



The Rattler



In This Issue:

- ◆ Donations Listings
- ◆ Trips With Jim
- ◆ A Visit With Melba
- ◆ On the Road with the Rattler

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

PCNCA's Mission Statement

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.

May-June 2011



Placerita Creek

Photo by Collette Lash

Dear Nature Friends

This is the last newsletter of the year! I thought that would get your attention. The docents lead school groups, so we work hand-in-hand with the school calendar. We will still be taking a few reservations during the hot summer months because of the year-round school schedule, but the tempo slows down.

The big news right now is Open House on Saturday May 14. Have a look at the flyer and tell all your friends. This is a fun family day at the Center with all kinds of great activities for all ages.

There will be a catering truck on site, or take a picnic; the park is really beautiful and green at this time of year. The stream has more water than we have seen in years, the waterfall is spectacular and wild flowers are poking up everywhere in spite of the long cold winter. Birds are singing and the sky is blue, we are so lucky to have this natural area so close by. Come, visit and take a walk on the trail...

The Rattler is a bi-monthly publication sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates to promote the preservation and enjoyment of the Placerita Canyon Natural Area. Please come, enjoy, learn...and volunteer.

Class of 1986

By Evelyne Vandersande

I am going to get my pin for having been an active docent at Placerita for 25 years and I am happy, pleased, excited...What can I tell you? It means a lot to me.

The class of 1986 was very strange: we had a student from Australia, one from the Netherlands and one from France (that was me). We were all very recently arrived in California and were disoriented by nature around us. Nothing was going according to the rules that we were used to and we were frustrated by not understanding our environment.

We met by accident at a "ladies coffee" organized by a friendly English lady named Maliet who had just become a docent the previous year at Placerita. Would you believe that the docent training was starting the next day and she gave us a strong push in the back to go there?

So we did ...to the great puzzlement of the staff who was not quite sure how to handle those foreigners who had no idea about the basic concept of California plants, animals, and climate. As the classes were much smaller at the time, we could not easily hide our lack of knowledge. We started from scratch and asked a lot of questions, but we loved every minute of it.

As the years went by, Marianne from the Netherlands moved to New Hampshire, Maliet went back to Great Britain and Jenny went back to Australia but I am still here. We remained friends; they still keep in touch and receive the Rattler in PDF format, sometimes they even send a donation to the Nature Center.

Through the years and all the education that the nature Center provided me, I have learned a lot about so many topics. This interest has spread to the rest of my family I am very proud to say. I have given much of my time to the Nature Center but always with much pleasure and I have gained so much more and gotten to know so many interesting people.

All this started around a cup of coffee 25 years ago. Be warned, new docents, you are starting something that might change your life forever!

"What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Rattler

Editor:

Evelyne Vandersande

661 254-2972

Publisher:

Heidi Webber

661 251-7978

If you have an article you feel would follow the interests of this publication, please feel free to submit it. The deadline is the 10th of every other month. Mail your article to:

Placerita Canyon Nature Center
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, CA 91321-3213

or you can email it to Evelyne at evelynevandersande@gmail.com.

Please email your article in MS Word if possible.

Visit our Internet site at www.placerita.org--Ron Kraus is the webmaster.

Moving? Please let us know so you won't miss any issues of the Rattler.



Board Members

President:

Jim Southwell

Vice-President:

Ron Kraus

Recording Secretary, NCA Co-Rep:

Pamela Koch

Corresponding Secretary:

Sue Wallander

Treasurer:

Heidi Webber

Directors:

Bob Moss

Evelyne Vandersande, PR Chair

Bill Webber

Rick Brammer

Angel Macdonald

Jack Levenberg, NCA Co-Rep

Fred Seeley

Alternate Directors:

Donna Fagan, Membership Chair

Paula Parr

The Rattler is printed by
Valencia Printers on Recycled Paper

Disclaimer

Because there is often limited space on various field trips, we find that we need to enforce the following: All trips and dinner celebrations are open only to Placerita Canyon docents and volunteers who have paid their yearly dues. Many trips can be open to family and friends but only with previous authorization from the person planning the trip. Thank you for your understanding.

The Placerita Canyon Nature Center and Natural Area Park are located within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County in the Supervisorial District of Michael D. Antonovich. The Natural Area and Nature Center are operated by the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates

Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, has designated an ADA Coordinator to carry out this Department's compliance with the non-discriminatory provisions of the ADA.. For more information you may contact the ADA Coordinator's Office at TEL 213-738-2970 TDY 213-427-6118 FAX 213-487-0380; Upon 3-day request notice, sign language interpreters and related materials in alternative formats (Braille-transcript, large print, audio-record, video-captioning, live-description) or any other reasonable accommodations are available to the public for County-sponsored activities and events.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates
Thank You!

- Yes! I want to contribute to help fund programs at Placerita
- \$25 Friend \$50 Donor \$100 Sponsor Wall
- I can pledge _____ monthly
- Please contact me about the Adopt-an-Animal Program
- _____

Your tax-deductible donations are needed to help fund programs provided by volunteers.
Send your donation to:

PCNCA
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, CA 91321-3213



A Day at Moorpark College

The sun was warm and the hostess (Jessica Nikolai) was perfect. Jessica first showed us the animals open to the public. We saw monkeys, lions, birds and more. At 2 pm we saw a special birthday animal show that was 45 minutes (most shows are 15 minutes). That was great. Afterwards Jessica took us behind the scenes where the public is not allowed. There we saw birds and reptiles off limits to the public. We finished up about 3:10 and the carnivore feeding was at 3:30. If you have never been to the Moorpark College Zoo you should take the time and GO! Thank you Jessica.

Jim Owens



This is the key awarded on opening day of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center, 40 years ago. It will be used in our celebration in November.

