



Mission Trails Regional Park News

Volume 20, Number 4

-A Publication of the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation-

Fall/Winter, 2009

How You Can Become an MTRP Trail Guide

First, what IS an MTRP Trail Guide? It is a special volunteer trained to lead interpretive nature walks throughout the park, for both the general public and organized groups. Each year MTRP conducts a training program for people interested in learning about the natural and cultural history of the park and sharing that knowledge with the public.

The curriculum covers ecology, botany, geology, history, birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, Kumeyaay culture and more! This 10-week program involves a three-hour classroom session every Wednesday evening, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., in addition to a three-hour field study session on Saturday mornings from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. At the end of the training, students take a written exam on the material covered and demonstrate their interpretive skills by taking a veteran Trail Guide on a sample nature walk. Trail Guide



Volunteer Trail Guide Fred Kramer leading an interpretive hike.

graduates are expected to sign up to share their new knowledge on at least one guided walk per month, but are welcome to do more than that, of course!

Trail Guides, continued on p.6

Winter Solstice Hikes on Cowles Mountain

Time: 6:00 a.m. on Sunday, December 20; Monday, December 21; and Tuesday, December 22, 2009.

Starting Point: Trailhead adjacent to the parking lot at Golfcrest Dr. & Navajo Rd.

Description: The Mission Trails Regional Park Trail Guides will lead pre-dawn hikes to the area of the solstice observatory on Cowles Mountain on the 20th and 22nd of December. The Canyoneers of the San Diego Natural History Museum will lead the hike on the 21st. The solstice site is approximately one mile up the trail. The age of the site is unknown. It is known that the Kumeyaay used similar sites in Southern California. For all three hikes, we hope to see the rising sun split by a peak on the eastern horizon. The ascent will be in the dark. Good shoes and a flashlight are recommended. These hikes continue to be among the most popular events in the park. A word of caution for anyone joining the hikes or hiking on their own: there is danger of eye damage if you stare directly at the sun. You can observe the sunrise safely for a very few seconds through narrow slits (such as between your fingers held together) or smoked glass. Plan on a two-hour hike.

Ravens Black as Night

By Trail Guide Lyn Olsson

Part 2

To view Part 1 of this article, access our last newsletter at <http://mtrp.org/newsletter.asp>

Mated pairs of ravens are territorial—protecting their food sources—and normally stay away from other ravens. But they do come together for the occasional family gathering during which time they put on spectacular aerial shows, diving, barrel rolls at 500 feet, and dropping objects from on high and then swooping down to grab them before they hit the ground. This is also courting behavior. Of course large groups do come together at particularly good feeding sites such as a large carcass or at a landfill. A very interesting book about their feeding practices in Vermont, which probably can be applied to other populations as well, is by Bernard Heinrich called Ravens in Winter (New York: Summit Books, 1989). It describes how young ravens, which don't have their own territories yet, will form loose flocks and will mob a particular meal to keep the adults from driving them off.

By the way, ravens produce pellets like raptors do (hawks, falcons, eagles, owls); it would be interesting to see what's inside a raven-produced one.

Ravens seem to be in competition with the American Crows in San Diego, and no doubt elsewhere as well. They do not normally frequent urban areas like the crows do, and if

Ravens, continued on p. 5



A Message From Councilmember Marti Emerald

Just as searing temperatures begin to cool off from a long hot summer the action heats up in Mission Trails Regional Park. The first week of October visitors encountered a mountain lion near the Visitors Center. Our park rangers tell us it's no surprise. Mission Trails may be in the middle of the City, but it's still wide open space filled with wildlife.

So, a reminder: Never hike in Mission Trails alone. If you do encounter a mountain lion or other wildlife, wave your arms and make yourself as big as you can be, to scare the animal into a quick exit. If you encounter a fresh kill, make a quick and decisive move to the nearest park exit. And if you're on a mountain bike, make sure you place your bike between you and your wild encounter. Never approach wild animals, chase or harass them. That could be a prescription for trouble.

