



Conservancy COMMENTS

The Donna O'Neill
Land Conservancy

Volume 16 Number 2
Fall/Winter 2008-2009

THE CONSERVANCY'S OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

This newsletter focuses on *The Conservancy's* school programs: the naturalists who lead them, the teachers who participate in them, and the donors who make many of them possible. At a time when schools are struggling financially, these critically important educational programs depend on the generosity of the community.

Listen to the current buzz on how to educate today's children, and you'll hear expressions like experiential education, place-based education, environment-based education and bioregional education. What do these terms mean and why are they being discussed now?

All are based upon the seemingly obvious idea of using local resources as a starting point for teaching concepts across the curriculum. *The Conservancy* supports this approach, which has achieved prominence in response to trends moving education in exactly the opposite direction. In an effort to ensure that "No Child [is] Left Behind"—title of a federal law focused on improving school performance—the K-12 curriculum has been increasingly standardized.

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"For the child. . . it is not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow."

Rachel Carson



Exhilarated After Climbing "The Big Hill"!

RMV RESERVE MERGER PROPOSAL

Balancing the needs of endangered species against human population pressures involves an alphabetic soup of acronyms. In Southern California, the USFWS administers HCPs under the FESA, while the CDFG administers NCCPs under the CESA.

Even if you have no idea what these acronyms refer to (see key below), you have undoubtedly heard about biological research involving banding birds, collaring mountain lions, and even tracking toads. Such studies are designed to learn more about the behavior of these animals, including how events and human actions can

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CDFG: California Department of Fish & Game
CESA: California Endangered Species Act
FESA: Federal Endangered Species Act
HCP: Habitat Conservation Plan
NCCP: Natural Communities Conservation Plan
USFWS: United States Fish & Wildlife Service

NATIVE SKILLS

Want to escape suburban life for a few hours? Come out to *The Conservancy* and learn a useful skill—how to build your own emergency survival shelter! You will also learn cool facts about local plants, as well as how to keep warm in the cold, cool in the heat, and safe and comfortable while hiking.

On a *Native Skills Walk*, guest instructor **Mark Hay** of Earthroots Field School will discuss how the native people of California met their needs for food, water, fire, and shelter using tools which nature provides. Participants construct a temporary shelter which would be usable in a wilderness survival situation.

Mark stresses that such shelters are, by necessity, seasonal. Different times of year offer different basic materials. Like Native Californians, one must learn how to make use of

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CONSERVANCY QUIZ

1. Age of “Mother Oak”:
 - a) 50 years old
 - b) 100 years old
 - c) 250 years old
 - d) 500 years old
2. Velvet Ants are a type of:
 - a) ant
 - b) wasp
 - c) bee
 - d) none of the above
3. TDOLC hosts:
 - a) bat & owl walks
 - b) insect & tarantula walks
 - c) native plant walks
 - d) reptile wanders
 - e) astronomy nights
 - f) all of the above
4. TDOLC conducts:
 - a) school group outings
 - b) scout programs
 - c) outreach events
 - d) all of the above
5. TDOLC speaks before:
 - a) Rotary Clubs
 - b) school assemblies
 - c) private groups
 - d) all of the above
6. TDOLC’s most common oak:
 - a) engelmann oak
 - b) coast live oak
 - c) black oak
 - d) white oak
7. You can help TDOLC by:
 - a) becoming a member
 - b) volunteering
 - c) starting a project
 - d) all of the above & more!
8. How to find out more:
 - a) take a TDOLC hike
 - b) call 949-489-9778
 - c) send email to:
<rmvlg@sbcglobal.net>
 - e) www.theconservancy.org
 - f) all of the above

ANSWERS:

1d, 2b, 3f, 4d, 5d, 6b, 7d, 8f.

FIELD TRIP NATURALIST ALEC MARKEN

When students visit *The Conservancy*, naturalists help them enjoy the experience. The same individual leads his or her group through multiple stations on a *Conservancy* loop trail. At each station, the naturalist guides students through program-specific activities, e.g. learning how to catch insects using a sweep net.

With skilled interpretation, the path between stations can be as excitingly informative as the stations themselves. And of course, the setting is Nature, so there may be surprises!

