

Van Duzen School

The school was named after the River of the same name. The river had been named by an “exploring party” after one of its members, James Van Duzen.¹

There were several different schools established along the Van Duzen River throughout history. The first school was a log cabin located near Anderson Ford in Mad River. That school was eventually closed due to a lack of student enrollment.²

A second school was at Buck Mountain and another school was built “near Cobbs” in Humboldt County, but that school was destroyed by flooding.³ Interestingly, none of these schools or school locations are listed in the historic school records located at the Trinity County Office of Education. However, the school district of Mad River, to which Van Duzen eventually belonged, was listed first in the records of school visits in 1898. Like many other schools in Trinity County, it’s very possible that



Van Duzen School c.1962

Van Duzen School began as a private school paid for by the parents of the students who attended and was not a public school. Or it is also possible, as an article in the local paper in 1960 indicates, that the early Van Duzen School was actually located in the Bridgeville School District just across the county line in Humboldt County.⁴

In 1960, 17 students from the lower Mad River area attended Van Duzen School in the Bridgeville District. As a new plywood mill had just been built in the area and an influx of families with children was anticipated to crowd that school. However, the Bridgeville Trustees were said to prefer not to take in students living outside the district. That would mean that the 17 students mentioned above would have to travel about 18 miles over a hazardous mountain road to the school at Ruth. With the present Mad River School scheduled to be moved and rebuilt to make way for the Ruth Dam, there was a lot of confusion and concern about what would happen. The parents and the community wanted to keep all of their children together by changing school boundaries and allowing their children to attend a school closer to their homes.⁵

A petition to annex an estimated 30 acres from Humboldt County to the Mad River School District was considered in May of 1960. Under discussion was the current Ruth School and the possibility of a new school on the lower Van Duzen. A school bond was also discussed which could be paid back through Forest Reserve funding. At that time, 63 students attended the Van Duzen School and 23 attended the Mad River School.⁶ After many public hearings and decisions made by both counties, the section of Humboldt County was, indeed,

¹ Bright, William, *1500 California Place Names, Their Origin and Meaning*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998,161.

² Canale, Peggy, Ed., “Community Treasures: An historical, anecdotal, and pictorial account of our community” by the 3/4th grade class of Van Duzen Elementary School, 2000, 4.

³ Supahan, Sarah, email communication with Canale, Peggy, Southern Trinity Joint Unified School District, April 22, 2022.

⁴ “School Boundaries Plague Mad River as Area Booms”, *The Trinity Journal*, January 7, 1960.

⁵ “School Boundaries Plague Mad River as Area Booms”, *The Trinity Journal*, January 7, 1960.

⁶ “Hearing on Petition”, *The Trinity Journal*, May 12, 1960.

determined to be joined to the Mad River School District, and a new school was to be built in Trinity County located somewhere above the high water level of the dam to be called Van Duzen.⁷

The Van Duzen School of the Mad River School District was said to have “come into being” in 1962, according to a thesis written by a student from Chico State College who had visited Trinity County in the early 1970s.⁸ In March of 1962, an article in the paper discussed the low bid for building the new school at Van Duzen.⁹ The date of the completed school building was 1963, and was 7,200 square feet. The cost of the building was \$200,267.¹⁰

By May of 1969, a Trinity County High School attendance center (branch campus) was also established at Van Duzen. It was to be held on the Van Duzen School site in relocatable buildings, but the buildings were not in place when school began in September of that year. Consequently, the high school utilized classrooms in the Van Duzen elementary school until the buildings were completed in October 1969.

On September 18, 1970, the elementary school building suffered a fire in a new classroom that created extensive damage to the roof and some damage to the carpeting. This new building had only been in use for twelve school days. A faulty gas furnace was determined to be the cause. Until the damage could be repaired, half of the elementary children had to attend school in the cafeteria.¹¹

Curiously, according to the California School Directory found on the California Department of Education’s website, Van Duzen Elementary School wasn’t opened until July 1, 1980, the same date as Ruth School.¹² Perhaps this is the date that both schools merged into the Southern Trinity Joint Unified School District as that district first unified in 1976.