Special thanks to Senior Ranger Tracey Walker for a bird's eye tour of the Park and Cowles Mountain in particular. Ranger Walker treated our District 7 staff to a great tour seeing the rock climbing areas, bird sanctuary and Padre Dam among

other inspiring features in this natural wonderland. And the views from Cowles Mountain! Wow! We also saw firsthand the challenges our park faces: overgrown, tinder dry brush, rutted and washed out roads and trails, waterways and restrooms in need of repair and maintenance. Message received, loud and clear.

The Fall Fiesta is a District 7 tradition. For the first time ever, we moved the Fall Fiesta to Mission Trails Regional Park. It was held on October 18, at the Mission Trails Visitor & Interpretive Center. As usual this very successful yearly event had lots of great activities for kids, young and old, with all proceeds benefiting the Alpha Project, which helps the homeless step off the streets and into new productive lives. For more information about Alpha Project and next year's Fall Fiesta call 619-239-1721

Your Mission Trails Regional Park Task Force and Citizens' Advisory Committee continue to work to improve the Park. Your elected officials from San Diego, Santee and La Mesa serve on the Task Force and are dedicated to preserve and expand Mission Trails Regional Park. Look for new planting and landscaping to repair damage from recent County Water Authority projects in the Park. We are planning dredging projects to maintain Padre Dam and to move forward with a bridge to help Park Rangers and Emergency crews navigate the San Diego River during heavy rains and flooding. Planning is also underway to repair and realign trails leading up Cowles Mountain.

The next Meeting for the Citizens' Advisory Committee is Tuesday November 3rd at 6:30PM at the Visitor Center. The November Meeting for the Task Force is Thursday November 19th at 12:15PM at the Visitor Center. Please join us. The Public is invited and welcomed.

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A Message From MTRP's Executive Director



Jay Wilson

Our Visitor Center is increasingly becoming a "Green Building" through the cooperation of the City of San Diego, a grant from SDG&E, and the expertise of San Diego Lighting Associates which has been serving San Diego for more than 20 years.

The result will be a more efficient lighting system throughout the Visitor Center. The much cooler LED lights will replace the current hot and high energy use bulbs. We had a demonstration and the new LED lights are barely warm to the touch and project a defused light enhancing the exhibits. The LED lighting will reduce our energy use, the reduced heat from the LED lights will improve the efficiency of the air conditioning, and save money as well.

We recently held two on-site volunteer recruitment events; one at the Cowles Mountain Staging Area at Navajo Road and Golfcrest Drive and the second at Father Junipero Serra Trail at the entrance to the Visitor Center parking lot. The response was very good, and we already have 10 new volunteers for the Visitor Center. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer at the Visitor Center or throughout the park, please contact

David Lee, the Center Director at DLee@mtrp.org or 619-668-3278. Additional information is available on our website at www.mtrp.org.

In September, KPBS aired the spectacular National Parks series by Ken Burns. MTRP Senior Ranger Tracey Walker recorded a 2 minute segment for KPBS TV on MTRP that aired prior to three of the programs. It was a good marketing opportunity for us.

The daytime temperatures at MTRP are ideal. Those very hot summer days have passed so it is an ideal time to hike or bicycle our miles and miles of picturesque trails. The trail map posted on our website was recently updated. You can always stop in at the Visitor Center, and our volunteers will give you a map and offer suggestions for an enjoyable hike. Come and enjoy a beautiful Fall day in Mission Trails Regional Park.

Cowles Mountain Trail Needs Your Help

by Sr. Park Ranger Tracey Walker

Re: Cowles Mt. Volunteer Patrol recruitment

Fact: Cowles Mt. Trail is one of the (if not the most) beloved hiking trails in the San Diego region.

Fact: Cowles Mt. Trail is in very poor shape due to erosion and trail cutting.

Fact: We need some dedicated persons who would like to see the following:

- Reduced numbers of dogs off leash
- Reduced amounts of dog feces on the trail.
- Reduced amounts of human generated trash along the trail.
- Reduced amounts of trail cutting and related (hyper expensive) trail erosion.
- Increased safety for everyone.

