

The Rattler



In This Issue:

- ◆ Donations Listings
- ◆ 3-Spine Stickleback
- ◆ Hunt for Lost Treasure
- ◆ Time Capsule

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

50 Years of Nature Education

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.

November/December 2011

Hello Dear Nature Friends,

The Holiday Craft Faire is coming on December 3 and 4. The Nature Center is the only place in this valley where you can make your holidays decorations with fresh greenery, pinecones, seeds, pods and have so much fun... You only need to buy a straw wreath and we will provide all what nature has to offer. The smell is delicious and the results are spectacular. We will also have children crafts so the whole family can have a good time. Mark your calendar.

You have a love for nature and enjoy the company of children, you have some free time and always wanted to become a docent at Placerita Canyon Nature Center but you do not even know how to start. Now is the time to grab this opportunity: Docent training is starting Tuesday January 10. Sign up right now. More details about the classes inside the Rattler.

The holidays are coming and we want to send you all our best wishes of happiness and health. We hope that you will have some good times with family and friends and that you will be able to enjoy the simple but deep pleasures of the change of the season.



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.

Goodbye Spooky

Spooky was the great horned owl that could be seen most of the time on the patio, she had only one wing so she could not be released in the wild. She was a rather stern bird and was never trained to be handled. She developed a small wound on its feet and had been brought inside a few days ago to be taken care of. The wound had healed but the bird was found dead in her cage on September 14.



NACPRO: means National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials.

In the last Rattler, we made a mistake and inversed 2 letters. As we received a national recognition for being a LEED building from this organization, we apologize and correct our mistake.



We would like to thank these generous patrons for their donations to the Placerita Canyon Natural Area. Our critters thank them too!

Nancy Allen
Michelle Balandran
Eileen Blanchard
Growing Tots Preschool
Tyler and Brandon Hodge
Just Plane Kids
Shirley Morano
Pinecrest Valencia
SCV International Charter School
Valley View ES

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 evelynvandersande@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:

Debra Barroso

Corresponding Secretary:

Fred Seeley

Treasurer:

Heidi Webber

Directors:

Bob Moss

Evelyne Vandersande, PR Chair

Bill Webber

Rick Brammer

Teresa Jacobs

Pam Koch, NCA Rep

Jack Levenberg NCA Rep

Alternate Directors:

Donna Fagan, Membership Chair

Sandra Balaram

Deb Clem

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

“Oak of the Golden Dream”

Francisco Lopez made California first authenticated gold discovery on March 9, 1842 while gathering wild onions near an oak tree in Placerita Canyon. He found gold particles clinging to the roots of the bulbs. Francisco Lopez find predated James Marshall’s strike at Sutter’s Mill by six years”

The Oak of the Golden Dream is California Registered Historical Landmark number 168.



**Where is the
Oak of the Golden Dream?**

The Oak of the Golden Dream is a historic landmark and visitors coming to the Nature Center ask this question on a daily basis. ..Or I should say that they used to ask; now they can find the tree all by themselves.

The new signs are 2-sided so visitors coming from different direction can see them. Some signs are on the parking lot posts and more can be seen on the trail. We are pleased if this improvement makes the visit to Placerita more enjoyable for all.



New trails signs are going to appear shortly, they will be vertical signs with the name of the trail and the mileage.

FALL - WINTER 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 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.
- BIRD WALK, CASTAIC** The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly bird walk at **Castaic Lake Recreation Area** on the first Saturday of the month at 8:00AM.
- 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.

Meet Angel Macdonald



Who is Angel Macdonald? She is the brain behind those emails telling which docent will be working on the trail and on what date. She is the one who allow plenty of time for planning our calendar but also the one who send a “help” email and allow the docent to volunteer at the last minute to give a school or a special class the opportunity to come to the center the next day when they suddenly find out they can take a trip..

Angel was the answer to difficult scheduling problems for many, many years before she took this job and she does it so well with great appreciation from all of us.

Who are you Angel? I was born in Kansas City, Kansas but grew up in the San Fernando Valley and the Venice beach area.

