

# POINT REYES LIGHT

Volume LXII No. 9/ Point Reyes Station, California

April 30, 2009



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Soccer players battled at a community pickup game in Bolinas last Tuesday. Softball and soccer games every Tuesday at Mesa Park are open for anyone looking for a little competition. Photo by Eli Hamann.

## Art book brings Tam into focus

by **Jacoba Charles**

Inverness Park artist Tom Killion and poet Gary Snyder spoke to a full house at Book Passage in Corte Madera on Tuesday night. The pair recently co-authored *Tamalpais Walking*, a multifaceted portrait of a much-loved mountain that blends poetry, history and Japanese-style woodblock prints.

"You learn a lot, that's one of the great things about the book," Snyder said. "It really deepens what the mountain is in our landscape."

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## Clean energy, women's way

by **Natalie Jones**

Long before Jon Stewart came along, Barbara George figured out that one of the best ways to get people to listen is to get them to laugh. It isn't easy to try to find humor in nuclear power and California's energy disaster, but after a few decades, George hasn't burned out. It's as if she's drawing her own energy from a steady and measured source, such as, say, a solar panel.

George founded the Fairfax-based Women's Energy Matters (WEM) in 2001 based on the collaborative qualities that she has found women bring to activism. According to the organization's mission statement, WEM approaches energy

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## Bolinas asks: bumpy or flat?

by **Nathaniel Page**

Nan Khtikian drives a station wagon manufactured in the last millennium. For the most part, the vehicle maneuvers across the furrows and ruts of the Bolinas mesa in a satisfactory manner.

On February 25, Nan was motoring home along Poplar, the mesa's northernmost moat. She reached the 300 block, descended towards the headwaters of Alder swale, and encountered a knoll that the old beast couldn't pass. She parked and got out.

"It's a classic Bolinas tempest in a teapot," said Andrew Blake, the boss of the

West Poplar Ad-Hoc Road Committee. "It all started with a comedy of errors..."

The speed bump had appeared overnight, the work of a woman in the adjacent house. The house is poised at the brink of the ravine. Poplar dips slightly before it, and motorists often barrel past. A speeder once smashed a dog there.

Nan approached the house and told the woman that her station wagon would not mount such a palisade. She asked cordially that the woman lower the bump. The woman resisted.

Bolinas Community Public Utility Dis-

# » Tam

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He's right. Leafing through *Tamalpais Walking* is like discovering a mythical version of home. Everything is familiar—pipeline trail, Potrero meadows, rock springs—yet each page is full of the unexpected. The sweeping views and brilliant colors of Killion's prints have a timeless quality, and Snyder's tales of exploring the mountain with Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and other Beat writers bring modern legends to life.

"Later I went alone over the rocky hill—swarmed by gnats—and being curious

went along Mickey O'Brien trail to Laurel Dell, a lovely flat meadow glowing green in the afternoon sun and a good camp," Snyder wrote in a journal entry from 1956. "Stopped and thought about what I'd said to Jack about human history, remembered that Nature is inexhaustible, why should I fret about a few years of men?"

In addition to their personal perspectives, Killion contributed a chapter on the history of the mountain. The early poets and preservationists who gave us the Mount Tam that we know today—from its undeveloped slopes to the Legend of the Sleeping Lady—are illuminated.

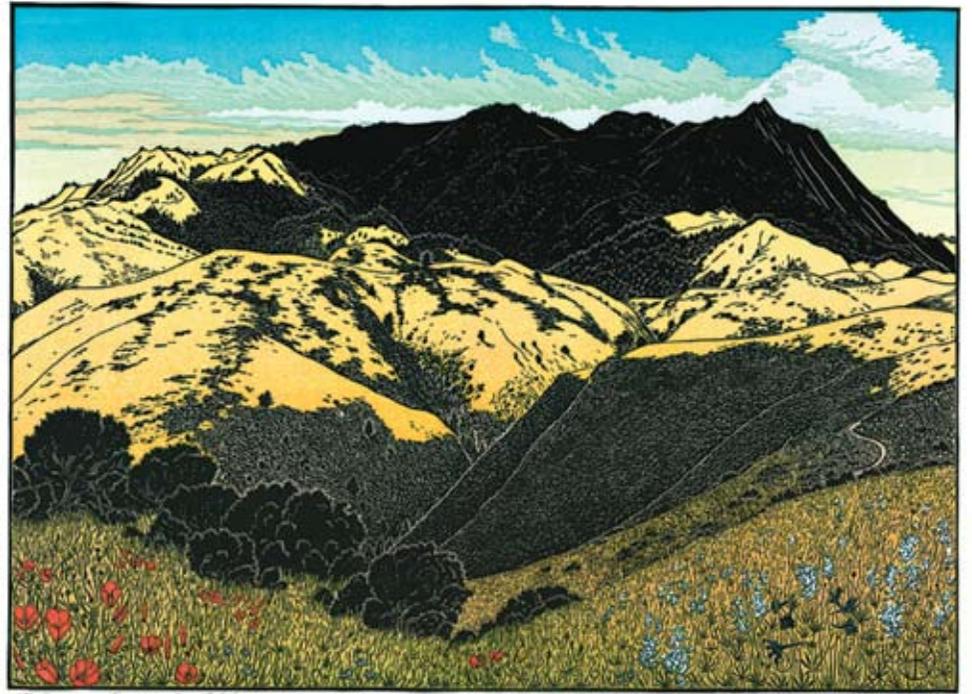
"Standing sentinel above the Golden Gate, where snowmelt and rainfall culled from Shasta to the southern Sierra meet the salty Pacific, this mountain has been a gatepost for myriad immigrants entering San Francisco Bay," Killion wrote. "Dark bar across San Francisco's northern horizon, touching the winter clouds, rising above tongues of summer fog. Just a mountain, but fixed in the imagination of a city."

