



SYMBIOSIS

A Quarterly Newsletter for MRCA Volunteers
Spring 2004

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SMMC Acquires Ahmanson Ranch

On November 7, 2003, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, along with its joint powers partner, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, announced the long-awaited purchase of the 2,983-acre Ahmanson Ranch. This stunningly beautiful property in the Simi Hills of Ventura County is nestled at the western edge of the San Fernando Valley and adjoins the 2500-acre Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space and NPS land in Cheeseboro and Palo Comado Canyons to the west.

The purchase price was \$150 million. The Conservancy's purchase of the ranch was made possible by the water-

shed protection provisions of Proposition 50, the state bond measure approved by voters in November 2002. Five million in Conservancy funds, a grant of \$10 million from the State Coastal Conservancy, and a grant of \$135 million through the Wildlife Conservation Board combined to complete the purchase price.

Ahmanson Ranch is part of a critical ecological linkage and wildlife corridor through the Simi Hills between the Santa Monica Mountains and the Santa Susana Mountains. Now under the Conservancy's permanent protection are,
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From the Editor...

2003 Volunteer of the Year Banquet.

It was a fine party! Check out the photos on page 7 and see how we celebrated the people and the work we did in 2003. I believe that anyone who volunteers their valuable time and talents is pretty special. But we would like to single out a few people for particular mention.

Congratulations to our 2003 MRCA Volunteer of the Year: **Steve Ioerger.**

And to our other Area Volunteers of the Year:

MRCA	Steve Ioerger
Northern	Al Dey, Linda Ioerger
MBU	George Gray, Pat McQuaid, Terry Harmon, William Foster, Mel Wishan
MAU	Deborah McNamee, Rebecca Florio, Sheryl Phelps
Urban Parks	Dan Christiaens
Ramirez	Bob Wolterstorff
Franklin Canyon	Andrea Diamond, JoAnn Leonard

As we go to press, budget cuts are not only “on the horizon”, they’re already here. Which is why we need our volunteers now more than ever. And you’ve responded - our Volunteer Challenge at the banquet resulted in keeping the Towsley Canyon Nature Center open on weekends, as well as Camping trips for kids from the Natural Park. But there’s more to be done. Contact me if you want to know more.



Spring has come early to Towsley Canyon. Red-shouldered hawks are nesting in the picnic grove.

(continued from page 1, Ahmanson Ranch)

diverse habitats and endangered species such as the California red-legged frog, the San Fernando Valley spineflower, and the Southwestern willow flycatcher. Rolling hills studded with valley oaks, sycamore-lined canyon bottoms, miles of trails, and vistas of unspoiled California landscapes are now parts of a parkland legacy. The ranch includes the headwaters of Malibu Creek, which flows to Santa Monica Bay and supports one of the few populations of Southern steelhead trout. Historical reports indicate the fish may have traveled upstream to streams on the Ahmanson Ranch.

The parkland is now open to the public (hiking, biking and horses) but currently there are **NO RESTROOMS, POTABLE WATER, OR PARKING LOT.** To get there from Los Angeles, take the 101 west. Exit at Los Virgenes Canyon Road and drive north about one mile to the trailhead entry. Limited parking is available on the street. There is a small public restroom at Gates Canyon Park which is about one mile east of Los Virgenes Canyon Road on Thousand Oaks Blvd. We have provided a trail map on page 4.

We will be retrofitting the Los Virgenes trailhead entry for wheelchair/stroller accessibility and expect to make another trailhead entry at Victory Boulevard sometime this spring.

Current park rules are in effect (no smoking, fire, weapons). Park is open during daylight hours. Dogs must be on a leash. Because there are **endangered species** and we must protect their habitat, **visitors must stay on trails and not use trails that are marked closed.** Our volunteers are our extra eyes and ears. If you observe any problems please call Ranger Services at (310) 456-7049.

The MRCA will be offering guided public hikes starting in March. If you wish to be on our e-mail list for hike schedules or are interested in volunteering, please contact Wendy Langhans (661) 255-2937 or wlanghans@smmc.ca.gov. For more information you can go to www.resources.ca.gov/ahmanson_ranch.html.

Just a head’s up: for legal reasons the name of the new park, “Ahmanson Ranch” will be changed. But as we go to press, the new name has not been chosen. So stay tuned.....

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2003 Volunteer of the Year Banquet



publication.

To submit an article or information: Contact MRCA Director of Volunteer Services, Wendy Langhans at (661) 255-2937 or wlanghans@smmc.ca.gov. Submissions must be received no later than one month prior to

pursuant to Section 6500 et seq. of the Government Code.