How did your love of Nature start? My brothers and I hiked and played in the foothills in Woodland Hills every week. Camping was always a big adventure even though the farthest we went was less that hour from home.

I went to Saint Monica High School in Santa Monica and I worked at Six Flags Magic Mountain’s marketing department for 27 years. I retired in 2005

What is your family life? I have 3 adult children who live in SCV. My mother lives with me and needs full time care.

When did you come to Placerita for the first time? I remember taking my children to the park in the 70’s. It was much the same as now. My sons loved to hike and play in the creek. The picnic area was a favorite for a Sunday afternoon.

What do you like most about your job at the Nature Center? I miss being able to interact with the children but am glad I am able to still be active by arranging the school groups from home. I was on the board for several years.

What are your favorite’s activities? I love to play golf, not that I am very good. Also I read a lot, maybe 2-5 books a week. I especially enjoy mysteries. I like to walk and the trails at Placerita offer something different all the time. I have a large family and enjoy spending time with them.

Birds Migrating in Flocks or Alone

Some species of birds are highly social during migration, moving in flocks that may stay together for the whole journey. Flocked migrants are the most conspicuous of migrating birds and are the most familiar to us. They are also easiest to watch because they are generally daytime migrants. In at least some cases, flocks of migrating birds consist of family groups. It is thought that young birds learn details of the routes of travel and layover sites from the more experienced adults, though this is surely not the sole reason that these diverse types of birds travel so often in groups.

Flocked migrants include a wide variety of birds. Most of the large water birds travel in flocks, usually of impressive size. Among these are auks and puffins, cormorants, pelicans, ducks and geese, cranes, gulls, terns, sandpipers, and plovers. Often they congregate during migration at a few major stop-over or staging areas where food is particularly abundant. Flocking is also common among many land birds, including doves, swifts, swallows, larks, pipits, crows, jays, waxwings, blackbirds, and starlings.

An equally diverse array of species seems to migrate in a more solitary fashion, perhaps occasionally forming more or less aggregations with others of their kind, but basically winging it alone. These birds include grebes, most herons, rails, some hawks, owls, nightjars, cuckoos, hummingbirds, kingfishers, woodpeckers, most flycatchers, creepers, wrens, kinglets, thrushes, vireos, wood warblers, and orioles.





Hello to everyone at Placerita Canyon Nature Centre from Sydney, Australia. I was so fortunate, some years ago, to do the Docent Training at Placerita when I lived in Valencia. It was at Placerita that I learned to really appreciate the beauty of Nature around me when I went for walks on the trails surrounded by those beautiful Oak Trees. Everyone at Placerita was so friendly, so I was thrilled when Evelyne suggested I write a little article for the “Rattler”.

Here in Sydney, it is turning into Springtime. The air is full with the scent of cascading Wisteria, flowering Jasmine, bright yellow frangipani and the beautiful perfume of gardenias wafts through when there is a warm breeze.

I live a few minutes from Garigal National Park which is heavily wooded with Gumtrees, Wattle and scrub and about 10 minutes (“as the crow flies”) from the beach. In this little area nature abounds.

There is a “resident” bush Wallaby (small kangaroo) who comes out at night to feed on freshly watered grass, he hops away if seen, bouncing along on his tail back into the bush.

There are “Tawny Frogmouth Owls” who perch on gum trees. They do not even flinch when one walks by, quite intent with their wide eyed stare on getting their dinner! Fruit bats settle in the high palm trees nibbling on palm dates.

Occasionally, if lucky, one might see an “osprey” (sea eagle) soaring really high into the sky on his rounds back to the ocean. You can tell them by the ‘tipped wings’ and such a large wing span, something I learned in Placerita when on a ‘bird watching’ tour.

There are also “bandicoots” (southern Brown Bandicoots) who love digging holes in my backyard with their long snouts. Sometimes my backyard looks like a ‘moon surface’ with all the little holes. They are similar to your “Gophers”. They like sandy soil and grass roots.

