



# Rancho Simi Trail Blazers

A Division of the Rancho Simi Foundation



## MT. MCCOY

A large white cross stands on the summit of a prominent hill at the western end of Simi Valley, approximately one mile south of the Simi Adobe, on part of what was the Madera Ranch - later called the Wood Ranch. A cross is thought to have been part of the summit of that hill since the Spanish period of settlement, and said to be a religious symbol and landmark for travelers on the El Camino Real.

Mt. McCoy received its name from C. B. McCoy, who purchased the Canada Verde Ranch, about 5,000 acres in size, from the Simi Land and Water Company in about 1898. C.B. was an officer of the company. At that time the hill was still known as "Verde Hill", a name that had persisted from the Spanish-Mexican Period. ("Verde" means green.)

A survey map (Norris, Washington and Hancock) from 1858-59 includes a note, "wooden cross", at that location. The Runkle family recalled a small stone cross on the hill when the family arrived in the valley in 1904. The cross is said to have been placed there by a shepherd. The discovery of the 1858-59 map inspired R.E. Harrington in 1921, to reestablish a cross on the hill. His Sunday school class of 12 year old boys carried the timbers for the cross up the hill. The main timber was 2" x 12" and 20 feet long. Easter sunrise services were held there for 47 years. The existing reinforced concrete cross is said to have been placed there in 1941. Poor access and little room for parking near the summit led to the abandonment of Easter sunrise services, however today the Rotary Club of Simi Valley illuminates the cross during Easter week.

Mike Kuhn

[Source of the historical information for this piece came from the "Historic Resources Inventory", prepared by Patricia Havens, City Historian.]

## VERY BLUSTERY HIKES

During the short days of winter, there is a large drop off in the number of hikers for our Thursday evening hikes. However, there is a core group that hikes all year around, and enjoys the peace and solitude found on these hikes in the dark.

Recently though, our perseverance has been severely tested. On the last four Thursday evening hikes we have been met with unusually high winds. Mark Scheele brought along his hand-held anemometer (a device to measure wind speed) and measured gusts of 41 miles per hour on one hike and 44 miles per hour on the Dec 23<sup>rd</sup> hike.

One wind speed measure is the "Beaufort Wind Scale" which uses the familiar "Force" units. For example at the low end, Force 0 is 0-1 miles per hour and described as Calm while Force 12 is 73-83 miles per hour and defined as a Hurricane.

At 39-46 miles per hour the wind is considered Force 8 and defined as a Gale. Gale force winds generally impede your progress and the gusts can make you lose your balance and fall. Needless to say, all of us were very careful.

John Sabol



## 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  
**January 19, 2005**



Alan Trzcinko

## TWO RELATIVELY RARE PLANTS ON MT. MCCOY

Two relatively rare plant species were identified on the upland area southwest of Mt. McCoy in the spring of 1998. Both species prefer clay soils in open grassland areas. One is the white-flowered filaree (*Erodium macrophyllum*), which is our only native *Erodium*. It is an annual with round leaves. You can look for it whenever herbaceous plant material is emerging. This usually occurs in the spring, however, in 2004, I noticed the plant well formed on December 4 – as a result of a wet October.

The other unusual plant does not have a common name. It is a member of the morning glory family and is known as *Convolvulans simulans*. It is generally found in grasslands and coastal sage scrub. It is tiny by comparison to other species and is probably a native. It has pinkish to bluish flowers.

These unusual finds on Mt. McCoy join the federal and state endangered Lyon's pentachaeta (*Pentachaeta lyonii*) and the federally threatened Conejo liveforever (*Dudleya abramsii* ssp. *parva*). It will be worth a trip to the Mt. McCoy uplands just to look for these beauties.

