



A COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON

President's message

by L. Tim Wallace

THE CONSERVANCY IS BUSY on several fronts—living up to our commitment to be vigilant about wildfire safety while encouraging a healthy native environment in Claremont Canyon. We help maintain trails and improve access to our nearby wildland interface and strive to educate our members and the public about wildfire prevention and safety.

Unfortunately, wildfire danger continues to be a major issue as fire season is becoming a year-round concern. Public agencies are unable to devote the financial and human resources necessary to address it. Jerry Kent's article in this newsletter brings us up to date on the situation with FEMA and the grants to mitigate wildfire danger in the East Bay Hills. Grant applications were submitted in 2005 and 10 years later, after exhaustive environmental review, funds were granted to three land owners in the East Bay Hills. But, after a round of litigation, FEMA withdrew its grants to UC Berkeley and Oakland. Litigation to restore the UC grants continues today.

Other agencies talk of moving forward but are reluctant to take on the 900-pound gorilla of removing eucalyptus and Monterey pine trees, which are the major threat to the safety of our community.

In Claremont Canyon, we have many neighbors who have moved in since the 1991 firestorm and may not be familiar with what they need to do to make their own homes more fire safe. Information about what homeowners can do is in the wildfire section on our website, www.claremont-canyon.org. The Homeowner's Guide to Wildfire Prevention by our own member Dr. Robert Sieben is also available.

We do have good news to report. More than 20 students joined us last month at a workshop and stewardship activity treating poison hemlock at the upper end of the Summit House Trail just below Four Corners (see page 3). The students also helped reinforce the Gwin Canyon Trail, removing a good bit of French broom along the way. Now is a great time to attack broom—its bright yellow flowers are in full bloom, making it easy to spot, and the soil is wet, making the plant easy to pull up by its root. Many people find broom pulling to be quite fun. If you want to help out, get on our email list by going on our website to be alerted about our monthly activities.

Finally, I want to pause and note with sadness the passing of Afton Crooks, one of the two founders of our predecessor organization, Friends of Claremont Canyon. Afton and our vice president Joe Engbeck stepped up immediately to offer their knowledge and expertise when the Conservancy was formed in the aftermath of the 1991 fire. I owe much to Afton. She was a consummate professional with solid financial and organizational skills who served five UC Presidents over 40+ years. She brought the same skills, and enthusiasm, to her work with the Conservancy. It was a distinct pleasure to know Afton Crooks.



Afton Crooks in 2008, photo courtesy of the Department of English, University of Washington, her alma mater.

SPRING STEWARDSHIP SCHEDULE

PLEASE JOIN US for stewardship events in Claremont Canyon throughout the spring and summer months: once a month (third Saturday) in Garber Park led by Shelagh Brodersen of the Garber Park Stewards and once a month in the main canyon (fourth Saturday) led by Jon Kaufman. All levels of fitness are welcome. Watch for the monthly emails or check the Conservancy website for added events and to see where to meet. We usually meet at the Claremont Avenue entrance when working in Garber Park and at signpost 29 for main canyon events. Events are 10 AM till noon.

When venturing into the canyon, wear long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes and a hat. If you have gloves, bring those too but we'll have extras. Please contact GarberParkStewards@gmail.com for Garber Park events and for all other events contact info@ClaremontCanyon.org.



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Conservancy members hosted a tour of Claremont Canyon with planners from the East Bay Regional Park District's Trails Development team, including trails manager Sean Dougan, Sean Connelly, and Ward 2 Board Member Dee Rosario. We hiked up the new Gwin Canyon trail extension connecting Park District and UC lands, then headed over to the Stonewall-Panoramic Ridge Trail (above) to assess its steepest section just below Panoramic Way. We are asking the Park District to consider building switchbacks on this degraded section of trail for increased safety and accessibility to hikers. We'll keep you informed as progress develops.

April 20 Earth Day events!

by Nancy Mueller

ON APRIL 20TH there will be three Earth Day stewardship projects coordinated with employees from the Claremont Club & Spa. I will be leading one group to clean up Evergreen Path, which goes



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directly into the backyard of the hotel. The path is currently strewn with debris and needs a haircut!

Shelagh Brodersen of the Garber Park Stewards will lead another group to help clean out invasive plants in Fern Grove and maintain other parts of Garber Park. Did you know there is now a map of Garber Park posted at the base of the park's entrance on Claremont Avenue? There is also a map/brochure you can pick up and carry with you. The trails are great for kids! The maps were underwritten by the Hotel.

