

THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

SPRING/SUMMER 2005

News

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

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Glimpse of the SF Bay from Garber Park at the base of Claremont Canyon, with home on Stonewall Road in the foreground.

Spring and Summer in the Canyon

by Laura Baker

This winter's abundant rains have brought renewed beauty to Claremont Canyon. Take a few minutes to stop and enjoy it before the tenderness fades with the summer drought. On the south slope of the canyon, the subject is *leaves*— of every size and shape. The soft, chartreuse canopy created by the big leaf maples contrasts with the leathery leaves of the live oaks. California buckeyes reach for the light with their five-fingered leaves. These trees shade the elaborate fronds of sword and wood ferns on the forest floor. As last year's leaf litter dries, banana slugs and slender salamanders retreat with the moisture to recesses beneath rotting logs. Here and there, dusky footed wood rats add more sticks to their mounded nests.

Along the north slope, the coastal scrub community is putting on a different show. Coyote brush has added a set of glossy new leaves that contrast with the feathery, muted gray-green foliage of California sagebrush. Cow parsnip is sprouting up here and there, its huge white umbels offering bees, beetles and other insects a luxurious feast. Nesting hummingbirds (resident Anna's and migrant Allen's) take nectar from the



A gray fox was spotted in the Canyon on the April 10 bird walk. Photo by Obi Gilkerson

yellow funny-face blossoms of monkey flower. Listen for the bouncing ball call of the wren-tit amid the tangle of scrub.

For a gaudier display, make your way to the Sidehill Trail at the eastern end of Panoramic Ridge. Here the blue-violet flower spikes of silver lupine contrast with the scarlet and yellow of Indian paintbrush and the orange of California poppies. This warmer portion of the canyon is a good place to see fence and alligator lizards sunning themselves in the middle of the trail. All this intricately interwoven natural beauty is there in the Canyon waiting to be enjoyed.

Head out on your own or join one of our guided nature walks. The walks, which are free, fill quickly and are generally limited to 20 participants with preference given to Conservancy members. Pre-registration is required: call or email Laura Baker at 510-849-1409 or Lbake66@aol.com.

Laura Baker is a biologist and a member of the Conservancy's executive committee.

Stewardship in Action

by Bill McClung

Our Conservancy is described as a "community-based organization to support the long-term stewardship of Claremont Canyon." But what exactly is stewardship? The late Nate Walrod, the youngest founding sponsor of the Conservancy, is often quoted by his friends as saying "love is an action." The same can be said of stewardship. Virtually everything that the Conservancy does is a form of stewardship, whether it's advocating wildfire



Cow parsnips in bloom on Earth Day in Garber Park.

safety, preserving native habitats or maintaining public access to our beautiful Canyon.

One person can be a steward in Claremont Canyon by simply picking up trash on walks. Our organized stewardship sessions typically attract a dozen or so volunteers, who have a great time pulling French broom, maintaining a trail or preserving one of our few surviving native grassland areas. In the last four years we have had close to a hundred volunteer stewardship sessions in the Canyon.

One of our ongoing projects is the maintenance of the loop trail between Evergreen Lane and Rispin Drive in Garber Park. Several experiments at slowing the spread of the invasive cape and Algerian ivies are underway here. And, a beautiful new stairway has been constructed by the East Bay Conservation Corps on the steep slope at the Evergreen end.

We have also had sessions at the “Chert Wall” in mid-Canyon, battling the broom infestation there with UC’s Tom Klatt, and studying the Claremont chert with new board member Martin Holden (see page 4). Under discussion is the question of whether the eucalyptus trees rooted in the outcrop should also be removed to protect the outcrop and encourage the native vegetation.

By agreement with UC and under contract with the Conservancy, workers from Shelterbelt Builders, includ-

ing Conservancy members Paul McGee and myself, have been managing vegetation and protecting native plants on one acre at Four Corners at the top of Claremont Canyon. A Conservancy volunteer session in November joined in the effort, planting a small plot of native june grass and phacelia seeds. And of course, Joe Engbeck and other volunteers have also added seedlings to the small stands of redwoods here (see below).

