

Milpitas Camera Club Field Trip

Field Trip: **Ardenwood Civil War Re-enactment**
Trip Date: **May 28, 2005**
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The battles still rage on 140 years after the truce!



Every Memorial Day weekend in the Bay Area, grey-clad Confederates clash with Union bluejackets. You'd think that someone would tell them the Civil War was settled a century and a half ago. These conflicts, of course, are re-enactments and one is held amid the tall trees in the Santa Cruz Mountains at Roaring Camp and the other in the East Bay at Ardenwood Historic Farm in Fremont.

Two camera club members attended the Saturday, May 28, 2005 event held at the Ardenwood Historic Farm in Fremont this year. Both of us, I'm sure, got our share of people shots and interesting images from this excursion.

Last year's Memorial Day weekend field trip was at Roaring Camp Railroad, near Felton. If you attend that event you should arrive early and stroll through the encampments, but the Fremont event is closed to the public until the park opens at 10 a.m.



At Roaring Camp, the soldiers and other participants are members of the American Civil War Association (ACWA) and take great pains to prepare authentic costumes and utilize Civil War-era camping equipment and methods. I actually enjoyed exploring the respective Union and Confederate

camps more than the main event—the midday battle played out on the central green. Don't get me wrong—you want to stay for at least one of the

battles! It is quite a spectacle with cannon volleys, troop advances and the final charge and hand-to-hand struggle with plenty of smoke and musket fire to get your adrenaline flowing. The steam trains chugging through the scene added that much more antique-ambiance to the event. And in the village marketplace, by the whistle stop crossing, you could find food booths, souvenir stands and sutters' tents packed with Civil-War-era oddities and costumes. The set-up is pretty much the same at the Fremont event, except the blue and gray camps are farther apart.

Attending either event doesn't require too much walking, but you might want to bring a compact folding chair because hay bales and seats in the viewing stands become hot property when the artillery crews begin to ready their field pieces.

Comparing the two events, I enjoyed Ardenwood's version a little bit more than the one at Felton because of the setting and some of the exhibits. The battle was played out in an orchard and proved to be very picturesque. Furthermore, the soldiers' camps seemed to have more things to look at.



Particularly interesting was the exhibit of the life-sized replica of the Confederate submarine, the C.L. Hunley. The submarine was recently discovered on the bottom of a South Carolina bay, and was the first submarine to destroy an enemy vessel in combat. Its crew accomplished the mission, but died when the craft sank. No one knows why it sank after they harpooned their target with a powder-charged lance. Perhaps the shock wave from the explosion, as it backed away and triggered the explosives, caused the craft's demise.

The craft, though simply designed, could submerge using diving plains like a modern submarine and it had fore and aft ballast tanks that were filled and emptied with hand pumps. It moved through the water by means of a propeller turned by a hand-driven, seven-man crankshaft. It basically resembled a boiler converted into a human-propelled diving chamber. The man who led the expedition to find the Hunley was present and provided the commentary as he sat in the replica, making for a truly fascinating exhibit.



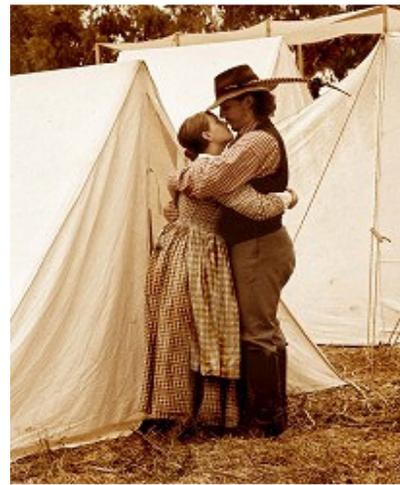
Another excellent part of the Ardenwood re-enactment was the presence of horses. A team of beautiful rescued thoroughbreds pulled one of the Union cannons and several troops were mounted. That definitely made it more appealing for me. The combatants at

Ardenwood, who belong to the National Civil War Association (NCWA), put on a very good show, indeed.

Both re-enactment groups are non-profit clubs dedicated to educating the public about the war that lasted four years and claimed the lives of 650,000 Americans. It was an extremely bloody and tragic conflict, and the horrors of the conflict cannot fully be



interpreted by re-enactments. Although they don't emphasize it,



the organizations are also dedicated to the enjoyment of club members who relish the

idea of putting on uniforms and “playing army” in a socially acceptable context. Some of them really take their roles seriously and once they get into “character,” they can't be easily enticed out of their roles for idle chatter. There are numerous such organizations that stage recreations of battles on some of the 10,000 former Civil War battlegrounds spread across the nation. Although California was far from the main theater of the war, many conflicts played out between Union and Confederate sympathizers in the newly established state.

If you'd like to attend next year's events here are some helpful numbers and websites:

You can get more details on the Roaring Camp venue by calling 831-335-4484 or surfing to the Roaring Camp website at:

<http://www.roaringcamp.com> Roaring Camp dates back to the 1830s when

mountain man Isaac Graham established a settlement, which was later given the name Roaring Camp by the Mexican authorities. In 1842 Graham built the first sawmill west of the Mississippi and began a logging operation. The trees at Roaring Camp, however, were spared and later became the first protected stand of virgin coastal redwoods. In 1875 the Santa Cruz and Felton Railroad began carrying tourists from the beach resort up to the trees. A narrow gauge railroad was established at Roaring Camp in the 1970s and the 1875 Felton-Santa Cruz route was reopened to tourists in 1985.

If you decide to stay close to home and go to Ardenwood, the admission fee is \$8 for adults. For information on the park you can call 510-796-0663 or go to the website: <http://www.ebparks.org/parks/arden.htm> The Ardenwood Historic Farm was originally the large farm of George Washington Patterson, who was part of the Gold Rush in 1849. His mining adventures failed, but he established a farm in the fertile bottomland in southern Alameda County. Patterson's farm flourished and he built a beautiful Victorian mansion and elaborate gardens on the property. The mansion is open to visitors and the farm buildings and surrounding fields are operated using nineteenth-century agricultural practices. You can even buy the fresh fruit and vegetables grown on this working farm. Families and school groups come to the park to see agricultural exhibits, live animals and educational programs.

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