



Rancho Simi Trail Blazers



1834 DESCRIPTION TRAILS OVER SANTA SUSANA PASS

A report, dated July 25, 1834, was prepared by the Mayor of the Port of Santa Barbara, Counsel Jose' Maria Garcia, for transmittal to Mexico City on the Santa Barbara Presidio District. The reports describe three routes from the San Fernando Valley over Santa Susana Pass.

"The middle road is the most frequently used, its starting point being beautified by a leafy grove of coast live oaks and sycamore trees. Starting the ascent, there is a spring of excellent but limited water. The ascent is rocky and difficult to the top, and the descent, although rough, is made pleasurable by a leafy grove and, halfway, a stream of delicious but intermittently flowing water. At the foot of the descent is a grove of the same species of trees and an abundance of pasturage. At the right of this road, there is another less steep climb, initially through rough vegetation. At a short distance, there is a running spring among native trees. This road merges with the first.

The third road is to the left (?). At its base there is a small grove of valley oaks. Ascending over wasteland, there is another small flowing spring halfway up among a few trees. The climb becomes increasingly difficult, hampered by rugged growth and boulders. This road continues until it joins with the other two to form a

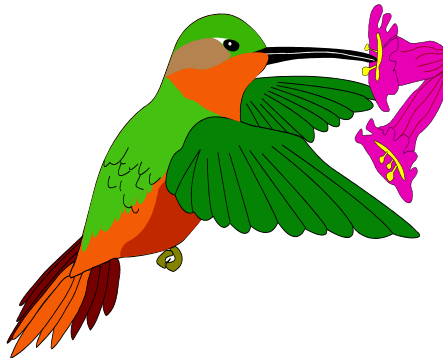
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ALL RSTB MEMBERS

Check your mailing label on your RSTB Newsletter for **renewing** your **Yearly Membership**.
Renewal Month is found after you name on the Newsletter Address

RSTB CLUB MEETING

The monthly club meeting will be held at the Community Center
In the B-1 Room
1692 Sycamore Drive
At 7:00 PM
On
Wednesday
Nov. 15th.



OCTOBER TRAIL WORK PARTY

Thirteen girl scouts, a scout leader and 2 scout moms from Junior Girl Scout Troop 212 joined ten Ranch Simi Trailblazers for the October Trail Work Party on the Chumash trail. This was one of the activities for the girls' "Sign of the Sun" badge. We started off with a safety talk, answered some questions and everyone picked up a tool and went to work. The morning was ideal with cool temperatures and an overcast sky. Arlene supervised the girls as some lopped brush growing into the trail paths while others raked away rocks in the trail bed. Many thanks to the following scouts and helpers:

Scout leader: Monica Burke; Adult helpers: Karen Yetter and Diatta Vasquez.

Scouts: Angela Alessi, Emily Burke, Jasmine Castillo, Rebecca Christman, Jessica Cronjager, Kirsten De Donato, Marlisa Guevara, Amanda Holt, Melissa Majewski, Ashlie Munoz, Mercy Vasquez and Elizabeth Yetter.

The remainder of the Trailblazers worked higher up the trail. Two trail posts were relocated to clarify the trail path and a spur trail was blocked with rocks to discourage use. We lopped brush as well as widening and leveling three narrow areas of the trail. Everyone worked from 8:00-12:00 PM. Many thanks to the following workers:

Bob Altieri, Arlene Altshuler, Phil Ankrom, Al Bandel, Martin De-

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single route, which descends to a small plain.Nearby is a fine spring known as Las Lajas which provides water for the plantings of corn, beans, etc.”

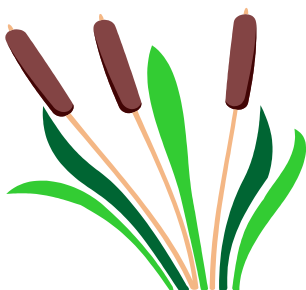
From this description it is clear that three tracks extended from the San Fernando Valley side to the top of the pass. The Simi Valley side seems to have had only one route. One of the three routes must have been what later was referred to as the Stagecoach Road. Trying to identify the other two routes would be interesting. It may be possible after a brush fire. Thrown in at the end is the comment about the agriculture associated with Las Lajas Canyon. The canyon still carries water year round.

