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# THE CALIFORNIA ACORN REPORT

*Dedicated to making acorn counting great again, eventually*

Volume 21

*The Official Newsletter of the California Acorn Survey*  
*Walt Koenig and Jean Knops, co-directors*

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Editor: Walt Koenig

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## THE FAMILY REPORT

Despite being empty nesters, it was an exciting pre-acorn counting season for the whole family. Of special note was kid #1 Dale, who turned in his thesis in pure math at UC Davis and is now Dr. Dale, at least to me. If there's anything you want to know about trisections, he's the guy to ask, at least if they're in three or four dimensions. (Five or six dimensions and I'm afraid you're out of luck and will need to look elsewhere.) We celebrated by flying kid #2 out and landing a coveted lunch reservation at Top Dog in Berkeley. Later we ate dinner at some dive on Shattuck (Cheese Pancake? I forget the exact name); it was very nice, despite offering no finely-seasoned sausages on its prix-fix menu.

*Phoebe, Janis (with her ravishing white hair), and Dale prior to dinner on June 14<sup>th</sup> as part of our celebration of Dale becoming the third "not-a-real-doctor" in the family.*



Other than his graduation and a weekend during which he accompanied us on the trek from Big Sur through Pfeiffer Canyon to have lunch at Nepenthe (otherwise mostly inaccessible due to the failure of the Pfeiffer Canyon Bridge on Highway 1 last winter), Dale hung out in Davis until finally leaving after 10 years of academic life at the end of July. He then joined me in my successful attempt to check off #1 on my Bucket List (details below), and bid adieu to the Western Hemisphere, heading off to... (anyone? anyone?)...you guessed it: Okinawa for a postdoc at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology. He plans to work there for at least the next two years, presumably trying to finally figure out those five-dimensional trisections.

Meanwhile, although annoyingly brief, it was great to have time with the Phoebster, who, as a field agent with the Tech Transfer Team of the Bee Informed Partnership at the University of Minnesota, helps large commercial beekeepers maintain healthy bee colonies. And, presumably, counting acorns in her spare time. If she has any, which I suspect she doesn't, since half the time we try to get in touch with her she's off in Texas, North Dakota, or Europe where her boyfriend Ben—a Ph.D. student in algebraic topology at Cornell (not to be mistaken for Dale, who's a... [anyone? anyone?]...*geometric* topologist—*totally* different), was hanging out until recently. In our increasingly pathetic attempts to stalk their every move, we've scheduled a visit to see Phoebe for Thanksgiving and a rather more convoluted trip to visit Dale in December. Shucks, the bottom line is, we're fabulously proud and lucky to have such talented F1s, even if neither has plans, at least so far, to devote their lives to counting acorns (or if they do, it's apparently only in three or four dimensions). We can always keep our fingers crossed that they'll come around when they're old—and perhaps more multi-dimensional.

*And here he is: Dr. Dale, sporting full academic regalia, all the way down to the tan sneakers and no socks that have been traditional for pure math Ph.Ds since Isaac Newton scandalized the Trinity College Cambridge community by wearing a similar pair to High Table in 1664. Throughout his graduate career, Janis and I did our best to give Dale advice, all of which was invariably useless. Fortunately, he was sufficiently on top of things to ignore us. Congratulations, Dale, and take the rest of the day off!*



**NEWS FLASH: OPEN HOUSE**  
**37603 TASSAJARA RD.**  
**CARMEL VALLEY, CA**  
**SATURDAY, Nov. 18, 3-6 PM**  
**COME SEE THE NEW HOUSE!**

## THE AARP REPORT

Shortly after Dale's graduation, we made a long weekend trip up to Calistoga for our first-ever mudbaths (not previously on my official Bucket List, although they clearly should have been), after which we crossed over to Sonoma County and met long-time acorn survey supporters (not to mention freshman college roommate) Robert and his SO (from the Manzanita Park trailers at Stanford) Tania, along with two of Tania's siblings (Natasha and Peter), for Tania's retirement party at Pepperwood Preserve. Not only was it great to welcome Tania into the stratified ranks of the unemployed, it was fabulous to finally make it to Pepperwood, one of California's oak hotspots (as well as a literal hotspot during the Tubbs Fire, although it appears as though losses there were much less than one might have feared) that the *California Acorn Survey* has previously failed to assimilate. Many thanks to Natasha, who's a docent there, for arranging the weekend and showing us around. Hopefully all of us successfully removed the healthy population of ticks that joined us, uninvited, during our walks. And best of luck to Tania in her attempts to stop organizing the library at Santa Rita School in Los Altos and instead accompany Robert in his quest to remain gainfully unemployed while keeping the squirrels off the apricot tree in their front yard.



