

# Trails and Tales

News for VIP Volunteers in the Montane Sector  
March 2012

## Meet the Park Staff by Bob Hillis

Shirley Jones has been working at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park for 24 years. Her official title is Office Technician (Typing) but unofficially she is the ambassador for California State Parks. Her kind and friendly approach to customers and co-workers is truly remarkable. Even when she is answering the same question for the twentieth time that day, she still makes the customer feel like they are her only concern.

Shirley left Cuyamaca briefly for a stint at Portola Redwoods and again to work in the Colorado Desert District Office in Borrego Springs. She always returns to Cuyamaca because she enjoys the mountain scenery and the wildlife (though she once told me that, after having been raised in Watts, when she first arrived here, she was afraid of squirrels). Shirley's favorite areas in Cuyamaca are the Green Valley Falls area and the top of Cuyamaca Peak.

When Shirley is not at work, she enjoys looking out her dining room window at Cuyamaca Lake or sitting outside looking at the surrounding mountains. She also enjoys reading, doing crossword puzzles, visiting friends in San Diego and Borrego, and hanging with family. Any week day that you are in Cuyamaca, stop in at the Sector Office to say "Hi" to Shirley. Her smile and contagious laugh are guaranteed to bring joy to your day.



## VIPEVENTS

- May 5<sup>th</sup> – MAU annual unit meeting and camp clean-up
- June 21 – 25 – MAU Los Vaqueros campout
- July 29 – MAU Benefit Ride
- Oct 13/14 – MAU safety training



## Article by Supervising Ranger Bob Hillis



Photo by Jason De Mendonca

Winter has finally arrived at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. It started snowing on Valentine's Day and didn't stop until we had 5" on the ground, going into the President's Day weekend. Swarms of sensibility-challenged visitors came to enjoy the snow, to ignore the "No Parking" signs, and to leave behind their trash, broken sleds and dirty diapers. The very same parents who would never allow their children to play near their quiet residential street think nothing of stopping in the middle of a slippery, high-speed, highway to let their children play in the roadway. When you ask them if there is any

justification for their actions, they reply, "My kids have never seen snow before." Of course, the logical extension of that line of reasoning would be, "Your kids have probably never seen the inside of an ambulance, a trauma center, or a coffin before but what's your hurry." Many times, I've been tempted to reply, "Have your kids ever played with a loaded gun before; I've got one here if they'd like to play with it." Instead, professionalism wins-out and I kindly inform them that they need to move. Upset by my lack of knowledge regarding the fact that I owe them a parking spot, they respond, "Well, where are we supposed to park?" I reply, "In any legal parking space." Then I move on to the next several dozen violators.

Stonewall Mine has been a birding hotspot for the last several weeks. The combination of a flock of Pinyon Jays and a male and female Williamson's Sapsucker, both uncommon in San Diego, has brought out birders from near and far. This, combined with the Common Redpoll (never seen before in San Diego) in Julian, and the Pacific Wren, reported by Ranger Jessica at Palomar, has made our local mountains a birding nirvana. If I could have seized all the expensive binoculars and camera lenses that I've seen in recent weeks, we could fund our parks for years to come.

The Meadowlarks have started singing and the Manzanitas have blossomed; spring will soon come to the mountains. To kick off this spring, we are doing a new volunteer orientation



Photo by Michele Hernandez

on March 17<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 A.M., in the visitor center. May Training this year will be on Cinco de Mayo at school camp. Feel free to wear your sombrero with your uniform. I'm thinking we may have a salsa contest (the food not the dance) as part of the activities. We are also participating in Earth Faire at Balboa Park on April 22<sup>nd</sup>.

These days, the only certainty in State Parks is uncertainty. We are trying to be ready for any number of scenarios that could transpire (see Nedra's article). Please be patient; as soon as we know anything to be semi-factual, we will let you know. In the meantime, be encouraged by the fact that the beauty of our Parks is not dependent on the actions of politicians and bureaucrats. Thanks for all that you do to make our Parks more enjoyable for our visitors.

## Important Up-date from Nedra

I thought I would write an article for this issue of T&T and let everyone know what the heck is going on with Parks these days. As I have said in the past, this is what I know as of today. Things keep changing on us and I just have to go with whatever the directions are as of today. With that said, I am moving forward on some plans to assist the staff and the volunteers with this roller coaster we call park management.

