



Brewery Gulch Inn

HISTORY OF BREWERY GULCH INN

Brewery Gulch Inn is intimately tied to the history, the land, and characters of early Mendocino.

In 1850 a ship from China bound for San Francisco loaded with silks and tea ran aground several miles north of present-day Mendocino. Instead of finding booty from the Orient, the group dispatched from the logging camp at Bodega Bay to recover the cargo and found instead virgin redwood forests. San Francisco lumberman and entrepreneur Harry Meiggs reacted quickly to this news and built a sawmill on the headland in summer 1852. When it was damaged during a winter storm, he erected a second one on the sheltered Big River, just east of modern Highway One.

Logging in Mendocino in the 1800s depended on the Big River for transporting giant redwood trees to the mill. Most of the logging occurred during the summer when the river was not strong enough to float the logs to the mill. Twenty-six dams were built on the river, and behind each dam was built a log “deck.” As this stack got higher its weight pushed the lowest ones deeper into the silt. When the rains came, they opened the dams and floated all but the sinkers to the mill. These “sinkers” were just waiting to be discovered.

Another major character of the area, Homer Barton, was fresh from the California gold fields when he arrived in Mendocino in 1854. While panning for gold, he realized that it was the merchants, not the miners, who were getting rich. He envisioned becoming boomtown Mendocino’s major food supplier. Barton financed his enterprise with profits earned from being one of the first drivers of oxen teams used to drag the redwood logs to the Big River. With the pick of the land, Barton established the first real farm in Mendocino County to which he later added a successful dairy and brewery. Legend has it that the reason the trees in this area weren’t cut is that the loggers were afraid that the felled wood might add tannic acid to the water and ruin the beer’s flavor. Protected from the coastal winds, blessed with water, and a favorable micro-climate, Barton found the site perfect for growing a wide variety of vegetables and fruits, ferrying the produce across Big River daily.

Over a century later, during a construction project on a nearby bridge, the “sinker” logs were found deeply settled in the silt. The perfectly preserved 100-150 year old logs ranged up to 16 feet in diameter. These eco-salvaged, virgin-growth “guiltless redwood” has been used as a major component in the construction of Brewery Gulch Inn. The location, part of Barton’s original farm, has water views and abuts hundreds of acres of unoccupied meadow and state protected forests

Beauty abounds on Brewery Gulch Inn’s three acre site that includes many species of native plants. The favorable micro-climate that made Barton’s farm thrive is also responsible for the lush two acre woodland garden with its variety of rhododendrons and ferns which form the backdrop to a beautiful wetlands restoration project.

Visitors to Brewery Gulch Inn will find a property and owner that both respects and celebrates its history.