



Canyon News

Black Mountain Park • Del Mar Mesa Preserve
Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve
Friends of Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, Inc.

July, Aug., Sept., 2011
Volume 25, No. 3

El Cuervo Adobe Wall Falls

Will Bowen, PhD

In mid to late March, during a rainy period, part of the wall of the El Cuervo Adobe at the west end of the canyon fell. As a result of the fall, the wall top retaining wood frame and bolts were thrown dramatically forward to the ground in front of the iron retaining fence.

Adobe is a porous material and the walls of the El Cuervo -- closest to the edge of the adobe flooring -- had been absorbing water. This absorption first began at the last El Nino about 10 years ago when rainwater pooled up very close to the adobe. You could see by the darker coloration of the lower wall that water had been absorbed and was rising upward, even though sand bags were placed for protection.

As a result of the latest rains and a slowly rising water table -- which is the result of increased stream flow due to runoff from development upstream -- more water infused the lower parts of the wall and brought things to a critical point. The wet adobe at the bottom of the wall buckled under the weight of the still-dry sections above. Other parts of the wall were left leaning at a precarious angle and are destined to eventually fall.



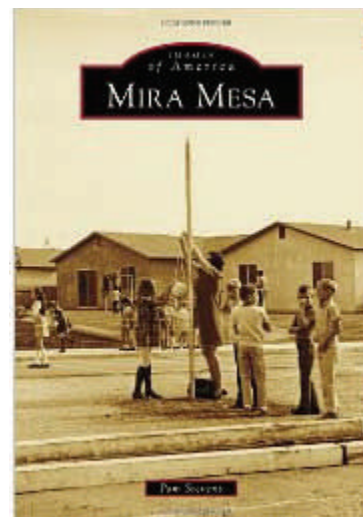
Participants on Will Bowen's El Cuervo History Hike examine the fallen adobe walls of the El Cuervo Adobe. Photo by Will Bowen

Highlights Inside

Hikes and Volunteer Opportunities	2-3
A Time of Opportunity	3
National Trails Day	4
The "King" of Snakes	5
Enjoy Your Canyon's Oaks	6
Local Spiders: Tarantula	7
Don't be left out!	7
Friends' Directory	7
Students Continue to Support Restoration Efforts	8

History of Mira Mesa - Cows and All

Long time Friends member and Mira Mesa resident Pam Stevens recently authored *Images of America: Mira Mesa*, a book on the history of Mira Mesa. Thoughtfully researched and written, this book offers many delightful anecdotes about the growth of this bustling community adjacent to the preserve. There are lots of photographs, including a cow herd resting beneath the old olive grove formerly at the west end of Mira Mesa Boulevard fortuitously taken by Friends' president Brian Swanson in 1971. Find this book at local and on-line bookstores or through Arcadia Publishing.



Events, Meetings, Training, Hikes, And Volunteer Opportunities

All of our hikes are free. There is a fee for the Tracking survey classes. See below for details or 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 Canyon-side Park Driveway off Black Mountain Road between Mira Mesa and Rancho Peñasquitos. Thomas Bros. p. 1189 (C7)

Every month:

Wildlife Tracking Walk

Saturday, 8 AM - 10 PM: July 9, Aug. 13, Sept. 10, Oct. 8, Nov. 12, Dec. 10

Everyone is invited to join an SDTT tracker for a free, easy introductory tracking walk to learn about the art of tracking and the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. Look for tracks, scat, and further evidence that coyotes, bobcats, raccoon, deer and other wildlife have been in the area! Information at www.sdtt.org. Meet at the Historic Adobe Ranch House on Canyon-side Park Drive and Black Mountain Road, Rancho Peñasquitos. Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7)

Volunteer Trash Pickup Lopez/Peñasquitos Canyons

Sunday, 9 AM - 1 PM: July 24, Aug. 21, Sept. 25, Oct. 23, Nov. 27

Trash pickups in Lopez & Peñasquitos Canyon. Volunteers needed! Community service credits available. Meet at Lopez Ridge Park at 7245 Calle Cristobal in Mira Mesa. Call Ranger John Garwood at 858-538-8066 for more info. Thomas Guide p. 1208 (J3)

