

THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

FALL 2006 *News*

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



Hiking along the Side Hill Trail toward Grizzly Peak on last June's Geology Walk.

Our Local Wilderness, by Matt Morse

Just a short walk from the cafes, bookstores, and delis of College Avenue lies the entrance to Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve. There, a trail off Stonewall Road takes you steeply up through a eucalyptus forest, and then quickly opens to vistas of the towns, bay, and bridges below. To the south extending eastward you see the canyon itself, with its perennial creek and lush native forest. To the north are vast hillsides of California north coastal scrub. Above, the trail ambles along the northern ridge eventually connecting to Grizzly Peak Boulevard, Tilden Park, and Strawberry Canyon. You're less than a mile (as the crow flies) from the Elmwood neighborhood and the University, but civilization has receded to a low hum and a grid of tree-lined streets; the wind, sky, and the beautiful hills remind you why we live here in the first place.

How is it possible that we still have such a treasure within our midst? It wasn't by accident. Much of the canyon was destined for development in the 1970s but for the efforts of a visionary local citizens' group, the Friends of Claremont Canyon. Some key players in Friends later joined with other local citizens after the devastating 1991 Oakland Hills Firestorm to form the Claremont Canyon Conservancy in 2001. The goal was, and continues to be, to energize the largest landowners to be better stewards of the land.

The work of the Conservancy is ongoing and needs the involvement of many people. Please come enjoy this local wilderness with us at one of our nature walks or by helping at one of our frequent stewardship events (see page 4). Everyone is invited — whether a member or not. If you'd like to become a member, see the box on page 7.

Founding Sponsor Program

In 1930, when the Olmsted-Hall Report "Proposed Park Reservations for East Bay Cities" was issued, over 1,000 citizens were listed as "sponsors" of what came to be the East Bay Regional Park District. Those far-sighted people — with names like Jepson and Maybeck and Wheeler among them — helped create what Galen Rowell described in *East Bay Wild* (Sierra Club Books, 1997) as "the most extensive system of wild greenbelts of any metropolitan area of the world."

With this spirit in mind, the Conservancy is renewing its campaign to build a strong core of Founding Sponsors, who can contribute or pledge \$1,000 to support the programs of the Conservancy over the next decade. By September 2006, 168 individuals, families, neighborhood organizations, and businesses have become Founding Sponsors. Our goal is to have 200 by the end of the year. Those who live near Claremont Canyon, or have businesses in the East Bay, are invited to step forward and

become stewards of this place where the city intermixes with nature, where most of the open land is public, where we can help shape our future. If you'd like to become a founding sponsor, see the box on page 7.

Neighborhood Meetings

To learn more about the Conservancy's activities in your neighborhood, we welcome you to any of the following meetings. If you would like to host a meeting, please call our message line, 510-843-2226, or email ClaremontCanyon@Hotmail.com.

Saturday Oct 28, 2-4 p.m., South Canyon – at the home of Teresa Ferguson and Peter Scott, 1047 Alvarado Road.

Sunday, Oct 29, 5-7 p.m., Upper Canyon – at the home of Jim and Tina Heldman, 7067 Devon Way.

Sunday, Nov 5, 3-5 p.m., North Canyon – at the home of Karen and Michael Meryash, 200 Stonewall Road.

Working Together: Conservancy Completes Fuel-Reduction Program with Community Partners, by Martin Holden

The Conservancy is pleased to announce the completion of the Mid-Canyon and Stonewall Road fuels-reduction projects, the final phases of our 2005-2006 fire-safety program in the Claremont Canyon Preserve. The program grew out of a consensus among neighbors, government agencies, and land-holders, who agree that we need to gain some control of the invasive eucalyptus, acacia, and pines that increasingly encroach upon the roads, homes, and wild habitat of the East Bay hills. The work was funded by a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and conducted with the oversight of the East Bay Regional Park District, with the participation and support of the City of

Oakland and individual neighbors. We hope that this work will serve as a model for public-private fire-safety partnerships in the future.

Though this project addresses relatively small portions of the larger problem, we feel that these two key sites are important links in the ongoing fire-safety work on University of California, EBRPD, EBMUD, Oakland, and private land in Claremont Canyon. The first phase of the program, fuel-reduction in the Gwin Canyon area, is described in our Spring 2006 newsletter. It can be viewed online at www.claremontcanyon.org.

The Mid-Canyon unit is located on the north side of Claremont Canyon, near the intersection of Claremont Avenue and Alvarado Road. The primary focus of the project was to reduce the potential fuel load in this steep, narrow part of the canyon. Another goal was to clear the massive eucalyptus trees along the City of Oakland's Claremont Avenue right-of-way, which posed a threat to egress for both residents and emergency vehicles in case of fire, earthquake, or winter storms. Approximately 200 exotic eucalyptus, acacia, and pine trees were removed, liberating the surviving native oak-bay forest and riparian vegetation.

The Stonewall Unit is located on the boundary of EBRPD and EBMUD land, northeast of the Claremont Hotel and adjacent to the Stonewall Reservoir. This section was chosen to extend the effective fuel break created by previous eucalyptus work in the Preserve. The removal of a dense stand of more than 200 euca-

lyptus trees has exposed the dormant native oak-bay forest, downslope from healthy coastal sage scrub chaparral. Initial site remediation at both sites consists of an extensive coarse mulch of finer eucalyptus and pine branches, which will help to both control erosion and provide habitat, plus the distribution of a small

amount of chip-ped material. A series of water-bars have been installed to control runoff, along with an additional 4,000 square feet of jute fabric and 400 lin-



The project was a true collaboration with agency representatives, Brad Gallup from EBRPD, Tom Klatt from UC, and LeRoy Griffin from the City of Oakland. Photo by Martin Holden © 2006.

feet of straw wattles at the Mid-Canyon site. At both sites, stump cambium has been carefully treated with an herbicide to prevent re-sprouting. Eucalyptus boles from Mid-Canyon were recycled off-site for heating wood; larger material from Stonewall was taken to a local cogeneration facility to be recycled for electricity production.

Future stewardship will consist of passive restoration (both sites are down-slope from healthy coastal sage scrub chaparral, which will provide an excellent seed source), and whatever active restoration EBRPD managers may deem appropriate. As of the first week in October, both sites are successfully re-sprouting with monkey-flower, bracken fern, and other native perennials.

The Conservancy would like to thank Tom Klatt, UC Berkeley's Director of Emergency Preparedness, for managing this project on a pro-bono basis. His vast experience in managing University of California wildlands was invaluable, as was his tireless attention to detail. We would also like to thank EBRPD Supervisor Ed Leong for his wisdom and careful oversight; EBRPD Fire Marshall Ken Blonski and Assistant Fire Chief Brad Gallup for their many contributions, and EBRPD senior construction inspector Bob Thomas for his helpful remediation suggestions. The



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Contractors, Mountain Enterprises of Lotus, CA and Jack's Tree Service of Concord, CA, expertly felled about 400 trees in Conservancy-managed projects this summer.

removal of eucalyptus along the Claremont Avenue right-of-way was made possible by the invaluable cooperation and financial support of the City of Oakland, facilitated by Oakland Fire Department Assistant Fire Marshal LeRoy Griffin. In addition, the Stonewall fuels reduction work was augmented by \$25,000 in private contributions from concerned neighbors.

Conservancy members put thousands of volunteer hours into the management of the project, beginning with Bill McClung, who wrote the initial grant proposal. The

Board would like especially to acknowledge the ceaseless efforts of outgoing President Tim Wallace in keeping the process moving forward, and the invaluable administrative oversight of outgoing Business & Finance Committee Chair Afton Crooks. Finally, special thanks to Amber Bach Gardner, Coast Region Grant Manager of the California Fire Safe Council, who helped the Conservancy manage the federal grant process from the very beginning. For further information about this project, including on-the-ground tours of the either site, please feel free to contact Martin Holden at MartinHolden@mac.com.



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Eucalyptus boles being trucked out of Claremont Canyon.



This season's stewardship program started with a most impressive trash pickup and creek evaluation session at the Claremont Chert on Oakland's Creek-to Bay Day, September 16.

Nature Walks and Tours, by Ann-Elise Emerson

Our canyon teems with activity year round. Nature walks and tours are a wonderful way to breathe in the quiet vistas, enjoy the peaceful beauty, and slow down to consider the smallest seedling or flower. Check our website, www.ClaremontCanyon.org, for details or for information on new walks added to the program. Don't forget to RSVP to ClaremontCanyon@Hotmail.com or call 510-843-2226.

October 14, 10:00 a.m. – noon, *The Plants of Garber Park*

Lech Naumovich, Conservation Analyst for the California Native Plant Society, will discuss the plants and conservation strategies for this little-known but wonderful old forest in Claremont Canyon. Lech has been compiling a plant list of Garber Park for the Oakland Fire Department this year as a part of his work with Shelterbelt.

November 19, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m., *Living with Our Chaparral (North Coastal Scrub)*

Another walk down into Gwin Canyon, this time with our Annual Meeting speaker, Richard W. Halsey, author of *Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California*. With Rick, we will observe the rich native vegetation in this side canyon of Claremont Canyon and learn about the similarities and differences between types of California shrublands and about the impacts of fire and disturbance.

December 9, 8:00 – 11:00 a.m., *The Birds of Claremont Canyon*, with optional *Owl Walk* from **4:30 – 6:30 a.m.** Dave Quady, Audubon Christmas Bird Count Leader, will take us on a winter birding outing to identify the birds residing and wintering in Claremont Canyon. He will also lead a special owling adventure in the wee morning hours, followed by a breakfast break. Join us for one or both. The scheduled "rainy day" make-up will be December 10.

January 20, 10:00 a.m. – noon, *Winter Mushroom Walk*

Join Robert Mackler, past president of the Mycological Society of San Francisco, in Garber Park as he explores the mysteries of mushrooms. Please come prepared for variable weather on this mycological adventure.

Monthly Stewardship Sessions

This year we are scheduling the third Saturday morning of each month as Conservancy Stewardship Day. With permission and support from landowners, we will visit different sites in the canyon where we have the opportunity to learn and work together. Typically, we look for an accessible, interesting, and problematic site where we think the intervention of thoughtful workers can make a difference in one day or over time, whether identifying plants and habitats, picking up trash, weeding, or maintaining a trail.

This is rewarding outdoor work among friends, and we always have some very knowledgeable people among our work groups. If you have questions or want to be informed of stewardship opportunities, please contact Bill McClung at wmclung@rcn.com.

Redwood Planting Progress Report

Late summer is blending into autumn and the northeasterly winds that are characteristic of this season are beginning to blow longer, harder, and more frequently—bringing hot, dry conditions that make it hard for our little redwood seedlings to survive. In response to these conditions, we have devised a watering program designed to help the seedlings survive until the rainy season begins in October or November. If they can be kept alive for the next couple of months, they should be fine for the next year or so.

If you would like to volunteer to help distribute water to the seedlings, please get in touch with Joe Engbeck at jhengbeck@aol.com. He will happily show you what to do.



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Joe Engbeck (l.) takes Jack Sawyer (r.) and others to the site of the newly planted redwood seedlings in the mid-canyon.



Conservancy Turns Five

It's been five years since we formed the Claremont Canyon Conservancy in the fall of 2001 and fifteen years since the Oakland Hills Firestorm of 1991. We commemorate these events with an outreach to the public and a grand gathering at the Claremont Hotel, Sunday, November 19, from 4-6 p.m. (see page 8).

Chaparral Naturalist to Speak Nov 19

Richard W. Halsey, author of *Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California*, published in 2005, will lead a nature walk in Claremont Canyon Sunday morning, November 19, and then speak later that day at our Annual Meeting at the Claremont Hotel.

After teaching biology and natural science for twenty years, in 1998 Mr. Halsey became a full-time chaparral ecologist promoting an appreciation for California's chaparral environment. He works with the San Diego Museum of Natural History, coordinates research and education efforts through the California Chaparral Field Institute, and publishes *The Chaparralian*, a newsletter focusing on chaparral and wildfire issues in California. He has also been trained as a Type II wildland firefighter with the U.S. Forest Service.

If you sample his lively website — www.californiachaparral.com — you will meet a robust thinker and engaging enthusiast for what he calls our “state's most characteristic wilderness: *chaparral*, a semi-arid, shrub dominated association of plants shaped by summer drought, winter rain and intense wildfire.” The northern coastal sage scrub typical of Claremont Canyon's south-facing slopes (sometimes called “soft chaparral”) is a variant of this vegetation type. Although Rick has developed his chaparral and fire expertise in Southern California, he did graduate work at Berkeley in Education, and knows our hills well. We look forward to his talk “Secrets of the Chaparral: A New Way to Look at Nature in California,” which he promises to tailor to “our neck of the woods.”



*A*mong the many rare and wonderful plants native to Claremont Canyon is *Dirca occidentalis*, or Western leatherwood. This shrub, or small tree, grows in moist areas of the canyon and can be recognized by its beautiful, smooth, copper-colored bark, jointed stems, and delicate, apple-green leaves. Leatherwood is one of the few plants to flower in mid-winter. The flowers lack petals, but have a lovely, lemon-yellow calyx and stamens. A berry-like fruit forms in June or July. The genus *Dirca* is restricted to two North American species, including the much more common Eastern leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*), found in scattered spots in Eastern forests. *Dirca occidentalis* is endemic to our area, occurring only in the hills surrounding San Francisco Bay. — Martin Holden

Major Work in Garber Park

Oakland's 14-acre Garber Park, at the bottom of the Canyon directly behind the Claremont Hotel, has been the scene of large vegetation management projects this summer and fall. The projects were managed by the Oakland Fire Department and with funding of over \$75,000 from the Oakland Fire Assessment District.

At the western side of the park, the East Bay Conservation Corps (see photo on page 8) had crews working for almost a month thinning the forest and removing dead vegetation between Claremont Avenue and Evergreen Lane. The purpose of this work was to reduce the chances of a surface fire rising into the crowns of the trees in that area.

At the eastern side of the park, Shelterbelt Builders has been managing the buffer zone near houses in from Rispin and below Siler and Alvarado. This work is in sensitive and botanically rich areas, including a creek. The purpose here is to reduce wildfire fuels in the forest and near the creek and houses. This work will continue through the fall.

Oakland Regional Fuel Management Project

The Oakland Fire Department, working in partnership with the University of California at Berkeley and the East Bay Regional Park District, has been selected to receive a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 2006 Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program grant.

According to Oakland Fire Chief Daniel Farrell, "Working together as partners we can be most effective in carrying out this large project, with multiple benefits to citizens, partnering agencies, as well as the entire East Bay, because the project works to reduce the risk of wildfire and its potential impacts on the community as a whole."

The project is designed to remove significant numbers of the non-native, flammable eucalyptus trees in four areas in the North Oakland hills. The first phase will be environmental compliance over the coming year. Following environmental clearances and approvals, FEMA would make final determination of the project scope and funding. For more information contact Kristine Shaff, (510) 238-7396.

Oakland Firestorm 15th Anniversary

Oakland Fire Department and BART
Invite You to a Commemorative Event

Rockridge BART Station
Saturday, October 21, 2006
10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Color Guard, Music and Parade
Neighborhood Fire Prevention Activities

Message from Past President

Dear fellow Conservancy members:

It's time for me to step down and turn the leadership completely over to Martin Holden, your president-elect. Our Canyon grants are over, the fieldwork is done, and the final accounting will be completed shortly. We managed to leverage our monies to bring in many additional funds. We've made a huge impact with the actual cutting of trees and restoration of some of the Canyon; and we've made exceptional gains in working with people from UC, the East Bay Regional Park District, and the City of Oakland. These personal relationships are keys in getting things the Conservancy stands for accomplished.

I'm proud to have served as head of the Conservancy, and very proud to have had the opportunity to work with the dedicated men and women of our Executive Committee and the Board. We've come through some tough times, and we wouldn't have if everyone hadn't pulled together as we strove to gain a place in the East Bay environmental community. We're a winner—and thank you all for helping make us what we are today.

I've appreciated everyone's cooperation and help. The Conservancy is truly a community team effort, with additional outstanding work done by a few key people. I'll stay on the Board, so please know how much I've appreciated your support over the years. Here's to all of us.

Most truly,
Tim Wallace



Newest Board Member, Ann-Elise Emerson, takes a lemonade break after pulling and bagging yellow starthistle during last July's "Weeds Awareness Week."

Claremont Canyon is the largest relatively undisturbed canyon on the western slope of the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. Much 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 reduce wildfire hazards, preserve or restore a healthy native ecosystem, and promote education and research.

Join the Conservancy

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

Family Membership: \$50 per year.

Student or Senior: \$15 per year.

Contact Us

PO Box 5551, Berkeley CA 94705, 510-843-2226

Email: ClaremontCanyon@hotmail.com

Website: <http://www.ClaremontCanyon.org>

The Board of Directors: Martin Holden, president; Joe Engbeck, vice president; Tamia Marg, secretary; Marilyn Goldhaber, treasurer; Bill McClung and Matt Morse, stewardship; Ann-Elise Emerson, nature walks, and Dick White, business and finance. Other board members at large: Matt Mitchell, Donald Pierce, David Sharp, and Tim Wallace.

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



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East Bay Conservation Corps poses under the grand hardwood canopy of Garber Park (see page 6).

THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

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

Annual Meeting

The Claremont Hotel

Sunday, November 19, 2006, 4-6 p.m.

Reception 4:00 p.m.

Presentations 4:30 p.m.

Open Forum 5:30 p.m.

Keynote Speaker: Rick Halsey, "Secrets of the Chaparral"

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

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