

RIDERS *of the* ALISAL

PUBLISHED WHENEVER A LITTLE CORRAL DUST NEEDS KICKIN' AROUND



We Just Lost an Old Friend...

Early on the morning of June 23 at approximately 7:00 a.m., our Bell Captain, Alejo, was walking past the stately old sycamore tree just outside the front office when something caught his eye. He noticed a bright orange spot about four feet up from the base of the tree where a piece of bark had recently broken off. What Alejo saw was of immediate concern. There was a significant crack from the place where the bark broke and all the way to the base of the tree. Because of the size of the tree and the horizontal angle at which this tree had been growing for many years, this was not something to ignore.

Alejo urged other front office employees to look at the tree and everyone agreed with his concern. A short three hours after the original crack was observed, the crack had grown from ¼ inch in width to a size where we could now place our fingers inside the tree. That's when the alarms sounded. An immediate telephone call to our arborist, followed by an e-mailed

cell phone picture, confirmed our worst fear – this grand old sycamore tree was in danger of falling. Many years earlier, a hollowed-out portion of the trunk had been filled with concrete, so we have had reason to believe a steady decomposition of the tree from the inside could have been taking place for some time. By mid-day, the crack had travelled laterally and extended into the hollowed-out portion of the trunk.

Pacific Tree, who has performed virtually all of the maintenance on the Alisal trees for decades, was on the scene by early afternoon ready to start the unthinkable – take the tree down. This would be no ordinary achievement because of both the girth and height of the tree. Based on the rapid expansion of the crack, we started to think the tree might not remain upright through the remainder of the day. As soon as the Pacific Tree crew arrived, they hoisted themselves up into the tree and began to relieve some of the weight that was clearly the primary cause of the strain on the trunk. Within a couple hours and after thousands of pounds of tree had been removed, the crack stopped growing and the sycamore tree seemed to be stable – at least for the time being.

Three full days later and after lots of noise, dust and disruption to the normally quiet Alisal setting, the sycamore tree was completely down. What was of great interest to Alisal employees was how many guests were enthralled by the tree removal operation and their desire to take a piece of the historic sycamore tree home with them. The tree crew, who probably does not work in front of such an interested audience very often, was extremely gracious in cutting sycamore keepsakes for the guests who requested them. Though this was an act of nature over which we had no control, the Alisal would still like to thank all of our guests who endured the disruption of the tree removal operation and were not able to walk or drive past the tree in the usual manner. All were very gracious in the way they dealt with this unfortunate interruption.

So, the next time you drive up to the Alisal front office, see if you notice something different. The sycamore tree that had served the Alisal so well in its sentinel role for many years is no longer with us. What will we raise up to take its place? That is now the question.

