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# THE CALIFORNIA ACORN REPORT

Volume 14

The Official Newsletter of the California Acorn Survey  
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## FAMILY REPORT I: IT'S PARTY TIME!

Greetings and welcome to this year's *California Acorn Report*. It's been an eventful season, which I'm going to arbitrarily pretend began on Saturday July 10<sup>th</sup>, when I picked up Dale, who was kind enough to honor us with one of his ever-rarer visit from Davis, and Laura, the daughter of old family friends Marty and Andy, in San Jose and proceeded to show them around Carmel while killing time until what was billed as a party for a Carmel Valley friend (Brian) at Monastery Beach.



*Here I am showing Laura Fort Point directly underneath the Golden Gate Bridge. Yes; I admit, this was a few years ago—20, to be exact. In*

*case you were wondering, Laura's still cute as buttons, while I'm even scarier than I was back then, having since perfected my technique for terrifying small children on Dale and Phoebe.*

As it happened, it wasn't a party for Brian, although I trust he appreciated the cuff-links I was instructed to buy for him as a present on the trip down. Instead, it was a party for, yes, *moi*, specifically, my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. And a surprise it was. Indeed, if any of you are wondering how to organize a surprise birthday party for someone, I can recommend Janis's technique: have it at least a month before the target's birthday; he or she will be completely dumbfounded. Or perhaps I'm just dumb. Whatever. In any case, the beauty of this method is that one doesn't even have to be particularly secretive; despite unequivocal evidence to the contrary, I was completely convinced that it was Brian's party until the end. Actually, even after the end—heck, even seeing various relatives (my cousin Steve and his family), friends who don't even know Brian (Robert and Tania; Bill and Karen), my postdoc Eric and all the Hastings FAs, and more wasn't enough to get my head around the concept that it was *my* party.

And it was, I have to say, fabulous, complete with everything I could dream of in an event I had nothing to do with organizing. The big thrill was the food, which was catered by Taquitos Nayarit of "Catroville, C.A." (sic)—not a taco truck with which I was familiar but one that clearly has its finger on the pulse of what truly fine tacos are; heck, I didn't even know there *was* such a thing as acorn salsa, although I always knew there should be. Thank you all; it was truly a memorable event.



*Here they are—a random sample of friends and relations who happened to be in California at the time—at my surprise 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party in Carmel July 11<sup>th</sup> along with Taquitos Nayarit, which I highly recommend next time you have a craving for tacos while beachcombing. For that matter, I wonder if I could have them FedEx tacos to us in Ithaca once a week? Please???*

This was far from the only party this summer, although it was the most unexpected. Kicking off the season was none other than the much-anticipated party for #5000—birds, that is, not acorns. This is one that we had been realizing was going to happen for some time,



although probably not back in October 1971 when Michael and Barbara MacRoberts banded their first acorn woodpecker at Hastings. (Yes, it did take 39 years, but was worth every second....)

*Mark Stromberg looks on as I unveil Julie Jo's inimitable woodpecker cake for the 5000<sup>th</sup> bird party back in June in the School House.*

## FAMILY REPORT II: EMPTY NESTERS R US

As all you long-time readers of the *California Acorn Report* know, we try our best to engage in at least some socially-acceptable activities during the off season. One of those activities, which seemed harmless enough at the time, was having kids, which Janis and I inadvertently found ourselves doing back in late August 1989 when we had Dale. Failing to learn from experience, we followed this with Phoebe in September 1992.

In any case, here we are, a mere 21 years later, with Child #1 Dale about to start his senior year at UC Davis where he's majoring in math/physics and, to finally come to the point of all this, with Child #2 Phoebe heading off to Reed College in Portland where, as a freshman, she has the luxury of not having the faintest idea what she's going to major in.

In short, it was a summer replete with the anxieties of having our last kid leave home going head-to-head with the joyful anticipation of becoming empty nesters. No doubt the tensest moment was when we got the phone message from the Mexican consulate in Merida while Phoebe was supposedly volunteering on an organic farm in the Yucatan Peninsula just before she left in August. (Oh no! Did we forget to warn her about trying to smuggle acorns across the border?) Fortunately, it turned out the guy just wanted a date, and who can blame him? She's adorable, *nearly* as much so as her mother....



