



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

## Best of the Bay Can Be Even Better

by Fred Booker

THIS YEAR IN ITS *BEST OF THE BAY* series, the East Bay Express named the Stonewall-Panoramic Ridge Trail in Claremont Canyon the *Best Hike in the Sun*. Similar honors were conferred in previous years, citing the trail's spectacular vistas and easy access from the urban core. A car is not necessary to get there, a bus or bike, or even walking, will do.

As wonderful and unique as the Ridge Trail is, it is not without some challenges. As the winner of *Best Hike of the Bay* in 2001, the Express quipped that the Ridge Trail will "help you get ready for your trek to Nepal..." a hint that this is not a walk for the casual hiker. While the trailhead is easy to reach, the trail itself is steep, fully exposed to the sun, and features loose, gravelly soil, making good footwear a must. Things could be greatly improved if the Park District would add some grading and switchbacks to bring the trail more in line with official statewide standards for parks and preserves.

Several of us on the Conservancy board are now working with the East Bay Regional Park District

(EBRPD) and other landowners in the canyon on issues related to trails—not only regarding the Ridge Trail on Claremont Canyon's north side, but trails elsewhere throughout the canyon. We believe that Claremont Canyon's *Best of the Bay* experience can be made even better, safer and more inviting.

In addition to the Ridge Trail on the north side of the canyon, there are several interesting trails on the canyon's south slope. Most are narrow, north-facing trails that tend to remain cool and shady. Many of us who like to hike enjoy trekking the two miles up this side of the canyon all the way to the top. There, near Grizzly Peak Boulevard, hikers can choose to use the Bay Area Ridge Trail to connect to a whole network of back-country trails in Tilden Regional Park, East Bay Municipal Utility District's De La Veaga trail to Orinda is nearby, and there are some very interesting and enjoyable trails in Huckleberry Botanical Regional Preserve, Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve, and Redwood Regional Park.

Unfortunately, there is no safe and easy way for pedestrians to reach the top of Claremont Canyon from its southern side and connect with the many

*Continued on page 4*

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*THE STONEWALL-PANORAMIC RIDGE TRAIL, as seen from across the canyon, wends its way along the top of Claremont Canyon's northern ridge. The trail overlooks the urban landscape from San Rafael to San Leandro then on to the San Francisco Bay and beyond.*

## UC Berkeley's New Students Service Day

*Garber Park continues to be the busiest place in Claremont Canyon for volunteers to congregate and have a great outdoor experience, thanks to the leadership of Shelagh Brodersen and others of the Garber Park Stewards. Shelagh and the Stewards have successfully negotiated with the City of Oakland to manage the 100-year old, 14-acre park at a time when park funds are severely limited. The park, which is a haven for native vegetation, is immensely pleasant to work in, mostly in the shade of large bays, oaks and buckeyes. It can be reached by foot from the ends of Evergreen Lane and Rispin Drive—and now also from small connector trails off of Claremont Avenue and Alvarado Road. The Conservancy's new map, due out on our website in December, will show the trails. Each season, several groups find their way to Garber Park to conduct educational workshops or to simply pitch in to beautify this natural area. Below is one of Shelagh Brodersen's entries from her Garber Park Stewards blog. ~ Editors*

SEPTEMBER 9TH WAS NEW STUDENT SERVICE DAY at UC Berkeley, and the Garber Park Stewards were happy to host a group of energetic and enthusiastic students. Led by four veteran Stewards we divided into small groups, one to clear ivy from the Fern Glade Restoration area (pictured below), another to cut back and remove invasive weeds that were rendering the trail almost impassable, and a third to remove broom and spurge re-sprouts from a corner of the park where a wall of broom had once threatened to encroach. The really “heavy lifting,” however was done by a fourth group which removed the remains of a large acacia tree that had fallen across the trail at the Harwood Creek Restoration area. In between the hard work there was a lunch break, and at the end of the day - ice cream! Many thanks to all for choosing to volunteer in Garber Park.



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*THE CAPE IVY GROUP with leader Shelagh Brodersen, second from the right, in yellow hat.*

## Keeping up with Claremont Canyon Online and in Print

*by Marilyn Goldhaber*

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO KEEP ABREAST of the goings-on in Claremont Canyon—and also in its surrounding neighborhoods.

