

How old are the trees in the Lee Grove?

When I got this question, the answer would have been "I have no idea." I have done a bit of research since yesterday and am now ready to make an estimate of their age.

The first thing I know about them is that they were planted; they did not sprout as part of a natural forest (although across the road to Towle Camp from the grove there are some trees that are probably less than ten years old which have either sprouted from seed or from root shoots).

Since it seems unlikely to me that Native Americans would have planted a grove of redwood trees, they were most likely planted by settlers or explorers in the area. In the early 1800's this area was given as a land grant by the Spanish Governor to the Peralta and Dominguez families and was occupied by various families until the city of Palo Alto purchased it in 1958. The city of Palo Alto did not plant the trees in the lee Grove.

By subtracting 1800 (start year) and 1958 (end year) from 2009 (this year), I have a possible age range of from 51 to 209 years old. The trees may or may not have been planted from seed; if they were transplanted the age range could easily be 20 or more years older.

I found a redwood age estimation (on the Sempervirens Fund website) created by Dr. Will Russell (an expert on redwoods). He estimates that a redwood tree will reach a maximum diameter at age 50 of 24 inches and at age 100 of 44 inches.

I measured 10 of the trees in the Lee Grove; the smallest had a diameter of 23 inches, the largest 57 inches with the average being 38 inches. I then used my numbers to determine a percentage of Dr. Russell's and found the smallest tree to be about 48 years old, the biggest to be about 127 years old and the average to be about 86 years old.

Since my mathematical age range (48 to 127) fits my chronological estimate; therefore, I can be confident saying the trees were planted in the early part of the 1900's.

Without cutting one of the trees down to count the growth rings I can not give a better answer than this estimate. The oldest living thing on Earth was a Bristlecone Pine; after it was cut down (just to see how old it was) it was found to be 4,844 years old. It is now in a museum, reminding people of why it is bad to cut down a tree just to see how old it is.

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