



Canyon News

Black Mountain Park • Del Mar Mesa Preserve

Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve

Friends of Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, Inc.

April May June

Volume 23, No. 2

Passing of an Icon Jack Northrop

Mike Kelly

Jack Northrop passed away Saturday, March 28 of this year. Jack was a charter member of the Friends of los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve who was passionate about saving the Preserve from development. He served many years on the Citizens Advisory Committee to the Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Task Force, a joint City and County committee that has oversight of the park.

Jack was no stranger to these pages, including articles just a couple of months ago. He wrote about the geology of the area, wildlife, the last cattle

See p. 3 for more

SDMBA Effort Del Mar Mesa Cleanup

Mike Kelly

The San Diego Mountain Bike Association (www.sdmba.com) organized a tremendous cleanup of the eastern part of the Del Mar Mesa, and the "Tunnels" portion of Deer Canyon (see p. 6 for pictures). In my recollection, the 93 volunteers that turned out for this event is only second to the Coastal Cleanup in the Preserve of 2 years ago.

Senior Ranger Gina Washington had this to say:

THANK YOU, THANK YOU,

See p. 6 for more

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Cactus Wren Project Underway

Mike Kelly, conservation chair

Our multi-year Cactus wren project — detailed in the last *Canyon News* — is well underway thanks to the more than 60 volunteers who have helped out so far. They have helped plant almost a 1,000 native prickly pear and cholla on one of the Cactus wren sites.

Many of the volunteers have come from the Mt. Carmel High School Key Club, while others have come via the Westview High School Advocates for a Better Environment organization.

Regular volunteers who have made most if not all of the volunteer work parties include Friends' Board member Edward DiBella and Janet Nelson. They have helped immensely with the preparation and organization each time.

Do to the warm weather and lack of irrigation on the site, we will not plant anymore until next winter's rains start. We will restart our tamarisk (saltcedar) control program again, beginning in May and continuing into June. See our Calendar in this issue for details.

We had exciting news recently when Senior Ranger Ed Christenson reported sighting Cactus wren on Lu-

See p. 7 for more



Jack Northrop, PhD on his horse, a familiar site on the trails of Peñasquitos Canyon, the Del Mar Mesa, and Carmel Mountain Preserve.

Free Hikes & Volunteer Opportunities

It's spring and the wildflowers are out. The yellow blooming shrub on the south and west facing slopes is probably California sunflower (*Encelia californica*). In other places you can see a plant 12-18" tall with white, pearl shaped buds, a flower aptly called Pearly everlasting (*Gnaphalium californicum*). It's also one of our strongest smelling native plants, a sweet smell some liken to maple syrup! The wonderful smelling sages are also beginning to bloom. If you visit Black Mountain Park or López Canyon you can still see and smell some purple flowering mountain lilac (*Ceanothus tomentosus*). Mariposa lilies (*Calochortus splendens*) are blossoming out while the Blue dicks (*Dichelostema capitatum*) are fading. Don't miss seeing our wildflowers and don't forget to smell them!

Hikes are free. Be sure to wear good trail sneakers/boots, sun protection, and bring plenty of water as the weather heats up. **Call 858-484-3219 for more information.**

Repeating Events

Every Saturday and Sunday:

Historic Adobe Ranch Tour

San Diego County Park docents lead a free guided tour of San Diego's second oldest standing residence, Rancho Santa María de los Peñasquitos, at 11 a.m. on Saturdays and 1 p.m. on Sundays, lasting 45 minutes. See an historic Mexican era rancho with three foot thick adobe walls, settler and Indian artifacts and tour the grounds. The Ranch House is located on Canyonside Drive off Black Mountain Road near I-15 between Mira Mesa and Rancho Peñasquitos. **Thomas Bros. p. 1189 (C7).**

Every two months:

Black Mountain Open Space Park Citizens Advisory Committee:

Thurs. 6:30 p.m.: May 14, July 9, Sept. 10, & Nov. 12

Public is welcome to attend this meeting to plan park activities. Meet in the Canyonside Recreation Center at Black Mtn. Rd. and Canyonside

Driveway. **Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7).**

Peñasquitos Canyon Citizens Advisory Committee

Thursday, May 21, July 16, Sept. 17, & Nov. 19, 6:30 p.m.

Public is welcome to attend this meeting to plan park activities. Meeting is at the historic Ranch House off Canyonside Driveway at Black Mountain Rd. **Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7).**

Friends of Peñasquitos Canyon Board of Directors

May. Call for date.

July 7, Sept. 1, Nov. 3.

Members are welcome to attend this business meeting to plan Friends' activities. Meeting is at the historic Adobe Ranch House at Black Mountain Road and Canyonside Driveway. **Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7).**

Every month:

Tracking Walk

Saturday, May 9, June 13, July 11, Aug. 8, Sept. 12, Oct. 10, Nov. 14, Dec. 12, 8 a.m.

Everyone is invited to join us for a free, easy tracking walk to learn about the art of tracking and the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. Beginner and Intermediate levels. Meet at the historic Ranch House on Canyonside Dr., Rancho Peñasquitos. **Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7).**

Miner's Loop Trail Walk, Black Mountain Open Space Park

Sat., 8 – 10 a.m. June 20, July 18.

Hike the Miner's Loop Trail on the north face of Black Mountain Park. Meet at the Parking Staging area at 14850 Carmel Valley Rd., about 1/4 mile east of its intersection with Black Mtn. Rd. in Rancho Peñasquitos. **Thomas Guide p. 1169 E7.**

Volunteer Trash Pickup López Canyon

Sun., 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.: May 24, June 28, July 26, Aug. 23, Sept. 27, Oct. 25, Nov. 22. Trash pickup in López Canyon. Volunteers needed! Community service credits available. Meet at López Ridge Park at 7245

Maps of Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve and Black Mountain Open Space Parks are available at www.penasquitos.org.

Calle Cristobal in Mira Mesa. Call Ranger Garwood at 858-538-8066 for info. **Thomas Guide p. 1208 (J3).**

Other events:

May

Volunteer Tamarisk Bash at Black Mtn. Park / Santa Luz

Sat., May 9, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Help remove the highly invasive Tamarisk (Saltcedar) in Black Mtn. Park. Bring water, sun protection, and gloves if you have them. Contact mike at mkelly1@san.rr.com or 858.342.8856 for more info. Meet in the northeast corner of Black Mtn. Ranch Community Park, 14700 Carmel Valley Rd., near Black Mtn. Rd. in Rancho Peñasquitos. **Thomas Guide p. 1189 (D1).**

Beginning Tracker/Naturalist Program

Wed. May 13, 7 p.m. & Sat., May 16, 8 a.m.

This class is devoted to developing tracking and awareness skills, with an emphasis on wildlife physiology and habits, how to move in nature, and techniques for recognizing habitats and associated flora and fauna. Email to register or go to www.sdt.org for more information.

Carson Crossing to Sycamore Crossing Loop Hike

Sat., May 23, 4 p.m. Join naturalist Linda King on this moderately paced loop walk to the waterfall and Carson's Crossing. Meet at 7107 Park Village Rd. at Celome Way in Rancho Peñasquitos, San Diego. Park by the kiosk. **Thomas Guide p. 1188 J7.**

Herb Walk in López Canyon with Will Bowen

Sun. May 31, 5-6:30 p.m. Learn to identify the different trees, plants, and shrubs of López Canyon used for food and medicine by Native Americans, Spanish, and American settlers. Meet at 4300 Sorrento Valley Blvd. in Sorrento Valley, San Diego. **Thomas Guide p. 1208 D5.**

June

Volunteer Tamarisk Bash at Black Mtn. Park / Santa Luz Sat., June 13, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Help remove the highly invasive Tamarisk (Saltcedar) in Black Mtn. Park. Bring water, sun protection, and gloves if you have them. Contact mike at mkelly1@san.rr.com or 858.342.8856 for more info. Meet in the northeast corner of Black Mtn. Ranch Community Park, 14700 Carmel Valley Rd., near Black Mtn. Rd. in Rancho Peñasquitos. **Thomas Guide p. 1189 (D1).**

Herb Walk in Peñasquitos Canyon Sun. June 21, 5-6:30 p.m. Join Will Bowen to identify the different trees, plants, and shrubs of Peñasquitos Canyon used for food and medicine by Native Americans, Spanish, and American settlers. Meet at 4206 Sorrento Valley Boulevard in Sorrento Valley, San Diego.

Trails Day

Volunteers Needed
Saturday, June 6, 10-2
Help staff the Friends' booth #133. Email Mike at mkelly1@san.rr.com or Pat at pwatkins2008@gmail.com

Northrop cont'd

drive on "the Peñasquitos," trails, and the history of some of its buildings and residents.

Following are remarks on Jack's passing by Brian Swanson, president of the Friends of los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. They were in response to the email sent by Bunny Clews, a long-time friend of Jack's, notifying us of his death.

I'm sorry to hear about Jack. Jack was a pioneer in the efforts to preserve Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve and surrounding open spaces. For many years he was on the Friends' Board of Directors, as well as the Peñasquitos Citizens Advisory Committee (he still held a CAC seat). He was a bridge to the earlier times, and with his decades of experience riding in the area, he had many stories to share with those who took the time to listen. Jack will be missed. Brian.

Jack was 86 when he died at his home in La Jolla. One of the earliest times I can remember knowing Jack was during the last cattle drive on the Peñasquitos. He and some other equestrians cowboyed up to help Norwood Brown corral his Black Angus cattle to

move them out of the canyon. With development all around and the fencing increasingly vandalized, the cattle would get out on area streets, creating a nuisance. So Brown's leasing of the canyon for his cattle came to an end. It actually marked the end of almost two centuries of grazing in the Preserve. I would meet Jack out on the trail, often on the Del Mar Mesa and Carmel Mountain, two of his favorite places to ride. In fact, he bordered his horse at the Clews Ranch in Carmel Valley. He used to ride the trails when Sorrento Valley and Carroll Canyon were still connected to Peñasquitos Canyon and when Brown had a boarding stable for horses in Sorrento Valley. Try to imagine that as you pass through this heavily developed area now!