SPRING/SUMMER PROGRAMS

- FAMILY NATURE WALK** Every Saturday from 11 to noon.
An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.
- ANIMAL PRESENTATION** Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.
See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.
- BIRD WALK** Second Saturday of the month from 9 to 11am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.
- BLOOMS OF THE SEASON** Learn about native plants and what is blooming along the trails. Meet in the patio at 9:30 for a one-hour stroll on the fourth Saturday of every month. Bring your camera and questions. For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832.
- COMMUNITY HIKING CLUB** A non-profit organization that invites all members of the SCV and community at large to: Join weekly planned hikes; Attend monthly nature series educational presentations; Participate in community outreach programs such as Calif Condor micro-trash clean-ups and maintenance of trails and native garden; Partner with groups such as Boys and Girls Club to introduce youth to nature. For more information, go to the website at communityhikingclub.org

For more information, please call 661.259.7721 or visit our website at Placerita.org.

On Enjoying Nature and its Everyday Gifts

by Phil Rizzo

Trees

*I think that I shall never see
A poem as lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the sweet earth's flowing breast.
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray
A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of Robins in her hair
Upon whose bosom snow has lain
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.
Joyce Kilmer, 1917*

I have chosen trees as a symbolic form to enhance our lives with beauty. We all can stand some coaching on appreciating the gifts of nature surrounding us every day.

It's easy to get caught in the ways of the world while overlooking the very things that bring solace to our weary souls. Trees are such things right in front of us. The poetic picture of the tree above is a good place to start relaxing.

At our home, the focus of attention in our yard is a birch providing shade for a statue of St. Francis, who was a great nature lover. The tree is best identified for its outstanding white-colored bark and multiple-trunk form. Most birches boast dramatic yellow leaves at the end of their season.

In our front yard is a Japanese maple ablaze with vermilion or orange leaves in the fall. The Monterey ashes gracing our neighborhood also reach the height of their beauty in the fall, when their leaves turn a flashy yellow.

A most spectacular species for fall color is the sweet gum or Liquidambar. Where these are planted in rows or presented in groves, you'll think that you're in Vermont or New Hampshire.

Yellow, orange, vermilion, green, brown, the leaves are guaranteed to please the eye. The Liquidambar can be selected in the leaf colors you favor.

These trees are a major source of hardwood in the forests of the East, as far west as eastern Texas. It's not a native of the West — gardeners have imported them here for their beauty.

Trees, by their very existence and form, invite wildlife into their realm. Look, and you'll see countless varieties climbing things jumping from branch to branch, birds nesting and resting and unusual insects burrowing — but you've got to get up close for the insects.

Our home itself, right here in Valencia, has provided shelter for many species. We were amused by skunks that made their lair under an old stair for a short time.

All we ever saw was their tails bouncing around their living area. Then one day, the mother led her brood off our lot, marching single file as if in a parade.

We have experienced many species of birds at our feeder and birdbath. The most exotic are usually migrating: the white-crowned sparrow, robins, a flock of red-winged blackbirds and another of cedar waxwings.

Regulars are black phoebes and the never-ending English or house sparrows and finches. Nothing gets more thrilling than the occasional visit of a Cooper's hawk, usually poised on the edge of the birdbath.

May I suggest you pause and look around in your own local environment? You don't have to sit beside an anthill for hours and watch the seemingly frantic movements of its occupants as Henry David Thoreau did. My guess is that Thoreau's mind was as placid as Walden Pond on a windless day.

My thoughts here aren't intended as a botany lesson. It's hard to go almost anywhere without seeing a tree, or for that matter, large slices of nature.

Certainly a sunrise or sunset can easily beat almost anything for inspiration. Take in the warm energy offered by the sun's rising or setting.

Don't overlook the shadows laid out in front of you to help you open or close the day. Like life, they are fleeting and soon gone to another place.

In a busy, trying world, there's refuge and peace in our local nature right here in our own yards, streets and parks. Pause, look and relax.

The Signal.



Japanese Garden Trip

by Jim Crowley

We had an inspiring time at the Japanese Gardens in the Sepulveda Basin. They have a very peacefully laid out garden that is supported by the Tillman Water Reclamation Plant, which we viewed from some overhead walk ways. The design and choices of plants, rocks and waterways all have meaning to promote a cheerful and positive life. Twenty eight Docents attended. The Garden Docents divided us into two groups to allow a better presentation. If anyone needs a place to rest and recuperate their mind this is a good place to visit.



Some Big Words:

What is Ecology? The study of home.

What about adaptation? Adaptations are genetic traits that help a living thing fit into its environment. For example, a toothed leaf won't be eaten first because it is prickly.

Symbioses? It is a special relationship of living together, in or on each other. Lichens are a symbiosis between fungi and algae. The algae make food by photosynthesis and the fungi keep them from drying out.

The term "succession" applies to the sort of plants that grow after a fire: Plants have adaptations that let them come back after a fire. Wild flowers and grasses are the first plants to grow, and then larger plants start to come back from their root system, by root sprouting, like chamise. It might take a few years and often the area ends up with a mosaic of burnt and unburnt patches which provide different environments for the animals to survive.

What is an Ecological Footprint? It is a measure of how much of the surface of the earth is needed to support a person's particular way of life. Check: www.myfootprint.org to calculate your own ecological footprint



Bird Walk

by Teresa Jacobs

The magic that is Placerita Nature Centre was very clear on this Bird Walk Saturday in February. More than 35 birds were showing off for those of us who were fortunate enough to be a part of this wonderful experience. The leader, Rosemarie, is informative and included all 15 of us in the adventure of searching the trees for these lovelies of nature. Bob Moss, another bird leader, helped add to the joy of the day. We strolled through the park and observed so many birds some of us were thrilled to see so many different species we'd studied in books and during our docent training.

Another real treat, Bob Fisher was on the trip. So not only did we get to watch the sky's for treasure, we got to watch the ground and surroundings for lessons in ecology, plant life, flowers and trees.

With all of the knowledge, skills, enthusiasm, fresh air, friendship available, please plan to join the group next month.





Vasquez Rocks

Frank Hoffman was our trail guide, it was a pretty crisp morning and very clear and our large group with most of the new docents present was eager to hit the trail and to learn about this other natural Area.

