



# Rancho Simi Trail Blazers



## NOVEMBER TRAIL WORK PARTY

The next work party will be held **November 15** on the **Mt. McCoy Trail**. Meet at the trailhead on Washburn St. We will work from **8:00 AM to 12:00 Noon**.

Hope to see you there.

Work Parties Chair  
John Sabol



## OCTOBER TRAIL WORK PARTY

We had a small work party on the Long Canyon Trail on October 18. We widened the trail by hand clearing weeds at the trail sides, lopped shrubs that were growing out into the trail and did some tread work on a badly rutted section near the top. It was a hot and dusty effort and everyone was happy to knock off work and head for Baja Fresh.

Many thanks to the following workers:

Arlene Altshuler, Tom Frye, Mike Kuhn, John Sabol and Mark Scheele.

Work Parties Chair  
John Sabol

## HOLIDAY POTLUCK

The **Rancho Simi Trail Blazers Holiday Potluck** will be held on **Wednesday, December 17th** at Al and Marty Richards' home.

Please call Marty at **(805) 526-4414** to discuss what you should bring.



## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

**Sandra Duarte & Family  
Tracy Frank**



## RSTB LOGO T-SHIRTS

Are your old logo T-shirts worn out? We still have short sleeve, long sleeve, and sweat shirts in assorted sizes and colors. Prices are:

short sleeve	\$12
long sleeve	\$14
sweat shirt	\$18

Please call Marty if you'd like to place an order: 805-526-4414.



## RSTB CLUB MEETING

This month's club meeting will be held at the **Community Center Room B-1** **1692 Sycamore Drive** at **7:00 PM**

on **Wednesday, November 19, 2003**

## HIKING NEWS

### SUNDAY EVENING HIKE TIME CHANGE

Starting in November, our Sunday Evening Hikes will start at 4pm.



### STAY ON TRAILS

The Simi Valley fires have burned through many of our trail areas. With the vegetation gone, there is a tendency for users to take shortcuts. Please resist the temptation to go off trail as well as ask others to stay on the original path.



### RSTB HAS A NEW WEBSITE

For those of you who use the Internet to check out our hiking schedule, please note that <http://rstb.homestead.com> no longer exists. It has been changed to <http://rstb.topcities.com>.



### LARRY BAIN

Loren 'Larry' Bain had contracted a very severe and aggressive form of cancer and passed away Wednesday, October 8, 2003.

Larry was a great supporter of our trail systems, both through his association with ZAC Tools and the time and energy that he spent with both the Trail Blazer and CORBA trail crews. We will miss Larry and his support.



## OUR INFLUENCE ON VEGETATIVE COMMUNITIES

Until the arrival of man in the new world, vegetative communities developed in response to climatic variations, exposure to sunlight, altitude, geology, animal life and countless other variables. The advent of man resulted in one new, seemingly insignificant variable among a sea of variables. Man wielded culture in the form of fire and ever improving hunting technologies. Fire was used in hunting, to control vegetative cover and makeup, and it in turn resulted in increased human population.

By about 11,000 years ago the American Indian had added the "atlatl," or spear thrower, to his tool kit, which resulted in greater hunting prowess and increased population. This increase in hunting prowess, resulted in selective removal of animals from the environment.

Combined with the effects of rapid climatic change, mass extinctions of megafauna resulted. No longer would the long horned bison, the antique bison, the saber-tooth lion, the extinct camel, the Shasta ground sloth, the extinct western horse, the American lion, the dwarf pronghorn antelope, the imperial mammoth, the Columbian mammoth, the Dire wolf, the American mastodon, the Steven's llama, and the short-faced bear roam the Simi Valley area. The elimination of those animals directly and indirectly resulted in changes in plant communities.

The first Spanish and American explorers in California described the practice of the Indian annually setting fire to the natural vegetation around them, primarily by women. They apparently did this to maintain a more open landscape, which favored both animals and pioneer plants which they preferred to eat. (Pioneer plants are those the growth of which are favored by disturbance, such as fire or mechanical clearance. For example, our roadsides are now populated by pioneer plants.)

In some areas, the setting of fires was done in association with hunting techniques. The diary of Fr. Juan Crespi, who accompanied the Portola expedition in

1969-1770, is full of accounts within Chumash territory of a scorched landscape as a result of intentionally set fires. Indeed, so much vegetation had been burnt that it was often difficult to find enough forage for their livestock.

The Chumash set fire to the vegetation around them nearly every year. Certainly many fires were set each year with the intent to clear the land. They probably were not that concerned that the vegetation deep in the mountains should be consumed, but certainly the more level land near their settlements needed to be cleared in order to make way for new growth.

