

# THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

## SPRING 2007 *News*

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



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*Inspiring mushroom maven Robert Mackler, in striped cap at center, speaks with some of the thirty-four people who attended the Conservancy's February Nature Walk in Garber Park. We sat on the enormous downed-but-still-living bay laurel tree that forms a natural meeting place within the Garber riparian area. Garber Park is a frequent destination and stewardship area for the Conservancy and is under planning for Oakland Measure DD restoration work.*

### Conservancy Update

The Conservancy is now in its sixth year of operation with 464 members, including 54 new members who joined since last spring (pages 6-7). Most members live close to the canyon, viewing it from their homes, driving through it regularly or enjoying its steep trails and expansive vistas.

The Conservancy continues to plan and implement stewardship programs, including invasive weed management and restoration of native redwoods, and advocate for improved access and better trails. We hold meetings and seminars for our members and the public, and sponsor guided nature walks and tours to increase our appreciation of the canyon's natural resources.

At this time of year, spring can be seen everywhere. Pink blossoms of the wild currant fade as the white blossoms of California buckeye bud along Claremont Avenue, ready to make their showy display in May and June. Birds and animals are everywhere too. One of our members, Kay Loughman, has put together a wildlife website for neighbors to share photos of creatures, large and small, seen in the "Hills" neighborhoods where Oakland and Berkeley meet near Claremont Canyon (see our website for details and how to submit photos).

Wondering where this canyon is? Claremont Avenue runs right up its center, from the Claremont Hotel at the bottom to Grizzly Peak Boulevard at the top. 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 of the land in private hands.

Some of our favorite places pictured in this newsletter are: the deeply wooded Garber Park (above and on page 6), entered from Rispin Drive at one end or from Evergreen Lane at the other; the upper reaches of Gwin Canyon (page 2), viewable from the end of Norfolk Road; and the Ridge Trail in the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve (back page), entered off Stonewall Road.

If you would like to learn more about the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, please see the box on page 7.

### Stalking the "Wild" Broom by Tamia Marg

There is something deeply satisfying about pulling that solitary broom bobbing with yellow flowers that would have spawned a zillion broom seedlings if you hadn't been there to pull it. Not only are you eliminating the prolific parents of future generations but you are opening up space in the continuum

*"Wild" Broom, continued on page 5*

## Nature Walks and Stewardship Events

by Matt Morse and Bill McClung

One of the deep pleasures of participating in the Conservancy is to be in Claremont Canyon learning and working with others. Being there and observing the beauties and problems of the Canyon with experts and knowledgeable people is always stimulating and rewarding. Typically from 10 to 30 people join us on our nature walks and for stewardship (work) sessions and you would be welcome to join the following scheduled events. For questions and to RSVP, contact [wmclung@rcn.com](mailto:wmclung@rcn.com) or call 841-8447. Long sleeves, long pants, and hats are recommended.

### **April 15, 9 to 11 a.m.** — *Nature Photography with Sharon Beals*

Sharon, a professional photographer with a passion for seeing and recording with her camera the plants, animals, and habitats around us, has been a student of Claremont Canyon for five years. We will meet at the intersection of Claremont Ave and Grizzly Peak Blvd (Four Corners), and walk or drive from there to promising areas, depending on the light. Participants are invited to bring their cameras and to make this a working session with Sharon.

### **April 21, 9 a.m. to 12 noon** — *Earthday Stewardship*

Join us on our traditional collaboration with the Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association to work on trail maintenance and French broom control in Garber Park. Bring gloves.

### **May 5, 7 a.m. to 12 noon** — *Resident and Tropical Migrant Birds of Claremont Canyon with Dave Quady*

We will meet with Dave, Audubon Christmas Bird Count Leader, at 7 a.m. at the intersection of Claremont Avenue and Grizzly Peak Boulevard, and bird at several locations. We'll attempt to hear and/or see several of the canyon's breeding birds—that is, the year-round residents and the tropical migrants that have arrived to breed. Participants should bring a field guide and binoculars. (There will be a couple of pairs of binoculars to loan.)

