

Calaveras Upgrade

Story by Eric Wolfe Photos by John Storey

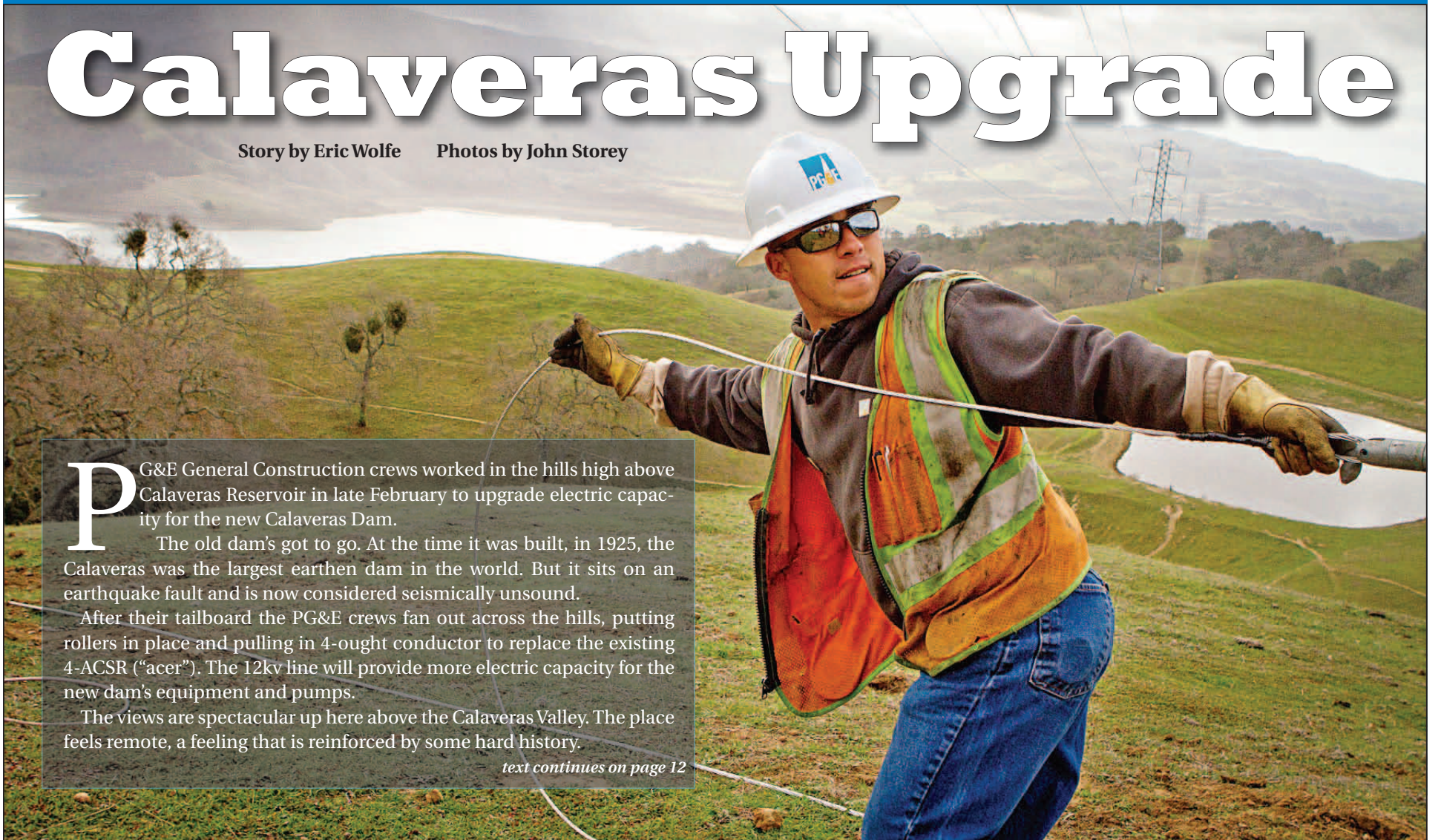
P G&E General Construction crews worked in the hills high above Calaveras Reservoir in late February to upgrade electric capacity for the new Calaveras Dam.

