

Hello Nature Friends,

The lazy, happy days of summer are upon us! Years ago, the Nature Center was a slow place during the hot months of July and August. The parking lot was empty and the building was quiet, the only sound being the soft hum of the air conditioning...

That was years ago, and those quiet days are long gone. The parking lot is constantly busy now. Hikers show up earlier in the morning, but many people also come later in the afternoon to take a stroll.

Children are out of school and parents take them to Placerita to visit our interpretive center at any time of day. Staff and docents are happy to answer their questions, brighten their days, show animals and give some nature education. Some show up with a picnic and eat under the shade of the oak trees. Because we live in Southern California, we enjoy clear nights all summer long. Looking at the stars and enjoying the moonlight is an experience that really spells summer time for me. Read about the new program "Twilight hike" in the calendar section and plan to come at least one time this summer, it will be a very special and lasting memory.

We wish you all a very happy summer, we hope you will have time to visit new places, see friends and enjoy yourself. Rest assured, the Nature Center will be there when you come back and we welcome you with open arms always!



Goodbye "Slingshot Tree"

by Ron Kraus

The old oak tree, called the "Slingshot Tree" by some of the Walker family fell over recently. It's on the right side of the picture in the upper photo, taken in the 30's. The bottom picture shows the tree and the area today. The oak has been declining for a few years, but I was sorry to see it go--I used it during docent training to mark the location of the Walker Summer House.

It was a really old oak judging by its size and the gnarled bark. I think it was its time.



The Rattler

Sponsored by the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates
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Placerita Canyon Nature Center Over 50 Years of Nature Education July-August 2016

President's Message

Hope you all are enjoying your summer. July and August are traditionally the slow months around Placerita Canyon for our docent programs. We really don't disappear in the summer, but the school tours have ended and many of us are off on our summer vacations.

What a great school year we had! We had another record year—I think we booked up all available dates sooner than ever before. Thanks to all who volunteered and a big thanks to our Lanita, our reservation coordinator.

Our other on-going programs continued with great success—outreaches, nature boxes, weeding, trail crew, museum committee & docents, bee exhibit committee, taxidermy improvements, gift shop, bird walks, wildflower walks, Saturday family nature walks & animal shows, and the Community Nature Education series

The special events were VERY special: the Craft Fair in December (thanks Mari & all who helped), the Peet's Coffee Holiday Fundraiser (raised \$1,000 for our programs), the Open House (thanks Joan, Andrea and Sandy Balaram for the heading it up and all of you who volunteered), and the History Mural anniversary celebration in May (thanks to Herb.)

We had a great docent class of 2016, the members of which are very active in many programs. On a somber note, we said goodbye to Paul Levine--docent, friend and Arthropod instructor on January 25th. Thanks to our great staff—Russ, Frank, Jeff, Agustine, & Marietta—for supporting us and keeping the center running in tip top shape!

There are a few dates to remember this summer, so be sure to check the calendar. You won't be sorry.

Enjoy yourselves this summer, stay cool, and let's all look forward to a great 2016/2017 school year!

Ron Kraus, President PCNCA



Taxidermy Update

We have one taxidermy expert at Placerita and her name is Olivia Miseroy. She has learned this art over many years, and we have been so grateful for all her help with the Interpretive Center.

She recently completed and installed the new cottontail taxidermy and rattlesnake model and we could not be happier. We are delighted with your talent, thank you so much Olivia.

The Election

Yes, we also have those at Placerita! Jim Crowley and Dan Kott were the board election committee. Thanks so much to you both! We elect half the board each year, to maintain continuity and enable efficient operations.

Here is the new board who will work hard to make Placerita a better place: Fred Seeley, Corresponding Secretary; Jack Levenberg, Vice President; Rick Brammer, Treasurer; Members at Large: RuthAnne Murthy (new member), Bill Webber and 2 new alternates, Denny Truger and Joan Fincutter.

Existing board members remaining until May 2017 are: Ron Kraus, President; Recording Secretary: Mari Carbajal; members at large: Sue Sutton, Evelyne Vandersande, Heidi Webber and Vicki Cunningham.

Congratulations and thanks to you all.



