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# MIDDLE MOUNTAIN INTERPRETIVE HIKES

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Image Adopted from Thompson & West History of Sutter County 1879

SPRING 2023

## President's Message

# Why Hike in the Sutter Buttes?

BY GREG PAYNE

Maybe I should rephrase that and say: "Why do people want to hike in the Sutter Buttes?" There are several answers to that. Perhaps the most common answer is "curiosity." I have been hiking in the Buttes for close to ten years now, and at the beginning of the hike when the guide asks why each person signed up for a hike in the Buttes, someone in the group will say: "I've been driving past the Sutter Buttes on Highway 99 (or 20) for the last (pick a number) years, and I have always wondered what was here." This small collection of volcanic peaks rising to over 2100 feet in elevation stands out in the middle of the very flat Sacramento Valley. It is only natural that people wonder about it.

Many of our hikers are returnees. For some, hiking is a way to exercise. The hike to the summit of North Butte will definitely get your heart rate up. A more challenging hike would be Tres Picos, where the first destination is to the top of North Butte followed by a climb up two lesser peaks called Old Man and Pigeon Peak. On a different property, "Brockman Challenge," speaks for itself. Any hike rated 5 or 6 boots will be good for the "serious" hiker. For others looking for a place to hike in the winter or spring when the high mountains are covered with snow, visiting the Sutter Buttes is an option.



Photo by Greg Payne

Some of our hikers return to see the different properties and the different terrain they offer. The Shaeffer Ranch hikes are on two ridges that are part of the lava flows from the volcanoes. On Dean Place you find yourself in a valley surrounded by peaks such as North Butte and Old Man. You hike through groves of oaks, cross creeks, or climb the peaks. Brockman is a canyon where you walk along a creek in the narrow valley but then climb up to a ridge with views into the middle of the Buttes or south overlooking the Sacramento Valley. All three properties give you a different perspective of the Sutter Buttes.

There are also hikers that have a special interest. Birders will, of course, sign up for our Bird Hike. Botanists may be interested in our Wildflower Hikes. If you would like to record nature's beauty, we have our Photographers' Hike.

What about those hikers who don't have a special interest, don't want to wear themselves out, and just want to have a hike to see what the Sutter Buttes are like? That is easy. Just pick a hike that fits your ability level. No matter what the "theme" of the hike, you are going to have an opportunity to see and hear what it is like to be in the Buttes. You will walk through open fields of grasses (and wildflowers if in season). You will walk under canopies of valley oaks, blue oaks, and live oaks. If you listen closely, you might hear acorn woodpeckers drumming against a tree or squawking "waka-waka," or valley quail calling what sounds like "chicago." Look closely at the rocks along the trails and see several different kinds of lichen. If it has rained recently, the mosses will be a brilliant green, creeks may be running and babbling along, and everything will look fresh and new. If the trails are dry, you can look for the tracks of deer and raccoons. As you follow your guide, try to observe and notice the details of your surroundings! Sign up for a hike that fits your interests, or not, but come and discover the Sutter Buttes.

To sign-up for Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes E-Newsletters, please visit the MMIH website at: <https://www.middlemountainhikes.org>.

## The Mission of Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes

Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes advances the understanding of the natural and cultural features of the Sutter Buttes through interactive educational activities for schoolchildren and the public.

*Donations are welcome at MMIH, a 501c3 non-profit organization. To donate send check to PO Box 3613, Yuba City, CA 95992-3613*

### Who We Are

#### Board of Directors

President: Greg Payne, Director/  
Education Program  
Vice President: Dan Russell, Director  
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Gene Trapp, Biologist  
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David Wyatt, Biologist

Inquiries may be directed by mail, by email, or by telephone:

#### Mailing Address:

PO Box 3613, Yuba City, CA 95992

#### Email:

mmsutterbutteshikes@yahoo.com  
Telephone: 530-370-4777

#### Website:

<https://www.middlemountainhikes.org>

## MMIH General Information

*Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes is not requiring hikers to be vaccinated. Please note, masks are welcome! If you have cold, flu, or Covid-19 symptoms, do not come on your registered hike.*

*None of our hikers or guides want to be exposed to cold/flu/Covid symptoms. If you are ill, MMIH will either refund your money or reschedule your hike. Thank you in advance for your kind and respectful consideration of others.*

Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes provides access to privately owned ranch land of the Sutter Buttes. Our guides share their knowledge of the hiking terrain's origins and history, and as a group you will examine together the natural ecosystems and habitats.

