Morning Fog, Big Sur

Celebrating Our Volunteers

Special Map Insert
Big Sur Vista Trail Network

Volunteer Spotlight
Anne Canright

Protecting the Big Sur Backcountry
Executive Director’s Message

I spent a lot of time on the road this past year and, between the trainings, briefings, panels and plenaries, made sure to stop and smell the flowers along the way. Despite a warm, dry winter and a rainy season that never quite caught its stride, Mother Nature put on a glorious show. Naturally, the most aromatic gardens were scattered along the slopes of California’s stunning wilderness areas.

From the limestone-loving mustards of Death Valley’s high country to the delicate mariposa lilies within the piney Chumash Wilderness, from the gentian and penstemon of the Ansel Adams High Sierra to the monsoon-watered indigo bush of the Mohave Desert’s Newberry Mountains, splendor and solitude reigned supreme. Of course, there was one place that topped the list, feeling somehow grander, rougher and wilder than all the rest, but I’ll get to that.

At this writing, California has 149 federal wilderness areas, representing 15% of its total land mass. Nevertheless, we are by far the most populous state in the union, a fact that raises questions and speaks to our collective values. How can all of us get by with so much of the landscape “locked up” for conservation? The answer is, of course, that these lands aren’t locked up at all. True, wilderness designations protect watersheds, air quality, pollinators and other ecosystem services, but Californians are among the heaviest wilderness users in the nation. Here hikers, youth groups, equestrians, researchers and just about anyone else seeking solitude or a glimpse into unfettered evolution can simply take a short drive to the trailhead.

I’d like to think that our fair state is perched on the cutting edge of conservation and that others have much to learn from our farsightedness. But there’s a catch — with so many people using our public wildlands, we need people to keep these lands wild. In a perfect world, agencies would be sufficiently funded to get the job done. Unfortunately, we don’t have the luxury of that perfect world — we need you.

Ascending through shrublands high above the Arroyo Seco on a trail unmarred by human footprints, my thoughts wander to the wisdom of those who championed the Wilderness Act nearly 50 years ago, and had the vision to protect the Ventana Wilderness not long after. It’s up to us to honor their legacy. Whether you pick up trash on your next backcountry hike or volunteer on a VWA Trail Crew; whether you join us as a sustaining VWA member or invest in the future through the Ventana Trails Forever endowment; whether you contribute one dollar or a thousand is up to you. But whatever you do, please, get involved.

Thanks and happy holidays,

Mike Splain  |  Executive Director
beautiful,” one student remarked, “it looks fake.” This telling remark demonstrates the dire need to provide these types of experiences for young people. They don’t really know that this wild beauty exists until they experience it first-hand.

Supporters of the Youth in Wilderness program recognize the importance of providing these opportunities to area youth, especially those who are at-risk. Thanks to the generous support of our members and grant providers, we are able to make these trips easy for students and schools by providing gear, food and leadership at no charge. Young people intuitively know the joy and importance of these experiences and catch on quickly to the simple pleasure of breathing deeply the sweet mountain air and sitting around a campfire at night sharing stories. The goal of these trips is to provide youth with a welcoming outdoor experience that leaves them with an increased desire to spend time outdoors, confidence in practical outdoor skills, and effective knowledge of local natural history and wilderness ethics.

“I actually like being out in nature much more.” Students relished the opportunity to explore a pristine watershed and enjoyed looking for steelhead in the deeper pools of the river. “Everything is so beautiful,” one student remarked, “it looks fake.” This telling remark demonstrates the dire need to provide these types of experiences for young people. They don’t really know that this wild beauty exists until they experience it first-hand.

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Sawyers, Grubbers and Swampers Unite!*  

When we looked at the VWA’s stewardship tracking data, we were astonished to see that in the past year 84 different people volunteered with the VWA Trail Crew! That’s seven dozen fun-loving wilder-folk who gladly took on the challenge of maintaining and restoring trail access in the Ventana region. These folks came from far and wide to trudge deep into the backcountry. Besides their essential gear, they carried loppers, hand saws, crosscut saws, Pulaskis, McLeods and other tools. And you know what? They were having fun! These intrepid volunteers understand the rewards of trail work. They relish the satisfaction that comes with removing obstacles, repairing tread, and expertly cutting back encroaching brush. And in the evening, after a day’s work is done, the volunteers share food and stories as they rest their weary bones.