Plea: We need your help!

You now have the opportunity to make a difference in helping your Mission Trails Ranger staff in controlling these issues and more. Join with us and learn how to report issues to Ranger staff in real time. No need to make any negative contacts, just report back to us via 800 MHz radio. Learn CPR and First Aid; learn the basics of verbal judo. Just your presence will make a huge difference.

If you'd like to join with us and participate in the Cowles Mt. Volunteer Patrol effort, call Senior Ranger Tracey Walker at (619) 668-3276 or for more information call (619) 668-3278.

Thanks for your consideration.

Not All Indians Lived in Teepees!

**By Ranger
Heidi Gutknecht**

That's right! The local natives of San Diego County and northern Baja, California – the Kumeyaay – lived in dome-shaped huts, called 'ewaa (pronounced ah-wahs, or just wahs). The building of an 'ewaa was a team effort for the Kumeyaay, where not just the men, but the whole family would be involved. The elders would first ask permission from the willow trees to harvest their branches for the frame. The family would then say a prayer for the trees and sing a song of gratitude to honor them, before they started construction of their new home.



From left to right: Pam Weinisch, Linda Kramer, Wendy and Terry Esterly, Yvonne Ellen and Jo Anne Ellen.

Holes were dug in the ground to anchor fresh and flexible willow branches, which were bent into arches to create the frame. Yucca leaves, or

ropes made from their fibers, were used to lash the branches of the frame together. The 'ewaa would then be thatched with whatever appropriate plant material happened to be available at that time, including willow, cattails, baccharis, or even chamise. Cattails (a.k.a. tules or reeds) were the plant of choice, as their leaves are both wind and water resistant, making them ideal for providing shelter from the elements.

The entrances to 'ewaas were positioned facing east, in order to greet the rising sun, and the doors were made of woven cattails. Mats of woven cattails were

'Ewaa, continued on p.6

2009 An Extraordinarily Productive Year for Park's Cavity Nesting Birds

Are you ever curious about the bird houses seen around the Park? These wooden boxes provide homes for cavity-nesting birds that reproduce in the park. Dead trees that might otherwise be used by nesters are often removed because they are unsightly or become safety hazards, possibly falling on people. Without suitable nest sites, certain birds will not reproduce. Our man-made "cavities" provide alternates to their natural homes.

In early spring, boxes are cleaned and made ready for the March through June nesting season. Last March ten volunteers began weekly observation of 73 boxes in the Park recording nesting activities: nest building, egg laying, feeding babies and finally young fledging.

While most of the activity is routine, every year produces surprises. This year a box was relocated to a tree

behind Kumeyaay Lake. Within days a pair of Tree Swallows claimed the box, chasing away other birds and humans defending their newly-occupied home. Tree Swallows frequently nest in the Park but 2009 was the first time they used a nest box, fledging four young. House Wrens are the dominant species finding the Park's habitat ideal with 35 nests producing 155 young. The second most common nester, the Ash-throated Flycatcher, migrates from Baja and central Mexico to use Mission Trails Park as its breeding ground. Fourteen flycatcher pairs raised 53 babies which will migrate south with their parents in the fall, hopefully surviving to return to the Park next spring.

Monitors recorded a total of 216 young birds fledging compared to only 112 last year and 163 in 2007. The variation in nesting success is only partially explained by annual

rainfall which was a little below average for the rain year ending in July, but significantly higher than the two previous years.

Upon completing her first season as a monitor, Rachael Borders summarized her experience by commenting, "The nest box project is a wonderful experience for anyone who enjoys seeing nature in action. From seeing the mother incubating tiny eggs one week to hearing the little chirps of the baby birds the next week, and then before you know it, the fledglings have flown off on their own, completing the cycle."

People interested in becoming a volunteer monitor next year or willing to construct nest boxes for the project can contact Ranger Heidi Gutknecht at 619-668-3279 or hgutknecht@mtrp.org for more information.

