

THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

Fall 2004

News

A COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION FORMED IN 2001 TO SUPPORT THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON



© 2004 Tamia Marg

Board of Directors: L. Tim Wallace, president, Joseph Engbeck Jr., vice president, Tamia Marg, secretary, Marilyn Goldhaber, treasurer, Laura Baker, Joshua Bar-Lev, Klaus Burmeister, Betty Croly, William J. McClung, Nancy Mueller and Dick White.

Annual Meeting, Nov 7

Autumn is harvest time, time to gather together to celebrate the fruits of the Conservancy's labor this past year. And what a year it's been! Please join us at the Claremont Hotel on Sunday, November 7th from 4-6 pm (see back page) when we renew friendships and review the year's events over good food and wine. Our keynote speaker will be Dr. Frank Beall, Chair of UC Berkeley's Fire Mitigation Committee. Dr. Beall's expertise is the post-fire analysis of structures to determine why some houses burn and others do not. Is it the hand of fate, blind luck, or can we influence whether our homes survive a catastrophic fire? Dr. Beall's research has revealed some amazing facts. You won't want to miss his talk, "Lessons Learned from the Recent Southern California Fires."

Conservancy Receives \$126,000

In September, the Conservancy received a check for \$126,000 from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for a Conservancy-managed program of removal of invasive exotic vegetation, especially eucalyptus and French broom, in three targeted areas of East Bay Regional Park District land adjacent to roads and homes: \$36,000 for Gwin Canyon, \$50,000 for Mid-Canyon and \$40,000 for Stonewall. As this newsletter goes to press, the EBRPD has given its approval and we are awaiting the last biological review from USF&WS.

Redwood Restoration Project

Our plan to create a cool, moist, relatively firesafe redwood grove in the upper part of Claremont Canyon is moving steadily toward reality. Already, the redwoods that were planted in April 1975 have been made more easily visible by the removal of thousands of 60- and 80-foot tall eucalyptus resprouts. More of those fast-growing, fire-dangerous eucs will be coming down as a combined effort of UC, PG&E, EBRPD and the Conservancy. Meanwhile, redwood seedlings are being grown for eventual placement in the canyon. Seeds have been collected from naturally occurring redwoods a couple of miles to the south in the Oakland/Berkeley hills, and about one thousand of them have been germinated and are being grown in a northern California nursery. Now, at the end of September 2004, our little seedlings are about one foot tall. The average is 14 inches tall; some are as much as 19 inches tall. The nursery operator reports that they are very healthy and will be ready for planting next spring.

The Conservancy Gives \$14,000

This year, we were able to award two money gifts to the University of California for a total of \$14,000 to help finish UC's eucalyptus cutting on their Phase 4 area (see next page). UC has done a wonderful job liberating the bay and oak trees in that area, and thereby reduced the potential fire hazard along the ridgeline and along Claremont Ave.

Top photo: Aerial view of upper Claremont Canyon where Claremont Ave meets Grizzly Peak Blvd and Fish Ranch Rd.

Interview with Tom Klatt

by *Tamia Marg*

The upper reaches of Claremont Canyon are hardly a pristine wilderness. The coast range vegetation in this canyon was intentionally modified with fire by this area's indigenous people – perhaps for thousands of years. Nineteenth century settlers used less fire but added large-scale livestock grazing to their land management regime. Then in the early 1900s up along Claremont Ave just below the intersection with Grizzly Peak Blvd, those practices gave way to a less intensively managed agriculture, eucalyptus plantations.

Cleaning up the abandoned eucalyptus plantations represents one of the major historical changes on this piece of land in the last few hundred years. Tom Klatt, Manager of the Office of Emergency Preparedness at UC Berkeley, is both the brains and the drive that is making this project happen.

Tamia Marg: How is it that the Manager of Emergency Services is the one to be working on UC's open space land?