*Peter, Natasha, Tania, Robert, moi, & Jani Lou at Pepperwood on June 27<sup>th</sup>. Note the incredible lineup of suave gray and ravishing white heads of*

*hair. How do we do it? Get plenty of rest, eat all your tacos, and, last but not least, count lots and lots of acorns.*

## THE BUCKET LIST REPORT

August, besides being the harbinger of the acorn count, hosted two items at the top of my Bucket List. #1 was climbing to the top of Half Dome, which somehow I had neglected to do all these years despite several Yosemite backpacking trips back in the day. Joining me on this legendary quest was Dale, in transit from Davis to Okinawa, and our good friend Chuck from Ithaca, a retired development sociologist at Cornell who flew out specifically for the occasion because getting to the top of Half Dome was apparently on his Bucket List as well. After a couple of lovely days preparing for

the expedition most notably by spending an afternoon tubing at Arroyo Seco, we headed off bright and early on Sunday, August 6<sup>th</sup> for Tuolumne Meadows.



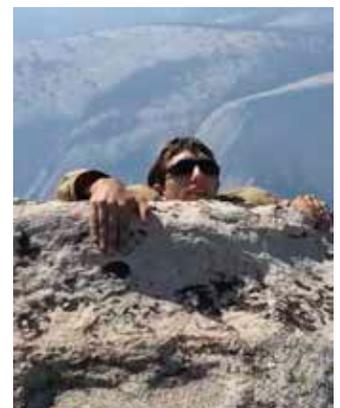
*Who said that training had to be hard work? Chuck shows us how it's done, floating down Arroyo Seco on Aug. 4<sup>th</sup> in preparation for our ascent of Half Dome.*

Since the last time I backpacked in

Yosemite was back in the late Pleistocene, learning to navigate the permit system constituted a large fraction of our efforts. But we prevailed, at least once we flashed the "California Acorn Survey, Official Vehicle" magnetic car sticker at the Tuolumne Meadows Wilderness Office. Not only did we manage to finagle a permit to hike from Tenaya Lake to Little Yosemite Valley and then down to Happy Isles, we snagged a much-coveted permit to climb Half Dome along the way. In order to accomplish this feat, one has to arrive the day before heading off into the back country, so we car-camped the first night at Tamarack Flats, perhaps the only campground in the park that avoids being overrun by people, apparently because it's 3 miles off the main road and protected by what, as far as we could tell, is a permanently affixed "Camp Full" sign at the Highway 120 turnoff.

The first day, which involved taking the bus up from Yosemite Valley and then hiking 12 miles to the top of Cloud's Rest and down to the John Muir trail, nearly did me in. (Chuck and Dale, in contrast, were both annoyingly unfazed.) However, after camping in a lovely spot just up from a small creek, conquering Half Dome the next day was pretty easy, especially compared to the surprising number of people who were ascending the full 5000 ft up (and back down) from Yosemite Valley in one day. Check #1 off the list.

*Dale climbing up the last few feet of Cloud's Rest on Aug. 7<sup>th</sup>. OK, so maybe it was steeper than we had been led to expect. Fortunately Chuck and I hadn't walked more than half a mile ahead before we noticed that Dale wasn't with us any more. Nice that he was able to hang onto that ledge long enough for us to get back and help him up.*



#2 came later in the month with the Great American Solar Eclipse of August 21<sup>st</sup>. Exactly how to navigate the road trip to Oregon was unclear until Bill Carmen and *California Acorn Survey* legal counsel Karen Nardi invited us to join them at an organic farm outside of Silverton involving Colombian shamans, magic mushrooms, a generous supply of organic pot, primal screaming, and a host of other nostalgia from the 1960s. Not to mention the eclipse, which was indeed amazing. And short. Did it really happen? I think so, but it may have been a hallucination. I'll have to make sure on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024, when the next major North American eclipse stretches up from Texas to Newfoundland, arching 40 miles or so north of Ithaca and achieving totality at 3:20pm. Is it too early to make reservations at Dinosaur Barbeque in Syracuse? I hope not. See you all there. That especially means you Ithacans—Chuck, Barbara, Steve, Natalia, Jim, and Anne. Put it on your calendars, by all means.



