



The Bagpiper

SPRING 2014
INVERNESS ASSOCIATION

Photo by Elizabeth Whitney

Vivian Mazur gazes at the first sightings of baby steelhead in Brook Ness behind her home in First Valley. She witnessed the spawning on Valentine's Day and two months later tiny fish greeted her delighted inspection.

Steelhead Return Thrills Observers!

By Elizabeth Whitney

When the rains finally came in February, refreshing the local creeks and delighting the local residents, a signal was transmitted into the waters of Tomales Bay. A small population of mature, fertile steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) knew this was their moment to head upstream to spawn, and a handful of them picked Brook Ness for their destination.

Fish aficionados Richard Plant and Tom Baty got the signal, too, and were rewarded with a few precious days of fish observation at the top of First Valley on Vivian Mazur's creekside overlook. The last time Tom remembered seeing steelhead spawn locally was fifteen years ago, and he and Richard were caught up in the excitement that lasted about five days.

"In ten years I've never seen anything like it," exclaimed Vivian describing her close encounter with the first pair that showed up one day in the tiny creek. First she heard "a big commotion" and then witnessed the female and male in full mating performance. "She was doing somersaults," said Vivian, describing the female digging out a nest, or redd, in the creek bed by flipping her tail around. The male then joined her and stayed by her side.

The fertilization of the eggs is a ritual that captivates even seasoned observers. Richard Plant describes it graphically: "The thrusting motions of the female makes a hole and the current carries away the fine sand. Then she expels her eggs with a quiver.

Steelhead have white mouths and when this is going on both of them have their snowy white mouths open and appear to be in a state of ecstasy. The male then releases his milt, rich in sperm. Then there is more digging in the gravel a little upstream to cover the first batch of eggs and create another redd and the process continues for a day."

The female will lay 3000 eggs, which lie protectively hidden under the gravel for 60 days until the tiny alevin wriggle free of the gravel, still attached to the yolk sac that nourishes them, and quickly hide. There are many perils ahead for the tiny fish, including being eaten by larger, older steelhead kin. "They are cannibalistic," noted Baty, and a one-inch fish will be food to a seven-inch older relative.

Learning to hide is the first skill of the newborn steelhead, which is why you will probably not notice the many that live in our creeks as they wait out a few years until they are ready to swim to the sea. "Those are not just leaves at the bottom of a pool," he says; "Those are little fishes." To see baby steelhead trout you have to be quiet and still, he cautions. "Have a care; it is a small habitat. You can affect their survival." The spawning adventure that was shared by these local Inverness residents was also an exercise in discretion so that this unique opportunity would not be disturbed by too much human excitement.

(Continued on page 6)

Watching the News...

The Inverness Association/Foundation talked a lot about money this year. We were catching up on unfinished business dating back many years and well as creating a new fiscal structure for future years and future boards. It was perhaps symbolic that we also cleaned out a lot of “junk” from the attic of the Gables to give us an orderly home for our papers and supplies.

Defining the distinction between the Inverness Association and the Inverness Foundation was another theme that flavored our Board meetings as we faced the scale of responsibilities involved with being landlords and caretakers of properties throughout Inverness. It soon became obvious that anything involving these projects belonged under the Foundation and its 501(c)(3) status and we gradually separated all the bookkeeping accordingly.

The great task of upgrading the Gables to comply with Americans with Disability Act requirements has morphed into the ongoing task of maintaining the 120-year-old building that houses the Inverness Library. We also rolled up our sleeves and hit the negotiating table with the County of Marin to advocate for funding for our efforts on various fronts once we realized we should be eligible for library funds earmarked for ADA retrofit. If you don't ask for it, you won't get it. So we asked for it. At the time of this newsletter, we haven't received a final answer, much less a check, for this, but we are far along enough in the process to have realistic expectations that a good percentage of what we spent will be reimbursed sooner or later.

All of this didn't yield any sensational results to broadcast to our members, so a year rolled by without an issue of the Bagpiper. I kept waiting for “news” to announce, such as a big fat check from the County of Marin and a new library lease establishing a more business-like relationship with our tenants. Board members seasoned by experience in county dealings observed that no news was normal news.

