



Mission Trails Regional Park News

A PUBLICATION OF THE MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK FOUNDATION Vol. 31, Number 1, Spring 2020

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MISSION OF THE MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK FOUNDATION

In partnership with the City of San Diego, preserve and protect the natural environment of Mission Trails Regional Park and provide and promote educational and recreational opportunities.

AT THE TIME OF THIS WRITING, coronavirus (COVID-19) has turned everyday life upside down. We are now practicing social distancing, a term few of us knew before this global pandemic made its way around the world and into our lives. This event has not only demonstrated our collective vulnerability and global interconnectedness, but also how much we depend on one another when faced with challenges, and how together we can persevere.

Our community is suddenly engaged in the global response to COVID-19. The park is closed until further notice and our regularly scheduled walks and activities have been canceled. Even the new class of Trail Guides, the largest class in the park's history, will have to modify its

typical schedule, hit the "pause" button until it is deemed safe to again gather as a group.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Mission Trails Regional Park Visitor and Interpretive Center. In this and forthcoming newsletters, we will include a



history of the park's founding, from the purchase of Cowles Mountain in 1974 to Mission Trails' most recent milestone, the opening of the new Field Station in the East Fortuna Staging Area. This project was decades in the making and, like the Visitor Center, was another successful collaboration between members of the community, the City of San Diego, and the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation.

In times like these, we realize what we take for granted. A simple handshake and trip to the market presently carry much weight, and the freedom to choose from many recreational opportunities in San Diego is no longer an option. As you read this newsletter, I encourage you to consider all that Mission Trails Regional Park means to you, and make a plan to explore the new Field Station in healthier times. It is Mission Trails' most recent example of what's possible when people work together.

– JENNIFER MORRISSEY, Executive Director, MTRP Foundation

Visitor and Interpretive Center (619) 668-3281

MTRP Foundation (619) 668-3280

Email mtrp@mtrp.org Web Site www.mtrp.org

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Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, Inc.,

established January 1988, is a non-profit public benefit corporation organized for the purpose of preserving, improving, and maintaining Mission Trails Regional Park.

IMAGE CREDITS Cover: Gerry Tietje; Page 2: Deke McLeod, Gerry Tietje; Page 3: Kristina Yamamoto; Pages 4-5: Angie Ollman; Page 6-7: Angie Ollman, unknown; Pages 8-9: Gerry Tietje; Page 10: Jayna McLeod, unknown; Page 11: Jayna McLeod; Page 12: Sean Ramirez, Wendy Wheatcroft, and @wifeofanaydentist.

ON THE COVER

A Hooded Oriole, a harbinger of Spring. If you're lucky, you might see one in your backyard.

Volunteers Honored at Annual Gathering

IN FEBRUARY, City of San Diego staff and the MTRP Foundation staged the 24th annual Volunteer Awards Celebration, an opportunity to acknowledge the service of the 829 individuals who volunteered at Mission Trails in 2019. Collectively, the volunteers worked a total of 11,991 hours of service, the equivalent of an estimated \$360,000.*

At the event, a dinner hosted by the MTRP Foundation preceded an awards ceremony where volunteers were recognized for their dedication to the park. Senior Ranger Ryan Robertson provided updates, including that the new Field Station at the East Fortuna Staging Area was to open soon, and that planning related to projects outlined in the updated Master Plan for Mission Trails Regional Park had commenced. Rangers presented on their respective focus areas, and the awardees received a certificate from Councilmember Scott Sherman and gift cards from the MTRP Foundation. Volunteers also received certificates marking 5, 10, 15, and 25 years of service.



ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Volunteer of the Year Roy DeRego with Senior Ranger Ryan Robertson; Ranger Aide Manour Habis, Ranger Dan Kimpel, and Trail Patrol Volunteer Silvie Plesim; Ranger Andrew Miller; Ranger Chris Axtmann recognizes Nest Box Program volunteers Richard Griebel, Petra Koellhoffer, and Wendy Esterly. **BELOW, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Ranger Julie Aeilts with Park Beautification Volunteer Bob Graham; Visitor Center Volunteer Mary Gibson with Facility Director David Lee; Trail Guide Bob MacDonald (center) with Ranger Chris Axtmann and Trail Guide President Fred Kramer; Ranger Heidi Gutknecht recognizes Habitat Restoration Volunteer Karen Randall.

VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Volunteer of the Year: Roy DeRego
West Sycamore Crew: Hart Welling
Habitat Restoration Crew: Karen Randall
Trail Improvement Crew: John Kiss
Park Beautification Crew: Bob Graham
Trail Guide: Bob MacDonald
Trail Patrol: Silvie Plesim
Visitor Center: Mary Gibson

SERVICE AWARDS

25 YEARS

George Varga, Tom Walters, Bill White

15 YEARS

Jeanne Raimond

10 YEARS

David Cooksy, Lilian Copper, Dianne Hill,
Silvie Plesim, Karen Randall, Janice Yale

5 YEARS

Marlin Burke, Diane Elias, Ruth Gautereaux,
Dave Rowley, Mary Todd

*Estimate determined using the *Value of Volunteer Time* calculator at IndependentSector.org.





CELEBRATING OUR NEW

Ranger Station



TOP, THIS PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT: San Diego City Councilmembers Jen Campbell and Scott Sherman cut the ribbon at the entrance of the new Field Station with Citizens' Advisory Committee Chair and MTRP Foundation Board Member Dorothy Leonard and Andrew Field, Director of the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department.

BELOW, THIS PAGE: Richard Leaverton representing ACT 1 Construction gives the keys to the building to MTRP Senior Ranger Ryan Robertson.

ON FEBRUARY 5, MEMBERS OF THE MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK (MTRP) COMMUNITY gathered for the ribbon cutting of a new 5,000-square-foot ranger station in the East Fortuna staging area. A major entry to the Fortuna area of the park, the completion of this long-awaited facility has been a 21-year process of planning and park development funded by the City of San Diego and the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation. This important park investment will give rangers improved resources and a state-of-the-art facility to better protect the park and engage with park visitors.

San Diego City Councilmember and MTRP Task Force Chairman Scott Sherman and City Councilmember and MTRP Task Force Committee Member Jen Campbell cut a ribbon at the building's threshold alongside Parks and Recreation Director Andrew Field and Dorothy Leonard, Chair of the MTRP Citizens' Advisory Committee and a



RIGHT: MTRP Rangers and City staff with Steve Haupt (center), District Manager, Parks and Recreation Department. **BELOW:** Geologist Pat Abbott, artist Roman de Salvo, Diana de Salvo, and Jennifer Morrissey, Executive Director, MTRP Foundation. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Testing out *Fountain Mountain* by Roman de Salvo.



member of the MTRP Foundation Board of Directors. Remarking on the new building, Councilmember Sherman shared, “Mission Trails Regional Park has a special place in my heart. As a native San Diegan, Mission Trails was basically my backyard and playground even before it became an official park. I’m glad we have invested in improving public safety for this important regional treasure.”

In addition to the new ranger station, a public artwork by acclaimed local artist Roman de Salvo was unveiled. The artwork, *Fountain Mountain*, consists of a large

boulder with trail-like channels carved into its surface. A functioning drinking fountain fixture rises out of the highest point of the boulder, and water flows through the array of tiny trails in serpentine paths down the slopes of the boulder. The artwork is inspired by the many trails at MTRP.

Park users can take advantage of the facility’s “hydration station” for themselves and pets, additional restrooms, shade underneath the building’s dramatic, sweeping roof, and can pick up park maps in the building’s entry.