Everyone is aware of the parks budget cuts from last year and this year but we are just starting to feel the pain now. This way of life looks like it will continue for the next couple of years but no one expects it to last forever. So, here is what our two parks are looking at;

Cuyamaca – While not listed on this first round of park closures, it has not been funded to its previous level and we are implementing “service reductions”. What this means is that we have no money for park aids and very little operating funds. Because of this I have had to make decisions on how our full time staff will be able to assist our visitors and still give them a quality experience. After talking to Ray Lennox, Maintenance Chief and Bob Hillis, Supervising Ranger we have decided that we can't operate all our campgrounds with the staff we have. Parks Aids are not just pretty faces, they handle a ton of work that three campgrounds generate and without them we can't do business as usual.



Photo by Michele Hernandez





Photo by Michele Hernandez

This year I decided to keep Green Valley and Granite Springs closed. Paso campground will only be opened on Fridays, Saturdays and half day Sunday. Paso day use will be open every day as well as the Los Vaqueros Group Horse Camp.

If this budget continues next year, then we will switch the campgrounds and Green Valley will be open Fri-Sun with Paso closed.

This decision was not made lightly and Ray, Bob and I spent days going over each scenario. This decision is also not the final word. CRSPIA is working with me to see if they can assist with money to reopen Green Valley on the weekends and as we all know, things change and end of the fiscal year money could come my way. If that happens then we will reopen facilities for

as long as the money will let us.

Palomar – As you know, Palomar is slated to close July 1<sup>st</sup>. We have already closed the campground this winter but Day Use remains open. Ranger Jessica Murany has decided not to transfer as it is looking like the park will remain open due to the great efforts of Rick Barclay, Michael Welsh and the CRSPIA Board of Directors. Money has been raised to back this proposal and we are awaiting final approval. We are working very quickly on this and hope to have word to you any day now.

Finally, I want to thank the park staff who have really stepped forward and assisted with ideas and the commitment that we can get through this. While I may be too cautious, they continue to say, “We can do this”.

We can't do this without all the volunteer and CRSPIA Board support. To all of you, thank you and if you have any questions, ideas or concerns, please feel free to contact me at either my office phone 760-765-3019 or my email [nmart@parks.ca.gov](mailto:nmart@parks.ca.gov)

## IAU Article by Bob Nuttmann

Spring is headed our way in more ways than one. For many years before returning to San Diego in 1985 I lived in Orange County. I regularly attended a very large church whose famous pastor's likely most famous quote would be "Tough Times Never Last, Tough People Do". Our mountains are just emerging from our "tough" season of winter into spring and possibly our parks too.

As evidence of spring arriving here in San Diego, is the first California Poppy of the season. It is from my yard in Jamul though and not Cuyamaca. Evidence of good spring hiking in our park can be seen in the smiling faces of volunteers Cathy and Vera on the trail ten days ago.



I was hiking with them and can tell you we were having many more problems with too much heat from our too heavy jackets than too cold. Evidence that not only is the season of spring going on in our park, but that just maybe we have survived the toughest part of our struggle to keep the local State Parks operating can be seen in the huge effort from private sources to keep Palomar going. And the efforts up there are getting results. Substantial funds have been raised and many hours donated from private sources. None of this



All photos in the IAU article by Bob Nuttmann unless otherwise noted.

would be taking place if it were not for the optimism of some that tough times never last.



Palomar State Park (Above) can and is being preserved by private volunteers and funds.



And views like these wildflowers are protected in our park every time we make the effort to rove, docent, or maintain our beautiful Cuyamaca State Park (above). Next time you get down in the dumps from some personal, work, or family difficulty just repeat to yourself, "Tough Times Never Last Tough People do". I guarantee it will help. And right after you start feeling better go take a hike in our park for some really potent tonic.



Photo by Jason De Mendonca  
"Early Bloom" on Harvey Moore Trail.



## TMU by Dave McClure

For all the beautiful weather we've been having this winter, none of it seems to have been falling on Wednesdays or Saturdays! We've been calling off our trail work the past few weeks because of either rain or snow coming down on our scheduled days.

There are a couple of bright spots, trail maintenance wise, however. John Sproule and Ron Robillard have been working at least one day a week clearing brush on the long neglected Dead Horse Trail. They started work on the north end, walking in with their equipment from South Boundary Fire Road via the CRHT. Enough progress has been made that they are now working in from the Merrigan Fire Road. Unfortunately, there has been some vandalism along this trail which includes unauthorized trail cutting and destruction of park trail signs. The trail cutting (mostly in the area of the off property residences) is very destructive and it can take the area years to recover. As we have no way at the present time to manufacture new trail signs, the destruction and theft of our signs will have an adverse effect on all of our visitors. It's really a shame that the bad acts of just a few can have such an effect on everyone.

