

Dear Nature Friends

On July 22, I saw a slender column of black smoke to the east.

Because I am one of the volunteers who are called if there is a fire evacuation at Placerita, I called the Nature Center to find out if the fire was close.

Frank Hoffman, recreation services supervisor, answered the phone. He told me all was well; that the fire was actually closer to his home.

Little did we know then that this fire, which had started close to the 14 Freeway, would spread so drastically and burn 41,432 acres, destroy 19 structures and cause one death.

Many docents had to leave their own homes quickly. We were to find out later that the daughter of one of our docents evacuated to her father's house, but her own home was one of those destroyed in the fire.

I will cover here only in broad strokes how the situation evolved at Placerita:

On July 23, it was clear the situation was changing. Sand Canyon and Placerita Canyon roads were closed, so only official help could be called for rescue. Two trucks from the Whittier Narrows Nature Center came to take all of our animals that Frank and Marietta Ewing had packed and loaded into the trucks to Vasquez Rocks for protection. They were also able to evacuate all the taxi-dermy and computers.

On July 24, it was heartbreaking when we learned that Los Pinetos Trail, Waterfall Trail and Walker Ranch had burned. At the time, the fight to keep the Nature Center buildings safe had started. Russ Kimura, the park superintendent at Placerita, and Hayden Sohm, deputy director of facilities for the L.A. County Department of Parks and Recreation, were supervising the road and the fire progress at all times, assessing the situation with the fire crews and sending information to the County Officials. We were extremely grateful that Leon Worden (SCVNews.com) and Ron Kraus (Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates president) posted information on Facebook on a regular basis to bring us news. Here was the message from Leon Worden at 1 a.m. on July 25:

"Placerita Canyon Nature Center is still standing. Crew from Oregon arrived a couple of hours ago and is camped out in the parking lot and has been clearing brush. Closest active flames are about 1/2 mile away and progressing slowly in zero wind. Other units are handling flames on both sides of Placerita Canyon Road just east of the Walker Ranch entrance. Numerous hot



The Rattler

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19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall, CA 91321
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Placerita Canyon Nature Center
Over 50 Years of Nature Education
September October, 2016



spots throughout the canyon are likely to flare up for days."

As the morning progressed, the fire did the same, going against the wind. The situation became scary as the fire approached the Nature Center. Planes started to make water drops in a systematic pattern for three hours along the fire break that had been created, and by 3.30 p.m., the fire in that area was out.

Sand Fire Update 5PM by Ron Kraus July 25: "The Nature Center, Walker Cabin, Oak of the Golden Dream and adjacent areas have escaped fire damage. The fire crews constructed a network of fire breaks around the park which protected it from the oncoming flames. Although the fire apparently has passed through the area, the crews will remain on duty in the park in case of flare-ups. Placerita Canyon Road and the park will remain closed until further notice."

July 25 was a day of great anxiety for all of us, and we are very grateful to the Oregon firemen who fought so hard and were ultimately successful in keeping our beloved Nature Center standing. They used the facility for a few days, setting up camp at Placerita and taking advantage of our restrooms and other facilities. We felt so good to have their presence in our park.

The animals were brought back from Vasquez Rocks on July 28. All is well at the Nature Center, and we are happy they are back home. Vasquez Rocks was threat-

ened for a short while but that was another source of anxiety.

I have been a docent for 30 years at Placerita and I have lived through a few major fires.

The devastation that it leaves behind is always shocking and disheartening. We get attached to a special tree, a bush that we felt in love with, or how the sun hits the leaves of the trees. Seeing so many burnt is hard to see and even harder to accept. However, we have to remember that the vegetation always comes back – so don't despair! Chaparral will take you by surprise, and 6 months to one year from now the park will be green again with plants growing back and bringing new hope with them. Do not let this first sight bring you down. Keep the faith and the hope for this new birth. It will happen, and that is a firm promise.



Calgrove Fire area, 6 months later.
Photo: Leon Worden

President's Message

By Ron Kraus

I started as a docent at Placerita Canyon in 2002, during a drought. At the time, several of us were worried that the drought was killing a large stand of Black Sage along the Hillside Trail (we hadn't learned about summer dormancy yet.) The rains returned, the plants leafed out, and to this day we have the sage covered slopes to enjoy along the trail.