*Phoebe and Janis at Ithaca High's graduation on June 24<sup>th</sup>. Phoebe spent the summer mostly not working at various restaurants in Ithaca followed by spending a couple of weeks in Mexico where she may or may not have*

*volunteered at an organic farm. But hey—it was her last fling before college, so no one's complaining. In any case, it all ended on Aug. 19<sup>th</sup> when she flew to Portland to matriculate at Reed College. Go Griffins!*

Fortunately, Phoebe returned from Mexico in time to bake me a cake for my actual 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, an event we celebrated with a cadre of our friends in Ithaca, specifically Steve & Natalia and Paul & Janet. Happy birthday to me yet again!



*Paul, Janet, Janis, Phoebe, Natalia, and Steve at my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday dinner in Ithaca. The only one missing is our dog Beelzebub, who was probably in the bedroom engaged in her favorite activity—chewing on our dirty socks.*



*And she can cook, too! Phoebe with the fabulous carrot cakes she made for my birthday Aug. 15<sup>th</sup>. After a childhood in which she mostly refused to eat anything that might even potential taste good, she's started to exhibit quite a flare for baking that we will greatly miss, almost as much as we miss the kids climbing up into the kitchen cabinets—which, fortuitously enough, they appear to be doing on p. 3!*

Yet one more family summer activity I have to mention before I move onto anything that any of you might conceivably be interested in reading about is the week Janis and I spent at Kona Village in Hawaii after we left Hastings and before we flew back to Ithaca—yet another event we rationalized as being in celebration of my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. I admit that it seems decadent and, worse yet, irrelevant to the *California Acorn Survey*, but you never know; an acorn is going to float across the Pacific and beach itself on one of those islands one of these days, and when it does, rest assured that we'll be doing our best to record it for posterity, albeit in between snorkeling and watching the sea turtles hang out on the beach.



*It was awfully sweet of Brad and Louise to arrange a sabbatical in Hawaii just so they could greet us when we came over for a short vacation in July. They, of course, are now seasoned empty nesters and we did our best to learn as many tips from them as we could as to how to get used to totally ignoring the existence of our offspring. Whatever their names were.*

And yes, that's about it for the family report. The bottom line is that we're all still in one piece, much to everyone's surprise, not the least our own. And with that, it's perhaps time to stop bragging about how old and decrepit I am and move on to what you all are waiting for—an in-depth discussion of *tacos*.

*It seems like, well, only 10 years ago or so that Dale and the Phoebe were climbing around the kitchen in the School House at Hastings celebrating the discovery of who knows what up in the cabinets. We are, I have to admit, secretly quite pleased that both are now back on the West Coast, giving us yet more excuses to visit California beyond woodpeckers, bluebirds, tacos, acorns, Trader Joes, tacos, Costco, and—I can't believe I almost forgot—tacos.*



## AUTUMN

*When is autumn?  
When gigantic acorns drop  
And beautiful colors glow  
When crunchy leaves shine  
And strong winds blow  
Then it's autumn!*

I couldn't resist throwing in one more obscure reference to Phoebe, whose 2001 calendar she made as a third grader at Tularcitos still sits on my wall in my office with this poem announcing September. Autumn it is; get out there and count acorns while ye may!

Our own counting festivities started on August 7<sup>th</sup> when we all headed to Minnesota for yet one more year of surveying the acorn crop at Cedar Creek north of Minneapolis. This included myself, Jean, Kyle, who is starting grad school at the University of Nebraska with Jean, and Kyle's girl friend Charisse, one of Janis's old FAs who came along simply to experience the thrill and excitement of it all.

*One of the thousands of protesters lining the streets of East*



*Bethel upset that we were once again counting acorns after Sheikh Abdul Al-Obeikan, vice-minister of the Islamic Fiqh Academy, declared a fatwa against the California Acorn Survey. No wait—that's not right. It's just Kyle, cleverly disguised as Sheikh Abdul Al-Obeikan, complaining about the wireless internet in the new dormitory at Cedar Creek after helping to count acorns all day. Calm down, Kyle; but in the meantime, both hands in the air slowly, please....*

This is, best any of us can remember, the 16<sup>th</sup> year of counting acorns at Cedar Creek, and yet again we vowed it would be our last. What Satanic force is it, we wonder, that continues to lure us to Minnesota every summer despite our fervent attempts to stay as far away as possible? Originally it was clearly the lure of the Minnesota State Fair, but since we now try to count earlier in the summer when there are actually acorns on the trees rather than the end of August, when the State Fair is going on but most of the acorns have been scarfed up by bounty hunters, it just isn't quite as fabulous as it used to be. Our big hope now is that Kyle, in his youthful enthusiasm, will write the study up during his massive free time as a first-year Ph.D. student this year, giving us an excuse to finally move on with our lives and only visit Minnesota when the fair is going on like everyone else.

*From the right, it's Jean, Charisse, and Kyle (aka Abdul) at Fish Lake after a tough morning of class 4 technical acorn counting. Now that I think of it, maybe that thing on Kyle's head is actually the Mildew Hat after it's been left out in the rain for a couple of weeks. We can only hope that both it and Kyle's brain will recover in time for him to start graduate school this fall.*



Of course, Minnesota does serve as a good way to finely hone our acorn-counting skills so that we'll be ready for California. We also have a good number of friends, relations, colleagues, and *California Acorn Report* subscribers there, and I assure all of you that I feel really guilty about not having tracked any of you down to say hello this year. What we did do after finishing the acorn count Sunday morning was spend some time wandering around Stillwater, Minnesota, looking for antique acorn-counting paraphernalia to wear at one of the many historical reenactments of colonial American acorn counts that we attend during the off season. I can't say that we found anything to match Kyle's hat, but we did have a good time and even found a stand selling minidonuts to help make up for the fact that we would yet again miss the State Fair.

*Lest I forget, here's (most of) our intrepid 2010 Hastings field crew (along with FAs in training Torry and Riley) at one of the parties celebrating Janis's arrival at the end of the season in June. We are used to having good FAs, but these guys were fabulous, being proficient at everything from Canadian trivia to writing silly songs about the hazards of Dr. Pepper addiction (I swear—I can stop anytime.)*



## MADE IN CHINA

The real California acorn survey—the one where we actually count acorns in California—began once again with a harmonic convergence at SFO, this time on Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>. This was, at least as far back as written records go, the earliest the stars have ever aligned for this galactic event. There were two reasons for this. First, following up on our poor judgment (back in 1992) of having a kid (Phoebe) on Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, a date that has caused problems in scheduling the survey over the past 17 years, was Jean's poor judgment (in 2008) in having a kid (Tilly) who's birthday is Sept. 14<sup>th</sup>, a date that is earmarked for causing problems for the next 17 years. The latter, in conjunction with a trip to Australia leaving on Sept. 21<sup>st</sup>, eliminated the possibility of starting the survey after Tilly's birthday instead of before. Hence, following an early drop-off at Ithaca International at 05:45 on Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>, I was met by Dale in the MPV at SFO's Terminal 1 and immediately found our way over to Terminal 3 to meet Jean.

Jean, as it happens, came with an entourage—Xiaoan and Wenjin—strange names that are pronounced “Chinese Dude 1” and “Chinese Dude 2”. It was hard to be sure, but best I could tell, Chinese Dude 1 (henceforth CD1) was a postdoc, while CD2 was a Ph.D. student, and both were from Lanzhou, whoever he was. Despite my skepticism concerning this blatant attempt to outsource the *California Acorn Survey* to China, not to mention the fact that somehow we had to figure out how to drag two extra bodies along on the entire survey in a car that only did a modest job of fitting two of us, both the CDs were great and turned out to be a lot of fun to have along. In fact, Jean had them making themselves useful by collecting soil from under each of our trees for nutrient analysis, which we thought might slow us down but in fact was performed so efficiently by the two of them that they frequently had time to stand around and shake their heads at Jean and me who were clearly engaged in some kind of capitalistic plot involving acorns, or whatever it was we claimed to be staring at up in the canopy.



*Xiaoan, yours truly, and Wenjin after we were fortunate enough to get a last minute lunch reservation at the Chico In-n-Out Burger on Day 3 of the survey. Explaining a “2 x 2, animal style” was definitely one of our bigger cultural challenges.*

It turned out that the CDs were on some kind of Chinese exchange program in which the Chinese government pays students to spend a year in the US learning how to do useful things, like count acorns and collect dirt. Is there a dirt shortage in China, perhaps? Or are there not enough people to go out and count acorns? Come to think of it, it is rather odd that one never hears much about the *Chinese*

*Acorn Survey*, isn't it? At least, not since 1972, when President Nixon made his famous visit to China followed by the US tour of the official Chinese Acorn Counting Team, that is. In fact, acorn counting became so popular for a while that I could have sworn it was scheduled to become an official Olympic sport.