Meanwhile, the steelhead came up Brook Ness! Jack Matthews mentioned it first—his son reported “one of the biggest trout he'd ever seen” in the creek by the tennis court. I sleuthed around a bit and learned about this exciting event and the buzz it created. At the same time, I heard about Harmony Grisman and her sunrise ritual prayer ceremony at Chicken Ranch Beach. Calling the salmon is a part of it, as was calling the rain while our endless sunny weather rolled through the winter months. It seems there is another layer of news that draws our residents into states of wonder when we stay still and look at one place day after day after day.

When I talked to Richard Plant about the steelhead, he mentioned that after the '82 flood devastated our creeks the Inverness Association applied for and received a grant from the California State Coastal Conservancy to restore our damaged streams and shoreline. As he shepherded this project, he was witness to the life force of creeks for the steelhead who need oxygenated water to survive. He remembers people working in the creeks rejoicing when they came across trout hiding here and there. It was thanks to the leadership of the Inverness Association that this grant came to pass and resulted in restoring the creeks and Dana Marsh (that the Inverness Foundation also owns) to the cycle of life that defines our ecosystem.

One of the sources I found for the article on the steelhead had this quote: “The presence or absence of salmon within a watershed is an indication of the health of the watershed.” This winter, thousands of steelhead eggs snuggled under the gravel of our creeks and began a new cycle of life as fish a few weeks ago. That's the news from the healthy Inverness watershed.

—Elizabeth Whitney, editor

The Inverness Association and the Inverness Foundation have the same Board of Directors and both meet monthly at the Gables with back-to-back agendas. The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and manages the properties it owns among its other responsibilities.

PASSAGES

Jerry Abbott

Among other community services, Jerry Abbott served on the Inverness Association Board of Directors for twelve years, (2000-2012); the last six of which he served as president. He died August 29, 2013 after declining health.



Lively Folks Bust Dust and Ghosts

On Monday morning, March 10, six hardy characters tackled the Inverness Association storeroom in the attic of the Gables. The goal was to throw out the junk, keep the good stuff (old agendas and minutes) and clean it up. The curtains came down and a rug (no one knew to whom it belonged) went out the window. Out went two ancient typewriters, a 1930's vacuum cleaner, boxes, building supplies, lumber, rat traps, old dishes, a broken desk—a trailer full of stuff. Our heartfelt thanks go to the hard working gang: Jim Grant, Linda Linder, Ann Read, Terry Jevitt (who contributed the trailer), Julie and Jim Monson.

This effort followed earlier clean-up work on two other attic rooms. For the first time in years, perhaps decades, the three peaked-roof storage rooms are reasonably well organized. All those ghosts can now rest easy and go back to sleep.

—Julie Monson



Nancy Hemmingway retired from 42 years as Inverness librarian with the words, “I love my job!” on her lips. On her last day, Saturday, March 29, she was greeted with bouquets of flowers and hugs from old friends and patrons.



Calling the Salmon with Sunrise Blessings

By Harmony Grisman

Photo by Toni Littlejohn

The Chant (while walking out to the point of the beach):

Now I walk in Beauty.
Beauty is before me,
Beauty is behind me,
Above and below me,
Around and within me.

The Prayers: There are three cycles of turning to the four directions, with a specific prayer for each direction.

First Cycle:

East: Thank you for this Day.
North: Thank you for this Light.
West: Thank you for this World.
South: Thank you for this Life!

Second Cycle:

East: May all people on this planet be fed and sheltered in health and safety.
North: May we have Peace on this planet. Peace in my own heart, Peace in all our hearts and Peace everywhere.
West: May we all Love and be Loved in our deepest hearts.
South: May this Love bring us Wisdom and Cooperation that we may heal ourselves and the planet.

Third Cycle:

Prayers are said for specific people or groups.
East: Prayers of Healing, Peace and Protection for Family.
North: Prayers for Healing, Peace and Protection for Friends.
West: For all those Known and Unknown throughout the planet, particularly those suffering from war, oppression and natural disaster.
South: We pray for Healing and Peace and Protection for the Entire Web of Life with its Thriving and Balance toward the Highest Good.

After the four directions prayers, I wait for this unique and particular morning's song. Every morning it is a different song based on all the life and elements that are present. Rarely do the songs have words, but some songs with words have come out of this practice, such as "Spider Woman's Song" and "I Will Be Glad." My seedpod rattle accompanies the songs. I sing in the direction of the mouth of the bay to call the salmon home, these days with lots of prayers for rain. I scan back and forth between that direction and the direction of the rising sun. The song sings until it is done. Bowing, I say a final prayer for the salmon: "May your journey be swift and safe. And may your progeny be many."