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) is a public entity of the State of California exercising joint powers of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Conejo Recreation and Park District, and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District



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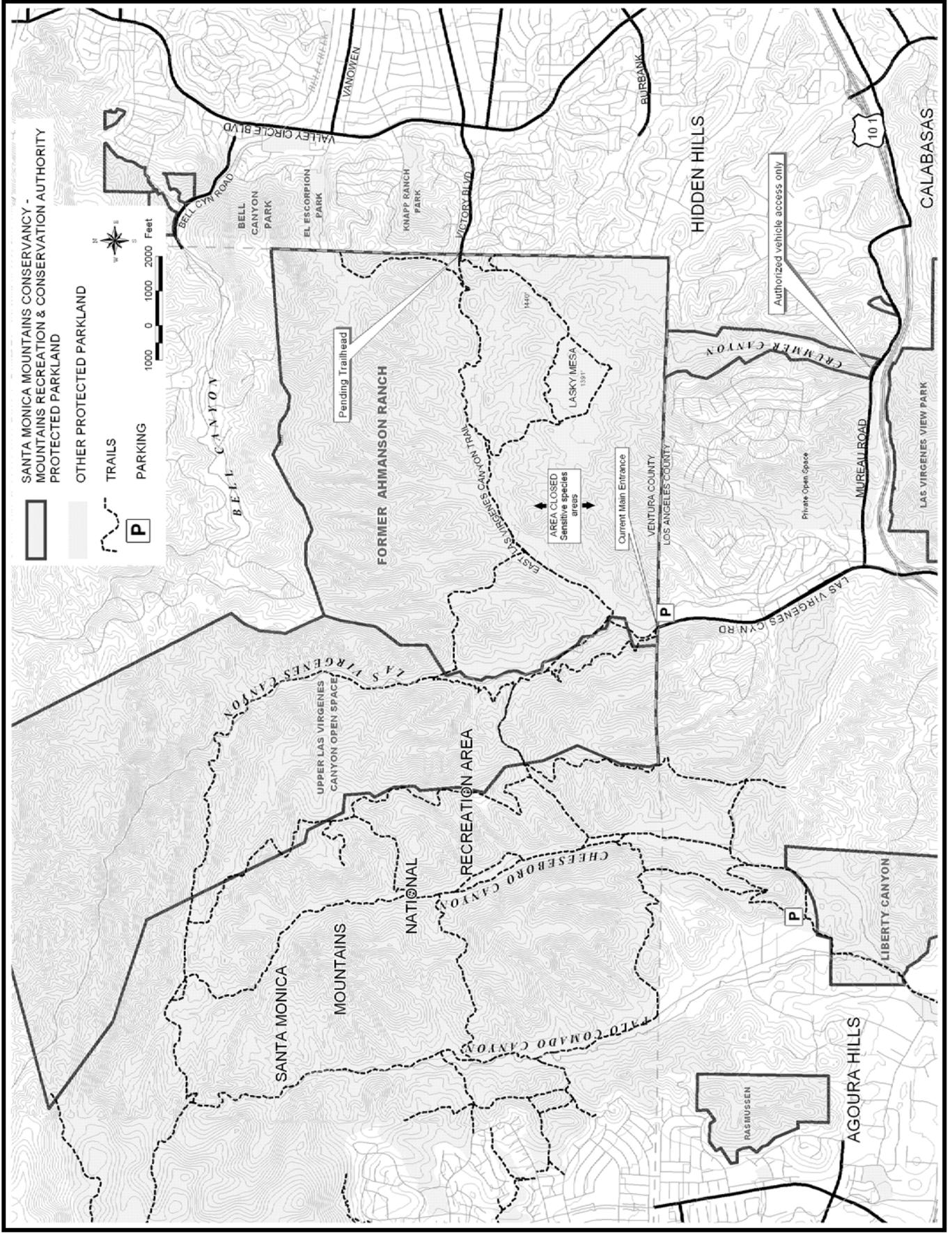
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MRCA Volunteers...Making a Difference!

The park formerly known as Ahmanson Ranch



MBU News...

The Mountain Bike Unit (MBU) is a volunteer organization that helps the NPS, CA State Parks and MRCA provide public assistance and resource protection for the Santa Monica Mountains.

Editor's Note: We are looking for MBU'ers who would like to report on their activities and provide ideas for informative articles. Contact me at wlanghans@smmc.ca.gov.

Here's a few things I learned by checking out some Mountain Bike internet sites. Just for fun, I'm going to put in an equivalent term from *ice skating*, a sport I'm more familiar with.

Dab. To put your foot down while riding so you don't fall over. (A two-footed landing, as in, "she two-footed that jump. Also, in Ice dance and Pairs, teams get extra points for the lifter balancing the team on one foot.