Annual grass seeds were probably the primary source of caloric intake during aboriginal times, especially for the inland Chumash - even more so than acorns. The food offered to those early Spanish explorers was primarily baskets of grass seeds, with acorns being offered only occasionally. Indeed, it appears that women intentionally scattered grass seeds following fires, especially around village sites, as a form of proto-agriculture.

Carbonized seed cakes of red maid (*Calandrinia ciliata*) have been found in hearths in archaeological sites. Red maid occurs now only occasionally. However, it is a fire-follower. Red maid seeds may also subject to broadcasting following a fire. One of the Harrington notes from the Ventura area includes comments on where chia (*Salvia columbariae*) grew in large stands - a favorite food of the Chumash. The old Chumash woman making the comment also noted that chia no longer grows there. Large stands of chia are only a memory. Chia seeds may also have been broadcast following intentionally set fires. What is clear from this discussion is that annual burning was critical to the food gathering regimen of the Chumash.

The coming of the Spanish saw a complete disruption of the Chumash way of life. The Spanish introduced a pastoral way of life and imposed it on the Chumash. Their way of life was a complete antithesis to the regimen that was necessary for the Chumash to survive and thereby abetted

the complete breakdown of the Chumash culture.

While the mission system never provided all of the food needs of its neophyte charges, the padres and accompanying soldiers immediately suppressed the Chumash practice of annual burning of natural vegetation. The economic life of Spanish and later of Mexican California depended upon grass for grazing animals. The wool of sheep for clothing and meat for sustenance were necessities. Economic viability of the new settlements ultimately depended upon the exportation of hides (for leather) and tallow (for lighting and soap). Setting fire to natural vegetation became a crime under secular and religious authorities. An act of carelessness was punishable by flogging; an act of guerrilla warfare was punished more severely. For the Indians, their very way of livelihood was destroyed. The succession from an annual regimen of burning to one where wildfires were enormously reduced in frequency came so suddenly that we have only a fragmented and unreliable picture of what plants, besides acorns, the Indians in Simi Valley ate.

Just how long this practice of annual burning of the landscape had been going on is impossible to say. However, ecological evidence suggests that native grasslands, coastal sage scrub and chaparral, the dominant plant associations in our area, are fire-climax vegetative communities. In other words, they have resulted from thousands of years of frequent burning. Since natural sources of fire, such as lightning strikes, are not that common in the Simi Valley area and in coastal sage scrub, former native grasslands and chaparral in general, these vegetative communities are certainly a result of the long term interactive social practices of the Chumash.

Exotic annual grasses have replaced perennial bunch grasses in most of California. The seeds of Mediterranean annual grasses came in the wool of sheep and with seed for crops during both the

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Spanish-Mexican and the Anglo-American periods. Overgrazing, especially associated with drought, favored the elimination of native grasses that re-grew from the same root masses each year in favor of annual grasses that germinate from seeds each winter and spring. It is possible that the native bunch grasses used by the Indians had acquired some of the characteristics of domesticated plants. The hallmark of domesticated grasses, like wheat, barley, oats and rice, is that instead of their seeds falling off of the stalks as soon as the seeds have ripened, the stalks hold the seeds - giving man time to harvest them. If native Americans were using semi-domesticated grasses, that very characteristic would have resulted in their disappearance once they were no longer cultivated following fire.

Remnants of native grasslands are present in many isolated areas in Ventura County and the Simi Valley area (the eastern slope of Mt. McCoy is an example). However, annual grasses, such as wild oats (*Avena fatua*), red brome (*Bromus rubens*), ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*) and foxtails (glaucous barley) (*Hordeum glaucum*) now dominate in our foothills and vacant lots. Most of the weedy annual grasses we know today are imports from the Mediterranean Basin. None of them were present 250 years ago. As some of the grazing land which surrounds Simi Valley is converted to public open space and grazing animals are excluded, it will be interesting to observe whether or not perennial bunch grasses become reestablished.

Sediment cores recovered from the Santa Barbara Channel indicate that small amounts of carbonized organic material are well dispersed throughout the sediments prior to 1800. After that date, there is a transition to modern times when long periods of 12 to 20 occur with little carbon are followed by deposits of abundant large pieces of charcoal. The transition from widespread annual burning to infrequent large scale fires with large fuel masses is clear in those offshore corings.

Today, we vigorously suppress wildfires, using helicopters, large fixed-winged aircraft, and bulldozers. When really serious fires occur, such as the Clampet Fire of November 1970, the fires tend to burn to the ocean, followed by severe soil erosion, mass wasting and lots of carbon being deposited in the ocean. Less frequent fires and reduced grazing pressure has resulted in reduced grasslands and the expansion of the areal coverage of coastal sage scrub and chaparral.

Man's role in changing the face of the earth has been profound. Simi Valley is but a small window on that global drama.

[Much of this material has been taken from the author's "Plants and Animals of Simi Valley," Simi Valley: A Journey Through Time (1997), pp. 321-323.]