Helping work the cattle allowed Jack to indulge one of his passions in life, his horses and riding. He knew all of the trails in our north city area, rode them and wrote about them in a booklet he published.

Jack was a man of many interests and accomplishments. During World War II he served as a flight instructor in the Navy. After the war, he received a bachelors' degree in geology at Princeton. A master's came from Columbia, and his PhD from the University of Hawaii. Marine geophysics and acoustics in the marine environment were his specialty.



Volunteers from the Grand Del Mar Hotel pose in front of a restoration site they planted at the waterfall. The hotel is a neighbor on the Preserve's northern border.. The hotel generously paid for the more than \$1,000 worth of plants.

PQ Fiesta Day

Volunteers Needed

Sunday, May 3, 10-5.

Help staff the Friends' booth and displays and pass out literature at this annual street fair in Rancho Peñasquitos. Always a fun outing. Email Mike at mkelly1@san.rr.com or

Pat: pwat-

kins2008@gmail.com



**National Trails Day
Rancho de los Penasquitos
Adobe Ranch House**

If you didn't know this historic adobe was hiding over near Black Mountain Road, come find this San Diego treasure! Lots happening the whole day.

**Saturday June 6th, 2009
10:30 AM - 1:30 PM**

Free

Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve
(off Black Mountain Rd)
12020 Black Mountain Road
San Diego, CA 92129
(858) 484-7504

The first Saturday every June is designated National Trails Day (NTD) in the United States. On that day every year more than a million hikers, bikers, equestrians, and others take part in thousands of events nationwide in celebration of America's trails. These events include new trail dedications, workshops, educational exhibits, equestrian and mountain bike rides, rollerblading, trail maintenance, and hikes on America's favorite trails. <http://usparks.about.com/cs/hikingtrails/a/trailsday.htm>

San Diego County's first Mexican land grant includes an 1823 adobe ranch house constructed by the Commandante of the San Diego Presidio. In 1846, Rancho los Penasquitos was the first place of rest for General Stephen Watts Kearny and his Army of the West after the Battle of San Pasqual. Enlarged in 1862 as the gracious home of a celebrated Yankee river boat captain and his wife, the niece of California's last Mexican governor, Pio Pico, the building and site comprise a National Historic and Archaeological District. The beautiful canyon locale within a 3700-acre open space preserve offers hiking, biking and equestrian trails.

<http://earlysandiego.org/FT00sites.html#6ranchopena>

San Pasqual Open Space Park Restoration Projects

Senior Ranger Ed Christenson

{Black Mountain Open Space Park Rangers also manage other parks in the north city area including Crest Canyon, San Pasqual, Clevenger Canyon, and Mt. Woodson. Visit the City Parks website to see trail maps and enjoy these additional places to hike, bike, or ride your horse.—Editor.]

In late December I was contacted by Jason López, Resources Manager, of the San Dieguito River Park who told me that the San Diego Urban Corps was working under a FEMA grant to do restoration work of areas that were damaged in the 2007 wildfires. The Urban Corps is a non-profit that trains at risk youth and adults in job skills. He offered me the use of up to 3 crews for up to 6 weeks to address any fire-related repair work I might have in the Santa Ysabel River valley. After a hike to assess the trail conditions and identify other potential projects, we got to work on January 5th. For 5 weeks Ranger Joel Tracey and I led crews in a major restoration effort of the San Pasqual Open Space Trail system. The trail system currently has 4.9 miles of open trails that traverse

slopes which average 30 degrees or more. The elevation change from the trailhead to the highest points on the north and south side is approximately 1,100 feet. Ranger Tracey focused on repair and construction of trail features such as stone retaining walls, rock steps, and traditional water bars. I focused on trail tread repair and restoring proper outslope, contouring switchbacks, building drain dips, and constructing one puncheon bridge.

The total work accomplished is as follows:

- Trail Restoration: 4.9 miles of trail covered. A significant portion of the south trails were worked on, the north trail didn't need as much attention, but portions of it were addressed from the trailhead to the top lookout near the end of the existing trail. One 13 foot puncheon bridge was built. Some 35 drain dips were established, 51 water bars installed, 1.8 miles of trail cleared of vegetation along its corridor, and 32 other check dams installed.
- In addition, 12 stair sections with 60 rock steps were built and 20 rock retaining walls totalling 3,000 cu. ft. were built.

