

# Placer County oak tree may be biggest in U.S.

## 'Lover's Leap Oak' awaits title

By Jim Woodworth  
BLM Public Affairs Specialist

In a tangle of underbrush on the western slope of Moody Ridge sits a mammoth California Black Oak (*Quercus kelloggii*), its girth, height and spread possibly the largest in the state. It awaits the title as the biggest specimen in the United States.

"Lover's Leap Oak" stands on a mountaintop about 3 miles south of the Alta camp on Interstate 80, near a high promontory called Lover's Leap that overlooks the North Fork American River Canyon.

Literally thousands of small trees surround the base of the oak. Its limbs dwarf the pines, cedars and firs just as a giant and muscular movie idol like Arnold Schwarzenegger might tower over a classroom of kindergarten tots.

The site is on U.S. Bureau of Land Management lands. Remnants of former lumbering activity are still visible in the area, but none are within 100 yards of the 350- to 450-year-old tree.

A team of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) specialists recently measured the tree for consideration by the American Forestry Association's National Register of Big Trees. Included in the team from the Folsom Resource Area were David W. Raney, forestry staff chief; Charles Bollinger, forester; Sarah Arden, forestry technician and Edwin V. Clarke, realty specialist.

The presence of the California Black Oak was called to BLM's attention by Flat resident Russell Towle. He contacted Austin B. Carroll and Willie Carroll, registered arborists from the Highlands.

Willie Carroll visited the site and is excited about the prospects of this tree

of 28.2 feet, a height of 124 feet and a crown spread of 115 feet.

The newly discovered Lover's Leap Oak has a girth of 29.5 feet (15 inches greater), but the estimated height is about 100 feet and 110-foot crown spread.

The tree stands at approximately 4,000-foot elevation. Willie Carroll roughly estimates its age at between 350 and 450 years old.

The BLM team had a tough time getting the required measurements because the Lover's Leap Oak is crowded among small, 10-20 and 30-foot tall pines, firs and cedars, some of which have died because of lack of sunlight.

Pushing their way through the wooded maze, the crew worked toward the outer fringes of the grove, their faces and arms scratched and cut by broken tree limbs. The tree sits on a westward slope that drops fairly rapidly putting the uphill base of the tree 2- to 3-feet higher than the downslope base.

All four BLM employees carefully stretched the tape around the tree 4 1/2 feet above the base to take the girth measurements, as required.

Approximately six feet above the base, the tree forks with its huge limbs spreading approximately northward and southward. These arms may be as big as 15 feet each in circumference, reaching skyward for 30 feet or so before other large limbs spread their reach in all directions. One large eastward-leaning secondary limb has been snapped off about 50 feet above the ground.

Willie Carroll has asked permission of BLM to begin work to protect the tree. Carroll said the oak has some crown rot and some root rot, all of which must be removed to keep the tree healthy. At the same time, he believes it may be necessary to place reinforcements around



Journal photo by Don Myrick

Colfax Chamber of Commerce president Ralph Kummer leans against what may be the largest Black Oak tree in the nation.

trees should be cleared from around the tree, Carroll said that should be done on a selective basis and over a long period of time. He said if it were cleared away, portions of the Lover's Leap Oak would

temperature from warming up too fast and putting the oak into a "tough condition."

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The presence of the California Black Oak was called to BLM's attention by Dutch Flat resident Russell Towle. He also contacted Austin B. Carroll and Willie Carroll, registered arborists from North Highlands.

Willie Carroll visited the site and is excited about the prospects of this tree being the largest known California Black Oak in the United States. The current holder of that title is a specimen in southern Oregon in the Siskiyou Mountains.

The present record-holder has a girth

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The tree stands at approximately 4,000-foot elevation. Willie Carroll roughly estimates its age at between 350 and 450 years old.

The BLM team had a tough time getting the required measurements because the Lover's Leap Oak is crowded among small, 10-20 and 30-foot tall pines, firs and cedars, some of which have died because of lack of sunlight.

Pushing their way through the wooded maze, the crew worked toward the outer fringes of the grove, their faces and arms scratched and cut by broken tree limbs. The tree sits on a westward slope that drops fairly rapidly putting the uphill base of the tree 2- to 3-feet higher than the downslope base.