Those famous rocks started as sedimentary rocks made of resistant red sandstone and fanglomerate beds that have been uplifted and eroded by selective erosion and faulting.

Many films were filmed there: Star Trek, The Flintstones, Planet of the Apes are just a few.

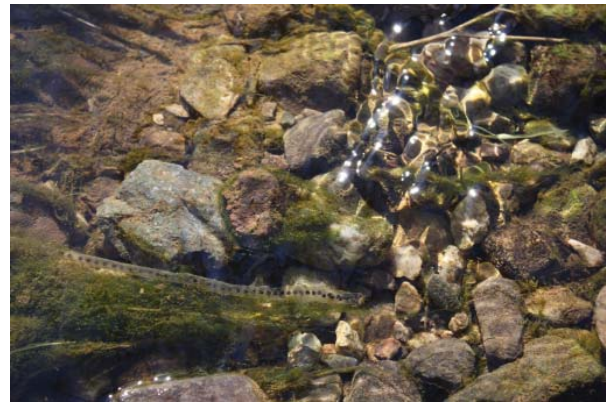
The Tataviam Indians lived there for about 4300 years and their names means "People of the South-facing slope" They were gatherers, hunters and traders. The Vasquez Rocks area was a crossroad for many Indian tribes on trading expeditions

We were very interested to see a different kind of mistletoe than we are used to in Placerita, with smaller leaves and berries gathered in a tight ball, and to discover a few desert wood rat nests close to the trail.

Another shrub that was plentiful is California Juniper. The berries persist on the plant through the winter and were a staple food to the Tataviam. They were dried and ground into a meal.

It had rained heavily two days before so it was perfect timing to check for prints and we found a nice one from a mountain lion on the trail. A good sign that spring is close were a few strands of Western toad eggs in the stream.

It was an interesting visit and some of the new docents were discovering this area for the first time.



Kathleen Ritner is Retiring

Here is the photo from the graduation from the class of 1986. Do you see this vibrant young woman on the front row with the big smile? This is Kathleen Ritner who, at the time, was superintendent at Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

Kathleen's career took off and she left Placerita but was always there to give us good advice and she cared very much for the Nature Center, trying to be present for many of our big events.

Now she is deputy Director and is ready to retire. We wish her well and thank her for her friendship through the years.

And Then There Was One

First you see 2 trailers and then you see one leaving on top of the truck. That does not seem too impressive but can you imagine the big Spring clean up that was needed to be able to empty a whole container, throw away many things that were not needed any more and to find a place for the items that we still use? Agustin, our ground maintenance worker, spent hours of planning and hard work



to make this happen. Thank you Agustin, little bit by little bit, we want our natural area to look just like that-- natural. One is gone and we keep our fingers crossed to be able to see the second one leaving too.



What Do We Do at the Nature Center?





An Important Date for Placerita Canyon Nature Center. March 1st 2011.

The Nature Center received the Silver Certificate LEED award from the U.S. Green Building Council and a scroll from County Mayor Michael Antonovich congratulating us for being the first county remodeled building to be certified.

We received also a very beautiful and imposing bronze plaque which will get a place of honor in the classroom.

This was the second item on the agenda for the meeting of the board of supervisors of the county of Los Angeles at the Kenneth Han Hall of Administration on Temple Street. Also attending the meeting were Gloria Molina (1st district), Mark Riley-Thomas (2nd District), Zev Yaroslavsky (3rd District) and Don Knabe (4th District).

Attending the ceremony from Placerita were Russ Kimura, Regional Park Superintendent, Frank Hoffman, Park Supervisor, Debbie Walt, Jim Southwell, Pam Koch, and Reg Fear.

Also attending the ceremony were architect Gwynne Pugh and Project Manager Stephanie Erickson. We were joined by

Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation Director Russ Guiney and Deputy Director Hayden Sohm.

David Howard from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, wants to get our early history for the county historian with an eye on getting our building on the historical registry. So, much excitement was in the air with so much good news.

As you can well understand, we are very proud of receiving this recognition and thank warmly all who made this honor possible.

The Nature Center underwent an extensive 30-monthlong makeover with new fire-retardant, roof, dual-pane windows, skylights and new accommodations for some of its animals.

Its 5,000 square feet of new building space features a new classroom and lab.

Other renovations include a new roof at the Walker Cabin, a new potable water system at Walker Ranch Campground, a pedestrian bridge with enhanced accessibility, as well as new energy and water conservation features such as energy-efficient air conditioning and cooling systems.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center is now a model by which other old county buildings can be renovated and it is a testament to the Department of Parks and Recreation's commitment to implementing creative and successful ways to embrace conservation and sustainability.

We love working in our new buildings, to conduct our programs with ease and to welcome all the visitors to our Natural Area in a place we can be proud of.



San Fernando Mission

It was a fun tour and the docent was very good, but there was too much to see in a short period of time. Most of us want to go back on our own to study the exhibits more.

So much of our Californian history is linked to the start of the missions that we need to review and be able to better appreciate all this information; it was a very interesting morning.



Baby Season Has Begun

This is an exciting time of year. We have been seeing pairs of birds doing their courting dances. Love songs fill the air. We already have babies in the nests! The coming of spring also can evoke humans to do a spring cleaning in their yards and for some crazy reason they like to trim their trees!

Botanically speaking, fall is the best time to do any trimming. Use caution when cleaning out dead debris. Quail and the Common Poorwill are examples of birds that nest on the ground.

Let's also respect the lizards and the spiders that nest on the ground. The best way to ensure to protect nesting animals is to resist the temptation to trim trees from now until after the nesting season in the fall. If you MUST trim a tree, at least hire a professional that knows how to examine the tree for nests. I recommend a professional who knows how to climb trees without injury and know how not to disturb the nest.

Remember, squirrels also nest in trees. I had a gardener come to my property to do an estimate for fire brush clearance and one of his kids, a 10 year old girl with a sweet smile, came to me all excited to show me something in a shoe box she had. Upon opening the top I saw a 1 week old hairless baby squirrel! After taking a deep breath, I calmly asked her the story of how she got it.

