

Oaks of Six Sigma Ranch

An Insider's Guide

Else Ahlmann

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Counting Our Blessings

By God's grace, our family became stewards of an amazing piece of nature in the year 2000. The 4,300 acres that span Six Sigma Ranch show off a beautiful variety of terrain – fertile valleys; creeks running through deep canyons; small bubbling brooks; ponds and rolling hills; and even a small mountain.

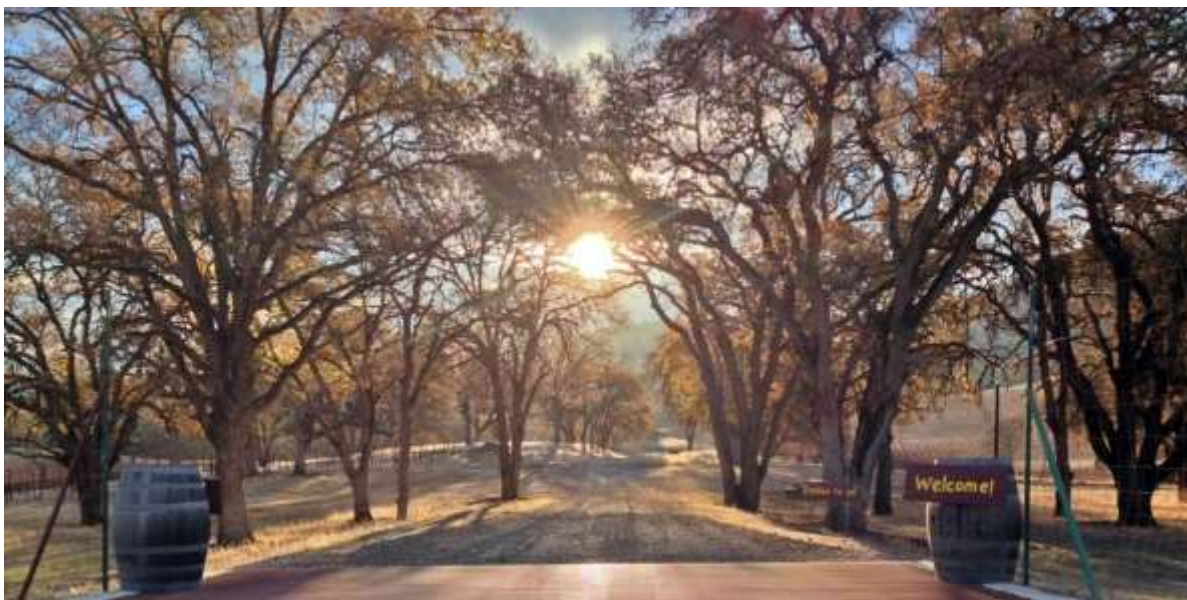
At least seven different species of oak grow on this varied landscape. Blue oak and interior live oak are spread out over most of the ranch. Majestic valley oaks stand guard along the creeks and climb up on the lower hillsides. A few canyon live oaks grow by Asbill Creek and on the rim of the canyon. Black oak is found in a few fertile spots; and California scrub oak share the most meager land with brush and other shrubs. Another shrub oak (leather oak) is one of the few plants that thrive in the harsh environment on the serpentine land. Oracle oak, a hybrid between interior live oak and black oak, grow in at least half a dozen spots.

We enjoy the oak trees' representation of God's larger creation, from the giant valley oaks that were mature trees before the Civil War, to the delicate details of the acorn that just dropped off of a shrub oak along the road. It is a blessing to live at the ranch, and we learn a bit more every year about the nature around us. In this booklet, we are happy to share what we have learned about the oak trees.

Oaks Between Front Gate and Tasting Room

Wine tasting at Six Sigma Ranch comes with a free bonus. The tasting room is two miles from the gate, and we invite you to take a look at the oak trees as you enjoy the self-guided tour down the road. When you follow Rustici Drive from the gate and continue straight on Main Street to the tasting room, you'll have the opportunity to see from your vehicle at least five oak species and one hybrid oak. (We ask you kindly to stay on the road and avoid hiking the valley and the hillsides as the wildlife there is delicate).

When you make it back to the gate after a wine tasting, we hope you find the drive worth your time – and worth the dust you may have collected along the way!



