

Mission Trails Regional Park News

Volume 22, Number 2

--A Publication of the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation--

Spring 2011

Explore Mission Trails Day

Come join the fun!

Join park staff and volunteers on Saturday, May 21, 2011 for an all day celebration highlighting everything Mission Trails has to offer. This popular event will feature free guided nature walks, talks and programs throughout the park, including live animals and special programs for children.

For more information about this popular annual event access our web site link. mtrp.org/EMTday.asp.

Trail Guide Graduation

Mission Trails had another successful Trail Guide Training Class this year with 27 new Trail Guides graduating on Saturday morning, March 26. Congratulations to all the students. As usual, they studied hard, completed the walkthroughs and written final exam, and, most of all, enjoyed the class. They will be great additions to the Trail Guide program and the Park!

Special thanks to the training team for their outstanding efforts that made this year's class a success. Team members are: Bill Howell, Wendy Esterly, Judy Alvarez, Bill White, Fred & Linda Kramer, and, of course, Ranger Heidi Gutknecht.

Photo and list of graduates on rear cover.

School Field Trips

By Education Ranger Heidi Gutknecht

As one of the largest urban open space parks in the nation, Mission Trails Regional Park is truly a wonderful place for school groups to visit on field trips. The Visitor and Interpretive Center is open daily (except for Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day) from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and is free of charge! Hiking trails throughout the park showcase a variety of natural habitats including coastal sage scrub, chaparral, oak woodland, riparian and grasslands – which provide food and shelter for resident wildlife. Kumey-

ay grinding rocks and the historic Old Mission Dam (California Landmark #52) are also on site to be explored and enjoyed.

Self-Guided Programs

At the Visitor and Interpretive Center, a self-guided opportunity is available for school visits, which may be scheduled Monday through Friday. Four different informative video presentations, ranging in length from 12 to 24

Field Trips, continued on p. 4



Ranger Heidi showing off a deer antler and other cool stuff

A Message From Executive Director Jay Wilson

Summer is rapidly approaching and we have a great number of activities scheduled: Explore Mission Trails Day will be held on Saturday, May 21. Our free concerts continue through June on the third Sunday of the month at 3:00 p.m. Every year, September through June, Education Program Instructor Linda Hawley conducts "Nature Adventures!", 90 minute educational programs for children at the MTRP Visitor Center. This summer we are adding an art class for 6th, 7th and 8th graders taught by Janene Farmer, and on July 24, Mary Holma and Cyndy Griffin, "Tellers of Tales" will entertain you with Native American and animal stories in our outdoor amphitheater. Check out our website for additional information on all our activities: www.mtrp.org.

The Visitor Center continues to serve as a very good venue for private evening events. On the evening of April 4th, Simeon Djankov, the Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Finance for Bulgaria was honored with a reception hosted by Julia Tserova, the Bulgar-

ian Consulate General in Los Angeles, and Petar Vutov with the Vasil Levsik Educational and Cultural Foundation. The MTRP Foundation recently received a grant of \$8,000 from AT&T to complete funding for a new Water to the San Diego Region exhibit for the Visitor Center. The AT&T funds allow our water exhibit to feature large, high-definition flat-screen monitors, which will project multiple images depicting the history of water in San Diego, as well as the course water travels from Northern California and the Colorado River to a thirsty San Diego.

The Foundation also received a \$15,000 grant from the Sempra Energy Foundation, extending the education program they initially funded in November of 2009. These funds benefit us in two areas. The first is a three-part program allowing us to reach nearly 750 additional children from primarily underserved areas with our educational program. Secondly, a portion of the Sempra Education Grant is being used

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Christine Moore, Director of External Affairs for AT&T California (left), presents a check for \$8,000 to Jay Wilson, Executive Director of the MTRP Foundation and Nancy Acevedo, Vice President of the MTRP Foundation completing the funding for the new Water Exhibit.

CONNECTING CHILDREN WITH NATURE

by Lilian Cooper

Pay attention

Be amazed

Tell about it.

-Mary Oliver

Just as this Pulitzer Prize winning poet turns to nature for her inspiration and the sense of wonder it instills, so, too, are children in our community finding their connection to nature, thanks to a program initiated by Ranger Mika Shimada-Cicirelli at Mission Trails Regional Park. Ranger Mika's work at MTRP prompted a 2010 New Years' resolution to offer a program, Nature Club, so that children ages 8 – 12 could "have a lot of WOW! moments" while hiking and exploring the trails in this amazing natural resource right here in San Diego.