*Xiaoan and Jean attempting to find Wenjin, stuffed somewhere in the back of the minivan, soon after making our first Trader Joe's stop on Day 2. Come on out, Wenjin; we know you're in there somewhere....*



But I digress. The CDs did manage to squeeze themselves into the minivan and become the first of what we trust will eventually be a worldwide retinue of international affiliates of the *California Acorn Survey*. Their main problem was that they had spent most of their time in the US in Nebraska working for Jean and seemed to have only a vague concept of where we were or what we were doing. “Is monument to Chairman Obama?” they wondered as we pointed out the Golden Gate Bridge after having lunch in the Emeryville Market and dropping Dale off at the train heading back to Davis. “Is Los Angeles?” they asked as we zipped through Modesto on highway 99. Fortunately, all this had little affect on their overall attitude, which was invariably upbeat, if a bit disoriented. Indeed, they were perhaps best described as two wild and crazy guys from Lanzhou, a cultural reference I didn't even attempt to explain to them. It turned out that CD2 had never seen an ocean, so the pinnacle of the whole trip, at least for him, was undoubtedly the stop we made at Carpinteria Beach State Park just north of Santa Barbara after setting up a new tanoak site south of Sedgwick. Surf's up, Comrade!

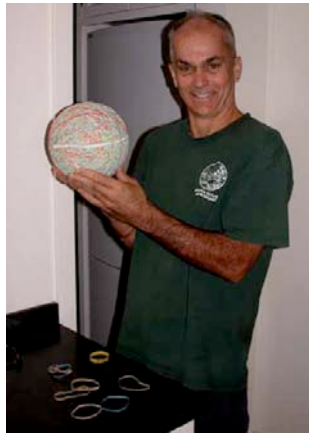


*Lest I forget, the last days of the survey benefitted not only from the CDs (between the minivans), but from Bill Carmen (on the left), the official drinks coordinator of the California Acorn Survey, and Brian Barringer, my new oak postdoc (on the right), who tagged along to try and figure out what he'd gotten himself into. Here we are trying desperately to re-sort all our junk after Jasper Ridge so that Jean and the CDs could make it to SFO in time for their flight back to Nebraska while Brian and I attempted to get to San Francisco in time for my seminar.*

## FUTURE SHOCK

With a limited time to conduct the survey before Jean and the CDs had to return for Tilly's birthday, we immediately had lunch, dropped off Dale, and drove to Hopland, where the official survey began. There is, I fear, relatively little to report from the trip itself, which for the most part covered what is by now strikingly familiar ground by spending the night mostly at field stations (Hopland, Dye Creek, San Joaquin Exp. Station, James Reserve, Sedgwick, and, of course, Hastings), Chez Brad et Louise (back from their sabbatical in Hawaii in time to host us in their usual gracious style in Davis), and one motel—the inimitable Lake Elsinore Hot Springs Resort, nearly full for the first time over Labor Day weekend, thus forcing us to stay in what we can only hope are generally used as spare closets. Next time I hope they'll at least remember to move the brooms.

*Brad hard at work on his legendary rubberband ball, his legacy project now reinvigorated after his year-long sabbatical in Boston and Hilo. Thank goodness for tenure!*



The acorn crop itself was unremarkable, being fair to moderate for pretty much all species and all localities. Probably the most notable event was getting to see our old friend Dick Sage, who was at Sedgwick on one of his rare visits from Argentina measuring the valley oaks he planted there 13 years ago in order to look at the effects of provenance and size on seedling survivorship and growth.



*Dick with his most glorious offspring, a valley oak sapling originating from an acorn collected at Hastings back in 1997. Grow, baby, grow!*

We were again unable to get to Switzer's, in the mountains behind Pasadena, which was closed off last year due to the fires and this year because the road had been undercut by erosion during the winter rains. *C'est la vie*. In its place, however, we added two tanoak sites, a species that we've taken a fancy to due to the possibility, confirmed by Kyle's observations up on Chews Ridge, that it may be insect pollinated, and thus subject to a completely different masting pattern than the wind-pollinated *Quercus* that make up the rest of the survey.