More recently I have a “Kookaburra” bird that perches on my clothesline in the backyard, waiting patiently for something to eat! They are sort of the ‘king’ bird and have been known to dive down and pick up a piece of sausage from someone’s hand. About this time when the weather gets warmer, the Blue Tongue Lizard appears; he is quite a friendly fellow and loves to rest in the middle of a path in the hot sun. And not to forget the possums (similar to your squirrels), who seem to compete with the fruit bats and bandicoots for territory.

Well, come to think of it, I didn’t realize just how many native animals lived around here, so I am grateful that I was asked to write this article.

Kind regards to all at Placerita Canyon Nature Centre. I look forward very much to reading the next “Rattler”.

Jenny Davies



A Trip with Deb

Deb Clem planned this trip very quickly but got a few people interested in visiting the LA County Arboretum in Arcadia with her. It was a very warm morning but the shade from the beautiful old tree collection, the Mayberg waterfall, the perennial garden and getting lost in the bamboo jungle was all very pleasant. They enjoyed taking photos from the Queen Ann Cottage built by “Lucky” Baldwin in 1885, a gorgeous place from the California Golden Age. It was used in the television series Fantasy Island for the opening theme when “the plane” is seen over the island and Tattoo rings the bell.

This is a lovely park to spend a morning with good friends and plant identification is made easy as all is marked.



My Bewick's Wren Treat

by Bob Fischer

I was sitting in my car waiting for my friend to come out when a Bewick's Wren flew onto the porch in front which was decorated with many potted plants. The wren scurried between, behind and in front of the pots picking up tiny objects from the ground. It stayed there for several minutes foraging on the ground in plain view no more than ten or twelve feet from where I was sitting. I don't remember ever having been so close to a Bewick's Wren and certainly was never able to observe one closely for so long a time. Being the obsessive bird watcher that I am, it was a very exciting and memorable event. I decided on the spot to write my next bird article about the Bewick's Wren.

On my morning walks I see or hear a Bewick's wren almost every day. They are a small gray and brown songbird with a moderately long barred tail often wagging or held cocked over its back, a thin pointed bill and a distinctive long, white stripe over its eye. Worldwide there are 70 species of wrens, mostly in the tropics, 30 alone just in Mexico and the US has 9 species of which 6 can be seen in southern California.. The Bewick's wren was found across the whole lower half of US and is common in the west but is disappearing east of the Mississippi. It is seen and heard year around in Placerita Canyon. Placerita also commonly has House Wrens but the Bewick's is easily distinguished from the House Wren by its long white eyebrow and slightly larger size, 5 1/4 inches versus 4 3/4 inches. But why is it called a Bewick's wren? It was named by John James Audubon for his friend Thomas Bewick (August 12, 1753 - November 8, 1828) who was an English engraver and renowned ornithologist. Bewick wrote and illustrated celebrated histories of quadrupeds and birds in 1790, 1797 and 1804.

I mentioned hearing the Bewick's song, A high, thin buzz followed by a warble. You can listen to it at http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Bewicks_Wren/sounds. But this is just one example and the same bird will sing several songs and no two will sound exactly alike and songs vary by range. The House Wren which is also heard frequently in Placerita Canyon has a much more melodious song. The tropical wrens are renowned for their singing including the fact that in some species males and females sing duets, alternating parts of a continuous song,

Wrens eat mostly insects, spiders, etc. foraging actively from ground to tree tops, but mostly low. Their long slender bills are suited to probing into crevices in bark or under rocks. They occasionally eat berries or seeds.

The nest is built in cavities, natural hollows, old wood pecker nests and also in artificial sites including nest boxes, tin cans, or holes in buildings. Nests are bulky (sometimes domed) with a deep cup of grass, feathers, hair, plant down, moss and dead leaves on a base of short twigs/sticks, rootlets, chips/leaf debris, spider egg cases, oak catkins. Often snakeskin or cellophane is woven into the cup, which is deep and tiny and may be in a back corner. The site is usually under 20 feet above ground. The male may start several nests and the female selects one and completes it. Usually 5-7 eggs or more are laid, white with brown spots, with one egg being laid each successive day, with eggs getting larger each day and with the female doing all the brooding. The chicks hatch from 14 to 17 days after the last egg is laid. Both parents feed the hatchlings and the babies leave the nest in about 14 days.