Every two months:

Black Mountain Open Space Park Citizens Advisory Committee

Thursday, 6:30 PM: July 7, Sept. 8, Nov 10

Public is welcome to attend this meeting to plan park activities. Meet in the Canyon-side Recreation Center at Black Mountain Road and Canyon-side Park Driveway, Rancho Peñasquitos. Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7)

Peñasquitos Canyon Citizens Advisory Committee

Thursday, 6:30 PM: July 14, Sept. 15, Nov. 17

Public is welcome to attend this meeting to plan park activities. Meeting is at the Historic Adobe Ranch House on Canyon-side Park Driveway and Black Mountain Road, Rancho Peñasquitos. Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7)

Friends of Peñasquitos Canyon Board of Directors

Tuesday, 7 PM: July 5, Sept. 6, Nov. 8

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 Canyon-side Park Driveway, Rancho Peñasquitos. Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7)

Quarterly:

Beginning Tracking Wildlife Surveys

Saturday, 8 AM - 4 PM: July 16

This class prepares you to participate in surveys that monitor the wildlife in major open space preserves and other critical areas. Topics include basic recognition and identification of animal tracks and other signs, introduction to track patterns and gaits, wildlife journaling, an overview of the survey protocol, and more! Classroom time is supplemented with plenty of time in the field ("dirt time").

Training is required for survey volunteers and also serves as a prerequisite for the Intermediate Tracker/Naturalist class. After this training, students are expected to participate in at least one SDTT wildlife survey. Preregistration is not required for individuals, but requested for groups. The \$25 fee includes a number of valuable reference materials. Dress prepared to spend time outdoors and bring a sack lunch and water.

Please bring your calendar to sign up for transects. For more information: 760.715.4102 or www.sdtt.org. Meet at the Historic Adobe Ranch House on Canyon-side Park Driveway and Black Mountain Road, Rancho Peñasquitos. Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7)

Intermediate Tracking for Wildlife Surveys

Class: Wednesday, 7- 9 PM: Sept. 21

Field: Saturday, 8 AM-4 PM: Sept. 24

This class expands on the beginning training and includes recognition and interpretation of tracks and sign on a variety of surfaces. There are exercises in speculative tracking, aging, soil dynamics, debris interaction, trailing, mammal skull and dental identification, and tracking on various sub-

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

strates. Additional gait interpretation is covered. Cost: \$50 (\$10 discount for SDTT or Friends members). Pre-registration required. Go to www.penasquitos.org/classes.htm for more information or e-mail lpitt@cox.net to register.

Advanced Tracking Wildlife Surveys

Class: Wednesday, 7- 9 PM: Nov. 16

Field: Saturday, 8 AM - 4 PM: May 21, Nov. 19

The Advanced Class continues to develop your tracking proficiency. Subtle details of track identification are presented. Techniques and exercises for trailing animals through various surfaces will enable you to stay on the right track. Drills and exercises will help expand your knowledge base, point out areas to work on, and give you a preview of the tracker evaluation process. Cost: \$50 (\$10 discount for SDTT members). Pre-registration required. Go to www.penasquitos.org/classes.htm for more information or send e-mail to lpitt@cox.net to register.