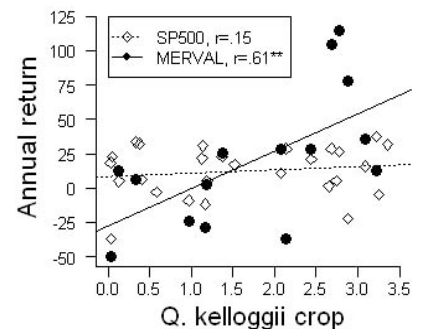
The first site was at the southern end of the tanoak range on San Marcos Pass near Santa Barbara; the second was on Empire Grade near Santa Cruz on our way to Jasper Ridge. The latter turned out to be fairly easy to find, which was fortunate given the disturbingly small room for error built into the day, one of us (me) having rashly agreed to give a seminar at San Francisco State that afternoon. The first was more challenging. Driving along the ridge, which provided nice views but no tanoaks, we came across a guy standing in front of a sign that proclaimed "Tanoak Hill". Much to our surprise, it turned out he was actually quite knowledgeable about tanoaks. "Are you from *the California Acorn Survey*?" he asked, looking at our magnetic car sticker. Yes, we replied, a look of pride spreading across our faces. "Never heard of it. Is it true that a good acorn crop means a wet winter?"

Of all the half-dozen or so queries the *California Acorn Survey* team has received over the past 30 years, the relationship between the acorn crop and winter weather clearly tops the list. My usual answer is that if the acorn crop could predict the future, I'd be a rich man today and would be on the Riviera dining on acorn soufflé instead of traipsing around California counting them. But what if the acorn crop *does* predict the future? Might I, privy to detailed information available to few others not bored enough to subscribe to the *California Acorn Report*, use those data, bursting with hidden secrets about tomorrow's mortgage rates and commodity futures prices, to become rich after all? Clearly it was time to check.

With this in mind, I took the radical step of analyzing some data. And to make a long story short, the answer is no, the acorn crop does not predict subsequent rainfall, at least in California. (The possibility that it predicts rainfall somewhere else, perhaps in sub-Saharan Africa, remains unaddressed.) *Doche shade*—I had really started looking forward to that acorn soufflé. And then I thought; who cares about rainfall? Let's cut to the chase and look for a correlation with something useful.

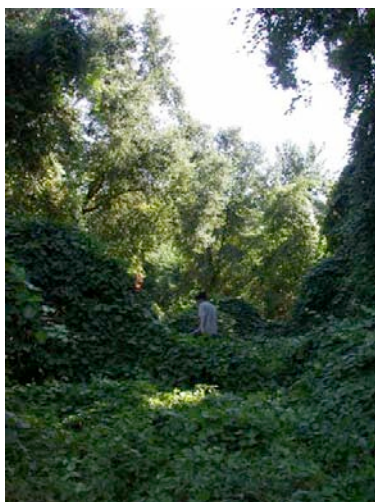
So, after checking correlations between all five species of oaks at Hastings and a dozen or so world stock market indices, with a couple of measures of Southeast Asian rice production thrown in for good measure, I finally succeeded in my quest.

*The mean (log-transformed) number of black oak acorns counted in our 30s samples at Hastings vs. the percent annual return of the SP500 and the Argentina MERVAL index during the subsequent year. With a crop of 2.37 this fall, the prediction is clear: buy! Or is it sell? I'm fairly sure it's one of those, anyway.*



What does this mean, you ask? Unfortunately, the acorn crop doesn't appear to correlate with any stock index you've ever heard of, like the SP500 or the Dow Jones Industrial Average, and believe me, I tried. In fact, most of the species don't correlate significantly with much of anything. The California black oak acorn crop, however, correlates fairly well ( $P = 0.01!$ ) with the Argentina Merval, an index of the Buenos Aires Stock Exchange that turns out to be heavily weighted toward various random foreign stocks such as Tenaris Depositara, Pampa Energia SA, Petroleo Brasileiro, Banca Macro SA, and more. So! here, at long last, is the payoff for all of you who have suffered through years of the *California Acorn Report* wondering when (if?) I am ever going to publish something (anything!) that is cosmically (as opposed to comically) meaningful: black oaks at Hastings had a fairly decent crop in 2010, with a mean (log-transformed) value of 2.37, indicating that the Merval index will rise 36.9% in 2011. Remember: you read it here first.