On your walks in Placerita Canyon, especially in the spring, you are almost sure to hear and see Bewick's Wrens bustling about and flying into and out of their nest holes.

References for this article include the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America, "Lives Of North American Birds" by Kenn Kaufman, The Cornell University Lab of Ornithology web page and "The Birder's Handbook" by Paul R Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin and Darryl Wheye, Wikipedia, and several other pages on the internet under Bewick's Wren



ON THE ROAD WITH THE RATTLER

If you are going places, take the Rattler with you and have a photo taken. We would love to publish it and see all the places the Rattler can go to...

Evelyne took the Rattler to City Hall in Ventura



Cyrus Clark took the Rattler to the sand box and tried to bury it.



Colette took the Rattler on her way to Nashville



Brigitte Dussert took the Rattler to Ibiza (Spain)



The docents took the Rattler on an in-service "Botany at the end of the Summer"



How does Weather Affect Autumn Color?

The amount and brilliance of the colors that develop in any particular autumn season are related to weather conditions that occur before and during the time the chlorophyll in the leaves is dwindling. Temperature and moisture are the main influences.

A succession of warm, sunny days and cool, crisp but not freezing nights seems to bring about the most spectacular color displays. During these days, lots of sugars are produced in the leaf but the cool nights and the gradual closing of veins going into the leaf prevent these sugars from moving out. These conditions-lots of sugar and lots of light-spur production of the brilliant anthocyanin pigments, which tint reds, purples, and crimson. Because carotenoids are always present in leaves, the yellow and gold colors remain fairly constant from year to year.

The amount of moisture in the soil also affects autumn colors. Like the weather, soil moisture varies greatly from year to year. The countless combinations of these two highly variable factors assure that no two autumns can be exactly alike. A late spring, or a severe summer drought, can delay the onset of fall color by a few weeks. A warm period during fall will also lower the intensity of autumn colors. A warm wet spring, favorable summer weather, and warm sunny fall days with cool nights should produce the most brilliant autumn colors.

USDA forest service



The Search for the Source of Placerita Creek – Part 1

By Ron Kraus

In the days of the Roman Empire, to search for the source of the Nile was a euphemism for undertaking a lost, cause. The ancient explorers did not have the expertise or technology to complete such a mission. The upper reaches of the Nile included disease-infested swamps and ferocious tribesmen. The source of the Nile remained a mystery until the 1860's when British explorers finally sorted it all out.

I have empathy for those early explorers, as the source of Placerita Creek has eluded me for three years. In November of 2008 I became interested in finding it after an unusually heavy early season storm dumped several inches of rain in the area. When the waters receded the creek bed was covered with a black oily film from Walker Ranch all the way down to the nature center and beyond. I followed the creek up to where it meets Los Pinetos Canyon (the Waterfall Trail) and noticed that the black oily stuff did not come down from there. Instead, it was coming from the tributary that branches out to the east and leads up to what was then called the SDI Property, now known as the East Walker Ranch Open Space. I made a mental note of the situation and went on to other things.

But I couldn't get that oily stuff out of my mind. Where did it come from? What was it? So I again began exploring the different tributaries that lead into Placerita Creek. Although there are many little side canyons that drain into the creek as you walk up the Canyon Trail towards Walker Ranch, they only run right after a rain and don't contribute that much to the total flow. After studying maps and conducting several exploratory hikes, I thought I finally had figured it out.

There are three primary tributaries that feed into Placerita Creek and they all converge near the same spot at Walker Ranch. The first is what I'll call the Golden Valley Fork. It drains the Golden Valley Open Space from the creeks and canyons in the vicinity of the Walker Homestead House ruins on the north side of Placerita Canyon Road. This is the first of the three tributaries that dries up in the spring, so it is not the main source. This tributary meets the main creek at the dip crossing on the dirt road leading down from the Walker Ranch parking lot on Placerita Canyon Road.