In summary, her dad accidentally cut off the leg of the mother, three babies were gathered alive and they kept it in a shoe box at home feeding them milk out of an eye dropper for 3 days. Two of the babies died. The one left was listless and cold. I instructed the girl that we were going to do the "grown up thing" and call a certified squirrel rehabilitator.

With the parent's permission, I took the girl with me to the "rehabber". The girl really wanted to keep it as a pet but she was brave and handed over the baby squirrel. A happy ending to a very preventable and sad story. Wildlife is just that....Wild and to be enjoyed.

Please be vigilant out there and do no harm!

Thanks!

Deb Clem

"All Good Things Are Wild And Free." H.D Thoreau

Thank you Deb for your article. The accompanying pictures were not taken at Placerita Canyon Nature center. We do not do rehab but here are some addresses of places that we can recommend:

Anna Reams,
Wildlife Care of Ventura County
Simi Valley
(805)581-3911
Native birds, corvids and Mammals
(bobcat, coyote)

Kimberley Stroud
Ojai Raptor Center
Oak View
(805)667-4727

Cindy can handle the transport of animals to those rehab centers:
(661) 993-3316



Spring is the time indeed where we get phone calls about animals needing help. As a good rule of thumb, the parents are always better equipped to handle their young than humans are. Always try to put back an animal in its nest.

If you see a bird in distress on the ground be aware that it is a normal situation if the bird has feathers. It is going through a phase where a bird is a fledgling. He is learning to fly and has not quite mastered the art. The parents will feed him even if he is on the ground. It is a dangerous time for a young bird but do not interfere. Many young birds do not make it but the stronger ones will.

Recognition Ceremony:

The nature Center Associates of Los Angeles will have an official Recognition Award on Saturday, April 30, 2011 at Eaton Canyon Nature Center.

A continental breakfast will be served before the ceremony.

This event is sponsored by the Board of Directors and Senior Docents.

2011 OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS

PLACERITA CANYON

Outstanding Adult Volunteer:

Jim Southwell

Outstanding Youth Volunteer:

Olivia Miseroy

BADGE AWARDS 2011

Five Year, Class of 2005

Angel MacDonald

Placerita

Rosemarie Regis

Placerita

Cliff Kelling

Placerita

Ten Year, Class of 2000

Reg Fear

Placerita

Bob Moss

Placerita

25 Year, Class of 1986

Evelyne Vandersande

Placerita

Silver Certificate, Class of 2010

Marc Alva

Colleen Kite

Sandra Balaram

Dan Kott

Bess Barber

Linda Lallo

Tischia Bluske

Collette Lash

Ingrid Brown

Jack Levenberg

Maria Christensen

Jim Crowley

Don Regis

Anna Renfro

Joan Fincutter

Fred Seeley

Greg Hiortdahl

Teresa Jacobs

Diney Stehnike

Kathryn Kazmer

Brenda Wadsworth

Gold Certificate, Class of 2009

Debra Barroso

Rick Brammer

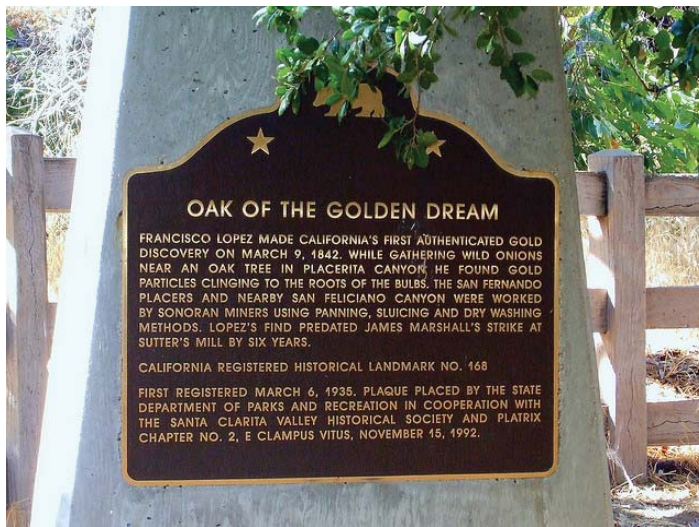
Linette Brammer

Sue Mayhew

Frances Bojorquez

Jim Owens

Norm Schweitzer



Oak of the Golden Dream

Francisco Lopez discovered the first California gold, ten miles to the east in Placerita Canyon, on March 9, 1842 — six years before Sutter’s Mill. The site of a large oak tree which still stands today is called “The Oak of the Golden Dream” and is marked by a plaque indicating it as State Registered Landmark 168.

Lopez first made the discovery of gold in commercial quantities in California on March 9, 1842 on his 40th birthday. Lopez wasn’t just some lucky rancher. He’d been schooled in mining at the University of Mexico and had good reason to be scouring the hills above the Mission San Fernando. Cattle ranching merely paid the bills while he was on the prowl for gold.

Lopez was the majordomo or overseer of Rancho San Francisco, which was owned by Ygnacio de Valle at the time. The area now known as Placerita Canyon was within the boundaries of Rancho San Francisco. On the morning of the 9th, Lopez and two other men set out to round up stray stock. Later that afternoon, Francisco grew tired and decided to take a nap beneath a live oak tree. Legend says that he dreamt of finding gold and became a wealthy man. When he woke up, Francisco felt hungry. With his knife, he dug up some wild onions growing by the tree for his lunch. He noticed shining particles resembling gold attached to the roots. Digging some more in the area he found additional pebbles.

Francisco brought this golden substance to Abel Stearns in Los Angeles who verified that it was in fact gold. He then attempted to file the first gold claim ever



in California with the governor, but for an unknown reason he never received a response. In its heyday, Placerita Canyon yielded approximately \$80,000 worth of gold. An estimated 2,000 miners, primarily from Lopez’s home state of Sonora, worked Placerita Canyon in the ensuing years.