Last, Gordon Piper will lead a third group of Claremont Hotel volunteers to reduce fire-risks at the North Oakland Sports Center. They will be clearing out broom, removing trash and generally tidying up. The work of the volunteers supports the Temescal Creek tributary that flows through the North Oakland Sports Field. The Oakland Landscape committee will be adding fire resistant plantings of succulents as part of its revegetation efforts.

All the workers and leaders will be treated to a bag lunch from the hotel, sure to be delicious!

We urge all Conservancy members to participate in an Earth Day activity. It could be as simple as cleaning the City drain nearest your house. To see other choices, search the web under "Earth Day Activities Near Me" the week before Earth Day (April 21st). The EARTH needs friends, including YOU!

Experimenting with poison hemlock control

by Jon Kaufman

THE CONSERVANCY HAS SPENT a great deal of effort in the past targeting eucalyptus and French broom—but there are other invasive plants that can take over in Claremont Canyon. Last month, we decided to focus on poison hemlock.

Poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) is a leggy, herbaceous plant that grows 5-8 feet tall. It is toxic to people when ingested—as we know from reading about Socrates. But, unlike poison oak, it is rarely harmful to touch and does not result in an itchy rash. Poison hemlock thrives in areas that have been disturbed, such as roadsides, trails and other places

where the soil gets moved around, making life difficult for native forbs and shrubs.

Under the guidance of Lech Naumovich of Golden Hour Restoration, we staged our March workshop in an area just below Four Corners along the upper end of the Summit House Trail.

With student volunteers from UC's Berkeley Project Day joining us, we first removed the tall, dried-out stocks remaining from last year's growth, then cleared small hemlock seedlings from the ground, and, finally, gathered redwood litter from beneath nearby redwood trees to spread over the treated habitat. This mulching reduces germination over the short term and, since we noticed that poison hemlock seems to avoid areas where redwood litter is found, there may be longer lasting results.

Time will tell if our mulching was effective but in the meantime that area along the trail looks a lot better. If you're interested, we invite you to park your car at Four Corners where Claremont Avenue meets Grizzly Peak Boulevard, go down the steps that Conservancy volunteers installed a few years ago, walk a few yards down the trail and you will see what we've done.



© 2018 Lech Naumovich



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With thanks to Tom Klatt we now have new trail markers where the Willow Trail meets the Gwin Canyon Trail. We installed these during our January stewardship event and are hopeful that the Park District will add a sign of their own at the far end of Gwin Canyon where the trail intersects Norfolk Road.

Claremont Canyon is the largest relatively undeveloped canyon on the western slope of the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. Most of the canyon's watershed is owned by the East Bay Regional Park District, the University of California, the East Bay Municipal Utility District and the City of Oakland, with about one-fifth in private hands.

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy promotes the long-term stewardship of the entire watershed, coordinated among the stakeholders to preserve or restore a healthy native ecosystem, reduce wildfire hazards, and foster education and research.

Join the Conservancy:

Founding Sponsor: \$1,000 over 10 years.

Family Membership: \$50 per year.

Student or Limited Income: \$25 per year.

Contact Us:

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The Board of Directors: L. Tim Wallace, President; Jon Kaufman, Vice President, Joe Engbeck, Vice President; Marilyn Goldhaber, Secretary; Josh Borkowski, Steve Holtzman, Jerry Kent, Nancy Mueller, Bob Strayer and Dick White, Members at Large.

Treasurer: Kay Loughman

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber and Kay Loughman.



Along the road to the Summit House Staging Station, circa 1900 (perhaps earlier). The background shows Grizzly Ridge, now part of the EBMUD Siesta Valley Watershed.

History of Claremont Canyon

by Karen Faircloth

This charming piece of Claremont Canyon history is excerpted from “A Proposal for the formation of Claremont Canyon Park,” the 1973 document that brought about the eventual formation of the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve. Reprinted here with permission from the author and the Claremont-Elmwood Neighborhood Association.

CLAREMONT CANYON HAS KNOWN human use for thousands of years although little or no archaeological evidence of aboriginal use is known to exist at this time. During the 1830s the canyon became part of the Peralta Rancho. The first known development of the canyon occurred in July 1858 when it was chosen as the route for the transcontinental telegraph cable between Oakland and the eastern states. Cable stringing began on July fourth of that year and reached Genoa, Nevada by autumn. The road that grew up beneath the cable became known as Telegraph Road. North of Oakland it followed the present course of Telegraph Avenue as far as the intersection of Telegraph and Claremont Avenues. At that point it angled eastward following present day Claremont Avenue and climbed up through Telegraph Canyon (now Claremont Canyon) on its way over the hills toward Mount Diablo and then northerly to the Sacramento River at Martinez. A road soon developed alongside the entire cable route and settlers began to take up land adjoining the road. Orinda, La-

fayette, Walnut Creek and other present day landmarks developed where they did because of this road.