By Volunteer Richard Griebe

Christmas at the MTRP Gift Shop

As the holidays approach please remember the Mission Trails Gift Shop when you are doing your gift planning. We will have a wonderful selection of books on history, geology, wildlife, and plants, as well as a nice selection of children's books that focus on the natural world.

There will be walking sticks from Whistle Creek in Colorado, Brazos Walking Sticks from Texas, walking sticks made locally by Jim May, and even a selection of novelty walking sticks with hand carved heads.

For authentic Native American items from rattles to hand fashioned baskets and pots, we are your source.

For low cost stocking stuffers we will have a wide variety of small toys that will please the youngsters while being easy on the wallet.

For more information and photos of many of the Gift Shop's items visit mtrp.org/gift_shop.asp. We look forward to seeing you during the Christmas season. The Shop is open from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., seven days a week.

Upcoming Art Exhibits

CONTRASTS:

A Solo Photography Exhibition
by Eileen Mandell

October 31 - November 27, 2009

Reception:

Sunday, November 8, 2009

1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

TWO ROADS CONVERGED

Wildlife Paintings

by

Shandel Gamer and Tom Teideman
November 29 - December 30, 2009

Reception:

Saturday, December 5, 2009

1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Ravens, continued from p. 1

you do see a raven in a more populated area it is probably being harassed by a murder of crows, or at least one.

The big question: is it a crow or a raven? Crows usually congregate in large groups called a *murder*, and as noted above Ravens are usually solitary or in pairs. Ravens are normally much heavier than crows, as much as four times heavier (but there can be some big crows out there too!). The telltale sign is with the tail. Ravens, when perched, have a definite wedged-shaped tail, which opens out to a U shape when they fly. Their wings are longer and less rounded than the Crows' at 45 to 51 inches. Ravens typically soar, crows flap. They have much more robust heads and beaks than crows, and the beak can be slightly curved like a Roman nose. They have shaggy feathers around their heads, and their legs and toes are much thicker. The Common Raven is almost iridescent jet black. Male and female look the same—no sexual dimorphism. Their voices are a wonderful low "crock crock" instead of the crow's higher-pitched "caw caw caw". They also produce a higher pitched bell-like sound and twanging noises, and lower



"brrronks". Like all corvids they also mimic sounds from their environment and can even mimic human speech, I would assume if kept in captivity.

Ravens' significance in mythology, lore, and religion is quite extensive, all the way from the evil to the creative. In Northwest Native American culture and the Northeast, Raven king Kutkh was a benevolent god who helped to create humans and the land itself, most specifically Kamchatka Peninsula. In the Pacific Northwest, Raven is the predominant

character in trickster stories, much like coyote is in the Southwest. As a trickster, Raven stole light, which was being kept in boxes by an old man in a very dark world, and thus brought light to the world. In Norse mythology, ravens Hugin and Mumin sat on Odin's shoulders and saw and heard it all. See a modern, young adult version of this story in Robin Jarvis's The Raven's Knot, (the Wyrd Museum series), Troll Communications, 1996. It's pretty thrilling. Vikings, kings of Norway, Denmark, Sweden and the British Isles all carried banner standards with ravens on them, yet on the other hand I've also found it said that in Sweden, ravens were the ghosts of murdered people, and in Germany they were the souls of the dead. Ravens frequently appear in the stories of the Celts and Welsh, and of course ravens must always live at the Tower of London in order to protect England from foreign invasion. Who's to say what is reality and what is myth?

Enjoy the ravens that we have here in San Diego County and try not to mix them up with crows! If you see any at Mission Trails Regional Park, please make note of the sighting in the wildlife sighting book on the front counter at the Visitor's Center. Less crow, more raven!

Star Parties With George Varga are Back

November 14, 2009, 5:00 p.m.

December 19, 2009, 5:00 p.m.

January 23, 2010, 5:00 p.m.