⁷ “Mad River to Get Section of Humboldt County”, *The Trinity Journal*, February 4, 1960; and “Mad River School Boundary Change Approved by Bd”, *The Trinity Journal*, July 14, 1960.

⁸ Holland, James. *A History of Education in Trinity County; A Thesis presented to the School of Education*. 1971. Chico State College, 33.

⁹ “Construction bid for Van Duzen School Studied”, *The Trinity Journal*, March 29, 1962.

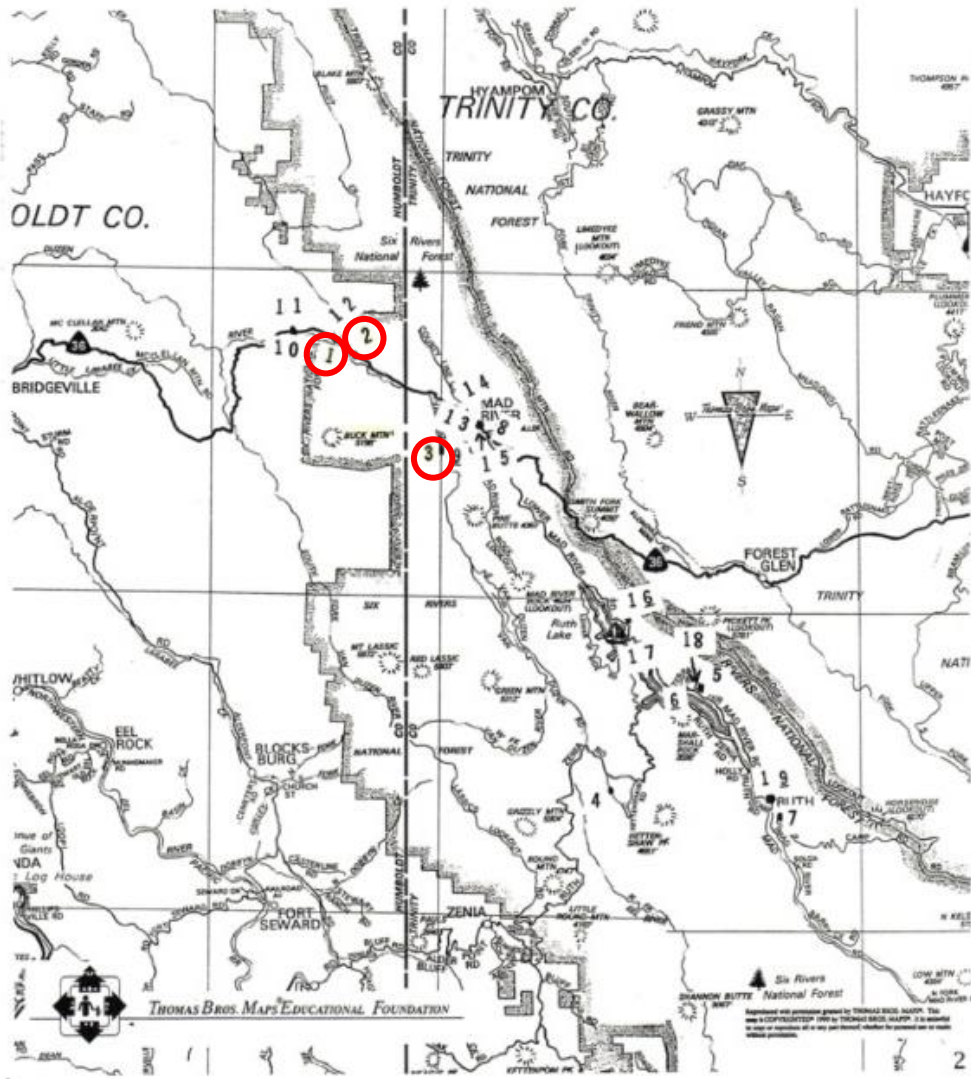
¹⁰ This was referred to in handwritten notes found at the Trinity County Office of Education.

