

The Clear Print

The San Diego Tracking Team Newsletter



Help Needed At Outreach Events

Besides all of our usual walks, classes, and wildlife surveys, spring is a particularly busy time for the SDTT because of all the outreach events. For example, we have been asked to participate in the training of Docents at Torrey Pines State Park, to have a booth in Earth Day's special "wildlife and native habitat" themed area, to participate in National Trails Day, and to lead a hike for San Dieguito River Park. If you would like to lead or assist with a hike or help staff a table, either now or sometime in the future, please contact Lani at 858 513 0359 or noreke@sbcglobal.net. **We particularly need help at the following events:**

May 1, Sunday, all day--Earth Fair at Balboa Park, need at least 2 representatives (or 4 in shifts) to set and identify tracks in gypsum within an interactive zone

June 4, Saturday, all day--National Trails Day at the Ranch House in Peñasquitos Canyon, need at least 2 representatives to work table plus others to lead optional walks or demonstrations.

June 11, Saturday, 9-12--San Dieguito River Park, Tracking & Awareness Basics, a hike meeting at the Ruth Merrill Trail/Highland Valley Staging Area. Need at least one leader and one assistant.

Apprentice Program Initiated

The SDTT is pleased to present their new Apprentice Program. The goal of the program is to keep people involved with the SDTT and continue to train transect leaders, instructors, and other active volunteers on an ongoing basis so that the team is self-perpetuating.

When a Student Tracker has completed all three classes in the Tracker/Naturalist series, he or she is eligible to enroll in the Apprentice Program. This free program is customized for each participant based on his or her goals, interests, and availability. A mentor is assigned, and participants will be expected to put in at least 100 hours in various SDTT activities including transects, assisting with classes, tracking walks, deer DNA study, and continuing education workshops. To clarify the different designations now possible within the SDTT, we have created the following definitions:

Student Tracker: anyone who has completed the Wildlife Survey Training or any of the Tracker/Naturalist classes.

Apprentice Tracker: anyone who has completed the Advanced Tracker/Naturalist class and has enrolled in the SDTT Apprentice Program.

Tracker: anyone who has completed their apprentice program, including 100 continuing education hours, a recommendation by their mentor and a successful evaluation by a SDTT Senior Tracker.

Senior Tracker: status awarded by a master tracker (or a consensus of senior trackers) recognizing a high level of tracking knowledge and skill, or special achievement. Requires a minimum of 5 years experience.

Master Tracker: (Expert level as defined by Louis Liebenberg). Requires a minimum of 10 years experience.

Mentor: a tracker or senior tracker who has chosen to share his or her expertise with an apprentice or fledgling team.

Transect Leader: a tracker or senior tracker who has demonstrated the ability and accepted the commitment of being responsible for one or more transects on an ongoing basis.

Instructor: a tracker or senior tracker who has demonstrated the ability and accepted the commitment of presenting tracking or naturalist training for SDTT classes.

Barry Martin, our very own Master Tracker, has awarded the following active volunteers Tracker or Senior Tracker status:

Trackers—Joe Bochiechio, Duane Boney, Patrick Campbell, Dave Cowan, Ann Hunt, Betty Kirchhevel, Karen Merrill, Gretchen Nell, and Phoenix Von Hendy.

Senior Trackers— Chris Bader, Rick Botta, Uli Burgin, Doug Hansen, Lee Kirchhevel, and Dean Woods.

As part of the Apprentice Program, Barry will hold quarterly skills workshops for people at the apprentice level and above. The first one of these will be on the principles of awareness and intensive tracking on May 7th. There will also be quarterly lectures/meetings, ideally hosted by different teams, featuring hikes and/or presentations as well as a social activity. These are open to everyone who participates in SDTT events. (Shea Valero's lecture last month was the first in this series.)

Please contact Lani at 858 513 0359 or noreke@sbcglobal.net if you would like more information on the Apprentice Program.