If you are interested mainly in the wildlands of Claremont Canyon and the activities of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, including our hikes, stewardship projects, trail upkeep, and wildfire safety, we have a monthly one-page newsletter that we send out by email to our members and anyone else who signs up for the service. We also have an 8-page print newsletter, like the one you are now reading, which we send out twice a year the old fashioned way, by US post, with archived copies available on our website. Not currently receiving these? Please contact us by phone or email to sign up free of charge.

If, on the other hand, you are interested in communicating with neighbors in the vicinity of Claremont Canyon, there are online forums for doing just that. Perhaps you have heard of Nextdoor.com, an online forum for people living in or near a specific neighborhood (for example, there are forums for Claremont Canyon, Elmwood, and Panoramic Hill). Despite the similarity in names, the forum called Nextdoor Claremont Canyon is unrelated to and independent of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, although Conservancy activities are posted there from time-to-time. Anyone can start a Nextdoor.com group, if none exists in their neighborhood, but to join an existing group you have to live in the area and be invited by a member (or otherwise approved by the group leader).

There is another, older, online neighborhood forum in the vicinity of Claremont Canyon called Open Forum run by the North Hills Community Association. Over the years, Open Forum has gained a solid following, having grown out of the need for residents of Oakland's north hills to connect after the 1991 Oakland Hills Fire. Anyone can post to Open Forum and you don't have to live in the area or show your true identity to participate. Most people who post, however, are hill residents, identify themselves readily, and post on a variety of issues.

There is now a good deal of overlap between Open Forum and several Nextdoor sites: people on one are often also on the other. If you are thinking about joining one or the other, or both, to interact with your neighbors, go to the NorthHillsCommunity.org and/or the Nextdoor.com website for further instructions. If you are mostly interested in Claremont Canyon and activities of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, please contact us soon to get on our email and snail mail lists.

## EVENTS IN THE CANYON

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR FALL/WINTER SERIES in Claremont Canyon. Stewardship outings include twice monthly (first Tuesday and third Saturday) restoration work in Garber Park in collaboration with the Garber Park Stewards, and once a month (usually the fourth Saturday) for weed management and trail maintenance elsewhere in Claremont Canyon. Please check our website for meeting places and last minute additions and changes.

When venturing into the canyon, it is good to wear long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes and a hat. All of our events are free and open to the public. To RSVP or ask questions, contact us through our website or email [info@ClaremontCanyon.org](mailto:info@ClaremontCanyon.org).

**November 8—The Berkeley Project**, 9 AM-3 PM. Cal students join again with Conservancy volunteers for a day of trail work led by Jon Kaufman. Includes lunch provided by Whole Foods and coffee by Peet's for all volunteers. Come for an hour or stay all day. Meet at the loop driveway at the Clark Kerr campus at 9:00. We'll drive to Signpost 29 from there.

**December 6—The Birds of Claremont Canyon** led by Dave Quady, Audubon Christmas Bird Count Leader, and Kay Loughman, creator of Wildlife in the North Hills.

*Join us to look for winter birds in Claremont Canyon. Dave and Kay will also lead a special owling adventure in the wee morning hours, followed by a break for breakfast. Join us for one walk or both.*

**Owling Walk** (December 6), 4:30-6:30 AM. Meet at the trailhead on the north side of Claremont Avenue (signpost 28), about one-half mile uphill from the Alvarado Road intersection. After a brief owling lesson, we'll listen for owls at a couple of locations in the canyon. We will walk a little, but mostly stand quietly in the dark and listen. Owling is chancy: we hope to hear an owl or two; if we're really lucky we may see one. Rain or high wind cancels.

**Daytime Bird Walk** (December 6), 8 AM until about 11:00. Meet at the top of the canyon at Four Corners (the Claremont Avenue/Fish Ranch Road/Grizzly Peak Boulevard intersection). We will drive to a couple of locations to sample different habitats in search of resident and migrant birds. We'll bird from roads, and hike on trails as much as conditions permit. Rain or high wind cancels.

