

Mission Trails Regional Park News

Volume 23, Number 4

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

Fall 2012

How You Can Become a Mission Trails Trail Guide

By Ranger Heidi Gutknecht

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

The curriculum covers ecology, botany, geology, history, birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, Kumeyaay culture and more! This eleven week program involves a three hour classroom session every Wednesday evening, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., and 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 learned, and demonstrate their interpretive skills by taking a veteran Trail Guide on a sample nature walk. Trail Guide 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!

In addition to leading guided nature walks, MTRP Trail Guides may also staff Discovery Tables in the Visitor Center, help out with special events

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Mission Dam: Engaging, Iconic and Mysterious

By Volunteer Trail Guide Audrey F. Baker

Whether still under mid-year waters or surging with winter rains, for nearly 200 years, Old Mission Dam continues to engage us. Frequent visitors know “Old Padre Dam” can present a serene face – calm and glassy, or an emboldened countenance – defying nature’s destructive forces. Within its walls, emotion, artistry and mystery reside.

A national historic landmark (dedicated October 11, 1964), the dam is an iconic symbol of San Diego, representing our shared history with Spain, Mexico and the Kumeyaay Nation. Created to support Mission San Diego de Alcala,

it is the first major European irrigation system in the Far West, and a relic of the earliest European settlement in California.

Earlier this year, John Clements delivered a power-point presentation entitled Old Mission Dam and the Water System. His opening remarks emphasized that, “Locally, water has always been a big problem.” This is the primary narrative of the Mission Dam story – the availability of water.

Historically, the Kumeyaay followed a seasonal calendar. As hunters and

Dam, Continued on p. 4



Photo by Jon Nachison



A Message From Executive Director Jay Wilson

The Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) Visitor Center has received some tender loving care in the past several weeks. Life Deck resurfaced the floors in the lobby and exhibit hall, and they look very nice. The City's painters brushed fresh paint on the walls of the meeting rooms, portions of the theater and staff areas, and refinished all the wooden railings and bannisters on the ramp to the second floor. The Animal Tracks Rubbing display in the exhibit hall has also been refinished and has improved graphics.

Three nonprofits have held recent events at the Visitor Center. "Sweet Retreat" was held on September 14 by the La Mesa Rotary. On September 22, the San Diego Brain Injury Foundation held a "Friendraiser," and on September 28, San Diego Soroptimists International held "Wine in the Wilderness." The Visitor Center and Terrace is a great venue for a special evening event for businesses, associations, and nonprofits.

Concerts continue in the Visitor Center Theater on the third Sunday of

each month at 3:00 p.m. thanks to the efforts of volunteers Mitsuo Tomida and Charles Carter, our Music Program Coordinator. Vicky DeLong, our Art Program Coordinator, continues to fill the Gallery with quality art and the exhibitions change every three weeks.

The Second Annual Family-Friendly Halloween "Spooktacular" will be presented by renowned storytellers Cynthia Griffin and Mary Holma on Saturday, October 27, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. in the MTRP Amphitheater. This free program is again sponsored by Team Northcutt Realtors. The Spooktacular Tales are for ages 3-93. Children are urged to come in costume, and each child will receive a bag of Halloween treats! Seating is limited so it will be first come, first served.

Linda Hawley's "Nature Adventures!" program returns to the Visitor Center from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., for children age three and up. Children can attend "Bats: Spook or Special" on October 30, 31, or November 1. For the rest of the topics, and registration information, go to mtrp.org, click on Nature Study, and then on Children's Classes.

The San Carlos Methodist Church has adopted a trail at MTRP. Throughout the year, they work with one of the rangers to help maintain and improve the trail. This is an opportunity for organizations to become actively involved with the park on an on-going basis. To learn more about how your organization can adopt a trail, or a portion of a trail, send an email to adoptatrail@mtrp.org.

Check the Mission Trails website for activities and special events at mtrp.org.

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2012 Nest Box Project Results

Wood Ducks Find a Home in Mission Trails

By Volunteer Nest Box Project Coordinator Richard Greibe

When Wendy and Terry Esterly observed a pair of Wood Ducks swimming in the San Diego River near the Grasslands crossing this spring, they knew ducks might nest in the Park. While these birds affectionately called, “woodies,” are frequently seen around Lake Murray, they are rarely seen near Kumeyaay Lake. Woodies usually nest in natural tree cavities but none are available in this area so we installed a woodie-sized nest box near the River. Two weeks later the hen was seen entering the box, a sure sign that we might have a Nest Box Project first. Upon checking the box in July, we observed egg shells left by ten to twelve ducklings after they hatched.