The second source is Los Pinetos Canyon. This is the stream that feeds the waterfall on the Waterfall Trail. The Los Pinetos Trail follows it up the mountain to its head at Wilson Canyon saddle. This stream usually runs longer than the Golden Valley Fork, so I consider it to be the secondary source of Placerita Creek.

The tributary that provides the most flow into Placerita Creek is the aforementioned unnamed canyon that leads eastward up into the East Walker Ranch Open Space. It runs late into the spring and has a relatively high flow. I followed it from the spot it meets Los Pinetos Creek at Walker Ranch to the ruins of the old SDI buildings at East Walker Ranch and found that it forks up south into the Angeles National Forest. This is where the black oily stuff was coming from. It turned out to be ash and soot that had washed down the creek after the Sayre Fire in November of 2008.

Knowing my limits, I decided that I would need some help exploring this last segment of the creek. So in February of this year, I recruited some friends to undertake this adventure to find the ultimate source of Placerita Creek. This area was the site of a big marijuana farm that was raided by the DEA the year before, so there was concern we might run into some illegal activity. Nevertheless, our group assembled on the morning of February 7th and trekked up from the East Walker Ranch parking lot into the deep forested canyon (see accompanying pictures.) Right at the mouth of the canyon, we were greeted by two men with about a dozen big dogs. Although polite, they asked us to stay put while they concluded some type of activity up the canyon. We complied and they disappeared for about 15 minutes. They reappeared, wished us a happy hike and walked back down in the direction of Placerita Canyon Road.

The hike up the canyon was difficult, as there was no trail and lots of poison oak. We had to scramble over boulders, fallen trees, and slippery rocks. Within a quarter mile or so of our goal, our progress was blocked by a waterfall. There was a way around it, but at that point we were too tired to attempt it so decided to turn back and try to complete the journey another day. When we came back a couple of months later, the winter rains had filled the creek to the point where it was impassable. As rattlesnake season had begun, we decided to postpone future exploration of the creek to the fall of 2011.

Will we finally reach the headwaters of Placerita Creek? You'll have to wait for the next issue of the Rattler to find out.