If fresh air and exercise in beautiful surroundings sound good to you, give stewardship a try. Volunteers are encouraged to contact Bill McClung at wmcclung@rcn.com to learn about upcoming stewardship events.

Bill McClung is a publisher, small business owner/land manager and a Conservancy board member.

Redwoods Replace Eucalyptus in Claremont Canyon

by Joe Engbeck

The Conservancy’s dream of replacing those fire-dangerous eucalyptus trees in upper Claremont Canyon took a step forward recently when volunteers planted some 1,100 redwood seedlings in areas where

UC has removed eucalyptus during the last couple of years. The newly planted, year-old seedlings are still so small that they're hard to spot, but now that the eucs are gone, it is easy to see the 60- and 80-foot-tall redwoods that the Piedmont Rotary Club planted in the upper canyon thirty years ago. Those older redwoods—now obvious on even a casual drive up Claremont Ave to Four Corners—make it easy to imagine what a redwood forest in the upper canyon will look like in the future.

This whole story goes back to about 1910, when tens of thousands of eucalyptus trees were planted in the Oakland/Berkeley Hills as part of a fad that was then sweeping through coastal California. Fast-growing hardwood! That was the idea. But enthusiasm soon faded as people discovered that wood grown from eucalyptus in California was not useful in most of the ways eucalyptus promoters had promised.

The trees themselves continued to grow, however. Seedlings sprouted in many places. In Claremont Canyon, for example, the result was a dense, self-perpetuating forest full of eucalyptus debris—leaves and branches and long shreds of peeled-off bark—that formed a mat several feet deep, enough to overwhelm most low-growing native plants and making it difficult if not impossible for people to walk through. The eucalyptus experiment had become an ecological disaster and a monumental fire hazard.

Then, in December 1972, a prolonged cold snap hit the San Francisco Bay Area. Thousands of eucalyptus trees in upper Claremont Canyon were frost-bitten from top to bottom. They were still standing, but they looked terrible—stark and dry and colorless, like so much kindling waiting for a spark. With the Berkeley Hills wildfire of 1970 still painfully fresh in everyone's memory, UC Chancellor Albert

Bowker decided to take bold action. He had all the eucalyptus trees cut down and hauled away. Logging crews with chainsaws and tractors and big trucks did the job. Afterward, the upper canyon looked like a war zone. To

minimize erosion, the area was seeded from the air, but it still looked terrible.

In response, the Piedmont Rotary Club came forward with a reforestation plan that involved planting some 550 Monterey pines and coast redwood seedlings in the upper canyon. With the approval and support of the University campus planning staff, the club's little army of volunteers did the job one Sunday morning in April of 1975.

Everyone had overlooked one problem, however. The eucalyptus root systems were not dead. Soon the stumps began to sprout—sending up four or five or six new stems to replace the old ones that been frozen and cut down. Within a few years, the upper canyon turned back into a forest of fast-growing, extremely fire-hazardous eucalyptus trees. By 2002, those new stems were 12 to 18 inches in diameter and as much as 80 feet tall.

Recognizing that the situation was once again out of control, Tom Klatt, manager of emergency planning for the Berkeley campus, set



California thrasher spotted on this year's bird walk. Please check our website for an upcoming article, "Of Thrashers and Swifts."

to work. After meeting with members of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy and with experts in forestry and fire safety from various local agencies, he came up with a plan and a budget to solve the problem on a phase-by-phase basis as funds became available. Once

again, the eucalyptus trees in the upper canyon have begun to come down. This time, however, Klatt is making sure that the euc stumps do not resprout. Oaks, laurels, elderberrys, and other native trees and shrubs



They might be giants! Forestry students Saphak Peou and Erica Smith plant redwood seedlings in the Canyon. Photo by Genevieve Shiffar © 2005.

are being left in place and redwoods are being planted in order to create a cool, moist, relatively fire-safe forest in the upper canyon.