The different territories of the Buttes provide a wide variety of hiking experiences. MMIH offers a helpful guideline/chart of "One Boot to Six Boot" ratings pertaining to physical fitness (ability/agility levels) to help all hikers succeed and thrive with their individually selected hike(s). This comprehensive hiking guideline (included in this newsletter and on the MMIH website) has been established to assist hikers with choosing a compatible hike.

All outings are educational/interpretive hikes. Note, the same hikes/outings are usually not offered every season. A typical day for hiking begins at 8:00 a.m. with meeting and greeting sessions amongst hikers/guides and ends about 3:00 p.m. (unless otherwise stated). Scheduled hikes will proceed in all but the most severe-weather conditions. Participants of all hikes should be prepared for uneven footing, stepping over rocks and boulders, crossing streams, and hill climbing. Fall hikers are likely to encounter and contend with thistles and stickers. Spring hikers are likely to encounter wet, squishy, and ankle-deep grass. Poison oak is abundant, but you will be warned of proximity. Mosquitos are often present unless there has been a recent freeze.

No smoking and/or vaping is allowed on the Sutter Buttes privately owned properties.

We do not hike on the Sutter Buttes working ranches in the summer because of the much more serious threats of fire danger and rattlesnakes.

Rattlesnakes, though common in the warmer weather, are usually reclusive and inactive during our hiking seasons of fall/winter (combined) and spring.

Some hikes are acceptable for children, but many are not. No hikes are appropriate for babies or toddlers. Hikes rated 3 Boot or 4 Boot may be suitable for children 12 or older, but it depends on the child and the hike. Please inform the hike coordinator if you are considering making a hike reservation which includes children.

Open Hikes are limited to approximately 20 unless otherwise stated. The hikes range from \$35 to \$45 per person. To sign up/register for open hikes, email [mmsutterbutteshikes@yahoo.com](mailto:mmsutterbutteshikes@yahoo.com) or call/text: 530-370-4777 during the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Charter Hikes cost \$300 for up to 10 hikers and \$30 for each additional hiker, with a maximum of 20. To arrange a charter (private/custom) hike, email [llush@mac.com](mailto:llush@mac.com) or call/text: 530-301-7371 during the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

The fall-hiking season is usually posted in early October (with hikes to begin in late October or early November), and the spring-hiking season is usually posted in early February (with hikes to begin in late February or early March) on the MMIH website at: <https://www.middlemountainhikes.org>.

For seasonal hiking news, subscribe to Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes e-Newsletters at:

<https://www.middlemountainhikes.org>

Follow Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/sutterbutteshikes/>



Like Us on Facebook!



# Education-Program Notes

By Kathleen & Greg Payne / Ed-Program Coordinators

We have some spectacular gnarly old oak trees at Dean Place where we hike with the children during the school year. On each trail there are certain spots where we stop and take a class picture of students. One spring day, we lined up the students in such a way that they were standing with their back to the 'Reindeer Tree' and had no idea what was behind them. Once the class picture was taken, we walked them up the hill and had them turn around. The students erupted into "Wow, look



Photo by Kathleen Payne

at that!" Immediately they identified our Reindeer Tree that the original Naturalist, Walt Anderson, introduced us to years ago. Just slightly off the beaten-cow path, we found this gem of a tree and have shared it with hikers, young and old, whenever we are on that trail. Alas, a few short months after this picture was taken, one of the 'antlers' broke off in a fall rainstorm.

On another trail we pass by our 'Enchanted Tree' tucked into a grove of live oak trees. Often unnoticed, it is a fun surprise to see when walking past this grove of trees while hiking back to the school vehicles. It is at the base of Seismograph Hill if you happen to want to find it! Peek off to the side and this Enchanted Tree is just as surprised to see you too!



