

How Berkeley Took to the Hills

The founders of the University of California knew they'd lucked upon the most beautiful site in the world, better than the Italian lakes and closer in spirit to the Olympian home of the gods. Poet Joaquin Miller agreed. "It sits in the lap of huge emerald hills, and in the heart of a young forest," Miller wrote in 1886, "with little mountain streams bawling and tumbling about; wild oats up to your waist in the playgrounds and walks, and a sense of largeness and strength grander than I ever felt in and about any university before."¹

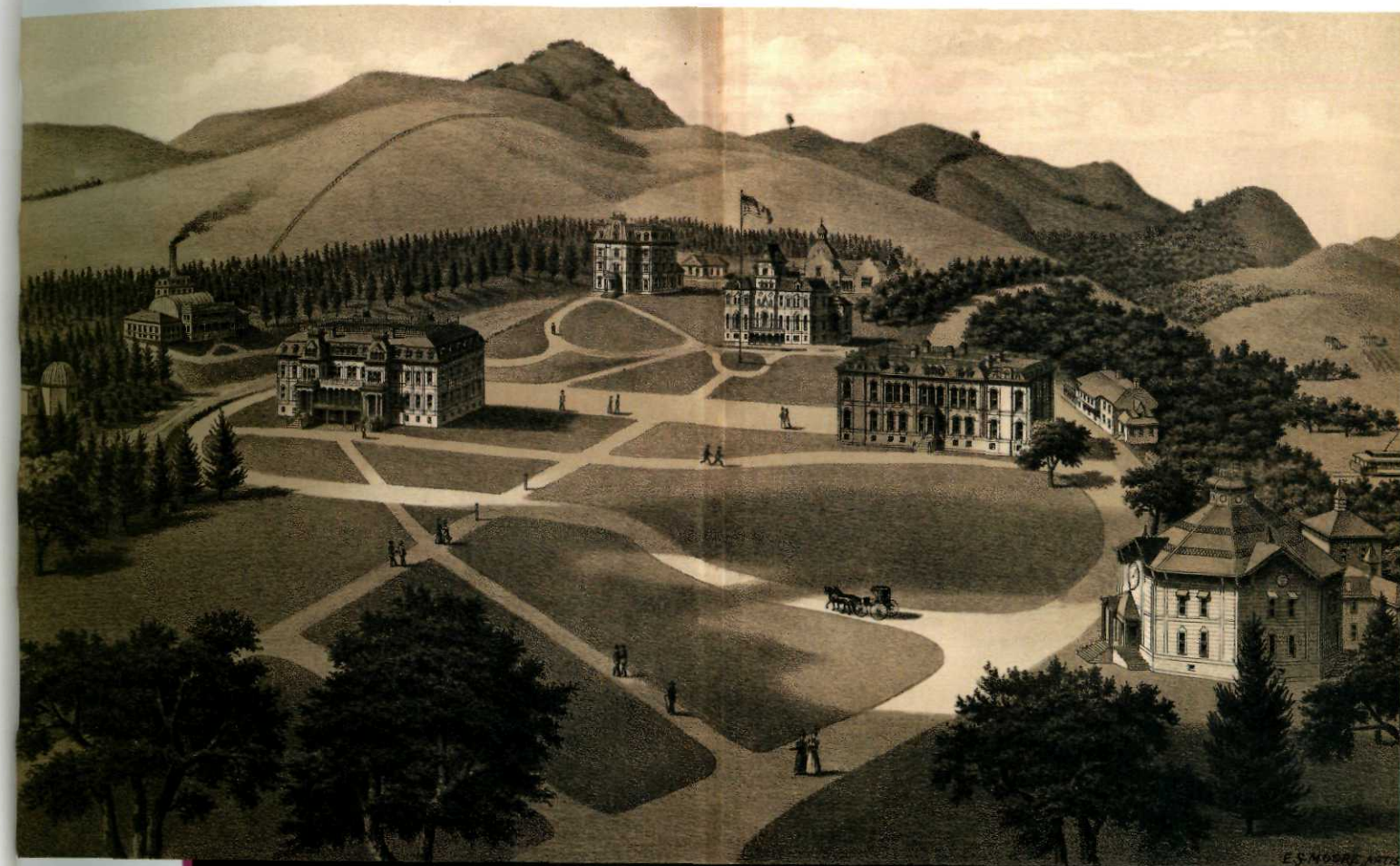
And every house built in the town's upper reaches, residents bragged, had a view through the Golden Gate. Berkeleyans could sit on their porches and watch buildings going up in San Francisco. The Berkeley Hills were wilderness. Bears roamed and salmon spawned in Strawberry Creek.