And these children are telling about their "WOW! moments". They publish their own quarterly newsletter, *Hidden Treasures of Mission Trails—Children Sharing Their Nature Experiences*, available at the Visitor Center for their families, friends, and the public. Their writing comes from individual Nature Journals and from shared observations. Isabella writes, "This was the first time learning how to build a campfire with friends...we learned wilderness survival skills." Of exploration beyond South Fortuna Mountain, Thunder says, "I liked seeing the giant waterfall"...and was "thrilled to cross the flooded San Diego River." Stephanie reports, "It was the first time I heard a coyote howl and I'm not kidding." Lauren discovered white wasp larvae wiggling inside a dissected oak gall. Coley's big adventure was a sunset watch hike to the peak of Cowles Mountain. Josh describes twilight as a "shadow showering over the mountains." After sitting on a rock at Old



Mission Dam and "painting anything in my eyesight," Isaiah goes on, "Outdoor painting is really something I would want to do again." Sisters Chloe and Emily sum up their experiences by saying, "Nature is fun!" and "By looking closer you can see more nature than you can ever imagine and we can gain a deeper understanding."

It is these moments of connecting close up with nature by seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and feeling, that Nature Club explorers will remember for the rest of their lives and want to pass on to children of the next generation and their children for generations to come. Every memory, no matter how small it may be, is their treasure to pass on to others. Each outing is also documented in photographs for sharing and passing on these memories.

As an MTRP Trail Guide and teacher of writing, I volunteer to assist in leading a "hike and write" once a month. During this past year, I have witnessed a transformation in our budding naturalists' curiosity, awareness, excitement, and noticing details.

What a reward it is to see nature through the eyes of a child! Emily Wilkins, 11, who has experienced over 70 hours in Nature Club, has definitely become a naturalist who thinks about nature in new and amazing ways. As we began our October hike to explore Old Mission Dam and the San Diego River, she eagerly asked, "What are we going to learn about today?" When she was told, "Water," she spontaneously offered with a huge smile, "Water can be anything—a drop, a river, an ocean...I know what I want to say about it...I am water, flowing, flowing, majestically taking with me anything in my path." Her perspective gave fresh insight into the lesson; her thoughts became part of a group poem in which each child offered their unique vision and ideas about water as they sat on the rocks of Old Mission Dam, observing and listening to the sights and sounds of the river below them.

So why is it important to have this connection—children with nature—so that all children can have experiences similar to that of Emily and members of Nature Club? Recent research is

Children, continued on p. 6

Field Trips, *continued from front cover*

minutes, can be viewed in the theater upon request. The first floor of the interpretive area features cultural, historical and geological exhibits, while the second floor features exhibits on the various plants, wildlife and habitats found throughout the park. The area surrounding the Center includes a native plant garden (with accompanying brochure available inside), exhibits of local wildlife species, and the 1.5-mile Visitor Center Loop Trail (with a Self-Guided Interpretive Trail brochure available inside, or at: <http://www.mtrp.org/assets/files/TrailBrochure.pdf>). Please note, for a successful self-guided field trip, a pre-trip visit to the park and Visitor Center is highly encouraged and recommended.

Ranger-Guided Programs

The K – 2nd grade program, “What is a Habitat?” is offered on Mondays from 10 to 11:30 a.m. This program begins with an educational presentation in the outdoor amphitheater with information about habitats, followed by a half-mile guided walk along the Oak Grove Loop trail, where students become “animal detectives” in search of “clues” left behind by resident wildlife.

“The Kumeyaay People” is the theme for the 3rd grade program, offered on Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. After students participate in a show-and-tell presentation of Kumeyaay items in the outdoor amphitheater, they are led on a one-mile interpretive walk down to an authentic grinding rocks site along the San Diego River, learning about the Kumeyaay usage of natural resources along the way.

The “Old Mission Dam” program for 4th grade is offered on Thursdays from either 10 to 11:30 a.m., or 12 to 1:30 p.m., and begins at the end of the Old Mission Dam parking lot. Students are led on a one-mile guided walk along



the San Diego River to (and on top of) the dam, through the grasslands and back. Topics discussed include the arrival of the Spanish Missionaries, the need for and development of the dam and flume system, and the cultural effects on the Kumeyaay.

For 5th and 6th grade, the “Ecosystems of MTRP” program is offered on

Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Students are led on a moderately strenuous 1.6 mile hike through four of the park’s dominant ecosystems, places where living and nonliving things interact. Along the way, students study and compare the differences between each ecosystem, and learn why these differences exist.

