

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

California Grizzlies

The California flag flaunts a grizzly bear with its characteristic shoulder hump. Sadly, no grizzly bears have lived in the state since the 1920s. The great bears disappeared from the Livermore Valley and its nearby mountains much earlier. The grizzly bear was the only native bear in this area. In coastal range valleys between 1830 and 1849, according to Charles Shinn in his book, *Historical Sketches of Southern Alameda County, 1889*, "grizzlies were to be seen in droves, or companies of twenty or more, gathering acorns under the oaks in autumn, or digging roots in spring or summer." The early practice of the ranchos had been to slaughter their cattle herds mostly for the hides, leaving the meat for scavengers like the grizzlies. The bears were not averse, however, to killing live cattle. Thomas McNamee, author of *The Grizzly Bear*, claimed that grizzly densities in California (over 10,000) were exceeded only by those in Alaska.

As the state population increased during the gold rush, hunters killed bears for their meat and oil. When smaller ranches replaced the huge Mexican tracts, the owners were not inclined to allow grizzly bears to prey on their cattle. They led expeditions into the hills to kill the marauders, and even laced freshly killed cattle with strychnine so that if the bears returned to feed on the carcasses, they would be poisoned.

James D. Smith, who lived in the San Ramon area in 1853 when he was a boy, told of hunting for a grizzly that had killed one of the finest cows in William Mendenhall's herd. Five men, including Mendenhall, came to the Smith house and asked to borrow their hunting dog. The dog would not go with the strangers, so

Smith's father suggested that Jimmy accompany them but stay safely back in the camp. Jimmy, of course, did not stay in camp but trailed along behind the men. The dog found the bear's trail; the hunting party paused when the trail led into a thick stand of chaparral. Thinking the situation was safe because they had stopped, Jimmy caught up with them. As soon as the dog entered the chaparral, the bear came crashing out. All the hunters except for John Cottrell ran away, but Cottrell stood by Jimmy and, when the grizzly rose on its hind feet, he shot it. The wounded animal scrambled back into the chaparral; when they returned the next day, the bear was dead. In later years Jimmy would tease Mendenhall, saying that William had led the procession in the race from the bear.

James Capen Adams, a well-known eccentric mountaineer man nicknamed "Grizzly," visited the Corral Hollow area to the southeast of Livermore at least four times in the 1850s. He maintained his Mountaineer Museum with its menagerie in a San Francisco basement. His exhibits were also a sideshow of Henry C. Lee's Circus. Adams's animals joined the circus on various tours, including annual visits to gold mining towns. The circus often traveled through Corral Hollow and stopped at the Zink House tavern for refreshment and to hunt meat, before heading to the destination of the next show. Edward Carrell, proprietor of the Zink House, described Adams's two visits to Corral Hollow in 1855. Adams drove a wagon pulled by two mules, with two grizzlies, Lady Washington and Benjamin Franklin, following behind. Lady Washington was chained to the wagon. Benjamin Franklin roamed free with Adams's greyhound, Rambler. Adams bought food supplies and mining tools at the tavern and

spent some time hunting animals locally but did not find any grizzlies.

According to Carrell's diary, in 1856 Adams came back again and set up a large grizzly trap made of logs at a u-turn in the Coral Hollow Creek bed. Adams returned to San Francisco but hired Carrell to tempt a grizzly into his trap. Carrell tried various baits to no effect until he boiled some sugar into a thick syrup, which did attract a huge grizzly. On 4 November 1856 its roars of frustration at being caught could be heard all over the area. Carrell sent word to San Francisco, and Adams came. With sheet iron and logs Adams built a cage which was roped on the top of his wagon. Ever the showman, he fastened circus posters on the cage exterior for the journey from Corral Hollow to San Francisco with his new bear, christened "Silvertip." Early in 1860, Adams took his menagerie, including Silvertip, around Cape Horn in a sailing ship to New York City, where he quickly became famous for his exhibits with P.T. Barnum's circus. Adams was compelled to kill Silvertip when the bear went berserk in a crowd of people.

Jeremiah Morgan brought the paws of two bears he had killed in the Black Hills country north of Livermore into Concord in 1869. Slocum's *Contra Costa County History* credited him with having killed 46 grizzlies in one year alone. In his diary, Edward Carrell recorded two young grizzly bears harassing his sheep in Corral Hollow in 1869 and carrying off a ewe. Again in June 1871 Carrell mentioned two grizzlies attacking his animals. By 1874, however, the great bears were gone from our area, although longtime City Clerk Elmer G. Still claimed that the last one in Murray Township was killed at Cresta Blanca in 1882.

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