*Bill honing the fine details of his world-famous gin and tonic mixing technique for Karen, Jani Lou (of ravishing white hair), & moi*

*outside of Silverton, Oregon ostensibly for the Great Solar Eclipse of Aug. 21<sup>st</sup>, but really in preparation for the forthcoming 38<sup>th</sup> annual California Acorn Survey festivities. Bill hadn't lost his touch, despite the extravagant cornucopia of organic and hallocinogenic materials available at the farm.*

After the eclipse, we braved the traffic and drove to Gold Beach, Oregon to stay with our friends Jan and Paul, who have a fabulous place with a view of the ocean just south of town. At least, that's what they claimed; with the heavy fog we mostly had to take their word for it. I've known Paul since we were both at Berkeley in the late 1970s (I as a grad student; he as a Miller Fellow), while Janis has known both of them since they were at Cornell in the 1980s. We all ended up at Cornell in the oughts when Janis got hired there in 2005, and we're now all back on the West Coast after having attained the ranks of the unemployed (except for Jani Lou, who won't officially retire until the end of this year). Is that a chorus of "It's a small world" I hear in the background?

*Yours truly giving Paul the traditional Vulcan live long and prosper greeting on the beach below his house in Gold Beach, Oregon where we scavenged for driftwood on Aug. 22<sup>nd</sup>. It's a fabulous place, despite the threat of fires and earthquakes, which appear to be an issue at all the finest places these days.*



On the way to Gold Beach, we had an outstanding lunch of clam chowder, oysters, and crab cocktail at Tony's Crab Shack in Bandon. If only Buz's Crab Stand in Redding, a promising sounding place we tried several times on the acorn survey that is now blissfully defunct, had been as good! Thanks to Jan and Paul for hosting us and showing us their lovely home; we're happy to learn that it survived the Chetco Bar fire burning in the mountains just south of them during our visit, and wish them all the best with the forthcoming mega-earthquake on the Cascadia subduction zone that threatens to turn the entire Northwestern coast into a scene from a post-apocalyptic disaster movie. Then again, who are we to talk? We're only about 25 miles from the San Andreas Fault as the woodpecker flies, so there's no reason to believe that filming for that movie won't start with us. Hmm...or maybe it already did...?

#### THE FIRE REPORT

Speaking of fires—a subject that continues to entail considerable angst here in California—we're happy to report that a mere 2 years (plus change) after the Tassajara Fire wiped out our newly-renovated Upper Carmel Valley house on Sept. 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the rebuild is at long last complete; indeed, we are moving in as we speak. And yes, it's nice. Very nice. Surprisingly nice. Heck, it even has indoor plumbing!! (Who knew?) Thanks to Phil for designing it (please accept our apologies for the various ways we messed up your lovely plans); Mike Newton for giving up his well-earned place among the retired to serve as our contractor; Carlos, Angel, and Wayne for doing most of the work involved in the actual building; Greg for wiring; Matt for plumbing; Don for painting; Max for the flooring and tiling; Ron for hardscaping; and California Casualty for paying the lion's share of the absurdly high cost. We expect all of you to come visit and see the new digs, even though the moat won't be filled until later on this winter and the velodrome is still in the preliminary planning stages.



*Nothing like a good archaeological dig, although I suspect they're probably a lot more fun when they aren't the remains (such as it were) of your former house. Here Carlos and Angel, our nearly tireless workers, excavate footings on Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016.*



*And here it is, one year later. Our hearts go out to all who now find themselves in a similar situation after the recent fires in Northern California. At this point, the worst part of the whole process for us has been that it's taken 2 years of our lives and we're bored to tears listening to ourselves talk about it, from the fire itself (which we missed, being in Ithaca at the time), to dealing with the insurance (a data intensive task for which we were fortunately well-trained), to the rebuild itself (don't ever make us choose any fixture, finish, floor, sink, tile, or appliance again, please).*

#### THE SURVEY REPORT, PT. 1

Yes, we did actually count acorns. Again. Year number (anyone? anyone?)...38 (thanks for asking). It all started on Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> with my predawn departure for Davis to meet Ian, who had flown out from his new job at the USGS in Colorado to count acorns on the various valley oaks he and his SO Jill identified in 2013 in and around the Davis area with the goal of seeing if more isolated trees produce fewer acorns as a consequence of their (presumed) more limited access to pollen. So far the preliminary results suggest that the answer is yes: more isolated trees produce fewer acorns. However, this year didn't do much to answer the question, as we only counted a total of 4 acorns on our trees. We're going to need a good valley oak acorn year—something we haven't had since 2009—before we can do more than hallucinate a result.

After recovering from our exhaustive counting of all 4 acorns, we kicked off this year's annual taco-fest by having lunch at Taqueria Davis, Ian's favorite Mexican eatery from his grad school days. The place is a tad upscale from what we generally experience on the statewide survey—there are tables and everything—but it was a fine start to what would be yet another eventful taco-eating season. Thanks to Ian for coming all the way out to California to participate; presumably he had plans in addition to directing me to the trees and confirming the lack of acorns.

*Ian displaying his acorn-counting prowess at one of our isolated valley oaks alongside a tomato field outside Davis on Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>. Ian is doing his best to keep the USGS in Fort Collins focused on plant-*



*herbivore interactions and the evolution of plant defensive traits in oaks, despite the recent Presidential directive requesting that all USGS research personnel devote their attention to eradicating golf course pests, especially in semi-tropical regions such as Florida.*

Next up was Jasper Ridge, which postdoc Mario and I counted on Thursday on Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>. Nothing much to report; it took the two of us a good 4+ hours to count all the trees and download the iButton data, after which we lunched at the nearby Alpine Inn Beer Garden, which we continue to patronize, despite its marginal cuisine, because it's such an anachronism in the middle of some of the most hoity-toity real estate imaginable. We strongly suspect that the only thing keeping it from being torn down are all the Teslas parked out in front.

*Postdoc Mario contemplating Searsville Lake at Jasper Ridge on Sept. 5<sup>th</sup>. Mario's been a great addition to the project, moving seamlessly between the worlds of acorns and acorn harvesters. This*



*is likely to be Marios last year, and it will be sad to have to see him go, although we can still hope that he'll end up in a place where he can at least come back and play ping-pong with me up at the new house, if not continue to count acorns every autumn.*

Jean showed up Sunday afternoon, Sept. 10<sup>th</sup>, in Monterey, with the intention of spending the night and then heading south on the statewide survey early Monday morning. Unfortunately, I had destroyed a bridge in my lower jaw over the weekend while eating a fabulous pizza in Berkeley with Janis, Pam Williams, and Betsy Mitchell during the Natural History of the Vertebrates reunion, and by Monday morning was already having difficulty both eating and talking. Jean might have appreciated the latter, but the former was not an affliction I wanted to put up with throughout the entire 9-day survey.

In the old days, I would have tracked down long-time *California Acorn Report* subscriber Steve Austin in Carmel Valley Village, but he had the bad taste to retire even before I did, leaving me stuck with pleading a “dental emergency” at a random nearby dentist in Carmel Crossroads who happened to open at 8 am Monday morning. Fortunately, the one I chose turned out to be very nice and was kind enough to smooth off enough of my tooth so that it no longer etched my mouth every time I moved my jaw. They then sent me on my way in an admirably timely fashion, allowing me to pick up Jean, count acorns at Pozo, and make it to Sedgwick more or less on schedule by the end of Day 1.



*Yours truly, smiling again on Day 1 of the statewide survey after Kris Sottosanti and faithful dental assistant Sarra were kind enough to temporarily fix up the bridge that came apart in my*

*lower jaw the prior weekend. Unfortunately, this was clearly the start of what promises to be a long, expensive relationship with modern dentistry over the next year or so. Am I excited or what?*