Two years later, the Foothill Fire swept through the canyon in July and almost burned down the nature center. Fortunately, a brave contingent of firefighters stood their ground and saved it and the Walker Cabin. Again, we were all in a funk, wondering what we were going to do for our school programs with nothing but ashes and burnt stumps along the trails. To compound the problems, heavy rains started falling in October, and before the rainy season was over about 50 inches of rainfall was recorded at Placerita Canyon. Trails were washed out, there was mud everywhere and the even the road into the park was impassable at times. But we persevered—there was a great docent class that year and we learned a lot about fire ecology from former park supervisors Ian Swift and Frank Hovore.

This year's Sand Fire damaged the eastern end of the park, from Walker Ranch to about a half mile east of the nature center. The Canyon Trail, Waterfall Trail, and the Los Pinetos Trail will be closed until further notice for repairs—there are downed trees, hanging branches and rockslides that need to be removed before the trails are safe for use again. But there is room for optimism among the ashes—the County is working diligently to clear and reopen the trails. Plus, a fire gives us the opportunity to see how nature restores itself. We will have some upcoming sessions on fire ecology for the docents so that we can all follow the restorative process as it unfolds.

So, although it's sad to see, the burned hills and canyons have a lot of life in them. Gophers are already busy pushing up dirt out of their holes onto the ashes, which mixes the soil and provides benefits to plants. The Harvester Ants are as busy as usual, seemingly oblivious to the fire. And soon the school year will start and we will have the opportunity to share our marvelous natural area with the thousands of students that visit every year!

So What Does a Museum Docent Do?

by Sue Sutton

Can you believe it's been more than a year since we celebrated the Grand Opening of our beautiful Interpretive Center? Our visitors love it and have wonderful comments and questions for our museum docents.

So what exactly does a "museum docent" do? Well, first and foremost, communicate enthusiasm for the natural world! That's right! Your enthusiasm is contagious. It's not necessary to be an "expert" in every element of the museum and classroom displays. Visitors typically have very general questions about the displays and seldom ask "technical" questions. Let the visitor's curiosity be your guide. As you circulate through the classroom, museum or courtyard, engage visitors as they look at display elements or our live critters. You'll find our visitors love to share their own critter stories with you as well. You'll find it helpful to download the "Museum Docent Guide" online and become familiar with basic information on the plants and animals in the displays. Importantly, don't be afraid to say,

"Gosh. I don't know about that."

Sound interesting? It's so easy to become a Museum Docent. Sign up for a two hour shift on Saturday or Sunday on the website "Sign up Genie". (Contact Irene Heerlein (irene.roesler@gmx.de) to receive Sign Up Genie notices.) Then, come to PCNC for your shift or, be spontaneous and come to PCNC when you have a little spare time. Again, let visitor curiosity be your guide and have an awesome time. By the way, this is a great way to be part of the PCNC docent family when a bum knee or the heat make walking the trails difficult.

You Have Another Chance

We are very proud of our Community Nature Education Program at Placerita and let me remind you that they take place at Placerita each 3rd Sunday of the Month at 2 pm. They usually last one hour and there is time to ask questions and clarification.

However, it is not easy to be always free on those dates and some people were very disappointed to have missed a presentation. We are so happy that we can get a second

chance!

Leon Worden is a life-time member at Placerita and saw there was a need he could help us with. He was able to have 2 programs recorded and the videos are posted online for viewing.

Thank you so much SCVTV and Leon Worden for your support of Placerita Canyon Natural Area!

"Dissecting the Dream: Fact, Fiction and Placerita's Golden Oak." An excellent presentation about our most famous historical feature, given by Alan Pollack, President of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society. View it here: <http://scvtv.com/2016/07/06/dissecting-the-dream-fact-fiction-and-placeritas-golden-oak/>

"Venomous Arthropods," by Brent Karner, formerly of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. This is an informative, entertaining, and fun look at the creepy crawlers that are all around us. View it here: <http://scvtv.com/2016/06/22/placerita-nature-center-presents-guest-speaker-for-lecture-about-venomous-arthropods/>



Not everybody can say his job involves a daily canyon hike while balancing a full-grown barn owl on his arm, but Frank Hoffman, recreations services supervisor at the Placerita Nature Center, can and does say just that.

“What do I do on my job? All of the above,” Hoffman said.

But the 56-year-old nature enthusiast didn't start out working with wildlife.

His first career was as a real estate field and loan officer. At age 35 Hoffman went back to school at Los Angeles Pierce College, graduating with an associate degree in natural resource management in 2000.