Assuming, as is highly likely, that this prediction is totally bogus, I will adamantly plead complete ignorance about it in next year's report. On the other hand, if it turns out to be correct, Janis and I plan on heading for Cannes to dine on acorn soufflé and perfect our tans on one of those beaches we've had our eyes on since our honeymoon back in 1987. *Le rapport gland français* here we come! (I do not recommend translating that.)



*Maybe the acorn crop can't predict the future, but what about the acorn survey itself? Apparently it's going to be very, very dark and completely overgrown by grapes, as indicated by Jean's attempt to make his way through the jungle at the Kaweah Oaks site. It's clearly time for an El Niño to wash this stuff away. Or at least time for some serious machete work.*

## THE ANNUAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

To be honest, we didn't eat in a lot of new places this year, preferring to stick to establishments that have proven themselves acorn-worthy during past surveys such as McPhee's in Templeton (fabulous food in a fine setting), the Ahwahnee in Yosemite Valley (so-so food in a fabulous setting), In-n-Out burger (decent cheap hamburgers in a quintessentially California setting) and Buz's Crab in Redding (so-so food in a so-so setting, but still an experience for the CDs). Consequently, in keeping with the globalization of everything else, we have gone beyond the usual dull dives we ate in during the statewide survey and include two restaurants we sampled during the Australian part of this year's survey along with one of our

traditional taquerias and the one truly new place we ate at during our annual circuit of California.

## THE TACO REPORT: CHINESE EDITION

With the CDs, who, after all, represent our future Chinese Overlords, to entertain and impress, we did our best to lunch at California establishments like In-n-Out burger rather than Mexican taquerias. However, driving to the Central Valley from Hopland invariably lands us in beautiful downtown Williams at lunchtime just as we get to I5, where **Roberta's Taqueria** beckons with her fabulous tacos, vying with Granzella's Italian Deli across the street with its mediocre, overpriced sandwiches for the interstate crowd. The choice is so blatantly obvious we can't quite figure out what Granzella's is still doing there.

In any case, being the first time we'd eaten out on the trip, the big challenge for the CDs was ordering. I offered some lame advice, explaining the difference between tacos, burritos, and enchiladas, all of which was no doubt incomprehensible, while Jean went off to try and find the head. Unsurprisingly, however, the CDs were perplexed when it came time to stand at the window and express themselves to the lovely *seniōrita* whose job it was to take their orders. After a few awkward attempts—apparently Mandarin is not all that interchangeable with Spanish—Jean fortunately came back and had the presence of mind to order tacos for them, thus sparing us the need to figure out what to do with the 37 *burritos cerebro del mono* they'd inadvertently been trying to order. ("Only on Sundays", apparently.) *Rating: 4 tacos.*



*Jean and the CDs enjoying tacos at Roberta's in Williams. This was their first experience with Mexican food, which apparently isn't widespread in Lanzhou. I wonder if anyone's considered the possibility that China might be a lucrative franchising opportunity?*

## ZEN AND THE ART OF CHINESE CUISINE

It was Sunday night. Labor Day weekend. It was getting late and we were still planning to drive to Lake Elsinore to spend the night. We had just made it to the north end of the San Fernando Valley and had no idea where to eat. What to do? As we drove through Glendale, Jean's GPS

directed us first to a place that was inexplicably supposed to be in the middle of a quiet residential suburb and then to something on Foothill Boulevard that had clearly been closed for some time, possibly since the mid-1970s. As it sat on the dashboard laughing uproariously at us in a faux female British accent, I couldn't help but wonder, who programs those things to have a sense of humor? We gave up and started cruising down Foothill looking for someplace that looked reasonable. With the CDs in the back seat still reeling from the In-n-Out burgers we'd been eating much of the rest of the trip, one place called to us: **Zen Sushi and Gourmet Chinese Cuisine** at 2650 Foothill in La Crescenta.

The menu was in English, which, combined with the mixed Chinese/Japanese theme, was highly suspicious. But things began looking up when the CDs queried the hostess in Mandarin and received what was apparently a satisfactory reply based on the smiles on their faces. Soon the Chinese cook (the husband of the hostess and presumably the manager "Tony T.") emerged, and although he looked less than enthusiastic to meet two fellow countrydudes, he responded favorably to their request for some "real Chinese food" and disappeared back to the kitchen, presumably to start marinating the monkey brains needed for whatever it was the CDs had asked for.