- Other projects we finished were installing fencing in the north lot, generally cleaning the trailheads and raking dried, dead vegetation from the area to open up walkways, repairing damaged failing fence, installing signage along the trail, and brushing the trail corridor. Previous fire related projects in the area included building 2 puncheon bridges and installing fence around the south lot.
- On February 20, 2009 Ranger Tracey and Ranger Allen were flown by the San Diego Fire Dept. in their helicopter to the most remote portion of San Pasqual north to flag the former trail bed / trail corridor which had not been maintained regularly and mostly disappeared in the fires. The great majority of the Santa Ysabel Plateau within our property boundary was severely burned. Using GPS technology and georeferencing the old map data to align with current aerial photographs Ranger Allen imposed the trail on to a new map. Our focus for this day was to find the old trail and flag the route so it will be visible upon our return. My goal is to again establish a useable hiking trail within our property that will allow for public access to this gem of an area. Situated near a section of the Cleveland National Forest, this is one of the wildest units of the San Diego Open Space system.

Rangers spent an estimated 384 work hours on this project and the cost savings with Urban Corps through the grant was approximately \$48,000 dollars. New brochures for the area are in the works from Leslie Wollenwebber with SDRP. Rangers are providing feedback for development. Rangers remapped the upper trails at San Pasqual North in preparation for re-opening the upper trail system that has fallen out of maintenance.



Urban Crew at work on trails in Clevenger Canyon

THANK YOU to the 93 people that came out today to clean up DMM Preserve. We spent 5 hours with 3 teams of people and filled one and a half 40 yard dumpsters.

Special thanks to SDMBA for coordinating this effort. There were three pickup loads of crates hauled out of Deer Canyon. Chairs and weight sets from the mesa top, countless pounds of broken glass, yards of old construction and other debris. I don't think we could have been more successful if we had been planning this for a year.

Thanks again and I look forward to seeing all of you again on the trail.

Photos by Marvin Gerst. Right, 1-1/2 40-yard dumpsters were chock full of trash. Bottom left, some of the 93 volunteers. Bottom Right, innovative use of poles to carry trash loads out of the canyon.



Cactus wren cont'd

zardi Creek, the first such sighting in recent memory.

Cactus wren prefer a coastal sage scrub habitat dominated by cactus, either the prickly pear or the cholla. They like it at least 3' tall and dense. This provides protection from predators for the nests they build in these thickets of cactus.

This song bird forages for insects in the shrubs and other plants making up the chaparral, plants such as California sagebrush (*Artemisa californica*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum californica*), Blue dicks (*Dichelostema capitatum*), and others.



Mt. Carmel High School Key Club volunteers take a break from planting cactus at the Santa Luz restoration site for the Cactus wren.



Mike Kelly leads a walk along Miner's Loop Trail on Black Mountain. Walks are conducted monthly.

Black Mountain Park Update

Senior Ranger Ed Christenson

Trail work was a central focus of our work in Black Mtn. Open Space Park, but not exclusively, this past quarter. Ranger staff, the Urban Corps, and volunteers:

- * Opened the connector trail with SD Mountain Bike Assoc. The trail was lightly brushed, signed, tread work completed and one puncheon installed.
- * Installed an upper set of stairs installed for a grant. The stair run was completed and vertical supports cemented in the ground. They are not yet open for public use.
- * Restored 4.81 miles of trail tread on the north and south trails (Re-established outslope, repaired erosion gullies, installed 50+ drain lenses, check dams, water bars)
- * Constructed 12 sets of rock steps (60 steps) where needed.
- * Built 20 retaining walls (3000 cu/ft) on the south trail east branch.
- * Assembled 1 13' puncheon bridge on the south trail.
- * Improved trail signage.
- * Cleared dead vegetation around the trailheads and removed litter.
- * Reinforced older fence with hardware and installed 7 lengths of new fence at the north trailhead.
- * Brushed the trail in tight locations and cleared sight lines.
- * Installed trail intersection signs.
- * Mowing trails along Lusardi loop.
- * Worked with voluntee in two events to improve Cactus Wren Habitat through a grant.
- * Organized one volunteer event to remove 60 cu. yards of non-native weeds.
- * Hosted a trail run in the Lusardi Loop with 260+ runners.



Rangers prepare to board SFD helicopter to survey fire stricken parkland.

Friends' Directory

Officers

President: Brian Swanson	760.739.5451
Vice-President: Don Albright	619.443.5937
Treasurer: Pat Watkins	858.538.2527
Secretary: Rick Botta	858.672.0584

Other Members of the Board of Directors

Edward DiBella, Ann Harvey, Mike Kelly

Walk Leaders

Brian Swanson, Don Albright, Will Bowen, Mike Kelly, Pat Watkins, Linda King, Arne Johanson, David Robertson.

Committees:

Newsletter: Mike Kelly at 858-342-8856.
Tracking Team Coordinator: Rick Botta,
858.672-0584

Conservation Chair: Mike Kelly, 858.342.8856

Webmaster: Beth Williams

Wildlife Surveys: Patrick Campbell, 760.471.9197

Trails Controversy

Mike Kelly, Conservation Chair

A bitter controversy has erupted over trails in Deer Canyon. This canyon separates Rancho Peñasquitos from the Del Mar Mesa to the west. It trends south to north, beginning at Carmel Mountain Road near SR56 and ending at its joint mouth with McGonigle Canyon in the eastern end of Carmel Valley. The controversy is over the number and location of trails and who gets to use them, pitting bikers against equestrians and user groups against conservationists and the regulatory agencies (Cal. Dept. of Fish & Game and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service).

