

EL SOBRANTE'S HERITAGE TREE – A NATIONAL RECORD HOLDER

By: Maurice P. Abraham – December 31, 2011

El Sobrante has its own Big Tree; not a Giant Redwood or Sequoia, but no less significant. It is a large Sargent Cypress (*Supressus Sargentii*) and is recognized by the National Register of Big Trees as the largest of its species known to exist in the United States.¹

The age of the tree is estimated at approximately 150-years according to the coordinator of the California Register of Big Trees. This would place its beginnings to around 1850-1860, the era of California's Gold Rush and Statehood and the U.S. Civil War. The tree was nominated to the Register by R. Nichols in 2001. It measures 58 feet high, with a trunk circumference of 244 inches and a crown spread of 63 feet for a size-ranking total of 318 points.²

This stately Cypress stands on the north-facing slopes of San Pablo Ridge adjacent to Clark Creek. While the tree is located in the El Sobrante Valley community, it is technically within Richmond's city limits. It is situated a short distance east of the EBRPD trail that begins at the end of Clark Road. The EBRPD trail is a right-of-way over the private property on which the Sargent Cypress is located.³ Therefore it's important that persons interested in viewing the tree be respectful of the private property by staying on or close to the trail, closing all gates and not harassing the livestock.

The National Register of Big Trees, a program of American Forests, lists about 800 champion trees nationwide. Of these, more than 80 are located in California, making them state champions as well. The California Register of Big Trees is a program of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the Northern and Southern California Societies of American Foresters. It maintains records for the largest specimen of each native and naturalized tree species growing in California.

Each registered big tree has its own history, its own story. We will never know the true history of this particular tree; did it occur naturally? If not, who planted it and why? And what natural disasters has it managed to survive?

However, it's not difficult to imagine the history this tree has witnessed these past 150-years as it stood in silent magnificence overlooking the El Sobrante Valley. It sprouted to life when California's early Mexican and European ranchers rode the surrounding hills and their cattle grazed the valley's abundant grasslands. Imagine if this tree could talk; it would surely have much to tell us.



¹ National Register of Big Trees: <http://www.americanforests.org/our-programs/bigtree/>

² California Register of Big Trees: <http://www.ufe.org/bigtrees/bigtreelist.lasso>

³ Canyon Park Friends of Open Space: <http://www.saveelsobrantehills.org/photosmaps.html>