AN INTERPRETIVE GUIDE TO THE NELDER GROVE AREA INCLUDING TRAIL DESCRIPTIONS AND SEQUOIA FACTS

Cover painting by Kelly Fine
Granddad Tree • Photo by Reid Marks

Bull Buck Tree • Photo by Brenda Negley

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Nelder Grove Directions
From the south exit of Yosemite National Park: Drive south 12 miles and make a left turn onto road 632 - Sky Ranch Road.
Coming from the south: Drive about 4 miles on Highway 41, north of Oakhurst, CA, and make a right turn onto road 632 - Sky Ranch Road.
Drive for 7 miles. Turn left on dirt road 6S47Y, and drive about 1 mile. At the fork, turn left for Shadow of the Giants trail, 1 mile. Turn right for campground and other trails. Then turn left at 5S19. The campground/trails are about 1 mile from the fork. See map on page 18.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the Sierra National Forest employees who provided advice and encouragement, and those who proof-read this guide. Any errors, typographical or of fact, that remain are the author’s.

To my husband, Brian Negley, for understanding all my efforts to share my love of Nelder Grove with others.

I also want to thank the Friends of Nelder Grove, Inc. members, Reid and Adele Marks, and Tom Efird for their support and encouragement.

I am grateful to Danny Jones from Three Forests Interpretive Association (3FIA) for his constant support in the creation of this guide.

A special thanks to Miguel Maldonado for layout design and excellent advise promoting and sharing Nelder Grove with the public.

This guide is dedicated to the memory of my Grandparents, John and Marge Hawksworth. They passed on their love of Nelder Grove to me, and through the creation of this interpretive guide, to you.

Brenda Negley – Friends of Nelder Grove
WELCOME TO NELDER GROVE

You can enjoy the plants, rocks and historical items because others left them for you. Leave what you find so that the next person can enjoy them.

Please observe the courtesies of the trail, the campground, and roads. Use existing camp areas and walk on the main trails to protect nature. Pick up your trash and take it with you. Remember this is a Pack It In - Pack It Out area. Follow the Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics. For information on Leave No Trace Ethics see http://www.LNT.org.

Respect wildlife. Watch wildlife from a distance and never approach, feed, or follow them. Protect wildlife and your food by storing your meals and trash tightly.

Be kind to other visitors. Make sure the fun you have in the outdoors does not bother anyone else. Remember that other visitors are there to enjoy nature. LISTEN TO NATURE.

Practice Responsible Pet Ownership. This means controlling your pets’ interactions with people and wildlife in natural areas. Please keep your pets leashed within developed recreation sites. We also ask that you “scoop the poop.”

The rare orchid shown below reaches it southern distribution limit in the Sierra Nevada at Nelder Grove. It is a Forest Service Sensitive species, and picking or disturbing these plants is prohibited. Please take only photographs.
ABOUT NELDER GROVE

- The grove consists of approximately 1,540 acres in the Sierra National Forest.
- Currently there are about 100 mature sequoias mixed in a forest of pine, fir and cedar.
- Nelder Grove was first named Fresno Grove of Big Trees because it was in Fresno County. The Grove was first surveyed in 1874 by the General Land Office. It was not until 1937 that the name Nelder Grove appeared on Sierra National Forest maps.
- The creek that flows through the campground is now called California Creek, but it was originally called Nelder Creek.
- The creek that flows through the Shadow of the Giants trail, is now called Nelder Creek, but it was originally called Alder Creek.
- Nelder Grove is a natural habitat for wildlife: black bear, mule deer, weasel, raccoon, gray squirrels, ground squirrels and flying squirrels to name a few.
- Bird life also favor the area: tanagers, juncos, sparrows, hawks and at least three different species of woodpeckers. The spotted owl is rarely “spotted,” but can be heard.
- Two historical cabins have been moved to Nelder Grove from Biledo Meadow.
- Lady bugs and monarch butterflies migrate through Nelder Grove.
- The giant sequoias in the grove grow in four separate groups: California Creek (18), Nelder Ridge (14), Nelder Basin (53), and Sierra Beauty (16). Numbers in parentheses signify how many mature sequoias are in each group.
- Nelder Grove Historical Area is designated as a special interest area
- The U.S. Forest Service acquired the land from the Madera Flume and Trading Company in 1928.

