

## **HISTORY OF OUR BELOVED TIMBER TRAILS**

If only the trees could talk! We are very fortunate however, to have among us today, some of the early members of Calaveras Timber Trails Association. After interviewing with various members, I have a pretty good picture of how Timber Trails came to be. I'm sure there are others who could add to this history and I would appreciate their input since the facts are a little sketchy still. Here's how I understand it came to pass:

The property was once owned by a San Francisco Bay Area group of Boy Scouts. When the camp was no longer needed in the early 1960s, they sold this property to a developer. At that time, the Hani, Commissary, Black Bart, Office, Teen Center and six comfort stations were already in existence, however only dirt roads wandered throughout the forested lands.

The property became part of the Western Leisure Management Development who had properties in Lake Tahoe which they were also developing into privately owned camp site memberships. A Public Report was done and the development was given 5 years to complete the sales of sites which consisted of 500 undeveloped sites. The Developer added 25 guest sites. The original intention for the guest sites was to be used by members of the sister Park in Lake Tahoe. The plans were to make available to individuals, their own camp sites which they could develop and use as they chose. Memberships were purchased at about \$2,500.00 plus a \$4,500.00 membership fee, each with dues being \$7.50 per month. The members all camped with their families and enjoyed the beauty of a rustic private campground to be used at their leisure year around. Promises were made in writing to develop the roads at specific widths which were required by the Public Report, pave them and improve other services in the park.

The developer promoted this bit of paradise by offering two nights free camping, breakfast and dinner for families, all they had to do was listen to what they had to offer in a short presentation. Soon many names were added to the list of happy camper members, but the developer could not financially perform what he had promised. By the late 60s the developer (funded from a bank in Chicago) had declared bankruptcy. The President of the Corporation at that time was Gordon McMahon (also the developer who had claimed bankruptcy). He represented the bank until 1976 and was easily elected as President each year. The Chicago Bank had since they were the holders of the original note, become owners of the sites in foreclosure and they also had to pay dues on those sites.

The members united in a meeting to decide what could be done to protect their interest in the Park. Those interested, decided to form their own corporation and others not up to the challenge, simply opted out. It would take months of work, many man hours on legal issues and negotiations, but they were ready for the task and supported each other in their efforts. Among them were seven men who were elected as the Board of Directors of this newly formed Corporation. Out of the seven, one was a lawyer, one a minister and one a financier. All members remaining continued to pay their dues but paid them to the Chicago Bank who then was the legal owner of the property. Although it was not the Bank's intention, they had suddenly become property managers of some unseen campsites in California.

The members elected Henry Siddell as President. It was he who came up with the idea of trying to get the Chicago Bank out of the picture. Henry Siddell had a plan to save the park for the members and was chosen by the members to go to Chicago on behalf of the membership to negotiate terms with the bank. His air fare was paid by the cooperation of the membership in hopes that an agreement could be reached. They had become a team working together to save their park in those early years. Siddell negotiated the terms with the bank which to settle the issue with the roads.

## CTTA History

The Bank was eager to listen to anything since they were being sued by the members for not completing roads, they had become property managers against their wishes and had numerous headaches managing a California park from Chicago. The bank quickly offered a buy-out of the title for \$60,000.00 but the members had already planned to sue the bank for \$35,000.00 for roads unfinished. Siddell told the bank he would “think about it” and would let them know after he presented their offer to the membership. The membership met again and voted to ask for an additional \$30,000.00 from the bank with zero percent interest for three years in order to pave the roads (even though the roads were not the width agreed upon originally). The bank agreed, the transaction took place, the three year loan was granted and the law suit dropped. The monies the bank owed to the Corporation for dues on the “bank owned” lots over the years, was enough to pay off the loan. The membership never had to pay a cent.

The Corporation was formed in March of 1972 with all seven board members signing the final Corporation papers. CTTA was then officially a non-profit camp grounds owned by the members. Over the next several years, the elected Board directed the park, selling memberships, overseeing the development of the roads, making other improvements and working together. By 1977 there were 250 members and the dues increased to \$15.00 then to \$25.00 per month. Many of those members are still here today. The park was developed in sections; Section I consisted of loops A-G then Section II was developed with Z loop being reserved completely for guests. Little by little the memberships were sold and the funds were made available to make improvements. They saved money by the members who donated their time, resources and skills to make the park work. Two 60’ single wide mobile homes were placed in the park by the developers which later served as quarters for the office and maintenance crew who stayed year around.

The families that came to Timber Trails weren’t just ordinary campers here to enjoy their family vacations in leisure; they were hard-working, fun-loving individuals who donated untold hours to provide activities, functions, and fun for all to enjoy. They spent their vacations making improvements, painting buildings, digging ditches, hammering nails, working on water lines and the list goes on. The various Boards over the years have donated thousands of hours to oversee the park operations, maintenance, office functions, and the always present legal issues involved in operating such a park. It has taken sacrifice on their part, but they made it fun working together as a team.

It was the team spirit that made the park we all enjoy today; a one-of-a-kind bit of our own paradise. It will take that same spirit of cooperation and sacrifice to make it better for tomorrow.

***“The group that works together enjoy the perks together.”***