Naturalists are a varied group, having traveled different paths to arrive at a place where they find themselves interpreting nature to schoolchildren. Alec Marken is not exactly a typical naturalist—because there’s really no such thing! Alec has, however, been a popular member of *The Conservancy’s* team for the past four years.

With a fun loving attitude, Alec maintains a relaxed sensibility that kids can easily relate to. Only Alec would include a rubber bat that squeaks as part of his standard field kit!

Besides working as a naturalist, Alec is an accomplished actor, musician, singer, and dancer. He appears in area stage productions. He also plays guitar and teaches dance at local

venues. Alec has put his artistic talent to work for *The Conservancy*. He recently donated time to record a version of the “Adaptations Song” used in *The Conservancy’s* third grade field trip program.

On a school outing which took place a couple of years ago, Alec had one of those amazing experiences that are only possible at a place like *The Conservancy*. On the day in question, Alec’s group was sitting next to a woodrat nest—which looks like a large pile of sticks—discussing the adaptations which enable woodrats to elude predators. As one of his students pointed, everyone caught a glimpse of a woodrat peeking out from a nest opening.

Once the group’s excitement died down to a manageable level, Alec continued the lesson by discussing snakes, one of the woodrat’s many predators. As Alec began to contrast a snake skull replica with the rodent skull he had shown earlier, another student pointed with excitement. Everyone looked over in time to watch a king snake slithering into the opening where the woodrat had been seen only minutes earlier. Seconds later, the woodrat exploded out another opening, heading away from the nest as fast as its little legs could move!

Needless to say, Alec’s students were beyond excitement. Nothing else during the field trip—not even Alec’s squeaky bat toy—could top that!



Alec Leads a Field Trip Exploration



Conservancy Volunteer Andrea Ferris

THE BENEFITS OF CAR TROUBLE

Each issue of *Conservancy Comments* profiles a volunteer who helps to make *Conservancy* programs possible. Just how do volunteers find out about us? Here's a unique story:

In 2006, **Andrea Ferris**, then a Cal Poly Pomona college student, was riding along Ortega highway with her mother when their car began to overheat. As luck would have it, the vehicle finally broke down very near *The Conservancy's* office. The pair walked over to ask for water for their car, began chatting with former executive director Laura Cohen, and eventually signed up to receive a copy of *The Conservancy's* newsletter.

Although *The Conservancy* offers many programs introducing patrons to the wonders of local wildlands, Andrea is one of the few Orange County residents who needs no such introduction. Since she was small, Andrea has lived on on a sliver of land located between Caspers Wilderness Park and Cleveland National Forest. Andrea says that directions to her house involve telling visitors to "get off the paved road." And be prepared to spend three weeks eating nothing but dried beans and rice should that road wash out! Growing up under these circumstances made Andrea the self-reliant individual she is.

The schools Andrea attended—e.g. Carl Hankey Elementary in Mission Viejo and Capistrano Valley High School—were filled mostly with kids from sub-

urban developments. Andrea feels her upbringing made her a little bit different, and laughs that she wouldn't be the same person "if I had lived in a 'normal' neighborhood." Andrea's house is periodically invaded by tarantulas. She spies red-tailed hawks routinely, and spent many childhood hours watching waterfowl and small fish in the local stream.

In September of 2007, Andrea had recently completed her bachelor's degree in Zoology. She was looking for an opportunity to give back to the community by volunteering. She put in a phone call to *The Conservancy*, eventually spoke with Program Director Emily Igarashi, and the rest is history! Andrea has become our volunteering stalwart, spending three hours almost every week in *The Conservancy's* office.

Andrea always arrives at our office with a smile and an enthusiastic attitude. (See photo!) She is cheerful, efficient and practical, and has been instrumental in helping *The Conservancy* stay organized by doing a variety of office tasks, including updating our email and mailing lists, sorting files, organizing supplies, and preparing newsletters and other items for mailing.

Staff were incredibly grateful that Andrea made herself available to help with packing duties as *The Conservancy* moved to a new, larger office, located immediately behind our old one.