Tom Klatt: In my current role, I'm responsible for emergency management and planning, and we've extended that to include wildfire hazard mitigation. While the UC Capital Projects Department has been focusing on the threat of earthquake by retrofitting campus buildings since 1998, I'm working to ensure a concerted effort to address the threat of a wildland fire.

TM: Can you tell us about the evolution of your thinking about how to grapple with the challenge posed by a hundred-year-old unmanaged eucalyptus plantation?

TK: Looking out over Claremont Canyon in 2001, it seemed like we were facing an ocean of eucalyptus trees. Most of the eucalyptus were logged in the early 1970s after a freeze apparently killed them. It turned out the roots weren't dead and the eucalyptus resprouted vigorously from the cut stumps, so now we had an even thicker 30-year-old euc forest.

My colleague, Jerry Kent of the East Bay Regional Park District, recommended starting with eucalyptus removal along the ridgeline, where the Diablo winds are strongest. So we began at the intersection of Claremont Ave and Grizzly Peak Blvd, the saddle at the top of Claremont Canyon.

Initially, we were unsure about how the community would receive the work, but we have had wonderfully positive support. People liked what they saw. By removing the eucalyptus, we were releasing the native landscape to thrive. In 2001, Phase One revealed coast redwoods, California bays, coast live oaks, big-leaf maples, madrones, as well as indigenous shrubs, forbs, and grasses. The following year we continued the project with Phase Two, moving southwest along Grizzly Peak Blvd. Phase Three in 2003 extended the euc removal below Phases One and Two, and Phase Four happened this summer and fall between Claremont Ave and Grizzly Peak Blvd. With adequate funding, future phases will fall into place.

TM: What hurdles have you had in getting this project off the ground?

TK: Building a consensus plan has been the most challenging aspect. With the support of a friend in the maintenance department, funding was secured to prove the concept in Phase One. With the success of that pilot project, just about everyone got on board.

In the beginning, I underestimated the effort it takes to eradicate a species as tough as eucalyptus. After three annual rounds of re-treatment, the 250 stumps from Phase One do not appear to be re-sprouting any longer. However, it remains to be seen how many of the estimated 10 to 100 million eucalyptus seeds per acre, now resting on the ground, will germinate and develop into eucalyptus seedlings. At this point, we are committed to monitoring and follow-up to ensure the eucs don't re-emerge.

TM: In terms of fire safety, you are effectively altering the biomass in this canyon. How will that help the big picture of fire safety in the East Bay Hills?

TK: We want less fuel along the ridgelines – our strategic point of fire defense and containment. In these areas, where firefighters can make a stand, we don't want overly tall fuels, with their potential for extreme flame length and heat output. We also don't want burning trees throwing embers that can travel in the wind and spread the fire. The forest might still burn, but the goal is to lessen the likelihood of an out-of-control wildland fire. By replacing the plantations with the bays and oaks that are already established below the eucalyptus canopy, we are converting to a native forest with lower fuel loads and less chance for ember production.

TM: Who are you partnering with in these large-scale fire

hazard mitigation projects on UC land?

TK: It has been a partnership! UC has been working collaboratively with East Bay Regional Parks, East Bay MUD, PG&E, and the City of Oakland to implement projects on adjoining land. As these projects get completed, the mosaic is taking form and the overall landscape is being transformed.

The regulatory agencies have been very supportive of our work. We've adopted "best management practices" to protect air, water, plant and animal resources, and have designed features and practices into our work that emphasize sustainability and conservation principles.

Our primary neighborhood partnership has been with the Claremont Canyon Conservancy. This cooperation has been terrifically constructive, both through direct financial assistance and through sharing information and ideas.

TM: *How do you make these projects fly financially?*

TK: I abhor waste and am frugal by nature, and I try to spend taxpayer money as if it were my own. Putting this into practice means getting lots of bids for the work, doing modest but efficient planning, limiting the use of consultants and continuously searching for more efficient approaches, partners and emerging opportunities. I was very pleased that the last eucalyptus project achieved a unit cost of \$24 per tree, which included felling and chipping the debris. With prices like these, the challenge of removing 10 or 20 thousand trees becomes attainable.

It takes about two gallons of fuel per ton of trees that we haul by truck from the site, so we have worked



Tom Klatt's dad, Peter Klatt, and Conservancy President Tim Wallace survey the work of the Brontosaurus, the eucalyptus-munching machine, on Frowning Ridge last winter.

to find ways to use the logs and chips as much as possible close to where they originated — a more sustainable solution all around.

Every volunteer that has worked, whether they are from the Conservancy or UC or the local high schools doing community service, has contributed to the success of this project. Even my dad, Peter, comes out on weekends to help with various projects, like the placement and chaining of the roadside logs.

TM: *What's next?*

TK: The early results have met with approval, both from the public and from the regulatory agencies, so we're looking to continue similar

work in new areas. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has tentatively approved a large grant to UC for further eucalyptus removal, as it will help restore habitat for the endangered Alameda Whipsnake.

City of Berkeley Receives \$413,000 FEMA Grant

This fall, FEMA awarded the City of Berkeley a \$413,000 Fire Prevention and Safety Grant to reduce the fire hazard in the Berkeley hills' urban wildland interface. Berkeley will provide \$177,000 in matching funds. The funds will be used to create a fire hazard evaluation program, distribute educational materials and foster academic studies of the Berkeley hills. Funds will also be made available to support vegetation management programs designed to reduce fuel alongside Berkeley hill pathways, thus creating better fire-breaks and community evacuation routes.

EBRPD's Fuel Management Projects

by Laura Baker

By any measure, the East Bay Regional Park District took a large whack at the standing fuel in Claremont Canyon this year. Under the direction of Fire Chief Dennis Rein and Fire Captains Paul Cutino and Brian Cordeiro, crews felled eucalyptus, chopped French broom and cut weeds in a set of strategic strokes around the canyon designed to increase firefighter access and reduce fuel loads. In many cases these projects were coordinated with those of UC to increase the overall effectiveness and cost in fuel reduction.

In January, the Park District brought in a large All-Terrain Brushing Machine, aka "the Brontosaurus," to cut back brush from along the fire road and remove coastal scrub from the tops of spurs on the north slope of the canyon. These breaks were established to improve firefighter access to stop fires from moving across the face of the slope and from jumping from one canyon into another. Recognizing that some of the vegetation removed was good native coastal scrub habitat, the Conservancy has been working with the Park District to plan to prevent weedy invasion of these areas. The work on the northern slope dovetailed nicely with UC's work at the top of the slope where pines and cedars

were limbed up and the understory cleaned up.

In the eucalyptus plantation behind Clark Kerr Campus and Stonewall Rd, crews limbed up and felled trees and pile-burned slash to reduce the chances of fire crowning in the eucs and of spreading by windblown embers and brands. Native oaks and bays in the understory will be released as the eucs are removed. Across the drainage to the north, goats grazed the hillside to protect the homes above on Panoramic Way.

Weeds and scrub were removed on the western side of Gelston to allow emergency access for park workers there and to provide a lower slope staging area that dovetails with work done above on the south-facing slope. This work also enhances the City of Oakland's roadside mowing to reduce ignition sites along Claremont Ave in mid-canyon. Last year's work by the Park District in this area included cutting and pile-burning of slash beneath eucs to widen the buffer zone at the bottom of the canyon and improve firefighter access.

A great deal of work has been done by both UC and EBRPD to manage the ridgetops to the north and east of Claremont Canyon where, from a strategic perspective, fire on Diablo wind days could spread to the south and west across the canyon. Eucs, which had regrown since the 1972 freeze, were removed by the Park District on Frowning Ridge just east of Grizzly Peak Blvd. This project complements UC's euc removal in the vicinity, providing a larger more effective fuel break.

In Gwin Canyon, weeds and scrub were removed in a band along Grizzly Peak Blvd and Marlborough Terrace to reduce ignition sites, manage ridgetops, and provide safe firefighter access to fight fires coming out of Gwin Canyon. Much of this work enhances fuel reduction done by private landowners around Gwin Canyon. Further down in the canyon large amounts of French broom were removed.

All of this work requires future maintenance both for fire reduction and for protecting and enhancing the rich native habitat in the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve. Managing for multiple values - the natural resources as well as the homes - will require funds in the future (see article on Measure CC below). On a recent tour of the canyon, former Assistant General Manager Jerry Kent and Chief



© 2004 Sharon Beals

A young visitor to Claremont Canyon, Alice Blecker, takes a whiff of native mugwort on a steep slope below Drury Lane. This slope, on private land, is managed by its owners by selectively cutting vegetation at well-timed intervals. Such care has brought about an almost entirely native cover, particularly rich in grassland species, and offers a measure of wildfire safety.

Dennis Rein expressed satisfaction that so much work had been accomplished this past year. They emphasized that fuel reduction is a work in progress and that there is more to be done and more to learn about its complexities.

Chief Rein said that the working relationship with the Conservancy has been very good, that the Conservancy has partnered effectively with both UC and the Park District to bring progress to the canyon. The Conservancy is grateful to Chief Rein and Captains Cutino and Cordeiro for their valuable support and teamwork. We look forward to working with them in the future.

City of Oakland Provides Fire Safety Services

Last year, residents of the Oakland hills approved a special assessment tax to provide fire safety measures and services over a 10-year period. These services now include free, unlimited curbside pick-up of tree branches (properly bundled in 4-foot long lengths) and brush (in special 30-gal. paper bags). For further information call (510) 613-8710. Also offered are free CORE (Citizens of Oakland Respond to Emergencies) training to neighborhoods to assist them in preventing fires and planning safe evacuation routes in the event of emergencies, and roving fire patrols to help monitor the hill area during high fire hazard days.

Vote “Yes” on Measure CC

On the November 2 ballot, Measure CC asks voters in western Alameda and Contra Costa counties to approve a 15-year special excise tax to fund public access, wild-fire protection, public safety and environmental maintenance of East Bay Regional Parks including Claremont Canyon, Tilden, Temescal, Sibley and a dozen others. The Claremont Canyon Conservancy strongly supports this measure and we urge a “yes” vote.

If the measure is approved, the EBRPD



Conservancy members Paul McGee (left) and Bill McClung (right) tour Gwin Canyon with Jake Sigg of California Native Plant Society and Jerry Kent, retired Assistant General Manager of the EBRPD. Fire safety concerns in Gwin Canyon are balanced with the need to protect and enhance the habitat, almost entirely native north coastal scrub, a rich environment for birds and wildlife.

would be authorized, but not required, to contract with counties to collect the tax on the property tax rolls, as needed. Occupants of single-family homes would pay \$12.00 per year and the occupants of apartments and other residential units would pay \$8.28 per year. Senior citizens below the poverty level would be eligible to receive a 50% discount.

Yellow Star Thistle

One of the most noxious weeds invading Claremont Canyon is yellow star thistle (*centaurea solstitialis*). YST displaces native plants and animals, threatening natural ecosystems and nature reserves. It also significantly depletes soil moisture reserves in perennial grasslands. Last year, Tamia Marg and Laura Baker worked for about a week with a hired hand crew to pull yellow star thistle (YST) along Sidehill Trail. YST had invaded the grassland portions and the edges of the coastal scrub, particularly along the trails cut into the scrub for the whipsnake monitoring project. Using the recommendation of hand pulling when approximately 5% of the population is in bloom, the crew dealt a major blow to the population.

The result is that this year’s YST population was significantly reduced. Elimination of YST from the canyon is an achievable goal. Thanks to this year’s efforts by Ed Leong of the East Bay Regional Park District and Tamia Marg of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, YST was removed from the shoulder of Grizzly

Peak Blvd at the corner of Claremont Ave south to Marlborough Terrace. In addition, EBMUD removed the population of YST that had invaded the meadow on the north side of Fish Ranch Rd, and Laura Baker and her son, Alex, returned to hand-pull more YST from Sidehill Trail. Although there are still some remaining YST plants, these will be eliminated over the next couple of years with decreasing amounts of effort, proving that timely, accurate, early intervention can knock out even the most invasive of weeds.

About the Conservancy

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

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

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber and Joe Engbeck



Hikers gather around an Alameda whipsnake trap along the Panoramic Ridge Trail last June. The live-capture trap was set to measure the prevalence of this rare snake in Claremont Canyon.

Join the Conservancy

Founding Sponsor: \$1,000 over 10 years
Family Membership: \$50 per year
Individual, Students, Seniors: \$15 per year

Visit our website at www.ClaremontCanyon.org.

Nature Walks

The Conservancy will once again be sponsoring a series of nature walks in the canyon beginning this winter and on into spring. Please check our website listings. We are looking for volunteers who would like to help coordinate this program. If you are interested in the natural history of the East Bay, enjoy learning about the plants, animals, and geology of this beautiful canyon, and would like to help run this program, please contact Laura Baker at Lbake66@aol.com or call (510) 849-1409.

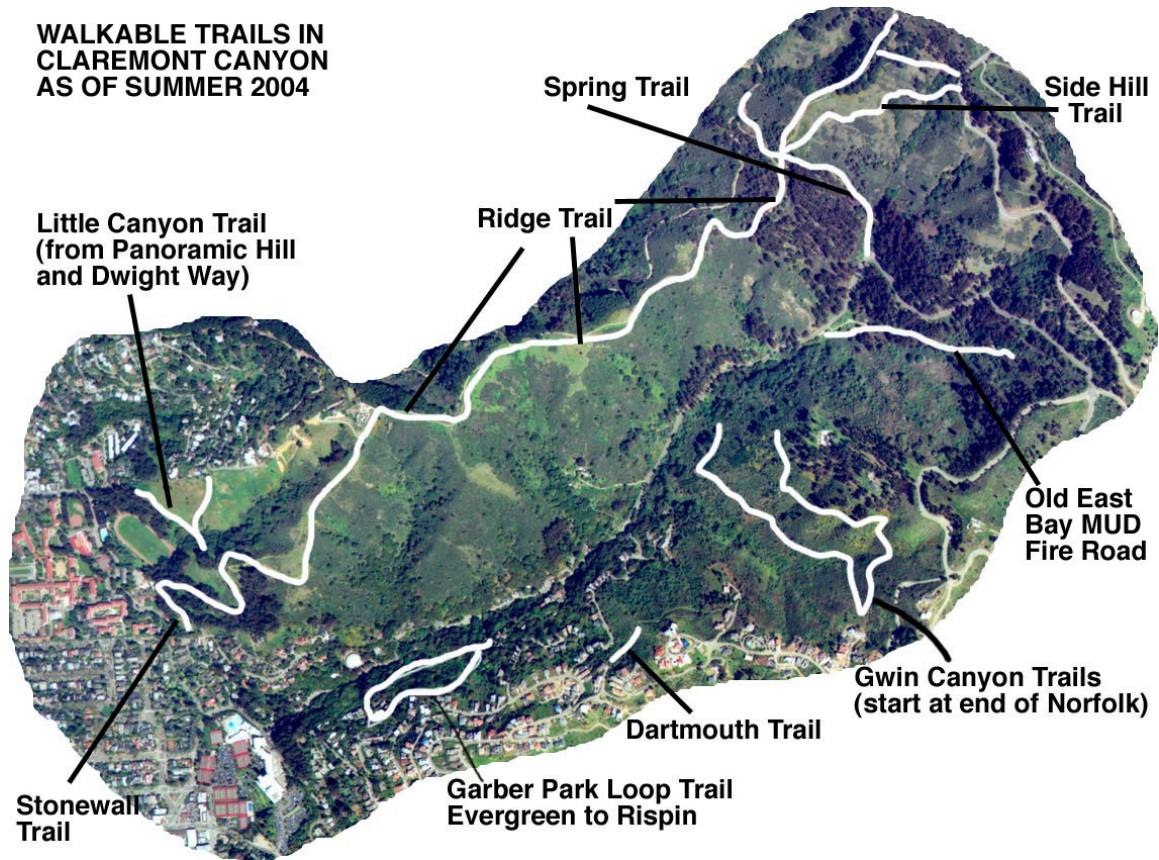
The Trails of Claremont Canyon

by Martin Holden

Panoramic Ridge Trail: This is the primary trail in the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve. It extends from Stonewall Rd to Grizzly Peak Blvd and offers magnificent views along the way. The trail is very steep in places, with a vertical elevation change of about 1200 feet. The lower segment of the trail is accessed from Stonewall Rd, just north of the Claremont Hotel, ascending quickly to a grove of century-old eucalyptus. After several switch backs one gets to the top of Panoramic Way, where there is a shady grove of pine and cypress.

The trail then crosses the University of California's Ecological Study Area and splits into several alternative routes. The main route heads straight uphill toward Tilden Park and Grizzly Peak Blvd. A smaller path, known as the Side Hill Trail, follows a parallel but gentler route to Grizzly Peak Blvd, passing through a particularly diverse stand of native chaparral. Another branch, known as the Spring Trail, runs sharply downhill to Claremont Ave.

**WALKABLE TRAILS IN
CLAREMONT CANYON
AS OF SUMMER 2004**



Little Canyon Trail (Rattlesnake Canyon Trail):

This unimproved trail is accessed from the eucalyptus grove at the top of Dwight Way, above Fernwald Rd. From here, deeply eroded steps ascend a steep, grassy slope across a wooded canyon. The trail forms a narrow rut, climbing to some large boulders, favored by sunset-watching lovers. From here one can return or find at least a couple of ways to connect to the Panoramic Ridge Trail.

Garber Park Trails: On the south side of the Claremont Canyon between the Claremont Hotel and Rispin Drive lies the City of Oakland's heavily wooded Garber Park. This lovely area is the only accessible portion of the canyon's cooler, moister north-facing slope. The forest here is a mixture of oaks, bays, buckeyes and bigleaf maples, many of the latter pitched at odd angles due to slope creep.

The trail into Garber Park can be accessed from the ends of either Evergreen Lane or Rispin. It meanders gently for the most part, but can be treacherous in spots, the slope falling away directly to the road below;

care should be taken not to dislodge loose stones— or oneself.

Gwin Canyon Trails: These trails traverse the east flank of Gwin Canyon, a lightly visited branch of Claremont Canyon. The trailhead is at the end of Norfolk Rd near Marlborough Terrace (there is no parking). From here, one trail follows the contour line around the top of Gwin Canyon to a dead-end, while the other descends through high chaparral almost to the bottom of Claremont Canyon.

Old EBMUD Fire Road: This relatively gentle path begins at a pull-out just west of the lower end of the Spring Trail where the canyon opens up somewhat - just across from the dramatic vertical exposure of layered chert along Claremont Ave. Part of the upper canyon here is still choked with eucalyptus and is therefore a good place to observe the battle between this exotic pest and the native vegetation. The Fire Road dead-ends after about a quarter mile, but rough trails continue through the pines, redwoods, fallen eucs and underbrush, which includes much poison oak.

CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY
P.O. Box 5551
Berkeley, CA 94705

PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE PAID
OAKLAND, CA
PERMIT # 549

www.ClaremontCanyon.org



Claremont Canyon Conservancy
Third Annual Meeting

MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS, *Please join us ...*

The Claremont Hotel
November 7, 2004, 4-6 pm

Reception 4:00 pm
Presentations 4:30 pm
Open Forum 5:30 pm

Keynote Speaker: Frank Beall, UC Professor and Chair of the Fire Mitigation Committee

No-host wine bar with complimentary refreshments. Bring a friend or neighbor.

RSVP: ClaremontCanyon@hotmail.com or call 510-843-2226