The Conservancy provided \$14,000 to help support Klatt's plan and also set out to provide the redwood seedlings needed for reforestation purposes. Seeds were collected from naturally occurring coast redwoods in the Oakland/Berkeley Hills about two miles south of Claremont Canyon. That means that the seedlings are genetically appropriate to the site where they are being planted; they are from a forest that has been evolving and adapting to local conditions for many thousands of years. The seeds were then turned over to the Moran Reforestation Center in Davis, which is operated by the California Department of Forestry. There seeds are cleaned, stratified, and stored under carefully controlled conditions of temperature and humidity until they are needed for reforestation projects. In March 2003, the Conservancy sent seeds to a nursery in Humboldt County to be germinated and grown. After about a year, the resulting seedlings were 20 to as much as 30 inches tall and ready to go into the ground.

As a labor of love and as vice-president of the Conservancy, I did most of the planning for this redwood reforestation project, and managed the actual planting effort. This involved a total of twenty volunteers, including eleven members of the UC Berkeley Forestry Club, two members of the Conservancy board, and a couple of East Bay Municipal Utility District ranger-naturalists, who were sufficiently enthusiastic about the project to use their days off to help out. As a result, about 1,100

redwood seedlings are happily extending their root systems down into the soil of the upper canyon and beginning to stretch their tender green leaves and stems and branches upward into the sunlight.

The University is planning to remove another 1,200 to 1,800 eucalyptus stems from upper Claremont Canyon later this year, and the Conservancy is getting ready to follow up by planting more redwoods. Seeds have already been sent to the nursery in Humboldt County to be germinated and grown. We expect to be planting those seedlings next year.

Joe Engbeck is a writer, environmental historian and vice president of the Conservancy.

The Chert Wall

By Martin Holden

The outcropping of the Claremont Chert in the middle of Claremont Canyon (the "Chert Wall") is one of the best exposures of this interesting geological formation. According to rumor, stone was quarried here in the 19th and early 20th Century for use as roadbed fill under what is now Claremont Avenue. Currently, the Chert Wall is part of the University of California's Ecological Study Area. It provides an accessible place to observe the sage scrub native to the sunny southern exposure of Claremont Canyon, a flora which has been largely displaced by eucalyptus and other exotics elsewhere in the Canyon.

How was it formed? The Claremont Chert is a marine sedimentary rock, originally deposited in a hemipelagic environment. This term refers to depositional basins which are neither near-shore nor in the deep sea. Modern examples of this type of depositional environment would be the basins between the Channel Islands, off of the Southern California coast. The much larger Monterey Formation is another example of a hemipelagic deposit. Both of these formations consist of chert, a hard, fine-grained silica-rich rock, plus more friable shales and mudstones.

What is it made of? The main components of the Claremont Chert are the siliceous skeletons of microscopic marine



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Conservancy member Tamia Marg studies the Chert Wall on last year's nature walk with UC geologist Walter Alvarez.



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Old California live oak in Garber Park.

creatures, primarily radiolarians. The interbedded shales are composed of clays derived from airborne dust particles, plus fish scales and other detritus. There are also occasional layers of yellowish dolomite, probably derived from calcareous microfossils such as foraminifers.

How old is it? The Claremont Chert was deposited in the middle to late Miocene approximately 13 million years ago. This is the period when the Earth began to look truly “modern.” Along with the formation of the Antarctic ice cap, the Miocene saw the expansion of kelp forests and grasslands, and the diversification of the mammals.

Why is it layered? The origin of rhythmic bedding is a source of controversy. The layers do not represent annual variations, like tree rings. The couplets that define each layer (consisting of about 10 cm of chert and a thin 1-2 cm band of shale) were actually deposited over a period of a few thousand years each, at least. Therefore, the bedding must represent some variation in deposition that occurs over this long time scale. The most likely explanation is that the layers were formed by changes in ocean fertility and/or wind deposition, relating to periodic climate changes. These

changes are probably associated with regular variations in the Earth’s orientation as it orbits the sun (the “Milankovich Effect”).

