

## February 2005 Newsletter

### General Membership Program Meeting: Monday, February 21, 2005

Please plan to attend this meeting and welcome our speaker for the evening, **Melanie Winter**.

Melanie is the founder and director of The River Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting comprehensive watershed-based planning for natural resource protection and enhancement in LA County. The River Project provides hands-on educational programs, designs and builds river parks, works with communities to revitalize the river in their neighborhood and undertakes scientific research projects that support healthy watersheds. The project will begin development of a watershed management plan for the Tujunga Wash subwatershed in January 2005. Its Valleyheart Greenway project in Studio City opened in June 2004.

Melanie has been instrumental in securing over \$100 million in State funds for the LA River. She spearheaded the Coalition for a State Park at Taylor Yard, a success that led to the acquisition of the first 58 acres of what will ultimately become a 100-acre LA River State Park. She serves on the County's LA River Master Plan Advisory Committee, the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee, and is a liaison to the Board of the LA and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council. She served as advisory to the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy in shaping their project priorities, and currently serves on the steering committees for the City's Integrated Resource Plan and CREST (Cleaner Rivers through Effective Stakeholder TMDLs).

Prior to founding The River Project, Melanie was executive director of Friends of the Los Angeles River. Last year she was honored by Sunset Magazine as the first recipient of their annual environmental award "Champions of the West."

*SSMPA General Membership Program meetings take place every 3rd Monday of the months during the months of September through November and January through May. Program meetings begin at 7:15 p.m. and generally conclude by 9:00 p.m. The venue is the Rockpointe Clubhouse, 22300 Devonshire, Chatsworth, on the south side, 1 block before entering Chatsworth Park South. Refreshments are served at program meetings. ▲*



Great Blue Heron

**Thank you for renewing your SSMPA membership:** Patricia Milow, Bob & Kathy Goldberg, de Sosa Family, Amanda Welbourn, Doreen Rusen, Jan & Patty Miller, Joanne Proffit, Mary Mcmannes, Terrie Brady, Bill Shore & Erica Stux-Shore, Cecelia Heppes, Leon & Shirley Brown, and Donald & Diane Fike (thank you for your extra donation!). **Welcome, New Members:** Kathryn Gaffney, Tom Harrison, and Fred A. Berk. **New Life Member:** Susan Gerke.

### Oak Trees Marked

The neighbor panicked when she first saw the red paint marks on the beautiful oak trees set back from the corner of Topanga Cyn. Blvd. and Tulsa, the corner where Vargas Ranch sold their goods at their stall for so many years. ↘

Quickly she made some phone calls to find out what was going on. She discovered that the new development scheduled for that corner would have 11-13 homes on 16 lots, and the entrance would be where the oaks reside, but - per the City Street Trees Division - no permit to remove the trees had been recorded...yet. And, per Caltrans, which is the entity specifically in charge of oaks on Topanga Cyn. Blvd., removal of oak trees is disallowed. The developer was asked about the red marks, but was himself in the dark. So why were they marked? What, if anything, will happen to them? Perhaps upon his return visit to a future Chatsworth Neighborhood Council meeting to present his full plan and to answer questions, we'll find out. Stay posted for a notice of that date.

### Oak Tree Lost

On New Year's Eve of 2004, in the late afternoon, Brent and Carla had just finished their hike behind Chatsworth Oaks Park. Carla went to the truck to sit for a bit and study her maps. Soon after she got out, a large Coast Live oak toppled over, falling directly onto the truck.

This heritage oak was at least 300 years old. It was healthy, as anyone could tell by examining the exposed root system. It didn't mind living right next to the parking lot there at the park, sheltering cars from the summer heat and providing cover for picnickers. But it might have preferred to keep its canopy, the beautiful balanced spread of low branches that is natural for oaks to have. Through the years, branches were cut back by the park employees, here and there, to give way for cars and people. With the recent heavy winter rains, the beautiful tree seemed to lose its balance, there in the soggy, grassy park. With a very loud, resounding crack, it fell to the ground. No human was hurt. Days later, the mammoth tree was cut up and removed by the City. ↘



### Las Lomas Update

The last large open space of unincorporated county land between the Golden State and Antelope Valley freeways appears has been saved, at least for the time being. Las Lomas, a 5,800-home mini-city proposed for the steep hills between L.A. and Santa Clarita, brought together city officials who cut a deal in December to split jurisdiction of the 555 acres in the Newhall Pass.