Andrea just started a new job working for Quest Diagnostics, and is excited about being able to put some of her college biology to good use. Fortunately, she has continued to volunteer. *The Conservancy* is extremely grateful for her help, and all our patrons should be, too! Thank you, Andrea!

"Those who can, do. Those who can do more, volunteer."

Anonymous

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 2008

8	<i>Trail Clearing</i>	8:00–11:30a
16	<i>Native Skills Walk</i>	9:00–11:30a
22	<i>Astronomy Night</i>	5:30p–7:30p
28	<i>Hike Off Thanksgiving</i>	9:30a–12:00

DECEMBER 2008

7	<i>Mistletoe Walk</i>	9:00–11:30a
13	<i>Trail Clearing</i>	8:00–11:30a
20	<i>Xmas Bird Count</i>	8:30–12:30p
26	<i>Picnic Walk</i>	9:00–11:30a

JANUARY 2009

10	<i>Trail Clearing</i>	8:00–11:30a
10	<i>Mushroom Walk</i>	1:00–4:00p
24	<i>Astronomy Night</i>	6:00–8:00p

Dates & times subject to change.

For an up-to-date listing of events, visit www.theconservancy.org or call 949-489-9778.

MOTTO CONTEST WINNERS

The Conservancy recently asked for your help devising a motto which uniquely describes who we are and what we do.

Congratulations to Terri Mammano Walters & Bill Walters who submitted the winning entry—***Preserving Nature's Legacy***. Terry & Bill will receive a signed, limited edition print by Richard Jackson, wildlife photographer.

The Conservancy looks forward to incorporating the new motto into our regular communication!

BOARD MEETINGS

Conservancy board meetings, held bi-monthly on the 2nd Thursday of the month, are open to the public. Date, time & meeting location subject to change. Call 949-489-9778 or email <rmvlc@sbcglobal.net> for more information.

THE DONNA O'NEILL LAND CONSERVANCY MEMBERS

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STARGAZING INITIATIVE

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll read about *Conservancy* school programs. Participation by many schools is grant or donor funded. But what do you do if your school doesn't have a grant? If you are an energetic young teacher like **Margaret Rettele**, you find another way.

Last April, Margaret was nearing the end of her second year of teaching at Las Palmas Elementary, a dual immersion school in San Clemente, where a significant proportion of the student body qualifies for subsidized school lunch. If funding for field trips is not included in the Las Palmas school budget, teachers can't assume that a wealthy PTA will pick up the tab.

Bus costs are one of the biggest obstacles to school outings. Las Palmas has sometimes been able to get transportation funding from the community. However, when it looked as if funds for the 2007-2008 school year wouldn't materialize, it meant Margaret's third grade class would go without a single school field trip.

Around this time, Margaret came across an issue of *The Conservancy's* newsletter featuring Astronomy Night. Her class was getting ready to study the heavens, and Margaret was sure her students would enjoy the event, which has consistently proved popular with *Conservancy* patrons.

She also knew *The Conservancy* was close by, and felt that families could not only afford the modest entrance fee, but might return to take advantage of other *Conservancy* pro-



Margaret Rettele & Claudia Villalobos

grams. Margaret worked together with another Las Palmas teacher, **Claudia Villalobos**, to translate material into Spanish, then sent home invitations to parents to make an optional stargazing field trip.

On Saturday, May 3rd, there was an excited turnout of third graders with their families. With its proximity to the coast, skies at *The Conservancy* are not always clear. But at 7:30 p.m., The Force was with us, and everyone was treated to a breathtaking view of the night sky.

The Conservancy's own astronomical guru, Mike Balmages, provided the introductory lecture, wowing the young crowd with his "way cool" green laser pointer. Clearly visible was the ever reliable Big Dipper, along with other well known constellations of the zodiac, such as Virgo and Gemini. After the talk, students clamored for a closer peek at the stars through the telescopes of our volunteer astronomers.

When students returned to school the following Monday, Margaret was amazed at how much they retained from the weekend outing. As a result, class discussion about the solar system, constellations, and other sky patterns was that much more lively.

Taking advantage of an opportunity to teach across the curriculum, Margaret used the field trip as inspiration for an exercise in language arts. Students were asked to compose individual and group narratives about their stargazing experiences. For once, no one complained they had nothing to write about!

