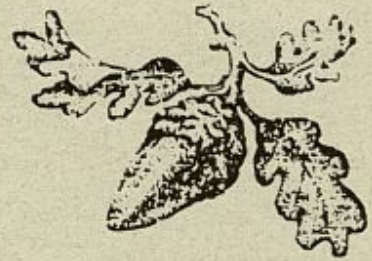


# The Acorn

*The American River Natural History Association*



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## Memories of the Old Fair Oaks and PCA Bridges

by Bob Brugger

One of the most pleasant memories of my childhood was the American River and the Old Fair Oaks Bridge. I grew up on the south side of the American River a very short distance from the Old Fair Oaks Bridge, the Pacific Coast Aggregate rock plant, and the old Southern Pacific Railroad Depot, located near the present auto dismantling yard. I learned at an early age, from my family how important a bridge is to a community. Our family had to cross the American River to go to church, the doctor, the post office, school and to get groceries. The bridge was also very important to my father, Frank Brugger, who was Superintendent of the Pacific Coast Aggregate Plant (PCA). The bridge was a crucial link for dispersing the aggregate products produced by his company. At that time there were only three bridges crossing the American River from Folsom to Sacramento. The Old Fair Oaks Bridge was our closest link to Fair Oaks, Carmichael, Orangevale, Roseville and the Loomis Basin. I remember my father telling me how the ranchers, farmers and merchants of Fair Oaks raised the money to build the original bridge. A portion of this structure still exists as the wooden approach to the current Old Fair Oaks Bridge, used by thousands as part of the American River bicycle and hiking trail.

When I became old enough, during the first twenty years of my life along the river, I would cross the bridge almost every day to go to Fair Oaks for one reason or another. I loved to watch Elmer, the owner of the Old River Store, stand in the middle of the bridge every day and lower a bottle into the river on a rope to collect a water sample. He sent the sample to Sacramento County to be tested for water quality.

I also remember the homeless squatters who came in at the Old Fair Oaks Bridge Depot and drifted to the river. Many of them stayed, because the area was so peaceful and beautiful, and built their tin and tent shanties along the south side of the river stretching from the Fair Oaks Bridge to Mississippi Bar. These old, single men were very nice and never bothered anyone. Once in awhile they would come to our back door to ask my mother for an aspirin or other minor medicinal items. During flood conditions my father would go and help them get their belongings out. Some of the old timers refused to leave and would stack their things on top of their shanties to wait out the high water. They lived there for many years until the development of the American River Parkway



*Photo by Randy Smith*

*Early morning view of Old Fair Oaks Bridge*

forced their removal. During the 1940s and 1950s swimming lessons for the youth in the area were held in the deep pocket of the river directly under the Fair Oaks Bridge which was referred to as the "old swimming hole." There were no public swimming pools at that time so swimming instructors from Sacramento, possibly from the Red Cross, would come to the bridge to give lessons. We all knew where to show up for lessons.

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### Bridges...from page 1

In November of 1950, the American River crested at 32 feet during a fierce winter storm. The pilings on the south side of the river were partially knocked out putting the bridge in jeopardy. The Fair Oaks Fire Department, comprised mostly of volunteers at that time, and a large crew from the PCA plant spent 24 hours a day with long poles trying to keep the debris from building up on the bridge again. In every flood since, this same technique has been used to maintain the structure of the bridge.

In 1953 the County put a five ton weight limit on the old bridge, virtually stopping all truck traffic from the PCA plant from crossing the bridge. This meant trucks from the company would have to go east to Folsom or west to Sacramento in order to deliver their materials to any point north of the river. The company decided to place a small bridge crossing down river from the Old Fair Oaks Bridge. The truck traffic would cross the American River and travel up Pennsylvania Avenue. In the summer of 1953, a series of eight culverts, 40 feet long, were joined together by cables and were dragged across the river. As they were positioned, a large work crew added dirt between the culverts, binding the dirt with cut willow branches and willow trees they had removed from along the river to help stop the fast erosion and wash-out of the soil. This bridge was used for two years until being washed out during a severe flood in 1955. Some of the culverts were salvaged and used for a second culvert bridge built during the summer of 1955. This bridge had a short life, being destroyed by high water the following winter. In 1958 two engineers from the company were assigned the job of designing a bridge that would withstand the yearly flow of high water. They used back-to-back pilings to span the river, on top of which was placed a 12 x 12 fir deck, all in panels. It could be lifted off with a crane during high water levels. This system worked until high water the next winter came during the early hours of the morning, tearing off the deck and washing it away. That same year, a concrete deck was poured on top of the pilings that would have the weight, strength and capacity to withstand any high water. Following the building of the new Fair Oaks Bridge (or the Sunrise Bridge as it was named), this concrete span was used by the aggregate company to transport materials from one part of the operation to another. It has withstood all subsequent flood waters and was donated to the County when mining operations along this stretch of the river were ceased in order to develop the American River Parkway. Known as Jim's Bridge, it is used by thousands of people each year who enjoy the Parkway.