Both cities had concerns that the development would have put too much strain on the region's traffic and resources. An informal agreement was reached to divide the land along the ridgeline and impose strict zoning requirements that would prevent Las Lomas from being developed.

The Las Lomas project would have uprooted 3,000 oak trees and removed 20 million cubic yards of dirt.



# U P C O M I N G H I K E S

**Sunday, 2/20 - Old Stagecoach Trail & Devil's Slide - 9:00 a.m.** Interpretative hike into colorful history in our Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park. 4 mi, 700' gain loop up the Stagecoach Trail. From Topanga Canyon Blvd., turn W on Devonshire, drive into Chatsworth Park S to parking lot at end. Leaders: Lee Baum, Judy Garris, Bob Galletly. (Sierra Club - Santa Susana Mountains Task Force)

**Sunday, 2/27 - Devil Canyon - 1:00 p.m.** Easy-paced, moderate, 5 mi, 300' gain nature hike through steep-sided canyon with some boulder hopping over stream. Explore mosaic of plant communities with fire recovery along upper slopes. Short stops for nature interpretations. Meet at N end of Topanga Cyn Blvd (N of 118 Fwy, L on Poema Pl to park). Wear long pants. Leaders: Judy Garris, Teena Takata. Call 818-346-7654 for info. (Sierra Club - Santa Susana Mountains Task Force)

**Sunday, 2/27 - Rocky Peak - 4:00 p.m.** Strenuous, 5 mi, 1000' gain hike. Meet at trailhead (from 118 Fwy W, exit Rocky Pk turnoff, park to R or L of bridge). (Rancho Simi Trail Blazers)

**Tuesday, 3/1 - Top of Reseda/Hub/Eagle Rock - 8:30 a.m.** Easy-paced, moderate, 4-6 mi, 1200' gain hike. Meet at top of Reseda Blvd. (3 mi S of Ventura Blvd - \$3 fee or park below white lines). Leaders: Ramona Dunn, Judy Garris, Marcia Harris. (Sierra Club - Santa Susana Mountains Task Force)

**Tuesday, 3/8 - Devil Canyon - 8:30 a.m.** Easy-paced, moderate, 5 mi, 300' gain nature hike through steep-sided canyon with some boulder hopping over stream. Explore mosaic of plant communities with fire recovery along upper slopes. Short stops for nature interpretations. Meet at N end of Topanga Cyn Blvd (N of 118 Fwy, L on Poema Pl to park). Wear long pants. Leaders: Ramona Dunn, Judy Garris, Marcia Harris. (Sierra Club - Santa Susana Mountains Task Force)

**Saturday, 3/12 - Old Stagecoach Trail & Devil's Slide - 9:00 a.m.** Interpretative hike into colorful history in our Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park. 4 mi, 700' gain loop up the Stagecoach Trail. From Topanga Canyon Blvd., turn W on Devonshire, drive into Chatsworth Park S to parking lot at end. Leaders: Susan Gerke, Bob Galletly. (Sierra Club - Santa Susana Mountains Task Force)

**Saturday, 3/19 - Wildflower Walk in Devil Canyon - 9:00 a.m.** Slow-paced wildflower walk. Meet at the north end of Topanga Canyon Blvd. Leader: Judy Garris. Call 818-346-7654 for more info. (California Native Plant Society hike)

**Sunday, 3/20 - Johnson Motorway to Rocky Peak Rd - 9:00 a.m.** Easy-paced 7 mi, 1000' gain hike. Meet at end of Iverson Rd (from Topanga Cyn Blvd, go N and R on Santa Susana Pass Rd, ¼ mi to Iverson Rd, just past Rocky Pk Church, turn R, follow road to underpass, park on dirt.) Leaders: Gabe Sende, Steffi Schadel. (Sierra Club)