Mike Kuhn

## THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

The botanical landscape of Simi Valley has changed dramatically over the millennia and at no time has that change been as dramatic as today. For thousands of years the Chumash Indians intentionally set wildfires and over exploited fuel wood in the immediate vicinities of their settlements. The Spanish/Mexicans suppressed Indian burning of the landscape, introduced livestock which overgrazed the valley, especially during times of drought, introduced agriculture and many exotic plant species, overexploited fuel wood, and largely replaced native perennial bunchgrasses with Mediterranean annual grasses. The Anglo-Americans eventually brought to bear technology to the suppression of wildfires, intensified grazing and agriculture, introduced wide-scale irrigated agriculture, overexploited fuel wood until the recent past, converted the valley floor to an urban landscape, and introduced new plant species on a grand scale.

The Indians set fire to the land every year in order to stimulate the growth of fire following plants, which were important to them for food. Some of those plants included native bunch grasses, the seeds of which they seem to have been broadcasting to augment the crop, chia (*Salvia columbariae*), and red maid. They used fires in hunting drives, and they used fire to keep the land free of dense shrubbery in order to destroy the cover for grizzly bears. Studies of the cores of offshore sediments exhibit annual deposits of finely dispersed charcoal up through the 18th Century. The fires were frequent and widespread but of low intensity. The primary targets of the annual burning were grasslands and oak woodlands. There is some ethnography which suggests that the Indians sometimes cleared the area under oak trees to preclude severe damage to the trees, which they valued for their acorns.

Nonetheless, those fires regularly spread to areas of coastal sage scrub and chaparral. The net effect was to favor the expansion of areas of grasslands and oak woodlands at the expense of coastal sage scrub and chaparral. The diaries of the Portola Expeditions of 1769 and 1770 describe a scorched landscape in Chumash territory where it was difficult to find feed for their animals and there was genuine concern that their horses, mules and other livestock might starve to death. The overexploitation of fuel wood beyond what could be naturally replenished locally no doubt resulted in the movement of villages every few years to an area that still had trees and brush that could fuel their heating and cooking fires.

One brief description of Simi Valley from 1795 survives. The report was written by Father Vicente de Santa Maria. That report resulted in the founding of Mission San Fernando de España in 1797 and the rejection of Simi Valley as a site for a mission. Through translation, "In the middle of the forenoon, going toward the east, by little and little we reached a valley which is called Simi. In the middle of the valley we came upon a small pool of water in a dry arroyo which crosses the valley halfway (Arroyo del Tapo?). In the afternoon the ensign, sergeant, two soldiers and I went to reconnoiter a place which said Jose Antonio Lugo claimed to have seen, and which, he said, had water and land. After examining

everything, we found the water to be not too abundant, the valley very narrow and dismal, and consequently unserviceable." (Here he seems to be describing Tapo Canyon.)

At the time of contact, Simi Valley included some scattered oak woodlands around the margins of the valley, including the southern side of what is now the Texas Tract. Those woodlands were made up primarily of coast live oaks in areas such as the old Hope Town property and the Susana Knolls westerly towards Stearns Street and in the canyon areas such as the Alamos, Brea, Oak, Bus, and Meier Canyons. On the valley floor, roughly east of Stow Street, was an oak woodland made up primarily of valley oaks and some coast live oaks that was known as *El Roblaro*. The valley floor west of that forest was largely devoid of trees and brush of any height except for the Arroyo Simi west of Sycamore Drive, where willows dominated. The hills were probably quite barren except for widespread coastal sage scrub and pockets of chaparral, including stands of California walnuts on some steep north facing slopes.

The Spanish needed grass for their livestock, so there was an immediate conflict with the traditional ways of the Chumash. The accidental or intentional setting of a wildfire became a very serious offense against the King. Accidents brought floggings and acts of gorilla warfare could be punished by death. The result of overgrazing and the elimination of annual burning was an expansion of areas of coastal sage scrub and chaparral at the expense of grasslands and oak woodlands. The less frequent but more intense fires reduced the number of mature oaks and other trees, and fire combined with cattle grazing to greatly reduce the success of oak saplings.

The replacement of native perennial grasses with Mediterranean annual grass occurred because of overgrazing and drought and perhaps, several other factors. The new grasslands in this area are made up of slender and wild oats, riggut and red bromes, foxtail barley, golden top and a few other species of grasses. Herbaceous annuals, such as sweet fennel, black, field and Mediterranean mustards and wild radish also were introduced.