What eventually emerged included a large bowl of egg-drop soup that the CDs pronounced as "definitely Chinese", a wonderful pork with fish sauce (the favorite of both the CDs), and two other dishes (shrimp with assorted vegetables and Mongolian beef) that both Jean and I thought were great despite being declared "too sweet" to be authentic. With a final bill of \$65, I'd have to say that this may have been the best Chinese food I've had outside of Tommy's Wok in Carmel. If you ever find yourself in La Crescenta, I highly recommend it, at least as long as you can sweet-talk Tony T. beforehand. *Rating: 4 monkey brains and a fortune cookie.*

#### DAS BIER

Strictly speaking, Australia is not part of the *California Acorn Survey*. But there we were anyway. Why Australia? Perhaps it was the surprisingly simple directions that Google maps give you for getting from Carmel Valley to Perth: a mere 130 segments encompassing 14,327 miles, which sounds complicated but is really quite straightforward, at least for the 9,993 miles of the trip that Google indicates involves kayaking across the Pacific Ocean. Actually, the main reason was, of course, that the entire continent is woefully short of acorn counters and clearly needs a highly trained professional to turn things around. Or not; I begrudgingly admit that there being no oaks on the continent may have reduced demand for such services. In any case, by Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup> we found ourselves in Sydney looking for dinner with our friends Steve and Natalia, acorn-counting wanna-bees from Ithaca who had also been misled by Google maps and ended up in Sydney

after making a wrong turn in their minivan somewhere south of Elmira.

This was harder than one might think given that despite being a beautiful cosmopolitan city, Sydney not only lacks oaks but also any good (or bad) taquerias. And after looking around, a taco stand where one could buy a fabulous el pastor taco for \$1.25 is definitely something one misses in a country where, best we could tell, the only comestible item one could buy for under \$3 was a bottle of water, and that only barely. After wandering around a bit we eventually ended up at the **Löwenbrau Keller** on the corner of Playfair and Argyle Streets, just up from our hotel in the Rocks district. The Keller was advertising "Oktoberfest as it's supposed to be", which seemed a bit ambitious given that we were both a long, long way from Germany and it was only September. In any case, the main rationale for the place seemed to be as an excuse for the Aussies to go out and drink German beer for a change. Having dragged our Lederhösens and dirndls all the way to Australia we figured we might as well wear them at least once, so after changing in we went.



*Walt, Natalia, Janis, and Steve don their finest in preparation for an old-fashioned Oktoberfest at Löwenbrau Keller in Sydney. Who would have thought that Steve and Natalia would be such good yodellers? Too bad my*

*alphorn hadn't fit in my luggage.*

With four of us and the cheapest entrée in the price range of a small Japanese automobile, we settled on beer and sharing a *Schlachtplatte*—a platter of various German sausages, sauerkraut, dumplings, pork, and small roasted pets, which the serving *Fraulein*, apparently fresh out of Düsseldorf, rather gratuitously brought in an extra-large version that included a hefty chunk of pig knuckle and only barely fit on the table. The good news is that the platter was more than enough to fill us up and in general was pretty good, at least in a Teutonic sort of way, even if it did push the price unexpectedly up into the Camry range. It certainly made for a pleasant evening, capped off with some fabulous views of Sydney Harbor from the rooftop of our hotel. It's a nice city indeed, and will be even better once they get some decent taquerias and plant some oaks. *Rating: 2 dirndles and a pint of amber.*



*There may not be acorns but Australia offers a lot of opportunity to practice by counting kangaroos. Not to mention baby kangaroos...sooo cuuuute.... (Photo by Bruce Lyon, who, unlike me, knows how to take them.)*

## FISH R US

There we were in Australia, and with no acorns to count, we went to a meeting in Perth and then spent a week wine-tasting our way through the Margaret River region before returning, via a grueling set of five flights (only two of which were technically red-eyes, at least if one doesn't count the 14 hour flight from Sydney to LA that leaves at 11:00 and arrives at 06:00 the same day) back at last to Ithaca. The best part of the meeting was, as usual, getting together with friends, two particularly notable examples of which were John and Sue, who inflicted a lifetime subscription to *The California Acorn Survey* on themselves by generously taking us out to dinner one night of the conference. This was particularly appreciated since previously the only places we'd succeeded in finding were a really dismal take-out kabob stand and a food court where we had what can best be described as Chinese-like food scraped out of a vacuum cleaner.