**Tuesday, 3/29 - Towsley Cyn./Santa Clarita Woodlands Pk - 8:30 a.m.** Easy-paced, moderate, 4-6 mi, 1300' gain hike with great vistas, a chilly narrows, diverse plant life and tar seeps. Meet at Ed Davis Pk, The Old Rd, Newhall (take Calgrove exit from 1-5 Fwy, W back under freeway, take The Old Rd S, R ½ mi to entrance on R, drive on dirt rd to Nature Ctr and parking lot [possible \$3-5 fee]). Leaders: Ramona Dunn, Judy Garris, Marcia Harris. (Sierra Club - Santa Susana Mountains Task Force)

**Tuesday, 4/5 - Valley to the Sea - 8:00 a.m.** Easy-paced 8 mi, 800' gain hike to the HUB on Fire Rd #30 and continue to Sunset Blvd. Ride 3 buses and return to bottom of Reseda Blvd where cars will take hikers to their cars at top of Reseda Blvd. This is an all-day adventure and lots of fun. Meet at Gateway Pk at top of Reseda Blvd (3 mi S of Ventura Blvd; park along street below white line at beginning of fee area or \$3 to park at top). Be sure to bring 2 qts. water, etc. Leaders: Ramona Dunn, Judy Garris, Marcia Harris. (Sierra Club - Santa Susana Mountains Task Force)

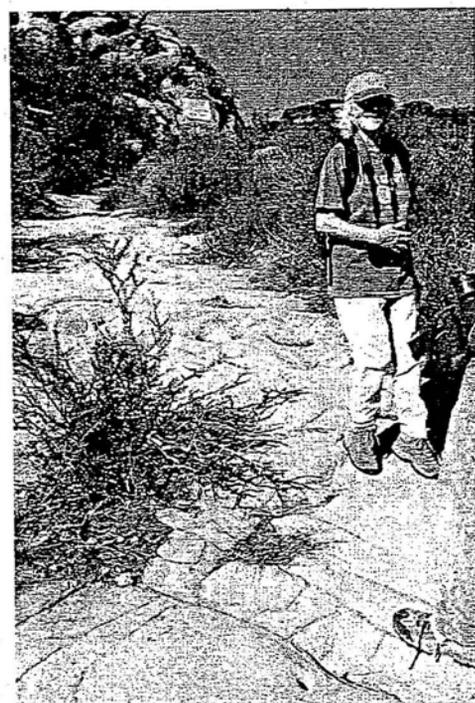
**Saturday, 4/9 - Dayton Canyon - 9:00 a.m.** Easy-paced 3 mi, 400' gain hike near prehistoric burial grounds to rock shelter overlooking Chatsworth Nature Preserve. Meet at gate. (From Topanga Canyon Blvd., turn W onto Roscoe, proceed to Valley Circle Blvd., cross intersection; park.) Leaders: Susan Gerke, Bob Galletly. (Sierra Club - Santa Susana Mountains Task Force)

Per Sierra Club guidelines, it is recommended that hikers wear sturdy shoes with tread or hiking boots and bring a quart of water. Most hikes stop for a snack break. SSMTF Outings Chair phone no.: (818) 346-7654.



Hiking Devil's Slide in the Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park - Dec. 4, 2004.