On March 9, 2011 the docents wanted to have a little ceremony to celebrate the anniversary of Francisco Lopez Gold discovery under the Oak of the Golden dream to the great enjoyment of a few school groups who came to see our living history in action.

Thank you to the crew from this reenactment: Kathryn Kazmer was Mrs. Lopez, Marc Alva was Francisco Lopez, Jim Henchey was the narrator and Anna Renfro helped glue it all together. Good job to celebrate the day!

A Little Park History

- Frank Walker homesteaded in Placerita Canyon in 1905. He married Hortense Reynier in 1908. Together they had 12 children, 7 boys and 5 girls. They built 3 houses in Placerita Canyon and started a fourth. The only one remaining is the Walker Cabin which is located near the nature center.
- The Walkers led a hard, simple life in the canyon. Frank Walker was very entrepreneurial and he and his family made money in several ways—farming, ranching, gold prospecting, mining, operating a dude ranch, selling Placerita “Fancy Rock,” and renting the property to movie companies. The Walkers were struck with tragedy in the late 1920s & early 30s with Mrs. Walker and several of the kids dying.
- The legacy of the Walkers is that they preserved the land in its natural condition and sold it to the state for a park in 1949



Those are the bare facts of the Walker family but we have a visitor at Placerita who comes sometimes during Docent Training to tell all the little stories and memories that we love to hear. That make the stories from this pioneer family so much more vivid, fun and interesting for all of us as we try to imagine how the daily life was in Placerita all those many years ago.

Melba Fisher Walker was one of those 5 little girls who grew up in the cabin. She is 95 years old now, a little hard of hearing, but she retains her zest for life, her sense of humor and her great laugh. Growing up in Placerita Canyon was a great adventure for her. It might seem like a difficult life by our standards but Melba was definitively a happy child, sharing many good times with her brothers and sisters . Her memories are filled with so many details from her childhood and she is always

very kind to share those with us.

We are always excited and honored when she comes to visit; here are a few questions we asked her:

What did you get for Christmas when you lived in the cabin? We always waited for that day with great impatience and our gift was an orange or an apple and we would make them last the whole day, eating only the smallest piece at a time. We also got 2 pieces of hard candy and that was heaven for us and a rubber ball. Oh, how much we played and threw this little ball up in the air and made it bounce. It really did not take much in those days to make someone happy.

One year we received a pick and shovels and we were not pleased at all because we knew we were going to have to work hard on making a road.

There is no bathroom in the cabin, what did you do? We had an outhouse like so many other people. We had a water pump in front of the house. That was our running water and we would take a bath once a week. The buckets were filled up at the pump, the water would be warmed up on the stove and we would all take a bath one after the other otherwise it would be too much work. My Mom would step last in the bath.

Did any of the children get bitten by a snake? Lord, no, we knew better to stay away from them. Once I saw a snake in our bed but it was not a rattle snake. I was so scared; I tried to tell my sister who was sleeping with me but my voice would not come out.

How did you get to school? There was an old school bus coming to pick us up. Mrs. Kennedy was the driver and the journey on unpaved Placerita Canyon took some time. We went to Newhall elementary which was 6 miles away. The nearest High School was in San Fernando.

I had one good pair of shoes to go to school and one dress so I made very sure it was washed and pressed at the end of the week to start fresh the next week.

Did you have any chores? We all did. I had to take care of the turkeys, so I would take them where they could find food but one day I fell asleep and a coyote killed the turkeys.

The hard part after that was to go home and tell my father what happened. He was not pleased and I had to look for a sprig to get my punishment. I carefully looked for the thinnest one I could find!

What games did you have? We did not have toys from the store but we made up our own games, running on the roof from the cabin and sliding down from the tree, hide and seek, climbing on trees and rocks all the time. In the summer we would enjoy swimming and splashing in the creek without bathing suits. We had so much fun!

How could so many children live in such a small cabin? We were not all there together at the same time; the older children

were gone early to look for work. I left the house when I was 16 years old but there also was another room at the back of the house used as a bedroom where we all piled up, boys and girls, a few in each bed. This room was removed by the movie industry when they started filming the cabin.

Were you born at the hospital? No we were born at home. I remember the doctor coming to the house with his suitcase. Then my parents telling me a few hours later that I had a little brother. I thought "Hum...I wonder if the doctor brought the baby in the suitcase" I was very young!

Did you find gold? My father said he was gonna strike it rich but never did. He had finding gold on his mind; he was "fishing for gold". Once he found a nugget the size of a 50-cent piece which he took for money to Los Angeles and which amounted to only \$22.00.

Where did you go shopping? We went to Newhall; there was one grocery store and one gas station. There was also a hay and feed store on San Fernando Road owned by the Frew Family. I remember the train stopping in front of the Saugus café, with people getting off the train and crossing the road to eat.

Where were you born? I was born across the street, in the first house built by my father along Placerita Road. Then we had a summer cabin near the Walker Ranch close to the creek. The cabin close to the Nature center was our winter cabin. We needed another place in the winter because the road around the summer cabin was too muddy in the winter.

Thank you so much for those great memories, Melba. We are very grateful that you share them with us. I can almost see all the little Walker children running around in what was their back yard and what is now our Natural Area. Thank you for protecting this place from development and keeping it for all the generation of children coming to enjoy it for years to come.



Visit to the Sepulveda Basin

We all had a great time being led by two of our docents who also volunteer at Sepulveda Basin, Bob Moss and Reg Fear.

As we were assembling to start our tour we encountered a pair of Great-tailed Grackles who were loudly chattering about and what I like to think of as welcoming us. One would think they were just another pair of ordinary black birds, but when Bob showed us the difference in his handy bird book everyone perked up and really enjoyed them.

Next we went off on a lovely trail walk where we enjoyed the plant and tree varieties, and yes more bird inhabitants, Western Kingbirds, American Goldfinches, Song Sparrows, Redwing Blackbirds to say a few. There are several inlets that allow you to view the waterfowl, of which we saw some rare species. Some memorable ones were the Ruddy Ducks with their beautiful blue bills, Great Egrets showing off their breeding plumage, Cormorants in and on their nests and at one point we were as close as 6 feet to a Great Blue Heron.