I stay some minutes in the peace of the After Song, then begin chanting and walking very slowly back to the car. The return chant is a Sufi song. The words are part English, part Arabic. On the third line of this four-line chant, I turn and face the rising sunlight to sing and then return to walking toward the car on the fourth line.

The Ocean refuses no river, no river.
The Open Heart refuses no part of you, no part of me.
Ishq Allah ma'bud lillah, il Allah
Allahu, il Allahu, Allahu, il Allahu

I sing this song because Sufism is one of the spiritual traditions that inform my life – Zen Buddhism, Quakers, also. The third line translates, "I believe God is Love," and was also told to me as asking the Great Spirit to make every possible use of me on behalf of the whole. Allah is just one of the many thousand names for the spirit that is recognized by humans everywhere as divine and sacred and present in our lives.

Harmony Grisman has lived in Inverness for over four decades, adding reverence and the beauty of her singing and song writing to the local culture and beyond. For nearly 10 years she has quietly walked to the Bay at Chicken Ranch Beach every winter dawn to sing, pray and call the salmon home.

At Chicken Ranch Beach: Tiny Steps Register Positive Progress

By Elizabeth Whitney

Chicken Ranch Beach could qualify as the heart of Inverness. It is a timeless, idyllic setting for swimming, picnicking, boating, flying kites, digging in the sand, snoozing, schmoozing, reading or simply experiencing the many moods of Tomales Bay. It is the beach where mothers bring their small children and where elders who once were those mothers show up, summer after summer. On a summer weekend it is packed with city folks, family parties and elaborate picnic spreads; on a mid-week winter day a lone stroller barely disturbs the seagulls and crows.

As sublime as it is, the issue of health hazards to swimmers at Chicken Ranch Beach has loomed for the last 12 years, since Marin County Environmental Health Services water quality testing in the area began to show higher than safe levels of E. coli and fecal coliform.

The source of the bacterial contamination has eluded several rounds of testing that eliminated some candidates, such as neighboring septic systems, but failed to pinpoint the type of contamination, animal or human, or the source. Complicating the problem is the convergence in a small area of several property owners involved—the County of Marin, the California State Lands Commission and two private homeowners—and a long human history of interfering with the natural alluvial flow of Third Valley Creek.

There has been a pasture with cows, a pasture with horses, various illegal attempts to drain land, artificial water channels dug, not to mention a project in the 1950s to lay a telephone cable across the bay that turned a mountain of its diggings in a berm preventing tidal flow to the wetland. The long-range vision for its future is a gradual return to a natural state where the creek fans out and creates a thriving wetland environment. Getting from here to there begins with solving the pollution problem, one that at last seems to be moving to the forefront of the public agencies involved.

The encouraging news, notes Tom Gaman, who has been leading the charge to get the Chicken Ranch situation moving, is that “everyone is on the same page—this is non-controversial.” The legal entanglements from past lawsuits that discouraged both the county and the State Lands Commission from delving into the situation are finally being analyzed and dealt with, step-by-step. Meetings with Supervisor Steve Kinsey indicate the county will take a lead in moving this project through its permit hurdles, and the current owners of the key property, Robert Butler and Janice Weltman, have been cooperative and responsive to the concerns of the community. “They have an interest in resolving this, too,” stated Gaman.

The current approach is to re-direct the drainage that enters “Channel B,” the artificial ditch that is the source of the polluted water entering the bay, at the upstream end of their property and begin to create components of a wetland where the water spreads out naturally. The long-run plan involves the State Lands property where the yards and yards of decomposed granite diggings now create an artificial berm, removing it, and encouraging natural stages of wetland restoration.

Working as a team, community members Peggy Day, Carlos Porrata, Victoria Hanson, Bridger Mitchell and Tom Gaman have attended meetings, advocated more refined monitoring systems and worked with the county to soften the impact of the legal language in the settlements from lawsuits pursued by previous owners, Gerry and Kathryn Cirincione-Coles. “It was a huge



Photo by Elizabeth Whitney

Tom Gaman stands where tidelands could one day exist, just west of Chicken Ranch Beach. He and his team of volunteers have been lobbying diligently on behalf of restoring the area to health for humans, flora and fauna.

task to go through all the old legal documents—it confuses you and ties you in knots,” commented Gaman, but this was required homework for the volunteer team.