Join resident star gazer George Varga and his telescope at the Kumeyaay Lake Campground day use parking lot to view the celestial objects of the night sky. In consideration of others, no white flashlights or lanterns near the telescopes, please.

Trail Guides, continued from p. 1

In addition to leading guided nature walks, MTRP Trail Guides also help out with special events, such as our annual "Explore Mission Trails Day," attend monthly Trail Guide meetings with special guest speaker presentations, and enjoy monthly outings to other open space areas with fellow Trail Guides on "Trail Guide Treks." The training program is really a lot of fun, is with a great group of people, and, we are always looking for "fresh blood" to join the MTRP Trail Guide team.

So, if you already know and love Mission Trails Regional Park, then why not learn more about it, so you can share that love with others? No experience is necessary, just a willingness to learn and share. The 2010 Trail Guide Training program begins in January and runs through March. Please note there is a \$25 materials fee due at the Orientation, which is scheduled for Saturday, January 9th, at 8:30 a.m. Space is limited in this once-a-year training, so please sign up early. For further information, please contact Ranger Heidi at hgutknecht@mtrp.org or (619) 668-3279.

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation Children's Classes

ANT-SIZED ADVENTURES!

10:00 - 11:30 AM

For preschool children (ages 2-5)

OUR NATUREHOOD!

1:00 - 5:00 PM

For children in grades K-3,
scout groups,
and others by special request.

NATURE EXPLORERS at KUMEYAAY LAKE CAMPGROUND

6:00 - 7:30 PM

For families and children of all
ages.

\$5.00 per child. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Accompanying adults attend free. For additional information please go to our website at: www.mtrp.org. Click on "Additional Information" just below the first paragraph.

'Ewaa, continued from p. 4

also used inside to sleep on. Rooftop openings were intentional to allow for smoke to escape, when small fires were built inside on cool nights for extra warmth. On rainy nights, cattail mats were placed over these openings to keep the water out.

To give visitors a glimpse of historical Kumeyaay living, we have three separate models of 'ewaa's here on site at Mission Trails: by the amphitheater at the Kumeyaay Lake Campground, along the Oak Grove Loop Trail by Dog Spring,

Notable Donations July - September 2009

Steward - \$2,500 - \$5,000

Founder - \$1,000 - \$2,500

Trailblazer - \$500-\$1,000

Path Finder - \$100-\$500

Ron & Nancy Anderson

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Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Trentacosta

Nancy & George Varga

Mark Wade

Cecile Walters

West Hills High School

Nancy & Dennis Wilson

and on the back terrace of the Visitor and Interpretive Center. For durability, instead of willow, the frames of each 'ewaa are made of welded rebar cemented into the ground. For thatching each 'ewaa, we were very fortunate to have assistance from some of our dedicated park volunteers, and the guidance of local Kumeyaay artisan and instructor, Stan Rodriguez, from the Santa Ysabel Reservation. Our wonderful volunteers, who we truly could not run this park without, continue to assist in the maintenance of these 'ewaa's for the education and enjoyment of all.



Mission Trails Regional Park Donor Opportunities

By donating to Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation you are preserving the past and investing in the future.

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation provides opportunities for individuals, businesses, community organizations, and foundations to support a variety of programs and projects within the park. Community support is important to ensure adequate funding to maintain the award winning Mission Trails Regional Park Visitor and Interpretive Center and the multiple amenities the park has to offer.

Special event and project sponsorships are also available. Sponsorships for Explore Mission Trails Day, an annual event held each May, range from \$500 to \$5,000. Exhibit sponsorships begin at \$2,500. Bench and table sponsorships range from \$1,500 to \$4,000 depending upon the item and the location in the park. Call Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation at (619) 668-3280 for additional information.

Names of contributors of \$1,000 or more will be engraved on the donor board displayed at the Visitor and Interpretive Center. Donations of \$100 or more are accumulated from year-to-year for donor recognition purposes.

