

PCWA-L-128

GERLE CREEK HISTORY

Follow this page as I add historical information collected over the years from my library of maps, pictures and documents. Work in progress. MG Brattland Author deer hunting McKinstry Peak, Fall 1991

If you want to contact me, the author of this web page, you can do so by e-mail me, Michael G. Brattland at mgbrattland@gerlecreek.comI live in El Cajon, California in the San Diego suburbs.....my complete address information is elsewhere on the web site under the purchase page for the technical bulletin I wrote on Ford multiple carburetion.....

Maps of the Georgetown Divide....from 1865 to the present day.....

Gerle Creek Summer Home Tract(GCSHT), US Forest Service Summer Home Tract, first established/located on Southwest side of Gerle Creek opposite from Swimming Hole on logging spur by the the Forest Service. A November 5, 1953 article in the MOUNTAIN DEMOCRAT entitled "*Plan New Recreation, Homes on Wentworth Springs Road,*"

"A new summer home and recreational area is being planned by Eldorado National Forest for Gerle Creek, on the Wentworth Springs Road approximately 40 miles East of Georgetown. The site selected embraces an area large enough for 50 to 60 summer homes, one public camp area and two organizational areas. Fishing, swimming and hiking will be the principal attractions. The area is only eight miles west of Desolation Wilderness area. Work on the proposal is being carried out under direction of County Supervisor Gene Chappie and Ranger George Ramstad."

This original plan and layout of the summer home tract lots along the Southside of the creek did not work out. Interest in the lots was basically lacking and some of the old stories indicated due to the location directly on the creek, the mosquitos made it difficult. In any case, with no interest in the original location, the Forest Service went back to the drawing boards and re-laid out the summer home tract in the present location on the North side away from the creek and up on the hillside above the Airport Flats area as laid out in the map below. Have a look at this original US Forest Service Map of the GCSHT, a compass and tape survey, dated Feb 1953. By the time the

FS offered lots at Gerle Creek, they had eliminated the lots on the Southside of the creek in favor of the current position up the hill on the Northside of the flats.

For a number of reasons not clear, there were no takers for the summer home tract between the original offering in 1953 and when they began again to create interest in the summer home tract. In a January 31, 1957 article entitled "SPRING OPENING OF SUMMER HOME TRACT ON GERLE CREEK PLANNED," published in the MOUNTAIN DEMOCRAT,

"Plans were announced this week by Ranger Kenneth St. John of Georgetown Ranger station for the opening of a summer home tract along Gerle Creek. The forest service will offer 40 lots for lease this spring or early summer, said St. John. The tract, about three and a one-half miles north of South Fork on Gerle Creek., will be reached either from the Georgetown-Wentworth Springs road or by the Icehouse road from Highway 50. The area is 39 miles northeast of Georgetown on the Georgetown-Wentworth Springs road and 28 miles north of Riverton on the Icehouse road. The lots, each of one-quarter to one-third acre in size, will be leased on a standard forest service permit, reissued annually, according to St. John. This is the first summer home development area opened along Gerle creek."

As originally envisioned, it was laid out for lots 1 through 47, but later lots 1 through , 8,9 and 16 were removed from this original plan. The exact position of the Summer Home tract center is 38 Degrees, 59.205 Minutes North; 120. Degrees, 23.010 Minutes West.

Later in the Summer of 1957, the MOUNTAIN DEMOCRAT reported n July 11, 1957 article entitled "FIVE SUMMER HOME SITE APPLICANTS AWARDED LOTS AT GERLE CREEK,"

"Summer home sites along Gerle Creek above Georgetown have been awarded to five applicants in the first allotment of 42 sites in the Forest Service development it was announced this week by Georgetown Ranger Kenny St. John. Lots were awarded to Steven R. Camber, Oakland; D.C. Young, Orinda; Albert H. Somner, Garden Valley; John Holmes, Sacramento; and Harry Heckenliable, Stockton. The five were among a list of applicants which has been building up since 1952, it was explained and many who had previously applied apparently were no longer interested, accounting for the small number of applicants appearing to select sites. Later applicants now on file will be notified of a date to be announced later when further selections may be made."