No one considering the history of Berkeley can ignore the hills—because nothing had as much effect on the city's development nor on its social and cultural life than the hills. Without the hills, Berkeley would never have become Berkeley—a town that glories in the beauty of its wilderness and in wilderness everywhere.

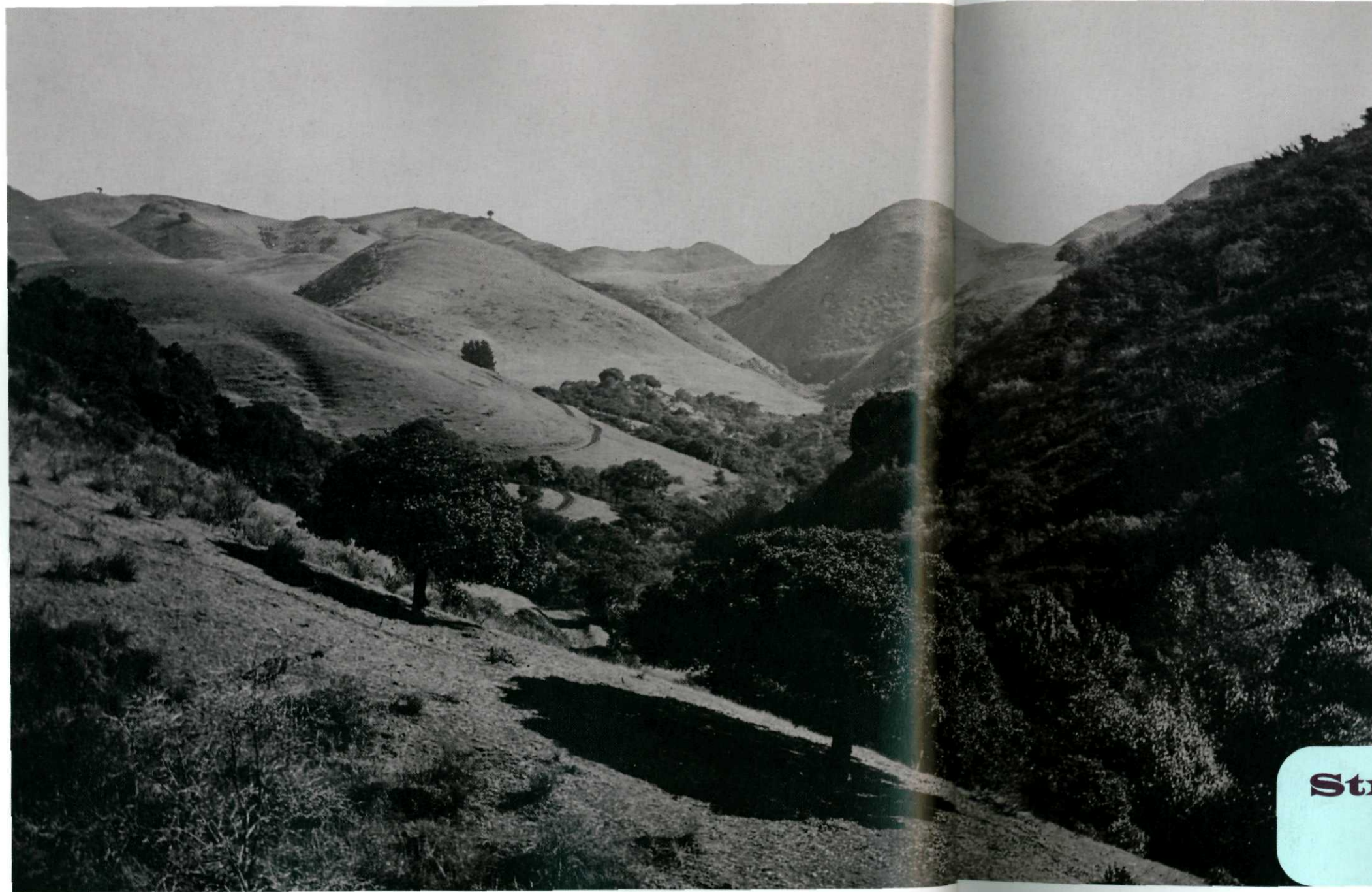
Berkeley became a city of hikers. Cornelius Beach Bradley described some favorite hikes in the 1898 book *A Berkeley Year*. "The quiet saunter up Strawberry Canyon, the long afternoon ramble over the hills to Orinda Park, the all-day tramp by the Fish Ranch to Redwood Canon and Maraga Peak, or more strenuous still, the cross-country trip to Diablo."²