¹¹ “Fires Create Problems for Two Schools in the County”, *Trinity County School Bulletin*, October 1970, 2.

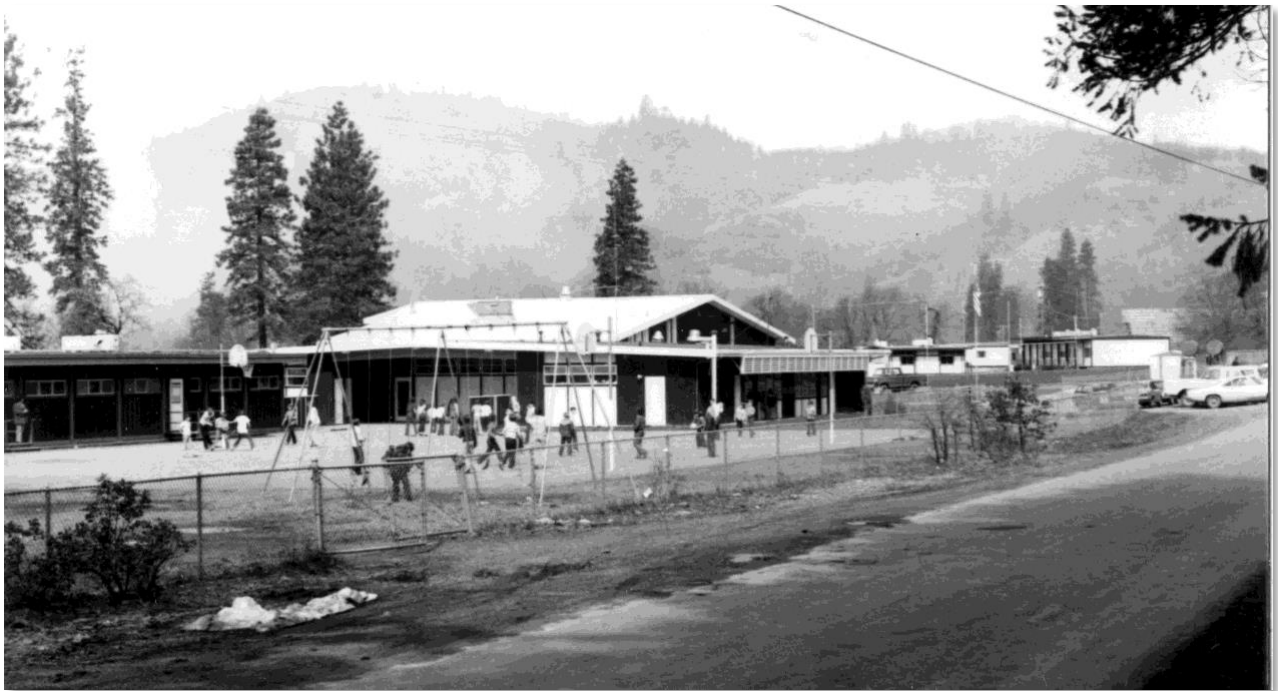
¹² *California School Directory*, www.cde.ca.gov/schooldirectory/details?cdscode=53738336053805, accessed on March 5, 2023.

VAN DUZEN ELEMENTARY

Mad River, California



The map above is from "Community Treasures: An historical, anecdotal, and pictorial account of our community" created by the 3/4th grade class of Van Duzen Elementary School, 2000. Peggy Canale was the Editor and the classroom teacher. It indicates that #1 is "The Old Van Duzen School (near the Weekender); #2 is Old Van Duzen School (Near the Humboldt County Line); and #3 is Van Duzen School today. Used with permission.



Photos of Van Duzen School are from the Trinity County Office of Education's Historic Photo Collection