FIRST INHABITANTS

- The first inhabitants utilized the area for gathering part of their winter food supply.
- They collected acorns from the black oak, as well as nuts, berries and many other native plants.
- The Western Mono believed the big trees were sacred and guarded by their guardian spirit the owl.
- The Western Mono called the Big Trees, “woh-woh-nah” after the call of the owl.
**JOHN NELDER**

In 1849 John Nelder left New Orleans to find gold. He traveled west to California along with thousands of other gold seekers.

After growing weary of prospecting, he came to the grove in 1875 and built a cabin in the shadows of the towering trees. It seemed that after a life of searching, the true treasure he sought was not gold but the wonder of nature.

John Muir, famed naturalist and author, met John Nelder outside his cabin under the sequoias in 1875. In Muir’s book *Our National Parks* (1901) he describes walking with Nelder. “His eyes brightened as he gazed on the trees that stand guard around his little home; squirrels and mountain quail came to his call to be fed, and he tenderly stroked the little snow bent sapling Sequoias, hoping they yet might grow straight to the sky and rule the grove.”

Nelder lived in the grove for 14 years, making shakes and souvenirs from the sequoia bark and red dye from the sequoia cones and seeds.

In 1889 his cabin burned down and he passed away shortly thereafter.
LOGGING

- The California Lumber Company started working in the area about 130 years ago near the current “Camp Redwood” and Gooseberry flat area off Sky Ranch road.

- The Madera Flume and Trading Company successors, the California Lumber Company, operated Mill #2 (1879-1884) in the lower meadow on California Creek. Lumber was processed at the mill, piled for drying, and then later put into a flume at the end of the meadow, and sent to Madera, California.

- Bundles of lumber would float down the flume to Madera, a distance of 52 miles!

- From 1888-1892 California Mill #4 was located within Nelder Grove near the campground.

- Most of the lumber harvested was not from the sequoia tree, but was primarily sugar pine, ponderosa pine, white fir, and cedar.

- The sequoia tree does not make good building material. When the sequoia tree falls it is very brittle and often breaks up into many pieces. Only a small section near the base of the tree does not “splinter” when it crashes to the ground.

- Estimates of the amount of wasted wood from logging operations of sequoias, primarily due to splintering, were as high as 75%.

- 277 giant sequoia trees were harvested.

- After 1892 to the 1920s, most of the larger sequoias that were cut were utilized by post, grape stake, and shake makers because of its high resistance to rot.

- In 1899 Mill #4 was moved to Sugar Pine.

- Sequoia stumps you see today in Nelder Grove have been there for about 120 years.

- Harvesting of sequoias is no longer allowed within the grove and they have been protected for many years in Nelder Grove.
Biledo Meadow is at an elevation of 7100 feet, on the southwest side of Mount Raymond in northeastern Madera County. Due to the snow load, and the desire to protect the cabins, these two were selected and moved to Nelder Grove in 1980-1981. Around 1982, during a wind storm, a tree fell and demolished one cabin roof. It was rebuilt the following year.

The buildings, structures, and objects found at Biledo Meadow today are related to mining and pioneering activities that took place during the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE GIANT SEQUOIA

- 90,000 sequoia seeds = 1 lb.
- Cones may stay on the tree for up to 21 years
- The sequoia seeds are almost pure tannin
- Chickarees (Douglas squirrels) eat the cone—not the seeds. This is one way the seeds are dispersed.
- A mature sequoia’s roots extend out from the trunk in every direction for a hundred feet or more
- The sequoia tree is protected by the tannin it produces
- The sequoias can be susceptible to high winds, moist soil, heavy snow loads, root rot, fungi, carpenter ants, and other insects
- The sequoia tree produces 60 million seeds in its lifetime, but only 3 or 4 of those seeds will grow to be 100 year old trees
- The giant sequoia and the coast redwood are in the same family but are in separate genus
- The oldest known sequoia is 3,200+ years old. Mature sequoias can be anywhere from 800-3000 years old. The exact age can only be determined by counting the rings
- The average growth is about two feet a year until they mature; however, this can vary greatly depending on environmental factors
- The limbs of a giant sequoia can have a diameter of six feet and be over 100 feet long. Visit the Granddad Tree in Nelder Grove to view its impressive branch
**GIANT SEQUOIA VS. COAST REDWOOD**

The giant sequoia and the redwood trees are often confused with one another. Though they are related, they are different.

The giant sequoia (*Sequoia giganteum*) that is found in Nelder Grove is also referred to as a “Sierra Redwood” and a “Big Tree.” These trees grow naturally on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada.