Become a Business Friend of Mission Trails

Business Donors making contributions of \$100 to \$500 are eligible for a web site link from the Mission Trails web site for a period of six months. Business Donors making contributions of \$500 and above are eligible for a web site link for a period of one year.

Our Funds ... You may designate your donation for one or more of the following funds.

Friends of Mission Trails—General support for all park programs and projects.

Trail Maintenance

Tree and Habitat Maintenance

Education Programs

Library Books and Supplies

Lake Murray

Endowment Funds

General Endowment Fund

Library Endowment Fund

Other ways you can donate ...

Memorial or In Honor of Gifts—Honor a friend or family member with a donation.

Matching Funds—Identify Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) Foundation for a matching funds contribution if your employer has a policy of matching charitable gifts.

Gifts of Securities—To allow donors to realize full tax deductions for appreciated stock, MTRP Foundation accepts gifts of stock. Call (619) 668-3280 for further details.

Wills—Remember MTRP Foundation in your will.

Charitable Remainder Trusts—With a CRT, highly appreciated assets are placed in an irrevocable trust. Those asset proceeds provide income to the donor and/or to his/her beneficiaries for life. Contact your financial advisor for information.

Please cut here ----- Please cut here

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, Inc. One Father Junipero Serra Trail, San Diego, CA 92119-1008

Name _____ Business Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ E-mail _____

You may designate your donation for one or more of the following funds. Please indicate the amount.

Friends of Mission Trails - General support for all Mission Trails programs and projects \$ _____

MTRP Foundation Endowment Fund - Earnings used for programs and projects _____

Special funds

Education Program Fund - Funds for education programs _____

Library Fund - Books and supplies for the library _____

Library Endowment Fund - Earnings used for books and equipment for the library _____

Trail Maintenance - Trail maintenance projects _____

Tree and Habitat Maintenance - To help maintain the park's habitat. _____

Lake Murray - Special projects at Lake Murray _____

Total Donation - Make check payable to MTRP Foundation and mail to address above..... \$ _____

Charge my donation to VISA _____ MC _____

Card No. _____

Expiration Date ____ / ____

Signature of card holder _____

Donor Levels

\$25 Individual

\$50 Family

\$100 Path Finder

\$500 Trailblazer

\$1,000 Founder

\$2,500 Patron

\$5,000 Steward

\$10,000 Sponsor

\$25,000 Benefactor

\$50,000 Trustee

\$100,000 Director

To give on line, visit our web site at
www.mtrp.org/donors.asp



**Mission Trails
Regional Park Foundation**

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Mission Trails Regional Park News

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Mission Trails Regional Park News is a publication of Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, Inc., published four times a year.

Editor: Roland Roberge

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GO TO <http://www.mtrp.org/newsletter.asp>

Scouts Contribute to the Park's Beautification

On Saturday, August 8, combined Cub Scout Packs 306 and 370 refreshed the paint on six wooden kiosks within Mission Trails Regional Park. There are twenty-six trailheads that grant entry to the Park, and each has a kiosk with posted safety tips and informational notices for park patrons. The kiosks at Deerfield Loop, Jackson Drive, Cowles Mountain (at Navajo), Barker Way, and Big Rock Park now boast fresh coats of paint...their first touchup since they were originally installed. The boys also repainted the kiosk at the BMX Track. Nine Cubs, aged 7-10, and two older boys from Boy Scout Troop 306 completed the job in three hours during the cool of the morning under the supervision of Ranger Mel Naidas and adults associated with the Packs.

The Packs' choice of this service project was an act of support and appreciation for Mission Trails Regional Park. This summer the boys have enjoyed the facilities on a regular basis. They have climbed Cowles Mountain, hiked the historic Father Junipero Serra Trail, and pedaled the path for bicycles at Lake Murray. What a resource the park is for young men! After painting, the boys celebrated their accomplishment with a session of catch-and-release fishing at Kumeyaay Lake.

The two Cub Scout packs are sponsored by the La Mesa First and Second Wards of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and their meeting place is within walking distance of Lake Murray. The packs meet together on Tuesdays at 6:30.