*Call Dave at 704-9353 before 9:00 PM on Saturday, December 5 if you're unsure whether the walks will run in light of the next day's weather forecast. Dress warmly and bring binoculars, field guide and flashlight (for owling).*



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*THE ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) is an irruptive species new to Claremont Canyon this year, likely the result of an acorn crop failure elsewhere. On September 14th, on their daily hike up the hill, Erica Rutherford and John Colbert counted 40 individuals in the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve, most of them gathering acorns (50 percent of their diet) and stuffing them into the crevices of the nearby eucalyptus trees. Acorn woodpeckers are unusual woodpeckers in that they live in colonies, can store up to 50,000 acorns in dead trees (called granaries), and breed cooperatively. Listen for their raucous "jacob, jacob, jacob" calls and look for their "clown-like" face and glowing yellow eye next time you are in the canyon.*

**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:**

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

Email: [info@ClaremontCanyon.org](mailto:info@ClaremontCanyon.org)

Website: [www.ClaremontCanyon.org](http://www.ClaremontCanyon.org)

**The Board of Directors:** L. Tim Wallace, President; Joe Engbeck, Vice President; Barry Pilger, Treasurer; Marilyn Goldhaber, Secretary; Fred Booker, Steve Holtzman, Jon Kaufman, Jerry Kent, Bob Strayer and Dick White, Members at Large.

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



*Best of the Bay continued from page 1*

miles of back-country trails that now exist along the crest of the Oakland-Berkeley hills.

To see all this for yourself, find Garber Park, just behind the Claremont Hotel and look for the half-mile loop that has recently been cleared. (You may need a local street map to find the park.) Exiting Garber Park and traveling up-canyon requires you to walk along the shoulder of Claremont Avenue, taking your life in your hands as you travel approximately one mile up to the Willow and Summit House trailheads at Signpost 29 on University of California land. These trails go all the way up to Grizzly Peak Boulevard at the top of the canyon.

Of course, there is always the option of walking up Alvarado Road and other residential streets to reach Marlborough Terrace and Grizzly Peak Boulevard. Many older hikers prefer this route. Traffic moves a bit slower; but there are no sidewalks and you are still stuck sharing the limited road space with cars, bicyclists and skateboarders. This route has worked for me so far, but as more of the empty fire lots get built out, I expect to see a steady increase in fast moving traffic, making the journey dangerous at times. So, the need is there for new trails to link the urban core to our beautiful hill area open space.

With all this in mind, the Conservancy is in preliminary discussions with UC and the East Bay Regional Park District about possible trail extensions and changes to existing trails for better access up both sides of Claremont Canyon. In talks with the Park District last month, Trail Manager Jim Townsend concurred that putting in switchbacks on the Ridge Trail would improve matters on the north slope. Extensions or additions in other places could prove problematic, however, due to issues of traffic, parking, and disturbance to areas set aside for the Alameda whipsnake. When Jim Rutledge, the Claremont Canyon Park Supervisor, was asked about extending the Norfolk Trail in Gwin Canyon to the intersection of Alvarado Road

and Claremont Avenue—while also adding a connector trail to the Summit House and Willow trails—the problem of parking, or lack thereof, was raised. The Park District folks are quite right, of course, when they remind us that the narrow streets in the hills were not constructed to serve as parking lots for urban hikers. There is little enough space for residents let alone additional visitors. But lack of parking should not keep us from building new trails or extending old ones. Many young adults who call the East Bay home do not own a car. They prefer mass transit or bicycles as the favored means of transportation. Knowing this, shouldn't we be planning our parks with non-drivers in mind?

With trails in mind, Joe Engbeck and I are working with Eureka Cartography in Berkeley to update the Conservancy's map of Claremont Canyon, both for our web site and for trailside displays to be strategically placed in the Canyon. The plan is for the new trailside exhibit panels (featuring a customized map of the canyon and its trails) to be placed on UC land at Signpost 29, Signpost 27 and at Four Corners. A fourth panel may be placed at an entry point near the Clark Kerr campus on Park District land. The map is being updated to include the trails in Garber Park and the Willow Trail, which starts at Signpost 29. The urban staircases and pathways behind the Claremont Hotel that the Garber Park Stewards have been cleaning up and otherwise resurrecting in recent months will encourage visitors and residents to explore more of our beautiful canyon. The new trail map is expected to be on the Conservancy's website starting in December. Take a look and let us know what you think of it.

Public access to the great out-of-doors without the aid of a private automobile is a concept the Conservancy embraces. Goals we have set for ourselves include improving existing trails in the canyon and making connections between the north and south slope trails.