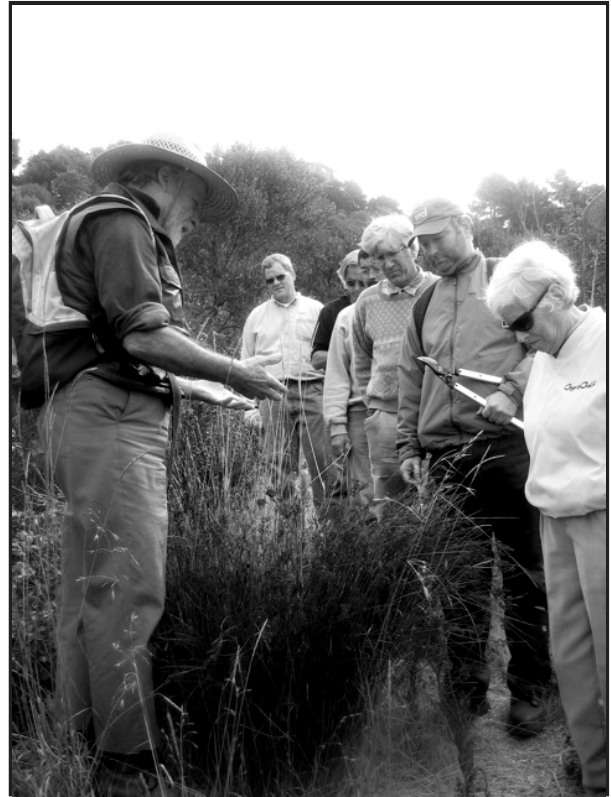
**ENTIRELY OPTIONAL:** *For those who wish ALSO to listen to the “dawn chorus,” join Dave at the foot of Gelston at 5 a.m. We'll listen there to the birds' pre-dawn singing, until about 6:30 a.m.—leaving time for a quick trip to Domingo before our 7 a.m. meeting time!*

### **May 19, 9 to 11 a.m.** — *Stewardship on the Side Hill Trail*

We will continue our four-year effort to eliminate yellow starthistle from colonizing the native coastal prairie on one of the most beautiful parts of the University's land in the Canyon. Come pull seedlings while the soil is still moist and the spiky thistles have not yet formed. Wear sturdy boots and gloves.

### **June 9, 9 to 11 a.m.** — *Managing Buffer Zones for Wildfire Safety and Native Biodiversity with Bill McClung and Paul McGee*

Bill and Paul will show and discuss several private shrubland/grassland areas along Drury Court where they have been work-



© 2006 Martin Holden

*Jake Sigg of the California Native Plant Society explains the charms of the native Blue rush on the “Native or Non-Native?” nature walk last September.*

ing for half a decade to achieve a balance between conservation and fire safety goals. The group will then travel over to the end of Rispin to walk into Oakland's Garber Park, where a largely forested area is also being managed for the same goals.

### **June 16, 9 to 11 a.m.** — *Stewardship at Four Corners*

We will continue our work on both sides of the University's land at the corner of Claremont Avenue and Grizzly Peak Boulevard, where we manage weeds, study plants emerging after the eucalyptus removal four years ago, and pick up trash in this strategic high canyon site.

### **June 30, 10 a.m. to 12 noon** — *Considering a Watershed Assessment of Claremont Canyon with Laurel Marcus*

Laurel is principal of Laurel Marcus and Associates. She has over 25 years of experience in the field of wetland and watershed restoration and project implementation. We will meet at the Chert on Claremont Avenue in mid-canyon and walk along the creek through the upper watershed, including the 30-year-old redwood forest and areas of heavy eucalyptus chip cover, and up to the headwaters at Four Corners.

## Touring the Urban-Wildland Interface with Oakland Deputy Fire Chief James Edwards

By Bill McClung

For about two miles along the southern and western edges of Claremont Canyon, nearly a thousand houses and private properties directly face about a hundred acres of *wildlands*. The management of these undeveloped lands owned by the Regional Park District, City of Oakland, and private landowners could determine whether firefighters can successfully keep future wildland fires in the Canyon from engulfing whole neighborhoods in minutes, as in 1991.

A man who knows well the challenges of fighting fires in Claremont Canyon and elsewhere in the Oakland Hills is Oakland Deputy Chief James Edwards, a 20-year veteran of the Oakland Fire Department, and newly rotated into the position of Fire Marshal. In addition to fighting the 1991 Fire, he was incident commander for the successful attack on the 1999 fire between Stonewall and Panoramic Hill, an operation that is considered a striking success as a brush fire was prevented from entering the eucalyptus stand above Clark Kerr Campus and from spreading up to Panoramic Hill.