Twenty years later, the lively coed Agnes Edwards headed for the hills whenever she could. "I don't think there's another place in the world where you can see so many different kinds of scenery," she wrote her folks. "The Bay is all spread out before us, the hills rise out of our yards almost, and altho' we're within an hour's distance of as citified a city as you could want, in ten minutes walk we can get so far from civilization that we'd never know we were near a city."³

Perhaps nothing—not Bohemianism, free speech, citizen activism, spirituality, nor good food—defines Berkeley so much as its beauty, which attracted the men who first made up the faculty and the poets, artists, architects, business people, real estate developers, and scientists who followed. In 1903, when President Teddy Roosevelt came to speak during commencement, the university's beloved president, Benjamin Ide Wheeler, invited him to gallop on horseback through the hills. Over the years, Berkeley's thinkers did their thinking



1887: The early campus got much of its character from the wild hillside that provided more than a touch of wilderness—including bears. From *Illustrated Album of Alameda County, California* by Jos. Alex Colquhoun. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center of the San Francisco Public Library.



while walking in the hills—none more so than physicists Ernest Lawrence and Robert Oppenheimer. It was on these strolls that they hashed out details for Berkeley's biggest contribution to history, the atomic bomb.

William Keith, perhaps Berkeley's finest painter and certainly its most successful, walked every day through a forest of campus oaks on the way to the ferry and his San Francisco studio. Many of those oaks turned up later in paintings of the Sierra. The Sierra Nevada itself was no stranger to Keith. He hiked there often with his friend John Muir.⁴

Thanks to Muir, Professor Joseph Le Conte and his son, Professor Little Joe, as well as biblical scholar William Badè and other Berkeleyans who helped found the Sierra Club, the Sierra became a Berkeley outpost, with locals like Bill Colby leading trekkers on month-long stays, complete with mules and slabs of bacon.

Colby recalled one of those trips with Little Joe. "Joe bought a mule and it was black. He called it Blackie. And before he got through with his trips, that mule was white—perfectly white. Everybody said that Joe would take the mule up to the top of a pass and put his head over the edge. When the mule looked down and saw where he had to go, he got so frightened that it scared him white."⁵

Another Berkeley mountain man was artist and professor Worth Ryder, who introduced modern art to Berkeley in the 1920s, later bringing in the abstractionist Hans Hofmann. But Ryder preferred the outdoors. "There is something primordial in the joy it gives me," he wrote of the Sierra. "Standing naked and alone in the wilderness, facing the sun and the wind. And such a wind it is. Hurrying across vast untrodden spaces, ozoned by fragrant forests, and cooled by crystal ice fields. It ripples across my back like joyous laughter."⁶

Strawberry Canyon

was dotted with live oaks and chaparral when the university was young. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

In 1998, the city council stopped providing the Sea Scouts with a free berth at the Berkeley Marina for its training vessel because of the Boy Scouts' policy against gays. The local scout organization was fine with gays—it was the first in the country to defy the Scouts' ban on gay members—but not the national. And that was enough for Berkeley.

From the early 1970s, Berkeley became a welcoming place for lesbians in the know, who flocked to several bars and restaurants mostly south of campus and in North Oakland. The Brick Hut, originally "two booths and five stools at the counter," began as a nine-woman co-op across from the Ashby BART station and was immortalized as the cover shot on an album by singer Mary Watkins.

Known for the community it created as well as for its food—fans happily waited two hours for breakfast—the Brick Hut moved to San Pablo Avenue near Dwight in the 1990s, adding to that neighborhood's reputation as a mini-gay district. Soon, at the suggestion of Brick Hut's owners, a woman's bookstore opened a branch store alongside Good Vibrations, which sold sex toys. Lesbians and gays, some moving from the city, bought up homes near San Pablo Park in what was largely a black neighborhood. Some called it "Girl Town."

When the Brick Hut went bankrupt in 1997, people mourned.

How Berkeley Indians Rallied 'Round Their Sacred Ground

The Huchiun people and their kin lived for four thousand years along Berkeley's shoreline and creeks, and

among its oak groves. But the Europeans who followed did what they could to remove their traces. Wilhemine Bolsted Cianciarulo, who grew up in West Berkeley during the 1880s and '90s, remembers seeing shellmounds just past Second Street, by "a beautiful beach of white sand."

"When the mounds were removed to make way for the present-day factories, many Indian skeletons, stone utensils, and arrowheads were found," she wrote. "The gruesome things were given to our University for study."¹

About 425 shellmounds—up to nine meters high and 183 meters in diameter—once dotted the Bay Area, many along the shore or alongside creeks or estuaries, Cal archeologist Nels Nelson determined in the early twentieth century. Even then, they were disappearing quickly, thanks to development, despoilment, and mining. In 1909, Nelson observed, "Not a single mound of any size is left in its absolutely pristine condition."²

Ads in the *Berkeley Gazette* offered phosphate-rich material from an "Indian burial mound," "one of the finest of fertilizers."

In the early days, archeologists regretted the loss of important historical sites. Places where Indians lived and worked revealed what little we know about the Bay Area's original ancestors—that, plus some revealing reports left by the Spanish padres and soldiers who had cajoled and often corralled the local tribes into moving to the Missions. Thousands of Mission Indians died of diseases imported by their Spanish overseers.

The mounds revealed what the Indians ate (shellfish, immense sturgeon, harbor seals, birds, elk, and deer), what

Remains of a Native American inhabitant discovered in a shellmound. Courtesy of the Berkeley Historical Society.



tools they used (stone pestles, mortars, drills, axes, hammers, knives, and arrowheads), how they dressed, and how they were buried. The mounds also showed that Indians engaged in trade over hundreds of miles with fellow tribes.

Besides the shellmounds, the Berkeley Hills are dotted with Indian sites—including Indian Rock and Mortar Rock, two parks that contain deeply incised mortars used by Indians for grinding acorns.

The university emerged early on as a leading center for Indian studies. Besides Nelson and his fellow archeologists, anthropologist Alfred Kroeber catalogued the state's Indians in his *Handbook of the Indians of California*, and befriended Ishi, last of the Yahi Indians. Kroeber's wife, Theodora, immortalized Ishi in her popular book *Ishi in Two Worlds*. Berkeley researchers have also helped record, preserve, and teach Californian Indian languages.

But it wasn't until Native Americans got involved with preserving their ancient culture that things heated up. For the Indians, preservation was more than an academic matter; it was about their ancestors and their culture.

Efforts in the late 1990s to build a shopping center in West Berkeley were fought by Native American activists and preservationists from the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association. In 2000, the city landmarked the site, which was buried beneath a parking lot near Spenger's Restaurant.

Scientists had fueled the preservationists' efforts by focusing on shellmounds not as mere "trash dumps" but as important sites for ceremonies, dances, and political meetings. Some, according to Edward Luby, Clayton Drescher, and Kent Lightfoot (a Cal anthropologist) were "mounded villages" built atop centuries of animal bones, shells—and human remains.

"They deserve our respect and our protection," Lightfoot said

of the shellmounds, "as places where the first people in the Bay Area lived and died."³ Lightfoot, an anthropologist, served as curator of the university's Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology.

Activists also demanded that the university return to their descendants the hundreds of remains that had been excavated earlier in the century from the mounds.