Intermediate & Advanced Tracker/Naturalist Classes: It's Not Too Late

The only Intermediate and Advanced Tracker/Naturalist classes scheduled for 2005 are coming up in May and June (see below for details), but if you missed the beginning class, it's not too late. If you attend the Wildlife Survey Training on April 16 and do some transects to get the dirt time, you may skip to the Intermediate class in May.

The following article is a result of the meeting of the Mission Trails Tracking Team on August 28, 2004. Thank you, Judy, for sharing it with us.

Wild Times in the Tunnel of Love

by Judy Lemon

Not everyone may be excited at the prospect of getting up early on a Saturday morning to go crawling around in a tunnel under the freeway. For some hardy souls of the newly formed Mission Trails Tracking Team, this prospect seemed irresistible. What could we possibly be looking for in such a place?

The wildlife access tunnel underneath freeway 52 and a small section of the land located at its south entrance are part of an official *transect*. A transect is a section of land, usually about 1 mile in length, which also includes the areas extending out to around 15 feet of either side of the main trail. There are currently 3 transects within our park – the tunnel, Spring Canyon, and Oak Canyon, and these form only a small part of a much greater selection throughout San Diego County. The Mission Trails Tracking team has become part of the San Diego Tracking Team, which is based out of Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. The SDTT performs quarterly wildlife surveys in designated areas – the transects – and we were taking part in one of these surveys.

Why are these surveys important? Briefly, it is because the data that is collected can be used to support conservation, education, and environmental projects around the county. For a more complete answer, please go to the SDTT website (www.sdtt.org).

In order to prepare to help with the transect, we had to attend a one-day class in wildlife surveying. Among those who attended from Mission Trails were the more experienced tracking members such as Judy Alvarez and Joe Bochiechio to a few newly graduated Trail Guides – me, Linda Hawley and Myrna Bateman. We agreed that although most of what was presented to us had already been covered in the tracking segment of our Trail Guide training, it was helpful to have it presented again in a different setting with a very enthusiastic and fun group of people. One of the most memorable demonstrations you can have in a tracking class is that of a full-sized adult attempting to demonstrate how a rabbit moves. Do try this one at home! At the beginning levels of tracking, the emphasis is mostly on tracks and scat. Since scat is simply another word for poop, the day was full of laughter and giggling as if we'd all suddenly become 5 year olds. We went through the tracks and scat for a range of animals such as the mule deer and mountain lion, and then touched briefly on other evidence which is referred to as 'sign'. For the new tracker, this is a harder area to grasp as it is more subtle. An example of sign might be noticing that a small branch had been nibbled. An expert tracker can tell you what kind of animal was sampling the greenery by the angle of the cuts left by the teeth.

One week later, primed and ready to track, we met up with Dean Woods, our transect leader for the day. Dean is also the Mission Trails Tracking Team liaison with the SDTT. Along with Ranger Luanne Barrett, we all carpooled over to an area of freeway 52, where we parked on the shoulder and climbed down the embankment to the tunnel. Since this transect occurred during a particularly hot spell in July, we decided to look at the surrounding areas first, then save the cool tunnel for the heat of the day. I would really love to say that we felt like we knew what we were doing, and were instantly able to identify even the slightest disturbances in the soil, but this was not the case. It takes time to develop the tracker's sight, and it was only when one of the more experienced members of the team pointed out something of interest that we were able to see how it related to what we had learned in class. However, every now and then we were lucky enough to find a nice clear print, and identify it correctly. This is quite thrilling!

We did find some mule deer and rabbit tracks, and the occasional sign of a coyote who had ambled through. When we finished surveying the nearby area, we finally got to enter the tunnel itself. It is not a long tunnel, but it does have an important purpose. As man and his developments encroach ever farther into wild lands where many animals live, some areas become like islands, with no access to adjacent land and food sources. Without tunnels such as these, many animals are forced to cross busy roads to get to the land on the other side, often with disastrous results. While the tunnel did bear signs of activity, it was agreed that there didn't seem to be as much evidence of animal movement as there had been in past transects. After you've spent several hours minutely examining a small area, you can start to get a bit silly. It was during this time that the tunnel became known as the Tunnel of Love. Thanks, Linda!