We asked Jim to visit the Claremont Canyon interface with us. On February 6, Marilyn Goldhaber and Bill McClung walked and drove with him along the interface along Norfolk and Strathmoor (where the Conservancy helped create a buffer zone in 2006 with the Park District), on private land in the Drury Court and Dartmouth area, and in Garber Park (where substantial work was done by the City of Oakland in 2006). On February 23, Martin Holden, Matt Mitchell, Marilyn and Bill showed Chief Edwards the Stonewall Buffer Zone, where a major eucalyptus removal project was accomplished in 2006, and hiked up the ridge to view Panoramic Hill.

These walks were enjoyable and we were grateful to have an opportunity to call to Chief Edward's attention areas where vegetation management seems to us adequate and where it falls dangerously short of the standards recommended by 1995 *Fire Hazard Mitigation Program & Fuel Management Plan for the East Bay Hills*. The landscape is complex and large areas of it are difficult to access, but we know fires do not hesitate to burn up steep slopes and through thick brush and poison oak.

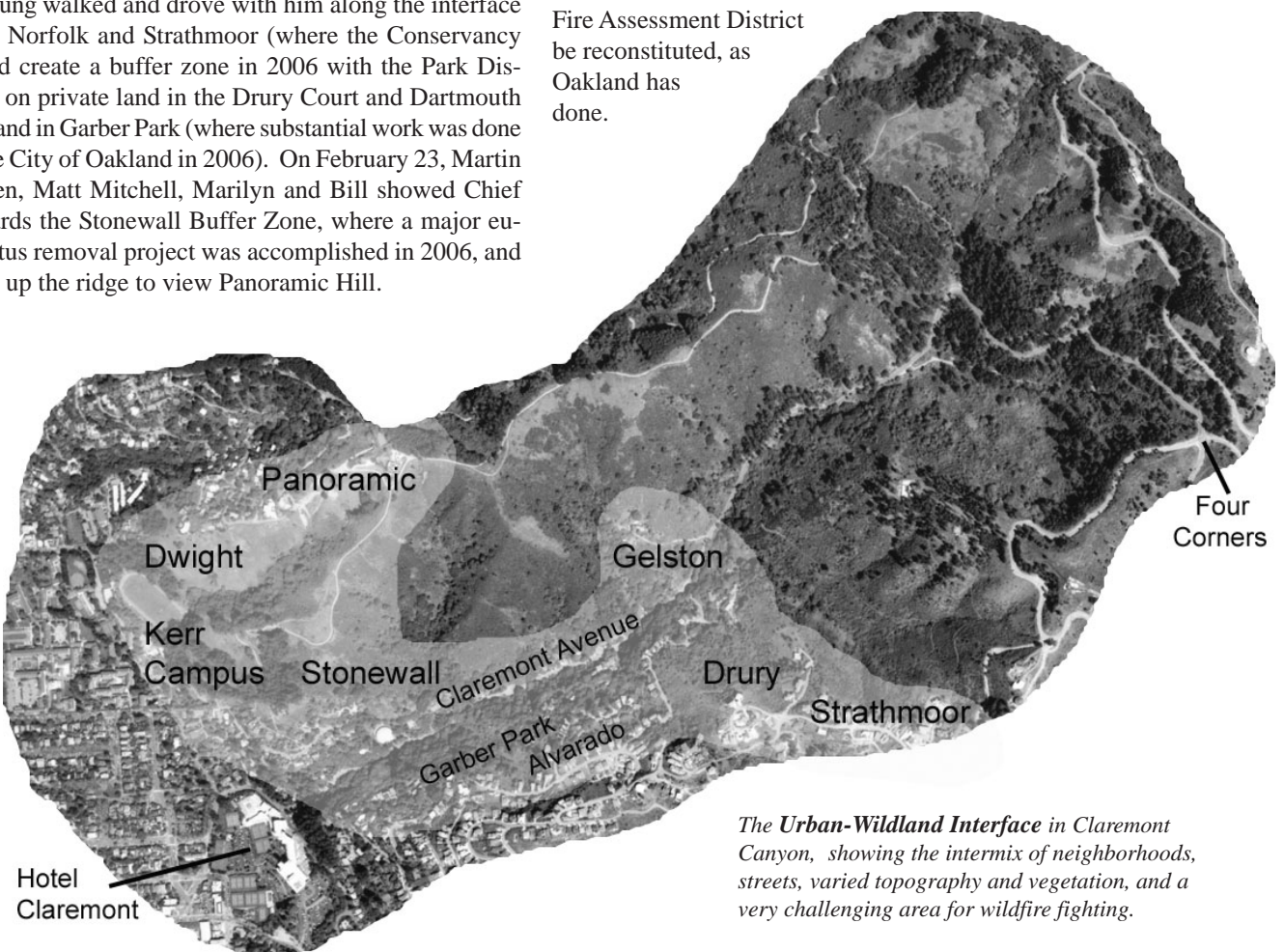
We are inviting Chief Edwards to think about whether a fire can be successfully fought in each interface location in Claremont Canyon, and to exercise his authority where he feels changes are needed. These tours were the first of many annual visits we intend to organize with wildfire experts, as suggested by the *North Hills Phoenix Association Citizens' 2006 Review of the 1992 Final Report of the Task Force on Emergency Preparedness and Community Restoration* (Forestry and Vegetation section chaired by William McClung and Robert Sieben).