In 2006, when the university decided to build an athletic training center next to Memorial Stadium, some Indian activists and environmentalists fought the project by camping out in a grove of live oaks that stood in the way. "They want to build a gym where my ancestors are buried," said Zachary Running-Wolf, a Native American who had recently run for mayor.⁴ University officials argued that there was no convincing evidence of Native American burials at the site.

Efforts to save about forty oaks—one of them hundreds of years old, the rest planted after the stadium was built in

1923—attracted Country Joe McDonald, the California Oak Foundation, councilwoman Betty Olds, and the ninety-one-year-old Sylvia McLaughlin—who had helped save the bay half a century before and soon found herself perched in a tree—along with a gaggle of tree-sitters who turned the grove into a treehouse city.

Oak lovers, who included a girl named Lizard, a guy named Aquaman, and Doctress Neutopia, were soon chanting

2006: A mural portraying Huchiun Ohlone Indians was created by artist John Wehrle at University Avenue and Fourth Street, across from one of Berkeley's largest shellmounds, whose remains are hidden by the parking lot at Spenger's Restaurant. Courtesy of John Wehrle.

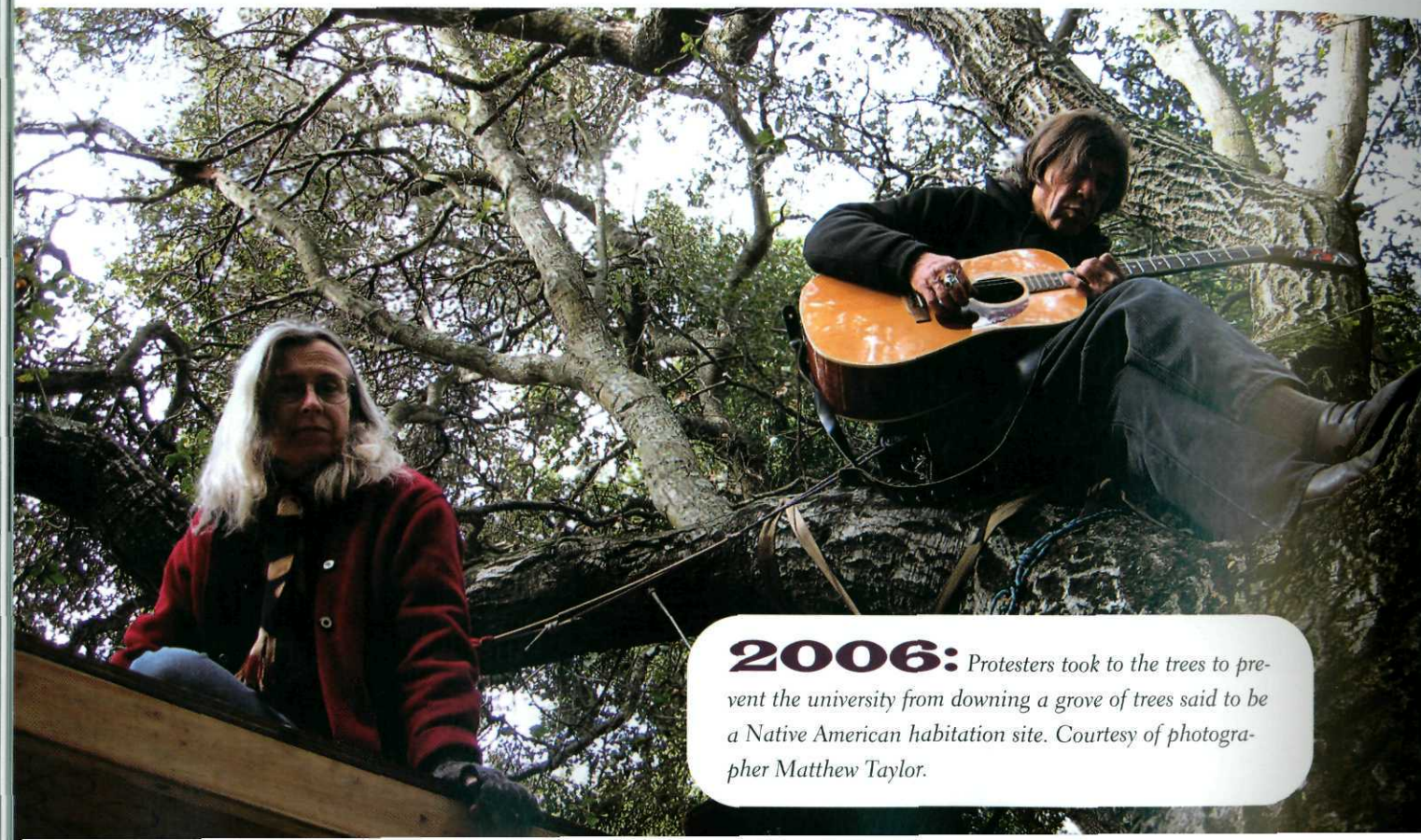


“om” while doing “the spiral dance,” staring each other in the eyes all the while. “Before you leave,” Aquaman told a reporter, “spend some time with the trees and really get to know them.” Even nudes scrambled up. “I never turn down a chance to take off my clothes,” said Debbie Moore, a founder of the X-plicit Players.⁵

The university, which vowed to plant three trees for every one it downed, fenced the grove off for Homecoming, when thousands of football fans from Tennessee padded past. Many enjoyed the tree-sitters. Others were aghast. “This wouldn’t happen in Tennessee,” Marcus Hilliard told a reporter. “No, ma’am.”⁶

Places

A mural by John Wehrle shows Berkeley’s Huchium people; it’s across from the shellmound buried beneath Spengers’ parking lot. Indian and Mortar Rock parks in the Berkeley Hills preserve mortars used to grind acorns. The Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology on campus has a vast collection of artifacts and human remains excavated in the East Bay.



2006: Protesters took to the trees to prevent the university from downing a grove of trees said to be a Native American habitation site. Courtesy of photographer Matthew Taylor.

How Berkeley Turned Green

In 2005, the owners of Power Bar came up with a great way to celebrate Berkeley’s commitment to the environment—a 350,000-pound blue quartzite sculpture showing Berkeley-born-and-bred David Brower, a longtime Sierra Club director and Earth First founder.