I believe that due to the rather remote location, the unfamiliarity of people in general with this area on the forest and real difficulty in reaching this area in the early 50s, that interest was lacking for few interested folks who were willing to trek to Gerle Creek. The roads to Gerle Creek then were little more than two tire tracks whether coming from Riverton or Georgetown. The narrow old log roads took considerable time and navigational skill to make your way to places like Gerle Creek. The initial offering of summer home sites in 1953 was coming at a period of time when the country was just 8 years past a major World War and currently was involved in the Korean War. Recreation opportunities for people were not high on the scale when balanced against the need to reestablish their basic needs including housing and work. Among the other difficulties of Gerle Creek was the fact that the original log bridge crossing Gerle Creek at Airport Flats in 1927 had been washed out in the Winter of 1951/52. So besides the isolation presented by the summer home tract at Gerle Creek was the fact you had to ford the creek every time you came or went to the summer home tract. In the days before the new Loon Lake Dam, this was no small feat and nearly impossible during the early Spring and Summer, due to the snow runoff. All tract residents as well as other users of Airport Flats barracks buildings, including the South Fork Mill ditch keeper had to ford the creek till 1963 when the first lane of the new concrete bridge was completed.

By 1957, 1958 people were ready to take up the opportunities presented by the Forest Service offering of summer home tracts. My parents, Gordon and Joy Brattland found out about Gerle Creek as a result of applying to the Forest Service for a summer home lot at Wright's Lake. Our family camped regularly at Wrights Lake from the mid 50s and fell in love with the isolated setting and the cabins around the lake. The Forest Service advised that they had no more lots at Wright's Lake, but they had a summer home tract at Gerle Creek and plenty of available lots. My parents then visited the tract in the early Summer of 1958 via Georgetown with my sister and I in tow and selected lot 34 next to the Holmes on Lot 33. After completing the paperwork and being awarded the lot, the Carey Brothers, who had also wanted Lot 34, had begun to build on the lot. When we showed up after being awarded lot 34 by the Forest Service, the Carey family indicated they had earlier actually selected lot 34 and that one of the three Carey Brothers was supposed to go to Georgetown and sign the required paperwork with the Forest Service, but had failed to do so. They were so intent on this lot that my father and mother decided to pick another lot, selecting instead Lot 24. They reported the problem to the Forest Service, who corrected both lease documents, awarding Lot 24 to the Brattland family, while allowing the Carey

family to retain Lot 34.

Gerle Creek Summer Home Tract Association

Original Association Hydraulic Ram Pumps for the water system picture 1 Here is a later picture with my friend Dave Orchard standing in front of the hydraulic ram pump house built over the ram pumps, picture 2.

Lot 24 History Brattland Family Cabin

Lot 41 History McDowall Family Cabin

Aerial shot 1968

Gerle Creek(Gurley) The creek was named for early El Dorado County settler, Christopher C. Gerle, a Swedish immigrant who arrived before 1860(Gudde). One of three Gerle brothers who came to California in 1851, Christopher C. Gerle was born in Sweden in 1833, marrying his wife, Mary Clausen in El Dorado County in 1865. Mary was daughter to Paul and Mary Clausen, both emigrating from England to Coloma. Her father Paul was born in 1806 while her mother was born in 1815. Her father Paul was a boot maker. Christopher C. Gerle and his wife, Mary initially had two boys, Peter C. Gerle, born 1869 and dying in 1871 and a second boy, Charles Gerle, born 1870 and died in 1871. Both are buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in Coloma with their two uncles, Charles W. Gerle and Christopher Cyrus Gerle. Christopher C. Gerle and his wife Mary later moved to Plymouth, in Amador County, California, having a third son George and three girls, Mary, Charlotte and Maggie. Charles W. Gerle was the oldest brother, born in Sweden in 1823 and dying March 4, 1907, while Christopher Cyrus Gerle was born in Sweden in 1831, but died in Coloma in 1875. Charles W. Gerle lived in Coloma with Minnie Johnson, who was previously married to an Englishman and had two boys Juan Johnson and Charles W. Johnson in Sweden, with a third child George M. Johnson, born in Coloma in 1878.