Wood ducks

Photo by Wendy Esterly

This is the first time Wood Ducks have nested in this part of the San Diego River in the twelve year history of the Nest Box Project. Wood Ducks prefer to nest in riparian habitats like the wooded areas surrounding the San Diego River, unlike the artificial environments at Santee and Lindo Lakes. The hen lays one egg a day and only after she has a full clutch, starts incubating the eggs around the clock. She plucks down feathers from her breast to blanket her eggs during the brief periods when she leaves to feed. Thirty days later the eggs hatch all within 24 hours. Ducklings jump from the safety of their birthplace as mama duck calls to her offspring, urging them to join her in the water where they begin to forage for their first meal.

Other birds that nest in the Park, such as Tree Swallows, Bewick's and House Wrens, hatch after about two weeks of incubation. Hatching occurs in the order the eggs were laid since they are continuously incubated starting with the first one laid. Unlike precocial Wood Ducklings that can immediately feed themselves, most perching birds are fed in the nest for another two weeks before they are mature enough to fledge.

Nesting success varies greatly from year to year as the 17 volunteers who monitored the 100 boxes installed around the Park learned when they compared 2012 results with previous years. The number of eggs laid was down to 306 compared to more than 400 last year. In addition to the reduced number of eggs, fewer young fledged from these eggs; 56% as compared to a 73% fledge rate last year. Several factors account for these variations: amount of rainfall, temperature variations during the nesting period, availability of insects for food, and predation. Raccoons, snakes and other birds take their toll as the easily-obtained protein packages are raided from nests. Ann Sixtus reported her first-hand observation of predation when she related her experience, “The most interesting event occurred when I approached a nest box that had six house wren eggs the week before. As I looked through the entry hole, I saw a portion of the body of a King Snake. It was totally inside the box and I did not feel that I should disturb the situation. When I checked the next week, there was no sign of any eggs.”

While overall the number of successful nests was lower this year, results vary within the same group of nest boxes. Ann continued, “This was my second year of monitoring nest boxes. Last year was very disappointing, as Daniece

Moden and I saw no successful fledges. This year, there were four different nests that produced from one to three successful fledges each. So compared to last year, it was much more rewarding watching the chicks growing every week to week.”

Birds typically return the following year to the area from which they hatched to raise their own offspring. The growing numbers of Ash-throated Flycatchers seen at Mission Trails is likely the result of nest boxes being available in past years. Also, a pair of Barn Owls returned for the second year to fledge young from a box located at the east end of Kumeyaay Lake. Last year was the first time Barn Owls used the nest boxes provided by the Project.

However, in spite of the disappointment of seeing eggs and baby birds mysteriously disappear, Maulik Trivedi, who has volunteered as a monitor for the last three years, captured the Park's spirit: “I love visiting and volunteering at MTRP. Each time I visit the park, I learn something new. An hour at the park is equal to a day spent in school”.



Betty Matthews inspecting nest box

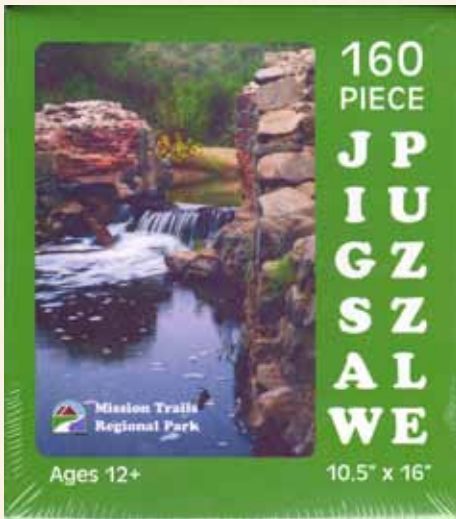
Photo by Wendy Esterly

Christmas in the Gift Shop

by Gift Shop Manger Patty O'Reilly

As the holiday season approaches, please remember the Mission Trails Visitor Center Gift Shop when you do your gift planning. You can shop for your favorite nature lover in the quite relaxed atmosphere of our award winning Visitor Center.

We are proud of our beautiful MTRP jig-saw puzzle featuring the Old Mission Dam. There is historical information on the back of the box and a reproduction of the puzzle on top. The photograph was taken by amateur photographer Edward Stalder.



We also have High Spirits "Pocket Flutes." These little beauties are the perfect gift for a current, or future musician. This pocket flute is not a toy, but a miniature instrument that can be easily carried.

There is a delightful selection of Folkmanis puppets in the Gift Shop, all representing various wildlife that can be found within the park. We have coyotes and bobcats and rattlesnakes and even a scary red tarantula! There are mini-puppets and large puppets. Find the one that is perfect for you.

The Gift Shop has an extensive selection of books for sale, from the most detailed and scholarly works on scientific subjects to a wide choice of plant and animal guides to assist with identifying what you might see, and a group of

children's books. If you are interested in the history of the indigenous peoples of this area, be sure to check out the wonderful Teachers' Guide, Written by a professor and a graduate student at SDSU.