Upcoming Hikes

July

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

Saturday, July 16 9:00 - 11:00 AM

Join hike leader Arne Johanson to hike the Miner's Loop trail on the north face of Black Mountain Park. Meet at the Parking Staging area at 14850 Carmel Valley Road, about 1/4 mile east of its intersection with Black Mountain Road in Rancho Peñasquitos. Thomas Guide p. 1169 (E7)

Night Walk with Will Bowen

Saturday, July 23 7:30 - 9:30 PM

We start at dusk and walk into the night to experience a different canyon in the dark. Hopefully we will encounter owls, bats, deer, and night blooming plants. The senses other than vision are enriched at night. This is also a chance to contemplate the moon, stars, and constellations. Bring a flashlight and water. You might need insect repellent. Meet at 4206 Sorrento Valley Blvd. Thomas Guide p. 1208 (C/D 5)

Night Creature Walk with Brian Swanson

Friday, July 29 7:00 - 9:15 PM

Join naturalist Brian Swanson and learn about the creatures that come out primarily at night. Search for spiders, bats, owls and other creatures that make noises in the dark. Suitable for all ages. Bring comfortable shoes, a light sweater or coat and a flashlight.

Dark clothing is best. Meet at the west end of Canyonside Park Way, next to the ball fields at Black Mountain Road and Canyonside Park Driveway. Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7).

Night Creature Walk with Brian Swanson

Saturday, July 30 7:00 - 9:15 PM

Join naturalist Brian Swanson and learn about the creatures that come out primarily at night. Search for spiders, bats, owls and other creatures that make noises in the dark. Suitable for all ages. Bring comfortable shoes, a light sweater or coat and a flashlight.

Dark clothing is best. Meet at the west end of Canyonside Park Way, next to the ball fields at Black Mountain Road and Canyonside Park Driveway. Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7).

August

Miner's Loop Trail Walk, Black Mountain Open Space Park Saturday, August 13 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Join hike leader David Robinson to hike the Miner's Loop trail on the north face of Black Mountain Park. Meet at the Parking Staging area at 14850 Carmel Valley Road, about 1/4 mile east of its intersection with Black Mountain Road in Rancho Penasquitos. Thomas Guide p. 1169 (E7)

Night Creature Walk with Brian Swanson

Saturday, August 13 7:00 - 9:15 PM

Join naturalist Brian Swanson and learn about the creatures that come out primarily at night. Search for spiders, bats, owls and other creatures that make noises in the dark. Suitable for all ages. Bring comfortable shoes, a light sweater or coat and a flashlight.

Dark clothing is best. Meet at the west end of Canyonside Park Way, next to the ball fields at Black Mountain Road and Canyonside Park Driveway. Thomas Guide p. 1189 (C7).

Full Moon Walk with Will Bowen Saturday, August 13 7:30 - 9:30 PM

A walk in the canyon under the eerie light of the full moon. Hopefully we will encounter owls, bats, and deer, as we contemplate the photoelectric effect of moonlight. Bring a flashlight and water. You might need insect repellent. Meet at 4206 Sorrento Valley Blvd. Thomas Guide p. 1208 (C/D 5)

September

Full Moon Spider Hike with Will Bowen

Saturday, Sept. 10 7:00 - 9:00 PM

In late Summer and early Fall -- you cannot predict exactly when -- in the early hours of evening Orb Spiders build huge beautiful webs across the trail. This is a hike to look for and admire these webs. We might find other spiders too, like Black Widows or Wolf Spiders. Bring a flashlight and water. You might need insect repellent. Meet at 4206 Sorrento Valley Blvd. Thomas Guide p. 1208 (C/D 5)

A Time of Opportunity -- Volunteer for Our Board

Brian Swanson, President

The Board of Directors of the Friends of Los Penasquitos is composed of a dedicated group of volunteers who started just like you! We were each members, with a love of the canyons and a passion for the environment. We wanted to get involved, but weren't quite sure what was needed, or how we could contribute. Somehow each of us found our way to a meeting, a hike or a weed bashing event, and our volunteer spirit was sparked. I for one have never looked back. I have a deep feeling of satisfaction, many wonderful memories and many good friends, all from my involvement in this wonderful preserve.

We currently have several openings on our Board of Directors. Friends' members can volunteer for the Board at any time. A board member's time commitment is minimal, as little as two hour meetings about six times a year, about a half dozen emails a month plus any other volunteer activities members choose to participate in. Please join us!