Mayor Tom Bates liked it but no one else did. “The notion of a white man astride the globe and reaching for the stars,” Richard Brenneman wrote, “evoked images of imperialism for many critics.”¹

The statue may have been deep-sixed, but not so the David Brower Center. The center, “a hub for progressive activism,” provided offices for environmental groups, an auditorium and conference center, and a restaurant devised with the help of Alice Waters, who served “affordable organic food harvested from local farms.”²

Berkeley’s environmental roots run deep—at least to John Muir, through the involvement of Berkeleyans with the Sierra Club and state and national parks, and through the work of Brower, who pioneered a militant anti-growth stance.

Berkeley pioneered curbside recycling, thanks to the non-profit Ecology Center in 1973, one of the first curbside collections in the country. Businesses that rescued trash from landfills by converting it into collectibles formed a mini-green business district in West Berkeley.

Berkeley was perhaps the first city in the country to ban the use of Styrofoam containers by restaurants or vendors of take-

out food. The 1989 ordinance also banned other ozone-depleting compounds.

In the first decade of the 2000s, when global warming emerged as a threat, Berkeley became one of the first cities in the nation to power a building (the Shorebird Nature Center) with a wind turbine. The city soon required residents to build with green materials and to cut back on packaging, and advised them to take the bus. Plans were underway to subsidize residential solar panels.

Achieving the city’s goal—reducing greenhouse gases by 80 percent—might prove expensive and even painful, said Cisco DeVries, who helped devise the plans. “But if Berkeley’s niche isn’t leadership on this issue, then what is it?”³

But it was up the hill, at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, that the most ambitious work was taking place. Lab director Steven Chu, a Nobelist in physics, mounted a campaign against impending global catastrophe with the same urgency that motivated Cal scientists sixty years before when they raced to develop the atom bomb.

The campaign against global warming developed along several fronts, including developing biofuels to replace petroleum—without generating additional carbon pollution or decreasing the world’s food supply by turning cropland into fuel farms. Another, one close to Chu’s heart, focused on solar energy.

Organizationally, too, the effort was varied. Cal reached a deal with the oil giant British Petroleum and the University of

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