



## CULTURAL HISTORY MOUNT DIABLO STATE PARK

# BARBED WIRE BONANZA IN CALIFORNIA

by Rich McDrew, MDIA

Reprinted from the *Barbed Wire Collector Magazine*, March/April 2008

Can you imagine over 200 miles, and 100 different kinds of barbed wire in a park? Well, that is exactly what has been found in Mount Diablo State Park. This 20,000-acre park is but one of 278 in California's State Park System. Yet, it is one of the most scenic and diverse of all the parks, especially in an urban area surrounded by over 6 million inhabitants. Consequently, it is frequently called an "island mountain". It is located in Contra Costa County, and is about 25 miles east of San Francisco. The park's summit has an elevation of 3,849 feet. The park has over 800 species of native plants, has a thriving wildlife population, and is a geological wonderland.

The park was first established in 1921 with about 600 acres at the summit. Over the ensuing years, the state acquired parcels from livestock ranchers, and thus grew to its present size. So today, in our parkland, exist remnants from over 100 years of ranching. Much of those remnants are barbed wire fencing.

Contract cattle grazing were permitted in the park up until 1993, when the state prohibited it. Two small sections remain with cattle for demonstration and educational purposes. The barbed wire fencing remained until 2001 when a volunteer group from the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association (MDIA) launched an effort with park management to remove that barbed wire fencing. Many people and organizations have become involved in this initiative, recognizing that without the barbed wire, the park is more beautiful and certainly less hazardous to wildlife. In fact, we have photographs of deer and other mammals impaled on the wire after getting caught in it and dying after being unable to free themselves.

Barbed wire removal resonated with many people and groups. We have coordinated fence removal with church groups, schools, service organizations, and have organized 25 Boy Scout Eagle projects.

One of the coordinators of this initiative, Burt Bogardus, a retired State Park Ranger, ingeniously crafted a mechanism to efficiently and effectively spool the barbed wire. Once the barbed wire is removed, the fence posts—steel and redwood—are lifted out of the ground using an old Bogardus modified bumper jack.

We have counted all of the fence posts removed, and measured all of the barbed wire wound-up over the past six years. And, we're not done yet! We have discovered about 100 different types of barbed wire. We have saved the different kinds in 18-inch lengths, and mounted them on a metal panel for public display purposes. The rest of the wire and posts are given to a recycler—the wood is made

into fuel pellets for a nearby electrical power plant, and the steel is melted down and ends up in new products.

*Notes:*

*Fence Posts = 11,201 (steel and wood)*

*Barbed Wire = 674,299 feet (127 miles – single strand)*