlesnake Dick

Richard Barter, also known as Rattlesnake Dick and Dick Woods, the son of a British officer, was born in Quebec, Canada around 1833. Though little is known of his early history, he was said to have been a reckless sort of boy.

He migrated west in 1850 during the gold rush, accompanied by an older brother and an old man who was some sort of relative. After settling in at Rattlesnake Bar, a small mining camp in Placer County, the brother and other man soon returned to Canada. But Dick remained at the camp working for other miners and doing a little prospecting on his own.

However, Barter was unsuccessful in his quest for gold and soon decided to turn to a life of crime. He began with rustling horses but was as unsuccessful at that as he was at finding gold. In no time he was arrested and sent to prison for two years.

When he was released he formed a gang made up of brothers, Cyrus and George Skinner, who along with several others, began preying on gold shipments from Nevada City.

In 1856, Barter learned from a drunken mining engineer that large gold shipments were being sent down Trinity Mountain from the Yreka and Klamath River Mines.

Barter sent George Skinner and three others to intercept the gold shipment, which was packed on mules. The gang stopped the mule train outside of Clear Creek, at gunpoint. Meekly, the men turned over $80,600 in gold bullion without a shot being fired. The bandits struck off for a rendezvous with Barter and Cy Skinner at Folsom.

Arriving in Auburn, the gang was intercepted by a Wells Fargo Posse. In the ensuing gunfight Skinner was killed and his confederates fled.

The lawmen recovered $40,600 of the stolen loot and though they searched diligently, failed to find the remaining $40,000.

In the meantime, Rattlesnake Dick Barter and Cy Skinner weren’t at the rendezvous point in Folsom, as they had been jailed for stealing mules. (Presumably for hauling the gold.) When they were released, Barter immediately sought out George Skinner only to learn he had been killed. He and Cy spent the next several weeks trying to find the buried treasure before finally giving up.

Both men went back to robbing stagecoaches but their luck soon ran out. On July 11, 1859, Sheriff J. Boggs trapped Barter and Skinner in a mountain pass near Auburn. Boggs shot Rattlesnake Dick through the heart, killing him instantly. Skinner was wounded but lived to be taken into custody and given a long prison sentence.

The treasure has never been recovered and is said to be somewhere on Trinity Mountain, part of which is in Trinity County and part in Shasta County. The gold is believed to have been buried about 12 miles south of the scene of the Clear Creek hold up.

Condensed from: Legends of America, by Kathy Weiser

Editor: Rattlesnake Dick Barter (who preferred to be known as, the Pirate of the Placers) is buried in the Old Auburn District Cemetery off Fulweiler Avenue in Auburn. Rattlesnake Bar is under water in Folsom Lake marked only by a boat-launch ramp.
Pack Rats Reveal the Riddle of the Sands

In 1849, a group of hungry gold prospectors were crossing the Nevada desert when they noticed strange glistening balls of a gummy substance littering the top of a cliff. The men had not eaten a proper meal for days, so they ate the sweet tasting spheres. In a few minutes, all were violently sick, though each managed to survive the ordeal.

Now this faintly distasteful story has one interesting feature. It is the first recorded interaction of man and pack rat midden. Today, pack rat middens, as we call these shiny spheres, are widely known among scientists because of their power to shed light on our remote history from the dawn of modern humans, 40,0000 years ago, right up to relatively recent events.

It all sounds very peculiar, so let us take a look at the creature responsible: the pack rat, or the wood rat, or Neotoma, of which there are 22 different species. Pack rats can be pale buff color, grey or reddish brown, with white undersides and feet. Measuring from between nine and 19 inches in length, they are found throughout North and Central America in a range of habitats, from deserts to forests and mountains. They sound like fairly ordinary creatures. However, the pack rat has one particular habit that makes it quite distinctive, its nest building habits.

Scientists have discovered that pack rats protect themselves by building dens out of any debris coming their way, twigs, fragments of food, pieces of plant, man-made items and waste products of other animals. Pack rats live in these dens which fill up with their excrement and become saturated with their urine. This latter, fairly disgusting addition crystallizes and cements the den into a brick like consistency. It then becomes a midden. The miners’ reaction to these gummy balls is therefore not surprising. However, their scientific importance was only recently appreciated, when researchers discovered, in Nevada again; an old pack rat midden filled with fragments of juniper, a plant that not grown there for thousands of years. So they dated the midden and found that it was 9,300 years old! Yet inside it were the perfectly preserved remains of the plants and animals that had thrived in that area many millennia ago. For thousands of years, the pack rat has been creating perfect time capsules of past life on Earth. Essentially, the pack rat collects detritus for several months from land in a radius of about 50 meters round its den. This material is then preserved in crystallized urine, creating tiny archaeological treasure troves.