VWA Trail Crew veterans who are reading this know the glories of trail work. For those of you who have been thinking about joining a crew, but haven’t yet, the fall and winter field season is upon us. Please join the ranks of the amazing 84 who worked the trails in 2013. No experience is necessary. Tools and training are provided by our experienced and certified Trail Crew Leaders: Betsy MacGowan, Mike Heard and Steve Benoit.

And for those of you who wish you could join a crew but can’t, there are, of course, other ways to support this effort. Your donations provide the infrastructure for the program and pay for tools, gear and training. The VWA has established the Ventana Trails Forever fund at the Community Foundation for Monterey County. Please call us at the VWA office at 831-423-3191 to learn more about this restricted-use fund.

*In case you were wondering, sawyers do the cutting, grubbers dig and clear shallow roots near the ground surface, and swampers move debris.


VWA Trail Crew volunteer Lynn Moncher provides perspective for these “before and after” photos of work done on the Ventana Double Cone Trail.
Volunteer Wilderness Rangers – A Baseline Workforce in the Backcountry

One element emphasized by the Forest Chief in the 10-year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge is the presence of a baseline workforce in the backcountry. As counterintuitive as it seems, when people visit wild places, it takes people to keep them wild. In the Ventana, this is most evident along major river corridors like the Big Sur and the Carmel and at popular backcountry camps like Vicente Flat and Pat Spring. Careless visitor use without management places the health of our wild places at risk.

Since the federal government does not prioritize and properly fund the maintenance of backcountry recreation sites, the VWA has stepped up to the challenge. The Volunteer Wilderness Ranger initiative was designed to address the need for a baseline workforce and has since morphed into one of our most essential programs, with an emphasis on campsite clean-up and public contact along the most heavily used backcountry corridors. The program is working. Since the beginning of 2013, 15 Volunteer Wilderness Rangers have made 1,139 visitor contacts, imparting fire safety and Leave No Trace information, while cleaning 160 campsites and removing 599 pounds of trash from the wilderness. The community has taken notice; the amazing work of our volunteers has garnered mainstream media coverage in the Monterey County Weekly and the Carmel Pine Cone.

VWA member contributions help provide the critical funding for this important program. Please join us in saluting and supporting our Volunteer Wilderness Rangers!

This program is also made possible by grants from these major funders:

- National Forest Foundation
- Patagonia Santa Cruz Outlet
We Love and Appreciate Our Volunteers!

For most of its nearly 15 years as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, the VWA was an all-volunteer grassroots organization. We were so busy working towards our mission that we sometimes forgot to take the time to acknowledge the volunteers that make this organization so efficient and effective. Well, not this year! Thanks to all the folks listed below — for giving your time and expertise to protect, preserve and restore the wilderness qualities and biodiversity of the public lands within California’s northern Santa Lucia Mountains and Big Sur coast.

Office Support
Gabrielle Carroll
Aaron Cole
Paul Danielson
Peggy Diller
Kim Gal
Erik Gandolfi
Jack Glendening
Mike Heard
Tom Hopkins
David Jacobs
Tamara Jones
Jon Libby
Greg Meyer
Sharon Sevilla
Stephanie Subdiaz
Tracy Wood

Trail Crew
Casey Andrews
Chris Arndt
Joel Baker
Monica Ball
Robert Barringer
Beth Benoit
Steve Benoit
Kitty Bolte
Justin Bronson
Richard Burton
Anne Canright
Angelo Castro
Cesar Castro
Karla Cravens
Tom Cravens
Taylor Davis
Miriam Enge
Laurie Fannin
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Nick Flores
Sandara Flores
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Dan Frost
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Lisa Gardner
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Jake Goetz
Robert Goetze
Dick Graybill
Dawn Hartsuko
Christopher Hauser
Mike Heard
Esperanza Hernandez
John Hickey
David Hirsch
Tom Hopkins
Leslie Ivosta
John Ivory