Trackstand. A riding technique that involves the rider stopping completely without putting a foot down. (There are three types of controlled stops in skating- snowplow, hockey, and T-stop. A forward T-foot ahead with blade at right angle to forward motion of body - and can be done on one foot. Your choice of stop is a not-so-subtle sign to other skaters of how good a skater you really are.)

Bunny Hop. A hop that you incorporate into your riding technique so you can clear obstacles such as logs without stopping. (The same term is used in skating, although it's not used to leap over objects. It's the way beginners start learning to jump. FYI - I did a face plant on one of these.)



Cyber-teer...

(Internet sites of interest for our volunteers.

This comes from our Scheduling Coordinator at Franklin Canyon, Nubez Jordan, who moved to LA last year.)

Los Angeles People Connection

www.lapeopleconnection.com

Since I moved to LA I have had to learn all the "new to me" exotic species of the Southland. So I have been doing a lot of research. I have found some great websites in my Internet searches for natural history information. I want to share one in particular with you because of the amount and variety of information I found.

Ever wonder what the pH of the LA River is? Have questions about the aqueduct? Recycling? Oil? There is lots of information on plants, animals, seismic history and geology. The LA Cityscape link, www.lapeopleconnection.com/cityscape/history/environmental_history.html, will take you to the environmental history section. But there's more: if you search you will find a calendar with hikes and other events, neighborhood information (the neighborhood I live in was built in the 1920's) and ways to meet new people (there's a cool café down the street from me). This site has something for everyone! It is a great resource for natural history and for life in LA. There is even a link to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy!

Science "News You Can Use" ...

A information you can use to expand of your programs and perhaps get you thinking in new directions.

Our moonlight hikes have been very popular with the public. But what time should they start? It should be dark, right? And when is that? It's not as easy to figure that out as you would suppose. Consider what the US Naval Observatory says about twilight...

Civil twilight is defined to begin in the morning, and to end in the evening when the center of the Sun is geometrically 6 degrees below the horizon. This is the limit at which twilight illumination is sufficient, under good weather conditions, for terrestrial objects to be clearly distinguished; at the beginning of morning civil twilight, or end of evening civil twilight, the horizon is clearly defined and the brightest

stars are visible under good atmospheric conditions in the absence of moonlight or other illumination. In the morning before the beginning of civil twilight and in the evening after the end of civil twilight, artificial illumination is normally required to carry on ordinary outdoor activities. Complete darkness, however, ends sometime prior to the beginning of morning civil twilight and begins sometime after the end of evening civil twilight.

Nautical twilight is defined to begin in the morning, and to end in the evening, when the center of the sun is geometrically 12 degrees below the horizon. At the beginning or end of nautical twilight, under good atmospheric conditions and in the absence of other illumination, general outlines of ground objects may be distinguishable, but detailed outdoor operations are not possible, and the horizon is indistinct.

Astronomical twilight is defined to begin in the morning, and to end in the evening when the center of the Sun is geometrically 18 degrees below the horizon. Before the beginning of astronomical twilight in the morning and after the end of astronomical twilight in the evening the Sun does not contribute to sky illumination; for a considerable interval after the beginning of morning twilight and before the end of evening twilight, sky illumination is so faint that it is practically imperceptible.

Tricks of the Trade....

Got a trick to share with your fellow volunteers? Something you learned...perhaps the hard way...or something that makes your volunteer job easier. Submit your "trick" to wlanghans@smmc.ca.gov. If your suggestion is selected, you will receive a by-line, bragging rights and a coupon good for a free Starbucks coffee. 100-words-or-less, please. This month's trick is courtesy of Rebecca Farr.

Lather up with nature's magic soap, the **California Lilac!**

Not only does the California Lilac bloom to perfection in the springtime, it also has served for thousands of years as nature's magic soap. Imagine life without soap? Dirty hands, hair, and clothes...Yuck! That's right, it's almost impossible to fathom.

The California Indians figured this out, while smelling terrific at the same time. They used the fragrant flower blossoms of the California Lilac, (*Ceanothus*) to make hand and body soap, shampoo, and even laundry detergent. It was then, and is now, as simple to use as 1, 2, and 3.

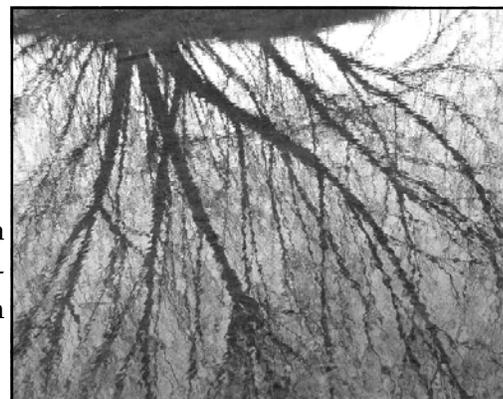
You may have seen the striking variety of blues and purples that the California Lilac parades on a springtime day.