The old dam's got to go. At the time it was built, in 1925, the Calaveras was the largest earthen dam in the world. But it sits on an earthquake fault and is now considered seismically unsound.

After their tailboard the PG&E crews fan out across the hills, putting rollers in place and pulling in 4-ought conductor to replace the existing 4-ACSR ("acer"). The 12kv line will provide more electric capacity for the new dam's equipment and pumps.

The views are spectacular up here above the Calaveras Valley. The place feels remote, a feeling that is reinforced by some hard history.

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ABOVE AND LEFT: Will Soria

BELOW: Crews gather for the tailboard before starting work.



PG&E General Construction

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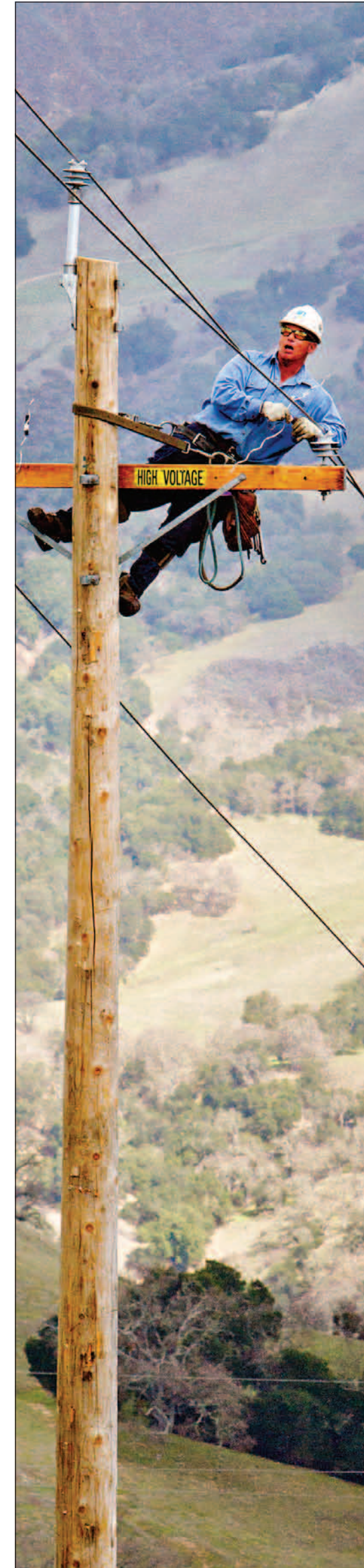
Eric Arnold



Tom Smithwick, left, and Ryan Rodriguez



Don Wamsley



Todd Walker



Eric Arnold



Ryan Rodriguez



Will Soria



Eric Arnold, in the bucket, and Will Soria

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Eric Arnold, in the bucket, and Ryan Rodriguez



Todd Walker

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The first effort to build a dam here ended in failure, when the structure collapsed before construction was completed. A worse tragedy struck on Father's Day 1963, when the reservoir swallowed two men out for a short flight in a single-engine Ercoupe. No one saw the plane go down, but suspicion fell on the Calaveras Reservoir and the children of one of the men returned several times over the years to cast red roses on the water's surface.

The bodies were recovered in the 1990s after a drought shrank the reservoir and uncovered the plane's wreckage.

But today this valley's troubled past seems to recede a little further as the sun streams through a break in the clouds and the IBEW members check the sag on the new lines they've pulled in.

To a lineman, perfect sag is a thing of beauty.

"It looks great," says Cisco Schaaf, a five-year member of IBEW Local 1245. "And you couldn't be in a finer place."

The new dam is expected to be operational in 2015.



Job over, heading back to the trucks.



John Marshall



Pat Windschitl, left, and Jason Fannan



Working the Calaveras job on Feb. 28 were, from left: Eric Arnold, Ryan Rodriguez, Alvin Knackstedt, Sabin Moreno, Pat Windschitl, Chad Nelson, Dave Garrity, Tom Smithwick, Phil Montoya, John Marshall, Howard Hancock, Cisco Schaaf, Don Wamsley, Will Soria, Alex Ellis, Jeff, Jason Fannan, Warren Recht, Todd Walker.