Mike Kuhn

#### SIMI ADOBE BURIAL?

Many years ago I discussed the grading of Friendly Village Mobile Home Park with a man who said he had been involved with the grading of the project. He indicated that many artifacts and skeletal remains were unearthed by the earth mover and other heavy equipment. The grading had been done years before the City was incorporated, so it was long before the passage in 1970 of the California Environmental Quality Act.

I assumed that the gentleman was being truthful when he said that "they were told to keep on working and not to say anything to anyone." He indicated that some of the workers followed the heavy equipment and picked up bowls, bones, human skulls, etc. I assumed that he was describing the historic Chumash Indian village of *Simi* (or *Shimiya*, *Shimiji*, *Sime*, etc.). After all, there was a relatively permanent source of water at the western extreme of the Valley (just up stream from where the Simi-Santa Rosa fault blocks the subterranean drainage of the alluvial basin) at the confluence with Sycamore Creek and *Canada de la Brea*. The same favorable location had attracted the headquarters of the rancho - perhaps because of the availability of Chumash

Indian labor. However, it is possible that some or all of those burials were from the historic period.

The rancho headquarters was established shortly after 1800 where the Peter B. Strathearn Historical Park is now located. The "Simi Adobe" was occupied continuously by the Pico family until 1841, when it was temporarily abandoned. By 1858 one of the de la Guerras was resident in the adobe. The adobe served as a stagecoach station from 1861 onward and was occupied by various folks until it was sold to the Strathearns in the late 1880s. None of the Strathearns were buried in Simi Valley.

During most of the rancho period there would have been many Chumash Indians employed on the rancho - some of them at the adobe. Throughout this more than 80-year period there was no formal cemetery in Simi Valley and it seems unlikely, but possible, that everyone who died here was carried to the cemetery at the San Fernando Mission or later to the settlement of San Fernando. That would have been a substantial trip, especially considering the ravages of warm weather. Some place near the adobe there may have been one or more cemeteries. North of the adobe, still on high ground, would have made a great deal of sense. It is of course possible that there are burials within the confines of the park. We may never know. Certainly, we will never know if historic burials were destroyed during the grading of the mobile home park.

Mike Kuhn



Up until the recent fire, *Datura wrightii* could be found blooming throughout open space in Simi Valley. A member of the Nightshade (*Solanaceae*) family, this plant can cause serious illness or death when ingested.



# November

## 2003



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						<b>1</b> <b>Wildwood Park</b> <b>See Schedule</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Michael Newton</i>
<b>2</b> <b>Rocky Peak</b> <b>4pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>3</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Don Hunt</i>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> <b>Chumash Trail</b> <b>6pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>7</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Joe Ferrall</i>	<b>8</b> <b>Upper Zuma Cyn</b> <b>See Schedule</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Terry Conrad</i>
<b>9</b> <b>Long Canyon</b> <b>9am hike</b>  <b>Rocky Peak</b> <b>4pm hike</b>  <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Heidi Portoghesi</i>	<b>13</b> <b>Chumash Trail</b> <b>6pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b> <b>Mt. McCoy</b> <b>Work Party</b> <b>See Schedule</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Jim Keppler</i>
<b>16</b> <b>Rocky Peak</b> <b>4pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b> <b>RSTB Meeting</b> <b>See Page 1</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Randy Klockenteger</i>	<b>20</b> <b>Chumash Trail</b> <b>6pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b> <b>Upper Las Virgenes Cyn</b> <b>See Schedule</b>
<b>23</b> <b>Rocky Peak</b> <b>4pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>24</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Arlene Altshuler</i>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Isabel Johnson</i>	<b>27</b> <b>Thanksgiving</b> <b>No Hike</b>	<b>28</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Mathew Carman</i>	<b>29</b> <b>China Flat to Chesebro Cyn</b> <b>See Schedule</b>
<b>30</b> <b>Rocky Peak</b> <b>4pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Mallory Ham</i>						