Why are the layers vertical? The steeply-dipping strata seen in of the Claremont Chert result from strike-slip and reverse faulting associated with the Hayward and related, smaller faults. This deformation began in the late Miocene, and is associated with the movement of the North American Plate relative to the Pacific Plate. Needless to say, this process is still occurring.

What other rocks are found in Claremont Canyon? The oldest rocks in the Canyon are the Leona Rhyolite and the Cretaceous Oakland Sandstone, which can be seen on the Ridge Trail. These Mesozoic rocks are overlain by the Claremont Chert, which is itself overlain by the late Miocene Orinda Formation, a riverine deposit. The youngest rocks are the basalts of the Moraga Formation, which are exposed in the road-cuts of Grizzly Peak Blvd.

Martin Holden, a writer and geologist, is one of the Conservancy’s newest board members (see next page for more about Martin).

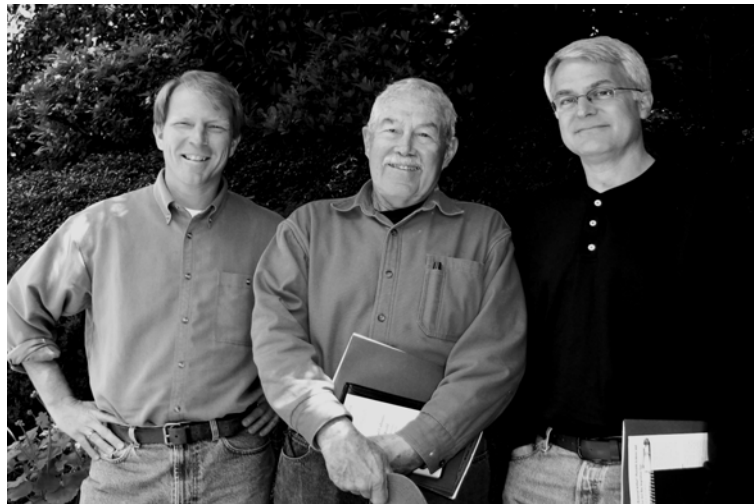
Ideas from Oakland's Wildfire Prevention Advisory Board

On February 24, the City of Oakland's citizen-based Wildfire Prevention Advisory Board agreed to six areas of focus for Oakland's new assessment district. Each goal has a list of suggested actions to help implement it, which can be viewed on the Conservancy's website: www.ClaremontCanyon.org. For additional information, email Tamia Marg at tmarg@california.com.

1. REDUCE THE SOURCES OF IGNITION
2. MAINTAIN ACCESS (FIRE SUPPRESSION) AND EGRESS (EVACUATION) ROUTES
3. DEVELOP FIRE PREVENTION FRIENDLY POLICIES
4. REDUCE THE SPREAD OF FIRES WITHIN THE URBAN WILDLAND INTERFACE
5. SUPPORT/LEVERAGE EFFORTS BY HOME/PROPERTY OWNERS
6. DEVELOP A YEAR ROUND SEASONAL STRATEGY

Oakland's New Herbicide Policy

Following recommendation from the Wildfire Advisory Board, the Oakland City Council voted in April to allow limited use of herbicides as part of a long-term strategy to reduce fire danger in Oakland's hills. This amendment to Oakland's 1997 Integrated Pest Management Policy allows certain herbicides (known by their trade names as Round-up or Garlon) to be carefully applied to highly-flammable plants such as



New Conservancy Board members Martin Holden, Dave Sharp and Donald Pierce.

eucalyptus and French broom. Details of the policy can be found at <http://www.jeanquan.org>.

New Faces on the Board

This year the Conservancy welcomes three new members, Martin Holden, Dave Sharp, and Don Pierce to its Board of Directors. Martin, originally from Southern California, studied Earth Science at UC Santa Cruz. He has written general-interest books on the sciences and currently writes for magazines on a variety of topics. He also operates an antiquarian bookshop in Berkeley. An avid naturalist, he loves to explore the Canyon with his children.