The taller, more slender California coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) grows in a narrow band along the Pacific Coast.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Sequoia Facts</strong></th>
<th><strong>Redwood Facts</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To 311 feet</td>
<td>To 367.8 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 3,200 years</td>
<td>To 2,000 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 2.7 million lbs.</td>
<td>To 1.6 million lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 31 in. thick</td>
<td>To 12 in. diameter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 8 ft. diameter</td>
<td>To 5 ft. diameter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 40 ft. diameter</td>
<td>To 22 ft. diameter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By seed only</td>
<td>Seed or root sprout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like an oat flake</td>
<td>Like a tomato seed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like a chicken egg</td>
<td>Like a large olive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round with scales</td>
<td>Flat needles in sprays</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE KELLEY FAMILY AND CAMP BEULAH

In 1929, Mr. Oscar A. Kelley, applied for a Special Use Permit to build Camp Beulah. The camp was created for disadvantaged children, most of whom came from the San Joaquin Valley area, some came as far away as the Bay Area. The camp opened in 1931. The average stay was two to three weeks. The children had access to a croquet court, took short walks to see the “Big Trees” and even hiked to Fresno Dome (about 5 miles away).

In the campground area, there are two apple trees still producing tasty apples. These were planted by Mr. Kelley’s parents. Camp Beulah existed for only three short years. In the fall of 1933 a new law was passed stating that a registered nurse must be present at all times in any camp for children. The Kelleys felt they were financially unable to comply with the new law. In 1937 the family moved to Oakhurst and in 1938 the buildings in Nelder Grove were torn down.

MEADOW AND WATERFALL AREA

Found South of the Bull Buck Trail Head. In the meadow there are two walk-in campsites, as well as some nice specimen sequoia trees, a waterfall, and lots of insects and other wildlife.

NAMING OF SOME OF THE SEQUOIAS IN THE GROVE

- **Bull Buck** - During the logging in the 1800s, the felling foreman or woods boss was called the “Bull Buck.” The woods boss told the crew to preserve the magnificent tree for posterity. The Bull Buck Tree was so named because its size made it boss of the woods.

- **Big Ed** - The name came from a foreman from Soquel Mill, Ed Zerlang. This was his favorite tree. Employees from Soquel knew this was his favorite tree and every time they passed this tree they would wave hello to “Big Ed.” Eventually the name stuck.
• **Old Forester** - This tree is on the Chimney Tree Trail. It is the tallest in the Nelder Grove campground area (at 299 ft.). This tree is named after Walter Puhn, who is a former Sierra National Forest Supervisor.

• **Chimney Tree** - This tree has a burned out center, but the outer shell of the tree is still living.

• **Hawksworth Tree** - This tree was named to honor John and Marge Hawksworth. They were campground hosts for 20 years at Nelder Grove.

• **Old Granddad and the Kids** - This isolated mature sequoia has one huge branch outstretched like a protective arm. Below this tree are several young sequoias.

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Granddad Tree • Photo from The Hawksworth library
THE TRAILS

- Shadow of the Giants Interpretive Trail - 1 mile loop - Easy
- Big Ed - 150 yards one way - Easy
- Chimney Tree Trail - about 1.2 miles loop - Easy to Moderate
- Bull Buck on Trail - 0.5 mile one way - Easy
- Bull Buck on Road 5S19 - 0.25 mile one way - Easy
- Trailhead parking on the left between camp host site and campground. Mileage is listed one way to points of interest locations:

  - Leaner Tree - 1 mile - Moderate
  - Clothespin Tree - 2 miles - Moderate
  - Kiowa Tree - 2.5 miles - Moderate
  - Graveyard of the Giants - 3 miles - Moderate
  - Hawksworth Tree - 3 miles - Easy
  - Granddad Tree - 3 miles - Moderate
CHIMNEY TREE TRAIL

Interpretive and other information you may find interesting

C1. Remnant of a two pole chute. See the interpretive sign near the Nelder Grove cabins.

C2. Remnant of a cross-log chute. See the interpretive sign near the Nelder Grove cabins.

C3. Logging Spur - If you look carefully you can see many of the logging spurs (also known as skid roads) used to transport the logs to the mill.

C4. Young Cedar with Burned Appearance - It may appear as if a fire went through this area when you see these young cedars; however, what you see is not a result of a fire and the trees are not harmed. What you see is actually a type of fungus that does not harm the young cedar tree.

C5. Mature Cedar - As you can see, the fire appearance is now gone. The cedar is sometimes confused with the sequoia, but they are in different families.

C6. Downed Fir - You can see the way the “branches” come forth from the tree.