Wilderness Ranger Program
Beth Benoit
Steve Benoit
Anne Canright
Angel Grivello
Paul Danielson
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Marc Eldridge
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James Garcia
Mike Heard
Esperanza Hernandez
Robert Jaramillo
William Kirkpatrick

Richard Lawton
Betsy MacGowan
Lynn Moncher
Joe Redders
Burt Siedhoff
Vincent Silva
Mike Spahn
Daniel Waage
Adam Wachtel
Davila Wachtel
Fabiana Zambrano

Youth in Wilderness
Casey Andrews
Bonnie Armstrong
Courtney Are
Chris Arndts
Malek Ascha
Denny Aseytne
Tracy Ballenger
Beth Benoit
Steve Benoit
Kitty Bolte
Max Brixey
Joshua Brown
Roslyn Caldwell
Bryan Casey
Angel Castro
Cesar Castro
Rachel Craft
Danish Cushino
Taylor Davis
Cameron Dunn
Melissa Edwards
Peter Fabian
Christian Fanin
Maria Ferdin
Kim Gal
Isaaf Garcia
Brooke Gilsenan
Amanda Guzman
Marielle Hanley
Dan Hartmann
Mike Heard
Dan Heaston
David Hernandez
Esperanza Hernandez
Markus Hinsche
Wayne Holland
Monica Holquin
Marcos Holquin
Paul Hopper
Allan Isbell
Althea James
Thomas Jones
Natalie Kennedy
Mike Kim
Jacob Koff
Kyle Konerman
Julia Kuei

Recreation Site Inventory
Demian Keller
Anne Canright
Aaron Cole
Taylor Davis
Sam Ellis
Pam Ellis
Jack Glendening
Chris Moncher
Nikki Nefed
Byamna Smith
Mike Splain
David Sussberg
Adam Wachtel
Bryce Winter
Tracy Wood

Events
Beth Benoit
Steve Benoit
Peter Carley
Gabrielle Carroll
Katie Chaterji
Kate Cunningham
Taylor Davis
Erin Deleissegues

Board of Directors
Al Budris
Esperanza Hernandez
Tom Hopkins
David Jacobs
David Knapp
Betsy MacGowan
Dennis Palm
Volunteer Spotlight | Anne Canright

**Q:** First off, please tell us a little about yourself and your family. Where were you born and raised?

I was born in Los Angeles. My father was a professor of organic chemistry at UCLA, my mother was a journalist-turned-housewife. They were from the Midwest and came to California in 1939—and felt like they’d found the Promised Land. My father was especially in love with the California deserts, and when I was a kid we spent quite a bit of time at Joshua Tree and Anza Borrego. We also spent summer vacations on the Mendocino coast or at Mount Lassen NP. I’ve gained a huge appreciation and love for the varied landscape of California as a result. Because of my father’s position, we also spent time overseas in Australia, Japan, and Germany. I got a bad case of wanderlust at a young age and have traveled to all the continents but Antarctica, photographing, mountaineering, trekking and simply exploring.

**Q:** Please tell us about your education and career.

I earned a BA in geography at UCLA and an MS in cartography at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. I went back to LA to secure a PhD in geography at UCLA and an MFA in creative nonfiction writing at Antioch University-Los Angeles. I’m a freelance editor for university presses, mostly University of California, though I’ve worked for close to a dozen different publishers. I edit nonfiction books. I was also a contributing editor of Coast & Ocean magazine for a good fifteen years, contributing stories quarterly on subjects ranging from snakes to oceanic upwelling, condors to island fox restoration. And I’m a photographer and make a (very) modest income from that pursuit.