Trail Guides

Educating the Public About Mission Trails

by Trail Guide Fred Kramer

Trail Guides are Mission Trails Regional Park volunteers who lead nature walks for the public. They enthusiastically share the natural, cultural, and historical aspects of the park with visitors to the park. Visit mtrp.org/events.asp for information on our numerous Trail Guide led walks. Special walks—any day, any time, any place in the park—can be arranged for scouts, clubs, or other organizations of any fitness or mobility level. Contact Ranger Heidi Gutknecht at 619-668-3279 or hgutknecht@mtrp.org. Please make a request at least 10 days in advance.

Before Trail Guides can lead walks for the public, they must complete a ten-week training program comprising a three-hour classroom session every Wednesday evening and a three-hour field activity on Saturday mornings. The curriculum covers ecology and habitats, botany and plants, geology, history, birds, reptiles, mammals and tracking, insects, and Kumeyaay culture. At the end, students take a written exam on the material and demonstrate their interpretive skills by taking a veteran Trail Guide on a sample walk.

The first class was in 1995 just after the Visitor Center opened. Bill Howell, the originator of this class, has been the lead instructor ever since. Under Bill's direction, the Trail Guide training program is widely considered the premiere such program in the region. Counting the recently-completed 17th annual class, 374 people have taken the class and become Trail Guides.

Since the beginning, Trail Guides have been the foundation for the public interpretive program at Mission Trails. In recent years, Trail Guides have led some 300 walks per year reaching more than 4000 visitors. Each walk is unique due to changing seasons, access to several different trails, and each Trail Guide's personal interests. You might learn about Native American uses of plants on one walk, the variety of habitats in the park on another, and geology of the park on a third. In addition, there is always something unexpected on a nature walk—a bunny scampering in the underbrush, a majestic hawk soaring

above, a hummingbird displaying aerial acrobatics, a track hinting at animals unseen, or countless other possibilities.

Trail Guides educate park visitors in other ways, too. Every three months a Trail Guide develops an interpretive display on the right side kiosk in front of the Visitor Center. These exhibits provide information about an aspect of the park's natural or cultural history. Topics have ranged from lichens to lions, from bats to bees, from rocks to ravens.

Recently, Trail Guides have created and staffed Discovery Tables, which are a series of interpretive exhibits that focus on a specific natural, cultural, or historical aspect of Mission Trails. Each exhibit is periodically displayed on a table in the Visitor Center with a Trail Guide knowledgeable on the topic to explain or demonstrate the main points of the exhibit. In addition to providing a learning opportunity for visitors of all ages, there are activities designed for children. Each table incorporates some take-home item, e.g., an information sheet, or word search or crossword puzzle, or craft activity. The objective of these tables is to provide park visitors with a better understanding of the specific topics covered by the table, and enhance their appreciation of the park.

Art exhibits

Where the Wild Things Grow

Marji Cramer
Shandel Gamer
Marilyn Grame
Karen Howard
Betty Johnsen
Carol McClure
Barbara Peterson

Now until April 22, 2011

Amateur Photography Contest

April 24 - May 30, 2011

Grossmont High School

June 1 - 17, 2011

Denise & Paul Strahm

June 18 - July 15, 2011

So, come to Mission Trails and learn more about nature. Join a Trail Guide on one of the guided nature walks. Check out the kiosk display in front of the Visitor Center. Stop by a Discovery Table when they're set up in the Visitor Center and learn from a Trail Guide about animal skulls, bird nests, animal tracks, bird beaks, Kumeyaay games, or any of the other topics. Trail Guides look forward to teaching you about our park.



Volunteer Trail Guide Fred Kramer describing animal skulls

Children, continued from p. 3

documenting in alarming ways the negative effects on youth of a sedentary, electronic media dominated indoor lifestyle. According to Dr. Stephen Kellert, professor emeritus of Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, our mental and physical fitness relies on experiences in the natural world. On November 9, as part of a lecture series on children and nature at the San Diego Natural History Museum, he showed how contact with nature promotes stress reduction, focused attention, problem solving, critical thinking, mastery of skills, imagination and creativity, health and healing, exploration and discovery, and productivity—for children and adults.

According to the Center for Ecoliteracy, students who learn nature's principles in gardens and other natural settings have been shown to score better in creative thinking and problem solving, science, and other academic subjects. A growing body of research examines benefits of higher test scores and grades, improved classroom behavior, and increased self-esteem. Eric Jensen, author of *Enriching the Brain*, cites neuroscience research showing that the developing brain needs active exploration to learn the world of senses. The real, physical world is where the child's brain needs to interact. Exploration and engaging all the senses encodes the love of learning, a natural curiosity, and excitement for discovery more than any other activity.