All of our volunteers and volunteer patrols should be keeping an eye out for anyone abusing the park resources in these ways. Anyone who discovers any destruction of or damage to our park resources should include this information in your end of shift report so that Park management can be made aware of the problem. Anyone seen riding or hiking off trail should be reminded of the importance of staying on the trail; however do not put your safety in jeopardy by any sort of confrontation. If necessary, report the offender(s) via your park radio to the duty ranger. When reporting to the Ranger, be prepared to give your exact location and a good description and direction of travel of the offenders.

Several weeks ago, while clearing fallen trees on the Conejos Trail, we encountered probably the largest fallen tree that we have ever encountered. And, of course, this mighty oak had



Photo by Michele Hernandez



This is a photo of a yard recently rototilled by feral pigs. This was taken by Gary Reese. The location is in the Descanso area 1.5 miles outside the park boundary. It gives a great visual on just the kind of damage these guys can do. This property owner is going to start trapping them as the whole property looks like this.



Have you completed your museum hours?

fallen right across the trail. Our largest chain saw, the 32" Stihl, was no match for this monster. After, discussing this to some extent, we were able to arrive at a plan of action. Fortunately, the tree had fallen right at the place where an access route and fire break had been cut by a Cal Fire crew several years ago. With some minor brush clearing on this abandoned access route, we were able to cut a short trail around the fallen tree. As a large branch from the large tree was across the access route, we had to cut most of it out of the way. I say most, because a good part of it is buried in the ground inaccessible to our chain saws. So there is now a very attractive "trail feature" there where you walk across a large, flat limb at ground level. This tree is not more than a quarter of a mile up from the Springs Fire Road junction, so next time you are up that way, take a short detour up Conejos and check it out.

After receiving reports of another "monster" down across West Mesa Trail, we hoofed it in from the West Mesa Fire Road junction with all of our equipment. And while this one wasn't as large as the Conejos Oak, it did fit the definition of a "monster". Fortunately, we were able to tackle this one (although barely) with the 32" saw – our largest saw. After a full morning spent making several cuts and rolling giant cut "pine wheels" off to the side, we were able to clear enough of it so that riders and hikers can easily get by. An added benefit is several new pieces of "trail furniture" from the cut tree alongside the trail. A place in the shade to sit and contemplate the hard work your trails crews do for the park!

I would like to take a minute to offer a big Thanks to our longtime TMU member, Skip Davis. Skip has been cleaning, repairing and sharpening our hand tools over the past few months. When he brings them back after the "overhaul" they are just like new. And all of this at zero cost to us – Skip volunteers all of his time and provides any needed materials. Thanks so much, Skip. And we have plenty more when you're done!

There is a big trail project coming up in March and April. The MBAU is sponsoring a trail cutting project for the long delayed Cold Spring Trail reroute. This will be a fun project and will hopefully, at long last, get this reroute trail open for all users sometime in May. Steve Boland is coordinating this project and is looking for volunteers who wish to help. The scheduled dates for work are March 17<sup>th</sup>, March 31<sup>st</sup>, April 7<sup>th</sup>, April 14-15<sup>th</sup>, April 28<sup>th</sup>, May 12<sup>th</sup>, May 19<sup>th</sup> and June 9<sup>th</sup>. Except for



April 15, these are all Saturdays. The meeting place will be at West Mesa Parking on Hwy 79 at 8:00am. There is a reward (other than getting the trail open) in that all helpers will be treated to free overnight camping at Green Valley on the weekend of April 14. You can arrive the afternoon of Friday, April 13 to set up your campsite for the weekend. MBAU overnights have no reputation of being dull affairs so be prepared for a lively, fun weekend. More details will be sent out as they come available. For any questions or for more information, contact either me or Steve. Also, all information, as it becomes available, will be posted on TMU's and MBAU's Face Book pages.

Speaking of Face Book, I want to give a big TMU thanks to TMU volunteer Mike Hamm for setting up and maintaining TMU's new Face Book page. It really looks nice and we are putting all information about trail conditions, trail work and our ongoing projects on our page. Please visit us at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park Trails Maintenance Unit. And while you are there, don't forget to friend us and "Like" us! And be sure to check out the fabulous new coffee mugs designed and provided by our longtime volunteer, Elizabeth Baker – aka "e-bake". They should be available for purchase at the gift shop by the time you read this.

Finally, speaking of the new coffee mugs, while you are in the Park gift shop purchasing your new mugs take a look around at the new merchandise that has recently been added. T-shirts, sweat shirts, caps etc etc. All for your park experience. And show your CRSPIA membership card for your member's discount. All profits from the gift shop go right back to the park. And don't forget to say HI to the hard working volunteer managers who put it all together and make it work, Barb McCoy and Jo Fritschel. If any of you would like to volunteer some time to the Gift Shop, Barb and Jo are always looking more help. Let me know if are interested and I will put you in touch with them. Our scheduled trail work dates for March are on Saturday, March 10 and Saturday, March 24. All details to be posted on Face Book.



Photo by Michele Hernandez

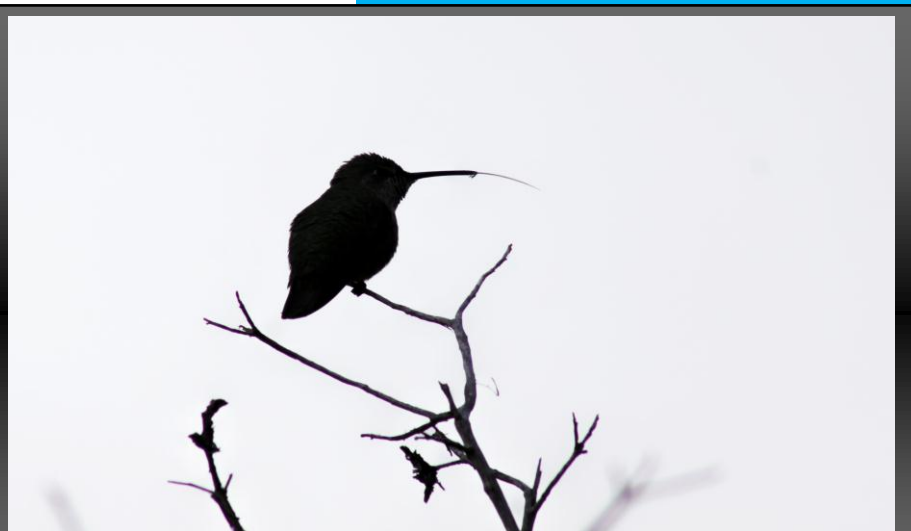
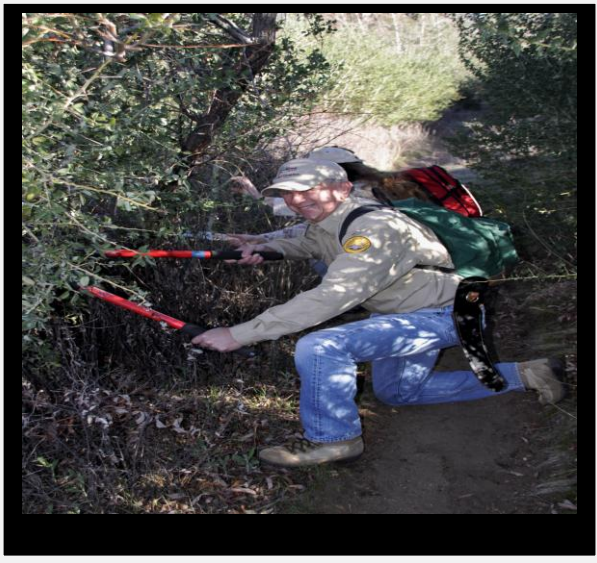