Our Board of Director Officer elections will be held this fall. The Board officers are President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary. Officer responsibilities vary by position. Generally each officer spends about two to four hours a month on Board business, with the President contributing about two to six hours per month. The president is the CEO of the organization, helping set the course and

marshaling resources where needed. The president prepares the agenda for our board meetings, keeps informed on issues affecting the preserve, occasionally writes letters to elected officials, consults with the Board, sends and receives emails, and participates on various committees. The Vice-President fills in for the president when the president is unavailable. The treasurer keeps financial records, pays bills and provides a monthly report at each meeting. Time commitment is about four hours a month. The secretary takes notes at the meetings, types them up and presents them to the Board at the subsequent meeting. Time commitment is about 4 hours a month.

Many of our officers have served for many years (I have been president 10 years!), and there will be one or more positions where the incumbent will not be running for re-election this fall. Retiring officers will continue to serve on the Board, but a healthy organization needs new volunteers and fresh ideas. Please contact me or any officer with questions on how you might serve on our Board. We will welcome you and help inform you about any issues that you don't feel up to speed on.

If we had more of our talented members volunteering to help lead us, we would be able to offer even better service to our members and the preserve.

National Trails Day

Brian Swanson and Erik Basil

Saturday June 4th saw County Park Rangers Paul Kucharczyk and Rusty Rhodes, City Ranger Gina Washington, resident volunteers Jesse and Jane Gray, and nearly 200 volunteers gather at the Penasquitos Adobe for National Trails Day service project. After a short pep talk by the rangers, groups split into teams and got to work. Projects included digging new post holes and installing split rail fencing, restoring trails washed out by winter flooding, and turning huge piles of mulch into small piles spread along the perimeter of the Mercy Road parking lot.

The Scouts participated as their second annual National Trails Day Inter-Unit Service Project, for San Diego Boy Scouts of America, coordinated by Citizen's Advisory Committee Scout representative Erik Basil. The Scout contingent included 158 volunteers, including Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, siblings and adult leaders. Communities represented at the event included Mira Mesa (Pack 1209, Pack 1205, Troop 1203, Troop 1212), Scripps Ranch (Troop 663, Troop 616, Troop 301), Black Mountain (Pack 605), and Clairemont (Pack 299).

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) coordinated with the County of San Diego, open to all Scouts, friends and family. BSA is a service-oriented organization with a long history of providing service to Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, including plantings at the ranch house, Eagle Scout Projects throughout the preserve, etc. BSA created this program to enable a "critical mass" of volunteers to accomplish large projects for the benefit of the public and the preserve. Participants work hard and earn volunteer service hour credits for "trail work".

Projects and work were divided among Units by age, number and appropriate tasks. There were four Scout projects: 1) Ranch House Crossing: fill, grade, and surface the trail north of the pedestrian/bike bridge. 2) Single track trail west of Ranch House Crossing, south side: fill, grade, and resurface the rutted trail. (RTA volunteers brush trimmed this, too). 3) Eichar's Grave: renovate and maintain the gravesite, including new rock cairn and new whitewash for the enclosure. 4) Single track trail east of PQ crossing, south side of creek: fill, grade, and resurface the rutted areas in the trail; trim, clear and remove brush from the trail tread, to make the trail 60" wide then haul out all the trimmings. (RTA also did canopy trimming in this section).



Supervising County Ranger Paul Kucharczyk led the "tail gate" meeting before sending the teams out for a morning of work.

Photo by Brian Swanson

Resident volunteers Jane and Jesse led their team in spreading large mulch piles beside the Mercy Road parking lot.

Photo by Brian Swanson



The “King” of Snakes

Ranger Heidi Gutknecht, Mission Trails Regional Park

Editor’s Note: This article originally appeared in the Fall, 2010 issue of Mission Trails Regional Park News. Kingsnakes can be found in our canyons as well.