The Search for the Source of Placerita Creek--continued



Scrambling over the rocks



Checking the GPS



Turning back at the waterfall

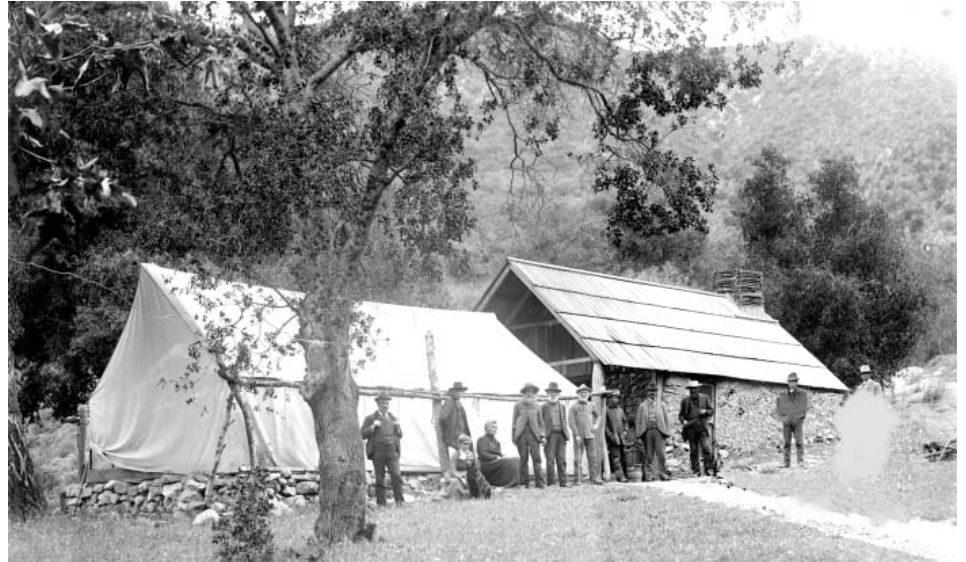


Black goo covering Placerita Creek

Placerita HSI: Historic Scene Investigation -- November 12th, 2011

By Ron Kraus

Over the past several years, I have acquired copies of old photos taken in Placerita Canyon from the late 1800's into the early 1900's. The pictures include houses, barns, utility buildings, gold mining operations, oil wells, Walker family dwellings, and other glimpses of life in the canyon over 100 years ago. I have matched up these old photos with the current locations where they were taken. We will visit about a dozen of these sites and compare the past to the present. Meet at Placerita Canyon Nature Center at 9AM. We will walk up to Walker Ranch and back. It's about a 5-mile round trip. Bring water and a lunch. We should finish up by 2PM.



ADOPT-AN-ANIMAL

PCNCA gratefully acknowledges **CUB SCOUT PACK 490 DEN 9 WOLVES** for their adoption of Sandy, the Nature Center's Alligator Lizard.

Adoption packages begin at just \$25.00, and they make great holiday gifts. We can personalize them in many different ways and gift wrap as well. Our animal adoptions are wonderful gifts for those nature lovers on your holiday list, and supporting our Nature Center in this way will be a gift to us as well. Pick up a brochure at the Nature Center or call Judy McClure at 661-252-6187 for all the details. Happy Holidays!





In Service “End of the Summer Botany”

Ron planned this class and did a great job preparing the topic for the large docent group who came to learn. He listed the plants from the Botany trail and the Canyon trail in the order that we were going to see them on the trail. He helped us to identify them and explained the changes the plants were going through after a dry summer.

We were introduced to a new term; **Aestivation** (from Latin *aestas*, summer, but also spelled “estivation” in the USA) is a state of animal dormancy characterized by inactivity and a lowered metabolic rate, that is entered in response to high temperatures and arid conditions. It takes place during times of heat and dryness, the hot dry season, which is often but not necessarily the summer months.

In the last Rattler, I wrote that the ground squirrel does estivate in the warm summer months and the plants do just the same. They dry out, look brown but if you look carefully, you can see some tiny green buds where the plant is growing again.

We were on the trail to identify plants but specially to observe how the plant communities are dealing with the prolonged hot and dry weather that is typical of our Mediterranean climate. In addition, many plants are forming fruits, some are starting to show their fall color and Ron pointed them out to us.

It was a warm day and we welcomed the shade on the Canyon Trail as we walked until mid gate. We were pleased to see that there is still water in the stream and many plants are taking advantage of that to bloom. Ron always tells us “At any time of the year, there is something blooming in Placerita. If that is not true, I will buy you lunch” No such luck and we saw many plants in bloom on both trails. It was a very educational morning, we took notes, photos, we learned new names and concepts and we had good times with our friends. What more can one wish for?

Ref: Ron Kraus, Wikipedia

The “Hole in the Bluff where the gold was hid”

By Ron Kraus

Of all the old photos I have come across of Placerita Canyon over the years one of the most intriguing shows a woman in a hat standing below a hole or cave in a cliff. Handwritten across the bottom is “Hole in the Bluff where the gold was hid.” The photo is included in George Starbuck’s Walker Family Collection on the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society’s website (George Starbuck is one of Frank Walker’s grandsons.) There is no further information available about it on the website. One source says it is a photo of Hortense Walker (Frank Walker’s future wife) taken in 1907 and that the hole was a prospecting tunnel used to store gold mined in Placerita Canyon until it could be shipped to San Fernando for disposition.



Hole in the Bluff where the gold was hid.

In early September I spotted a hole in a cliff on the north side of Placerita Canyon Road (outside of the boundaries of Placerita Canyon Natural Area) that looked very similar to the one in the photo. I took some photos of it from a distance and tried to match them up to the old picture. Although not a perfect match, it was close enough for a closer look. So I put together a little group and we trekked up to the site in mid-September. It turned out to be a rough scramble up a steep roadside slope covered in dense chaparral. We found the hole but no gold (although a few gold-painted

rocks appeared from somewhere.) An attempt to recreate the old photo was stymied by the rough terrain and thick brush. Maybe we didn’t find the right hole? In any case, it was a fun morning hike with some friends. As several wise people have said, “The journey is the reward.”