In 1834 an "Investigative Report on the Santa Barbara Presidio District" (translated by the late Richard Whitehead) describes Simi Valley thusly, "At the foot of the descent (east end) are a grove of coast live oaks and sycamore trees and abundance of pasture. Tapo - This place has an abundant supply of water and a scattered growth of willows and sycamores, which make it very pleasant. There is a ranch named Simi with five small springs that supply water for 800 to 1000 head of cattle of the rancho. It is surrounded by hills of barren land. There is a narrow valley called *La Verde*, which has considerable pasturage and two springs which form ponds. Quimisa Road goes through a grove of live oak trees and willows and has a stream fed only by rain and lasts until June." Here, "Tapo" refers to Tapo Canyon, *La Verde* refers to the lowlands of Wood Ranch, which are occupied today by a golf course, and Quimisa Road followed the route of Los Angeles Avenue out past the sewage treatment plant.

## CHAPARRAL BEARGRASS

Several Spanish names refer to vegetation. They include *Los Roblaro*, which refers to the oak woodlands of mainly valley oaks at the eastern end of Simi Valley (east of Stearns Street), *Canada de los Alisos*, which refers to many sycamore trees (later called Big Sycamore Canyon and now Meier Canyon), *Canada Aliso*, which refers to a sycamore tree in a canyon (now Bus Canyon), and *Canada de los Alamos*, which also refers to many sycamore trees (now, Alamos Canyon).

The Anglo-American period saw a gradual shift to more intense grazing, dryland agriculture, including apricot production and grain, and eventually into intense irrigated agriculture with lemon, orange, walnut and avocado production. Massive windrows of blue gum eucalyptus began to appear in the late 1920s, but they came into their own in the early 1930s. Wildfires became intensively suppressed which resulted in less frequent but catastrophic fires. Those studies of offshore sediment cores, which represent the second half of the 20th Century, reveal much greater quantities of charcoal deposits every 7-12 years with little charcoal in-between. With the improvement of transportation, including the advent of freeways, and the importation of water from northern California, there is now a massive shift from an agricultural environment to an urban woodland. The present view of the valley from the hills is of a forest of exotic trees.

There is a growing homogeneity of plants, insects and animals with the rest of the developed world. Our natural environment is now studded with such exotic plants as: Russian thistle, yellow star thistle, Peruvian pepper trees, tree (Brazilian) tobacco, Persian knotweed, poison hemlock (the same stuff that poisoned Socrates), sweet fennel, giant reed, Italian thistle, pineapple weed, chicory, bull thistle, Australian brassbuttons, prickly lettuce, German ivy, common groundsel, milk thistle, dandelion, oyster plant, black, field and Mediterranean mustards, wild radish, water cress, London rocket, oriental mustard, Australian saltbush, lambs' quarters, Mexican tea, Tasmanian goosefoot, bindweed, common morning glory, castor-bean, French broom, yellow sweet clover, Spanish broom, white clover, spring vetch, winter vetch, purple vetch, long-beaked filaree, red-stemmed filaree, horehound, pennyroyal, spearmint, blue (Tasmanian) gum eucalyptus, Bermuda buttercup, English plantain, curly dock, purslane, scarlet pimpernel, tree of heaven and puncture vine.

Still there are remnants of *El Roblaro* in and among the subdivisions. We retain coast live oak and sycamore lined canyons and willow lined stream channels. California walnut trees still are present in groves on those north facing slopes that will always be too steep to develop. Fremont cottonwoods and California bay laurels can be seen here and there. Now we have begun to honor and preserve some of the exotic trees, such as eucalyptus windrows, the California fan palms along Alamo Street and the Mexican fan palms along Appleton Road.

What will tomorrow bring?

Mike Kuhn

California and National Trails days (1999) saw the Rancho Simi Trail Blazers, with the help of many people, including Boy Scouts, cutting a new segment of the China Flat Trail. Specifically, the new segment begins on the eastern side of the canyon just east of King James Court and connects up with the original trail about a half mile up the canyon to the west.

Some time after National Trails Day I heard third or fourth hand that someone had complained that we had destroyed one or more endangered plants. After making further inquiries, I was told that they said it was a "Nolina". The 1993 edition of *The Jepson Manual* lists only one possible nolina in Ventura County, and that is Parry's nolina (*Nolina parryi*). Parry's nolina is quite common in the Peninsular Range and elsewhere, so I was puzzled. At first I dismissed the assertion but had nagging doubts about whether the complaining party might know what they were talking about. Further inquiry suggested the source of the complaint was the wife of Rick Burgess, both botanists in Ventura County. A call to Rick, a long time acquaintance (I don't know his wife.) proved very interesting.

The plant was cut in April during the first day of California Trails Days. At that time it didn't contain a fruiting body and is relatively indistinguishable from our local yucca (*Yucca whipplei* ssp. *intermedia*). By the time National Trails Day came around in June, the remaining plants had flower stalks and could be identified as something other than yuccas.

The plant that was bushwhacked was part of a very small colony of a newly identified species that is known only in a few populations in San Diego, Orange and Ventura counties. One of the populations in Ventura County is on a ranch in the Ojai Valley and the other is on the south slopes of Simi Peak - right where we constructed the trail. The plant is now known in botanical circles as chaparral beargrass (*Nolina cismontana*). Eventually, this new species, which may number less than 1,000 individuals, may achieve "Endangered" status. At present, it is a Federal Species of Concern.

While easily mistaken for the yucca, the two species differ in several significant ways. The yucca usually occurs as a single rosette and never more than three. The nolina, however, often grows in colonies of more than three, often as many as 20 or 30. The tip of the yucca leaf is usually dark green, while the tip of the nolina is darker than the rest of the leaf and is often brown. The yucca leaf is stiff with a very sharp, hard spine on the end, while the nolina leaf is flexible with a not-very-sharp spine on the end of each leaf. The yucca flower stalk is stout, erect and usually straight, while the nolin's stalks are often recumbent. Unlike the yucca, the seed pods of the nolina are papery.

Well, now we know, and will avoid the chaparral beargrass in the future.

Mike Kuhn



# RSTB Calendar January 2005



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						<b>1</b> <b>Happy New Year!</b> <b>No Hike</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Gabe Sende</i>
<b>2</b> <b>Rocky Peak</b> <b>4pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> <b>Long Canyon</b> <b>6:30pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> <b>Chumash Trail</b> <b>6pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Tom Siebert</i>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b> <b>Lang Ranch</b> <b>8am hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>
<b>9</b> <b>Rocky Peak</b> <b>4pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> <b>Long Canyon</b> <b>6:30pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b> <i>Happy Birthday</i> <i>Paula Lightfoot</i>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> <b>Chumash Trail</b> <b>6pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b> <b>Chumash Trail</b> <b>8am Work Party</b> <b>See Schedule</b>
<b>16</b> <b>Rocky Peak</b> <b>4pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> <b>Long Canyon</b> <b>6:30pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>19</b> <b>RSTB Meeting</b> <b>See Page 1</b>	<b>20</b> <b>Chumash Trail</b> <b>6pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b> <b>Happy Camp</b> <b>8am hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>
<b>23</b> <b>Rocky Peak</b> <b>4pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> <b>Long Canyon</b> <b>6:30pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b> <b>Chumash Trail</b> <b>6pm hike</b> <b>See Schedule</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b> <b>Latigo Canyon</b> <b>8am hike</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>Daniel DeGoey</i>	<b>31</b>					