Blue oaks welcome you by the gate. Our son *Christian* took this picture on a chilly morning. *December 18, 2013.*

Most of the oaks in Michael's vineyard are blue oaks. With a backdrop of small vineyard blocks, they are beautiful year-round. In spring, the new leaves start out with a light green color. *April 24, 2012.*



On a warm summer day, Kaj, with Fly the Border Collie, found a cool spot under a blue oak. *July 1, 2006.*





I have noticed just one canyon live oak on this trek. The fairly small tree is growing on the north side of Rustici Drive, after Michael's Vineyard. It sits close to a giant dead trunk, so I speculate that this spot once had a giant canyon live oak like the ones growing further into the ranch. *July 30, 2017.*



The few valley oaks in Michael's Vineyard are hard to spot among the many blue oaks, but outside the vineyard, they become more prominent. These majestic trees grow on the north side of the road. *March 29, 2015.*



Evergreen interior live oaks grow abundantly on the hillsides. This giant tree stands out on the north side of Rustici Drive. Top: *April 1, 2013*. Bottom: *November 29, 2014*.



After studying oak trees on the ranch for several years, I thought I had at least the basics down. The evergreen trees keep their leaves over winter, and the deciduous trees develop colorful leaves and drop them in the fall.

But, then I stumbled on a few trees that behave like both. The leaves turned into a yellowish green or bright yellow in late fall or early winter but after that, they stayed on the trees for a long time instead of dropping off.

It turned out that the trees are oracle oaks, hybrids between the deciduous black oak and the evergreen interior live oak, so that explains their “intermediate” behavior. So far, I have identified oracle oak in half a dozen locations.



This oracle oak stands out with its yellowish green colors on the west side of the cattle barn, halfway up the hillside. *December 31, 2014.*



As the days start warming up in spring and summer, the valley oaks around the tasting room provide shade and keep the temperatures several degrees lower than the surrounding area. *April 6, 2015.*



Congratulations, you made it! Come on in for a wine tasting. *May 17, 2015.*

Oaks Between Tasting Room and Diamond Mine Vineyard

When weather permits, the tour to the Diamond Mine Vineyard in our off-road Pinzgauer is very popular among Wine Club members and other visitors. As you ease uphill on Sorensen Avenue, you'll learn about the history of Six Sigma Ranch, our grape growing practices, livestock program, wildlife, wine club and events – as well as any other subject you might find of interest to ask about.

Like the trip from the front gate to the tasting room, this 2-mile trek comes with the opportunity to watch half a dozen different types of oak trees. (For a tour, just call the tasting room for availability!)



The fully loaded Pinzgauer headed for the Diamond Mine Vineyard. *August 22, 2014.*

Oaks Between Tasting Room and “Annette’s House”

Eagle Rock Road (the “road to the back” of the ranch as we call it) is less traveled than the road to the tasting room and the Diamond Mine Vineyard, and we have no regular tours out there. The road follows the canyon of Asbill Creek, and there are a few creek-crossings along the way. The two-mile trek leads to interesting landscape and wildlife, and all seven oak species are represented there. The only tree I have not yet found is oracle oak, the hybrid. (You are welcome to call the tasting room to make arrangements for a hike!)



Kaj with the oldest Ahlmann grandchild, Caleb, and Fly the Border Collie in front of blue oaks by the hay barn. *October 8, 2012.*

Oaks off the Beaten Path

The ranch has a lot more to offer than what you can see from the beaten path. I'll share just a few special photos of sites that are usually only visited by cattlemen and a few trusted friends who help us with wildlife management (and often provide us with a wild turkey for Thanksgiving!)



I took this shot that I call a "family picture" on a northern hillside hidden from view from the road. The naked tree on the left is a black oak that had already dropped the leaves; on the right is an evergreen interior live oak; and the yellowish tree in the middle is an oracle oak, the hybrid between black and interior live. Maybe the "parents" are not exactly the two individual trees in the photo but, then again, they might be.
December 6, 2016.







Turkeys foraging under blue oaks in Michael's vineyard. *February 2, 2014. Photo: Molly Hartz.*



Turkeys getting ready for night in the valley oaks by the tasting room. *February 7, 2017.*



Deciduous Oaks: Leaves and Acorns

Blue oak	Valley oak	Black oak
 <p>Up to 3", oblong, with wavy margins or shallow lobes; mature leaves are bluish green</p>	 <p>Up to 4", oblong, with deep lobes; mature leaves are dark green</p>	 <p>Up to 8", with deep lobes ending in soft bristles; mature leaves are dark green</p>
 <p>Acorn 1 inch, oval, slightly tapered</p> <p>Cup Shallow, with small round knobs</p>	 <p>Acorn Up to 2.5 inch, cartridge shaped</p> <p>Cup Fairly deep, with warty knobs</p>	 <p>Acorn 1-1.5 inch</p> <p>Cup Very deep, with thin, ragged, overlapping scales</p>