Photo by Kathleen Payne

Maps name the captivating 1.6 million-years old volcanic peaks as the "Sutter Buttes."

Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes offers homage to the indigenous name of the spiritually vital "Mountains in the Middle" rising dramatically from the center of the Sacramento Valley.

Views from afar inspire closer visits through a 60-minute drive, 45-mile bike ride, or a memorable hike within the Buttes 10-mile-wide range.

## Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust

Calling All Photographers, Including Students in K-12 to enter your photos in the **18th Annual Calendar Photo Contest**

Deadline: Friday, April 28, 2023.

Winners contacted: May 26, 2023.



For more information contact us at:  
(530) 755-3568 or  
Photos@SutterButtesLandTrust.org



Sutter Buttes  
Regional Land Trust



Photo Subject:

- The Sutter Buttes and surrounding areas
- Farmers, Ranchers, Farming Activities
- Native Fauna and Flora
- Geological Features
- Waterfowl Habitats
- Natural or Weather Aerials or Landscapes
- Agricultural Heritage or Landscapes

# Sutter County Loses Pioneer Matriarch, Mary Spilman Crane, 12/29/1923-1/3/2023

By Michael Hubbartt

We recently lost pioneer family matriarch, Mary Spilman Crane, of whom passed away on January 3, 2023, at the age of 99. Mary resided in Pennington, the old historic townsite on the north side of the Sutter Buttes.



Old Sutter County maps reveal the Spilman family ranch parcels that were acquired for farming around the Buttes 150 years ago. Tombstones at the nearby Pennington Cemetery memorialize multiple generations of Spilman family.

Pictured below is the old Spilman cottage which is still

situated in front of the barn and adjoins two newer Spilman family homes in the community of Pennington.

The portrait of Mary and husband James was taken after WWII. Both served in the military.

The rugged rangelands of the Sutter Buttes have been preserved by a dozen local families, such as the Spilmans, whose farming and ranching operations have protected the historic character of this landmark.

Mary supported the interpretive and educational programs of Middle Mountain Foundation and even hosted our annual guides' gatherings at her home for many years.

Mary's daughter, a fifth-generation Spilman, still resides in the family home and continues to carry on her mother's wishes to preserve their pioneer heritage and protect their historic parcel from exploitation.

Visit our local Sutter County Museum to learn more about the families who farm and ranch the grounds around the Buttes hillsides.



Photos Furnished by the Spilman Family.



*Photos are of MMIH Guides, Spencer Morrison and Rose Hoskinson, both of whom met with hikers at the Sutter County Museum to first study a relief map of the Sutter Buttes before leading hiking groups to Dean Place and Brockman Ranch. Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes provides access to privately owned ranch land of the Sutter Buttes. Our guides share knowledge of their hiking terrain's origins and history, and as a group, examine the Buttes natural ecosystems and habitats.*

# Open-Hikes Schedule & Hike Descriptions

MAKE YOUR RESERVATION AT [HTTPS://WWW.MIDDLEMOUNTAINHIKES.ORG](https://www.middlemountainhikes.org)

Detailed hike and payment information emailed upon reservation. Unless otherwise specified in the following hike descriptions, the cost is \$35/per person; meet and greet time is by 8:00 a.m. with an ending time of 3:00 p.m.; and each hike is limited to approximately 20 registrants. All hikers are to carry a backpack containing a sack lunch/snacks and water (for a day's hike). Wear hiking boots or strong/tough/sturdy shoes with a good tread (no tennis shoes/sneakers, please)! Note: Hiking/walking sticks are a great idea for everyone!