Nudging the County Department of Health to take more sophisticated DNA samples of the area is a second challenge, particularly when recent samples showed no bacterial contamination. This was an unexpected result after years of positive findings and the county now is being urged to retest more precise locations to hopefully finally resolve where the problem is located. The suspicion is that it comes from the drainage off of the Camino del Mar bluff.

For Peggy Day, the issue looms large as the summer swimming season approaches, and she is concerned that the bacteria-laden water in the ditch is also in the bay. “I believe the contaminated freshwater sitting in Channel B meets the tidal water underground twice a day and is sucked out into the bay with each receding tide,” she explains, based on her research on typical salt/fresh water interface.

“After the fresh water from Channel B enters the bay it does not simply mix together with the salty bay water and become diluted; it sits on top of the salt water. Because of this, we recommended that the county conduct Ultraseep tests to pinpoint where the fresh water enters the beach and use passive diffusion samplers to test the water as it enters the swimming area. To date, the county hasn’t offered to conduct these specialized tests anytime soon.”

Meanwhile, Tom Gaman reminds us of the progress we have made and looks at the long view when the pollution issue is finally resolved. “When the wetlands are in place, there will be less polluted water, more creatures, more biological activity—and it will look better.”

Native Plants Add Joy to an Inverness Garden

By Julie Monson

Our coastal climate on the Inverness Ridge hosts an abundance of floristic treasures. One has only to hike one of the many ridge trails or along Bear Valley trail to appreciate majestic native trees and an undergrowth rich with blooming shrubs and perennials, ferns and grasses. Many of these plants thrive in our domestic gardens if planted and maintained with care. I know because I now have at least 16 natives in my garden that I planted. Others, like hazelnut, were already here, and a few, to my delight, volunteered.

My experience, and the experience of many other Inverness gardeners, is that natives not only do well in this climate but are extremely satisfactory garden plants that contribute to a beautiful garden. Success depends primarily on two considerations: First, the need to mimic our Mediterranean climate when watering. This translates into more irrigation in winter and spring, almost none in summer. Second, patience. Many of these lovely plants grow slowly. Once established, however, they are vigorous and hardy. They are not maintenance free, but I've learned to keep them in hand and find that, for the most part, they do not require a great deal of attention.

We're surrounded by a forest of Douglas fir, California bay, oaks, buckeye and elderberry, a pretty deciduous tree at the edge of the property. In addition to these native trees, we have also planted non-native Japanese maples, mayten, ginkgo, dogwoods and a flowering plum. All these trees thrive on the Inverness Ridge in our climate and soil. Having different species mingling in the garden provides a diversity of foliage, flowering and shape not unlike that found in the forest around us. Even better, it is seasonal, constantly changing as the months roll by.

Our property had several enormous coast live oaks, most of which have not yet succumbed to Sudden Oak Death. We planted six more. Those in sunny places with irrigation from the start grew astonishingly to 30 feet in 15 years. Others with less sun and water have grown more slowly. A small oak is unimpressive when it is young but, as we know, over time it becomes magnificent.

I'm following the adolescent growth of four buckeyes, purchased two years ago as sticks that looked like nothing at all. Deer like their leaves, so though now 5 feet tall, I keep a wire fence around them until they grow higher. The mature buckeyes existing on the property when we bought it are extremely vigorous, so this is a plant that eventually needs lots of space.

Another favorite plant is ceanothus, which comes as a shrub or tree. We found that deer liked the ceanothus shrubs we planted, so we planted two pretty ceanothus trees (Ray Hartman), a hybrid that blooms sweetly each spring (pale blue flowers), is evergreen, and tidy. Madrone, also evergreen, is reputed to be difficult to establish. I've not had any difficulty. We planted three near each other in a small cluster and provided limited water in summer. They, too, bloom with tiny white bells followed by red berries in fall. Very attractive and not too big.

Care: I regularly monitor these trees to make sure they remain healthy. The large, pre-existing coastal live oaks are the only trees that are treated. These large trees receive a spray or injection each fall to assist their immune systems to withstand the Sudden Oak Death we have all around us. The garden is surrounded by California bays and we know we live with the possibility of SOD. The trees we have planted have so far not been adversely affected by SOD.