Mike Kuhn

EPORTEZUELO

The 1834 report on the Santa Barbara Presidio District calls the road out of Simi Valley due west of the Simi Adobe *El Portezuelo*. The road leads to a small plain known as *Tierra Rajada*. *El Portezuelo* means “narrow pass.” While the Tierra Rejada Road through the pass between Simi and the Tierra Rejada valleys is now quite wide, it is obvious from the existing topography that the route through the pass was widened from what must of been a narrow passageway. The name, *El Portezuelo*, seems appropriate for the time.

Mike Kuhn



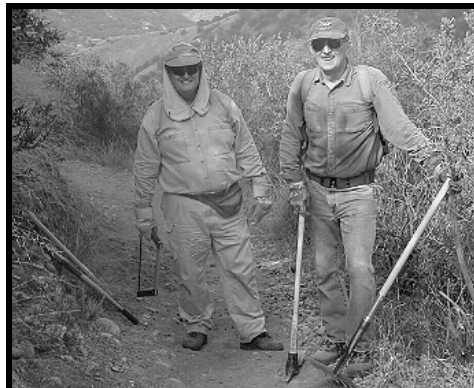
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Goey, Mike Kuhn, Tom Frye, John Downey, John Sabol, and Don Steeley.

The next work party will be held November 18, again on the Chumash Trail and we will work from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Hope to see you there.

Work Parties Chair

John Sabol



Chumash Work Party on 10/21/00 Mike Kuhn and John Sabol.
Photo taken by Bob Altieri

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 fuelwood. The Spanish/Mexicans suppressed Indian burning of the landscape, introduced livestock, which overgrazed the valley, especially during times of draught, introduced agriculture and many plant species, overexploited fuelwood 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 fuelwood 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 broadcast 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 1769/70 describe a scorch 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 fuelwood 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 Espana 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 half-way (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 oak 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 results 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 oak 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, ripgut and red bromes, foxtail barley, golden top and a few other species as well as herbaceous annuals, such as sweet fennel, black and Mediterranean mustard and wild radish..

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, and Quimisa Road followed the route of Los Angeles Avenue out past the sewage treatment plant.

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, *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 as late as the 1890s, 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 woodlands. 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 brass-buttons, prickly lettuce, German ivy, common groundsel, milk thistle, dandelion, oyster plant, black and Mediterranean mustard, wild radish, water cress, London rocket, oriental mustard, Australian saltbush, lambs' quarters, Mexican tea, Tasmanian goose-foot, 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. More come in each year. 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

		NOVEMBER 2000					
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
			1	2 Happy Birthday Joe Ferrall Chumash Trail Hike 6 pm see schedule	3 Happy Birthday Don Hunt	4 Sulfur Mountain Hike, meet at 8 am, read Schedule	
5 Happy Birthday Jim Keppler Rocky Peak Trail hike Meet at 4pm	6	7	8 Happy Birthday Nour Saling	9 Happy Birthday Linda Jordan Chumash Trail Hike 6 pm see schedule	10	11 Tailpop Loop Hike meet at 8 am, read Schedule	
12 Rocky Peak Trail hike Meet at 4pm	13	14	15 RSTB Club Meeting at 7 pm. B-1 Room,1692 Sycamore Dr.	16 Chumash Trail Hike 6 pm see schedule	17 Happy Birthday Nicale Marnier	18 Chumash Work Party meet at 8 am, read Schedule	
19 Rocky Peak Trail hike Meet at 4pm	20	21 Happy Birthday Pat Nadsady Seifert	22 Happy Birthday Nora Young	23 Chumash Trail Hike 6 pm see schedule	24 Happy Birthday Arlene Altshuler	25 Happy Camp upper trail Hike Read Schedule	
26 Happy Birthday Isabel Johnson Rocky Peak Trail hike Meet at 4pm	27	28	29	30 Chumash Trail Hike 6 pm see schedule			

RANCHO SIMI TRAIL BLAZERS

EXECUTIVE CHAIR:	MIKE KUHN	HM (805) 583-2345 WK (805)583-6776
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_____ Birth Mo. _____ Day _____ Phone wk/hm _____

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Please make out tax deductible member dues check for the year Sept.-2000/Sept.-2001 to:

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

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