

Bulls and bears ... in Linda Mar?

Can you imagine a Grizzly bear ambling down Linda Mar blvd.? It does seem ludicrous, yet only the timing is off. When there were thousands of cattle grazing the hills and valleys of San Pedro Rancho, only 14 or 15 decades ago, Grizzlies lived around here as well. Where there are now hundreds of Linda Mar ranch homes, the descendants of cattle brought in by the Padres thrived where Pacificans now hang their hats, and so did the native Grizzlies. What's more, if they could avoid the local cowboys' weapons, the bears lived very well. By bringing in cattle to graze the hills and valleys of California, the Spanish and their Mexican successors may have created a paradise for Grizzlies, a food source both ample and easy. Beached whale and seal carcasses were tasty and nutritious when available, but irregular at best. There were many reports of the bears ripping up cattle hides used to store tallow. During the years that Pacifica was part of Mexico, beef could not be sold profitably. Hides and tallow were the only salable parts of cattle, able to survive a long, slow sea voyage to world markets. Candles were in heavy demand, and therefore the tallow they were made from. The animals were butchered and skinned. Tallow was rendered and solidified. Hides were used as containers. Most of the meat was wasted, though the rancheros probably ate a lot of beef steak. It would be interesting to know if the meat was tough or tender, had good or mediocre flavor, and if the rancheros took their over-abundant supply for granted.

I don't know of any Grizzlies specifically reported along the north county coast after the American occupation, but Roy Cloud's 1928 county history mentions several attacks, the last one in 1868, within the county. One occurred at "Wall and Robert's Ranch near Bald Mountain, in the northern part of the county." (Could Bald Mountain have been San Bruno Mountain?) 15 head of cattle were lost. A large Grizzly, about 800 lbs. was trapped and taken to San Francisco for sale.

Grizzlies and bulls provided some rough and impromptu entertainment in the form of staged fights. Since neither animal was really anxious to be involved, the most important job was probably to make sure that neither one was free to leave.

Bears raided farms near Half Moon Bay in 1861. Cattle were killed. In 1866 Pedro Garcia came upon a Grizzly mother with cubs. Garcia was badly mangled.

On Feb. 15, 1868, County Supervisor Easton and others with him were treed by two Grizzlies.

Another source states that the last Grizzly in the county was sighted in 1878. It's ironic that a state whose flag honors the Grizzly should have to import them from distant states if they are to be displayed at our zoos. Still, I can't imagine they will ever again be allowed to run free. They are too strong, too predatory, and too much of a problem to deal with. But I'd love to see a page one Tribune headline, "Grizzlies seen on Linda Mar Blvd. for the third time this month." Wouldn't the NIMBYs love that?