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**News:** 01/15/2014

# Ancient oak at Jack London spared the axe – for now

See more from: Sarah C. Phelps (</pub/auth/80>)

The ancient but ailing oak tree that towers outside Jack London’s cottage in Jack London State Park has been offered a surprise reprieve from removal.

“We are all thrilled,” said Tjiska Van Wyck, executive director for the Valley of the Moon Natural History Association (VMNHA) which operates Jack London Historical State Park in partnership with the California State Parks.

After a large branch fell in November 2012, the coast live oak, estimated to be more than 350 years old, was evaluated by a team of arborists who found that it was infected with a pathogenic fungi, and was dying.

Out of concern for the safety of the public and the historical cottage that stands nearby, California State Parks slated the removal of the tree for November 2013, and several memorial events were held throughout the fall.

However, one final test in October 2013, conducted by



**Photo by Gus Peters.**

**The 50-foot-tall coast live oak towers over Jack London’s cottage in this photo from April 2013. The 250 to 400 year old tree has been granted a reprieve from removal after further tests performed by researchers from U.C. Berkeley.**

Matteo Garbelotto, from UC Berkeley's Forest Pathology and Mycology Laboratory, has concluded that while the tree does have significant issues with decay, steps can be taken to minimize danger and monitor the decay, instead of removing the entire tree.

"Lab tests indicated that while there is significant decay, the limbs that jeopardize the cottage and the public are only 50 percent affected," said Van Wyck. Van Wyck said Garbelotto's recommendation is that those limbs don't have to be completely removed until they are 70 percent affected.

While there is no way to tell how rapidly the decay will progress, Garbelotto's analysis estimated that the tree may be spared from removal for at least a decade, although it could be sooner.

The cost of the \$2,000 for the October test was shared between State Parks and VMNHA. Garbelotto's lab has offered to retest the tree in two years or sooner at no charge.

Van Wyck said that with regular monitoring and some removal of the dead material on the limbs that pose the greatest threat, danger to the historical cottage and the public will be minimized.

Garbelotto's report recommends keeping vehicles and people away from two limbs which could fall beyond the fence periphery. Also, the state should do a "crown reduction" (shortening) on another limb to minimize risk to the cottage, and continue to monitor the tree for further signs of decay. Van Wyck mentioned there is also a power line that runs in close proximity to the tree and that is something that may also need to be addressed.

"The tree is an ancient and valued member of the park," said Van Wyck. "We got this news in December, during the holiday season, so it was just a real gift."

*Sarah Phelps is a Kenwood Press editor and staff writer. She is a graduate of Loyola Marymount University with a B.A. in screen writing.*

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