40 Year Anniversary of the Mural

by SCVNews

Exactly 40 years after it was dedicated, the artist responsible for the mural next to the Oak of the Golden Dream returned to Placerita Canyon State Park to describe its features and explain how he did it.

Rudolph "Rudy" Pavini, now 81, was working at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center as a naturalist when the Los Angeles County Parks Department persuaded him in 1976 to paint a mural on the walls of the flood-control channel where Placerita Canyon Road crosses Placerita Creek. The mural was to depict the history of the park.

Pavini, who lives in Canyon Country, was neither a naturalist nor a historian by trade; he was an artist. Born in Massachusetts, Pavini attended art school in Boston and taught art for 25 years in elementary schools and after-school programs.

So he researched the history of the area in the local library and decided to paint six panels, each representing a different point in history.

Hiking along the trail from the Nature Center to the famous golden oak, viewers walk forward in time from pre-dawn of man through the arrival of Tataviam Indians, followed by the Spanish, Mexican and finally the American periods

One of the best known features is Pavini's depiction of Francisco Lopez and the nearby tree where legend tells us Lopez napped, dreamed of riches, and awoke to discover gold flakes clinging to the roots of some wild onions.

A favorite among visiting schoolchildren is the last panel, which shows prospectors sitting around a morning campfire, preparing for another hard day's work.

It took Pavini three months to complete the mural, which was dedicated May 23, 1976. He said he was still leading schoolchildren on hikes while he worked on it; he occasionally enlisted their aid in painting lower portions of the mural while he worked on the upper portions, which required scaffolding.

Addressing a group of several dozen Placerita Canyon Nature Center volunteers and county park staff members Monday, Pavini revealed some hidden secrets of the mural. Upon close inspection, the viewer will see that certain features are raised; Pavini used a polymer mixture with local sand to create the texture of the riverbed, and he used sawdust for the bark of the golden oak. Irregularities in pictures of boulders represent Native American petroglyphs, and the rider on horseback in a late-afternoon scene with a reddish orange sky is intended to be Francisco Lopez.

By and large, the acrylic painting has withstood the ravages of time. Ranger Frank Hoffman said he has seen water to a 5-foot level in the channel during El Nino weather events, covering lower portions of the mural, which is only about three feet off the ground in certain places. Most of the mural is shielded from direct sunlight, and Pavini said he used a protective coating so it can be cleaned.

S U M M E R P R O G R A M S

FAMILY NATURE WALK

Every Saturday from 11 to noon.

An easy 1-hour walk exploring the area's natural and cultural history.

ANIMAL PRESENTATION

Every Saturday from 1 to 2 pm.

See, learn and ask questions about live native animals of the area.

BIRD WALK

Second Saturday of the month from 8 to 10am. For all levels of birders. Bring binoculars, water and field guide.

BIRD WALK, CASTAIC

The Placerita Canyon Natural Area docents lead a monthly bird walk at **Castaic Lake Recreation Area** on the first Saturday of the month at 8:00AM.

BLOOMS OF THE SEASON

Learn about native plants and what is blooming along the trails. Meet in the patio at 9:30 for a one-hour stroll on the fourth Saturday of every month. Bring your camera and questions. For more information about this free program, call 661.259.7721 or 259.7832.

NATURE EDUCATION

An exciting program at Placerita in conjunction with the Community Hiking Club. Every 3rd Sunday of the month at 2pm the PCNCA and CHC will provide a free educational program open to the public. July 17th- Travel to Antarctica and Patagonia by Nikki Dail.

August 21st – Wolves presentation by The Wolf Foundation. This is a very popular presentation and we recommend that you arrive early.

TWILIGHT HIKES

This program is offered on the third Saturday of each month; these programs will begin at 7:00 pm and run for about an hour. These programs are extremely popular and we recommend that you come to the center 10 minutes before the start of the program to help with the planning of the different groups.

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS Saturday, August 20th 9am at the Nature Center. It is a great opportunity for the docents to get together for a pot luck breakfast and to participate in a game to brush up on their knowledge during the long summer. Ron Kraus, PCNCA President, will be the MC.

Changes may be made, so please contact the center at 661.259.7721 to verify.

For more information, please call 661.259.7721 or visit our website at Placerita.org.



Farewell to the 2015-2016 School Tours

The Placerita Docents/Naturalists met on Saturday evening June 4th to celebrate another highly successful year. After the delicious pot luck dinner, the president of the PCNCA, Ron Kraus, served as the MC of the awards presentations. He first described just of sampling of the accomplishments of this year. Some of them include the Family Hikes, Animal Shows, Nature Boxes, Museum Interpretation, Gift Shop sales, Bird Walks, Blooms of the Season Hikes, Craft

Fair, Open House, Peet's Coffee outreach, school outreaches, the visit from Rudy Pavini, the Lyon's Oak Interpretive project, the Tataviam Interpretive project, the Walker Cabin Interpretive project, docent training, a redesigned website, and much more. He thanked Olivia Miseroy for her taxidermy contributions.

The school field trips are the core of our program. It was a full year, and Lanita had to turn away 112 schools who wanted to visit because we were fully booked. Thank you Lanita and all the docents who volunteered. What a year it has been!

Most importantly, Jim awarded five well-deserving docents gift cards to honor their dedication to the Nature Center. Those honored were Al Hofstatter, Jack Levenberg, Fred Seeley, Shirley Morano, and Ray Davis. Each of these special people continue to bring their special touch to the program.

A special tribute was given to Vicki Cunningham. She received the 1st Paul Levine Cup for Excellence in Interpretation. Congratulations to Vicki for her continuing excellence. She is a role model for all of the docents. Thank you!

Ghost Bike Memorial to Rod Bennett on Placerita Canyon Road

Roderick Travis "Rod" Bennett, teacher, musician, sports fan, cyclist, kayaker, fisherman and 24-year resident of Santa Clarita, California, died on May 25, 2016, when he was struck by a car while riding his bicycle on Placerita Canyon Road.

This accident did not happen near the Nature Center but close to the overpass of Freeway 14.

You might notice the white bicycle that has been set up as a roadside memorial at the place of the accident. It is also intended as a reminder to passing motorists to share the road.



photo by Ron Kraus



Trail Treasures

By RuthAnne Murthy

California Buckwheat *Eriogonum fasciculatum*

The topic of this Trail Treasures is one of the most common plants of the chaparral, California Buckwheat. It is so ubiquitous that it is easily overlooked. It is a 2-4 foot high perennial woody shrub that grows below 7500 feet preferring dry slopes.

It blooms from March to November. The flowers are in small clusters stemming out from an umbel, like the spokes of a wagon. They often bud a rosy pink, turn white, and then finally, a rusty brown. They are about 1 inch in diameter. Each flower produces a single seed.

The leaves are very narrow and in tight bundles called fascicles. The dark green leaves have fuzzy white undersides. The leaves are about 3/4 inch long.

The Tataviam Indians used the seeds for food. The seeds could be eaten without preparation that made them perfect for trail food while hunting. The seeds were cooked with acorn meal to enrich gruel or flatbread. The leaves and stems were steeped to make a tea used as a remedy for colds, headaches, urinary tract infection, and stomach aches. The fresh flowers were eaten as a laxative.

So when you come across California Buckwheat, you will know not to take this important plant for granted. It is truly a Trail Treasure



News from the Beehive

In a previous Rattler, we announced that we have a new queen in the hive. The bees look as though they may be ready to swarm again, and if they do, another new queen will be needed.

You have no idea how proud it makes us to be able to write something like this! It shows how well this program was handled, all the care and attention to detail that was taken all along the way and what a great success it is.

Adults and children are delighted to be able to see the bee activity from so close.



photo by Ron Kraus

Blooms of the Season Hike

Each 4th Saturday at 9:30 am, a great group of wildflower lovers meet at Placerita Nature Center to explore the flowers and learn about their habitats. Most of us bring our cameras to capture the blooms at their peak. The meandering walk takes place on various trails. It is scheduled for an hour, but usually we are so enthralled that we go overtime.

Even in the heat of the summer we find some hardy flowers to enjoy. Because there are fewer summer blooms, we have a topic that we explore to increase our knowledge of our native plants.

We hope you will join us. Wear cool clothing, hat, and sunscreen. Don't forget water and your camera.

Open House

by Andrea Donner

Placerita Nature Center's annual Open House on May 14th, was a huge success, and was well attended. Each year Placerita Nature Center holds this event to give back to the community, and thank them for all their support. This year, approximately 60 volunteer docents and the County staff at Placerita Nature Center set up about 47 tables displaying vendors, non-profit agencies, crafts, educational and fun activities.



Theodore Payne Institute, Sierra Club, SCOPE, Redbird Vision, Animal Tracks, were just some of the non-profit organizations providing information for the community.

There were several fun crafts for the children including rock painting and a craft depicting the frog life cycle. The children also enjoyed finding items at the event for the Treasure Hunt, and the ever popular face painting. Panning for gold was fun for all, and of course meeting Smokey the Bear was a highlight.



Also represented were several organizations and clubs, including the Astronomy Club, Community Hiking Club, Southwest Herp Society, Sierra Pelona Rock Club and Audubon Society. Nature Boxes, which were made by Placerita docents, were scattered throughout the event and provided hands on experiences in different topics such as plants, mammals, birds and geology. Other hands on activities for children and adults were, weaving with a heddle loom, using a cross cut saw, and of course doing your laundry with an old fashion scrubbing board.

Throughout the event, people were entertained by a fun, country music band. A food truck from Acton Market provided delicious Bar-B-Q chicken and ribs, for people to purchase.

The event was fun for everyone, and although the purpose was not to make money, it did make some profit, which went back to Placerita to help feed the animals.

If you weren't able to join us this year, mark your calendar for the second Saturday in May 2017, and hopefully you can join us.

Meet Denny Truger

I was born in San Francisco and raised in Glendale California. In San Francisco I remember my father growing a victory garden. My Mom still talks about how sweet the corn tasted. When I was three we moved to Glendale, Ca. and that's where I went to school, eventually graduating from



Hoover High. I then went to Glendale and Pierce Colleges. After working at 31 Flavors, selling shoes at JC Penney's and not knowing what career path to take, I followed my Maternal Grandfather, Uncle, Father, and brother to become an electrician. I'm very so happy with that choice.

Growing up, my summer vacations going to Idaho to visit my paternal grandparents were the best times of my life. My grandfather was a hard-rock gold and silver miner. The last time I visited, my grandfather confessed that he had gold fever (we all knew that) and he was sure that gold was just one more blast away. My grandmother was the best cook ever and loved all animals. This is where I developed my love for nature and the outdoors. My brother and I were always hiking, feeding the squirrels, chipmunks, birds, chickens and porcupines, along with playing around the mines equipment. Great times.

I spend 45 years as a Union Electrician. I moved a few times and wound up in Agua Dulce. When I retired I found Placerita Nature Center thru an advertisement in the Acton/Agua Dulce Country Journal. They were looking for docents, so I went for it and I graduated in the docent class of 2012. I had never been to the Nature Center before and it was a perfect fit for me. I've made lots of friends and I hope they will be life long.

My accomplishment that I am most proud of at Placerita is the Tatavium Village. It had been derelict for many years so I got together a band of docents along with the board of directors approval and we put it back together with some extras.

When I was working I didn't do much traveling, but I'm changing that now. It's funny, I've never been busier and happier since I retired.



"Invasive Plant Removal Team"

by Robert Grzesiak

This is the new name for the incredible team trying to battle the invasive plants at Placerita. They will take a break in the hot summer months. This is what they did in June.

"We focused on removing 6 Tamarisk bushes from the Ecology Trail and along the Heritage trail. We tried removing them with pry bars, but the Tamarisk roots were too deep to make them effective. Besides weeding the school trails, we have decided to focus on removing invasive weeds around the pond and restore native plants that host or feed butterflies.

Our next meeting will not be till the first Monday in October. We will have a grand kick-off with pizza. Come on out, it is rewarding and educational. In the meantime, we will be collecting seeds (from Placerita only) for the restoration such as buckwheat species, California Milkweed, Santa Barbara Milkweetch, Lupines, Malva, Johnny Jump-up pansies and Common Sand aster.

Sue and Allan Wallander have done a great job in establishing the Narrow leaf Milkweed in front of the pond in memory of Paul Levine. Check it out next time you are in the park".