(Disclaimer: This story is about an attempt to find an historic location in Placerita Canyon, not about hunting for gold. All forms of gold mining are prohibited in Placerita Canyon Natural Area. Besides, there’s no reason to hunt for treasure in the park, because the park IS the treasure!)





The Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Presents its Annual

Holiday Craft Fair

Saturday and Sunday, December 3 & 4

10:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

at

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall

1 1/2 miles east of the 14 freeway

Create and decorate your own holiday wreaths, centerpieces, candles and ornaments using a large assortment of fresh-cut greenery, pine cones and other beautiful natural treasures.

Supervised candle dipping for the kids

**The Nature Center Gift Shop will be open to help you
finish off that holiday shopping list**

(661) 259-7721 • www.placerita.org



The Grizzly Bear is Back.

How did we get this bear at the center? I went back to the old Rattlers and thought it would be time to publish again the story so that we don't forget how this came about.

We received the bear in October 2005 from Sandy Tietjen. At that time, I had called Sandy to get more detail; how does one become the proud owner of a grizzly bear and she told me the story.

Her grandfather had hunted the grizzly bear in Alaska in the 1950's. The skull had been removed, bleached and was hanging on the wall of her grandfather's house as the prized trophy. The taxidermied grizzly was standing next to the skull and Sandy, as a child, was always very impressed when visiting her grandfather and liked to stand next to the imposing bear.

When her grandfather passed away, nobody in the family wanted the bear and Sandy, then 18, claimed it for her bedroom. She thought "This beautiful creature died, I am not going to abandon it now!" Her parents were perplexed by the new décor of their teen-aged daughters' room.

When she was newly married, she was very excited at the first Halloween in her new home and the opportunity to give candies to the children. The first time the bell rang, she opened the door and three young boys around six years-old were



Harvest Moon over Placerita

This beautiful photo was taken by Ron Kraus, who is always at the right place at the right time with his camera. This time he caught the harvest moon over the hills of Placerita.

I decided to investigate a little bit what is really the Harvest Moon, why does it look so big and a different color than the "regular" full moon. This is part of what I found:

The harvest moon is the full moon closest to the autumnal equinox. Historically, it afforded farmers extra time for harvesting crops. Before the invention of electricity, farmers relied on bright moonlight in the late summer to gather their ripening crops after sunset.

Often, the harvest moon seems to be bigger or brighter or more colorful than other full moons. The warm color of the moon shortly after it rises is caused by light from the moon passing through a greater amount of atmospheric particles than when the moon is overhead. The atmosphere scatters the bluish components of moonlights (which is really reflected white light from the sun), but allows the reddish component of the light to travel a straighter path to one's eyes. Hence all celestial bodies look reddish when they are low in the sky.

The moon appears larger in size because the brain perceives a low-hanging moon to be larger than one that is high in the sky. This is known as a moon illusion and it can be seen with any full moon.

Wikipedia, The Christian Science Monitor

standing in front of her, their eyes were huge, their jaws had dropped and they stood petrified. They did not even ask for candy! Sandy had forgotten her bear was standing in front of the window and the massive silhouette was in the light. She said that she was out-staged the whole evening.

Why did she decide to give away the grizzly? Sandy was in the process of revising her insurance policy and came to the conclusion that insuring a grizzly was just too expensive for her young family. She thought about Placerita and we are very happy that she did.

Because of its middle size, our supervisor at the time, Ian Swift, estimated that it was killed at around 2 years of age so it is a juvenile, not a full-sized adult.

The bear needed some minor repairs and went to the taxidermist, came back to his restored sponsor and we are happy to have him back at the center.

Time Capsule

City officials on August 25 dedicated a time capsule to be opened by Santa Clarita residents 50 years from now, but they didn't actually bury the capsule because more donations for it are needed.

During the ceremony, a crane hoisted a four-ton steel frame to the top of the new Newhall Public Library. City leaders see the library as a cornerstone of downtown Newhall redevelopment.