Ranger Frank, as he's now known to visitors, learned about the Placerita Canyon Nature Center from a fellow student, who mentioned the center was looking for part-time employees.

He applied and was hired, using the revenue to pay for school.

“It was a perfect storm, a perfect mix, if you will,” said Hoffman.

He spent his nights learning about wildlife, then took his new-found knowledge to work and applied it during the day, he said, adding: “Not a single course was a waste.”

His favorite part of the job is “interacting with the general public and educating the people that visit.”

Hoffman gets plenty of opportunity for that. The Placerita Canyon Nature Center is a destination for school outings, boy and girl scout troops, hiking clubs and other educational organizations all week, and on the weekend it's among the favorite places for families to visit.

The Nature Center and Natural Area offers seven hiking trails, a museum, live animal displays, natural history displays and picnic tables.

Aside from education visitors, a large part of Hoffman's job at the center is dealing with animals, but that's easy for Hoffman. His hobby is hunting with birds of prey.

“I have been interested in falconry since before I could drive,” Hoffman said.

His fascination led him to aspire to be a master falconer, a several-years-long process that starts with a two-year apprenticeship.

Hoffman is now a master falconer and serves as the treasurer of the California Hawking Club. Along with his wife, Mary, he assists with the membership process.

His own bird is a 14-year-old red-tailed hawk that, with its darker color and interesting plumage, is considered a very rare animal. Hoffman said his hawk most likely migrated from Alaska or Canada down to the valley area where he trapped and trained it when it was just a year old.

“I have had many offers on it,” he said. “But I am very happy keeping this bird.”

The Great American Campout

by Glenda Perl

For the 7th Annual Great American Campout held on Saturday, June 25th, at Central Park, a number of Placerita Canyon Nature Center docents joined in the family fun to lead camp-goers on a mini-nature hike around the park perimeter.

As always, our thanks go out to Ranger Frank Hoffman, who spent most of the mega-hot day entertaining the crowds with his own animals brought from home, as well as leading BOTH night hikes.

Docents who participated in the Flashlight Night Hike included: Sandra Cattell, Glenda Perl, RuthAnne Murthy (along with her husband, Ashok), Ingrid Brown and Dan Duncan. Roger McClure and his family attended the campout and hike.

Frank said “I had a great time and would especially like to thank all the docents who attended with me.”

I appreciated them all being there and partnering with me for our city...it was a hoot!!

PayPal

We now have PayPal on our website Placerita.org. It will now be super easy to donate to the PCNCA--go try it out...



The majority of the oaks survived, but the sycamores are burnt, including both trunks and the roots. Heavy rock slides block the trails in different places. There is also very deep and slippery ash.

Pinch points will be removed from the Canyon Trail so heavy equipment can get through to pick up rocks and trees. The County has to make sure that the area is totally safe for hikers and bikers before it can be opened again.

Winter is going to be another challenge if we have much rain, as mud slides will be almost certain. No vegetation will be there to hold the soil. In the past, even with normal conditions, we have seen the stream bed changing location...so under the current circumstances, we are not sure what to expect.

We ask for your patience while we are going through this process. Please, understand that the barriers at the trailheads are there for your protection. Thank you in advance.

It Could Have Been Worse

When I saw the photo that Ron Kraus took of the Walker cabin, I was very concerned; it looked like the cabin was crushed by the weight of a large branch that fell on the roof... However, when the branch was removed by the fire crew we were very relieved to see the damage was superficial and only the porch is going to require some repair.

The tree has been trimmed and all should be well for many more happy years.



Update on Placerita Trails

The Canyon Trail, Los Pinetos, Waterfall and Hidden Trails are all closed. So no access is available even using the back way to the Canyon Trail. Many trees are hanging over the trails, parts of the trails are blocked by downed trees, and it is very dangerous.

The Forest Service mopping-up crew did their best to cut all they could, but in some situations trees are hanging on each other and could fall at any time.



Jim Crowley, Docent Volunteer of the Year 2016

Volunteer of the Year That's what the e-mail said on July 12 and it indicated I was chosen. My first reaction was ...no way! So many people in the PCNCA deserve this more than I do. However, my parents taught me to recognize talents in people for whatever they do. Likewise, a person must also accept compliments and accolades with humility.