By Robin McKie (condensed)

Editor: About 17 years ago, we found a pack rat had built a nest (midden) on the bench seat in a unused (by people) outhouse near the Lake City park entrance. Brer Bear, no doubt desirous of a pack rat lunch, savaged the nest and the outhouse in the process. The fate of the pack rat is unknown, except to the bear. The outhouse was destroyed.
45th Annual Humbug Day
Saturday June 12th, 2010
11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Featuring:
entertainment by acclaimed bluegrass performers Mountain Laurel and Alkali - Last of the 49ers, special tours, wagon rides, barbeque picnic, Lazy Dog homemade ice cream, gold panning, candle making and other participatory period crafts, old-fashioned family games, the world’s shortest parade, face painting, and shooting the water cannon!

For more information call 530-265-2740
or check out our web site at www.Malakoffdiggins.org
Not an Ivy Covered Hall

It was a state-of-the-art four holer and there was one each, for boys and girls, at opposite ends of the school, but it was still an outdoor sprint through snow, rain and wind. Then there was the draft, but one would have to have experienced that phenomenon to appreciate the point.

In fact, “drafty” would describe the schoolhouse itself, drafty and cold most of the time. Boys were kept busy chopping wood to keep the stove popping and pushing heat through overhead pipes suspended from ceiling hooks. Note the ceiling vent, adjusted manually from the teacher’s desk.

The first school in North Bloomfield was built in 1857 and then replaced by the present structure in 1873 at a cost to the townspeople of $3,700, complete with furnishings and its own library. Classes were held for kindergarten through eighth grades, all in the same room with two or three students per desk.

The left wing of the school was added on at a later date, to accommodate the expanded enrollment. As many as 144 students took lessons from two teachers in the L-shaped two roomed schoolhouse.
Notice the length of the L-addition in the left hand photo at the bottom of the previous page. The room ends approximately one foot beyond the window. This photo was taken before 1900. The right hand photo reveals that sometime later an additional 15 feet were tacked on, no doubt to accommodate those 144 kids.

Numerous blackboards graced all four classroom walls, chalk being used as the primary teaching aid since paper products were scarce during the gold rush. Children used slate boards and chalk to do homework. A bench, at the front, right of the room, was used to seat children who were being disciplined or were figuratively wearing the dunce cap.

The front doors open into two cloak rooms with a supply room in between. A small hole in that ceiling provided boys access up into the bell cupola. A perpendicular wood ladder made the climb interesting or even exciting for some. Shinnying up that ladder into the dark attic below the cupola, possibly inhabited by bats, and only back-lit by kerosene lamps from below, was not for the meek. On the previous page both men and boys had made the climb to pose for the photographer.

When the school opened in 1874, F.D. McAlister served as principal and teacher for which he received a salary of $90 per month. His assistant, Mrs. McDonald received $50 per month. Subsequently, residence cottages were provided near the school for the schoolmarms and masters.

The structure served as a church and Sunday school on weekends. Catholic, Methodist and Episcopalian religious services were conducted here. The place also provided the community a town meeting hall before Cummins Hall was constructed.

Closed in 1941, North Bloomfield School was acquired by the California Department of Parks and Recreation in 1973, one hundred years after it was built.
June 12th  Humbug Day
July 10th  MDPA Board Meeting
August 28th  Empire Mine “Miner’s Picnic”
September 5th  Ice Cream Social
September 11th  MDPA Board Meeting
October 9th  MDPA Board Meeting / Annual Meeting / Elections

BOARD of DIRECTORS

Wes Nelson  President  Morley Hardaker  Director
916-412-3277  wesleynelson@comcast.net  530-756-4137  hardaker@pacbell.net

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Cooperating Association Liaison
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Name: _______________________________________________________

Mailing address: ______________________________________________

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Email Address (private): _______________________________________

Phone: (____) ____________________________

Membership Status:   New ____    Renewal ____

Please check the volunteer opportunities you maybe interested in!

___ Docent        ___ Trail work ___ Sales Center / Museum

___ Humbug Day       ___ Publicity ___ Fundraising / Donor

Please send your completed application and check for $10.00 to:

   MDPA Membership
   23579 North Bloomfield Road
   Nevada City, CA  95959
   www.malakoffdiggins.org
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