



There's a new monument at the top of Chili Bar, overlooking the South Fork of the American River on Highway 193 south of Kelsey. The plaque on the rock marker recognizes the property as Wildman Hill, gives a brief history of former owner, Clifton Wildman, and how the land came to be preserved by the American River Conservancy.

But the backstory of Wildman Hill has generations-long twists and turns, much like the road to Placerville, eventually leading to good fortune for a family and a greater good for the future.

In the late 1800s, Martin Heatlie's grandfather Clifton Wildman, a mining engineer, came to California in search of gold. He settled in Placerville but when the mining jobs played out, he ran for the office of El Dorado County Surveyor. He was elected in 1912 and began the major project of surveying the present route of Highway 193 from the Chili Bar river crossing to Kelsey. He selected the route to avoid horses being spooked by an overhead cableway about 200 feet to the west that carried slate shingles from a quarry in Kelsey to Placerville.

In the following decades, Wildman and all four of his children left the area and the family's connection to the land seemed to have come to an end until serendipity intervened in the form of Martin Heatlie.

According to the history provided by Sierra Cascade Land and Trust Heatlie, who was born and raised in the Bay Area, was driving through Placerville in 1967 and stopped at the side of Highway 193 to take a walk through a stretch of open land.

"I heard the sound of running water and came upon a beautiful waterfall and knew at once that this was a very special place," recalled Heatlie. It was so special that he made a point of bringing his wife to see the area along the South Fork of the American River.

Not long after, Heatlie overheard a colleague at work describing a piece of property he owned and wanted to sell. Heatlie immediately recognized this as the place he had stumbled upon during his hike. At this time, Heatlie's mother and aunt were looking to move out of the Bay Area to a warmer climate and this was the perfect opportunity so. Together with his mother,

aunt and cousins, Heatlie purchased the 233-acre parcel, which includes over a half-mile of both sides of the river, in 1969. During the purchasing process, the family discovered the connection between Highway 193 and Heatlie's grandfather and named the property Wildman Hill.

In 2006, after his mother and aunt passed on, Heatlie and the surviving owners decided to sell the property for the American River Conservancy to protect as wildlife habitat and open space. Funding for the purchase was provided by the State of California Natural Resources Agency River Parkways Grant Program. The property was then conveyed by donation to the Bureau of Land Management.

Describing this decision, Heatlie said, "Although the sale was at a much lower price than we could have sold it for, I am thrilled to have done this. I know my mother, aunt, and grandfather would be pleased."

The plaque declares that through this selfless act, the property will remain true to its name: wild and replete with expansive views of the open country for all to enjoy. And in memory of Clifton, his wife Lucy and their four children, it is the wish that this property continues to be known as "Wildman Hill."

According to Get Off Your Gass, once a series of booklets written by Tom Peterson and now a website with over 300 pages of hiking trails and detailed, hand-drawn maps, the entrance to the Wildman Hill trails is located at the first of two locked gates on the right going towards Placerville. The right trail is steeper and drops with switchbacks to the river at its confluence with Kelsey Creek. The left trail is an old but still steep road that winds its way

down to the river closer to Chili Bar. A great ditch trail connects the other trails along the river. But you may want to wait until spring to try this hike as the bottom section of the Wildman Hill trail is now closed due to a property dispute.

For updates on the closure, go to Peterson's site getoffyourgass.com and choose Wildman Hill under the Favorite Trails and Pages. But while you're there, choose another hike that's accessible now, and like Peterson says, Get Off Your Gass!

https://www.gtgazette.com/lifestyles/entertainment/meg-s-meanderings-memorial-marks-wildman-hill-history/article_b3733922-738d-11ee-9bbd-3f625a8dc32a.html