In 1860 a petition was presented to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors asking for the road to be declared a public highway. A stage route (J. Bamber & Co.) began to operate between Park Street in Oakland and the Morgan House in Martinez. Service was coordinated with the ferry boats that came from San Francisco to Oakland, and from Benicia across the Sacramento River to Martinez.

The Pony Express riders used Telegraph Road through Claremont Canyon during 1861 whenever the west bound trips failed to connect with the Sacramento-San Francisco riverboat and therefore came overland—crossing the river via the Benicia-Martinez Ferry. The trip from Martinez to Oakland required about two hours for the express riders. In *New Pictures from California*, Bayard Taylor describes a rather difficult and frustrating three-hour-long trip over Telegraph Road and through Claremont Canyon in the year 1859. The road through the canyon was so steep, narrow, and otherwise difficult (especially for loaded wagons) that there were many accidents and a call soon went out for a new route that would be easier and safer—perhaps by means of a tunnel through the hills.

The road into the canyon from the Oakland side ran past Thornburg’s Sanitarium which stood on the Martin Dunn Ranch where the Claremont Hotel now stands, and then wound along the canyon bottom very much on the course now followed by Claremont

Avenue. A little saloon named “The Last Change” was stuck into the side of the hill (near the intersection of Claremont Avenue and Alvarado Road) and beyond that point the grade became steeper and steeper as it approached the summit of the divide. For a time this part of the road was called Summit Road and a hotel and staging station by the name of Summit House (elevation 1,315 feet) was built at the top of the divide. It continued in operation for many years (1860 to about 1903) and was operated for at least six years (1861-1867) by Milton J. Rook and his family. Stages including those bound for Mount Diablo often changed horses at Summit House.

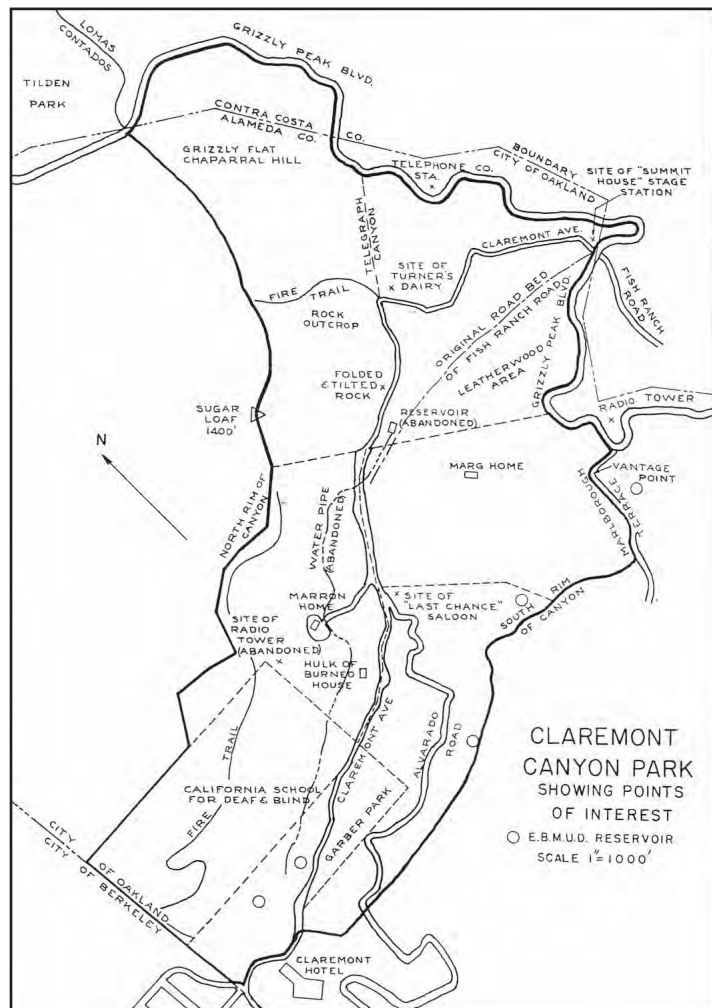
In 1893 a pledge of financial support and a concerted effort by the Merchant’s Exchange Club of Oakland (a forerunner to the Oakland Chamber of Commerce) persuaded the supervisors of both Alameda and Contra Costa Counties to proceed with the construction of a tunnel through the hills. Years of planning, fund-raising, and construction were capped on November 4, 1903 by the formal opening of the original 1,100-foot-long tunnel that was some 320 feet lower than the old summit. Traffic on the old road then dropped off very sharply and it was not long before the road was closed completely. The upper part of the canyon then became a very quiet and rather remote area used only for cattle grazing, dairying, some minor quarrying, and the development of water from the hillside springs. The Alameda Water Company and William Glasscock then owned the 174 acres that later (1923) became East Bay Municipal Water Company property, and then in turn became University of California property (1961).