## Nature Study | Dean Place

Learn about the natural elements and features of the Sutter Buttes – things not made by people. Opportunities abound for observing and examining flora and fauna. We will study nature and learn about the natural world in a beautiful outdoor setting while establishing a sense of wonder and respect for everything we see along our pathway – be it a lizard, bug, bird or plant. **Hike Difficulty Level: 3 Boot. Date: Saturday, February 25.**



## Summit | Dean Place/North Butte

The Summit Ascent is one of our most challenging treks. This route is a steep 1,000-foot push straight up North Butte. It is off trail and has no easy switchbacks. Hikers

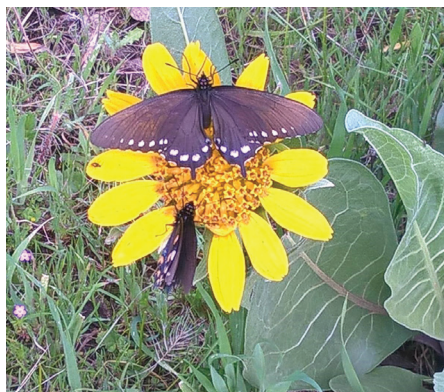
must be in extremely good physical condition and not suffer from vertigo. Limited to approximately 15 hikers. Cost: \$45. **Hike Difficulty Level: 5 Boot. Dates: Sunday, February 26; Saturday, March 4; Saturday, March 25; and Saturday, April 1.**

## East Ridge | Shaeffer Ranch

Hikers will explore the historical Shaeffer Ranch belonging to the same family since the 1860s. This moderate/challenging hike provides glorious inland views of North Butte and Peace Valley. Mount Lassen and Shasta are often seen in the distant horizon, weather permitting. **Hike Difficulty Level: 3 Boot. Date: Sunday, February 26.**

## Nature Study | Brockman

Learn about the natural elements and features of the Sutter Buttes – things not made by people. Opportunities abound for observing and examining flora and fauna. We will study nature and learn about the natural world in a beautiful outdoor setting while establishing a living sympathy with everything we see along our pathway – be it a lizard, bug, bird, or plant. **Hike Difficulty Level: 3 Boot. Date: Sunday, March 5.**



## Ridin' Fence | Dean Place

Walk the fence line of the historic Sutter Buttes ranch, Dean Place. The fence line terrain is rugged just like the cowboys charged with mending it. Bring sturdy boots, a day's worth of water, and your sense of adventure - work gloves optional. **Hike Difficulty Level: 6 Boot. Date: Saturday, March 11. Time: 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.**

## Wildflowers | Shaeffer Ranch

Enjoy a springtime walk in the beautiful green hills of the Sutter Buttes where we hope you will be greeted with a delightful plethora of wildflower blooms like: Popcorn Flower, White Hyacinth, Larkspur, Monkey Flower, Dutchman's Pipe, Shooting Stars, and Baby Blue Eyes. Remember to bring your hand lens, camera, and wildflower field guide. **Hike Difficulty Level: 3 Boot. Date: Saturday, March 11 and Saturday, March 25.**

## Wildflowers | Brockman Ranch

Enjoy a springtime walk in the beautiful green hills of the Sutter Buttes where we hope you will be greeted with a delightful plethora of wildflower blooms like: Popcorn Flower, White Hyacinth, Larkspur, Monkey Flower, Dutchman's Pipe, Shooting Stars, and Baby Blue Eyes. Remember to bring your hand lens, camera, and wildflower field guide. **Hike Difficulty Level: 3 Boot. Date: Sunday, March 12.**

## Geology | Dean Place

Learn about the exciting volcanic origins of the Sutter Buttes, a small-mountain range, with Volcanologist, Dr. Brian Hausback, as he teaches us about the Buttes 1.6 million years of geological history. **Hike Difficulty Level: 3 - 4 Boot. Date: Sunday, March 19.**

## Brockman Challenge | Brockman Ranch

Prepare for a six-mile strenuous and steep ascent between the tallest of ridge tops. The trail is narrow and will have us traversing a precipitous incline with an elevation gain of 1,000 feet. At the hike's midway point, we will be gazing with incredulous wonder at the deep, beautiful hidden valleys below. **Hike Difficulty Level: 5 Boot. Date: Sunday, March 19.**

### **Brockman Canyon | Brockman Ranch**

Travel to the intriguing and fascinating central core of the Sutter Buttes. Be prepared for a steady climb on uneven ground with frequent stops for contemplation of the landscape's natural elements and mesmerizing views.