Photo by Michele Hernandez

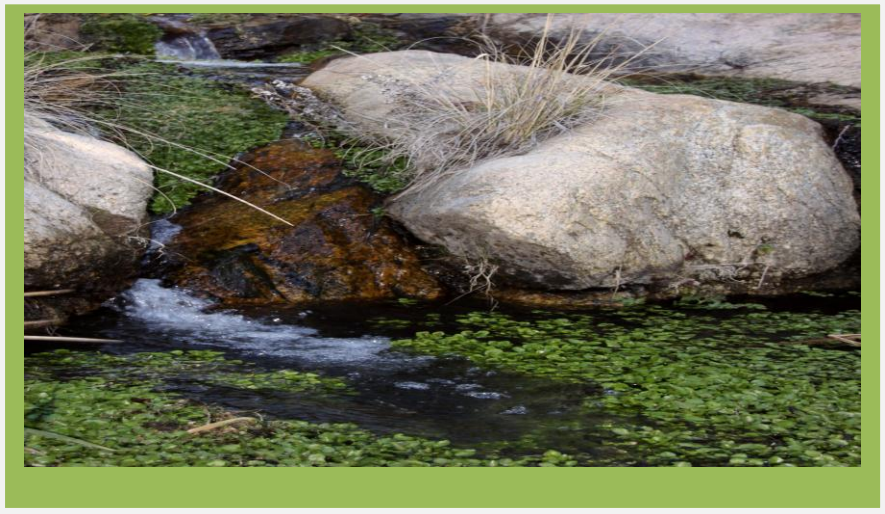


## Hike and Hack by Susan Russo

Michele Hernandez and I have been hiking and hacking again. This time we went to the top of Oakzanita Peak.



First we showed TMU member Mark where we had left off on Lower Descanso trail the week before and I cut a tree branch off the trail.

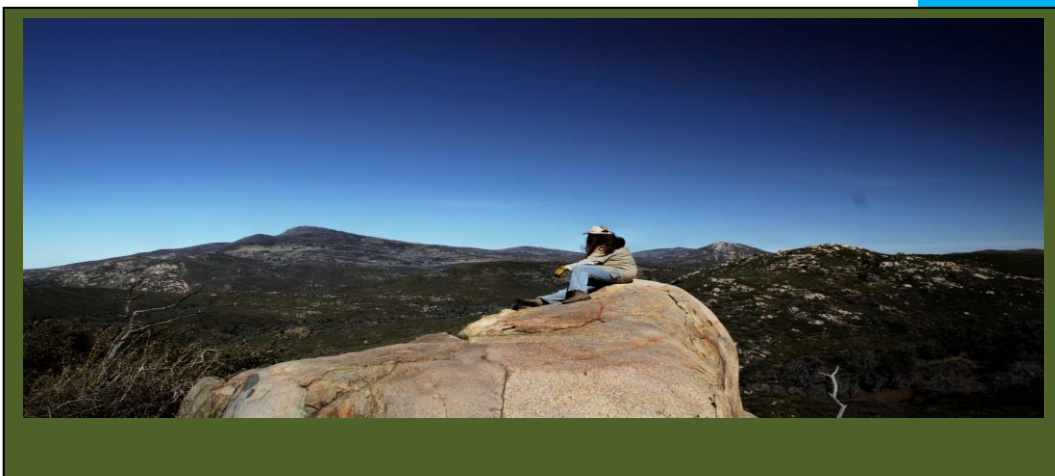
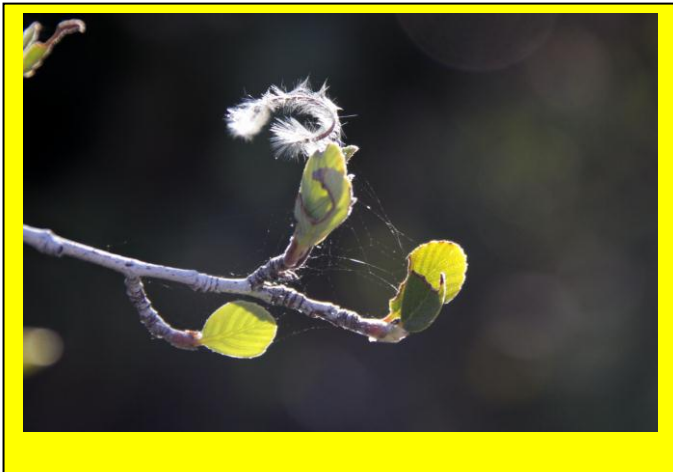
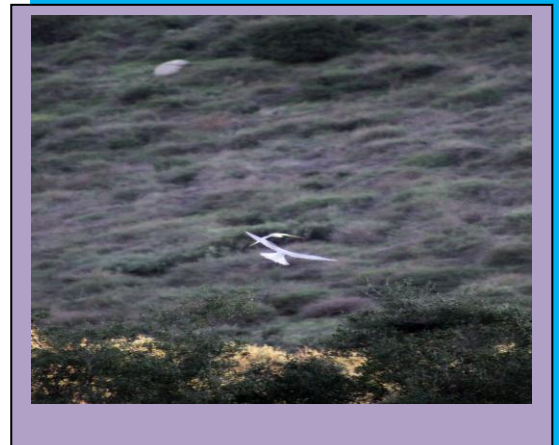


The little waterfall there is quite lovely. We met a small group of hikers who were looking for a good hike so we recommended Oakzanita Peak. Later, we met them again as they were coming down from the very top. They thanked us for the advice as they walked away happy and satisfied. The view from the top was gorgeous.