Some know who I am, some not. So I will digress to that. As a native Angelino, our house was a 900sq ft. "mansion" built in 1903. My parents and two sister siblings made for a great family. I attended grammar school at St. Francis of Assisi and then St. John Vianney High School and eventually received a Degree from California State University, L.A. I retired from careers at Sears Roebuck & Co and Lockheed Martin.

More about the "mansion"it came with a great yard. The previous owner was a gardener and the yard had numerous fruit and citrus trees, rose bushes, ferns, and a green house next to a lawn for playing croquet. It was a great place to discover the wonders of such things as picks breaking clay soil and the wonders of trap-door spiders. My dad was an engineer at Lockheed and mom a registered nurse who came from a farm in Wisconsin. So they taught me how to repair or fix most things and appreciate attending to greenery. Dad was my mentor for woodworking. He claimed everything was solved through mathematics and leverage. In life you have to bend or you will break.

Understandably my love for nature began in that yard...lots of exploring with bugs, birds, a desert tortoise, the dog and cat, fresh fruit on demand and amazing poinsettias that grew 20 feet in the air. It gave me an appreciation for nature that I have had ever since.

My wife Toni, of 50 years, and I met while horseback riding in what is now the grounds of the "new" LA Zoo. She accepted camping in lieu of Holiday Inn camping, graciously. I thank God for blessing me with Toni, a son in Atlanta, GA, one in Austin, TX and one in Southlake TX. With our boys we spent wonderful times camping throughout the country. Bless their patience.

Volunteerism...what is it all about? Everyone has talents, likes, and dislikes. We just need to be pushed a bit and off we go doing what we do best. People are truly at their best when doing that. At the nature center we have endless opportunities to use our talents and at the same time pass on our own knowledge and a spark of energy. Children certainly have it and you can see it in their eyes, and in their parents and teachers when we volunteer our personal time and talents....all this fun with no strings attached.

My appreciation of Placerita Canyon began over 40+ years ago. Volunteering there as a Docent began in 2010. It's all energized by other Docents and kids. Teaching and learning about nature from kids and Docents is the greatest reward. Beady eyes staring up at me to see what this guy is going to offer, and so happy to be at the center and not at school. Is that an opportunity or what? Enthusiasm will spark most of them to discover the energy that is boundlessly all around them in nature and realize their integral part of that energy cycle. But mostly, their enthusiasm will carry back to school providing good energy to others and push to pursue information about the world around them.

Over the past few years I have been involved mainly with the school programs and for a period of time arranged outside field trips to various other nature and historic places. The "Wall of Fame" picture boards are a personal favorite project of mine. And with the assistance of several other docents, we conduct the annual Board of Directors Elections. Beware, I also keep a close eye out to recruit potential people with hidden talents.

So many Volunteers, so few awards, that's Volunteerism, on and on. My thanks go out to the Board of Directors as you have humbled me. However, I understand several other candidates were nominated for their Volunteerism and they should be recognized.

Robert Greziak leads an endless non-native plants removal effort with a dedicated crew. Denny Truger rebuilt the Tataviam area and electrified a few PCNC things. Andrea Donner developed a super Nature Box program and Glenda Perl offers her built-in smile and talents working the gift shop along with conducting Docent tours. These people put meaning in "E Pluribus Unum."

Here are some of my favorite quotes from children. Enjoy..."Are we lost?" maybe.. "How do snakes poop?" Same way you do pal... "How do you tell a girl snake from a boy snake?" It's complicated..."Do you know what you are doing?" I hope so... "I have a pet unicorn"... Really?... "Really!" And my all-time heart tugging favorite. "This is my first hike and the best day of my life." Fist bump, we have a winner!

Brown Bag Lunch In-service Training

by RuthAnne Murthy

What better way to spend a day at our Brown Bag Lunch In-service Training? Our first event will be on Monday, September 19th. There will be 3 sessions that you can choose from. Be sure to bring your lunch! You are welcome to attend one or all of the sessions. Be sure to mark your calendar today!

9:00 Sue Sutton will present Bees.

10:30 Sue will continue with Museum/ Classroom raining.

12:00-1:00 Andrea Donner and her committee will share Nature Boxes.

Projects in the Park

The docents are going to engage in several projects, assisting the county with their financial aspects and Joan Fincutter is going to be the Project Manager for the County and the docents. We were all so impressed by Joan's planning and organization during the Open House that she was the top choice for this new job.