Among the principal recommendations of the *Review* are:

- That the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) evaluate the adequacy of fuelbreaks on public lands at the urban-wildland interface in the East Bay Hills each year.

- That the Fire Departments of Oakland, Piedmont, Berkeley, and El Cerrito also do a regular annual monitoring of public wildlands along their urban-wildland interface.

- That the Berkeley Fire Assessment District be reconstituted, as Oakland has done.



*The Urban-Wildland Interface in Claremont Canyon, showing the intermix of neighborhoods, streets, varied topography and vegetation, and a very challenging area for wildfire fighting.*

## Taking Out the Eucs *by Marilyn Goldhaber*

Over 9,000 eucalyptus trees have been removed from Claremont Canyon since 2001 and thousands more are due to come down in the next 2-4 years. Monitoring and follow-up of the logged areas this time will assure that a recurrence of resprouted trees and new seedlings will not overwhelm the land, force out the native flora and fauna, and present an unacceptable wildfire hazard to the canyon and nearby homes.

Some people will undoubtedly miss these trees, which have held their place in the canyon for nearly a century. Had they been less aggressive in growth and less flammable by nature, wildland managers might have been able to deal with them in a different way. But this was not the case for the fragrant and breezy giants, mostly *Eucalyptus globulus*, or Blue Gum, which were imported from Australia for commercial reasons a hundred years ago. Removal of eucalyptus from Claremont Canyon has become the highest priority for public land managers in an effort to restore a natural landscape and reduce the chances of another 1991-style firestorm.

The decision to remove eucalyptus was made several times before in the East Bay Hills: in the 1930s and again in the 1970s and 1980s, when people were still reeling from recent firestorms that destroyed homes and threatened lives. Each time in the storms' aftermath, wildland managers logged eucalyptus trees and hauled them away by the thousands. Unfortunately, there weren't enough funds for follow-up to prevent the stumps from resprouting or to intercept new seedlings. Each time, the trees came back with a vengeance, the severed stumps often sending up as many as six or seven new stems to soon become a cluster of tall trees.

Then, on October 21, 1991, as many of us recall, came the most devastating firestorm of all. On that day, a small wildland fire just south of Claremont Canyon swirled out of control during Diablo wind conditions and within hours spread across 1,520 acres, destroying 2,449 homes and taking 25 lives. In the firestorm's aftermath, as homeowners began to rebuild, wildland managers again faced the challenge of what to do about the eucalyptus.

UC land managers were on it fast, embarking on a multi-year, phase-by-phase program of removing eucalyptus from

UC-owned land in Claremont Canyon and elsewhere, taking care to retain as many native trees and vegetation as possible. Phase Six of the removal in Claremont Canyon has been completed and Phase Seven is due to begin soon, with long-term follow-up planned for all logged areas.

"This does not mean there will never be another fire in the canyon," says UC's Tom Klatt. "It does mean that we expect fewer, less intense fires, and ones that should be more readily controlled and produce less threat to the adjacent neighborhoods and to the ecosystem. The threatened Alameda Whipsnake is a beneficiary of all of this work, as we are reversing the loss of native habitat and making it much more likely that our native flora and fauna will have long-term success in Claremont and Strawberry canyons."

By 2004, the Park District stepped in, removing eucalyptus from ridge lines owned by the District to the north and east of the canyon and thinning out the eucalyptus plantation at the trailhead of the Claremont Canyon Preserve. Additional fire safety work is currently undergoing administrative review at the Park District.

In 2006, the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, a citizen-based organization, partnered with the Park District and

the City of Oakland in buffer zones near roadsides and homes. The bulk of the work consisted of removing eucalyptus in crucial areas of the Preserve and roadside rights-of-way. The massive eucalyptus trees lining Claremont Avenue were of particular concern, as they posed a threat to egress for both residents and emergency vehicles in case of fire or earthquake.