*Tamalpais Walking* is the second book by the two authors, who share a love of wilderness and influences from Japan. Their first was *The High Sierra of California*, a book of prints and writings from the mountain range that has been another focus for their art and recreation. A similar project focused on Mount Tam was a natural next step.

Both Snyder and Killion have long relationships with Tam. "It was the most important landscape of my life," said Killion, who grew up on the foot of the mountain. "The formative landscape is always the one that you take with you, and there it was, looming over my childhood world." He liked to explore the seeming wilderness of the mountain, and from an early age wanted to make woodblock prints of it.

"When I was ten, my parents gave me this little book of Hokusai prints of Mount Fuji," he said. Inspired, he developed an urge to create his own prints, capturing Mount Tam in Hokusai's style.

"I always saw a parallel between Mount Tamalpais and Mount Fuji," Killion mused on Saturday, standing on the overlook where he sketched the first version of the print that can now be seen on the title page of the new book. "It is a world of little people—no cars or construction projects or big freeways—and wild mountains."



*Tamalpais Walking* by Tom Killion and Gary Snyder will be read at Toby's Feed Barn on June 20. Tickets will be available at Point Reyes Books in mid-May.

He first began making prints as a teenager—he was probably 15 when he did the first one reproduced in *Tamalpais Walking*. Though he went on to pursue a successful academic career in African history, he never stopped making prints. Seven years ago, he left academia to pursue his art full time.

"I had this strange combination of being interested in a quite a few different things but being able to focus myopically and stupidly on this one thing," Killion said. The woodblock prints also were key to his friendship with Snyder, which began in 1975 when Killion offered his first book, *28 Views of Mount Tamalpais*, to the poet.

"I really loved it and told him how much I appreciated the mountain," Snyder said. "We started seeing him from time to time and staying in touch." Snyder's own relationship with Mount Tam began as a young man. Though he was born in San Francisco in 1930, he grew up on a farm north of Seattle. At 18, he hitchhiked through San Francisco to meet up with his girlfriend on his way back to Reed College. The two went camping on Mount Tam and wound up walking and hitching all the way to Tomales Bay, "taking the easiest way through the chaparral like a pair of little god and goddess critters"

Over the two decades, Snyder lived in the

Bay Area when he wasn't traveling or living in Japan. Whether he was living in Marin, Berkeley or San Francisco he always wound up on the mountain. For a year or more he lived in a cabin in Homestead Valley.

"I would walk right out the door of that cabin and I'd be all over the mountain," he said with a gold-capped grin. "All the way to Stinson and Bolinas. I did a night hike every evening when I was working on building a house with my father."

But before he went to Japan, he added, he was "just a normal hiker." While working at a Zen temple in Kyoto translating Buddhist texts for an American heiress, he discovered an old tradition of circumambulating mountains as a walking meditation practice. He later saw similar rituals performed in other countries such as India and Nepal, and along with Ginsberg decided to bring the ceremony home to Mount Tam. Like the poets, trail-builders, preservationists and playwrights who are also given voice in *Tamalpais Walking*, the lighthearted-yet-serious ritual the pair developed was one more way for a people to make the mountain their own.

"Why Tamalpais?" Snyder asks in the book. "Because it's there, you might say. And it blessedly balances the magic city along the tight-rope of the fault line."



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