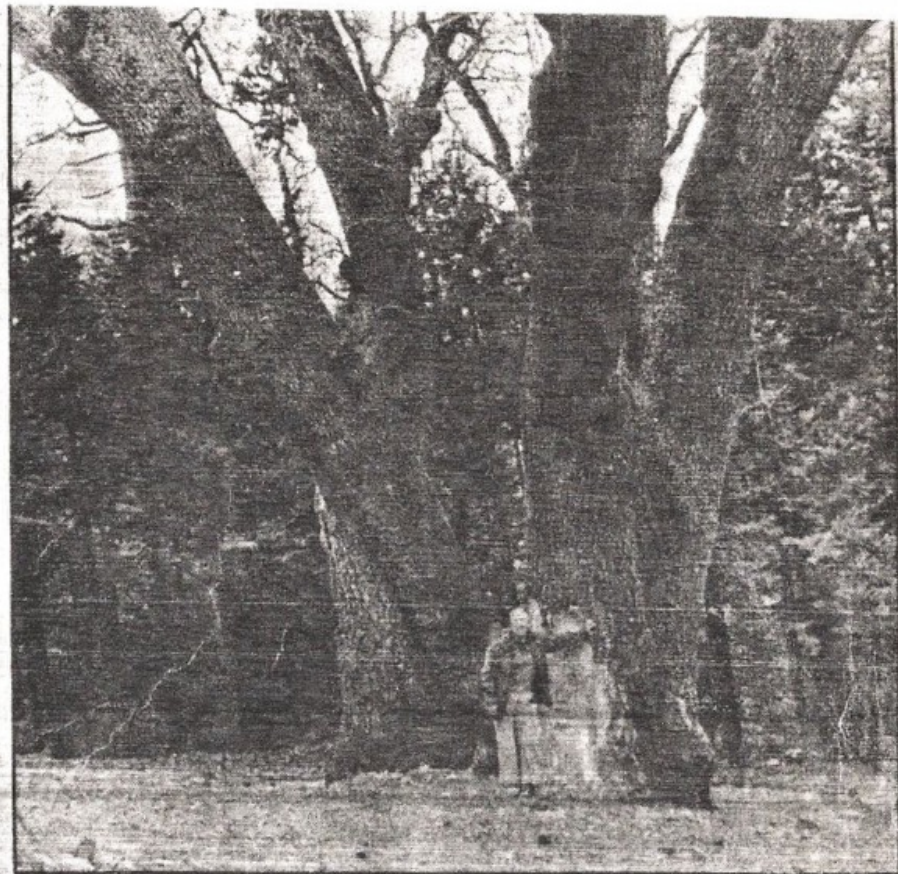
All four BLM employees carefully stretched the tape around the tree 4½ feet above the base to take the girth measurements, as required.

Approximately six feet above the base, the tree forks with its huge limbs spreading approximately northward and southward. These arms may be as big as 15 feet each in circumference, reaching skyward for 30 feet or so before other large limbs spread their reach in all directions. One large eastward-leaning secondary limb has been snapped off about 50 feet above the ground.

Willie Carroll has asked permission of BLM to begin work to protect the tree. Carroll said the oak has some crown rot and some root rot, all of which must be removed to keep the tree healthy. At the same time, he believes it may be necessary to place reinforcements around the two major limbs to prevent them from splitting apart due to tremendous weight and spread.

He proposes to complete the work before winter snow falls.

When asked if the brush and small



Journal photo by Don Myrick

Colfax Chamber of Commerce president Ralph Kummer leans against what may be the largest Black Oak tree in the nation.

trees should be cleared from around the tree, Carroll said that should be done on a selective basis and over a long period of time. He said if it were cleared away, portions of the Lover's Leap Oak would be exposed to the hot sun for the first time in perhaps a hundred years. "Trees, like humans, can be burned by the sun," Carroll said. In addition, it may be necessary to work with the soil around the base of the tree to prevent its present

temperature from warming up and putting the oak into a "drought condition."

Nearby is Lover's Leap, a promontory of huge rocks sitting at 4,120 feet elevation, overlooking the North Fork American River Canyon and its 35 miles of wild and scenic river about 2,400 feet almost directly below the rugged viewpoint.