The air was clear and we could see all the way to Timbuktu. The trail was in fair shape, but it could use a little trim in some spots. Moreover, there were about three downed trees. We managed to move or break the branches of one tree to make it less dangerous and off the trail. However, the others will need a chainsaw. Along the way, we saw a lot of birds and buds...flower buds! Spring is right around the corner and I am sure this trail will bloom spectacularly. If you have a chance, take a hike!





## MAU by Suzie Kirkwood

Lest we forget, it's still winter in the Cuyamaca Mountains! Several inches of snow stuck to the ground in Descanso Monday and the park has much more! The patrol cancellations continue!

Welcome to our seven (possibly eight) new MAU trainees who braved a cold and damp Orientation Ride last month. We haven't had this large a training group in quite a while. Please make an effort to say hello to our newest members at May training and the annual unit meeting.

The first Saturday in May will be here before we know it, and that means mandatory park training and unit meeting. Be sure to plan on attending both the training and meeting. We'll have our camp clean-up work parties that same day in the afternoon.

We still have corrals available for our Los Vaqueros campout in June. Get your reservations in. Any corrals unsold by April 1<sup>st</sup> will be available to guests, and I have quite a waiting list of guests already, so I'm expecting a sell-out this year.

Our safety training dates are confirmed with Pillsbury Ranch for October 13 and 14. Mark your calendars. Rain dates will be October 20 and 21, pending availability of the facility.

Thanks to the artistic efforts of MAU members Maggie Benfante and Michelle Erickson, we'll soon have a new MAU patch! Watch for it at the Visitor Center Gift Store. I'm sure we'll all be changing out our old patches when we see how nice the new one is.

Thank you to everyone who made the effort to complete their Museum Duty hours on time and especially to those who donated extra hours to MAU members in need. If you are still short on Museum Duty hours, please get them finished as soon as possible. You won't be allowed to patrol until your hours are completed.



Photo by Jason De Mendonca

Planning is already underway for our Benefit Ride on July 29<sup>th</sup>. We're trying hard to have better participation this year after last year's meager turn-out. It's not too early to start thinking about raffle prizes and donations.

I hope you enjoy the photo in this issue of the unusual passengers Ernie Smith and I encountered on a cyclist while on patrol last weekend. You never know what you're going to see in the park!



*New Item Alert!*

Remember the old metal campfire mugs? These are not that. It's better! Nothing dainty about this new mug! Now for sale in the Cuyamaca Visitor Center, check out the new 15 oz. Cobalt Campfire Style Stoneware Mug! Nice and heavy, this rugged mug celebrates our parks with either the CUYAMACA or PALOMAR and TAKE A HIKE! design.

Handy, sturdy, fun and functional...sounds like a Trail Volunteer to me!

(Why choose? Get one of each! Plus they make great gifts for park supporters and family members).

Cobalt blue with white imprint

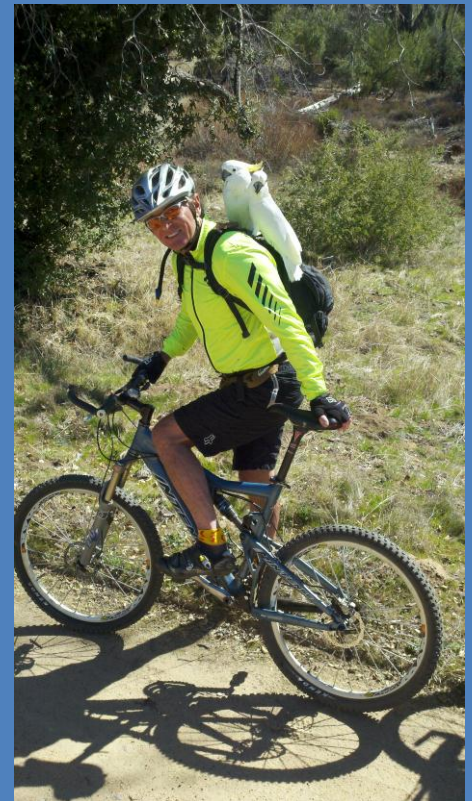


Photo by Ernie Smith







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Paso Picacho Kiosk (for weekends) -- 760-765-3023

Green Valley Kiosk -- 760-765-3024

Palomar Headquarters -- 760-742-3462

**Send articles and photos for next month between the 24<sup>th</sup> and the 29<sup>th</sup> to-**

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