

California Alpine Club: Early History

Update: October 31, 2008

The California Alpine Club, established in 1913, is a non-profit corporation organized with an elected Board of Directors and appointed Committee Chairpersons as well as a few Standing Appointments culled from its membership by the acting President. Since the beginning the Club has depended on men and women volunteering skills, time, talent and resources for the benefit of all.

California Alpine Club (CAC) was incorporated in 1936 with legal help from Hilary Crawford, Sr. The Board of Directors handle Club business and affairs, own the properties, publish the "Trails" monthly newsletter, establish dues, and generally seek to maintain the diversity of activities, hospitality and well-being of the membership. We are fortunate to have on file all Board of Directors Meeting Minutes since 1914.

CAC owns two lodges—Alpine Lodge on Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County and the Echo Summit Lodge, acquired in 1952, overlooking Lake Tahoe in El Dorado County—that are operated independently and are responsible for their own finances. Each lodge has an elected Board of Trustees that manage the properties and report to the CAC Board of Directors.

Early History

The core members who formed the Club first came together before 1913 as a YMCA hiking group. During February and March of 1913 the San Francisco "Call Bulletin" newspaper published a series of articles on outdoor recreation. Upon

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invitation of the writer of these articles more people started to meet with the YMCA group for Sunday morning hiking trips in the San Francisco Bay Area. In April a club was formed under the name of the newspaper. Officers were elected, a constitution and by-laws adopted and arrangements were made for the printing of a schedule of regular, weekly trips.

Most people came from San Francisco or Oakland by ferry to Sausalito; they then to the train to Mill Valley for the hikes on Mt. Tamalpais. There was a "Hikers Retreat" in Mill Valley where lockers could be rented and showers were available. The Mt. Tamalpais Railroad, built in 1896, operated from Mill Valley to the top of Mt. Tam until 1930. One early member wrote of hiking up as far as West Point Inn, then riding the "gravity cars" back down Mt. Tam, that wound around Double Bow Knot.

The California Alpine Club

Excerpt from a 1920 article in "Trails" by Norma Holroyd Pinther:

“At the annual meeting April 16, 1914, President Frank Allen presiding, a reorganization was effected. All connections with the newspaper organization were severed, and the present name “The California Alpine Club” selected.”

Subsequent meetings were scheduled for the first Sunday of every month at the hike’s lunch destination. Names of prospective members were read at each meeting. Many decisions were made and later some were changed. June 7, 1914, at Rodeo Lagoon the Club adopted the "Arrowhead" emblem—still used today—when the decision was made to print "Local Walks" twice a year that covered scheduled hikes May to October, and November to April. Quarterly Meetings

Reference

were to be held in April, July, October and January. Dues for the club year 1914 were paid by eighty-four people and forty-three more joined during the year before April 1915. These might be considered "founding members" although no list of Charter Members (if one existed) has yet been found.

At the Annual Meeting on April 4, 1915 five new officers were elected with Al Pinther serving as President and Alice Cazasus as CAC Secretary. None of the 1914 officers were re-elected. September 13 at a "Special" evening meeting, the new Constitution & By-Laws were adopted. The object of the club: "To make excursions into trailed and un-trailed portions of California for the purpose of bringing the people of the cities out in the open, and the full enjoyment of the natural wonders of the State; to aid in every way possible, the preservation of woods, streams, game and natural features of the country".

November 7, 1915 there was another evening Special Meeting at Polito Hall (rented for \$4.50) to elect a Board of Directors as required by the new constitution. Five were elected from the fifteen nominees. Al Pinther presided over this first Board of eight men and two women. A photograph of the "First Board of Directors" is on the wall in Hertenstein Hall at Alpine Lodge.

An Outdoor Theater on Mt. Tamalpais

Al and Norma Holroyd Pinther were lifetime supporters of the California Alpine Club, as well as the Mountain Play on Mt. Tamalpais, founded in 1912. Many CAC members took part in the play's productions each year. CAC member William Kent deeded the land that is now the Mountain Theater in 1915, and Art Blake, with help from members of the Tamalpais Conservation Club and other

Reference

CAC members, spent a summer building the amphitheater. A list of the first ten Mountain Plays appears in the 1922 issue of *Trails*. The Mountain Play has grown with the California Alpine Club, and still maintains its connection.

Excursions

The first "High Trip" was to climb Mount Whitney in 1916 and place the hiker's register on top. At least 18 more peaks had been climbed and registers placed by CAC members by 1923. Bill Halliday organized many of the trips to the Sierra Nevada mountains. He died in 1952 in a hospital in Bishop, CA after collapsing on the CAC High Trip to Lake Sabrina.

The first "Annual Outing" to the Sierra Nevada was in 1919. Thirty-seven hardy members went by train to Porterville, then by truck to the Tule River, then hiked to the Camp Nelson pack station to join twenty pack animals for two weeks in the Kern Canyon area. When Echo Summit Lodge was purchased in 1952, the Annual Outing was held there.

Seventy-four of 206 Club members served in the military during WW1, 1916-1918, including Alice Casazus, as a telephone operator. Anita Franz (West) and Norma Holroyd (Pinther) worked for the government in Washington D.C. A "Sweet Box" committee was established with Beth Stripling, Chairman. All the addresses were obtained and the girls met once a week at homes on both sides of the Bay, writing letters, contributing 10-12 boxes of home made goodies that Beth picked up, sorted and mailed. At Christmas every boy received a gift (this committee was still active in 1952). During this period, at almost every meeting one or more of the "boys" resigned from a CAC office or committee because of

Reference

having been called to service. The Club voted to suspend dues when one was leaving for the front.

Finding A Home

The Halliday boy's (Bill, Chris and Archie) stationery store at 2506 Mission Street served as the first CAC office and information center. Later, in 1923, the office was moved to Bill and Marie's gift shop at 37 Powell Street in San Francisco. The Club eventually shared space with the Tamalpais Conservation Club at 525 Pacific Building, moving to the Flood Building in 1978. All CAC records were moved to the Alpine Lodge in 1987 and are now stored in the Tam Building.

By the 1920's membership had grown to 252. Initiation fee was \$2.00 and annual dues were \$2.00. Attendance at Club affairs was very high—from 60 to 100 on most occasions! There are photos of large groups hiking together. The "Camp Craft" show registered more than 600 visitors in 1921. Men helped clear roads and make new trails. Bay Area walks or social events were scheduled nearly every weekend interspersed with longer trips further away. There were even occasional "moonlight" walks and because of this robust social activity the Club was sometimes referred to as the California Alpine Matrimonial Club.

A ski trip to Truckee via Donner Pass by train was very successful, as were trips to the Pinnacles, Mt. Hamilton, La Honda and Pescadero. Joint events were scheduled with the Contra Costa Hills Club, Sierra Club and other organizations committed to the outdoors.

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Very beautiful volumes of "Trails" were published from 1920-23 containing detailed stories about CAC trips, accompanied by fine photographs, poems, lists of members, financial statements, schedules of walks and advertisements of particular interest to our many members. Porter Griffith drew cartoons, as well as the cover ad for the West-Franklin-Pinther "Forest Lodge", the Club's "mountain get-away" until the late 1940, before Echo Summit Lodge was acquired.

In the early 1920's the members began thinking of finding a permanent home for the Club up on the mountain (Mt. Tamalpais) and held a variety of fund-raising events, parties, dinners and dances. Harry Hertenstein located the stone walled "cabin" that was for sale on Throckmorton Ridge that boasted commanding views of both ocean and bay.

In a letter dated February 25, 1983, Jules Sigrist recalls the day he met Harry Hertenstein coming out of a Club meeting "discussing the purchase of the cabin ... but not enough money available". They went up to look at it and Jules decided right then to loan the \$1700 to make the purchase. Jules then named Harry Hertenstein, Tim Murphy (Club President) and Bill Halliday (past President) as Trustees and Owners of the property. The same letter also mentions Vic Hahn and William Fankhauser as deserving much credit for the early success of the lodge in the following years. Other records indicate that the cabin was purchased from U.C. Professor Turner whose bride was not enamored with his mountain retreat so he chose to sell it.

With almost all volunteer help CAC gradually added the women's dormitory, porch, kitchen, septic tank, showers, and purchased the adjoining

Reference

property for the location of a men's dormitory. CAC members Oscar Cook had a plumbing business; Clyde Williams, electric appliances; Sam Deal sold insurance; Hilary Crawford, legal advice.

Harry Hertenstein was a "founding" member and an architect with a shop on Florida Street where much construction took place. His shop also became the storage place for all of the camp equipment and supplies. Harry and Alma were among the life-long supporters of the CA Alpine Club. In 1952-54 he designed and helped build the recreation hall at Alpine Lodge. He was also one of the first Trustees of Echo Summit Lodge from 1952-56.

CAC was an early member of the Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs. Many other FWOC member clubs donated "stones" for the fireplace in the recreation hall—now named Hertenstein Hall—where one can find the names of these affiliate outdoor clubs engraved.

Snow In The Sierras

There were more than 460 members in 1951 when the CAC By-laws were amended (with a lot of opposition) to allow the acquisition of a mountain lodge. The "youth" group of the club, chaired by Hilary Crawford, Jr. raised money and searched for a ski lodge. Gladys Peyser first suggested the scenic area off Highway 50 overlooking Lake Tahoe. Jean Miller, Ken Wiltz, Hilary and others skied in and located a place for sale in 1951. A larger group came in the summer, including Dr. Budd Smith, Gail Lindlow, Verna Steele and Harry West. Some of the "old-time" members also came to inspect the place and the decision was made to purchase Echo Summit Lodge from Mr. and Mrs. Butler for \$10,000.

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The Echo Summit Lodge (ESL) consisted of a small grocery store, dining room, kitchen, 9 rooms and two bathrooms on the second floor and an unfinished attic, heated by two wood burning stoves on the first floor. Al Pinther loaned \$5000 and along with money that had been already raised the building was purchased in July 1952. Dr. Budd Smith was the first Echo Lodge Trustee Chairman, holding office for twenty-seven years. Harry Walter West was one of the first five Trustees and served for thirty-five years followed by his daughter, Judy West (the first woman trustee), for fifteen. Ray Sommer has been serving as an ESL Trustee since 1982.

Many of the CA Alpine Club men and women who started the club— Charles and Esther Andresen Blake, Sam and Tense Sullivan Deal, Harry and Alma Schirmer Hertenstein, Al and Norma Holroyd Pinther, Al and Evelyn Reese Tunzi, Anita Franz West (Harry P. died in 1947), Casper and Anna Zwerlien— were also the ones who supported the younger member's wish to obtain a ski lodge for the Club.

Alpine Lodge and the Mt. Tam Building

Over the years there have been many alterations and additions to Alpine Lodge. The large "Hertenstein Hall" was finished in 1954. The deck was added in 1995 after the dining porch area was enlarged. There have been other updates and modernizations over the years—a uni-sex bathroom on the main floor, new bathroom on the second floor, kitchen updates and a lot of attention paid to décor and comfort. There have been changes and updates in the Tamalpais "Mt. Tam" Building at the lower end of our property where there are now separate rooms as

Reference

well as a comfortable men's dorm. When a new sprinkler system in the upstairs bathroom of Alpine Lodge went off unnoticed for several days and completely flooded the floors both up and down stairs many more repairs were made. The old floors, ceilings and a complete emptying of the kitchen was required; everything was repainted along with also refinishing the main hall floors. Another major improvement was to install a complete new “green” sewer system in 2003, partially paid for by an assessment made on the current membership.

As of 2008 there have been seventy-four Club Presidents, most serving one year terms. Sixteen Presidents served for two years, and Ray Sommer (1961-63) and Laurence Kornfield (2001-03) served for three. Officers are elected for one year; Trustees for three year terms. We have located a photo of all California Alpine Club Presidents, except one.

By Verna Steele West

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Author's Comments

October 31, 2008

I have chosen to include some names in this document, most of which were "founding" members and continued their support for the CA Alpine Club the rest of their lives and some have members of their families still living and active. For every name mentioned there were dozens (in the hundreds) of people working along side or in the background.

Archives are stored in the Tam Building. The *Trails* newsletters on file are filled with anecdotes and stories that are very interesting.

There is a binder in the Trustees closet that contains instructions for all appliances, bills of sale, building contracts, etc.

Sources of Information:

Caroline Waldear joined in the fall of 1916. Encouraged by Win Hayward and Margaret Dormeyer in 1982-1983 she asked for stories, biographies, memories, from many early members. She edited and rewrote some of them (with some errors) and wrote her own stories. Included in the History published in 1983 are some old photos, including some from the West family. The booklet was "Xeroxed", resulting in poor quality photos, but the stories are wonderful. There is a copy in a white binder at Alpine Lodge.

1914-1919 Book of Minutes from the Archives in the Tam Building

CAC "1920 Trails", page 1, "California Alpine Club, by Norma Holroyd Pinther"

Copies of Trails, Reunion Programs and other written material in West family files

Muriel Less brief History for the Alpine Lodge Hostess Manual 2003

My husband's father, Harry Phillip West, was a member of the YMCA youth group in 1912 and was a member of the first Board of Directors in 1915. His mother Anita Franz joined in March 1917 and was Secretary in 1919. They both kept albums of photographs, hers labeled, his not. Some of those earliest members were life-long West family friends and there are many photos over the years. I joined in 1952 and was more active at Echo Summit until recent years. I also have taken many photos, labeled and mounted in albums.

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