Did you know there are several fish species, including Talapia in those ponds? But no fishing allowed! For those of you who couldn't be with us, sorry you missed it. All in all we saw 29 bird species.

Hope you have a chance to visit the Sepulveda Basin soon and enjoy it as much as we did.

Rosemarie



ADOPT-AN-ANIMAL

PCNCA gratefully acknowledges the following special guardians who are helping in the care and feeding of their adopted animals:

Catherine Hartnek - Squirt, the Western Pond Turtle

Skip Newhall - Sandy, the Alligator Lizard; Rosie, the Rosy Boa; Viper, the Rattlesnake; Hopi, the Barn Owl and O.J., the Great Horned Owl

Cub Scout Pack #490, Tiger Den #9 - Squirt, the Western Pond Turtle

Alicia Hernandez - Daisy, the Opossum

Isabella Leech - Hopi, the Barn Owl

Ethan Leech - Cricket, the American Kestrel

Santa Clarita Fun For Fours - Moon Shadow, the Kingsnake

Mrs. Metcalf's 2nd Grade Class (Castaic Elementary School) - Cricket, the American Kestrel

We thank you all for your support and generosity!





Olivia Miseroy

Junior Volunteer of the Year 2011

1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood?

I was born in Woodland Hills California and grew up in the San Fernando Valley. When I was 11 my family moved to Santa Clarita.

2. How did your love of Nature start?

As a kid my dad would take my sister and me hiking almost every weekend. I really loved it, especially catching frogs and seeing lizards. My love for nature was reawakened the summer of 2008 when I went on a trip to the Sierra Nevadas for the first time and grew even more when I started volunteering at Placerita October 2009.

3. What was your education?

I went to Lorne Street Elementary School, Sierra Vista Jr. High and Canyon High School. I graduated from College of the Canyons last year with an Associates Degree in Art.

4. What is your work experience?

I work as a model maker and painter. In college I got an internship at Grant McCune Design Inc. and have been there ever since. I've gotten to work on some awesome projects for movies, commercials and museums.

5. When did you come to Placerita for the first time and why? What do you remember about this place?

Placerita was one of my favorite places my dad would take us hiking as a kid. There are pictures of me at all different ages sitting on the stone fireplace at Walker ranch.

6. What are the titles you have held at the Nature center?

Volunteer

7. What did or do you like most about your job at the Nature Center?

I like being around so many awesome people and animals. It's really opened me up to so many things, like how amazing our native wildlife is. I really like sharing what I've learned here with people too.

8. What did you or do you not like about the job?

When I see people who don't appreciate the park.

9. At Placerita, is there some special accomplishment that makes you feel proud?

Well, I recently learned that I'm Junior Volunteer of the Year which is a great surprise and honor.

10. What is your favorite food?

Sushi, Italian sausage and mac and cheese. I also like trying "strange" meats. I've had rattlesnake, rabbit, ostrich, gator.... and they've all been super tasty!

11. What is your favorite color?

The color of a Red-tailed Hawk's tail.

12. What is your favorite TV show? Or music? Or pastime ?

I don't have a TV but amuse myself with silly animal videos on Youtube. I listen to a lot of metal bands no one's heard of and orchestral soundtracks. Volunteering has also introduced me to bird watching which I've gotten real into as of late. I love seeking out birds, identifying them and taking pictures of them. I also collect skulls and am really interested in learning taxidermy.



The Theodore Payne Foundation

On Tuesday, March 29, a group of Placerita docents and friends visited the Theodore Payne Foundation in Sun Valley. Founded in 1960, the Theodore Payne Foundation promotes the understanding and preservation of California native flora. They have a California Native Plant Nursery which is open to the public year round and the grounds are a great place to visit or picnic. They also



sell native plant seeds online, offer classes at the nursery, and have school field trips to the facility.

Our guide for the morning, Lisa, explained the importance and benefits of using native plants in our gardens. Not only do natives require less water, but they also support a wide variety of animals with food and shelter.

Placerita Canyon Natural Area is included in their wildflower hotline every Friday. Check it out at:

<http://www.theodorepayne.org/hotline.html>



Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Open House

and Family Festival

May 14, 2011
10AM to 3PM

- Animal Presentations
- Panning for fools gold
- Guided Hikes
- Face Painting
- Food & Drink
- Free Parking & Admission

Many fun activities for the whole family!

19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall
(661)259-7721
www.placerita.org

sponsored by

Placerita
Canyon
Nature Center
Associates



The Placerita Canyon Nature Center and Natural Area are located within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County in the Supervisorial District of Michael D. Antonovich. The Natural Area and Nature Center are operated by the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates.



On the Road with the Rattler:

We have a new feature in the Rattler, I have asked the Docents and Volunteers to take the Rattler with them when they go places and to take a photo with it.

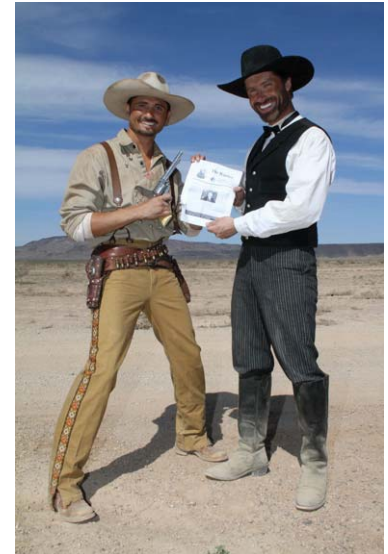
Collette Lash went on a big trip and took all kinds of photos in interesting places. She demonstrates in a very clever way that you can just use the front page and take the photo yourself.

You really do not have to go to exotic places either.

I had a photo taken in Ventura in a pizzeria...hum...pizzeria ? You have me confused Tony? But the pizza was very tasty and you get to build your own fire in the fire pit.