The remainder of the survey took place fairly uneventfully, with the exception of Jean’s insistence that we listen to Rush Limbaugh in the mornings while driving to our first site. (Admittedly better than most of the alternatives, which were almost always religious stations.) If it hadn’t been my car, I would have considered disconnecting the radio. Otherwise, all went well. Thanks to old friends Brad & Louise for hosting us for two nights on Days 3 and 4, to Kathy Purcell and her SO Ken for feeding us and letting us stay at their fabulous haybale house in Coarsegold on Day 5, and to Hannah Bird and her crew for feeding me at Hopland on Day 8. Highlights included: getting what Jean and I decided

were the best tacos ever in Santa Barbara at a place just across from the recently moved Trader Joe’s on Milpas Street (see review below); clearing \$6.50 between the two of us on the slot machines at Cahuilla Casino; getting a good start with Brad Shaffer on a business model for the “All Rice & Beans” restaurant we plan to open after the money is taken away from basic research and all US institutions of higher learning are converted to Trump Hotels, perhaps in an Executive Order coming soon; driving 28.8 miles on Forest service road 7N23 on Liebre Mountain after having been advised by our local USFS colleague Vilnius that the western part of the road we use to get to our black oak site had washed out over the winter; finally abandoning the trees back by the river at Kaweah Oaks Preserve that have become all but inaccessible as the grapevines and brambles have overgrown them, replacing them with some nicer, easier-to-access trees next to one of the farther trails (yes, this is the kind of thing that counts as a big event for the *California Acorn Survey*); Lewis’s Woodpeckers flying overhead at Dye Creek; and finally, sparkling wine tasting at Scharffenberger Cellars in Anderson Valley followed by a hike through the redwoods at Hendy Woods State Park. At the end, we counted at Hopland the morning of Sept. 19<sup>th</sup> and hot-footed it back across the Golden Gate to Hastings after a brief stop at the taco truck in Hopland to finish up the survey, an even 2,439 miles later.

*I can’t claim to be much of a landscape photographer, but this year, with all the smoke up in the Sierras from various fires, the view from*



*the pullout on Wawona Road on our way to our Yosemite Valley trees was especially photogenic. Here it is in all its glory as Jean takes a selfie in the foreground.*

But there’s more! We still had Chews Ridge (which Jean and I did on Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>) and then Hastings, the latter of which we accomplished over the weekend along with Bill Carmen, who came down to defend his status as the official gin and tonic mixer of the *California Acorn Survey*. Saturday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> finally saw the last acorn counted, followed by the first annual pizza dinner up at “The Point” above our not-quite finished house on Tassajara Road. There are those close to me who wonder whether it will

ever end, and much to their surprise, the answer is yes. Twenty-four days and 16,822 acorns later, year 38 was a wrap. Which is not bad; in fact, it's the most acorns we've had since the 19,687 we counted in 2013. The record, by the way, was 2000, when we counted a grand total of 33,067 acorns; the worst year in the statewide survey so far was 2003, when we counted a measly 6,572. And now that you have me going, it turns out that the *California Acorn Survey* has counted a total of 516,353 acorns on 28,508 trees since its inception in 1980. We have a special prize to award the millionth acorn, by the way, so stay tuned.



*Yet another notable event was the retirement of the backpack we've been using to carry around the dendrometer equipment, which I finally threw out after one too many spare springs fell out of its many holes. It was originally Mark Stromberg's son Brian's high school backpack in the 1990s and came to us shortly after we fitted the Hastings trees with dendrometers in 1994. Thanks Mark!*

*Jani Lou (of the ravishing white hair), Bill Carmen, and Jean partake in the traditional closing banquet of the California Acorn Survey, this year serving the fabulous pizzas from Café Rustica in Carmel Valley Village and held up at "The Point" beyond our nearly-finished new house.*



## THE SURVEY REPORT, PT. 2

For the few hard-core acorn enthusiasts out there who are actually interested in the acorn crop and were misled into thinking they'd learn something about it from the title of this newsletter, here are a few details:

*Valley oak:* As already mentioned, it was a dismal year for the most part, with the exception of Kaweah Oaks in Visalia, which had its best year since 2004, and Malibu Creek State Park, where the trees were loaded. (Yes, we should have been doing this site from the beginning. Me bad.) The Hastings valley oaks had their worst year since 2005.

*Blue oak:* Highly variable. Of our 9 blue oak sites, 3 did quite poorly, 2 were moderate but not terrible,

and 4 were actually quite good, including Sedgwick, Kaweah River, and, oddly enough, San Joaquin Experiment Station, where blue oaks had their best year ever. Meanwhile, across the Central Valley at Hastings, blue oaks had their worst year ever. Clearly somebody needs to study this stuff someday. (Ooops; that would be us....)