At issue is what balance should be struck between recreational use of the preserve and adjacent open space such as the Del Mar Mesa and Deer Canyon by bikers, equestrians, and hikers and protecting the sensitive plants, habitats, and wildlife that our open space is designed to protect in perpetuity as part of the Multi-Species Conservation Plan.

The dispute has degenerated into a bitter personal one between several people, with accusations, finger-pointing, and name calling, leading to a poisonous atmosphere in the discussion, especially in the email exchanges this writer has read. The dispute has spilled over into the public arena, in listservs, online magazines, Channel 10 TV, and the community newspaper in Carmel Valley, as first the biking groups, and later the equestrians, tried to gain an advantage by inviting outside coverage they hoped would bolster their side. Of course, once the outside media is involved, truth tends to get left further and further behind! The Friends have been caught up in this dispute since our President, Brian Swanson is our representative to the Peñasquitos Canyon Citizens Advisory Committee and to its trails subcommittee. One biker group has criticized Swanson for not supporting their particular position on this issue.

One Friends' member even contacted me, asking me to help remove Brian as the Friends' representative to the CAC, believing Brian wanted to favor the equestrian side and bar bikers from the "tunnels."

See *Bike Magazine* (bikemag.com),

February 2009 for some good pictures of the "tunnels" and an account that gets some, but not all of the key facts correct. Perhaps we can sort some of these out here. See files, pictures, postings at LPCPCAC@yahoo.com as well for other points of view.

"Tunnels"

The focus has been on the groups of trails and connections known as the "tunnels." These single-track (i.e., narrow) trails resemble tunnels through the taller scrub oaks and other shrubs that are part of the habitat of Deer Canyon, having overhead canopy and close-in "walls" of vegetation. It's a different atmosphere from most trails and became a quiet favorite of the biking community in past several years. The controversy erupted at a Citizens Advisory Committee meeting in 2008 when the City of San Diego presented a final draft of the master plan for Carmel Mountain and the Del Mar Mesa.

The plan included a trail system for the Del Mar Mesa that didn't include Deer Canyon. The plan is years late in the making and is meant to guide management of the Carmel Mountain Preserve and the Del Mar Mesa Preserve, extensions of Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve to the north that are home to some of the most sensitive habitat left in coastal San Diego.

Worried that the lack of mention of the "tunnels" trails in the plan could lead to their being closed, Erik Basil of a group calling itself the Multi-use Trails Coalition mobilized — as is their right of course — a sizeable contingent of bikers to attend the CAC meeting where the latest draft of the plan was being presented. Unfortunately, the person presenting the plan wasn't familiar with it, being a new employee and not having been part of the team that guided the plan through the Parks and Planning Depts. internal processes or the public process in the early years. The knowledgeable people had left City employment, leaving a person who wasn't able to explain basic facts about the plan or to answer questions.

The CAC agreed that more time was needed to study the "tunnels" trails is-

sues and asked the City to come back to a future meeting for more public discussion. The City agreed to do this and subsequent meetings continued the discussion. The existence of the "tunnels" was news to many, if not most, of the CAC members.

The Friends representative, along with other conservation minded people was concerned about the location of the trails through very sensitive habitat, this sensitivity now accepted as fact by most in the discussion. The Trails Sub-committee of the CAC, composed of representatives of the biking, equestrian, and hiking user groups, decided to visit the "tunnels."

Enter the 'Regulators'

As the controversy erupted publicly, the regulatory agencies including the Calif. Dept. of Fish & Game and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, took notice. They have some jurisdiction because the City developed the Multiple Species Conservation Plan under sections of the Endangered Species Acts on both the Federal and State level. These agencies are the permitting agencies because of the presence of species of plants and animals listed as Federally or State Threatened or Endangered. They proved to be extremely concerned about the unplanned and unsupervised trails through sensitive habitats, both in Deer Canyon and on the adjacent Del Mar Mesa with its vernal pools. Both agencies own parcels with sensitive habitat on the Del Mar Mesa. They pressured the City Parks Dept. to close off the trails until the matter could be studied by them. The City did so, going so far as to station a Ranger with ticket-writing authority in the area.

About this time someone did some significant enlarging of the "tunnels," principally up. Although not proven, the charge — with some logic behind it — was that equestrians had cut them overhead to permit their passage on horseback. The original trails had been too low to allow mounted equestrians to pass through. For the first time, horse sign appeared in the "tunnels." Finger-pointing of bikers and equestrians as to

who had done what illegal cutting in which decade became common.

For the regulators, Parks Dept. and conservation minded members of the CAC the issue became, ok, there are trails now in an area where there were supposed to be none — what do we do? These lands were and are recognized as extraordinarily sensitive in the master community planning encapsulated in the Future Urbanizing Area process of the last 30 years.