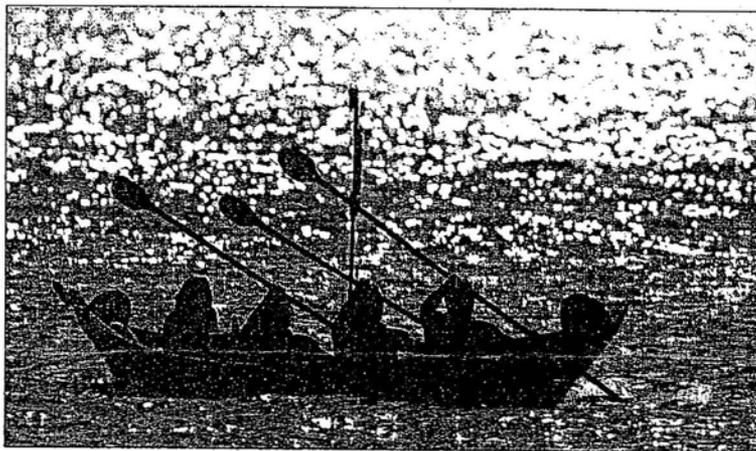
photos by Robert Kaptan



### Chumash Descendants Revive Channel Crossing

Notes of anthropologist John P. Harrington provided the blueprint for their tomol, an ancient seagoing plank canoe that first plied the waters between the Channel Islands and the mainland 2,000 years ago. Last September, for only the second time in at least 150 years, the Chumash people again made the 21-mile journey through the waters of Santa Barbara Channel. Some 200 people erupted in cheers at its arrival on Santa Cruz Island, a place honored by Chumash legend as the source of human life. As the tomol approached the island, the paddlers raised their paddles in salutation.

Three shifts of paddlers were used, with the last consisting of teenagers and young men who were handed the tomol tradition as a rite of passage.



September 11, 2004 - Members of the Chumash Maritime Assn. paddle a replica of a tomol from Oxnard to Santa Cruz Island.

From SSMPA Board Member

Carla Henry:

*"A friend of mine in the Paradigm Poetry group wrote this poem, inspired, as she drives to work along the 118 in Simi Valley, by what she sees happening there."*

### SHAVING

by: Chris Beauvais

Earthmovers shave layers of  
chaparral, scrub oak  
dried by western sun.

Huge dozer blades cut  
precise depths along the base,  
hillsides trimmed back,  
acres of adobe clay removed.

Water trucks follow,  
splash gallons,  
on exposed earth,  
to reduce dust  
that clogs engines.

Day after day I watch this ritual,  
remember scratching sounds  
as my father scraped the double edge  
across his cheek.

Hills layered to flatness,  
leveled for the new mall,  
designed for the clean,  
natural look.

### Sphere of Influence

On December 14, 2004, at a duly noticed joint meeting of the Neighborhood Council Planning and Land Use Committees of Neighborhood Councils of Districts 2 and 7, the LA City Planning Dept., by its representative, Mr. Platkin, presented a proposal to change the "Sphere of Influence" Negative Declaration 841-04-PL: ENV-2004-7108. The deadline for public comments to the proposal was given as December 27<sup>th</sup>.

In attendance at the meeting were appointed and elected representatives from Chatsworth Neighborhood Council, Foothill Trails District Neighborhood Council, Granada Hills North Neighborhood Council, Porter Ranch Neighborhood Council, Sunland Tujunga Neighborhood Council, Sylmar Neighborhood Council, and West Hills Neighborhood Council. The proposed sphere of influence area comprises over 19,000 acres, 30 square miles per the Negative Declaration – a significant increase in land influenced by the City of Los Angeles by any means or method of counting.

Mr. Platkin stated that some material regarding this proposal would not be available until January 2005, which produced concern among attendees as this would be well after the deadline for comment. Other concerns and unanswered questions resulted in the following drafted response statement to the City by the Chatsworth Neighborhood Council (CNC):

The CNC does not agree with the Sphere of Influence Proposal.

- The CNC wants the existing undeveloped areas to remain as open space for wildlife corridors, preservation of natural landscapes and passive recreational uses.
- We ask that the City adopt the County proposed SEA standards in these areas. These proposals have gone through extensive public review and comments with multiple meetings.
- Avoiding infrastructure development is critical because additional infrastructure enables greater density of development.
- In the recent Deerlake Ranch County subdivision case, we were severely disappointed when City Planning declined to provide traffic mitigation suggestions, or street layouts on an impacted Chatsworth Street, or any other concerns, even when directly asked at a County Regional Planning Commission hearing.

**A Sphere of Influence is not needed. The City should focus on re-development of underutilized and/or abandoned areas instead of further urban sprawl.**

## **Ecological Prototype, Powerful Conservation Tool... What is Green Burial?**

An alternative to funeral parlor practices is taking hold in America, and the movement has an interesting potential for conserving nature in open spaces, and right here in Southern California.

