

# The Traveling Beekeeper



## Road Travel Log: As Almond Petals Fall

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Wicwas Press

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**M**arch was a pretty amazing month for me, as I played a series of cards to visit the almond orchards of California along with visiting several beekeepers. The first card I played was a frequent flier pass that turned out to cost me \$10 to fly in and out of Sacramento. The second card was for contacts with bee clubs in California, and I was able to attend four and speak at three meetings of local clubs over a nine-day period. Finally, I got to play my "I want to see the almond petals fall" card, and won the hand. It was great.

The flight from Chicago to Sacramento was cloudless, and I got some brilliant shots from 38,000 feet of the frosty and snowy middle and west of the country until we started to land in the Sacramento River valley, and then it was green! I was to hook up with Randy Oliver (author of a series of articles in *ABJ*) after I got my rental car. I drove

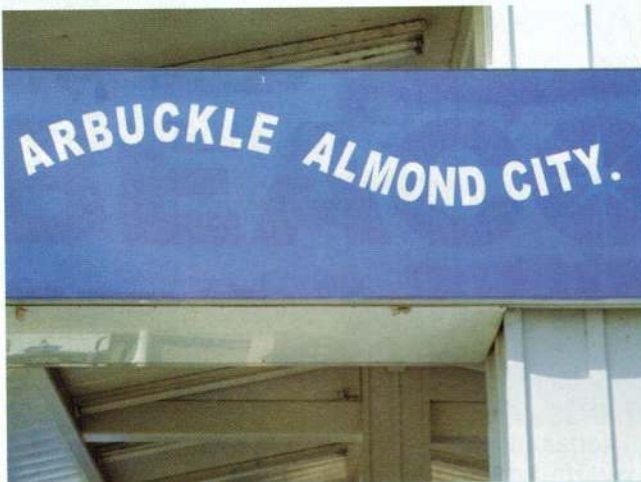
up to Nevada County and got directions. I was able to find Randy's place, but no Randy. He was out chasing some bees somewhere with his son. We got things sorted out, and I was put up with Randy's mother, Joan.

Joan Oliver is a charming lady and a wonderful hostess. She makes a mean breakfast and I was glad when she joined Randy and me for a tourist day into the almonds, where we were able to look at the bees Randy had rented for pollination. We got sandwiches and drinks and had a picnic with the bees in one of the orchards, the grass green and the bees filling the air with the sound of their business.

I was able to pick out a few of my favorite shots of the almonds in bloom. I hope you enjoy them. There was plenty of talk of CCD (Colony Collapse Disorder), but none was seen. The bees I visited, from several beekeepers, were strong,

apparently healthy and the beekeepers were getting some mighty impressive pollination rental checks from the growers. I was in bees and almonds from Arbuckle to Chico California, and it seems the bees made the almond growers a lot of money this year.

While on this trip I had a telephone message with acceptance of my bid to buy a house in Kalamazoo, Michigan near where I grew up. I will be a few miles from my 92-year-old mother, and have a functional place where I can expand my beekeeping publishing and writing efforts. Talk of doing some beekeeping with breeding as an objective is so far, just talk, but it would be fun to do some again. But by the time this reaches you, I will have packed up and left Connecticut after 27 years, and relocated in the area I left in 1963 when I took off for college.



Arbuckle, California is the self-appointed Almond Capital of the world, as the gas-station sign indicates.



Drive into the almonds where Randy Oliver has some of his bees for pollination.





Honey bees at work on the almond flowers.



My goal was to see almonds in petal fall, and I was right on target. The weather was in the low 70s to low 80s during my visit—warmer than usual even for California!



Growers and their brokers tell the beekeepers where to drop their hives, and there are often bees along the roadside and at every corner, as well as in the middle of the fields.



Randy Oliver's bees at work flying to and from the almonds.



Joan Oliver  
in the almond orchard.



Thousands of acres of newly planted almonds will increase the demand for almonds very quickly. Bees are usually placed on trees in "third leaf" — the third season they are in the ground in the orchards.





Bees gather both pollen and nectar from almond flowers and the colonies build during the bloom if they are in good shape going into the orchards.



Randy and Joan Oliver eat left-over almonds from the previous season, in still-eatable mummies on the trees. This was after we ate sandwiches to the sound of bees pollinating the flowers.

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