After 1900 a number of subdivisions began to be developed in the westernmost parts of the canyon. The first of these was named Claremont Estates. Later developments were Claremont Knolls, University Villa Park and University Uplands. The Hotel Claremont was built in 1914 as part of the region-wide speculation brought about by the excitement surrounding the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco that opened in the following year.

About 1920 John Garber Park was donated by the Garber family to the City of Berkeley, but during the boundary change it came to be in the middle of Oakland and was later given by Berke-

ley to Oakland. In the 1920s a landscape architect laid out the park’s trails, picnic and barbecue facilities. Other park and recreation uses of the canyon date back to the twenties also—when the canyon was still in its pre-automobile era.

Horse stables were maintained near the present-day Claremont Hotel site and both riders and hikers used various trails or the still unpaved road up into the canyon. Until 1929 the road remained closed to wagon or other vehicular traffic at the edge of the water company land in the upper part of the canyon. At least one well developed recreational hiking trail followed the contours about half way up the north slope of the canyon. It passed by several springs and was quite popular as a way of hiking over the hills into Contra Costa County. In 1929 the road was paved and opened to automobiles, thus ending horseback riding opportunities on the road itself and markedly changing the quiet atmosphere of the canyon.



UC sues FEMA to recover funds

by Jerry Kent

WE REPORTED IN LAST FALL'S NEWSLETTER that the Conservancy supports UC Berkeley's efforts to recover its funding granted in 2015 by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The grants were to reduce fire danger in Claremont and Strawberry Canyons by removing stands of hazardous trees. The approved work was backed by a 4,000-page Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that analyzed potential impacts to UC's land and surrounding environment.

To date, UC has received none of its funds.

A year after the original EIS, under the settlement of a lawsuit against FEMA filed by the Hills Conservation Network (HCN), FEMA withdrew UC's funds, as well as Oakland's, and offered them instead to the East Bay Regional Park District, a co-recipient of the grants.

The Conservancy had supported UC's proposed work and the original 2015 EIS, the result of 10 years of scrutiny by government agencies and the public. We were shocked to see the funding yanked in a closed-door, last minute settlement.

In response to the HCN settlement, UC filed a suit of its own stating that its funds were removed without consideration of the impact that would have if the fire hazard were not reduced on its land in the two canyons. The Claremont Canyon Conservancy attempted to join the suit as a plaintiff intervener in support of the University but was denied permission by the court, based on procedural grounds.

This was a big disappointment.

We cannot imagine that FEMA has decided, despite the 4,000-page EIS, that the dense eucalyptus grove along the north side of Claremont Avenue and up to the ridge are somehow now fire-safe. More likely, FEMA (and the Park District) decided to take the line of least resistance and settle with HCN rather than litigate and defend the EIS in court. Indeed, it appears that FEMA would just as soon wash its hands of the entire matter, leaving Claremont and Strawberry Canyon residents exposed to the significant fire hazards explicitly identified in the EIS.

FEMA has made a serious mistake by settling with the Hills Conservation Network. That settlement, along with an earlier 2012 settlement between HCN and the Park District, has increased wildfire hazards



Courtesy of EBRPD archives

In the 1991 Firestorm, homes were lost on ridges without fuel breaks. Fire crowned in the eucalyptus grove above Gwin Canyon but did not spread into the oak/bay woodlands of Garber Park (bottom left corner of the above photo).



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A Diablo wind fire in this eucalyptus grove on the ridge overlooking Strawberry and Claremont Canyons would throw burning embers into lower residential areas making firefighting difficult, if not impossible.

for residents of the East Bay hills. We cannot believe that giving UC's money to the East Bay Regional Park District will solve problems that lie outside the District's borders. The fire mitigation projects on UC's land in Claremont and Strawberry Canyons (and in Tunnel Canyon on City of Oakland land) are essential.

FEMA, HCN and the Park District opposed the Conservancy's effort to support UC's litigation to recover its FEMA grant. UC is now engaged without other parties' support in its legal fight.

While these legal battles are distressing, our members can be assured, that the Conservancy will continue to press ahead outside the courtroom. This means aggressively advocating for fire mitigation projects with UC, the Park District, East Bay MUD, the cities of Oakland and Berkeley and others that own open space in the hills.

Thank you to members who have donated this past year

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THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON

