

## November/December 2001 Newsletter

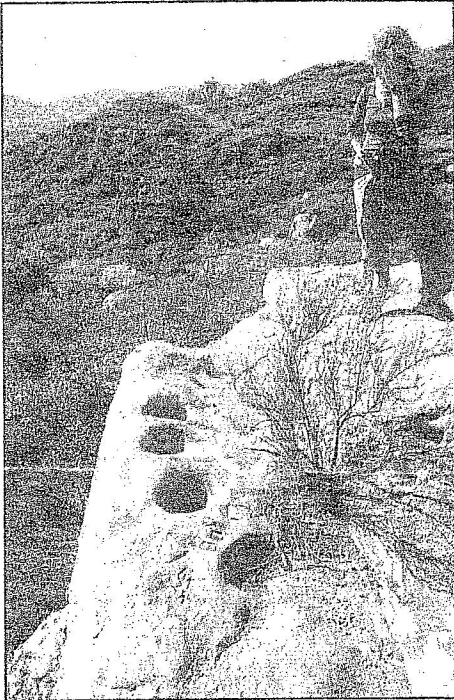


PHOTO BY BRYAN McLELLAN

Bedrock mortars used by Chumash Indians.

### Sacred Canyon

*From Westside Weekly 12/10/00*  
Chumash Indians inhabited Topanga Canyon for thousands of years among the chaparral, creek banks, meadows and rock outcrops. As far back as 8,000 years ago, bands of hunter-gatherers would migrate up the canyon from their permanent camps along the coastline to collect plants for food, carry water from the streams, bury their elders and conduct rite of passage ceremonies. There are about 60 recorded Chumash sites throughout Topanga, but local archeologists estimate that more than 100 sites dot the community and some hillsides are home to numerous ancient relics. Trying to find these sites is somewhat of a challenge, however, since their locations are a loosely held secret among locals, preservationists and archeologists to prevent vandalism and

souvenir seekers. To further protect historically significant sites, new development projects, such as the Pine Tree Circle Shopping Center recently completed in Topanga, are supervised by Chumash observers. Still, without a formal preservation policy, a host of valuable sites could be lost forever without protection.

Covering some of Topanga's hillsides are bedrock mortars, holes once used by Chumash women to grind acorns into flour. Some of these six-inch-deep pits are aligned in the sandstone from east to west, so may have been used for rituals.

"You can tell they were shaped by people because they are conical, polished and have patterns," said Chester King, an archeologist and 21-year Topanga resident. "The smaller cupules may have been used by women for fertility prayers. They would eat the stone paste and pray for a baby. The aligned mortars may have been used as star maps, like a calendar system."

A few natural rock structures shelter very simple rock art made from red ochre and a burned stock. One such painting faintly depicts a net with mesh around it. Red and black lines trail off along the side of it. King said this particular cove might have been where a girl was sent during the onset of puberty.

Known for their extensive trading practices with other tribes, the Chumash made beads out of shells. Basalt and chert stones, indigenous to Topanga, once were used by the natives to make knives and arrowheads. Fragments of these materials are scattered in Topanga's soil. "Topanga is a unique piece of land," King said. "There are at least 50 archeological sites up here. There are cemeteries, drawings and other activities that we will miss if development continues."

Scientific studies of Topanga began in 1947 when UCLA professor and

(continued on page 2)

### General Membership Meeting Monday, January 21, 2002

Paul Edelman, Chief of Planning and Natural Resources, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, will be here to give us a PowerPoint presentation and talk about what is left to be done to keep open space between Sage Ranch, Chatsworth Nature Preserve and the Ronald Reagan Freeway. Please join us for what should be a very interesting evening.

Because of the holiday, there will be no December general meeting.

SSMPA General Membership Program meetings take place every 3rd Monday from September through November and January through May. Program meetings begin at 7:15 p.m. and generally conclude by 9:00 p.m. at Rockpointe Clubhouse, 22300 Devonshire, Chatsworth, on the south side, 1 block before entering Chatsworth Park South.

Members are invited to General Membership Program meetings and Board of Directors meetings. Board of Directors meetings take place at the Chatsworth Park South Visitors Center on the first Monday of the month. Refreshments are served at program meetings.

*Editor's Note: Jim Shirley's presentation on Box Canyon at our meeting on Oct. 15th was enlightening, educational, revealing and fascinating--all of the above and more. I did not want it to end. The corner of the county named Box Canyon is very special and precious. It is under immediate threat of development. Hopefully, any development that occurs there will be done cautiously and legally while carefully considering the unique characteristics of the Canyon. ▲*

## IN SUPPORT OF OUR STATE RESOURCES

Next March we will have an opportunity to vote for Proposition 40, a \$2.6 billion bond act which will provide funding as described below. SSMPA will do its part to support and ensure the passage of Prop 40. We hope you will help with your vote and by spreading the word. The following is printed from the Planning & Conservation League website. Visit [www.pcl.org](http://www.pcl.org) for more information

Proposition 40 will improve the quality of life of all Californians by providing cleaner air and water, recreational opportunities, safe parks, and new wildlife preserves.

Proposition 40 is a well-balanced proposal. It will fund water quality and restoration projects in rivers, streams, lakes and watersheds throughout the state. Proposition 40 will also improve air quality by providing funds for regional air districts and promoting tree planting throughout the state. By protecting threatened coastal land, it will keep our beautiful coast accessible to the public and free from inappropriate development.

Proposition 40 also includes substantial funds for safe neighborhood parks, including programs to give youth safe recreational alternatives to gangs, drugs, and other harmful activities. It also includes funds for youth to participate in environmental education, outdoor recreation and after school programs, and funds the conservation corps, which give youth opportunities to learn important job skills.

Our magnificent State Park System badly needs the funds. Proposition 40 will provide to improve visitor facilities, protect old growth redwoods, build and maintain campsites, and make trails safer. Proposition 40 also safeguards California's rich heritage by providing programs for conservation of wildlife, agricultural lands and historical and cultural resources. These programs will help promote the recovery of threatened species, preserve structures, sites and artifacts of great cultural and historical significance, and protect our important agricultural lands.

Programs included in Proposition 40 will benefit every neighborhood in California. Proposition 40 gives heavy emphasis to improving the quality of life in our cities and suburbs. Specific programs go to making neighborhood parks safer, providing new recreational opportunities, planting trees in urban areas, restoring rivers and streams in our cities, protecting open space, and protecting beaches and coastal waters.

All areas of California are treated fairly by Proposition 40. Many of the funds are allocated in proportion to population to ensure that bond money is spent where most Californians live, work and play. Small cities and rural counties will also benefit greatly from Proposition 40. The minimum grant provided by the per capita program is \$220,000 for cities and \$1.2 million for counties, enough funds to make a difference in meeting local priorities for acquisition and development of local parks.

Proposition 40 is the latest of a long line of park bond acts dating back to the 1920s. However, there has been only one park bond act in the past twelve years. California has added more than five million people since 1988, and must continue to invest in clean water, clean air, places to recreate, and places for children to play safely. Proposition 40 was placed on the ballot by the Legislature and the Governor to improve the quality of life in our state. Tremendous leadership was shown by Assembly Speaker Hertzberg and Speaker Pro Tem Keeley, and by Senate President pro tem Burton.

If you would like to join in the campaign to pass Prop 40, contact Yes on Proposition 40, 926 J St., #612, Sacramento, CA 95814, or call 916-444-8726.

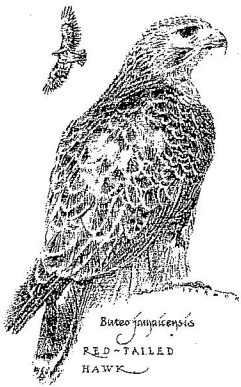
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archeologist R.F. Heizer was out collecting firewood. Off Entrada Road in what is now part of Topanga State Park, excavators from UC Berkeley and UCLA uncovered a village site estimated to be 8,000 years old. Stone grinding tools and numerous skeletons were discovered there. Near the site, another similar village was found and excavated by a UCLA field class in 1965. Dating back 2,600 years, the location was unique in that stone-lined pits used by the Chumash to roast yucca stalks were discovered.