The Georgetown Gazette reported in their August 20, 1880 edition about Charles Gerle's trial in justice court..... *"The trial of Chas. Gurley (misspelled), for drawing a rifle on James Smith, took place in Justice McLains court last Saturday. Dist Attorney Ingram represented the presecution, with Jas. Smith and Chas. Harris as witnesses for the complaint, while Gurley testified for himself. The weight of the testimony told against Gurley, but the matter was compromised by Gurley pleading guilty to simple*

assault and paying a fine of \$50.00. "Gernes; Deibert, 1999

A report from the June 23, 1882 edition of the Georgetown Gazette on the movement of livestock through Georgetown to the ranches in the Sierras....."A great many droves of stock and dairy cattle, sheep and goats, have passed through Georgetown during the present month for their ranges above, and many more are yet to pass before the month ends. Among those who have already passed up with dairy stock are: Forni of Gold Hill, Sam Forni of this place(Georgetown), filippini & Co., Bacchi of Garden Valley, Schelari and Gerley(mispelled) of Uniontown, Deller and Son near this place (Georgetown) and others whose names we have not in mind. Besides this, no less than a dozen large bands of sheep and goats have passed through town. Much stock is also passing up by routes south of this place." (Gernes; Deibert, 1999)

The Gerle Brothers used their Sierra ranch on Gerle Creek (Gurley; Lawyer's Cow Camp; & Wagner Bros.) to raise hogs during the Summer months, hauling the pork products over the Sierra's on the Georgetown/Wentworth Springs/Rubicon Springs/Lake Tahoe Road to sell in Virginia City, Nevada. The earliest maps including Bowman's 1874 Map of the whole Georgetown Divide show their ranch and the creek identified with Gerle misspelled and written as it sounded; "Gurley." Gerle's Ranch became a very important way stop on the road to Lake Tahoe from Georgetown, remaining so till Charles W. Gerle died in the early 20th Century when the ranch property was sold off, to be eventually purchased by the Lawyer Family and renamed.

Gerle Creek Reservoir-Eldorado National Forest, El Dorado County, Ca

In 1885, Alex F. Forni applied for a patent on 560 acres near what is now Gerle Reservoir in the Butler Meadows area, where he operated a ranch (Errington 2000). Review of the earliest map of the area, shows AE Browns ranch house and fence in this area, but no mention of Forni. Butler Meadows is more than likely named for the Samuel Butler and his pioneer family who were early cattle ranchers, arriving in about 1860. This same area was also an area frequented by Indians, most likely Southern Maidu, making use of several areas around the juncture of Angel Creek and Gerle Creek, "during the Summer months, hunting, fishing and gathering seeds, fruits, and bulbs" underneath the current reservoir, according to Wilson and Dyson(1962)

For a picture of Charles Forni, see Rambeau, 1998, page 21 for a group photo of the

I.O.O.F. lodge in Georgetown, 1889. There is a group picture showing members Alex Francis, Charles Forni, Dan Jerrett, Gus Orelli and Charles Wentworth, all significant men in the history of Gerle Creek

Gerle Creek Reservoir Dam

Gerle Creek Reservoir Dam was completed in 1962 and is on the East side of Butler Meadows. As an interesting piece of background on this eventual site for this storage reservoir for SMUD, in 1916, hearings were held on the water rights of the Truckee River General Electric Company to water from Gerle Creek. These rights had been assumed when they acquired them from the California Water and Mining Company (California Water Company). The company wanted to build a dam and reservoir to produce electricity. This claim was disputed and became part of rather complicated and extended federal hearing. The most interesting part of the proposal, was the intention to build this dam on Gerle Creek at Jacobsens, creating water storage lake in the meadow adjacent to Jacobsens extending back into Gerles Ranch or Lawyers Cow Camp. The hearings were reported on extensively, including the names of witnesses who testified, including Jacob Jacobsen (Mt Democrat Sept 30, 1916). In the April 17th issue of the Mt Democrat in 1917, it was reported the federal government found in favor of the Truckee River General Electric Company and confirmed their rights to the water for use of Gerle Meadow for a dam and reservoir. By 1924, these rights had been passed along to the Georgetown Divide Water Company (Mt Democrat, March 8, 1924). All real action to actually create a dam and reservoir were put off till the early 1950s when El Dorado County in the push to resolve their increasing need for water with the post WWII boom revisited creating a a number of dams and reservoirs in the county for electricity generation. From early 1951 till at least 1955, the planning of the SMUD Upper American River Project on the divide included the Gerle Creek Dam and reservoir in Gerle Meadows next to Jacobsens. The Mountain Democrat carried a very extensive and detailed article including a map showing 68 proposed dam sites in the June 23, 1955 newspaper, including the actual proposed reservoir site at Gerles Meadow, next to Jacobsens and not in its present location. As the proposed SMUD Upper American River Project progressed after 1955, the Gerles Meadow site was dropped in favor of the eventual and current site in Butler Meadow.

