

RANCHO DEL OSO
3600 California Highway 1
Davenport
Santa Cruz County
California

HALS CA-102
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

RANCHO DEL OSO

HALS NO. CA-102

Location: 3600 California Highway 1, Davenport, Santa Cruz County, California

Rancho Del Oso is located at the mouth of Waddell Creek inland of Highway 1, 17 miles north of Santa Cruz. It is part of Big Basin State Park.

Latitude: 37.09755, Longitude: -122.27425 (the Rancho del Oso Nature and History Center front door, NAD 1983, 30 feet elevation, circular error 7 feet).

Significance: Waddell Valley, Rancho Del Oso, was the property of Theodore Jesse Hoover (1871-1955), brother of Herbert Hoover, the 31st President of the United States, and his family. Theodore Hoover's wife, Mildred Crew Brooke Hoover (1872-1940), was the first author of *Historic Spots in California: Counties of the Coast Range* (1937), later expanded with additional authors to cover the entire state. The family home of her daughter Hulda Hoover McLean (1906-2006) and her husband, Charles (Chuck) Alexander McLean (1906-1981) is now the Rancho del Oso Nature and History Center, a portion of Big Basin State Park. Hulda Hoover McLean was a Stanford University graduate, author, painter, farmer, naturalist, mother and wife, member of the Board of Supervisors for Santa Cruz County (1956-1963) and past president of the California League of Women Voters (Reese 1997, McLean 2002, Rogers 2012).

Description: Rancho Del Oso is located in the valley of Waddell Creek Waddell Creek empties into the Pacific Ocean just south of the Waddell Bluffs, a well-known landmark south of Año Nuevo State Park and the San Mateo County Line.

The Rancho is now owned by California State Parks, except for a portion of land still owned and managed by the Hoover Ranch Property Owners Association, founded by Hulda's and her sister Mindy's children. Some of the privately owned land is rented to organic tenant farmers (McLean 2002).

There is a parking lot on the west side of California Highway 1, which accommodates hikers, wind surfers and other visitors. Waddell Beach is famous kiteboarding and wind surfing beach.

Additional parking can be found at the Nature and History Center and the equestrian center near the lower Park Office on the north side of Waddell Creek. The equestrian center and park office occupy the area of the complex of farm buildings designed by Roy Heath. The buildings were razed after the land was sold to the state.

The Nature and History Center is located on the south side of Waddell Creek, and is reached by a short, unpaved road. Hiking and trail riding are also popular activities at Rancho Del Oso and Big Basin State Park. The best known trail is the Skyline to the Sea Trail, which starts at Castle Rock State Park, on the crest of the Santa Cruz Mountains, extending through Big Basin State Park and ending at California Highway 1 on the north side of Waddell Creek (California State Parks 2013a).

The Nature and History Center opened July 15, 1986 in the Casita, the ranch-style home built in 1971 by Hulda and Chuck McLean. The Center was renovated and reopened in April 2012 (Rogers 2012). The house is built around a central courtyard. Part of it is maintained as a residence for rangers. It is in very good physical condition.

History: Originally the home of Coastanoan Indians, Waddell Valley was the campsite of the Portolá expedition of 1769, which was searching for a sheltered anchorage in Monterey Bay. The expedition missed the bay, and continued up the coast to this location, where they rested. Soldiers suffering from scurvy made a miraculous recovery, possibly after eating manzanita berries. Their camp was called Cañada de la Salud (Hoover 1937). The expedition marched on and eventually discovered San Francisco Bay. Realizing they had passed Monterey Bay, the expedition turned back.

Waddell Valley and Creek are named for William Waddell (1818-1875), who built a sawmill and a tramway to transport lumber to his wharf at the mouth of the creek in the 1860s. Waddell died from grizzly bear-afflicted injuries. After his death, the mill fell into disrepair, and a number of people used the land for grazing and farming.

The Waddell Valley property was purchased in 1913, by Theodore Hoover, older brother of Herbert Hoover, 31st President of the United States. Theodore first saw the property in 1898 as a student at Stanford, and “fell in love with the Waddell Valley” (McLean 2002:12). He decided he would purchase the land some day. After the purchase, Mildred Crew Brooke Hoover, his wife, cabled instructions from London where the family was based, for a house to be built of redwood in the valley (The Brown House), and in 1914, Mildred moved there with their three children, Mildred (Mindy) Brook Hoover, Hulda Brooke Hoover and Louise Brooke Hoover. Theodore, a mining engineer was in Burma on assignment (McLean 2002).

The family lived at Rancho Del Oso until 1917 when the family moved to Palo Alto so the girls could attend school, but the family returned to the ranch on the weekends. Theodore began teaching at Stanford in 1919 and became dean of the school of engineering from 1925 until 1936, when he retired. After Theodore Hoover retired, he and Mildred Hoover lived in a newer house built in 1925, the

Casa, until they passed away: Mildred in 1940 and Theodore in 1955 (McLean 2002).

Because Theodore Hoover was in ill health after Mildred's death, Hulda and Chuck moved back to Rancho del Oso in 1943 to help run the farm. In 1975, concerned that she and her sister's families could not honor their father's intention to keep the land undeveloped, Hulda Hoover McLean and her sisters sold 1600 acres of the 3000 acre Rancho Del Oso to California State Parks, in a deal brokered by the Sempiverens Fund. It opened as Rancho Del Oso State Park. In 1978 Rancho Del Oso was added to Big Basin State Park. After her husband's death, In 1985, Hulda sold the Casita to Sempivrens Fund to be used as a nature center (McLean 2002). The remainder of the land, with the Brown House and Green Cottage, is in family ownership

The Brown House, the Hoover's first family home at Rancho Del Oso, was constructed in 1914. The Green Cottage (1913) was originally the cheese house. The Farm House (1917-1994) was constructed as part of the farming complex by Theodore's cousin, Roy Heath, and the complex was later razed by State Parks. This is the current location of the equestrian center. The Casa (1925-1959) was the home of Theodore and Mildred Hoover. It burned in 1959. The Casita was built by Chuck and Hulda Hoover McLean (1971). In 1976, La Cabaña was built near La Casita (McLean 2012). The Casita is on state property and became the Rancho del Oso Nature and History Center, recently remodeled (2012), and open to the public Saturday and Sunday afternoons (Rogers 2012).

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2013 HALS Challenge Entry: *Documenting the Cultural Landscapes of Women*



Rancho Del Oso Nature and History Center. Front entrance at double doors on deck. (Mary A. Gerbic, 05/25/2013).



Rancho Del Oso Nature and History Center, interior exhibits, with original fireplace and Hulda Hoover McLean's watercolors (background). (Mary A. Gerbic, taken 05/25/2013).



View from Rancho Del Oso Nature and History Center front deck, view west to Waddell Beach, and the Pacific Ocean. (Mary A. Gerbic, taken 05/25/2013).