"The work revealed some magnificent (native) trees," said David Kessler of the North Hills Phoenix Association, "especially oaks that have a lot more elbow room, which must have been literally in the shadows previously....The Claremont Canyon Conservancy, the East Bay Regional Park District, the University, and all of us who live in the area need to work together for years ahead to find effective strategies to manage vegetation, and to clear, restore and maintain areas where work has been done."

The Conservancy continues to urge the large landowners to utilize available funds from FEMA, US Fish and Wildlife, Measure CC (Alameda County) and Measure DD (Oakland) for ongoing fire safety work and follow-up in Claremont Canyon.

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*Board members Tim Wallace and Joe Engbeck discuss the eucalyptus removal program amongst the eucs ( no longer standing) in 2002.*

## Two reasons to remove eucalyptus



“Of the many eucalyptus species that evolved with fire, none is more incendiary than blue gum. *Gasoline trees*, firefighters call them. Fire doesn’t kill blue gums. Rather, they depend on fire to open their seedpods and clear out the competition. And they promote fire with their prolific combustible oil, copious litter, and long shreds of hanging bark designed to carry flames to the crowns. Blue gum eucalyptus doesn’t just burn, it explodes, sending firebrands and seeds shooting hundreds of feet in all directions.”

From *American’s Largest Weed*  
by Ted Williams

“Native wildlife finds little use for eucalyptus except for those trees in bloom, and many birds that swarm to flowering “eucs” may die as a result of this connection. Non-blooming “eucs” cause areas of ecological emptiness that could otherwise be viable habitat if planted with native trees like oaks or pines. From a point of view that would favor the health and prosperity of native North American plants and animals, especially birds, eucalyptus trees (particularly those that bloom from October to February) should be removed.”

From *Deadly Eucalyptus* by Rich Stallcup

## Weed Management Area

The Conservancy is currently exploring the concept of establishing a *weed management area* for Claremont Canyon, in partnership with the major landholders and agencies. This would lay the groundwork for a long-term, multidisciplinary approach to vegetation management, with quantifiable outcomes. We would begin by mapping and prioritizing critical weed problems, based on the best available information and expertise, then chart a course of action for ongoing field work in the canyon.

### “Wild” Broom, *continued from page 1*

of habitat for a more native balance to move in. We are not talking here about the removal of those forests of broom that have become entrenched on hillsides all around the East Bay Hills. Those require armies of people with all sorts of weapons and multiple strategies. This venture is the hunt for the sentinels—those lone riders that venture out into undisturbed territory, quiet invaders bringing devastation

to the modest areas of native diversity left near our urban jungles. As these bad guys forge ahead, their progeny will spread into the densest native thickets, skewing the balance of habitat for the local denizens. The only things that stop them are deep shade, wetlands—or weed warriors.

The older plants have the advantage of being flagged with sweet-smelling bright yellow flowers. This means that you can spot a sentinel plant on a distant hillside between February and April. Getting to one of those lone riders in the midst of an otherwise impenetrable scrubland takes some strategy. This is not a walk in the park. You’ve got to suit up in thick denim pants that will armor you against the spiny native blackberries and thickets of crusty branches. Wearing tall boots means fewer annoying dirt clods and sticks under your arches. Rubberized or leather gloves allow you to use your hands as climbing appendages, part the sea of vegetation, and, of course, pull broom. Your plant identification skills must be honed to know your prey, but also to know your potential nemesis, poison oak.

In contrast to most native shrubs with their web of roots, broom’s long skinny taproot makes them easy to pull. Removing older plants requires the leverage of a weed wrench- <http://weedwrench.com/>. Carrying a weed wrench into the out back is hard work, but then sometimes it is the only tool that works. You could take along a handsaw, but cutting broom does not guarantee its demise. Rule of thumb is the larger the trunk, the better the chance the broom will never replot. A 3" diameter stem cut off near the ground is more likely to die than a 1.5" stem, while a half inch stem is guaranteed to resprout the next year with a vigorous flowering topknot of growth and a wickedly tenacious root system.

Two-foot high seedlings come up like butter from the saturated ground after a good rain, but they do not always have the advantage of being flagged with yellow. If you find yourself where these young ones are spreading into a native area and you have an eye for detail, the hunt is on. Scan the ground around you to look for the telltale set of soft rounded leaves. The game is *can you see the broom seedling in this picture?* Watch for the one hiding behind a native, trying to blend in. Once you’ve got the hang of recognizing them, the work goes quickly and you leave in your wake a purified land, at least for the time being.