**Hike Difficulty Level: 3 - 4 Boot. Dates: Sunday, March 26 and Sunday, April 2.**

### **Photographers | Dean Place**

This unique event is designed for photographers of all levels. Note, there will be several backup guides available so that you can scout/hike the Buttes dramatic terrain for the best lighting/angles for those highly sought after scenic-photo opportunities. Remember to bring your camera.

**Hike Difficulty Level: 1 - 3 Boot. Date: Saturday, April 1. Time: 3:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

### **Wildflowers | Dean Place**

Enjoy a springtime walk in the beautiful green hills of the Sutter Buttes where we hope you will be greeted with a delightful plethora of wildflower blooms like: Popcorn Flower, White Hyacinth, Larkspur, Monkey Flower, Dutchman's Pipe, Shooting Stars, and Baby Blue Eyes. Remember to bring your hand lens, camera, and wildflower field guide.

**Hike Difficulty Level: 3 Boot. Date: Sunday, April 2.**

### **West Ridge | Shaeffer Ranch**

This moderate/challenging hike will have you exploring the Shaeffer Family Ranch, a historical Sutter Buttes property belonging to the same family since the 1860s. Depending on visibility, the hike may include views of North Butte, Peace Valley, and the old Titan Missile Site. Both Mount Lassen and Shasta are often seen in the distance.

**Hike Difficulty Level: 3 Boot. Saturday, April 8.**

### **Birds | Dean Place**

Witness a variety of birds while searching for and contemplating their natural habitat of brush, shrubbery, and old oak trees. Did you know that the Sutter Buttes are located in the famous Pacific Flyway? Remember to bring your camera and binoculars.

**Hike Difficulty Level: 3 Boot. Date: Saturday, April 15. Time: 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.**

### **Dean Ridge | Dean Place**

Hike and climb the rocky, rather steep, hilly ridges of Dean Place, a working-cattle ranch, belonging to the same family since the 1890s. This invigorating hike will reward you with unforgettable views of the Sutter Buttes interior upon greeting a beautiful landscape of woodlands, a dense growth of native trees, brush, and shrubbery.

**Hike Difficulty Level: 3-4 Boot. Date: Sunday, April 16.**

### **Sacred Manner | Dean Place**

A contemplative and peaceful nature walk with Stan Padilla focuses on his respectful reverence for the sanctity of all life and the Native-American mythology of the Sutter Buttes.

Did you know that the name Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes offers homage to the spiritually vital indigenous name, Mountains in the Middle?

**Hike Difficulty Level: 2 Boot. Date: Sunday, April 23.**



### **Sunset Serenade (Annual Fundraiser) | Dean Place**

Join Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes at its annual fundraiser, Sunset Serenade, scheduled to be held on Saturday, May 6, in an enchanting outdoor setting at the base of North Butte (weather permitting). You will enjoy an afternoon stroll or hike, delicious appetizers, wine and beer, a catered dinner, light-classical

music, fine desserts, and pleasant company. Unique items will be featured at the Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust (SBRLT) silent auction and drawing. Pre-registration is required at <https://www.middlemountainhikes.org> or [mmsutterbutteshikes@yahoo.com](mailto:mmsutterbutteshikes@yahoo.com). Cost is \$125 per person (SBRLT hike discounts are not accepted). Information/details emailed upon registration.

Meet/Greet Time for Stroll/Hike is at 2:30 p.m.; appetizers at 5:00 p.m.; and dinner at 6:00 p.m.

Meet/Greet Time for Dinner is at 4:00 p.m.; appetizers at 5:00 p.m.; and dinner at 6:00 p.m.

**Hike Difficulty Level: 1 - 3 Boot. Date: Saturday, May 6.**



## HIKE/EVENT BOOT RATINGS

Hike/Event Boot Ratings are a guideline for helping you to choose an outing that matches your physical fitness/ability levels. Distance and elevation gain are dependent on the outing, the property, and the guide.

**1 Boot = Easy:** One to three miles and less than 300 feet elevation gain/loss.

**2 Boot = Moderate:** Two to five miles and generally less than 600 feet elevation gain/loss.

**3 Boot = Moderately Challenging:** Four to seven miles with the possibility of multiple elevation gains/losses of 600-800 feet.