"The time capsule is meant to show people 50 years from now the things people were dreaming of in 2011," Mayor Marsha McLean said during the dedication ceremony. "We hope to show people that dreams come true."

There is still more room for people to send in their contributions for the capsule, McLean said.

Those who attended the dedication were invited to sign their names on the large steel frame before construction workers hoisted it 60 feet to the top of the highest part of the library roof.

The library is scheduled to be completed by mid-2012 and will include 74 computers, a children's section, and a fireside reading room.

"This really is an historic time for Old Town Newhall," said City Council member Laurene Weste, "which is what makes the time capsule so fitting."

"People 50 years from now can see that this community had vision and that they thought ahead,"

Ref: *The Signal*

Cory Minderhout.



To our great pride, Ron Kraus was invited by the city to provide a bag of items to represent Placerita Canyon Nature Center during the event. Ron did not have much time, just 24 hours to fill up the bag and bring it on time to be included in the ceremony. Ron wanted our input and advices and sent an email asking for help and suggestions but he did all the footwork. I have to pull off my hat to him for gathering so rapidly diverse items that indeed, describe the park in 2011.

Items from Placerita Canyon Nature Center for inclusion into the time capsule are:

- A cloth patch with the nature center logo.
- A envelope with "Rattlesnake Eggs." It's a novelty item sold in our gift shop—not real eggs. It buzzes when you open the envelope. Somebody 50 years from now might think it's funny.
- A field notebook commemorating our 50th anniversary this year.
- Four photos: The nature center building, our staff, our 2011 docent class, and our signature landmark--the Oak of the Golden Dream.
- Our newsletter, "The Rattler."
- The list of our current members
- A CD containing PDF files of the membership list, the newsletter, a report on the history of Placerita Canyon, and a report on the Walker Family, the pioneer family of Placerita Canyon.
- A DVD movie covering the recent history of Placerita Canyon. Who knows if they will still be able to watch DVD's in 2061. I can still play 78 RPM records that are 50 years old.

We were very pleased to be included in the event, Ron Kraus, Pamela Koch and Eileen Blanchard braved triple digits temperature to be part of the ceremony but it is a nice feeling to become part of history that way. Who know what will be happening in Placerita Canyon Park 50 years from now? What will have changed? What will remain the same? Any drastic earthquake will change the topography from the park? At least, we will leave a memory of how it was in 2011 in our home away from home.



A New Fish at Placerita?

If you have lived long enough in Santa Clarita, you have heard about this fish at one time or another but I am pretty certain that you were never able to see one.

If all goes according to plans, Placerita Canyon Nature Center is going to be able to display a specimen soon and Fish and Game official have given us a permit so we will be able to kept one in an aquarium. A river specimen likes to find a



peaceful environment and we hope to be able to provide this so that our visitors will finally have the possibility to observe this elusive fish that was able to survive in the Santa Clara River for centuries...

The unarmored threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni*) (UTS) is a small, scaleless, freshwater fish of up to 5 centimeters (cm) (2 inches (in)) standard length (i.e., the distance from the tip of the snout or lower jaw to the end of the vertebral column) inhabiting slow-moving reaches or quiet-water microhabitats in streams and rivers. Favorable habitats are usually shaded by dense and abundant vegetation. In more open reaches, algal mats or barriers (e.g., sand bars, floating vegetation, low-flow road crossings) may provide refuge for the species.

The UTS feed primarily on benthic insects, small crustaceans, and snails, and to a lesser degree on flatworms, nematodes, and terrestrial insects. The UTS reproduce throughout the year with less breeding activity occurring from October to January. Reproduction occurs in areas with adequate aquatic vegetation and slow-moving water where males can establish and vigorously defend territories. The male builds a nest of fine plant debris and algal strands and courts all females that enter his territory. He turns bright red when mating. A single nest may contain the eggs of several females. Following spawning, the male defends the nest including newly hatched fry by dashing forward with a gaping mouth and "hackles" raised.

When the egg laying is done however, females are unceremoniously ejected from the premises. The UTS are believed to live for only 1 year and is highly endangered.

Ref: *US. Fish and Wildlife service.*



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