Irrigation: While some of our trees are on a drip system, once the native trees became established we removed them from regular irrigation. They get rainfall, and during the summer watering by hose or bucket. Watering should follow our climate's rainfall pattern: lots in winter and spring, hardly any in summer. This rule is for established plants. Young, new plants do need more protection and care until they are hardy. Watch them closely. In our forecasted drought, it is better to water established trees and shrubs up to June. Use limited water, if any, during summer months.

I assess on a regular basis the need for modest (or greater) pruning. Natives should be pruned judiciously, never more than 1/3 of the plant at a time, and generally at the end of winter, in January or February. Prune to reduce excess branching in the center of the tree, to remove criss-crossing branches, and for shape. I like to cut limbs and branches back to where they are attached. Do not top off upper branches. If possible, chip removed branches to make mulch.

While I don't fertilize most of my native plants, I do mulch them vigorously. Again, it's like mimicking the natural environment they grow in, since most natives will have a thick layer of forest duff as natural mulch under the plant's canopy.

My enthusiasm for natives extends to shrubs, perennials, ferns and grasses. Here is a list of some of the favorites in our garden: Shrubs: Huckleberry, Coffeeberry, Hazelnut, Pink-flowering Current, Manzanita, Fremontia, Mahonia. Perennials: Yarrow, Heuchera, various Salvias. Ferns: Western Sword Fern, Maidenhair Fern.

Our Inverness Ridge landscape is truly beautiful. I've learned to bring some of that richness and diversity into the garden where we appreciate it in a more intimate setting and on a daily basis. Our lovely garden provides us with us with a sense of place, of integration with the woods all around us.

Useful references: California Native Plants for the Garden (Bornstein, Fross, O'Brien); Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates of the San Francisco Bay Region (East Bay Municipal Utility District).

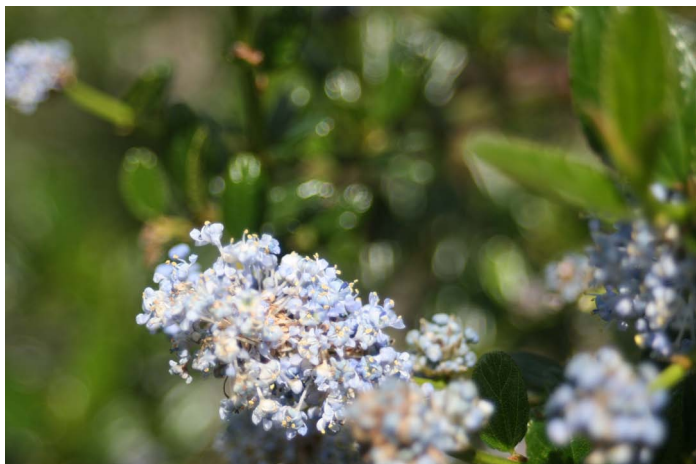


Photo by Ben Livingston

How to Work With Bishop Pines in Your Garden

While Bishop pines exist in spots along the California coast from Baja to the Oregon border, the forest on Inverness Ridge contains the largest stand of Bishop pines anywhere. Their twisted, wind-blown silhouettes are a distinctive feature of our landscape. As unlikely as it might seem, these handsome conifers not only do well in our gardens, but nicely integrate our domestic plants with the surrounding forest. For advice on gardening with Bishop pines, I contacted our local forester, Tom Gaman. Here is a summary of his advice:

These trees grow primarily in granitic soil, perhaps the first consideration in deciding to plant one. They will not do well in other soils. Seedlings can be transplanted, if you can find some on land outside the National Seashore. The tree's cones are tightly closed and only open to release their seeds during a fire. You can propagate them yourself by first collecting a few cones, heating them in the oven or a wood fire, and then soaking them for a day or two. Plant the seeds in sandy (must be sandy) soil in a small pot, water, and store in a shady place. They will soon sprout and grow surprisingly quickly. Tom said 2 to 3 feet a year.

