

Cosumnes River Preserve Hike

By Don Quesenberry

Big SIR Craig Chalmers led Little SIR Jack Reefer, Brent Williams and Don Quesenberry on a Halloween Day morning's 3 plus mile hike through Cosumes River Preserve's oak forest and grass lands, and along the boardwalk into the wet lands. Then we went to Giusti's Place for a great lunch followed by a drive into the heart of Staten Island's vast area of diverse cropped fields now plowed and flooded as a water fowl Preserve.

The weather gods treated us to a perfectly calm, sunny day for hiking. We began with a quick visit to the visitor's center to speak to a staff member and to get a trail map with details about the numbered trail markers explaining special sights. Not having hiked the 3 mile river loop trail for too many years, I was pleased to see that not much has changed except for the growth of the valley oak trees planted in the late 1980's. These oak trees were first planted two ways: young saplings and as acorns planted Indian-style by poking a hole in the ground with a pointed tree branch and inserting the acorn in it before stomping it closed. It was eventually found that the trees that grew best were started from acorns.

Decisions, decisions: We had to debate if we would hike the trail clockwise or counter clockwise. Craig, being the outdoorsman of our small group, said it was best to go counter clockwise because that is what he does to keep the sun out of his eyes when deer hunting. Go figure! So we set off walking counter clockwise upstream through the oak forest along the Cosumes River, the last free-flowing river on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. The morning was unusually quiet and free of nature's sounds. Where were the ducks, geese and sandhill cranes? About half way along the river trail we stopped for a 10 minute break and sat on some concrete benches overlooking the river. Craig surprised us with diminutive size "trick or Treat" candy bars to celebrate Halloween. (Some treat!!) We continued on until the river trail met with the grassland trail which we followed in a round-about way back to the visitor's center. From there we drove to the wetlands section of the preserve where a boardwalk took us into the wetlands where we saw our first group of sandhill cranes feeding nearby on a levee. It was surprising that they let us get as close as we did to watch them. We continued walking on the boardwalk to the wetlands' viewing platform where we saw both ducks and geese.

An often asked question is where does the Cosumnes River empty into the Mokelumne River? Answer: About ½ mile from the Visitor's Center where the Mokelumne quickly divides into south and north branches. It so happens that, Giusti's Place Restaurant where we treated ourselves to lunch and libations, is situated on the west bank of the north branch of the Mokelumne River. After lunch we drove back across the north branch of the Mokelumne onto 9,100 acre Staten Island which is situated between the south and north forks of the Mokelumne. As we drove along the road between Staten Island's fields we marveled at the number of sandhill cranes and literally thousands of ducks and geese we saw. It was a wonderful way to end a perfect day in the Sacramento River Delta.