The faith we had that there was a god (generally envisioned in the form of a woodpecker on an oak throne) was restored upon arrival at **Kailis Bros. Fish Restaurant** at 101 Oxford Street in Leederville, a suburb of Perth. "May we have a quiet booth?" asked John, innocently. "Maybe if you come back at midnight", quipped the hostess, seating us in the back where it was nonetheless blissfully possible to carry on a conversation. Besides employing people with a sense a humor, the place had the first really good food we'd eaten in Australia. We started with a flourless seafood pancake with garlic and chili prawns, which was almost as good as the herb and garlic bread. Our entrees were similarly tasty, including Tuscan spiced snapper, linguini with blue crabmeat, and a Mulloway stew with vegetables. All in all, the food was really good and it was fabulous having the opportunity to spend it with John and Sue, who we got to know back when Janis was a postdoc at Arizona State. *Rating: 3.5 kangaroos and a joey.*

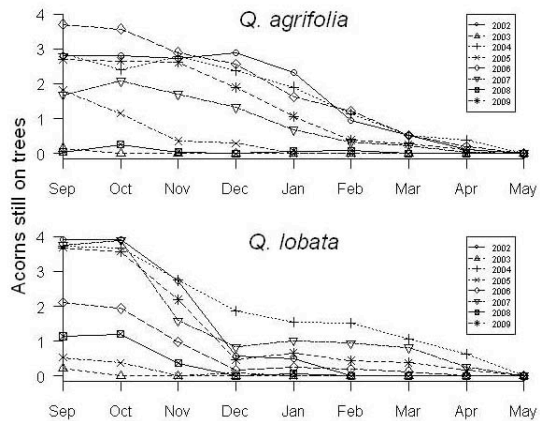
## COUNT TILL YOUR TOES FALL OFF

As many of you realize, one of the difficulties about making acorn counting a national sport is that the season is so unfortunately short. We here at the *California Acorn Survey* have been working hard to fix this problem by setting up the *California Winter Acorn Survey*. As a test trial, we started counting acorns back in 2002 on a subset of the trees at Hastings once a month through the winter, ending only when spring comes along or when the trees run out of acorns altogether. Helping in this endeavor since 2006 has been Eric Walters, my woodpecker postdoc, who went around with me regularly for the first couple of years and has been in charge of the survey entirely since I started spending winters basking in Ithaca.

So what do we find? Unsurprisingly, there's a lot of variability among years: shockingly, when there aren't any acorns in September, we generally don't find any later on in the winter either. But in good years, there can

be a significant number of acorns still on the trees through the winter and even into the spring. In 2002, for example, there were still, on average, more *Q. agrifolia* acorns on the trees in January than were produced in 4 of the 9 years. Although we knew this about coast live oaks some time ago, valley oaks were another story. For the most part, acorns in this deciduous species mostly disappear off the trees in November, as expected. But not always: in 2004, for example, there were still a lot of acorns on a small number of trees in February and beyond, long after all the leaves had fallen off. We have yet to fully explore the implications of this, beyond the fact that at least in some years, one needn't resort to virtual acorn-counting software to keep in shape for the main season in the fall.

Summary of the Hastings winter acorn survey, 2002-2009  
(mean log-transformed acorns counted in 30 sec by month)



## WRAP-UP AND FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

And that would appear to be all the time we have for this year's *California Acorn Report*. We gratefully acknowledge support from the National Science Foundation, the official science foundation of the *California Acorn Survey*. Our corporate offices include:

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*The California Acorn Survey, founded in 1980, is a vast international conspiracy of a dozen or so people dedicated to the understanding of acorn production by California oaks.*

*Code names and years of servitude include*

Ron Mumme, Meadville, PA (1980-83, ex-officio 2009-)

Mark Stanback, Davidson, NC (1989-90, 1992)

Elizabeth Ross-Hooge, Mt. McKinley, AK (1991)

Jay McEntee, Berkeley, CA (2005)

Xiaoan Zuo & Winjin Li, Lanzhou, China (2010)

Eric Walters, Jamesburg, CA (2006-2010)

Bill Carmen, Mill Valley, CA (1981-88, 90-92, 94-98, 2000-10)

Jean Knops, Lincoln, NE (1993-2010)

Walt Koenig, Ithaca, NY/Jamesburg, CA (1980, 1984-2010)