Future Urbanizing Area

Long story short, the voters passed Proposition A in 1985, the first and only growth management proposition to win a majority of votes in San Diego. Prop A put 12,000 acres of relatively undeveloped land, mostly (but not all) in the northern part of the City of San Diego, off limits to urban development without master planning and a vote of the people. This land was called the Future Urbanizing Area. Prop A was put on the ballot by a coalition of environmentalists appalled by the ‘leap-frog’ development and subsequent strain on city finances and the loss of open space occurring with development in the north city area of San Diego

The FUA was divided into 5 Subareas. The Del Mar Mesa was in its own Subarea V. Deer Canyon was in Subareas III (Pacific Highlands), IV (Torrey Highlands) and V, complicating any trail designation different from the plans for each of these areas. The master plans for Subareas III and IV went on the ballot and were approved, with environmentalist support, by the voters.

The master plan for Subarea V, which proposed less than urban level densities and set aside about 60% of its land for open space, was part of the “Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan,” a type of master planning under the City’s regulations. After a big public fight and many compromises it was finally passed by the City Council and later amended as recently as 2000.

All three of these master plans were the subject of extensive public review including multiple Environmental Impact Review documents, public meetings at area planning groups, and on numerous occasions at the City’s Planning Commission and the San Diego City Council. I attended most of these and sat on various committees in-

involved in these planning efforts. Why do I emphasize this? Because, significantly, while trail systems were included in all 3 plans, **not one of these plans proposed a trail for Deer Canyon or the eastern portion of the Del Mar Mesa. None is shown on any of the trail maps.** Were they forgotten, an oversight as some in the discussion seem to suggest? No, it was in recognition of the biological importance of the few hundred acres comprising the eastern portion of the Del Mar Mesa and Deer Canyon.

In the many public meetings and documents for each of the 3 plans and the ballot fights not one person or group involved in the current fight over trails came forward to propose these trails at that time. The fact that Deer Canyon falls into all three FUA subareas: northern half in III, eastern rim in IV, and southern half in V **poses a legal vulnerability for those proposing trail changes to the plans. It suggests the need for consensus to avoid court dates!**

Biological significance

The Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan (1996, 2000) highlights this sensitivity:

The Del Mar Mesa is considered a high value core habitat area ... The City of San Diego and a number of wildlife conservation groups and wildlife agencies have identified the Del Mar Mesa as an important area that allows for wildlife movement connecting Los Peñasquitos Canyon with Deer Canyon, McGonigle Canyon, Carmel Valley, and open space areas to the north, west, and east. Corridors and habitat linkages are important in the maintenance of viable wildlife populations and biological diversity ... Deer Canyon has been identified as a major corridor due to its relative isolation from disturbance and its water sources.

During the 1990s the City finalized another planning effort, the Multiple Species Conservation Plan, a master plan for protecting some 86 Threatened and Endangered Species and their habitats under special provisions of the State and Federal Endangered Species Acts. These plans were the subject of a more than 10 year public planning ef-

fort that involved developers, the local communities, conservationists, user groups, city planners, regulators and others. The result was an integrated plan that seeks to maintain viable connections between multiple “core habitat preserves” within the City to other open space areas outside. The habitat and trails plans for the Del Mar Mesa and Deer Canyon and this MSCP are consistent with each other. Again, no one came forward during this very public process to propose trails in Deer Canyon. This inaction stands in marked contrast to the approach the Friends used to propose recognition and establishment of wildlife corridors and linkages in these same plans.

Friends’ wildlife corridor mapping

In the 1980s the Friends became concerned about habitat fragmentation when we saw Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve cut off from good connections to Beeler Canyon and the east by the new Scripps Poway Freeway at Pomerado and other plans. I formed a team of scientists to map wildlife corridors in the north city area to identify corridors so we could protect them as future planning developed. Dr. Alan Pepper, our then Conservation Chair and a Salk Institute geneticist and plant scientist; Dr. Mike Conrad, former head of the Peñasquitos Planning Board, geneticist and owner of a Biotech company; Dr. Will Bowen, anthropologist; and Dave Hogan, biologist with the then Southwest Center for Biodiversity and vernal pool expert; joined me in a year-long effort to map existing and potential wildlife corridors and linkages. But we didn’t stop at mapping.

We invited and paid the way for Dr. Mike Soulé, the founder of Conservation Biology and an expert on habitat planning and corridors, to come and ground truth our maps. On a field trip with more than 30 biologists from many agencies we toured our corridor locations, receiving a great tutorial from Soulé along the way. He told everyone the maps were good and the corridors had the potential to work as we wanted.

We next put together a “dog and pony” show as we used to call them (PowerPoint now?) and made formal

presentations to the environmental staffs at the City and Caltrans and to a coalition of developers and property owners in the north city area. Our goal was to have our mapping integrated into the planning process early on. We were successful. We weren't perfect. We missed two corridors, one a big one (Carmel Mtn. Rd.). The second we were able to identify and incorporate at a later date (Camino del Sur).