# Rancho Simi Trail Blazers

## Hiking Schedule



- November 1 Wildwood Park**  
Moderate 4 - 6 MRT. Check out the new growth that has sprung up since the last rain. This hike is not within the jurisdiction of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. Meet 8am near Donut Delite at the corner of Madera and Royal. Bring 2 qts. of water and snack, wear boots.
- November 2 Sunday Evening Hike**  
Meet 4pm at Rocky Peak trailhead at the end of Rocky Peak Rd off Santa Susana Pass. (Strenuous, 5 MRT)
- November 6 Thursday Evening Hike**  
Meet at 6pm at Chumash trailhead. Directions - take 118 Fwy to Yosemite exit. Go north on Yosemite, turn right on Flanagan Dr. Trailhead is at the end of Flanagan Dr. (moderate, 5 MRT)
- November 8 Upper Zuma Canyon**  
Moderate 5 MRT hike down into Upper Zuma Canyon. This hike is not within the jurisdiction of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park district. Meet 8am near Donut Delite at the corner of Madera and Royal. Bring 2 - 3 qts. water and snack. Wear boots.
- November 9 Sunday AM Hike – Long Canyon Trail**  
Meet at **9am** in the Long Canyon parking lot, at the corner of Long Canyon Rd and Wood Ranch Parkway. (Moderate - strenuous, mileage depends on the hike leader)
- November 9 Sunday Evening Hike**  
Meet 4pm at Rocky Peak trailhead at the end of Rocky Peak Rd off Santa Susana Pass. (Strenuous, 5 MRT)
- November 13 Thursday Evening Hike**  
Meet at 6pm at Chumash trailhead. Directions - take 118 Fwy to Yosemite exit. Go north on Yosemite, turn right on Flanagan Dr. Trailhead is at the end of Flanagan Dr. (moderate, 5 MRT)
- November 15 Mt. McCoy Work Party**  
Help maintain a one of our more scenic trails. Directions: From the 118 take Madera south to Royal. West on Royal, north on Acapulco, then west on Washburn. Trailhead is on the left, just before Washburn turns into Amigos Ave. We will be working from 8am to noon. Tools will be provided. Bring 2 - 3 quarts of water, hat, sunscreen, and gloves to work on the trail.
- November 16 Sunday Evening Hike**  
Meet 4pm at Rocky Peak trailhead at the end of Rocky Peak Rd off Santa Susana Pass. (Strenuous, 5 MRT)
- November 20 Thursday Evening Hike**  
Meet at 6pm at Chumash trailhead. Directions - take 118 Fwy to Yosemite exit. Go north on Yosemite, turn right on Flanagan Dr. Trailhead is at the end of Flanagan Dr. (moderate, 5 MRT)
- November 22 Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Trail**  
8 - 10 MRT exploratory hike on a recently opened trail. This hike is not within the jurisdiction of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. Meet 8am near Donut Delite at the corner of Madera and Royal. Wear boots, bring bug juice, lunch, and 2 - 3 quarts of water.
- November 23 Sunday Evening Hike**  
Meet 4pm at Rocky Peak trailhead at the end of Rocky Peak Rd off Santa Susana Pass. (Strenuous, 5 MRT)
- November 27 Thursday Evening Hike**  
Meet at 6pm at Chumash trailhead. Directions - take 118 Fwy to Yosemite exit. Go north on Yosemite, turn right on Flanagan Dr. Trailhead is at the end of Flanagan Dr. (moderate, 5 MRT)
- November 29 China Flat Trail to Chesebro Cyn**  
Moderate - strenuous 10 MRT shuttle from the China Flat trailhead near King James Court, down the Palo Comado Connector to Chesebro, past Sheep Corral, Shepard Flat, and Sulfur Springs. This hike is not within the jurisdiction of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. Meet 8am near Donut Delite at the corner of Madera and Royal. Bring 2 - 3 quarts of water, hat, sunscreen, wear boots.
- November 30 Sunday Evening Hike**  
Meet 4pm at Rocky Peak trailhead at the end of Rocky Peak Rd off Santa Susana Pass. (Strenuous, 5 MRT)

**For more information on hikes/work parties, contact the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District at 805-584-4400.**

**Special Note:** - On all hikes and work parties, bring water and wear lug-soled boots. Hikes will be cancelled if it rains.

<http://rstb.topcities.com>

**RANCHO SIMI TRAIL BLAZERS**

EXECUTIVE CHAIR:	MIKE KUHN	HM (805) 583-2345, WK (805)583-6776
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SECRETARY:	DAVID WAGNER	HM (805) 577-5931
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WORK PARTIES CHAIR:	JOHN SABOL	HM (805) 583-2541
HIKING CHAIR & WEBSITE:	ARLENE ALTSHULER	HM (805) 581-9735
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PUBLICITY CHAIR:	URSULA CHRISTIE	HM (805) 527-5338
NEWSLETTER EDITOR:	BRUCE SEVERY	HM (805) 526-1831

-----cut out and return with your payment-----

**MEMBERSHIP**

Please enroll me as a New ( ) or Renewing ( ) member of the Rancho Simi Trail Blazers for the annual donation fee of:

Single.....\$10

Family..... \$15

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Mo. \_\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone wk/hm \_\_\_\_\_

How did you find out about the RSTB \_\_\_\_\_

Please make out tax deductible member dues check for the year to:

“Rancho Simi Foundation” mail it to “RSTB, P.O. Box 630399, Simi Valley, Ca 93063-0399

Please list any extra names and birthdays of more than one member (Month & Day Only)



**RSTB**  
**P.O. Box 630399**  
**Simi Valley, CA 93063-0399**

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