**4 Boot = Difficult:** Four to seven miles and elevation gains/losses likely in excess of 800 feet.

**5 Boot = Strenuous:** Four to eight miles with multiple and/or significant elevation gains/losses.

**6 Boot = Extreme:** Five to fourteen miles with multiple and significant elevation gains/losses in excess of 1,000+ feet (miles determined by outing).

## 2023 SPRING HIKE SCHEDULE

DATE	DAY	HIKE NAME	WHERE	BOOT
Feb. 25	Saturday	Nature Study	Dean Place	3
Feb. 26	Sunday	Summit*	Dean Place/N Butte	5
Feb. 26	Sunday	East Ridge	Shaeffer	3
March 4	Saturday	Summit*	Dean Place/N Butte	5
March 5	Sunday	Nature Study	Brockman	3
March 11	Saturday	Ridin' Fence	Dean Place	6
March 11	Saturday	Wildflowers	Shaeffer	3
March 12	Sunday	Wildflowers	Brockman	3
March 19	Sunday	Geology	Dean Place	3-4
March 19	Sunday	Brockman Challenge	Brockman	5
March 25	Saturday	Summit*	Dean Place/N Butte	5
March 25	Saturday	Wildflowers	Shaeffer	3
March 26	Sunday	Brockman Canyon	Brockman	3-4
April 1	Saturday	Summit*	Dean Place/N Butte	5
April 1	Saturday	Photographers	Dean Place	1-3
April 2	Sunday	Wildflowers	Dean Place	3
April 2	Sunday	Brockman Canyon	Brockman	3-4
April 8	Saturday	West Ridge	Shaeffer	3
April 15	Saturday	Birds	Dean Place	3
April 16	Sunday	Dean Ridge	Dean Place	3-4
April 23	Sunday	Sacred Manner	Dean Place	2
May 6	Saturday	Sunset Serenade	Dean Place	1-3

\*\$45 Hike. All other open hikes listed are \$35.

Notes: The approximate number of hikers (per hike) is 20. Summit & Tres Picos Hikes (15).

## MIDDLE MOUNTAIN INTERPRETIVE HIKES

PO Box 3613

Yuba City, CA 95992-3613



**MMIH Gift Certificates  
are a great gift idea  
for hikers and nature  
enthusiasts!**

TO SIGN-UP FOR MIDDLE MOUNTAIN INTERPRETIVE HIKES E-NEWSLETTERS,  
PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:  
[WWW.HTTPS://WWW.MIDDLEMOUNTAINHIKES.ORG](https://www.middlemountainhikes.org)

## SUTTER COUNTY MUSEUM



Admission to the Sutter County Museum is free. Donations are welcome! Register for the Museum's monthly E-Newsletter at [www.suttercountymuseum.org](http://www.suttercountymuseum.org) to receive updates about upcoming programs and events.

**Like & Follow the Sutter County Museum on Facebook & Instagram!**

### Contact Us

*Thank you for reaching out to  
Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes! You may contact us:*

- On our website: <https://www.middlemountainhikes.org>.
- By mail: PO Box 3613, Yuba City, CA 95992-3613
- Kelly Gash, Open Hikes Coordinator,  
[mmsutterbutteshikes@yahoo.com](mailto:mmsutterbutteshikes@yahoo.com) or 530-370-4777
- Laura Lush, Charter Hikes Coordinator/Hike Program  
Director, [llush@mac.com](mailto:llush@mac.com) or 530-301-7371
- Gregory & Kathleen Payne, Education Program  
Coordinators, [greg947@sbcglobal.net](mailto:greg947@sbcglobal.net) or 530-218-1346

#### Newsletter

Editor: Kelly Gash

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*Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes is a 501c(3) nonprofit  
organization; Federal Tax ID #32-0454378.*

For Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust information, contact SBRLT at:  
PO Box 3359, Yuba City, CA 95992-3359; Phone 530-755-3568;  
[info@sutterbutteslandtrust.org](mailto:info@sutterbutteslandtrust.org); or <http://www.sutterbutteslandtrust.org>.