"The main things we find today are the bedrock mortars," said Russ Guiney of the CA Dept. of Parks and Recreation. "In Topanga, a lot of Chumash artifacts have been found--remnants of fire, cooking, food preparation and burial sites. As erosion occurs, more artifacts are discovered. We are sensitive to protecting these sacred objects."

But erosion may not beat the test of development. In fact, the center of town along Topanga Canyon Blvd. once was a Chumash burial site. "We don't have a real good future, but at least in Topanga, land is destroyed at a slower rate," King said. "Ultimately, we'll figure it out from the pieces that we find. Every year, we find less and less. That just makes it more challenging."

But to locals, the spirit of the land overshadows any such encroachments. "There's dreams that live in this canyon. That's what makes this place a sacred site. It connects us all to spirit," said a Topanga resident and Native American preservation activist. "That's what draws us here. When you stand quietly and listen, you can feel the spirit of these ancient people."



## UPCOMING HIKES

(BRING WATER, SUNSCREEN, SOCKS, LUGSOLES, HAT, SNACK. RAIN CANCELS.)

### Sierra Club Hikes

Sunday, 11/18 & 12/16 Stage Coach Trail Hike: Interpretative hike into history in our Santa Susana Pass State Historic Pk. Meet at 9 am for a 4 mi (700' gain) loop up Stage Coach Trail. From Topanga Canyon Blvd., turn W on Devonshire; drive into Chatsworth Park South to parking lot near Rec. Bldg. Leader: Lee Baum (818) 341-1850.

Weds. 11/28 Mission Peak Conditioning Hike: Moderate 5 mi, 1200' gain to view lights of San Fernando Valley. Meet 7 pm at trailhead (Take 405 Fwy to 118 Fwy W to Balboa, N 2 mi to Sesnon, W 1 mi to Neon Way, right to end of street). Leaders: Casey Bialas (661) 251-4619; Henry Schultz (661) 284-5613.

Sun. 12/2 Devil Canyon Hike: Moderate paced 3.5 mi, 300' gain. Stream crossings. Meet at 9 am at trailhead. Take 118 Fwy to Topanga Canyon exit, go N about 50 yds to end and park. Ldrs: Judy Garriss (818) 346-7654; Bob Galletly (818) 885-1920.

Thur. 12/6 O'Melveny Park Hike: Moderate pace 7 mi, 1200' gain. Meet 8:30 am at trailhead. N on Balboa Blvd. to Orocco, turn left, go to Sesnon, turn left, go 1/4 block to trailhead, park in lot. Ldr: Joanne Profit (818) 718-7581; Asst: Romona Dunn (818) 783-8318.

Thur. 12/13 Weldon Canyon Hike: Moderate pace 6-8 mi on newly opened trail. 1000' gain through oaks, black walnut and fir trees. Meet at 8:30 am. Take I5 N to Calgrove exit, go W under freeway to Old Road, turn left, go 1 mi S, 300' past church to trailhead, park in lot near Santa Clarita Woodlands. Ldr: Nancy Krupa (818) 981-4799; Asst: Margaret Vernallis (818) 360-4414.

Thur. 1/3/02 Chumash Trail Hike: Moderate pace, 10 mi round trip, 1700' gain. Meet at 8:30 am at trailhead. Directions: take 118 Fwy to Yosemite exit. Go N on Yosemite, turn right on Flanagan Dr. Trailhead is at end of Flanagan Dr. Ldr: Ants Leps (818) 993-7689; Asst: Virve Leps.

### Rancho Simi Trail Blazers Hikes

Every Thursday (except 11/22) - Chumash Trail Hike: Moderate pace, 5 mi, approximately 1000' gain. Meet at 6 pm at trailhead. Directions: take 118 to Yosemite exit. Go N on Yosemite, turn right on Flanagan Dr. Trailhead is at the end of Flanagan Dr.

Every Sunday - Rocky Peak Trail Hike: Strenuous, 5 mi, approximately 1000' gain. Meet at 4 pm at trailhead. Take 118 to Rocky Peak exit. Trailhead is N of fwy.

*(For more information, contact the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District at 805-584-4400.)*

### Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy / Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority Programs & Hikes:

Sat. 12/8 East Canyon: Animal Tracks Program, 9:30-11:30 am

*(For more*

Sun. 12/9 East Canyon: Mammals of the Canyon, 2:00-4:00 pm

*info, call*

Sat. 12/15 Towsley Canyon: Campfire Program, 5:00-7:00 pm

*310-589-3200)*

Directions to Towsley Canyon Park & East Canyon: Traveling N, take Calgrove exit from I-5. Turn W back under fry and take Old Road S, proceed to 1st driveway on right. Look for sign "Ed Davis Park at Towsley Canyon". Park in back lot; meet at kiosk. East Canyon is located approximately 1 mi further S on the Old Road.

### **INTERESTED IN SAN FERNANDO VALLEY HISTORY?**

Have you ever visited the **Canoga-Owensmouth Historical Society Museum**? It's rich in history and replete with old photos and fascinating historical information about the SFV. If you are lucky, your docents will be Beth and Howard Shirley, parents of SSMPA board member: Jim Shirley. The next opportunity to visit will be **Sunday, December 9th between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m.** Address: **7248 Owensmouth Ave., Canoga Park** (next to the library).

Also, CSUN's new **SFV History Digital Library** is now up and running. Try [digital-library.csun.edu](http://digital-library.csun.edu) for a great ride! The online collection includes more than 2,200 historical photos and documents about the SFV, carefully alphabetized and in true colors.

## WHAT IS A CONSERVATION EASEMENT?



Many individuals call MRT to inquire on how property can be conserved and protected. There are several methods. One of the most flexible and practical approaches is placing a conservation easement on the property. Land trusts from coast to coast utilize conservation easements to protect land parcels and preserve their valued resources. In fact, almost 3 million acres in the United States are covered by a conservation easement.

During 2000, MRT accepted two significant easements from concerned land owners in the Los Angeles area. In one instance, the owner's residence was located on 2.4 acres where four additional lots could be created. By placing a conservation easement on the vacant portions of his property, the owner decreased the value of the property to gain a substantial tax deduction and reduced his property taxes. And, most importantly, he protected important natural habitat and a wonderful view surrounding his home and neighborhood.

The second land owner placed a conservation easement on 40-acres of residential property located in Malibu and within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. This easement protects scenic resources as well as provide for wildlife movement within the Santa Monica Mountains.

*So, just what is a conservation easement?* Below, we provide a basic overview for your information.

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or a government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. It allows the land owner to continue to own and use the land and to sell it or pass it on to heirs.

When you donate a conservation easement to a land trust, you give up some of the rights associated with the land. For example, you might give up the right to build additional structures, while retaining the right to grow crops. Future owners also will be bound by the easement's terms. The land trust accepting the donation is responsible for making sure the easement's terms are followed.

### How restrictive is an easement?

An easement restricts development to the degree that is necessary to protect the significant values of that property. Sometimes this totally prohibits construction; sometimes it doesn't. For example, if the goal is to preserve a pristine natural area, an easement may prohibit activities that alter the land's present natural condition. Even the most restrictive easement typically permits land owners to continue traditional uses of the land.

### Can granting an easement reduce a property owner's income tax?

The donation of a conservation easement is a tax-deductible charitable gift, provided that the easement is perpetual and is donated exclusively for conservation purposes to a qualified conservation organization or public agency. To determine the value of the easement donation, the owner has the property appraised both at its fair market value without the easement restrictions and at its fair market value with the easement restrictions. The difference between these two appraised values is the tax deductible easement value.

### Can granting an easement reduce a property owner's estate tax?

Many heirs to large properties face monumental estate taxes. Federal estate tax is levied not on the value of the property for its existing use, but on its fair market value, usually the amount a developer or speculator would pay. A conservation easement often can reduce estate taxes. To the extent that the restricted value is lower than the unrestricted value, the value of the estate will be less, and the estate will thus be subject to a lower estate tax.

### Can granting an easement reduce an owner's property tax?

Property tax assessment usually is based on the property's market value, which reflects the property's development potential. If a conservation easement reduces the development potential of the property, it may reduce the level of assessment and the owner's property taxes.

This text is based on material distributed by the Land Trust Alliance.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR - BE INFORMED

On Saturday, Nov. 10th, The Presidio Group LLC gave tours of the future location of the 485 single homes subdivision planned for the area just north of the 118 freeway and the existing Twin Lakes homes. As noted on the map, there will be two entrance/exits: one at Topanga Canyon Blvd. and the other at Canoga Ave., and there will be two bridges constructed over the creek. The EIR for this project is "almost ready" to be released. Two informational meetings will be held at the Raddison Hotel on Topanga Cyn. Blvd., both at 7:30 pm: (1) Thursday, Nov. 29: this meeting is primarily for residents of the Twin Lakes neighborhood to discuss neighborhood infrastructure issues, and (2) Thursday, Dec. 6: for all interested parties; to be discussed are EIR issues such as traffic impacts, ecology, fire protection and other issues relating to the City of Chatsworth and its residents. If you would like to be involved in helping to preserve the rural atmosphere of this area of Chatsworth, contact C.H.A.M.P. (Chatsworth Homeowners Alliance for Mountain Preservation) at (818) 882-2924; e-mail address: [CHAMPorg@aol.com](mailto:CHAMPorg@aol.com).



### CHATSWORTH OAK TREE DIES

Address: 9627 Andora Ave. Was a well established California Live Oak. Had been slowly dying beginning 4 years ago when the nearby houses were built. Located in a low area, it did not withstand the grading that changed the soil height around it. The rest of the story is clear--the roots must have been cut to put in the street and storm drains. Grading and heavy equipment should not be allowed near the oaks on this lot. The developer should have to post a bond (good for 5 to 10 years) to ensure preservation of the oaks.  
(Submitted by a neighbor)

### P.L.U.M. RECOMMENDS BRIDLE TRAIL - 10/23/01

A Chatsworth development dogged by controversy was recommended for approval on Tuesday after a city bowed to community wishes by ordering a second horse trail for the project. The City Council's Planning and Land Use Management Committee urged that a 12-foot-wide horse trail be required along Topanga Canyon Boulevard -- unless Caltrans decides it needs the land to widen the street. "We've never had a horse trail on Topanga Canyon -- anywhere along Topanga -- because of the safety concerns," said Councilman Hal Bernson, who represents the area. "But if we can do it without stopping the project, I'm in favor of it."

### NEWS FROM CHATSWORTH LAND PRESERVATION ASSN.

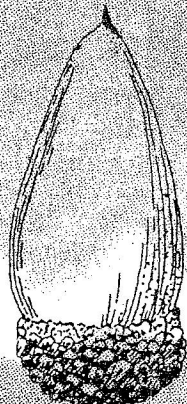
Law Suit Update Information as of November 10, 2001: CLPA timeline based upon City Council hearing on the tentative tract map: October 30, 2001: City Council votes to approve tentative tract map #53292 (vesting) at northwest corner of Topanga Cyn. Blvd. & Chatsworth St. for 20 RE-11 homes with equestrian trails on Topanga Cyn Blvd. & Chatsworth St. Within 30 days, Mayor of LA to sign an Ordinance of Approval (or Disapproval) of the tract. About 10 days following, CLPA expects the City Attorney to request the court to "reactivate the law suit". Defendant, City of LA requested months ago, when the tentative tract approval process began, that our case be suspended until this legislative process was concluded. CLPA agreed, as did our attorneys, Chatten-Brown and Associates. In addition, CLPA is responsible for compiling the legislative record for our case and the court, as well as transcribe all the taped recordings of all the hearings that were held on our case. The court only accepts written transcriptions (by a "certified/bonded" copier and an official court reporter or transcriber). December 2001/January 2002, CLPA expects a routine settlement hearing required by the Court to take place. All parties may discuss settlement possibilities (if any) and/or explore options of the case. If no settlement is reached: Late January, early February, CLPA expects to present our case to the Court. Defendants then present their arguments, which CLPA may counter in a final presentation. All submissions in this type of case are in written form presented to a single judge, with no oral cross-examinations. *Donations for this cause can be mailed to: CLPA, PO Box 4183, Chatsworth, CA 91313.*

Thank you for renewing your membership to SSMPA!

Tony Gaudenti, Jeffery & Lisa Burkhart, Merrily Lovell, Keith & Debra Larson & Judy Garris.

## SANTA SUSANA MOUNTAIN PARK ASSOCIATION

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN / RENEW / REJOIN S.S.M.P.A. (Please circle one.)



valley oak

Investing in the future of our communities and its resources is probably one of the best expenditures of our time and efforts. Return this cutoff with your contributions to help ensure our futures. Please make checks payable to SSMPA and send to SSMPA, P.O. Box 4831, Chatsworth, CA 91313-4831.

- Senior or Student (\$5.00)     Individual (\$10.00)     Family (\$15.00)  
 Business or Organization (\$25.00)     Life Member (\$100.00)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Interest/Expertise: \_\_\_\_\_

The purposes of the Santa Susana Mountain Park Association are the protection, preservation, restoration, and enhancement of the Santa Susana Mountains and Simi Hills as open space lands and wildlife corridors linking the Los Padres National Forest and San Gabriel Mountains, including the Angeles National Forest, to the Santa Monica Mountains; as habitats for plants and animals native to the Santa Susana Mountains and the Simi Hills; as locales of unique geologic formations; as sites of ethnological, archaeological and historical interests; to provide passive recreational opportunities and environmental education opportunities; and, to support the acquisition of new public parks, open space and conservation easements, the expansion of existing parks, participate in the planning of park infrastructure and programs, and support said programs. To find out how you can volunteer for SSMPA, call Judy Garris, President, at 818-346-7654 or Susan Gerke, Newsletter Editor, at 818-704-9304.

 **Mark your calendar**  

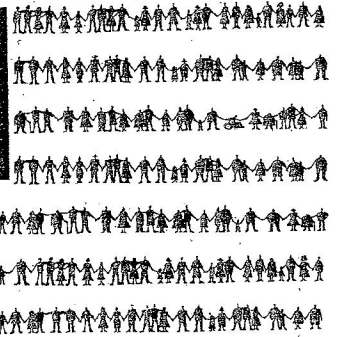
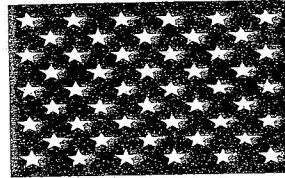
**SSMPA BOARD MEETINGS**  
 @ Chatsworth Park South Visitors Center:  
Monday, December 3rd at 7:30 p.m.

**SSMPA PROGRAM MEETINGS**  
 @ Rockpointe Clubhouse:  
Monday, January 21, 2002, 7:15 p.m.

Please note the renewal date on your label and send in your dues  if you wish to continue your SSMPA membership and receive the newsletter. If you are current with your dues, kindly disregard this notice. If you are a Life Member, we thank you and invite your continued support with periodic donations to help meet the costs of producing this newsletter.

**SSMPA Executive Board 2001-2002**

Judy Garris, President	818-346-7654
Dorian Keyser, Vice President, Program Chair	818-345-3795
Sandra Johnson, Recording Secretary	818-341-0341
Diana Dixon-Davis, Treasurer	818-341-4242
Jim Shirley, Member at Large	818-888-7631
Susan Gerke, Member at Large, Newsletter Editor	818-704-9304
Holly Huff, Member at Large	805-526-0961
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