Aerial shot of the Lake 1968

Airport Flats US Army Air Corps Rest Camp (R&R)-Gerle Creek, now Airport Flats US Forest Service Campground, Eldorado National Forest, El Dorado County, Ca

Here is a 1931 article from the "MOUNTAIN DEMOCRAT" which gives the basis for the "Rest Camp" built by the US Army Air Corps at Gerle Creek in 1931 which hereafter gained the name "Airport Flats." This article was contributed by Monte Hendericks, a volunteer historical researcher with the Eldorado Nation Forest, whose primary interest is military and civilian plane crash sites on the Eldorado National Forest. Have a look at this link for more information on aircraft mishap sites on Eldorado National Forest. Many thanks to Monte for sharing this essential record.

ARMY AIR CORPS PICKS SITE FOR "REST CAMP"

Georgetown District Scene of Development on 45-Acre Tract

About 45 acres in Eldorado National Forest, Georgetown District, has been taken over by Mather Field of Sacramento and Crissey Field Air Corps of San Francisco under government permit for a rest camp.

The camp is on Gerle Creek, near the Francis Ranch, in a forest of large yellow pine.

Forest Supervisor Edwin F. Smith, through whose efforts the site was selected, and Ranger R. C. M. Berri-man, in charge of the Georgetown District have just returned from the camp and report great activity there.

Several acres of ground have already been cleared of brush, a large mess hall and cottages are under construction, as well as a swimming pool and base ball ground. Major Tinker, Commanding Officer at Mather Field, will have a cottage on a knoll overlooking the camp. On the outer edge of the camp will be cottages for the married men and their families.

The camp is for the purpose of getting the men away from the flying fields and airplanes for at least two weeks. The camp will be kept open as early and as late as the seasons permit, and from 50 to 80 men will be there at a time, thus providing rest and recreation for several hundred fliers.

Large government trucks pass through Georgetown daily with lumber and supplies for the new camp.

Mt. Democrat 22 May 1931

Here is a Sacramento Union article from June 12, 1931, reporting on the work and plans for the "Army Camp" at Gerle Creek.....

WORK IS BEGUN ON ARMY CAMP

New Project Located About 40
Miles From Placerville

(Special to The Sacramento Union)

PLACERVILLE, June 11.—Construction work at the United States army air rest camp, located near Georgetown, about 40 miles north of here, has begun, it was indicated today when Sergeant Hawkins, in charge of building construction, reported in Placerville yesterday that there was a force of 24 men at work at the camp site.

Quarters for officers and enlisted men and a large mess hall are now under construction, providing accommodations for several hundred.

Sergeant Hawkins, who has been stationed at Mather field for some time, states that this site is an ideal rest camp, being located in a beautiful pine grove in the rolling hills, where fish and game are abundant. There is a large meadow nearby, which may be made into a landing field, providing space for any of the larger planes, he said.

The camp was established by Edwin F. Smith, federal forest supervisor, several weeks ago.

Here is a follow on article from the "MOUNTAIN DEMOCRAT" of July 31, 1931 on the Airport Camp at Gerle Creek.....

80 TO 100 MEN AT AIR CORPS VACATION CAMP

Forest Supervisor Reports Operations in Full Swing for Season

Between eighty and 100 men from army air fields in the Central California region are vacationing at the Army Air Corps rest camp east of Georgetown in El Dodado National Forest.