Unlike many native trees, Bishop pines respond nicely to pruning, so nicely in fact, that you can create a hedge by planting a line of them and then pruning them to fill in the spaces, for instance, along a fence. With judicious pruning, you can keep these pines in scale with the scope of your garden, or even train a tree to become a picturesque copy of those along the ridge. They produce a prodigious quantity of acid litter, a perfect mulch for an understory of rhododendrons, azaleas, or a native huckleberry and, of course, ferns.

— Julie Monson



Photo by Ben Livingston

Steelhead

(Continued from page 1)

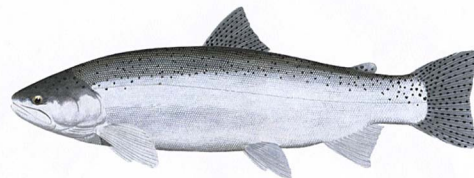
Steelhead are uniquely adaptable and, while the species is a branch of the salmon family, it is also a rainbow trout when it becomes landlocked and stays in the rivers and lakes. Some will stay as trout and never go to sea, but with the opportunity, most will begin a migration to the ocean in a few years. This includes an adaptation period lingering for a few months in an estuary and becoming anadromous, adapted to fresh and salt water. At sea they grow large—up to 15-20 pounds—and acquire the silver look of a salmon.

They are rarely caught in the ocean and where they go, according to Richard Plant, remains mysterious. (He recalls the one time his son Nathaniel hooked one off the pier at the Yacht Club, and minutes before he landed it, a sea lion grabbed it and swam off with it!) When mature, the steelhead will begin its reverse migration back to fresh water to spawn. How they do this is also one of the great mysteries of the salmon family. One account says, “At first they use the ocean currents, stars and the earth’s magnetic forces to find their way to their home stream. As they get closer, they use their sense of smell to find the exact place where they were born.”

Once again, somewhat more adaptable than salmon, the steelhead is willing to “stray” and seek one of several creeks near its birthplace, maybe picking the stream that seems the most inviting that particular winter. Unlike their salmon relatives, steelhead do not die

after spawning but live to continue the cycle for several years.

For Inverness, this year of the drought seems to have created conditions that invited these particular steelhead to call Brook Ness home. It could be that they were held back by the lack of rain until very late in the breeding season (usually in mid-winter) and the late rain sent a particularly urgent signal. Whatever the combination of factors was that set the stage for the inter-species close encounters, it was a thrill for all humans involved.



Steelhead *Oncorhynchus mykiss*

Historian Dewey Livingston wants us all to know that the correct names for the creeks of Inverness are: Brook Ness (in First Valley) and Alder Creek (in Second Valley). He points out that these beautiful and historic names dating from 1889 reflect the Scottish heritage of the founders of Inverness and admonishes all to “cease from erroneous re-naming of local places!”