THE ORIGINS OF

Mission Trails Regional Park: 1960-1985

Text by Liz Doroski, MTRP Volunteer

HOW FORTUNATE WE ARE TO HAVE AN URBAN OASIS like Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) to call our “back-yard.” Park users—including those who experience our Visitor and Interpretive Center—often marvel at how lucky we are that the park exists at all, in its beautiful natural state, and wonder how the park came to be. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the opening of MTRP’s iconic Visitor and Interpretive Center, and we are celebrating the milestone by providing an overview of the history of the park in this year’s newsletters. In this way, we can share the timeline of events that made the park a reality, and salute those dedicated individuals in our local community who were integral to ensuring Mission Trails’ existence.

It was 60 years ago that what is now Mission Trails Regional Park began as a glimmer of an idea. In 1960, the San Diego City Planning Department outlined a plan for an approximately 1,765-acre park to include the most dramatic areas of Mission Gorge, Old Mission Dam, and the entire Fortuna Mountain ridge. Sparking this proposal was the federal government’s decision to release 1,220 acres of the proposed park land as surplus real property. This land had been added to the

City as part of the Camp Elliott annexation and was purchased by the City at a nominal cost. In addition to this land that had served as a military training area, 375 City-owned acres and 140 acres controlled by the Cuyamaca Water Company would be included in the park. However, it would be more than a decade before the County of San Diego would release its first definitive plan of the proposed regional park’s land use and design.

RIGHT: MTRP Task Force and Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CAC) members with community representatives at the May 17, 1980 ceremony officially designating the park Mission Trails Regional Park. L-R: Art Kohrmann, Francis Leatherman, Jo Reilly Cummings, Dorothy Leonard, Supervisor Roger Hedgecock, Sharon Murphy, Mike Pent (CAC Chair), Councilmember Larry Sterling (Task Force Chair), Dick Murphy, Richard Teague, unknown, Hank Wilson, Woody Miller.





In this photo from 1937, what are now known as the “Five Peaks” of Mission Trails Regional Park are visible behind San Diego State College.

In 1974, park promoters successfully formalized the acquisition of Cowles Mountain, which was under imminent threat of private development. The County provided \$2.2 million to purchase Cowles Mountain and the City purchased a one-half undivided interest. This acquisition led to a jointly sponsored area consisting of Fortuna Mountain, Cowles Mountain, and Lake Murray, aligning with the “one diverse park” concept in the City’s 1960 proposal. The next step was to enter into a master planning process that began in 1975 and culminated in the presentation of the final Master Plan in March 1977. Once the Master Plan was accepted, there was still one more bureaucratic hoop to jump through: an Environmental Impact Report, which was completed and certified by the City Council in March 1979. It truly reflected a process where both the land and the public were heard.

In 1979, what was originally called the “Lake Murray, Cowles and Fortuna Mountain Regional Park” was renamed “Mission Trails Regional Park” to better reflect the area’s historic connection to the San Diego Mission, the historic Old Mission Dam, and the flume. A ceremony to dedicate the park was held at the base of Cowles Mountain in May 1980, and a small Mission Trails Regional Park sign was placed on the site. An endowment fund with The San Diego Foundation was established in 1985 for the benefit of

Mission Trails Regional Park, which still exists to generate education and outreach opportunities.

On January 17, 1985, the MTRP Task Force, comprised of elected officials, unanimously approved the Master Development Plan 1985, and forwarded it to the City Council and Board of Supervisors for consideration and adoption. On April 29, 1985, the San Diego City Council adopted the Mission Trails Regional Park Master Development Plan by Resolution No. R-263065. On June 11, 1985, the Plan was approved by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors.

With the leadership, vision, and determination of so many individuals over the last 60 years, Mission Trails Regional Park has flourished, becoming a sanctuary for native plants and wildlife, as well as a much needed place for people to escape urban living for a moment and reconnect to the nature that surrounds us. Thank you to all who have made Mission Trails Regional Park a reality.

COWLES MOUNTAIN USED TO BE KNOWN AS “S” MOUNTAIN.

In 1931, students from San Diego State College, now SDSU, painted a 400-foot-tall letter “S” on the side of the mountain. In April 1942, during World War II, the military ordered the S covered up for national security. After the war, the painting tradition was resurrected.

In the 1970s, the repainting tradition ceased for environmental and habitat protection, but had a brief resurgence in the late 1980s. The S has not been repainted for nearly three decades, but many locals still remember the giant letter that could be seen from miles away.

Signs were placed at the park entrance at Mission Gorge Road and Father Junipero Serra Trail in January 1985.





Winter to Spring

Text and photos by Gerry Tietje, MTRP Volunteer

AS SPRING CHASES THE LAST VESTIGES OF WINTER AWAY, we look forward to new beginnings in Mission Trails Regional Park. We look forward to seeing colorful wildflowers along the trails and on the hillsides. We relish in the flow of water over Old Mission Dam, the stream that meanders through Oak Canyon, and vernal pools filled with life-giving water for flora and fauna, including Mesa Mint and fairy shrimp. And we look forward to seeing a variety of colorful birds that arrive in spring and stay to breed. We enjoy seeing the young chicks that hatch and learn life lessons from their protective parents. This article is about them.

The winter birds have left, and permanent residents are joined by several new colorful species during spring migration. Bullock's Orioles are in the park by mid-March, heralding spring with their colorful orange, black-and-white attire. These close cousins of the Baltimore Oriole are

attracted to sycamore and oak woodland areas in the park. They raise their young in hanging, bag-like nests, which are woven from grass, dodder, and even fishing line. Colorful Black-headed and Blue Grosbeaks join other birds that breed in the park. Black-headed Grosbeaks arrive by late March and love the Old Mission Dam area. Blue Grosbeaks frequent Oak and Spring Canyons in April and May; the males are striking, with a dark blue head and body and rufous wing bars. Grosbeaks have broad conical beaks that mark them as seed eaters, but they also eat berries and insects. White-spectacled Yellow-breasted Chats arrive by mid-April. The male's distinctive song echoes throughout the park at this time of year; but seeing one is sometimes a maddening challenge, despite their bright colors.



One of the delights in nature is to see the chicks that hatch in the springtime. When first seen, some chicks still sport a front egg tooth that was used to crack and emerge from their eggshells (see American Coot chick photo, opposite) or downy feathers over parts of their young bodies (see Green Heron photo). Perhaps the most unusual looking chicks are the American Coots. Feather tufts in psychedelic colors stick out from their heads and bodies after they hatch. These numerous birds begin nesting in late March and chicks are seen by mid-April. Green Heron chicks are common in April and May. They love the cattails and bulrushes in the bays of Lake



Murray. And who can resist being enthralled seeing a female Mallard giving her young chicks a tour of Kumeyaay Lake (see page 2)!

While we may not be able to enjoy all of these birds this season due to MTRP's temporary closure, we look forward to future adventures at the park. Appreciation of the birds at Mission Trails adds another dimension to one's enjoyment of the park. But in the meantime, we can all enjoy the birds in our own backyard.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT THIS PAGE:
Yellow-breasted Chat, Green Heron chick,
American Coot chick, Blue Grosbeak,
Black-headed Grosbeak.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bullock's Oriole,
Mallard chick.



IN MEMORIAM: John Barone

It is with great sadness that we share news of the passing of former Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) Senior Ranger John Barone. On March 9, at the age of 48, John lost his five-month battle with a rare form of bone marrow cancer. He is survived by his wonderful wife of 17 years, Monica, and their two young sons.



John Barone in 2003.

He was promoted to Senior Ranger for MTRP in 2003 and worked at the park for two years before becoming Senior Ranger at Otay Valley Regional Park. For the last three years of his career, John worked as a Senior Planner for the City of San Diego Public Utilities Department, managing various habitat restoration and trail development projects.

Those who were fortunate enough to have known John will remember his positive and selfless attitude, strong work ethic, passion for the environment, great sense of humor, devotion to his family and friends, and his contagious smile and laughter. He will be greatly missed by his family, friends, City of San Diego colleagues, and the MTRP community.

Born in San Diego, John was raised in Chula Vista and attended Hilltop High School where he played football and other sports. Following graduation, John went on to Southwestern College, then transferred to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where he earned a degree in Forestry and Resource Management.

He began his 21-year career with the City of San Diego in 1999, working first as a Park Ranger at Balboa Park, then Chollas Lake and Black Mountain Open Space Park.



DONOR

THANK YOU to the following community members and organizations for their donations to support Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) through the MTRP Foundation.

This list reflects donations of \$500 and more made in 2019. Please contact the MTRP Foundation at mtrp@mtrp.org with any inaccuracies or omissions.

BENEFACTOR \$25,000 to \$49,999

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Donna and Edwin Gookin
Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation

🌱 Denotes gift made through the San Diego Foundation.



Highlights

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Eleanor Lynch, Ph.D. and Patrick Harrison, Ph.D.
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Point Loma Rotary
Ernest Shaw
Paul H. Stuverud
Jill Thacker and Gregg Rosner
Luann and Brian Wright
Michael Wu in dedication to Zeus

LEAVE YOUR LEGACY AT Mission Trails

Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) is in the “forever” business. City of San Diego staff and the MTRP Foundation work to preserve and protect this extraordinary natural resource today, tomorrow, and for generations to come. Did you know there are creative ways to support the park through the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation? Through planned giving, you can support our wonderful park in perpetuity, and also realize important tax benefits for you and your loved ones.

We invite donors at all levels to name the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation as a beneficiary in their wills or trusts, to make life-income gifts, or other deferred giving arrangements to benefit the park. There are a number of ways you can support the MTRP Foundation through planned gifts, including:

Bequests

Charitable Gift Annuities

Charitable Lead Trusts

Charitable Remainder Trusts

Gifts from Retirement Plan Accounts

Beneficiary Designations from Life Insurance or Retirement Plans

Such giving techniques are called “planned gifts,” because with thoughtful planning, you create win-win solutions for you and Mission Trails Regional Park. You may be able to make such gifts while minimizing capital gains taxes on certain appreciated property and reducing income and estate taxes.

Mission Trails Regional Park’s ability to advance our mission and accomplish our goals is directly tied to the generous support we receive from families and individuals, including these kinds of planned gifts. Although the park is under the umbrella of the City of San Diego, there are limits to government funding but private philanthropy and legacy gifts to the MTRP Foundation help to assure the continued preservation and maintenance of the park. Help us secure our future as an unequalled natural resource for our community and visitors from around the world.

To discuss the planned giving program or voluntarily inform us of your intention to leave a bequest to Mission Trails Regional Park, please contact Jennifer Morrissey, Executive Director, MTRP Foundation at jmorrissey@mtrp.org or 619-582-4502.

PLEASE NOTE: Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation does not provide legal or tax advice. You should consult with your attorney or tax advisor to determine the benefits and risks of any charitable planned gift.





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Adventures at Mission Trails

As many families can attest, Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) is a wonderful place for children to explore the outdoors and learn to appreciate nature. Several families report that their first campouts are at Mission Trails' Kumeyaay Lake Campground because of its cleanliness, family-friendly atmosphere, and close proximity to home. Parents often capture their family's moments in the park and post the images on social media. These photos serve as a great reminder of what an incredible resource the San Diego region has in MTRP, and how through children's experiences at MTRP, we are creating our next generation of environmental stewards. [#missiontrailsregionalpark](#)



IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR PARK USERS

In line with County of San Diego guidelines to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, all City of San Diego Parks and Recreation facilities, trails, and amenities are CLOSED until further notice. This includes the entirety of Mission Trails Regional Park, including Cowles Mountain, all trails, parking lots, and restrooms; Lake Murray; Kumeyaay Lake Campground; and the Visitor and Interpretive Center. All regularly scheduled volunteer work crews, programs, and events at Mission Trails Regional Park are also cancelled until further notice.

For the latest updates from the park, please visit www.mtrp.org.