Proponents of home funerals and of green burials -- wherein bodies are legally interred in natural environments and in ways that promote decomposition -- claim that embalming and metal caskets are not only costly but toxic to body, spirit, land and communities, and lastly, are unnecessary.

In a "green" cemetery, land conservation (minimum disruption; use of only 5% of the land) is combined with natural burial techniques: no embalming fluid, biodegradable burial containers such as wood or a simple shroud, a flat rock or a tree as a marker. Endowment funds are dedicated to ecological restoration of the land, and a conservation easement for the land ensures that it cannot be developed in the future. Families can prepare their loved one themselves for burial, if they wish, which can provide an opportunity for them to lovingly tend to their dead instead of turning them over to others, and to experience healthy catharsis in this way. For-profit management operates the facility, digs the holes (sometimes the family prefers to do this part), builds the trails, and markets the facility.

Dr. Billy Campbell, Joe Seehe and Tyler Cassity are partners in making green burial places happen wherever they are welcome in the community. So far, green preserves have been successfully put in place in South Carolina (the first one, Ramsey Preserve, 35 acres), Marin County and Mill Valley, CA.

Campbell says they hope to work with conservation groups to open similar natural burial grounds across the country, each crisscrossed with hiking trails. "What we are doing is basically land conservation," Campbell says. "By setting aside a woods for natural burials, we preserve it from development. At the same time, I think we put death in its rightful place, as part of the cycle of life. Our burials honor the idea of dust to dust." They have been researching several places in both Orange and L.A. Counties and discussing possibilities with board members of SSMPA and other organizations.

A recent article in the AARP Bulletin (August '04), polled readers, asking: "What type of burial is most appealing?" 70.4% chose green burial over traditional practices and cremation. After the article ran, Ramsey Creek Preserve received 6,000 e-mails from people asking how they could be buried this way.

Three years ago, the Commemorative Nature Preserves of New York, an organization that advocates memorial nature preserves, calculated what American cemeteries inter annually in addition to bodies: 827,060 gallons of embalming fluid, 1,636,000 tons of steel, 2,700 tons of copper and bronze, and 30 million board feet of hardwoods. And although the practice of cremation doesn't waste land, neither does it save it.

Perhaps catharsis was lost when the funeral industry took over ritual many years ago, but perhaps undeveloped land and wildlife corridors can be saved from housing development by this minimum use, in a new twist of "win-win".

*For articles written about this subject, see:*

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2004/08/22/MNGEV8CIGT1.DTL>

[http://www.aarp.org/bulletin/yourlife/Articles/a2004-06-30-green\\_graveyards.html](http://www.aarp.org/bulletin/yourlife/Articles/a2004-06-30-green_graveyards.html)

[http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20040607/news\\_1n7graves.html](http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20040607/news_1n7graves.html)



## **Santa Susana Mountain Park Association**

**invites you to JOIN / RENEW (circle one).**

**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 contribution lend your support. Make your check 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)  
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**City / State / Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Special Interest / Expertise:** \_\_\_\_\_

## A Piece of Local History in the Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park

The stagecoach ride over the Santa Susana Pass was considered to be a relatively difficult trip, especially through the steep Devil's Slide portion. Stage "way stations" were established on both sides of the pass to assist the stage companies and travelers with meals, lodging and fresh horses. In 1867 Rosa de la Ossa, widow of Vicente de la Ossa of Rancho El Encino, was forced to sell the rancho lands to her son-in-law James Thompson and vacate the rancho. She then moved her family to the foot of the Devil's Slide where they built a stage way station that served the coast route stage lines and their passengers – a service the family had done at Los Encinos since 1859. The adobe ruins of the former stage station are located in the base of the Devil's Slide. By 1869 another stage station had been established on the west side of the grade known as Larry's Station. Both of these stations served stagecoaches and passengers as they crossed over the steep, rocky pass.



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 participate, contact Jan Miller at (818) 702-0854.



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