Dave is a true outdoorsman. An avid hiker, climber and back-country skier, the former Nevada rancher has long worked as a snow surveyor in the Sierra Nevada. He has also been a high school teacher and coach, and has operated a tree service business in the Bay Area for many years. He can often be found hiking in the Canyon with the family dogs.

Don is a Bay Area native who grew up in the Berkeley hills, where he roamed as a Boy Scout before attending UC Berkeley. After the 1991 Firestorm he became active in working with the City of Oakland and local homeowners' groups. He is currently a board member of the United Policy Holders, an advocacy organization seeking to safeguard homeowner insurer's rights in the aftermath of natural disasters.

The Conservancy stands in great debt to its three outgoing board members Klaus Burmeister, Nancy Mueller and Betty Croly, Klaus for his legal efforts throughout the Conservancy's formative years, Nancy for her leadership on stewardship projects and the Annual Meeting, and Betty for her thoughtful counsel on the Board and work on the Membership Committee.

Tale of the Tapping Towhee

by Marilyn Goldhaber

At first, I wondered if my husband had a secret admirer. I could hear a tapping at the window of his study, like someone wanting to get in. But when I went to investigate in the wee hours of the morning, no one was there. Then again— tap, tap, tap— and I saw him, a little brown bird earnestly pecking and flapping at his own reflection. He continued this way *all day long*.

That evening I told my husband, and we had a good chuckle (At this point we did not know whether the bird was a he or a she.). The next day it started again. I cleaned the window and took down a bird kite that we had strung on the study wall, thinking that it might be the attraction. But within minutes, the little fellow was at it again ... tap, tap, tap at the same ground level window.

This was in early March, around the time our bookkeeper comes in to help out. Being a resourceful young woman, she went straight to Google and entered: “bird tapping at the window.” She turned up a delightful article by naturalist Marcia Bonta on tapping towhees. “Aha, it’s a towhee!” we said, “and others have had them too!”

We confirmed the identity of our little bird in *Western Birds* by Frank Shaw. While many towhees are spotted and colorful, the California towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*) is plain and brown ... and highly territorial. This was definitely our guy. According to Bonta, the male busies himself singing and defending his territory while his mate builds their nest, lays the eggs and broods over them for 3 to 4 weeks (about the duration of our tapper’s stay). Bonta had her own tapping towhee story and indeed found other accounts of tappers as determined as ours.

“While his mate was incubating ... a male towhee discovered his reflection in the windows of a nearby house,” wrote F.W. Davis of Massachusetts. “From crack of dawn until dark he attacked his image with time out only to feed. He would flutter against a pane for a few seconds, take a few tentative but firm pecks at it, retreat, give a few ‘drink-your-tea’ calls, and then return to drive off the interloper...He continued this behavior even after the eggs hatched. On his way to feed the young with a beakful of larvae he usually tarried long enough to make a few sallies. Ultimately he fought with— and smeared— every window in the house.”

Poet Brendan Galvin also hosted a tapping towhee. In his “Poem of the Towhee” he writes: “This one has bunted the window all spring, baffled by glass...”



So, if you ever find a towhee tapping at your window, you’re in good company.

Marilyn Goldhaber lives at the urban/wildland intermix of Claremont Canyon and is treasurer of the Conservancy. The towhee shown above (not the Goldhabers’) is taking a breather after battle with a car mirror.

Claremont Canyon is the largest relatively undisturbed canyon on the western slope of the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. Much of the canyon’s watershed is publicly-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.
Individual, Student or Senior: \$15 per year.

Contact Us

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The Board of Directors: Tim Wallace, president; Joe Engbeck, vice president; Tamia Marg, secretary; Marilyn Goldhaber, treasurer; Laura Baker, education; Bill McClung, stewardship. Other board members at large: Joshua Bar-Lev, Martin Holden, Donald Pierce, David Sharp and Dick White.

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

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UC's Tom Klatt (kneeling) and the Conservancy's Joe Engbeck (third from the right) join UC Forestry Club members plant redwood trees in Claremont Canyon (see inside, page 2).