SR 56, Deer Canyon & trails

Historically, the biggest threat to Deer Canyon was the middle alignment of State Route 56. The original alignment, if my memory serves me correctly, came from the master state route map drawn up and approved by the legislature in the 1930s. Yes, it's way back then that a whole system of state highways was envisioned. SR56 was a line on a map then that came down Deer Canyon, what came to be known as the central alignment.

Thank goodness SR56 wasn't built all at one time. Due to funding, ballot measures, and urban planning issues, it was built in three sections: the western or coastal portion starting at I-5 and running east to about the current Carmel Valley Rd. exit, the eastern section, from Black Mtn. Rd. east past I-15, into Sabre Springs, and the middle section connecting the two, the last to be built. This 'split' personality of the highway gave the community the opportunity to push the alignment out of Deer Canyon, our last undisturbed coastal canyon.

The middle portion wasn't built until last for two reasons. First, it fell within the Future Urbanizing Area boundaries of Proposition A (see above) and the backers of Prop A didn't want it built until master planning for the entire area was approved. Second, the money for SR56 was coming from a sales tax that was part of a package of transportation measures going on the ballot for voter approval (TransNet I). To win a majority vote, the TransNet proponents, led by a prominent San Diego and state politician, needed the environmental vote. A deal was cut that the environmental groups involved in the FUA wouldn't oppose TransNet if funding for the middle portion of SR56 was precluded from the transportation measure, which it was.

Saving Deer Canyon, a new alignment for SR56

As the City and developers moved forward with plans to build the middle portion of SR56 down the middle of Deer Canyon, in 1997 the Friends took the lead in forming a coalition of conservation and community groups to oppose this alignment, instead proposing an alignment up out of the canyon and onto the disturbed tomato fields east of the canyon. This is where SR56 now runs.

I spent a lot of time in the 1980s and 1990s surveying Deer Canyon for its biology and the impact the highway would have on it. On several occasions in the 90s we had field trips with public officials, officials from the regulatory agencies, conservationists, city planners, and others. I remember standing with then City Councilman Harry Mathis and others on the edge of Deer Canyon surveying the planned and alternative routes we had asked to be flagged by Caltrans to visualize these impacts. Craig Adams, then Conservation Chair of the Sierra Club, was the one who actually drew on a map what was to become the "northern" alignment where 56 is today.

At that time, it was plain for all to see that neither the "tunnels" nor any other trail went up Deer Canyon. The only thing to cross it in any fashion was a utility road for SDGE's utility corridor that came off the Del Mar Mesa and crossed it from west to east more or less. The trails were to come later.

Who built the "tunnels" & when?

Part of the debate is who first created the "tunnels" trails. There's a video circulating among the bikers that purportedly shows a giant migrant camp in Deer Canyon, thus arguing that the migrants did it. The *Bike Magazine* article mentioned earlier claims 800 migrants were living in Deer Canyon at their peak numbers.

Nonsense. I hope this is an honest error by the narrator and the magazine writer and not an outright lie. Anyone that knows the topography can recognize that the camp depicted is in McGonigle Canyon. It even had a name, El Diablo. And it did have 700-800 people and small *tiendas*, a small church area, a prostitute center, and

more. This was well documented in all of the media over more than a decade.

At one point Councilwoman Abbe Wolfsheimer, whose District I the camp was in, arranged to have porta potties and potable water delivered to the site, a site on private property. Eventually, years later, the camp became such a nuisance that public pressure forced its dismantlement. When the dozers rolled in, many of the migrants dispersed to other areas, including the nearby Deer Canyon, but not nearly in the same numbers.

It's clear the migrants built some of the initial trails, which were improved and expanded by the bikers, later by the equestrians. *But, ultimately, what does it matter who built them?* No one is being prosecuted. If you don't catch someone in an illegal act, there's not much you can do.

New trails require an extensive environmental review process just like a development would. This was the case with the recently approved trail down from Camino Ruiz Park into the Preserve. Building or improving and expanding a trail system and then presenting it as a fait accompli to get around this review process can't be allowed or it will be happening all over. The equestrians did this in Little Shaw Valley several years ago, through southern maritime chaparral, and we denounced it then and put a stop to such illegal trail building.

The "tunnels" are going through such an environmental review now. Will it be necessary to publish an EIR? It might be made legally necessary if a consensus on how to move ahead isn't reached.

Balancing priorities, then & now

The Friends have always stood for an appropriate balance of recreational trail usage and protecting the environment. This is no exception. In the 1980s and 90s the Friends and the CAC helped develop a Master Plan for Peñasquitos Preserve. We also worked to have this plan reflected in the plans of the adjacent communities. For example, early drafts called for a trail all the way up López Canyon and a trail from Calle Cristobal through the Thomas Hayes finger canyon to the south side trail. The Friends convinced the CAC and later the City that the trail in López should only go as far as

the Old Man López Road, thus leaving the rest of the upper canyon as a wild-life refugium, being good deer habitat. We made the same case to leave the Thomas Hayes Canyon in the main canyon a refugium for wildlife during the daytime.