There is a selection of branded items including t-shirts, caps, patches, pins, and note cards displaying various animals and plants to be found within the park. And you can carry them home in an MTRP biodegradable tote bag, always carried logo side out so you can give us a little help with promotion!

The Gift Shop also carries a nice variety of Kumeyaay pottery. Our pots are made by the Pai Pai Kumeyaay community of Northern Baja California where there is an active group of artisans, each making her own designs. The pots are fired but unglazed, depending upon the beautiful patterns that result from the firing process for decoration.

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(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 with a great group of people, and we are always looking for "fresh blood" to join the Mission Trails 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 2013 Trail Guide Training program begins on Saturday, January 12th and runs through March 23rd. Please note there is a \$25 materials fee due at the orientation. Space is limited in this once-a-year training, so please sign up early. For further information, please contact Ranger Heidi Gutknecht at hgutknecht@mtrp.org or call her at (619) 668-3279.

Dam, continued from p.1

agriculturalists, they used mobility, harvesting according to season, water pooling/diversion techniques, and experience with rain and drought cycles to successfully manage resources.

Conversely, the padres depended upon a reliable source of water to sustain European-style farming, animal stocks and settlement. Their experience was daunting. The first two seasons' crops (planted near the Old Town area) failed. For the third season, they planted at the present mission site, and irrigated by surface diversions from the San Diego River.

The story of Mission Dam begins in May and June, 1769, with the overland arrival of the missionaries from Mexico. Clearly, from the very beginning a dependable water supply was a major concern.

On June 9, Father Juan Crespi wrote to Fr. Francisco Palou, explaining that within two weeks of finding the San Diego River flowing in abundance, it was now dramatically reduced. He feared that diminishing water flow may force the padres to look for another place to establish the mission and obtain irrigation. In August, 1774, in separating from the Presidio, the mission removed to its permanent Mission Valley site.

Our arid climate, infused with drought and flood phases, continued to undermine their efforts. Various crop failures were noted. Mission life was a "never-ending struggle for irrigation water."

With ensuing years, mission irrigation technology improved. Water was initially baled from pit (sump) holes in the river sand. Beginning in 1773, ditches with sand, and brush diversion dams to feed the fields. A third phase (possibly 1794-1799) introduced the mission well house (replete with double-barreled cisterns and mechanical water lift), masonry ditches and three

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Dam, continued from p. 4

storage and distribution reservoirs. It is estimated this system provided 388,000 gallons for daily use. The demands of a growing mission and repeated damage by floods (particularly to the well house), made these lower works inadequate and unreliable.

In Mission San Diego (publ. 1920), Historian Fr. Zephrin Engelhardt tells us after completing church and vestry in 1813, work began on a “much greater and more difficult undertaking.” His source, the mission’s annual report of December 31, 1813, enigmatically states, “We are working at an aqueduct, which is to bring water to the Mission.” There is no specific mention of the dam. For the padres, it simply is part of the aqueduct system.

A December 31, 1814 mission notation announces 6,600 varas (3.8 miles) of the aqueduct have been completed. After 1816 nothing more is noted, leading us to conclude work was completed that year. Conjecture also tells us the aqueduct was likely built to connect with earlier ditches, creating the desired “nearly perennial” water supply.

Located 6 miles above the mission, at the head of Mission Gorge, the dam rests upon the last-exposed volcanic

bedrock. No cut rock was used for the dam and aqueduct. Its builders used “the right-size rock” for all requirements. It is constructed with river gravel, granite boulders and spalls. The full assemblage consisted of the dam and its 6-mile water delivery system – an aqueduct (or flume).

Mission dam has a 20-acre feet capacity forebay that extended 500 feet upstream. Its dimensions are 250’ in length, 10’ in width at the top, and 12’ in height. In operational days, a wooden floodgate spanned the distance between its north and south wall.

Heavy rock, some over 2 feet in diameter, was used in its facings. Smooth rock (affording minimum resistance, hydrostatic pressure and uplift) forms the upstream face. The downstream face is rough, deflecting water forces.

Its structural integrity is a memorial to those who built it. It was engineered in a 700-year old Spanish tradition (honed by experience gained from projects built in Mexico), and was constructed by the labor of Kumeyaay Indians.

Lime, burned in kilns, produced mortar for the dam. A major portion of this difficult work was performed by

the Kumeyaay, and included carrying raw lime and fuel, firing the kilns, and transporting finished lime to the job site. Work on tiles and bricks, transport of food and equipment, and assemblage of rock material were also required.

No physical descriptions or specifications of the dam have been found in the early Spanish records. Much of what we know comes from those who share a passion for its story and its preservation. Even a desultory chronicling of investigators introduces us to tenacious individuals, spanning past and present. The first known account is the observations detailed in 1867 by Judge Benjamin Hayes.