Margaret tells us that school field trips are also an important opportunity for students to form a closer bond with each other, teachers and parents. Margaret's husband is a professor, and she laughs that "both of us spend so much time in the classroom, this was one occasion when we finally got to see one another!"



Walking the Loop Trail

FIELD TRIP CURRICULUM

What's a field trip to *The Conservancy* like? We offer second and third grade programs aligned with California State Science standards. Upon arrival, students divide into groups, each with its own naturalist, and hike to themed stations along a scenic loop trail. Programs last two-and-a-half hours.

Our second grade field trip introduces students to the idea that the surface of the earth changes and is composed of material resources with distinct, useful properties. Heading into *The Conservancy*, students examine land formations along the road. Loop stations address topics such as how to distinguish rocks from minerals, qualities of different soils, rock weathering, sand and its uses, and fossil origins.

Our third grade field trip emphasizes adaptations, the structures plants and animals use to survive, grow, and reproduce. Loop stations review basic concepts centering on the interplay between biology and a changing environment, and stress that living things—notably people—can change the environment in ways that benefit some species but cause others to disappear.

The Conservancy also provides customized field trips emphasizing the topic of your choice. We welcome inquiries from both teachers and parents. For more information, please contact Emily Igarashi, *Conservancy* Program Director, at 949-489-9778 or <rmvlc@sbcglobal.net> .



Field Trip Sponsored By Carmeuse Industrial Sands

FUNDING OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Studies have shown that field trips enhance student comprehension, boost morale, stimulate new interests, build confidence, and create lasting memories. According to *The Los Angeles Times*, however, teachers “across the nation report decreased funding for field trips in recent years.”

“Field trip coordinators, school principals and teachers attribute the decline in student visitors to increased classroom hours devoted to the high-stakes English and math testing required by the No Child Left Behind Act, as well as budget cuts.” According to a local museum official, “Everything is geared toward that testing. And money. Money is a huge issue for each and every school.”*

The Conservancy has hosted field trips for thousands of area students over the last decade. Some schools are able to pay their own way. Additional funding has been obtained through grants. In the current climate of fiscal crisis, however, field trip funding is unlikely to be a priority.

The Conservancy is dedicated to creating a positive future through outdoor education. We look to the community for funds enabling students to connect with Orange County and learn to care about its remaining wildlands. *The Conservancy* is launching a campaign to raise these funds called “Sponsor-A-School.” Several area businesses have already stepped up to sponsor local schools,

including **Carmeuse Industrial Sands**, **Tree of Life Native Plant Nursery**, and **Hetherington Engineering**. We’d like to tell you the story of one of these sponsorships.

Las Palmas, a school which primarily serves a low income neighborhood, had no second grade field trips scheduled for the 2007-2008 academic year. When a *Conservancy* staffer, who also substitute teaches at Las Palmas, suggested the school as a candidate for a donated field trip, *The Conservancy* approached **Carmeuse Industrial Sands**, a supplier of high quality milled sand to local beaches, golf courses and playgrounds.

Carmeuse welcomed an opportunity to give back to the community, and partnered with *The Conservancy* to design an Earth Science program which would also touch upon career diversity and environmental awareness. The entire cost of the Las Palmas field trip, including bus transportation and *Conservancy* staffing, was underwritten by Carmeuse. In May of 2008, six classrooms enthusiastically boarded a bus to visit both *The Conservancy* and Carmeuse.

At *The Conservancy*, students explored the connection between mining products and the natural processes of weathering and erosion. By answering questions such as “What causes erosion?” or “Why is soil different colors?” they reviewed the relationship between rocks, minerals, sand and soil. As students climbed a steep hill, looking for horned lizards

and listening to cicadas, naturalists discussed how wind and rain erode the earth’s surface. Children could see for themselves how these forces have created hillside cliffs and canyons. As always, a *Conservancy* field trip also teaches children about their place in and responsibility to the environment.

At Carmeuse, students took a guided tour of the mine. They watched giant sand scrapers in action, and took turns using walkie talkies to direct the machines. Students scooped and sifted sand of different grades, and viewed objects made from sand, such as stucco, glass and tile. With guidance for hands-on activities by employees, students explored questions such as “What is sand used for?” and “Where does it come from?” The outdoor classroom was full of laughter and excitement.