C7. Burl - This is a tree growth in which the grain has grown in a deformed manner. A burl results from a tree undergoing some form of stress.

C8. Cedar - Twisted cedar

C9. Sugar Pine - This pine looks like a “Tuning Fork”

C10. Twin Sequoia - Is this one sequoia or two?

C11. Tree Felled by Axe - Only two such stumps are known to be cut by an axe within the grove.

C12. Trail Plant - This plant “points” the way!

C13. Triplet Tree - Three cedars have grown together.

C14. Broken Heart - Stump with broken heart appearance.

C15. Cedar or Sequoia, what do you think? - See bottom of next page for the answer. Check out the bark and needle structure.
C16. **Tannin** - Notice the red in the middle of this sequoia log. This is what gives it the strong natural defense against fire, decomposition and infestation.

C17. **Slash Area and Wind Damage** - Most of the wind damage you see occurred in the 70's.

C18. **The California Tree** - Circumference is 54 feet.

C19. **The Chimney Tree** - The debris behind the tree is a major fire concern.

C20. **Azalea Bush** - The bush you see in front of Chimney Tree.

C21. **Felled Sequoia** - When a mature sequoia falls they tend to splinter from their lowest branches upward. These pieces were perfect to use as grapes stakes, shingles and posts. Tannin makes them decompose slower, making them more desirable.

C22. **Waterfan or veined water lichen** - A rare aquatic lichen. This blackish “lettuce-like” lichen in an indicator of good water quality. It can also be found at both bridges near the Shadow of the Giants trail.

C23. **Post Pile and Springboard Notches** - You can see where the log was bucked for the correct length for the posts and see the spaces that held the springboard. A springboard is what the logger would stand on to fell a tree.

C24. **Snag** - VERY LARGE burned snag (a dead standing tree.)

C25. **Fallen Sequoia Root System** - As you can see the sequoia has a shallow root system. The mature tree does not have a tap root. The roots are less then 4 feet deep, and spread out around 40-50 feet, though some can be about 100 ft. or more. This can be a weakness as occasionally they can topple over due to winds or wet soil.

C26. **The Old Forester** - If you look through the trees you can see the Old Forester.

**ANSWER TO C15**: Notice the lichen. This is a cedar.
Bull Buck Trail

Interpretive and other information you may find interesting

B1. Snag - If you look at the right angle, this burned snag looks like a howling coyote.

B2. Walking/Horse Trail - Trail takes off to the left of the Bull Buck Tree, behind the burned stump. The trail connects to Road 5S19 (not drivable) and ends at Road 5S95 near Soquel Meadow.

B3. Bull Buck Tree - See page 11 of this booklet.

B4. Logging Picture - A picture of the stumps to the left of the Bull Buck is available for viewing at the Nelder Grove Interpretive Center that shows one of the stumps still standing.

B5. Dogwood - During the months of May or June large showy white blossoms of the dogwood add contrast to the sequoia’s red bark.

B6. Small Snag - This snag is about 1/2 gone and hollow which allows for you to see the “branching” from within.

B7. Fir - Fir with a Burl. See item number 7 describing “burls” listed under Chimney Tree Trail.


B9. Burned out Snag - This snag is hollow and has many holes burned through. You can look through one (as if a window) to see toward the campground and the Bull Buck trail head.

B10 Heart Stump - Known by its heart shape.

B11. Lightning Stump - Kids may recognize the lightning shape.

Big Ed Trail Highlights

E1. Two Pole Chute - Interpretive sign located at the site.

E2. Tramway - Interpretive sign located at the site.

E3. Cross Log Chute - Interpretive sign located at the site.

E5. Wood Pile - Used to power the logging train or the donkey engine.

E6. Cabins - Cabins were moved here from Biledo meadow.


E8. Large stump to the left of the trail - The first 60 feet were harvested by the loggers, the remaining were left because of the splintering that occurred. This is noticeable from the butt end (the log you see to the right of the trail) of the log.

E9. Young Sequoia Growth

E10. Wild Roses

E11. Gooseberry

E12. Sugar Pine

E13. Big Ed Tree

E14. California Creek

Mill #4 tramway - Tramway was used to transport lumber from the mill to the flume

Photo: Hawksworth Library
Friends of Nelder Grove, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) public benefit non-profit group of citizens dedicated to better understanding the cultural and natural history of Nelder Grove of Giant Sequoias leading to its interpretation and active management for the mutual benefits of sustaining Nelder Grove’s natural resources and its use and enjoyment by the visiting public.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.