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EL DORADO HILLS TELEGRAPH

Editor's View: Second 'Take a Hike with the Editor' a success in Folsom, El Dorado Hills

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Nothing seems to ignite the imagination more than old ruins coming up from the bottom of a lake.

On Saturday, I headed to Green Valley Road and Sophia Parkway for the second "Take a Hike with the Editor" outing at Folsom Lake. About 50 people were waiting at the rocks for our arrival, including freshman Rep. Ami Bera, who came up from Elk Grove, and a few of his staff members.

Many asked questions as we made the walk over the hills to the site. I was amazed by the number of people who were at the lake Saturday to check out the ruins of Red Bank. When I was there a few weeks before Christmas, taking photos for the Telegraph, I was alone.

But, back to the hike. I talked about my 2008 interview with Artie Davies, who was 94 at the time, and her son Jim, and my research and stories I've written about the site. She's now 100 and resides in Folsom.

First is the old “barn” foundation, which Artie tells me was really more of a social gathering place than a traditional barn. She told me they had dances at the site and recounted once hearing a car traveling too fast on the nearby road and running off into the ditch.

Speaking of the ditch (the tree-lined “groove” many think is a road), it was the Natoma Ditch, a series of ditches delivering water to the communities in the area. It started up river at Salmon Falls and made its way down through Red Bank, Mormon Island, Folsom and out to Prairie City.

The rock walls built into the hillside? Those are the remains of the old Red Bank Winery, built by Henry Mette in 1872, according to a March 31, 1966 Telegraph article.

And the dairy? A concrete slab and grooves mark the old dairy site, where they would milk the cows. Artie tells me her husband ran the dairy and delivered milk to homes around the area. Some of the old milk bottles were on display at the Folsom History Museum a while back.

Now, let’s me answer some frequently asked questions.

What is the old asphalt near the ruins? Someone asked me if they were from access roads used to build the dam. No, there were roads running through the area, as it was a small community, just like any community today.

What are all those stumps? Those are the remains of the orchards, trees lining the Natoma Ditch and trees from yards and along roads. When the Army Corps of Engineers was constructing the dam, they bulldozed the buildings and cut down the trees (harvesting the timber).

Where do I get my information? From hours spent interviewing historians, poring over archives at the Folsom History Museum and the El Dorado Hills Library and from interviews with people who resided there (such as Artie Davies and her son). Back in 2008-2009, I did a series of stories called “From the Depths,” when the ruins started showing up again (as they do whenever there is a drought). To read my original series, just search the phrase, “From the Depths” at folsomtelegraph.com.

Are the ruins Mormon Island? No, the ruins are of the Red Bank area, a series of orchards and ranches on the hills above and a little upriver from Mormon Island. Since Mormon Island was founded on the banks of the American River, the lake would need to be completely drained and back to a river for it to start showing up.

So there was more than just Mormon Island in the area now covered by Folsom Lake? Yes, there were upward of 20 small communities (some down to a handful of ranches), which were knocked down and flooded to create Folsom Lake. According to a 1950 newspaper clipping, “There were three communities in Sacramento County facing destruction caused by the dam — Mormon Island, Red Bank and Maple Ridge. Placer County lost Bean, Poker Bar, Cartonville, Doton’s Bar and Horseshoe Bar.”

Will we do another hike? Yes, depending on the weather and my schedule. The hikes are free.