Richard Louv, a San Diegan who has authored the book, *Last Child in the Woods, Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, reinforces the idea that children need nature for the healthy development of their senses, and, therefore, for learning and creativity. From 1997 to 2003 there was a 50% decline in the proportion of children ages 9 to 12 who

spent time outdoors hiking, walking, fishing, playing at the beach, or gardening. To encourage more time in nature, Louv has started a national movement, the Children and Nature Network (C&NN), with a website and resources for connecting with nature. Our regional organization is the San Diego Children and Nature Collaborative (SDCaN).

Getting kids out in nature is not just beneficial; it's fun for adults, too. We learn and discover together—the children, Ranger Mika, myself, and other volunteers, Andrew Koperdak, Sandra Miller, and Nicole Prestholdt. The famous naturalist, Rachel Carson, states, "If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder...he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."

All of us need to get outside—anywhere—whether Mission Trails Regional Park or a walk around our neighborhood. San Diego is blessed with one of the most diverse ecosystems in the country, the home of many species of plants and animals that exist nowhere else other than Southern California. We need to appreciate and preserve the nature that is around us. What is at stake here is the future of today's children, as well as future generations. It is through connecting with nature that each successive generation will want to preserve and be stewards of the natural systems that sustain all life.

STAR PARTY

With George Varga

April 9, from 7:00 - 9:00 pm.

May 21, from 7:30 - 9:30 pm.

Meet at the Kumeyaay Lake Campground day use lot. Canceled if skies are overcast.

Wilson, continued from p.1

to develop a series of three to five minute educational videos.

MTRP Foundation Education Program Instructor, Alicia Berg goes into school classrooms and provides an overview of Mission Trails, including the importance of the park as a major natural resource to San Diego. This is followed, a few days later, by a field trip to Mission Trails. Finally, Ms. Berg returns to the school classroom to review with the students everything they learned from her initial visit and their fieldtrip to Mission Trails.

Notable Donations January 1 – March 31, 2011

Steward - \$5,000 - \$9,999
Allied Waste Services

Patron - \$2,500 - \$4,999
Olive Garden Italian Restaurant
Superior Ready Mix

Founder - \$1,000-\$2,499
Marie Tuthill

Trailblazer - \$500-\$999
Diane Nelson & David McLaren

Path Finder - \$100-\$499
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Philip Schev
Rose Van Hook
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Adeline Williams

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 sponsorship are also available. Sponsorship 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 its location in the park. Contact Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation at 619-668-3280 or mtrp@mtrp.org 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. Yearly 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 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.

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 may 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. Contact 619-668-3280 or mtrp@mtrp.org 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 the donor's beneficiaries for life. Contact your financial advisor for information.

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, Inc.

One Father Junipero Serra Trail, San Diego, CA 92119-1008

Name _____ Business Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ Email _____

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 used for education program..... _____

Library Fund - Books and supplies for the library..... _____

Library Endowment Fund - Earnings used for library books and supplies..... _____

Trail Maintenance - Trail maintenance and improvement 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.... _____

Donor Levels

\$25 Individual

\$50 Family

\$100 Pathfinder

\$500 Trailblazer

\$1,000 Founder

\$2,500 Patron

\$5,000 Steward

\$10,000 Sponsor

\$25,000 Benefactor

\$50,000 Trustee

\$100,000 Director

Charge my donation to VISA _____ MC _____ Card No. _____ Expiration Date _____ / _____

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To donate online, visit our web site at mtrp.org/donors.asp

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**Mission Trails Regional Park News
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A COPY OF THIS AND PAST NEWSLETTERS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE: mtrp.org/newsletter.asp

Meet our 2011 Trail Guide Graduates

Top row (l to r): Zac Thayer, Bill Zeigler, Sue Sifton, Gary Jensen, Bill Edwards, Jerry Cooper, Joan Kraft, Karen Klimowitch, Maulik Trivedi, Sonya Thorne-Mosqueda; Middle row (l to r): Silvie Plesim, Mark Tierney, Bob Holloway, Karen Cassimatis, Kristina Meiners, Lindsay Gagnon, Sandy Schielke, Sheridan DeWolf; Bottom row (l to r): David Cooksy, Byranna Barnes, Diana Vandebussche, Sacha Dansky, Jean Igoe, Eva McCatty, Janice Yale. Not pictured: Kirstin DeGeer, Helen Pittman. Photo: Fred Kramer. Article on front cover.