*Coast live oak:* Except for the Santa Rosa Plateau, where these guys were pretty dismal, it was a respectable year—the first since 2011, at least at Hastings.

*California black oak:* After producing no acorns at Hastings for the last 2 years, black oaks had an OK crop. Our only site where they did well was Palomar State Park, where they tend to have a pretty good crop almost every year.

*Other species:* Canyon live oak did generally well throughout the state. Engelmann oak had a pretty dismal year down at the Santa Rosa Plateau, as did interior live oak with the exception of Hopland, where they did quite well. Our Oregon oaks up in Trinity County did well (again); since adding that site in 2002 there have only been 2 years (2005 and 2015) when they didn't have at least a good crop of acorns. Similarly, tanoaks had good crops at all 3 of our sites. This species, along with Oregon oaks, are the two that don't appear to really mast in any cogent way. Hopefully somebody will figure out why one of these days. (Hmm. I guess that's once again supposed to be us.)

*Jean counting acorns as the mist clears at Sedgwick on Day 2. Jean was the driving force behind starting the statewide survey in 1994 and has succeeded in carving out time to participate in it every year since with the exception of 2012,*



*when he was on sabbatical in China. For both of us, the main difficulty has been to schedule around the birthdays of our daughters, which is Sept. 8<sup>th</sup> (for Phoebe, now no longer expecting a party) and Sept. 14<sup>th</sup> (for Tillie). The former is now counting bees instead of acorns, while the latter hasn't decided what to count professionally as yet. (Think acorns, Tillie.)*

## THE PUBLISH OR PERISH REPORT

It's recently come to my attention that I've neglected this section since 2015. But what can I say? Being officially retired, it's no longer my responsibility to populate journals with my musings about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (with apologies

to Stan Freberg). On the other hand, I haven't quite figured out what else to do with myself, other than to go up and see if our house is finished yet and ride my bicycle to Cahoon Summit, so currently I'm still writing papers when I have the chance. Furthermore, former postdoc Ian, current postdoc Mario, grad student Kyle, Mary Ashley's group at the University of Illinois Chicago, and several amazing Spanish colleagues have done an outstanding job of picking up the slack I've succeeded in producing so far. So much so that we appear to have 16 papers since 2015 in journals ranging from the obscure-sounding, yet prestigious, *New Phytologist* (always one of my favorites) to the impressive-sounding, yet totally obscure, *International Oaks*, and covering topics from phenology to leaf miners to—(anyone? anyone?)...yes, you guessed it: acorns! You'll be relieved to know that I'm not going to discuss each of the papers in detail. Or even in brief. But each and every one is a classic, believe me. Feel free (or tree, as the case may be) to check them out at <http://pages.nbb.cornell.edu/wkoenig/wicker/CalAcornSurvey.html>.

#### THE TAQUERIA REPORT

We didn't start out with the goal of eating entirely at taquerias this year. And we didn't. But we came close. First up:

**Taqueria El Bajio, 129 N. Milpas, Santa Barbara**, where, as I've already mentioned, we had what may have been the best tacos *ever*. They weren't cheap: the tacos were \$3.99, twice the usual price, but were well worth it. They came on a hand-made tortilla with high-quality meat, and unlike standard tacos were topped with sour cream and avocado. I won't try to compare Jean's fish taco with those at Mi Tierra, which I consider to be unmatched, but my carné asada was without question the best I've had anywhere. We recommend searching out and eating at El Bajio as often as possible. **Rating: 5 tacos.**

*Jean signaling his approval of his fish taco while my carné asada awaits me at El Bajio on Day 2. Perhaps it was partly that Jean's been stuck eating Nebraskan food since last year, but we both would have been happy to have these guys deliver tacos to us throughout the remainder of the survey, if not the rest of our lives.*



The only problem with El Bajio was that the other places we visited during the survey all seemed decidedly mediocre. I think they were basically about as good as they always were; it's just that they paled in comparison to El Bajio. This included **Jilberto's** in Pauma Valley, where we ate lunch after counting at Palomar Mountain State Park on Day 3; **Roberta's Taqueria** in Williams, where we got sopes on Day 8 that needed avocado and some spicier peppers; and **Lalo's Mexican Food** in Hopland, the taco truck at the corner of 101 and Highway 175, where we had lunch on Day 9 before heading home. It definitely included **Waba Grill** in Castaic—a rice-bowl faux-Japanese fast-food chain that we ate at on Day 4—whose only apparent redeeming feature was that it was healthier than the In-N-Out Burger I was lobbying to go to instead.

