

#### #4 Oil / Black Gold



The antique oil equipment along side the trail is symbolic of the early oil discoveries in the Santa Clarita Valley. In 1850, oil from natural Seeps in Pico Canyon was distilled and used for lighting the San Fernando Mission. In 1876,

California's first refinery was built in Newhall. This pioneer oil refinery was capable of producing up to 20 barrels per day. By the turn of the century, numerous wells had been drilled in Placerita Canyon, many of which continue to produce.

The large piece of machinery on the south side of the trail is Gould's pressure pump, manufactured in 1902. It was used to pump oil to the refinery from the wellhead, or for water dispersal. At the base of the pump is a rolling-surface rock bit, used to excavate well shafts through layers of rock or hardpan. To the right of the pump is a production packer, attached to the top of a well pipe to narrow the flow and increase subsurface pressure to speed and regulate flow. The tools on the rack across from the pump are rod elevators (used to hoist sucker rods), tubing tongs (to tighten pipe), rod wrenches (to tighten sucker rods) and pipe threaders.

#### #5 Murals (by Rudy Pavini 1976)



The murals on the wall of the under pass depicts the history of the canyon from the Tataviam Native Americans (450 A.D), to the settling of the area by Spanish immigrants (late 1700's), to the discovery

of gold clinging to the roots of wild onions (1842).

#### #6 Gold



In March, 1842. Placerita emerged from sleepy anonymity and became the focal point of interest in Southern California when three herdsmen, Francisco Lopez, Manuel Cota and Domingo Bermudez discovered gold in the canyon. Legend states that the discovery occurred after Francisco Lopez awoke from a siesta beneath a large oak tree. While asleep he

had dreamed of finding gold and becoming wealthy (or so the legend goes). When he awoke, he shook off his dream of riches and went back to the reality of fixing a meal. He began to pull up wild onions for seasoning,

and there, clinging to the roots of the plant were small particles ....gold!

By May over 100 miners were in Placerita Canyon, searching through the streambed for gold. The local civil government in the Pueblo of Los Angeles gave Antonio Del Valle the power to collect fees from the miners for the wood, grass and water which they and their animals consumed. By June, Del Valle reported that only 50 miners were left in the area because the stream was drying up, as it does each year. In the following years, numerous methods of extracting gold, including dry washing, panning and hillside erosion (hydraulic mining) were used.

By the time the quarry was exhausted in 1848, it had yielded 125 pounds of gold. That Francisco Lopez's discovery is largely lost in U.S. history is understandable since this part of California was under Mexico rule and Lopez's discovery was a "Mexican" discovery and not an "American" one as Sutter's Mill.

#### **Docent-led trail talks are available for school and youth groups. Please register online @ Placerita.org**

Mission: "To inspire a passion, awareness and respect for the environment, and to preserve and protect for future generations the history and ecosystem of Placerita Canyon."

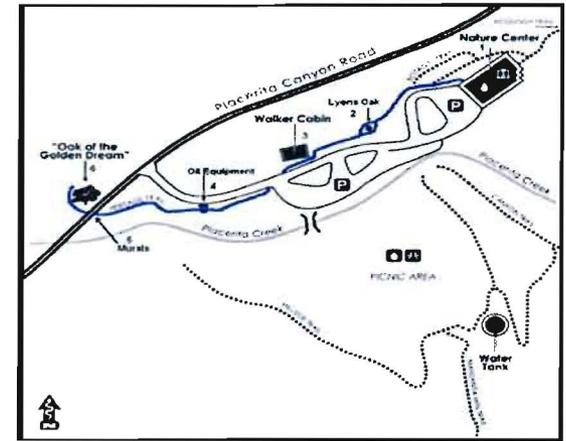


## **Placerita Canyon Natural Area and Nature Center**

### **HERITAGE TRAIL**

SELF-GUIDED HISTORY TRAIL

LENGTH: APPROX 0.30 Mile TIME: APPROX 30 minutes



19152 Placerita Canyon Road  
Newhall, California 91321  
661-259-7721  
[www.placerita.org](http://www.placerita.org)

The Heritage Trail is designed as a short concrete wheelchair and stroller accessible trail, a pleasant, yet educational hike. The journey starts at the Nature Center Museum exhibit on the first peoples of Placerita Canyon, past the Walker Cabin, across the park road, and ends at the Oak of the Golden Dream. The trail takes you under Placerita Canyon Road where you will see a mural depicting the history of Placerita Canyon including the Tataviam indians, to the settling of the area by Spanish immigrants, to the discovery of gold clinging to the roots of wild onions.

This trail is designed for ADA compliance.



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**Please make Memories, take Photos, and take Trash** away with you, and nothing else – no plants, animals, sticks, stones or leaves. Enjoy your visit and allow others to enjoy theirs.

Placerita Canyon is steeped in the history of Southern California. Indians camped beneath the spreading oaks: the bandit, Tiburcio Vasquez, passed through here: California's first major gold discovery was here: it has been used as a locale for hundreds of films and television shows.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center's Heritage Trail extends through the west end of the park from the Nature Center to the historic Oak of the Golden Dream. Represented along the way are Tataviam Indians, oak trees, Walker's Cabin, early oil explorations and the discovery of gold. The trail begins inside the court yard of the Nature Center.

### Things to look out for on the trail

As you hike this trail, watch for **Scat** (animal droppings) some animals, especially the **Gray Fox**, may deposit their **scat** to mark their territory. As a territorial marker, they deposit their scat in the most conspicuous place, so to warn other members of their species, that this territory is taken.



**Darkling beetle:** common name Stink bug. For protection it stands on its head and emits a foul-smelling liquid for defense- that's how he gets its name.

They're good for the environment; they clean up after plants and animals. Keep a look out for **Acorn Woodpeckers** and **Red-tailed hawks** in the skies and trees above you.

### #1 Tataviam Indians



The display case on the south wall of the Nature Center Museum contains authentic Southern California Indian artifacts. Many of these came from the Tataviam Indians who frequented Placerita Canyon.

These peoples were also known as the Alliklik by their neighboring tribes, a rather derogatory term meaning something like "stutterers" undoubtedly due to the difference between their languages.

These people were hunters and gatherers who lived most of the year beside the Santa Clarita River, in late summer each year, the Indians split into family units and migrated to the surrounding canyons to harvest acorns.

This food was carried back to the valley and stored for use during the winter when food was scarce.

The peaceful Tataviam were never particularly numerous, and so were unable to resist the forces of change which came with the Spanish Mission system of the late 1700's. In the name of Christianity and civilization, Franciscan padres and soldiers moved the Indians to the mission where they labored and learned the crafts of the white man. In 1797, The San Fernando Mission was established and the Tataviam living in the Santa Clarita River basin were "missionized". The demise of their culture and their lack of resistance to the newly introduced diseases of the Spanish led to a rapid decline of the Tataviam population. By 1920, the last of the full-blooded Tataviam was gone.

### #2 Oak Trees



The large trunk section of the "Lyons Oak" (moved here after the tree was removed to widen Lyon's Avenue in the early 70's) is representative of the many oak trees growing in the Santa Clarita Valley, by far the dominant visual feature of Placerita's flora and fauna.

Oaks play an essential role in the natural history of Southern California. In addition to their acorns used as food by local Indians and numerous animal species, oak trees provide shade, shelter, nest sites, roosts, forage and forage sites, insect food and homes and of course, oxygen. Their spreading root systems control erosion, stabilize the soil for animal burrows and provide food for numerous subterranean organisms. The burnt section you see was caused by the Foothill Fire (July, 2004). The cause of the fire was a Red Tailed Hawk electrocuted by a power line.

Look closely and you can see the tree's growth rings. In temperate and polar climates, hardwood trees add one ring to their girth each year of their growth. In good years the rings are wide and in drought years the rings narrow. This tree is estimated to have been about 147 years old when it was cut. Count the rings and see if you agree.

### #3 Walker Cabin



Walker's Cabin in one of three homes built in Placerita Canyon in the early 1900's by Frank Evans Walker. Winter rains would frequently wash out the road along the

streambed. Therefore the Walker family built homes in both the eastern and western ends of the canyon. This structure, built by hand in the 1920's, housed Frank, his wife Hortense and 12 children (7 boys and 5 girls).

Life in the wilderness of Placerita Canyon was not easy, especially for such a large family, and the Walkers had to utilize the canyon's natural resources whenever possible. Deer were plentiful. They raised beef and dairy cattle, pigs and horses. They also raised their own garden crops in the rich canyon soil. Water ran freely most of the year. Now abandoned, an oil well yielded enough high-grade fuel to heat and light their home and power their Model T Ford.

Income was otherwise derived from a variety of sources; leaf mold was gathered from the deep layers of oak litter and sold as fertilizer, "

Fancy Rock" (the unique green and white Placerita schist formation) was sold for ornamental use; and of course, gold was mined from the placer deposits from which the canyon derives its name. During good times, the Walker family was able to find up to \$22 (about 1 oz) worth of gold a day – however, there were many days when the take was nothing at all.

Luck also played a part in helping the family fortunes. Producers of Western movies, which were becoming so popular by 1915, discovered that Placerita Canyon was an excellent location for filming. It combined isolation, sunny days and rugged countryside, and was reasonably close to Los Angeles. The Walker children were intrigued by the movie people, and the extra dollars added to the family budget. Among the movies and early television shows filmed here were "Robin Hood" with Errol Flynn, "The Cisco Kid" and Hopalong Cassidy". Movie companies were, in fact, responsible for the addition of the porch and shingle roof on the cabin.

The present restoration, then, is to the post-movie company appearance, with modifications for security. Originally, it had no porch, a tar-paper roof, and a row of storage rooms along the back wall. (See model on display in the cabin) The furnishings, tools and utensils in the cabin are representative of the early 1900's, and were not necessarily owned by the Walker family. The large dining table is, however, the original table constructed by Frank E. Walker.

The Walkers continued to live here until the 1940's. Then desiring to preserve the natural and historical features of the canyon, Frank Walker sold his property to the State of California in 1949, creating Placerita Canyon Park. In 1959, the park was expanded to its present 350 acres, with responsibility for the administration assumed by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation.