

* THE SANTA SUSANA BACKBONE TRAIL *

Equestrian Trails - Corral 54

Fall 1989

It has long been a goal of Corral 54 to preserve two outstanding trails in the unincorporated Los Angeles County area of the mountains just northwest of Chatsworth, namely Devils Canyon and the Simi Trail. These trails are favorites of equestrians, as well as hikers and bicyclists.

In case you are not familiar with them, the Devils Canyon Trail begins at the north end of Topanga Canyon Boulevard. After you make your way past the condominiums, the trail drops down into the canyon, and follows the stream northward along the canyon floor. It is one of the few trails in the area that is green, oak-shaded, and cool even in summer.

The Simi Trail, or Johnson Lateral, begins at the north end of Iverson Road and winds upward through spectacular rock formations and cliffs, offering panoramic views of the San Fernando Valley below. The trail crosses into Ventura County and joins with Rocky Peak Road.

Our efforts to save these trails began in 1979, when development north of the 118 Freeway was first proposed. Working with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Santa Susana Mountain Park Association, our Corral was instrumental in preserving access to Devils Canyon, as well as 74 acres of the Canyon as dedicated open space.

Next the development of the northern part of the Iverson Ranch threatened to sever the trail connection between Devils Canyon and the Simi Trail, as well as access to both of these trails from Iverson Road. During the public hearing for this development, Indian Falls Estates, everyone agreed that this crucial 3-way trail intersection would not be cut off. The developer agreed to give a trail easement to the County Department of Parks and Recreation as a condition of the development.

This initiated the SANTA SUSANA BACKBONE TRAIL project of the County Department of Parks and Recreation, which incorporates both the Devils Canyon and Simi Trails, and joins them together to form one continuous trail from the Topanga Cyn. trailhead to the Ventura County line. The rest of the trail appears on the Rancho Simi Trails Master Plan. The Santa Susana Backbone Trail has been designated as part of the RIM-OF-THE-VALLEY Trail System by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

In 1982, the tentative subdivision map for the Indian Falls Estates showed a 12' wide trail easement along Falls Creek between Devils Canyon and Iverson Road. However, in the final tract map of 1987, the trail had been relocated, and approved, on the extreme northern perimeter of the property. This change put the trail in a completely unusable location which did not take into consideration the solid-rock-cliff nature of the terrain.

The Department of Parks and Recreation has tried to move the trail easement to a more suitable location, but the developer now refuses to approve of any new alignment, even though the suggested new trail easement is located on unbuildable land and does not interfere with the development in any way. It now will require a specific action on the part of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to condemn the land necessary for a usable easement, or the trail cannot be completed.

Why the Backbone Trail is important to you

The Los Angeles County General Plan (II-22) sites the lack of outdoor recreation facilities for the great increase in urban population. It specifically recommends that the Santa Susana Mountains "...should be used for trail systems and recreational connectors." The Santa Susana Backbone Trail is the only attempt by Los Angeles County to fulfill this recommendation in the entire southern side of the Santa Susanas.

This trail has been used by residents of Chatsworth and Simi Valley for horseback riding, hiking, and bicycling for many years. The loss of this trail would further diminish already scarce outdoor recreational opportunities.

This trail is of regional importance, since it joins the trails of two counties, and links two large urban areas, the San Fernando and Simi Valleys. IT IS THE ONLY EAST-WEST LINK IN THE RIM-OF-THE-VALLEY TRAIL SYSTEM NORTH OF THE 118 FREEWAY BETWEEN L.A. AND VENTURA COUNTIES.

This trail is the only trail project proposed by Los Angeles County for this area. It is the BACKBONE TRAIL which would form the basis for any future links with Los Angeles City trails, Simi Valley trails, or links over the ridgeline with Santa Clarita trails.

This trail is a highly scenic, virtually undisturbed natural trail, which offers many glimpses of deer and other wildlife. It represents a high quality recreational experience, easily accessible to local residents.

The entire trail is in good condition and completely usable except for the missing Indian Falls segment. One individual should not be allowed to destroy access to miles of trails spanning two counties!

Recently, the State Legislature passed a bill to improve public access to the Rim of the Valley Corridor and greenbelt areas. This trail is necessary for both purposes. It is one of only two access points to parkland in Devils Canyon. The County should take the initiative to see that this trail is completed as planned, in order to act in accordance with the intent of the state legislation.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP SAVE THIS TRAIL

Our vocal community support for this trail is the only way to influence the ultimate outcome. We need to let Los Angeles County Supervisor Mile Antonovich know that we will not allow this extremely important trail to be ruined by one developer acting in bad faith. We need to speak out in support of the SANTA SUSANA BACKBONE TRAIL project of the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation. If you want to see this trail completed, here is how you can help:

Petitions—

We are circulating petitions in support of the Santa Susana Trail, and other trails in the Santa Susana Mountains. Our goal is to collect 1000 signatures. There is space for 10 signatures on each petition. If you think you can collect more than ten signatures, please make copies of the petition before you begin to circulate it. Send completed petitions to:

SANTA SUSANA MOUNTAINS TRAILS
21115 Devonshire St. #288
Chatsworth, CA 91311

Letters—

Write a letter to Supervisor Mike Antonovich, putting in your own words how you feel about this matter. State that since the developer of Indian Falls Estates will not cooperate, it is now up to the Board of Supervisors to enforce the conditions of this development by condemning land, if necessary, to obtain a suitable trail easement. Ask the Supervisor to actively support the Santa Susana Trail, and to do whatever is necessary to insure that a suitable trail easement around Indian Falls Estates, Tr #42353, is obtained, and that the trail is constructed within a reasonable period of time.

You may want to add what your interest in the trail is, i.e. horseback riding, bicycling, etc. Explain why this trail is important to you and your community, that you would like to see a trail connecting Chatsworth and Simi Valley, etc.

Please make two photocopies of your letter. Send the original letter to:

Hon. Mike Antonovich
Supervisor, Los Angeles County
Hall of Administration Room 869
500 West Temple
Los Angeles, CA 90012

IMPORTANT: Include on the envelope
ATTN: Peter Whitingham

Send one of the copies to:

Mr. Jim Park
Head Park Planner
County of Los Angeles Department
of Parks and Recreation
433 S. Vermont Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90020

Please send the second copy to:

SANTA SUSANA MOUNTAINS TRAILS
address at left

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN HELPING FURTHER?

Trails in the Santa Susana Mountains are now in serious danger because of increasing development pressures, and the lack of a comprehensive trail plan. If we are not to lose our trails, trail users need to unite and work for their preservation. Ongoing development in the Santa Susana Mountains should be balanced with recreational trails and open space.

We want to unite all trail users, including hikers, equestrians, and bicyclists, for the most effective voice in saving these beautiful trails. Please return the coupon below if you can lend some time, ideas, or skills to help organize the SANTA SUSANA MOUNTAINS TRAILS COUNCIL!



YES! I WANT TO HELP PRESERVE THE TRAILS IN THE SANTA SUSANA MOUNTAINS. MY INTEREST IS IN HIKING HORSEBACK RIDING BICYCLING

I'M ABLE TO ATTEND MEETINGS EVENING DAYTIME WEEKENDS

FAVORITE TRAIL(S):

*Hi Nancy,
I already put you on
our mailing list, so you
needn't return coupon.
But please share info.
herein w/ interested people.
Can you write a letter?
Thanks, Sandy*

NAME _____
(PLEASE)

TELEPHONE (____) _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ ZIP _____

Return this form to: SANTA SUSANA MOUNTAINS TRAILS COUNCIL, 21115 Devonshire St. #288
Chatsworth, CA 91311