So...was El Bajio the best taqueria in the world, or not? There was only one way to find out—head to Mexico, the cradle of tacodom. Fortunately, I had recently been invited to Mexico City by long-time friend and new subscriber to the *California Acorn Report* Hugh Drummond and his SO Sylvia. Hugh and Sylvia live in a fabulously Mexican house in Coyoacan (home of the Frida Kahlo museum) and work at UNAM, teaching its nearly 350,000 students (!) about blue-footed booby behavior (Hugh), collaborative learning (Sylvia), and presumably oaks, since along with tacos, Mexico is indisputably the cradle of oak geographical ecology.

Mexico City was fabulous, and not only because of the tacos. It was great to meet Tom Pizarri, who studies how chickens count acorns (or something like that; I may have gotten the details mixed up), and get to see Rob Raguso, a chemical ecologist from my very own Department of Neurobiology and Behavior back at Cornell, both of whom were visiting and are now among the new subscribers to the *California Acorn Report*, no doubt much to their dismay. But even more importantly, I got to check out Mexican taquerias. Well, two of them, at least. (How many are there? Apparently nobody has counted. But here's my best estimate: Mexico City is 573 square miles in size, and I wouldn't be surprised if there were 100 taquerias per square mile, which leaves me with 57,298 to go. So, if I go back and sample two a day, 365 days a year, I should be able to provide a complete report on all of them by 2097, which, coincidentally, will be the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *California Acorn Report*. Don't miss it—it'll be a keeper, believe me.) In any case, here's a review of two of them:

**Taqueria Dos Damas, División Del Norte Metro Station.** Like a majority of small taquerias in Mexico, this one didn't appear to have a name, but is simply plopped down on the sidewalk in the vicinity of a site where people wander by. In any case, these two charming ladies seemed to have a good thing going, and since it was approximately lunch time, I squeezed in between several other patrons and ordered sopes. Actually, I tried to order one sope, but apparently that's not possible, and I was given 3, along with a Mexican coke, all for about \$2. And yes, they were good, and needless to say, authentically Mexican. The tortillas were handmade (actually, pretty much every tortilla in Mexico is handmade), the meat was great, the service was cheerful, and the price was right. What more could



you ask for?

**Rating: 4 tacos.**

*I failed to get their names, but these gals outside the División Del Norte Metro Station made wicked sopes*

*and were having a great time to boot. In fact, just about everybody seemed to be having a good time in Mexico, perhaps because they are not currently being led by a narcissistic moron of a president. We should be so lucky.*

**Chez Hugh y Sylvia, 2da. Cda. de Omega 124, Pedregal de San Francisco, Mexico, D. F.** No, it's not a taqueria, but I have to include Chez Hugh y Sylvia, who generously put up with me during my largely self-indulgent visit to Mexico City. They



also provided several excellent dinners, starting with the *sope de papa con chorizo* on the left and the *cazuelita* on the right cooked up by Isa, their live-in helper, early in my trip and here displayed by Sylvia prior to consumption. As Hugh pointed out, we probably get stuff

somewhat like this in California, but for some reason it never tastes as authentic as it does in Mexico.

**Rating: 5 tacos and two shots of mezcal.**

## THE HASTINGS UPDATE

Acorn Woodpecker activities continue to occupy much of Hastings, coordinated mostly by my former postdoc Eric and his crew from Old Dominion University while I spend my time preparing for the acorn count, riding my bicycle up to Cahoon Summit, and getting my weekly manicure. I do, however, occasionally still preside over a Field List Party, the most notable of which included this record-breaking one with 10 of us on July 7<sup>th</sup>. Clockwise from the left: Mickey, Rob, Sahas, Toni, Sarah, Hana, Paula, Eric, Natasha, et moi. Keep up the good work, guys, and remember: don't fall.



And that's it for the 2017 *California Acorn Report*. At least for the moment, our editorial office remains:

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*The California Acorn Survey, founded in 1980, is an international organization dedicated to the understanding of acorn production by Californian, and sometimes a few other, oaks. Names and years of service include*

Ron Mumme, Meadville, PA (1980-83)  
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