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## The Acorn

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## Where's That "Bug" Man?

Where is that entomologist who gave such interesting programs on bugs and spiders at the Nature Center—the man who trained the spiders for the movie *Arachniphobia*?

Many people have asked about Larry Allen, a dedicated volunteer who shared his enthusiasm for the world of invertebrates and inspired his audiences to look at creepy, crawly things with new interest and appreciation.

Though he is now too far from Sacramento to continue these programs, we are happy to report that Larry is still using his outstanding skill in the world of insects, serving as County Entomologist/Agricultural Biologist for the County of San Joaquin. Only ten of the leading agricultural counties in California have entomologists, San Joaquin ranking fifth among these in agricultural production. An important focus of this job is not only to protect the County's agriculture from damaging insects but also to insure and certify that agricultural products shipped from the county are pest free. Larry is the expert who identifies all insects and supervises six trappers who screen for potential pests such as the gypsy moth and Japanese beetle.



We talked to Larry about his job after his return from an international medfly symposium. Before the symposium two scientists from the Smithsonian and the US Department of Agriculture flew from Washington DC to confer with Larry on an insect he collected. It was a seed bug—the first record of this Mediterranean insect found in the Western Hemisphere. While this bug is not a threat to local agriculture it serves as an important indicator for the spread of species and, therefore, is of great interest nationwide.

When Larry took the position with San Joaquin County, he and his wife, Sharon, moved to a five-acre ranch in Valley Springs, Calaveras County. Here, they have their own nature area with hills, ponds, trees—habitat which is rich in wildlife from king snakes to coyotes, from "bugs" to birds. And he says the stars at night are spectacular.

Though we all miss his wonderful programs, clearly Larry's skills and enthusiasm are being well used. His work is fun and he takes great pride in what he is accomplishing. He will continue to be part of ARNHA as he contributes to the insect section in the next edition of *The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region*.

Bridges...from page 2

Today, even though no vehicles are allowed on the Old Fair Oaks Bridge, it is probably busier than it has ever been. Along with the old Lonestar (PCA) bridge, the two bridges greatly enhance access to the American River Parkway, offering a slow paced environment enjoyed by artists and photographers, and even used as an occasional Hollywood movie set. To stand and watch the river flow under the graceful arches of the Old Fair Oaks Bridge on its timeless journey to the sea is reminiscent of an earlier, more idyllic time of boyhood life along the river. I am very thankful these two bridges still exist.

*Bob Brugger is recently retired and lives in El Dorado Hills. He grew up in a small house on South Bridge Street in old Fair Oaks. Bob's father began working for Pacific Coast Aggregate Company, in 1915. Bob became Superintendent of Maintenance at the company, now known as RMC Lonestar in Rancho Cordova.*

## CROSSING THE RIVER

by Bill Dillinger

If today's commuters think there are too few bridges across the American River, they should have been here "yesterday." Before the Gold Discovery, the only foot or wagon crossing was on an old Maidu trail. Sutter and the scattered landowners along the river had scows or other small boats with which to cross, but there was no provision for the ordinary traveler.

At first, those who came for gold were content to work the south side of the river, spreading out gradually from the discovery site. But as more and more strikes on the north and middle forks were reported, there was increasing traffic across the river to the new diggings.

Most of these gold seekers used one of three fords. Lower Ford, or El Paso, at the end of 16<sup>th</sup> Street was in use in the Fall of 1849, and may have been the crossing on the Maidu trail used by Sutter.

A Middle Ford, at 28<sup>th</sup> Street, near the fort, and an Upper Ford, just below the present H Street Bridge, were also in heavy use at that time. Fords were useless during the higher water of winter and spring, however, and the need for something that would serve year-round soon led to the establishment of ferries.

One of the first was at the Upper Ford, established in the Fall of 1849, when a rancher at Brighton complained to A.H. Bayley about being pestered to take people across the river in his scow.

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