Several of us also participated in the Spring Canyon transect held the following day, and of course there are some great stories to share about that day as well. Sadly, I am limited by space, so I'll have to save the tale of the Extraordinary Scat for another article.

So, why has a plain old cement wildlife corridor underneath a freeway been dubbed "The Tunnel of Love?" Well, you'll just have to come along on this particular transect to find out!

Upcoming Events

Spring Wildlife Survey period starts April 16th. The transect schedule should be available by then, and experienced trackers who do not wish to attend the training may sign up for transects by contacting Lani (858-513-0359, noreke@sbcglobal.net.). Starting April 25th, please direct transect questions and sign ups to Karen at 760 715 4102.

Saturday, April 9: Monthly tracking walks, 8:00 am to 10:00 at the Peñasquitos Preserve Ranch House. Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced levels offered.

Saturday, April 16: Wildlife Survey Volunteer Training at the Ranch House in the Peñasquitos Preserve, be there by 9:45 to register, class runs from 10:00 until 4:00, bring a bag lunch, water and dress as for a hike. Pre-registration is not required. This is an introduction to tracking, essential for transect volunteers. All experienced trackers are also welcome to attend and you are invited to come and help set up (look for tracks), assist with instruction, or just review. Experienced trackers who do not wish to attend the training may sign up for transects by contacting Lani (858-513-0359, noreke@sbcglobal.net.)

Saturday, April 30: Discover Tracking and Signs with Mark Elbroch, Malibu CA, see <http://www.pacifictracking.com/calendar.htm> for more details.

Saturday, April 30: Preserve Calavera's Eat the Invasives Lecture/Guided Hike/Picnic, 10 AM – 1 PM at Oak Riparian Park in Oceanside. Advanced tickets required. \$20. Call 760-720-5220 or 760-438-1209 for reservations/information.

JUST ADDED ! Saturday, May 7: Continuing Education Workshop: Principles of Advanced Awareness and Intensive Tracking, 8:00 am to noon at the Peñasquitos Preserve Ranch House. This workshop presented by Barry Martin is free and open to those enrolled in the Apprentice Program as well as all current Trackers and Senior Trackers.

Saturday, May 14: Monthly tracking walks, 8:00 am to 10:00 at the Peñasquitos Preserve Ranch House. Beginning and Intermediate/Advanced levels offered.

Sunday, May 15: Discover Tracking and Signs with Mark Elbroch, Oxnard CA, see <http://www.pacifictracking.com/calendar.htm> for more details.

Thursday, May 19 and Saturday, May 21: Intermediate Tracker Naturalist Class, 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm Thursday and 8:00 am to 6:00 pm Saturday at the Peñasquitos Ranch House. Contact Rick Botta (858-672-0584, rmbotta@earthlink.net) to sign up as a student or to help out.

Saturday, May 21: Explore Mission Trails Day, 9 AM – 5 PM at Mission Trails Regional Park. See <http://www.mtrp.org/EMTday.asp> for more details.

Friday through Sunday, May 27-29: Track and Sign Intensive with Mark Elbroch, Cuyama CA, see <http://www.pacifictracking.com/calendar.htm> for more details.

Saturday, June 11: Monthly tracking walks, 8:00 am to 10:00 at the Peñasquitos Preserve Ranch House. Beginning and Intermediate/Advanced levels offered.

Friday, June 24 and Saturday, June 25: Advanced Tracker Naturalist Class, 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm Friday and 8:00 am to 6:00 pm Saturday at the Peñasquitos Ranch House. Contact Rick Botta (858-672-0584, rmbotta@earthlink.net) to sign up as a student or to help out.

Don't forget, you can help support SDTT in two important ways—volunteer your time and/or contribute financially by becoming a dues paying member. Call our new number 760-715-4102 to volunteer and go to www.sdtt.org for a membership form.

Please send submissions to the Clear Print to Lani Noreke at noreke@sbcglobal.net.