A topo map and a compass give you a sense of the watershed you’re exploring, help you understand how the water flows and which slopes are most sunny. While binoculars let you check out the redtail soaring overhead or maybe even a shy thrasher, they also extend your ability to spot the far broom. That distant yellowish plant could be broom, but once you look through your binocs, it might turn out to be just an anemic coyote bush. Walkie-talkies are invaluable when you’re in over-your-head brush and you have lost sight of your prey; a friend sitting on the opposite hill watching you with binocs will be able to guide you into arm’s reach of your yellow-flagged quarry. Plus you can have an audience for the running narrative of your adventure, as well as a ride to pick you up at the end.

Next year there will be more broom seedlings to pull, and it is not until the fourth or fifth year, that you can look back with satisfaction at a piece of land that requires minimal effort to be broom-free. Even though there might be some broom seeds lurking in the soil, waiting for decades to spring forth, you make a huge difference in the health of the land by beginning the eradication now.

## Founding Sponsors of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy in order as they joined, October 2001 through March 2007

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Rick and Ann's Restaurant

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*Shelagh Broderson goes down the trail in Garber Park.*

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## Honoring our Members

From our beginning in 2001, we encouraged nearby residents and Community organizations to support the Conservancy by becoming Founding Sponsors with a commitment to contribute \$1,000, either at once or over ten years. We are grateful to list on the opposite page, in approximately the order the commitments were made, our first 189 Founding Sponsors.

Below, we honor our newest members, from other categories of membership, who joined the Conservancy since last spring. We also are grateful for 243 other members, too numerous to list here, who have joined the Conservancy in previous years and who continue to support our work with their yearly contributions.

Susan Aaron &  
Steven Sherman  
Beth Abovlfia &  
Jacqueline Tully  
Lexi & Jason Bieber  
Don & Carol Anne Brown  
Martha Chase  
Helene Cohen  
Renate & Robert Coombs  
John Cooper  
John Dal Pino  
George Davis &  
Katherine Westine  
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Mark Burget  
Calvin Tam  
Dale Uptegrove  
Marcy Whitebook &  
Carl Price  
Joseph & Arnette  
Whitehouse  
Marty Williams  
David Williamson



Berkeley Project volunteers Nick Kwong and Tim Liu use a “weed wrench” provided by Shelterbelt Builders to pull French broom in Dwight Canyon on March 17th. This small canyon, nestled within the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve, is home to redwoods, at least six species of ferns, and an abundance of wildlife. Under the direction of Conservancy Board members, and Berkeley Project volunteer coordinators Andrew Rowland and Jeff Naecker, 30 enthusiastic Cal students removed 50 bags of debris and cleared over half an acre of invasive weeds. Supplies and support were provided by Tim Pine of UC’s Office of Environment, Health & Safety, and Phil Cody and Lisa Bauer, of Physical Plant-Campus Services. A wonderful lunch, catered by Founding Sponsor Rick & Ann’s Restaurant on Domingo Avenue, was enjoyed by all.

## A Menu



In Michael Pollan’s bestselling 2006 book *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, he describes his fourth and “perfect” meal as one he completely hunts, gathers, and makes himself. “This being Berkeley,” he writes, “I felt compelled to add a few pretentious restaurant menu flourishes:

*Fava Bean Toasts and Sonoma Boar Pâté  
Egg Fettuccine and Power Fire Morels  
Braised Leg and Grilled Loin of Wild  
Sonoma Pig  
Wild East Bay Yeast Levain  
Very Local Garden Salad  
Fulton Street Bing Cherry Galette  
Claremont Canyon Chamomile Tisane  
2003 Angelo Garro Petite Syrah.”*

That’s our cup of tea.

## Join the Conservancy

Founding Sponsor: \$1,000 over 10 years.  
Family Membership: \$50 per year.  
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## Contact Us

PO Box 5551, Berkeley CA 94705  
510-843-2226  
ClaremontCanyon@hotmail.com  
<http://www.ClaremontCanyon.org>

## The Board of Directors:

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

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



CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY  
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[www.ClaremontCanyon.org](http://www.ClaremontCanyon.org)

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*Flowering of Dirca occidentalis (western leatherwood) in January in Claremont Canyon.*

## THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

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



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*Conservancy board members take Oakland's Deputy Fire Chief Jim Edwards (in white) on a tour of the urban-wildland interface, see page 3.*