Rattler with 3-time world champion gun spinner, Joey Dillon on the set of "The Adventures of Loop & Rhett" (a short western film) in Benson, Arizona



Loop Rawlins and Michael Tushaus stars of the short western film "The Adventures of Loop & Rhett" the photo was taken out at the Jean Salt Flats in Nevada.



Rattler with me in Las Vegas



Rattler at Hoover Dam



Rattler simultaneously in 2 states at the same time! Nevada and Arizona



Anna Renfro

Co-Chair of the Open House

1. Where were you born and where did you spend your childhood? I was born in Venezuela. My parents came from Italy but the quota for Italians was met so they moved to Venezuela for 4 years to meet the immigration law requirements at that time. We moved here when I was 3 to Southern California. I grew up in Burbank and have a full blood Italian/catholic upbringing.

2. What is my education? I graduated high school in Burbank. I went to C.S.U.N. and got my B.A. in psychology but had to go on further to do anything and I decided it wasn't for me. I went to school to be an x-ray/ultrasound technician and just loved it.

3. My work experience: I worked at Olive View and Henry Mayo hospitals. I did a full range of ultrasounds from neo-natal to full adult soft tissue exams.

I loved doing pregnant woman. There were some sad moments but I got excited with the couples' anticipation to their expected newborns.

4. What is my family life? I have been married for 22 years to Patrick and have one daughter-Kiersten. She is a senior at Hart High and wants to go away for college; some of you have met her-she is my best friend.

5. When did you come to Placerita? I used to come here with my daughter when she was home-schooled for Jr. High. I remember Frank with black hair back then. He would take them for hikes. All the kids were mesmerized by him.

6. How did I get started with Placerita? I met Heidi at the gym and she told me about the docent training. So since I used to bring my daughter here, I decided to come back in a different capacity and do the class of 2010.

7. What have I done at the nature center? I loved the docent class of 2010. Ron and others have made the class fun and enjoyable. I have worked on the board elections. I have helped out with the food patrol for the docent training class of 2011. It was so enjoyable to meet the new class and have such a variety of food for everyone. Also I work in the gift shop.

8. What is my favorite food? To look at me-I love everything but of course my favorite is Italian.

9. In being involved with Placerita, I have to say that I have met some of the nicest people from the staff to the volunteers. Everyone is so genuine and just fun to be with. They are easy to talk to and have that family feeling.

I personally would like to thank everyone for the words of comfort. As most of you know I had to put Baby down on the last day of docent training. She had a lot of issues and was having a hard time. She was more than a dog to me and very special. Thanks to everyone for making her a part of Placerita

DOCENT GRADUATION

Saturday, March 26 was the culminating event for the docent class of 2011. They received their graduation certificates from Ron Kraus, the director of docent training. The docents had attended 3 months of training to become a Docent/Naturalist. They are now ready to begin leading hikes and educate the public about the animals, plants and other features at Placerita.

Twenty-one individuals completed the training by attending classes, auditing hikes, and leading at least three hikes. They will now be committing to leading hikes at the Nature Center.

New docents Ed Benison, Vicki Cunningham, Garret Denise, Ray Orloff, and Jackie Thomason received awards for perfect attendance. Their prize was a hand-painted hat created by Jill Goddard

Ron Kraus received a gift certificate from the docents as an acknowledgement of his work in presenting the docent classes. Anna Renfro and Joan Fincutter received a custom-made apron created by Jill Goddard in appreciation for their work in arranging the food for the docent classes. They in turn presented awards to Roger McClure, for making coffee every class meeting, and to Sandra Balaran, for bringing food for the class meetings.

Judy McClure received a special award for her work on the Docent Training Committee. She received a beautiful poncho, hand-knit by Jill Goddard.

The potluck dinner was a huge success due to the wide variety of food made by all the docents. Sue Wallander was in charge of the preparations for the dinner.

Congratulations to all and Thank You for your efforts.



Placerita's Spring Avian Jewels Shine

by Bob Fischer

Spring was here in all its glory. All plant life in bright green, bird song everywhere, greeting us first as we stood under the giant oak in front of the Nature Center. Just at the edge of the parking lot in the first clump sycamore trees we encountered our first avian jewels, a pair of Western Bluebirds. With the sun shining on him the male is brilliant, blue head, rose throat and chest, cream tummy and blue back and tail. The female's colors are a muted version of the males. The pair seemed to be exploring holes for nesting sites, flying from one knot in the tree to another. Western Bluebirds seem to be especially abundant this year.

Next, Acorn Woodpeckers, the most abundant of our brightly colored Canyon resident species, put on a continuous show, perching where we could watch them, displaying their clown faces and scarlet head stripes and flying back and forth showing their large white wing patches. Our first sighting was of a group of four or five all together in the top of a tall sycamore. After that each sycamore we passed seemed to have a little colony hanging out. Western Scrub Jays, as usual, were all

over the place scolding us and confusing us by showing their light gray fronts one time and their dark blue backs another time. You can't call them "blue jays" when all you can see is their front. And besides the real "Blue Jays" all live east of the Rocky Mountains.

Two other year around residents that posed for us so we could get close-up looks were Black Phoebes and Oak Titmouses [you decide if it should be Titmouses or Titmice]. Black Phoebes are one of the most observable small birds in the Canyon, always sitting out in the open where they can be seen showing off their tuxedos. Maybe because it's spring the Titmouses were demonstrating their several different incessant calls. Speaking of calls, actually songs, we finally found the source of the music masters we began hearing in front of the Nature Center. A House Wren posed for us at eye level just ahead on the trail alongside the parking lot. Song poured from his open black, slender beak. He just sat there fifteen feet away and serenaded us. We could easily see the fine marbling on the back, wings and tail of this tiny bird.

Then in quick succession some truly rare jewels came into view. First, high overhead in the oaks at the far end of the meadow a small bird flashed a patch of yellow. Patient watching revealed a bright yellow head, black throat and white tummy, black back

and wings with white wing bars. It was a male Hermit Warbler on his way from southern Mexico to the tall pine and fir forests of California, Oregon and Washington. Next a Nashville Warbler, not quite as brilliant as the Hermit showed. The Nashville has a gray head, prominent white eye ring, olive upperparts and yellow underparts. This warbler is on its way to northern woodlands and spruce bogs from northern California to British Columbia after leaving its winter habitat in southern Mexico and Central America. We next saw a warbler that was black and white. Was this a Black-and white Warbler or a Black-throated Gray Warbler? The difference is one has a black throat on an otherwise striped black and white very small bird and the other doesn't. If a Black-throated Gray, it was headed to woodlands and brush covered land throughout northern California and the west. If a Black-and-white it was headed toward mixed woodlands in the Rockies on up to northern Canada. A small mixed flock of these migrating birds flew back and forth between the sycamore on the far side of Placerita Creek and the willows on our side.

During their annual migration warblers feed and rest during the day and fly at night. The birds we saw on that Saturday would be over 100 miles further north the next day and might be traveling hundreds more in the next week or two. A report just received on the internet stated that Yellow-rumped Warblers which are common winter residents in southern California are already showing up in Fairbanks, Alaska.



Acorn Woodpecker

www.birdperch.com



Jim Southwell

Volunteer of the Year 2011

1. I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at the height of the Great Depression. Our family moved west to Carmel, California in the late 1930's to escape the foul air of Pittsburgh and relieve my father's asthma. Traveling cross country in our 2 door Ford Model A Convertible with my older sister in the rumble seat would take a week camping at night in our tent.

2. "Carmel by the Sea" was just a village then, located in the pine forests of the Monterey Peninsula. Summers I would investigate the forest and its mysteries by following the animal trails, letting them lead me wherever until it was time to come home for dinner. Mothers were less concerned where you had been all day than that your hands and face were washed and hair combed

when you sat down at the dinner table. On a good day exploring I would find a dead deer that I could examine up close and observe the process of decomposition. Seven-year-old boys love to watch the maggots at work.

3. I graduated from Pacific Grove High School in a senior class of eighty-five students where we actually knew everyone's name. During my senior year I attended a "Youth and Government Model Legislation" in Sacramento where I was made Speaker of the House to conduct Youth Legislation. On the final day we had a joint session with the Senate members where I had the honor of introducing Governor Earl Warren (later to become Chief Justice of the Supreme Court) to the joint session.

Monterey Peninsula College was my home for two years where I studied engineering prerequisites and was elected to Student Body President. During this time I met my future wife of fifty+ years and we began a four year courtship. After graduating with my Associate of Arts Degree, I attended California State University San Jose and received my Bachelor of Science Degree just as the Russian Sputnik satellite went up and the race was on for engineers. Several companies interviewed me at college trying to convince me to work for them. By then Diane and I had married and were living at college when I selected a Van Nuys Aerospace company to work with.

4. I spent 35 years with The Marquardt Company going from Flight Test Engineer to Program Manager to Departmental Manager. The Company produced aircraft accessories, supersonic ramjet engines, spacecraft rocket engines and medical equipment before closing in the 1990's.
5. My family life consists of being a husband of 54 years with two married sons and a married daughter, six grandchildren and one great grand daughter. Family is the most important aspect of my life. Marriages today seem so frail without the will to work out the rough times. Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying, "keep your eyes wide open before marriage and half closed after". I think too many people have that reversed.
6. We lived in Sand Canyon for 29 years and I drove to work on Placerita Canyon Road every day, passing the Nature Center going to and coming from work. I don't remember paying much attention to the park center but we always referred to Placerita Canyon Road as our "attitude adjustment period" after fighting traffic on the highways. Diane says she frequently took our kids to the park when I was working and she attended the Park Center Dedication in 1971. I did run out of gas one night right in front of the park entrance and coasted-in to use the telephone. That was when I first met Frank Hovore.

After unsuccessfully seeking employment for two years after my aerospace job folded, my wife said I needed to do something (anything) and showed me an advertisement for docent training at Placerita Canyon Nature Center. I called the number (with wife standing over my shoulder) and was told a docent would soon call me back. ("Off the hook, I thought, they probably would never call me back"). But hours later a woman with a delightful French accent called back and said they would be happy to have me join the training class.

7. I quickly learned that if you suggest an improvement in the docent organization that you better be prepared to implement your ideas. That's how I started Jim's Trips, became docent training leader and president of the docent board of directors.
8. The Nature Center Docents are a wonderful group of people, more of a family than just individual volunteers. I have the greatest respect for the talent in this group and their ability to find a place in the organization to express that talent.
9. When I first came to the Nature Center Associates of Placerita docents were down to about 6 key people and were thinking about cancelling school groups for lack of volunteers, our training class of 12 people produced about 6 keepers who have stayed with the organization and became the core of the Board of Directors, special events, training and fund raising. Now 13 years later, I can say that the organization runs smoothly without my guiding hand, and for that I am truly proud and appreciative of everyone's contributions.

First Quarter 2011 Donors

Thanks go out to all these wonderful people and organizations who thought of our nature center and all those who live there. Your thoughtfulness and gift is greatly appreciated.

Adat Ari El	Golden Valley Charter School
Ileene Anderson	Frank and Mary Hoffman
Henrietta Babb	Diana Kalisz
Bethel Christian School	Laura Kliegman
Eileen Blanchard	Angel MacDonald
Buena Vista ASB	Fred and Judith MacMurdo
California Retired Teachers Assoc. Div. 68	Sue Mayhew
Castaic Elementary School	Shirley Morano
Nikki Dail	Rinaldi Adult School
Daisy Scouts	Daniel Signett
Dr. Annette Steifbold	Skyblue Mesa Preschool
Elaine Dvorak	Claudia Strock
Egremont Schools	Third Street School
Robert Fischer	Vena Ave ES
	Wiley Canyon ES



The Rattler

*Placerita Canyon Nature Center
19152 Placerita Canyon Road
Newhall, CA 91321-3213*



*"We exist so children
and oaks
can grow together."*

NATURE CENTER ASSOCIATES OF
LOS ANGELES COUNTY