One of Mission Trail’s less-often seen snakes is the kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula californiae*). Despite its name, this snake can also be found in Arizona, southern portions of Nevada, Utah, and Oregon, southwest Colorado, northwest New Mexico, and northwest Mexico. This beautiful snake reaches lengths of up to 48 inches and typically has horizontal bands of alternating chocolate brown to black and white to yellow, but, occasionally has length wise stripes, or, a combination of bands and stripes. This dark and light coloration enables them to blend in when amongst patches of shade and sunlight. Because of its unique beauty, the California kingsnake is often confused as an “exotic” snake by people who have never seen them in the wild before.

The kingsnake in the photo was recently brought in to the Visitor Center by a local resident who found it trying to crawl into a vent on the side of his home; since he had never seen such a snake in his neighborhood before, he thought it might be someone’s lost pet. A while back, I received a call on the radio from the police that there was “an exotic snake that must have been a released pet” loose at the Equestrian Staging Area off of Mast Blvd. I arrived to find five nervous police officers hanging back a safe distance from the mystery snake. When I calmly walked over and picked the snake up, they all yelled and jumped back. - “It’s just a kingsnake!” I told them, laughing at their reaction. I then gave them an impromptu lesson, after which one officer remarked, “That’s why you’re the Park Ranger and not us!”

So, why are they called “king” snakes anyway? Well, kingsnakes actually prefer a diet of other snakes; they eat all types of snakes, including other kingsnakes and even rattlesnakes! The reason they can get away with eating rattlesnakes is not because they are “immune” to the venom as was once believed. They actually have a special enzyme that is able to break down the venom, minimizing its



Mission Trails Volunteer Pat Pawlowski showing visitors a kingsnake

damaging effects. This makes the kingsnake a superhero among snakes and is how it got its appropriate name. They will also eat small rodents, birds, eggs, amphibians, and whatever else they can find in the wide variety of habitats in which they live. Like other non-venomous snakes, the kingsnake constricts its prey by coiling tightly around it until it suffocates and then swallowing it whole, head first.

When captured, kingsnakes often vibrate their tail, hiss, bite, and excrete a foul-smelling musk to discourage predators; however, they become tame quickly and make good pets. Of course, it is illegal to take any animals from the wild but, due to their popularity, California kingsnakes are bred in captivity (under special permits from the Department of Fish and Game) for sale as pets. Keep your eyes open while hiking and you just might be treated with a “royal” sighting.

Enjoy your Canyon's Oaks

Autumn Acker

Editor's Note: This article first appeared in Canyon News in Jan, 2006

As one walks, jogs, bikes, or rides through the canyon, it's impossible not to notice the beautiful foliage offering shade overhead. One source of that shade is the magnificent Coast Live Oak (*Quercus Agrifolia*), which is unique among oaks in its ability to thrive along the coast. Its dense crown and wide-spreading limbs, which often touch the ground, create a welcoming resting place for park visitors as well as for many critters who call this tree their home. The Coast Live Oak is not only a beautiful species to behold, but it's also a critical part of our history and of our environment.



The Coast Live Oak has been an integral part of human history. Native Americans harvested and consumed its acorns as a dietary staple and mission builders used its wood for "construction, wagon parts, and farm implements," (Pavlik, 1991). For thousands of years humans have used these trees for shelter, food, and as a general resource.

There are many species aside from humans which rely on the Coast Live Oak for food and shelter. "Oaks produce a cornucopia of wildlife foods including acorns, leaves, twigs, sap, roots, and pollen," (Pavlik, 1991). The importance to our environment is undeniable. Mule deer and California quail thrive under the cover of oak woodlands, and acorn woodpeckers and western gray squirrels forage for its acorns. The list of amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, and plants associated with the Coast Live Oak is immense.

But beyond history and the importance to our wildlife, these magnificent trees also bring a feeling of magic back into our hectic everyday lives. The sun filtering through the canopy, the soft rustle of the leaves in the wind, and the awareness of the history these trees have endured release built-up stress. Suddenly one feels small in the greater scheme of things.