The joint program was a learning experience for both organizations. Carmeuse was pleased to discover that hosting the field trip served as a tremendous morale boost for employees, who are proud of what they do and worked hard on plans to share their daily routine with students. *The Conservancy* has also learned much about the rewards of community involvement in education.

Recently, two other area businesses, have stepped up to sponsor field trips. **Hetherington Engineering** donated a field trip for 40 students from Crown Valley Elementary School in Laguna Nigel. Hetherington’s generosity prompted Crown Valley’s PTA to provide matching funds so the entire grade level can visit. **Tree of Life Native Plant Nursery** is sponsoring a dual hosted field trip for the entire second grade of San Juan Elementary, a school located next to San Juan Capistrano’s mission. Next spring, San Juan students will be visiting both Tree of Life and *The Conservancy*.

On behalf of children who will benefit, *The Conservancy* thanks these companies for their generosity. Please consider joining them! For more information, call 949-489-9778 or send email to <rmvlc@sbcglobal.net>.

Sponsor-A-School Fundraising Campaign

Ensure environmentally responsible citizens of tomorrow
by sponsoring a school field trip to The Conservancy today!

Conservancy Field Trip Programs:

- Hands-on environmental learning in a unique, accessible location
- Proven programs highly rated by teachers, students and parents
- 10 year history of success
- Experienced, enthusiastic staff
- Programs adhere to California Science Standards

Sample Underwriting Costs:*

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Field trip bus for 60-80 students | \$ 350 (bus only) |
| • Field trip for 40 students | \$1000 (includes bus) |
| • Field trip for 60 students | \$1250 (includes bus) |
| • Field trip for 80 students | \$1500 (includes bus) |
| • Field trip for 120 students | \$2500 (includes bus) |

Benefits:

- Newsletter listing
- Website acknowledgement
- Thank-you's from students
- Know exactly where your tax-deductible donation is going
- Satisfaction of helping kids experience the wonders of nature



*Transportation costs applicable to Capistrano Unified & Saddleback Valley School Districts.



*The Donna O'Neill
Land Conservancy*

CONTRIBUTION FORM

YES, I / We / Our Organization would like to become a school field trip sponsor!
SPONSORSHIP LEVELS

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 120 students | \$2500 | <input type="checkbox"/> 40 students | \$1000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 80 students | \$1500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Bus only | \$ 350 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 60 students | \$1250 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | \$ _____ |

Name _____

Title _____

Organization _____

Address _____

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Use donation where most needed. Use donation for District/School/Grade Level/Teacher (circle one) specified below.

Sponsored School District _____

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Make check payable to "TDOLC" and return to:
TDOLC, P.O. Box 802, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92693

All donations are tax-deductible – Tax ID 33-0443790.

Check if you would like to receive TDOLC's monthly email announcement of *Conservancy* events.

Check if you would like to receive TDOLC's printed Newsletter, *Conservancy Comments*.

The Donna O'Neill Land Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1990 to provide stewardship for a 1200-acre South Orange County wilderness reserve located in the coastal foothills just east of San Juan Capistrano.

The Conservancy's mission is to create awareness of the rich natural and ecological resources of the San Mateo Watershed by providing opportunities for environmental education, biological research, and sensitive recreational access to *The Conservancy*. The public is regularly invited to join nature walks & hikes, butterfly counts, astronomy nights, bird walks, bat & owl outings, and much more.

For more information, please call *The Conservancy* office at 949-489-9778 or send email to <rmvlc@sbcglobal.net>.

For a current schedule of events, consult *The Conservancy's* website at www.theconservancy.org.

CONSERVANCY TEACHERS

The Conservancy knows that the enthusiasm of a single individual makes all the difference. Over the years, many dedicated and talented teachers have taken the lead in convincing their colleagues that a field trip to *The Conservancy* is not only feasible, but educationally beneficial—and fun! We are proud to introduce two teachers who have been instrumental to the past success of *Conservancy* school field trips.