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*THE AUTHOR HEADS UP THE CANYON along Claremont Avenue towards Grizzly Peak Boulevard on his early morning walk—braving commuters whizzing by in their cars on their way to work. On Fred's left is the eucalyptus grove slated for removal once the FEMA grant is approved (see picture on page 6 of the same grove). On his right is the restoration area where eucalyptus trees were removed in 2003. The restoration area is filling in with native trees, with the help of the landowner, UC, working with the Conservancy to keep invasive weeds at bay.*



OVER THE SUMMER AND INTO THE FALL the Conservancy continues its efforts to remove invasive plants (see picture on page 7) and maintain trails in Claremont Canyon. Cal students will be joining with us again on this fall's Berkeley Project Day, Saturday, November 8 (details on page 3) to widen and improve the trails in the upper canyon. Above are Cal students on Berkeley Project Day in 2010 grading the trail in the upper canyon and putting in steps. It takes all of us to make progress and we are pleased to report that the cooperative spirit of local residents and students is yielding results in Claremont Canyon.

## The Alameda Whipsnake: Claremont Canyon's Threatened Species

by Jerry Kent

ALAMEDA WHIPSNAKES HAVE BEEN FOUND in upper Claremont Canyon and on adjacent UC, EBMUD and EBRPD property along the high ridge lands between Tilden and Sibley regional parks. This gentle, non-poisonous snake (*Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*), endemic to Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, and nowhere else, gained Endangered Species Act protection when it was listed as a federally threatened species in 1997. The State of California had previously listed it as threatened in 1971.

In May 2013 the US Fish and Wildlife Service issued a biological opinion covering FEMA-funded grant projects (see next page) for fire hazard reduction work in the East Bay hills. This biological opinion describes and analyzes the impact of proposed work on the Alameda whipsnake and its critical habitat, along with a detailed list of mitigations required of UC, Oakland, and EBRPD as recipients of the grant. The full text of this opinion may be found on the Conservancy's home page at [www.claremontcanyon.org](http://www.claremontcanyon.org).



ALAMEDA WHIPSNAKE IS SOOTY BLACK with distinct yellow-orange stripes running down each side. These snakes are often small but can reach up to four feet in length. They feed on lizards, rattlesnakes, small mammals and birds. Although the Alameda whipsnake tends to be found in shrub vegetation, they frequently venture into adjacent habitats, including grassland, oak savanna, and, occasionally, oak-bay woodlands.



© 2014 Jerry Kent



*UC's TOM KLATT (pictured above) and several Conservancy volunteers surveyed the north slope of Claremont Canyon last March to conduct a tree density study. The average tree density was estimated as 353 trees per acre for eucalyptus and 387 trees per acre for oaks and bays. These findings support our contention that native trees are present in good numbers and will fill in naturally with increased air, light and water once the eucalyptus are removed. Most of the eucalyptus trees in Claremont Canyon are coppice trees, that is multiple stems growing from the stump of what was previously a single tree. These trees were logged following a hard freeze in the 1970s. At that time, however, the stumps were not treated and the trees were able to re-sprout.*

## **Elected Officials Urge Removal of Eucalyptus from Claremont Canyon**

*by Jon Kaufman*

AS FIRE SEASON IS IN FULL SWING, twelve locally elected officials are urging the Federal Emergency Management Agency to release funds for the removal of the hazardous eucalyptus trees from Claremont Canyon. Their letters come as the agency is completing work on a final Environmental Impact Statement.

Work on the grant began nine years ago but has been held up while the fire danger has continued to increase. FEMA released a draft Environmental Impact Statement in Spring 2013 and held hearings that attracted public comments ranging from keep the trees to remove them completely. Some have suggested that a compromise would be to thin the dense eucalyptus groves.

But as the elected officials letters point out in their letter, "Simply thinning the trees will block the sunlight, consume the limited amount of ground water and keep

the less flammable native species from regenerating. Furthermore, thinning will enable the Diablo Winds to blow through the eucalyptus thus enhancing the fire danger and increasing the threat to homes. Thinning also obligates property owners to years of additional maintenance expense."

The letter concludes by asking FEMA to approve the EIS as originally submitted. That approach would enable the University of California, as the major land owner in Claremont Canyon, to remove the trees and allow the other two agencies to use their funds in the ways they see fit.