The flowers are small, but bunched in large 3-6 inch clusters. It usually grows on dry chaparral slopes as shrubs or small trees, thriving in high and low elevations. Also known as the Soap Bush, the California Lilac can be used immediately on the trail, or can be harvested for cleansing fun all year round. 1. Start

by gently shaking the fresh flowers off of the branch into your hand. 2. Add a few drops of water. 3. Vigorously rub your hands together to make an exfoliating, fragrant soap.

Lather up your park visitors to demonstrate native plant uses by keeping a year-round supply of flowers in your pack. The California Lilac can be harvested at any time while in bloom, however, it is best when blossoms are almost dry and can be easily shaken off (late April to May). **Be sure to only harvest in areas where plant removal is permitted.** Simply shake flowers from branches into a large flat basket or container, and allow them to dry in the sun for a few days, evaporating all moisture. Once completely dried, store in a closed container and enjoy the lather of nature's magic soap at anytime.



Reflections in a stream at Ah-manson Ranch

Training for MRCA volunteers...

To RSVP for these free classes, your contacts is Rebecca Farr, (310) 858-7272 x 132 or farr@smmc.ca.gov.

Saturday, March 6, 3:00 Franklin Canyon.

Quarterly WODOC volunteer meeting at the Ranch.

Saturday, March 20, 9:00-3:00, NPS Headquarters
Visitor Contact & Radio Skills & Procedures.
Contact Lynne Rubin (310) 391-1121 or yumiMtnBKR@aol.com.

Saturday, April 17 & April 24. 9:00-5:00. Towsley Canyon & Franklin Canyon

Specialist Training - Mammals. Meets partial requirements for "Specialist Training".
April 17 will be held mostly in the classroom and include information about common mammals of the Santa Monica mountains, as well as information about how to write an interpretive program using NAI thematic guidelines.
April 24 will be in the classroom and the field, where you will be presenting programs you have developed using the NAI thematic interpretive format.

Training Update. As we go to press, we are unable to schedule Spring volunteer training due to budget cuts. Therefore CIG training as well as additional Specialist training is on hold. If you are interested in signing up for training in any of the following areas, contact Rebecca Farr at Franklin Canyon to get on our sign-up list: Plants, Birds, Reptiles & Amphibians, CIG, or CIH.

In your own words....

Our thanks to Gene Foley, a new volunteer who received his CIH training last December at Franklin Canyon.

Stink Bugs

Eleodes sp. AKA Darkling Beetle, Circus Beetle, Acrobat Beetle, Clown Beetle, Stink Beetle, Stink Bug.

This is the commonest mini-track maker on the dirt trails through the hills. These inky black beetles are pretty obvious in their trail crossings year round, and easy to avoid stepping on, although they get run over and mashed all too often by giant humans and bicycles.

Eleodes is a large genus of beetles in the Tenebrionid or Darkling Beetle Family, which includes mostly dark-colored beetles that feed on decaying matter and some plant materials. If you are familiar with mealworms, they are the larvae (immature stage) of darkling beetles.



The scientific name for the Order of beetles is Coleoptera, which means "sheath-wings" and refers to the hard, full-length top outer covering of the abdomen,

somewhat like a tuxedo with tails might look from the back. The two sheaths have to open up sideways for the membranous wings underneath to unfold. But in *Eleodes* the sheaths are fused together so it can't get its wings out to fly.

So where did the silly names come from? You've seen these beetles moseying across the trail with their long rear legs and abdomens tilted up. When your giant (to them) foot gets near, or they feel otherwise threatened, they tilt their abs up at 45 degrees or more, often freezing in place. Thus the name Circus, Acrobat, or Clown Beetle. They emit a stinky fluid from the end of the abs as a form of deterrent to birds and other small predators, Thus the name Stink Beetle and Stink Bug.

How does *Eleodes* know we're there? Do they get in a defensive position because they hear us talking on the cell phone or see us heading full steam towards them? Nope.

As the Beach Boys once put it, "I'm picking up Good Vibrations". *Eleodes* sense vibrations, because of their "ears" (the sensory hairs on their legs) and their antennae located one-fourth inch from the ground.

Imagine you have ears on the sides of your feet that are close to the ground! You'd definitely feel ground vibrations, (and your sunglasses wouldn't fit nearly as well. . .). Also imagine that, like *Eleodes*, you could only see a few inches ahead of you. No wonder they're so quick to raise a stink.