Forest Supervisor Edwin F. Smith said during the week that the camp was opened about two weeks ago and is under the supervision of Major Tinker, of Mather Field.

The fliers come and go in detachments, so that when one group leaves there is another scheduled to take its place, according to Smith.

Electric lights, sewer and water installations are being made and the camp is all ready equipped with a mess hall to seat 100 men, cooking equipment to match, a swimming pool and an athletic field.

Tents are erected over platforms to house the men.

During their stay at the rest camp, the men rest, the idea being to relieve their nerves and give them opportunity to forget about flying so that they may physically get back to "normalcy."

According to Les Clemmens of Stone Cellar (Clemmens, '04), by the mid 1930s, the Airport Camp at Gerle Creek was a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp with a local man named Joe Flynn in charge of it.

Prior to 1931, the Airport Flats area was a naturally open area in the trees at a natural fording point of Gerle Creek (picture of the McDowall Family Ford pickup sitting in front of the Ford on Airport Flats, 1962) on the Georgetown/Wentworth Springs road to Wentworth Springs. From 1873, it was the point where the ditch tender's road branched off to the diversion dam (Pic#2, Pic#3) at the head of the Gerle Creek Ditch (1873 Map) on Gerle Creek. Have a look at this dual picture kindly volunteered by Lint Brown using the 2001 photo of the Diversion Dam taken by myself alongside a very nice 1936 picture taken by friends of his father Linton A. Brown showing his father and a friend at the same dam 64 years earlier. In 1927, a log bridge [This excellent picture was taken in 1959 by John Holmes, showing the collapsed Gerle

Creek log bridge at Airport Flats. Those two boys swimming in Gerle Creek are Bill and Charlie Holmes. Of further significance is the flow of the water in this picture. The creek flowed much higher prior to the removal of the Old Loon Lake Dam in late 1962 and is evident by the fact that both of the Holmes boys are swimming in deep water as opposed to the flow today which is shallow at best. Many thanks to John Holmes for sharing this very historic picture of this special log bridge long ago gone.....] was built within about 20 feet of the present modern single lane concrete bridges at Gerle Creek, Airport Flats. The first lane of the concrete bridge was built in 1963 (Picture taken in 1962-63 by McDowall Family) and followed with the second lane in 1969. This log bridge with concrete foundations served well from 1927(Supernowicz, 1983) till the severe Winter of 1951/1952 when the log bridge was lost in the Spring runoff. There after till the concrete bridge was built in '63, cross creek traffic returned to the natural ford South of both bridges about 100 feet. Here is a 1962 picture of the Airport Flat access to the ford across Gerle Creek (McDowal Family Photo)The primary reasons for this cross creek traffic of Gerle Creek was the road to Wentworth Springs went this way; access to the two barracks buildings built adjacent to the swimming hole off the flats on the Southside in the early 1930's by the US Army Air Corps; access to the road from the flats to the Gerle Creek Ditch and Diversion Dam, a mile down Gerle Creek from the flats, as well as accessing AE Browns Ranch(early maps clearly list this name as "AE Brown" while some other sources suggest that his name was "AC Brown") halfway down the ditch keepers road off the flats as well as the land used by Alex Forni after 1885.. This ditch and diversion dam were constructed during the summer seasons of 1873/74 and finished late in 1874 for the California Water Company diversion of Loon Lake water to Georgetown. The barracks buildings were used both by the US Army Air Corps till the end of World War II, when the custody of the two barracks buildings, the large water tank and a large garage building in the center of the flats were transferred to the Forest Service.

Here are two historic pictures of two of the several buildings originally built by the Army in 1931on Airport Flats. The first picture is of one of the barracks buildings, which in later years was all that really remained at Airport Flats and was called the "Guard Cabin" or Airport Flats Ranger Station by the Forest Service. This picture was taken by W.Maule of the US Forest Service in 1959 as a means of documenting existing structures on the forest. This building was not torn down until the late 1960s. The Forest Service survey crew who surveyed the new road up in our area, lived in this barracks during the Summers of the 1967 and 1968. During the Summer of 1968, due to the general disrepair of the structure, the Forest Service brought in a trailer and