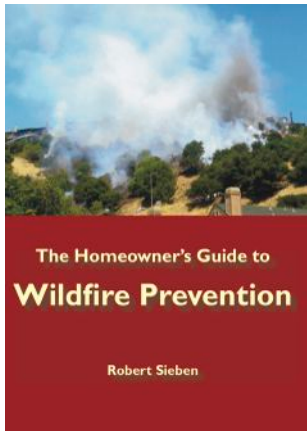
Signers of the letters include State Senator Loni Hancock, State Assemblymember Nancy Skinner, Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates, Berkeley Council members Jesse Arreguin, Laurie Capitelli, Susan Wengraf and Gordon Wozniak and Oakland Mayor Jean Quan and Council members Dan Kalb, Rebecca Kaplan, Larry Reid and Libby Schaaf.

## The Homeowner's Guide to Wildfire Prevention

by Fred Booker

THE HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO WILDFIRE PREVENTION by Robert Sieben, MD is a quick read full of useful information—a volume every homeowner in the hills should have on their bookshelf for easy reference.

The book is organized by tips one through six starting at the home and then moving out and away from the house: 1) reduce the sources of ignition, 2) make fire prevention a year-round activity, 3) reduce your home's vulnerability to embers, 4) maintain a non-ignition zone adjacent to your home, 5) create defensible space around your home, 6) for those with more than half an acre, create a wildland fuel reduction buffer zone.



The six tips are complemented by an appendix consisting of a month-by-month treatment program and how to make yourself, your family and home firesafe and ready for emergencies. Additional material provides information on management of invasive plants that are particularly relevant to wildfire prevention such as broom, pampas grass, Monterey pine, and eucalyptus.

Author Bob Sieben, a practicing neurologist, is a charter member of Oakland's Wildfire Prevention Assessment District's Citizens Advisory Committee, where he served three terms, during which time he wrote the first edition of his book. Since then he has gone on to revise this earlier version into a new 67-page booklet. It was Bob's hope that the WPAD would publish and distribute the handbook to all residents within the Wildfire District. Unfortunately, the Oakland Fire Department did not agree to serve as publisher. So, taking the initiative once again, Bob is distributing the book himself.

The book provides a useful checklist of dos and don'ts for your house, yard and family readiness. So do yourself a favor and get a copy of this book and, while you're at it, buy one for a friend or neighbor. The book can be purchased locally from the following book stores: A Great Good Place for Books on LaSalle in Montclair Village and at Builders Booksource on 4th Street in Berkeley for under \$9. It can also be purchased from Amazon.com or downloaded for free from the Conservancy's website or from the website of the North Hills Community Association.

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## November 16 Annual Meeting, 4-6 PM

### Keynote Speaker is Scott Stephens

by Marilyn Goldhaber

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CONSERVANCY will be held at the Claremont Hotel again this year (see back page for details). All are invited to attend free of charge. After light refreshments and brief updates from the board, we will hear from our invited speakers. First we will have a brief presentation by UC students who have conducted a study of the eucalyptus groves in upper Claremont Canyon. We will then hear from our keynote speaker, Professor Scott Stephens, an expert on forest structures and wildfire behavior. Dr. Stephens' recent research has centered on the pine forests of California and Mexico. We have asked him to turn his attention to the eucalyptus forests that we have here in the East Bay hills and to ask whether lessons learned in Australia, where the trees are native, can be applied to our situation here. "I believe the central question is the definition of the desired future conditions. This is true for any ecosystem. Once we have this then we must decide what management tools are appropriate to achieve and maintain the desired conditions." Please come to hear these interesting presentations and stay for the questions and answers afterward.



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DESPITE THE DRY CONDITIONS it is possible to pull French broom out by their roots thereby preventing further propagation. Above, Bob Strayer uses a weed wrench to tackle a particularly large broom plant in Gwin Canyon, while Park Ranger Jeff McKenna looks on.



P.O. Box 555 I  
Berkeley CA 94705  
[www.ClaremontCanyon.org](http://www.ClaremontCanyon.org)

## THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

*Dear Friends and Neighbors*

*Please join us on*

**Sunday, November 16, 2014, 4-6 PM**

**The Claremont Hotel**

*Sonoma Room*

### ***Annual Meeting***

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

Keynote Speaker: Scott Stephens, PhD, Professor of Fire Science  
UC Berkeley Center for Fire Science and Outreach  
to speak on "Lessons from Australia for California"

*Complimentary wine bar and refreshments. Bring a friend or neighbor.*

**RSVP:** [info@ClaremontCanyon.org](mailto:info@ClaremontCanyon.org) or call 510-843-2226