Nona Reimer is a fifth grade teacher at John S. Malcolm Elementary School in Laguna Niguel. Growing up in San Clemente, Nona developed an intimate familiarity with local wildlife such as the coastal rosy boa, the diminutive snake which plays a starring role in *The Conservancy's* third grade field trip program. Nona is enthusiastic about the natural wonders of Southern California. Echoing a theme expressed by many local environmental education providers, Nona says she wants her fifth grade students to know that they “don’t have to go to [Yosemite’s] Half Dome to see beauty.” There is wonder and excitement right here at home.

Because Nona received a youth scholarship from the Audubon Society to attend an ecological summer camp, she later sought to give back by assisting with Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count, held annually at *The Conservancy* and elsewhere around the country. That first visit to *The Conservancy* started Nona down the path of working with us on many different school-related programs, e.g. organizing participation of Orange County environmental education providers—including *The Conservancy*—in CREEC, the California Regional Environmental Education Community.

Nona also worked with *Conservancy* Trustee Mike Evans, owner of Tree of Life Native Plant Nursery, to develop butterfly habitats. At school, students set up gardens of native butterfly plants. They subsequently took a field trip to *The Conservancy* to see mature plants and animals *in situ*.

Nona also brings college students out to *The Conservancy*. She teaches biology to undergraduates from Cal

State Fullerton who are hoping to pursue a teaching credential. Her class is typically a science requirement for non-science majors. Nona works hard to help her somewhat reluctant students understand that science is a hands-on activity which—when presented well—can be vital and exciting. The key is lessons which go beyond the walls of the classroom. Homework includes a notebook of nature observations made during mandatory forays to local wildlands. Nona asks students to “detox from college pressures” by just sitting and observing. She says that those who groan about the assignment at the beginning of the quarter often end up saying it was one of the best things about her class.

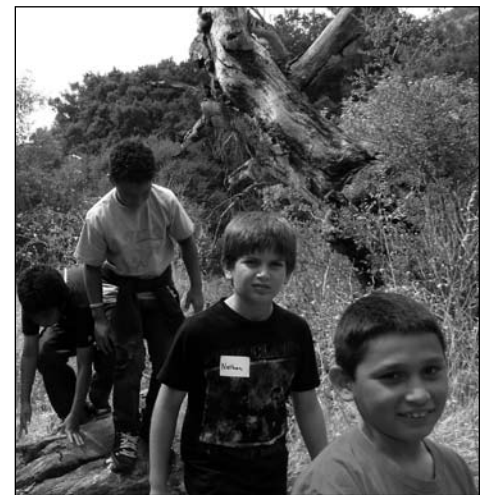
Most student visitors to *The Conservancy* hail from south Orange County, but teacher **Kathy Shuler** brings in middle schoolers from Paramount, in Los Angeles County.

Like many patrons, Kathy first learned about *The Conservancy*—more than a dozen years ago!—by reading an article in the *Orange County Register*. Her first visit involved a full moon evening hike. At the time, there was little developed property in the area, and participants thought they heard a mountain lion. In retrospect, Kathy describes the experience as “surrealistic.” She says that ever since, she’s been “on a mission” to share that kind of experience with her students.

Kathy grew up in an active, athletic household, very much connected to nature. A physical education teacher by training, Kathy has always taught middle school. Five years ago, her district assigned her to teach seventh grade life science. From the start, Kathy wanted to “expand out of the book.” She says it is “one thing to sit in the classroom, and look at a film,” even a very good one. She believes in “showing the kids real things. Reality is my ticket!” Kathy asked herself, “How can I create naturalists like myself?”

The question is particularly meaningful for Kathy’s students, many of whom grow up in gang territory. With

parents or caretakers struggling just to survive, nature trips are not on the family agenda. For these kids, Kathy says that “even the van ride to the *Conservancy* is an experience.” To make such an experience possible, Kathy worked through bureaucratic red tape, putting in her own time and money where necessary. Since it was easier to get the school’s sport van than arrange for a school bus, that’s what she did, though it meant fewer students could make the trip at one time. She says it has been worth it. Jumping over a big log, or just feeling a completely new sense of open space gives her charges a brief glimpse of another world.



Hopping Over Logs On A Field Trip

MEMBERSHIP

continued from back cover

events—and the satisfaction of knowing local wildlife is protected by the many programs membership funds help support.

Conservator, Supporting, Sustaining and Lifetime members receive additional benefits. For details, additional membership applications or a current schedule of events, call us at 949-489-9778, consult our website www.theconservancy.org, or email us at <rmvlc@sbcglobal.net>.

“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.”

John Muir

NATIVE SKILLS WALK

continued from page 1



Gathering Grasses for a Shelter

“The oldest task in human history: to live on a piece of land without spoiling it.”

Aldo Leopold

Mark notes that many people have a romantic fascination with rugged individuals—including cowboys and Native Americans—surviving in the wilderness. Witness the popularity of the reality television program, *Survivor*, with its contestants isolated in the “wilderness” of exotic locales.

Even if an unrealistic TV version of survival skills is the hook, Mark hopes event participants come away with a more grounded view: “Learning physical skills, such as how to construct a shelter, connects you in a deep way to the local ecosystem.” Approaching the landscape this way puts one “in a position of humility, in the position of a learner.” Mark grew up in Tustin, and would like to see others living in Orange County appreciate just how special it really is. He believes thinking about the practical skills original inhabitants used to “physically get through each day” is a good first step.

Mark’s Hay’s *Native Skill Walk* is open to families with children ages 6 and up. *The Conservancy* expects to offer Mark’s walk at least once per season. The last *Native Skills Walk* of 2008 will be held Saturday, November 16th, from 9:00 to 11:30am. Hope to see you there!

what is available.

During summer walks, Mark demonstrates how to make a comfortable “mattress” of non-native grasses. Participants gather their own grasses, weeding in the process to make more room for *The Conservancy’s* native flora. Skeptical that a grass mattress will prove comfortable? You’ll be surprised to discover these structures actually tempt you to linger on the ground!

Mark asks those who may still think of the original inhabitants of California as “primitive” to ponder the sophisticated solutions native peoples actually mastered. How does one find water? Without modern tools, how does one carry it? Native Californians used local grasses to make water-tight baskets Mark calls “simply amazing.”

Those attracted to “survival skill” classes are often different from “tree-hugging” nature enthusiasts.



Grass Mattresses Are Surprisingly Comfortable!

RMV RESERVE

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alter that behavior.

The Conservancy’s mission statement mentions “biological research,” but historically *The Conservancy* has been unable to devote sufficient funds to scientific monitoring and management of its land; such efforts would have come at the expense of our public educational programs. Ironically, it is development—the most significant source of habitat loss and degradation—which often provides the legal impetus and necessary funding for scientific management.

The Conservancy’s 1200 acres are owned by Rancho Mission Viejo (RMV), a historic cattle ranch, Orange County’s largest grower of lemons, and a local developer. Between 2004 and 2008, RMV obtained approvals from the County of Orange, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, USFWS, and CDFG for a development and open space plan popularly known as “The Ranch Plan.”

In exchange for permits to build 14,000 homes, RMV agreed to make phased dedications of land to a new habitat reserve, *The Reserve at Rancho Mission Viejo*, which will eventually grow to include some 20,000 acres. In drafting The Ranch Plan, RMV commissioned a number of baseline studies to determine the distribution of species and vegetation types across future Reserve lands. RMV funding will underwrite the management and monitoring of these species and vegetation types over time.

In January 2008, RMV began formal discussion with the County of Orange and the City of San Clemente about a proposal for integrating *The Conservancy* into the new reserve. The proposal entails (1) recognition of *The Conservancy* as a distinct entity through retention of its name, (2) continuation of the public education programs for which *The Conservancy* is known, (3) expansion of these programs onto future Reserve lands, and (4) a renewed focus on protection of *Conservancy* resources through monitoring of species throughout

RMV RESERVE

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Conservancy Tarantula

an integrated reserve. Reserve management will identify and respond to stressors—e.g. fires, floods, or invasion by non-native plants and animals—that might negatively impact sensitive and endangered species.

In August 2008, the County Board of Supervisors accepted RMV's integration proposal. A few weeks later, the San Clemente City Council considered the same proposal, but took no action. San Clemente plans further discussion of the proposal in public workshops. As this newsletter goes to press, however, no workshop dates have yet been set.

Some *Conservancy* supporters have expressed concern about proposed changes in public access to meetings of entities governing the new reserve, dissolution of *The Conservancy's* Board of Directors, and funding levels for public education on the merged reserve.

Resolution of these issues is still under discussion, but there is one thing certain about the future. There will be more scientific management and monitoring of *Conservancy* lands than there has been in the past—a positive step which should increase our understanding of *Conservancy* resources. Expect to hear more in upcoming issues of this newsletter.

Conservancy patrons with questions about the new reserve are invited to contact Reserve Manager Laura Coley Eisenberg at 949-240-3363.

"Nature answers only when she is questioned."

Jacob Henle

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

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According to critic David Sobel, "State mandated curricula and high stakes testing put everyone on the same page on the same date, [thereby] discouraging attention to significant nearby learning opportunities." Standardization of the curriculum is "driving a wedge between our children and the tangible beauty of the real world." The result: no time left to do things like take a field trip to *The Conservancy*! And yet such trips may be more important for children today than they ever were.

Readers of this newsletter are aware of environmental challenges we face, including a limited supply of fossil fuel, a housing footprint increasing faster than the growth of the population, and many other forms of unsustainable consumption. Although discussion of such problems is not a curriculum mandate, children learn about them, if not in the classroom, then from friends, adult contacts and the mass media. Yet, for many kids, such challenges are numbingly abstract.

How can a third grader comprehend threats to an invisible ozone layer or a rainforest on another continent? In postmodern childhood, experience with the environment is indirect. "Nature" is a program on TV or a factoid looked up on the Internet. Or something you buy: an ant farm or a museum visit.

What's missing is the deep emotional resonance of a viscerally direct, completely unmediated experience of the wild. Author Richard Louv has commented eloquently on this situation: "Nature is a place to use all the senses—and to learn by doing." By contrast, the contemporary built environment "narrow[s] our senses until our focus is mostly visual, appropriate to the dimensions of a computer monitor or TV screen."

Place-based learning offers an alternative, and *The Conservancy* is doing its part to support it. For the past ten years, *The Conservancy* has been a popular destination for schools in the Capistrano Unified and Saddleback Valley School Districts. We believe, like Sobel, that "hands-on, real-world

"A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers but borrowed from his children."

John James Audubon

learning can increase academic achievement, help students develop stronger ties to their community, enhance their appreciation for the natural world and create a heightened commitment to serve as active, contributing citizens."

What's more, these approaches are fun! Over and over again, *Conservancy* staff see the excitement of students, many of whom are getting their first experience in a natural environment. They marvel at oak groves containing trees which are hundreds of years old. They inhale the pungent smell of coastal sage scrub. They examine scat with enthusiasm and exclaim over tracks of deer or mountain lions. They gawk at giant wood rat nests and squint to catch a glimpse of hawks flying overhead.

These experiences reconnect students with what Louv has called "the mystery and moral complexity of Nature." Children come away with an awareness of being in the presence of something greater than themselves. We believe such experiences also lead to respect, to feeling that these things are worth saving. Such sentiments are our best hope for the future.



Using Simple Tools to View Nature Close-Up

The Donna O'Neill
Land Conservancy

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**CONSERVANCY
MEMBERSHIP**

The Donna O'Neill Land Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1990 to provide stewardship for a 1200 acre wilderness reserve, located in the south Orange County coastal foothills, just east of San Juan Capistrano.

Our mission is to create awareness of the rich ecological resources of the San Mateo Watershed. We offer programs in environmental education, biological research, and ecologically sensitive recreational access, including nature and bird walks, butterfly counts, astronomy nights, bat and owl outings, and much more.

By supporting *The Conservancy*, you join a growing movement to protect and care for local Orange County wildlands. All members receive a biannual newsletter, free nature walks and hikes, discounts on special

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MEMBERSHIP LEVELS:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime | \$10,000* | <input type="checkbox"/> Conservator | \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining | \$500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family | \$45 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting | \$250 | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$25 |

*onetime donation or accumulated gift

- I prefer not to join, but please accept my contribution of \$ _____

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