On the other hand, we approved many miles of trails for all users throughout the rest of the Preserve. When I headed up the Trails Committee we opened and improved trails as well as closing redundant or dangerous ones. We had a consensus of all the user groups when we did this.

We need to approach the Del Mar Mesa and Deer Canyon the same way. Even before the "tunnels" trail system was built there was an illegal trail through the Caltrans, now CDFG, Vernal Pool Preserve on the mesa. Despite chainlink fencing, concrete barriers, gates, locks and no trespassing signage for 30 years, trucks, motorcycles, bikers, equestrians and hikers have routinely used this trail through actual vernal pools. I and some other conservationists wanted to stop these incursions but realized it was impractical for many reasons and that the practical alternative would be to create a legal trail through less sensitive habitat, then closing off the sensitive area trail. I'm still open to exploring this possibility.

So why the extraordinary turmoil this time around?

Bad history, toxic personalities?

I know of no other park in the County where the feelings between equestrians and bikers get so ugly — ugly to the point we had them calling each other out to a fist fight at one of the trail committee meetings! I think we have two dynamics at work here.

First, historically, Peñasquitos was known as an equestrian canyon well before it ever became a park. The rancher owners and lessees welcomed riders in the old days. I've listened to equestrians argue it was "their" canyon in the good ol' days before bikes. I've heard a deep resentment toward bikers expressed by a couple of them.

When the park was formed and bikers became commonplace in the 90s the single-tracks were open only to hikers and equestrians, but many bikers were on these trails anyhow, despite the signage. There were some

early incidents between the two, generally with the horses being spooked by the bikes. In my opinion this fanned the existing resentment. The Preserve is known to have many "weekend," and often inexperienced equestrians and is also well known as a "beginner" canyon for bikers. Not a good mix in the early years. Trail etiquette was often non-existent, but has come a long ways now.

When Erik Basil and his Multi-use Trails group came on the scene and argued to open all single-tracks up to bikes there was resistance among the equestrians due to the history of conflict and lack of trail etiquette. About the same time a then (now former) equestrian member of the CAC was telling equestrians in Carmel Valley that the bikers were out to ban all horses from the Preserve. Some chose to believe this assertion (lie?), from a person known to be deeply disturbed, one of several people I call "toxic" personalities in this saga.

Unfortunately, exaggerations and demagoguery on the part of several people and their followers on both sides have sometimes drowned out the reasonable people I found to work with, some of whom might still be around.

Side note: do equestrians run the CAC?

Bike Magazine's writer and some bloggers state that a majority of the CAC for the canyon is made up of equestrians and that this is why bikers are being discriminated against. This is one of those lies that get repeated enough until someone believes it. I say lie because the membership is public and who represents who is well known to all. Before I left the CAC years ago, a period when it was reorganized, there were 3-4 members out of the 17 who rode or owned horses. Today I understand it's 3.

Having said this I will note that the person replacing Geof Smith (a hiker and biker) as head of the CAC is Marvin Gerst, an equestrian. We're reprinting his election statement where he commits to an even handed leadership of the CAC and I'm sure all will be ready to hold him to this promise! His positive treatment of the recent biker led cleanup of the mesa (see this issue) was a good first step.

Gerst Statement

Marvin Gerst, PhD
Chair, Los Peñasquitos Canyon
Citizen Advisors Committee

I anticipate a lively year.

Some of the issues that are facing the CAC include:

- * Responding to and working with the State and Federal wildlife agencies and City of San Diego staff to finalize the DMM/CM Resource Management Plan. We anticipate a revised draft will be released soon.
- * Similarly, working with the surrounding community and recreational organizations to implement the final recommendations of the Resource Management Plan.
- * Continuing attempts to insure that all legitimate user groups (i.e. human foot powered, mountain bicyclists, equestrians) can fully enjoy the preserve in the ways uniquely associated with their mode of movement.
- * Continuing attempts to close illegal "trails" and prevent new vandalisms.
- * Support and expand our newly reactivated volunteer patrol under CAC member Erik Basil's leadership.
- * Continuing the work of protecting the flora and fauna of the preserve as detailed in the Master Plan while allowing compatible recreational access.
- * Activate a program of boundary enforcement against property owners who have encroached onto Preserve land with plantings, fences, hot tubs etc., and prevent any future encroachment attempts.
- * Task Force. The Preserve is owned by the City and the County. The entity which we advise and which oversees our activities is a "Task Force" composed of the City Council members and the County supervisor of the districts bordering the preserve, i.e. Supervisor Pam Slater-Price, and city Council members Sherri Lightner (district 1) and Carl DeMaio (district 5). In the past, we have had difficulty in arranging task force meetings. I will meet with the staff of each office to work out an arrangement assuring a minimum number of task force meetings.



Long-time Friends' hike leader Will Bowen poses with recent hike participants near the 'Old López Homestead.' Will has done lots of research into the López Homestead, the López Family, and the ruins still there.

Membership Application

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