The Inverness Almanac Offers Seasonal Tributes

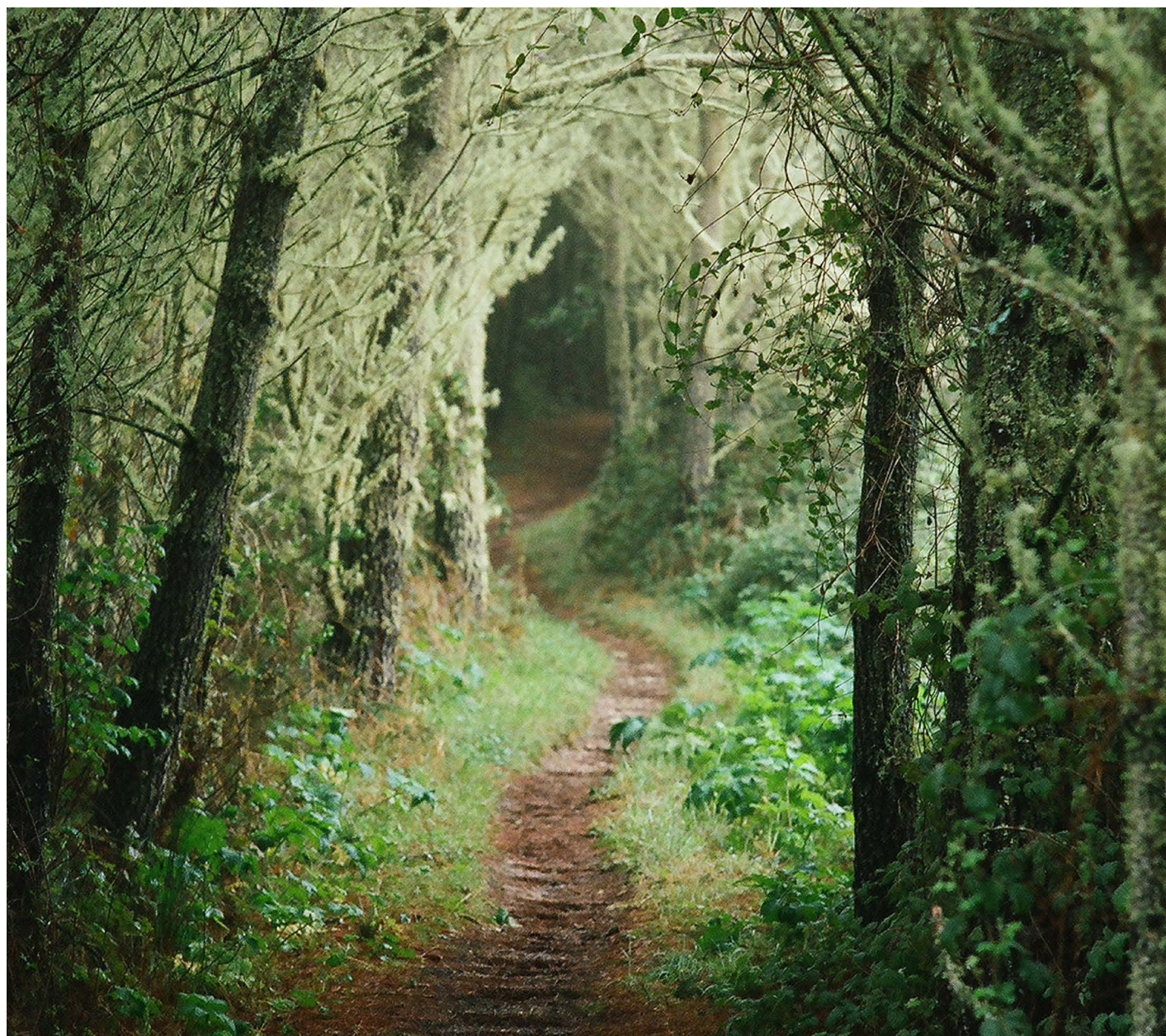
By Ben Livingston

I'm sitting at the top of Mount Vision, thinking about all the stories it has to tell. A cold wind blows in from the ocean. A bag-piper plays at the solstice. A massive forest fire is started. A boy has a mystical encounter with a coyote. A raven plucks a newborn songbird from its nest. There are these stories and there are countless other legends. Yeats said that every mountain and river has untold stories attached to it and it is the duty of the artist and craftsman to share these stories, to plant them in the hearts of the land's inhabitants, so that even a thousand miles away they could remember their land and be at home. This is the work of the Inverness Almanac.

The Inverness Almanac is a forthcoming quarterly print publication started by coastal West Marin residents Jordan Atanat, Ben Livingston, David Bailey and Jeremy Harris, joined more recently by Katie Eberle and Nina Pick. We seek to collect and share the stories, knowledge and artistic expression of what

it is to be a part of this naturally and culturally rich place we call home. Right now the Almanac is in gathering mode; turning stones to unearth stories, observing the changing seasons, the growth of plants and migrations of birds. We are welcoming the community to share its experiences with us, be it through art, poetry, scientific accounts, essays, profiles of plants or animals, gardening tips, myths or histories. The first issue of the Almanac will be appearing Spring 2015, and since each issue will be based on the season, we are collecting spring-inspired submissions. In summer we will be collecting for Summer 2015, and so on. Help us create an immersive documentation and celebration of our place and our place within our place.

More about The Inverness Almanac can be found at www.invernessalmanac.com and submissions can be emailed to invernessalmanac@gmail.com



Photos by Danny Vitelli

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The Inverness Association meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Jack Mason Museum.

The agenda is posted in advance on our website:

www.invernessassociation.org

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Nick Whitney removed this cedar from Second Valley, reworked it and set it in Martinelli Park near the Inverness Store, one of the properties owned by the Inverness Foundation. Recently a plaque was attached dedicating it to "the children of Inverness in loving memory of Ron Powell." (Photo by Elizabeth Whitney)

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Memberships
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