Then there’s F. E. Green, who, in his own words, set out “with pick and shovel, tape line, rule, level, camera and notebook” to gain an understanding of early efforts at irrigation in California. His unpublished treatise (1933), *The San Diego Old Mission Dam and Irrigation System*, stands as the go-to text for modern dam enthusiasts. John Clements sums up its value, saying, “Green covers most of what is known and, most importantly, includes his documentation of all vestiges of the water system extant in the 1930s.

Local historian (and MTRP trail guide) Bill White can attest to the challenge of resolving mysteries associated with Mission Dam and its aqueduct. In partnering with geologist Greg T. Cranham, the team has expanded on the tradition of F.E. Green’s field inspections, mapping the GPS coordinates of all existing elements of dam and flume. From investigations, with “The Green Report” in back-pack, they have produced new research on the water system.

One perplexing question is, “which came first – the dam or the flume.” Practicality suggests the aqueduct. The flume required 2-3 times more effort than dam construction. Green postulates a smaller, temporary dam



Photo by Richard Richard Guarascio

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Dam, continued from p. 5

long-preceded our dam, and envisions dam and aqueduct were constructed as a “continuous job.” The upstream portion appears to have been built first, and that water wheel and mill house on the northern end, and the south-end buttress wall are part of a second construction. This scenario remains under debate.

The flume began at the north end of the dam’s right bank, 2½ feet above riverbed. An open ditch, it ran three miles through the gorge, with an elevation varying from 5-25 feet, transversing 10-15 foot-wide gulches. There, stone trellis formations were built high enough to maintain the level.

It was constructed of cobblestone, with a narrow tile set in cement at the bottom. (Its cement durability was certainly proved in these gulches.) The flume then continued toward the Mission, and emptied into a ground-level ditch that carried its water further onto the Mission grounds.

Construction of the flume was accomplished without use of precise level instruments. For the masonry section, a bricklayer’s plummet level, carpenter’s “A” frame, or water-trough level may have been employed. The dirt ditch grade was likely judged by eye, and helped through trial and error.

With the completion of the Mission Dam and its aqueduct, replete with water wheel-driven grist mill and mill house, crop returns improved. A continuous general increase spanned the years from 1816 through 1821, and allowed the Mission to reach the height of its success. By 1831, the system was no longer in use. Under the act of secularization passed by the Mexican congress, the mission period came to an end in 1834.

Repair efforts were undertaken in the late 19th Century and in the 1930s. As we move toward celebrating its 200th year, Mission Dam consistently shows

the face of a hearty survivor. For two centuries, it has withstood the test of a succession of major floods, including the epic flood of 1916 (with a peak flow of 45,000 cubic feet per second and running 10 feet over the dam top), and the “Big Rains” of December, 2010.

F. E. Green’s report closes with a desire that resonates in the present. “The old Mission dam and aqueduct, together with the restored Mission church, are San Diego’s most conspicuous and important landmarks of these Spanish-Mission days, and if there is a way to bring about their preservation, it would seem most fitting, indeed.”

To this, many would add the necessity of preserving vital documentation relating to Mission Dam. Publication of “The Green Report” will greatly enhance our appreciation of this icon symbol of San Diego.

For details on the mechanical operations of dam and its maintenance, see “Historic Old Mission Dam Project” by Ranger Heidi Gutknecht, in the Mission Trails Regional Park News, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Winter/Spring, 2008).

Editor’s note: To read the MTRP newsletter noted above, go to <https://mtrp.org/assets/files/166872.pdf>. To see early photos of the dam and an example of what the flume may have looked like, come to the Mission Trails Visitor Center.

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Winter Solstice Hikes on Cowles Mountain

The Mission Trails Regional Park Trail Guides will lead pre-dawn hikes to the area of the solstice observatory on Cowles Mountain on December 20th and 21st. The Canyoneers of the San Diego Natural History Museum will lead the hike on December 22nd. Each hike begins at 6:00 a.m. and lasts approximately 2 hours. 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. 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.

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. 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 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.

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Roland Roberge, Editor.

A COPY OF THIS AND PAST NEWSLETTERS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE: mtrp.org/newsletter.asp

Mission Trails Nest Box Project Volunteer Monitors



Photo by Wendy Esterly

MTRP Nest Box Monitors: Front row: Debbie Giambuzzi, Terry Hurst, Betty Matthews, Nancy Reed
Second row: Jeanne Raimond, Dawn Rucker, Doug Fenske, Richard Griebe, Ann Sixtus, Terry Esterly, Wendy Esterly. Not present: Eileen Bialas, Vernon Clinton, Lisa Crabtree, Honey Ho, Petra Koellhoffer, Maulik Trivedi. See related article on page 3.