Many projects are going to be divided up with specific docents in charge of each project: Sue Sutton, Ron Kraus and Russ Kimura will be in charge of the Braille trail, while Sue Sutton will be in charge of the Museum Display case and installation. Vicki Cunningham will be responsible for the Mural Restoration; Fred Seeley will be in charge of the Amphitheater Handicap Access.

The broken water fountains will be replaced by the County under Russ' supervision, and the docents will bring some financial help to the project. Rick Brammer reminded everyone that all project-related spending is required to be documented in detail and Rick will coordinate project financial record keeping.

That is a lot of work for people who volunteer their time very graciously to make those many projects possible. Thank you.

The 2016 NCA Annual Recognition Event

All the docents and volunteers from Placerita Canyon Nature Center are invited to join the members from other Nature Centers to attend the Annual Recognition and General Meeting to be held at Eaton Canyon Nature Center on Saturday, September 17, 2016. Coffee and juice will be served at 9.30 am and the meeting will start at 10.00am. A light lunch will be served afterward around 11.00am. Business Casual dress is suggested.

Location is:

Eaton Canyon Nature Center
1750N. Altadena Drive
Pasadena, CA 91107

The PCNCA docents who have 5, 20 or 30 years of service will receive their gold name tags: **Five years:** Armida Brooks, Vicki Cunningham, Charitha Eragoda, Bill Kahl, Ray Orloff, Carol Rush, and Jackie Thomason; **Twenty years:** Heidi and Bill Webber; **Thirty years:** Evelyne Vander-sande.

Jim Crowley, our 2016 PCNCA Volunteer Of The Year, will also receive special recognition.

It is a wonderful opportunity to meet the docents from all the Nature Centers and celebrate together. Thanks to all of you for your dedication to Placerita, we are deeply grateful for your help in making it a better place.

If you would like to carpool, please be at the PCNC parking lot at 9:00 am.

Trail Treasures by RuthAnne Murthy



Coast Live Oak:
Quercus agrifolia

I think it's human nature to overlook the most obvious and take for granted the common things in our lives. For this reason I have chosen one of the most common trees in Placerita Canyon for this month's Trail Treasures. Coast Live Oaks often grow to 75 feet tall and are evergreen, hence the name "live". They can live up to 250 years.

The oval leaves can grow up to 2 inches long. The spiny-toothed margins of the leaves are convex allowing rain or dew to drop on the drip line at the base of the tree. The leaves are well adapted to the Mediterranean climate being hard and waxy with undersides of a lighter green with tiny hairs. The leaves have two or three layers of energy producing cells. The tree's rough bark is often 1 inch thick or more to protect the tree from wildfires.

The inflorescence of the Coast Live Oak appear on the trees in the spring. The trees have male and female blooms on the same tree that facilitates pollination by wind. The male catkins are about 2 inches long, whereas the female are about 1/2 inch long.

The acorns grow up to 1 1/2 inches long and are slender with pointed ends and small caps. It takes 7-8 months for the acorns to mature. The acorns contain a large amount of tannic acid that the California Indians had to leach out before they could eat them as one of their staple foods. It is estimated that a family of four would have to gather about 500 pounds of acorns to have a yearly supply.

So next time you are hiking in the Canyon, stop and observe this Trail Treasure.

The California Grizzly

We have a wonderful taxidermy grizzly bear in the classroom. It is a juvenile bear from Alaska but Andrew Lasken (docent from the class of 2016) saw that it could be used to provide our visitors with some nature education about the California Grizzly. He did extensive research on the topic. This is not always easy as the mythic creature is often part of many legends.

During the last board meeting, Andrew presented us with a wonderful pamphlet that can be given to our visitors. He covered the early history of the California Grizzly, Native Americans, Shamans and "Werebears," the Spanish and Mexican Era, The Bear Flag revolt, the American Era, Placerita Canyon Connections and the Grizzlies vs. Black Bears. Thank you so much for this wonderful new tool Andrew!

FALL 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.

TWILIGHT HIKES

Park staff and the Nature Center Docents split groups adventures through the different trails in the dark. Come howl at the moon--if there is one that night! September 17 and October 15 at 7:30.

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.

NATURE EDUCATION

An exciting new program at Placerita in conjunction with the Community Hiking Club. Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA and CHC will provide a free educational program open to the public. Changes may be made, so please the center at 661.259.7721 to verify. September 28th-Condor by CA Fish and Wildlife October 16th- Bats of Placerita.

NCA RECOGNITION

September 17, at 9.30 at Eaton Canyon Nature Center (see article)

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