Poison oak, prevalent in the park, has an oily substance on its leaves and a juice that are highly irritating to the skin. Note carefully the shape of the leaves, which turn from a shiny green in the Spring to rich orange in the Fall.
José Vincente DeLaveaga was a successful businessman and financier from San Francisco during the second half of the last century. Born in Mexico in 1844, DeLaveaga moved with his family to San Francisco in 1868. In 1887 he bought his first piece of land in Santa Cruz and continued acquiring more parcels for the next several years. The land which is now DeLaveaga Park was a vacation spot, or hacienda, for the DeLaveagas. Horses were a central part of hacienda culture, so the land was criss-crossed with bridal trails leading to La Corona, the highest peak of the estate. The picturesque location also included many interesting plants imported from Spain and Mexico and even a zoo with deer, fox, bears and buffalo.

When he died in 1894, José DeLaveaga left more than three quarters of his nearly one million dollar estate to a variety of charities ranging from orphanages to the SPCA to Golden Gate Park. In addition to his 965 acres in Santa Cruz county he left 50 acres to a proposed asylum for the hearing, speech and vision impaired and the remainder to the City and County of Santa Cruz for a public park. Unfortunately, a state law prohibited leaving more than one third of the total value of an estate to charity if there were surviving heirs, and though he was unmarried he did have a lot of kin including a brother, two sisters and nieces and nephews. The will was contested and a San Francisco judge entered a ruling that radically modified the will, reducing many bequests, eliminating the asylum while fortunately retaining the park. The land was officially turned over to the City and County in 1900.

Over the years, the park has provided space for many activities - an archery range, a National Guard Armory, a Boy Scout camp, the SPCA animal shelter, a stage for outdoor entertainment, trails for hiking and picnicking grounds for sunny afternoons. Today, though the Boy Scout camp, the animal shelter and the zoo are long gone, DeLaveaga Park remains a park full of natural beauty and fine facilities for public use.

DeLaveaga's dream for his hacienda is a reality: a place for the public to enjoy for years to come.