So take some time out to enjoy the beautiful trees in the canyon, especially the Coast Live Oak. Stop and listen to the life happening around you: the babbling of the creek, the calls of the birds, the hum of the insects, and hopefully the footfalls of a mule deer. It's important to enjoy the stillness of the canyon, not just the experience of traveling through it.

Pavlik, B., P, Muick, S. Johnson, and M. Popper, 1991, Oaks of California, Los Olivos, CA: Cachuma Press.

Photos by Janet Nelson

Local Spiders: Tarantula

Brian Swanson

Tarantulas are impressive spiders, frequently encountered walking across roads and trails in late afternoons, especially in the fall.

They prey on crickets, flies and other small insects. They are harmless to humans, but can inflict a sharp bite if you pick them up.

Their main predator is a large blue/black wasp with orange wings. The pepsis wasp, also known as the tarantula hawk, is adept at locating these spiders. The tarantula hawk, after finding a spider, will sting and paralyze the spider, then drag it to a burrow where it lays one egg. When the egg hatches, the wasp larvae consumes the paralyzed spider.



Photo by Brian Swanson

Membership Application

Membership category: (circle 1 below)

Senior (62) or Student \$10 Individual \$15
Family \$20 Sponsor \$30 Patron \$100
Corporate \$250 Life \$1000
Contribution \$ _____

I/We are interested in the following:

___ Volunteer to help a committee (call to discuss)

___ Hikes

___ Indian Culture

___ Educational Workshops

___ School, Family, Youth Programs

___ Environment (Plants, birds, mammals, geology)

Other: _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City State Zip _____

Home Phone _____

Email _____

Please make checks payable to:

Friends of Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, Inc.
P.O. Box 26523
San Diego, CA 92196

Thank you for your support! Your donation is tax deductible.
Call **858.484.3219** or **858.342.8856** for more information.

Don't be left out!

Want to keep up with all the events sponsored by the Friends of Peñasquitos? Get all the latest information and details by giving us your email address.

Email your contact information to Janet Nelson at nelson.janet1@gmail.com or to Pat Watkins at pwatkins2008@gmail.com.

Friends' Directory

Officers

President: Brian Swanson	760.739.5451
Vice-President: Don Albright	619.443.5937
Secretary: Edward DiBella	619.563.0717
Treasurer: Pat Watkins	858.538.2527

Other Members of the Board of Directors

Les Braund, Anne Harvey, Mike Kelly, Mary Lueking, Janet Nelson

Walk Leaders

Don Albright, Will Bowen, Diana Gordon, Arne Johansen, Mike Kelly, Linda King, Mary Lueking, David Robertson, Brian Swanson, Pat Watkins

Committees

Conservation Chair: Mike Kelly, 858.342.8856
Newsletter: Janet Nelson, 619.519.3150
nelson.janet1@gmail.com
Tracking Team Coordinator: Rick Botta, 858.672.0584
Webmaster: Beth Williams



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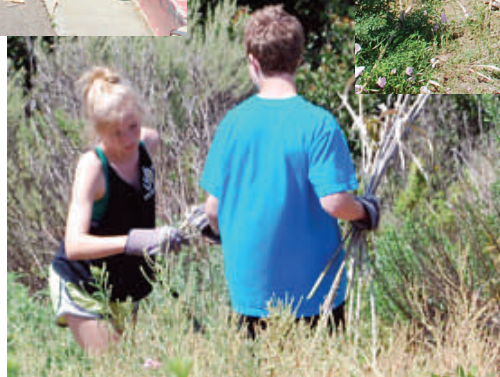
Check Your Label

If your expiration date is close or has come and gone, please take the time to send in a renewal check for your membership dues and save us the postage for reminder mailings!

Students Continue to Support Restoration Efforts



Students from Westview High School helped remove dead Arundo from the canyon near Adobe Bluffs Elementary School (Adobe Bluffs Road & Waterford Lane) during a work party held on May 7, 2011.



Photos by Janet Nelson