# Rancho Simi Trail Blazers

A Division of the Rancho Simi Foundation

## Hiking Schedule



- |         |    |  |
|---------|----|--|
| January | 1  | <b>New Year's Day - No Hike</b>  |
| January | 2  | <b>Sunday Evening Hike</b><br>Meet <b>4pm</b> at Rocky Peak trailhead at the end of Rocky Peak Rd off Santa Susana Pass. <b>(Strenuous, 5 MRT)</b>   |
| January | 4  | <b>Tuesday Evening Hike</b><br>Meet at 6:30pm in Long Canyon parking lot. Directions: Take First Street South. Continue when the road's name changes to Long Canyon Road. The parking lot is at the intersection of Long Canyon Road and Wood Ranch Pkwy. <b>(Moderate 3 MRT)</b>  |
| January | 6  | <b>Thursday Evening Hike</b><br>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. <b>(Strenuous, 5 MRT)</b>   |
| January | 8  | <b>Lang Ranch Exploratory Hike</b><br>Strenuous, approx. 6 - 10 MRT hike on a trail in the Lang Ranch area. 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. of water and a snack, wear boots.   |
| January | 9  | <b>Sunday Evening Hike</b><br>Meet <b>4pm</b> at Rocky Peak trailhead at the end of Rocky Peak Rd off Santa Susana Pass. <b>(Strenuous, 5 MRT)</b>   |
| January | 11 | <b>Tuesday Evening Hike</b><br>Meet at 6:30pm in Long Canyon parking lot. Directions: Take First Street South. Continue when the road's name changes to Long Canyon Road. The parking lot is at the intersection of Long Canyon Road and Wood Ranch Pkwy. <b>(Moderate 3 MRT)</b>  |
| January | 13 | <b>Thursday Evening Hike</b><br>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. <b>(Strenuous, 5 MRT)</b>   |
| January | 15 | <b>Chumash Trail Work Party</b><br>Help maintain one of the most traversed trails in Simi Valley. Directions - take 118 Fwy to Yosemite exit. Go north on Yosemite, turn right on Flanagan. Trailhead is at the end of Flanagan. We will be working from 8am - noon. Tools will be provided. Bring 2 - 3 quarts of water, hat, sunscreen, and gloves to work on the trail.             |
| January | 16 | <b>Sunday Evening Hike</b><br>Meet <b>4pm</b> at Rocky Peak trailhead at the end of Rocky Peak Rd off Santa Susana Pass. <b>(Strenuous, 5 MRT)</b>   |
| January | 18 | <b>Tuesday Evening Hike</b><br>Meet at 6:30pm in Long Canyon parking lot. Directions: Take First Street South. Continue when the road's name changes to Long Canyon Road. The parking lot is at the intersection of Long Canyon Road and Wood Ranch Pkwy. <b>(Moderate 3 MRT)</b>  |
| January | 20 | <b>Thursday Evening Hike</b><br>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. <b>(Strenuous, 5 MRT)</b>   |
| January | 22 | <b>Happy Camp Upper Trail</b><br>Moderate to strenuous 10 MRT hike with elevation gain/loss of 1300'. See panoramic views of Simi Valley and Moorpark to the Channel Islands. 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. of water and lunch, wear boots. |
| January | 23 | <b>Sunday Evening Hike</b><br>Meet <b>4pm</b> at Rocky Peak trailhead at the end of Rocky Peak Rd off Santa Susana Pass. <b>(Strenuous, 5 MRT)</b>   |
| January | 25 | <b>Tuesday Evening Hike</b><br>Meet at 6:30pm in Long Canyon parking lot. Directions: Take First Street South. Continue when the road's name changes to Long Canyon Road. The parking lot is at the intersection of Long Canyon Road and Wood Ranch Pkwy. <b>(Moderate 3 MRT)</b>  |
| January | 27 | <b>Thursday Evening Hike</b><br>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. <b>(Strenuous, 5 MRT)</b>   |
| January | 29 | <b>Latigo Canyon to Castro Peak</b><br>Strenuous 7 MRT hike with beautiful scenery. This hike is not within the jurisdiction of the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park district. Bring snack and 2 - 3 qts of water, bug juice. Wear boots. Meet 8am near Donut Delite at the corner of Madera and Royal.   |
| January | 30 | <b>Sunday Evening Hike</b><br>Meet <b>4pm</b> at Rocky Peak trailhead at the end of Rocky Peak Rd off Santa Susana Pass. <b>(Strenuous, 5 MRT)</b>   |

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**

*A Division of the Rancho Simi Foundation*

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

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