**Q:** How did you first come to be involved with the VWA?

I volunteer on the Monterey County Search and Rescue team. Often we go into the Ventana looking for lost hikers on trails that may appear on a map but don’t actually show up on the ground. After these sorts of searches I would often check the VWA website and the trail reports to confirm my own impressions of the area. After doing this often enough, I realized what a treasure trove the trail reports are and decided to donate to the VWA. The next day I got a call from Mike Splain. He invited me to help with a Recreation Site Inventory and asked me to attend the annual board retreat/volunteer workshop. I was very impressed with the commitment of the board members and the energy of the RSI volunteers. After going out on a few inventory outings, I got a call from one of the Wilderness Rangers inviting me to do some trail work. I was hooked. I love that volunteering for the VWA gets me out into the wild of Big Sur AND that I get to do good work besides. What a great combination.

**Q:** What is it that attracts you to these mountains?

I love to walk: I could walk all day, every day, just moving through the world, and be completely content. I especially love to walk on ground rather than concrete. I love to walk in a place where I’m surrounded by natural beauty. I love to walk where magnificent vistas open out before me. I love to walk to a place where I can set up my tent, throw down my sleeping bag, then go sit by a rushing stream and watch dippers duck in and out of the glistening water, listen to the tumbling rocks and rattling tree branches. I love all this in the Ventana. There, too, I love the way the vegetation changes as you move through the land and the variety of landscapes, from redwood canyons to hot chaparral to grassy meadows full of wildflowers. I love the forbidding ruggedness of the Ventana, which is contrasted by so many welcoming flats and springs, its embracing oaks and huge ocean views. Going into the backcountry allows me to slow down and feel at peace, giving me at least a momentary respite from my monkey mind. It works my body and it soothes my soul. I feel so fortunate to have the Ventana and Silver Peak Wildernesses in my own backyard.

**Q:** What do you find most rewarding about your work as a Volunteer Wilderness Ranger?

I especially enjoy cleaning up campsites: downsizing fire rings (tossing rocks, shoveling ash) and clearing debris, making the site pleasant and safe for the next camper. I also like keeping trails clear, whether it’s with hand clippers or with a saw. Until I started rangering I took trail access for granted. It never occurred to me how much hard work goes into that! If it weren’t for the dedication and hard work of so many volunteers, this wilderness would close up and become barely, if at all, accessible. And we don’t want that. We want to encourage people to experience this special place—and also to treat it with proper respect. That’s another thing I enjoy about being a VWR: talking with people, hearing about their experiences and excitement about the place, and helping them become stewards of the wilderness as well.
Special Places of the Santa Lucias/Escondido Camp

by Mike Splain

Having ascended southward from Hanging Valley, our adventure along the proposed Arroyo Seco-Indians National Recreation Trail continues. Soon we enter the deep canyon of Eagle Creek, often referred to by its more colorful pseudonym, Sky Ranch Creek. Amongst a particularly aromatic stand of chaparral, attentive travelers will recognize Arroyo Seco bushmallow (*Malacothamnus palmeri* var. *lucianus*) cloaking slopes above and below the route. This particular bushmallow can only be discerned from its closest relatives with a hand lens. Focus in on the leaves and its stellate (star-shaped) hairs are unmistakable. At one time this location was thought to be this bushmallow’s only stronghold, but enterprising botanists have since located several more remote populations.

Not a quarter mile beyond, we cross the canyon’s namesake stream. This time of year, Sky Ranch Creek is barely a trickle in the culvert below us; nevertheless, a little exploration up or downstream might reveal pools, springs, waterfalls and myriad other wonders along a genuinely magical watershed that drains the highest peaks of the Santa Lucia Range. But those explorations will have to wait for another day as our destination lies miles to the south.

Once again we ascend, this time along a dividing ridge to Vaqueros Sandstone outcrops with remarkable views encompassing the yawning gorge of the Arroyo Seco and much of the Ventana Wilderness. Maintaining our elevation as we traverse around an unnamed tributary, the coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) of Escondido Camp soon come into view. Extremely steep terrain divides the next two miles into massive side hill traverses across stacked switchbacks. The extensive chamise-dominated chaparral is punctuated by at least four species of ceanothus and inhabited by dusky-footed wood rats (*Neotoma fuscipes*) and the grey foxes (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) who so ardently hunt them. On a warm autumn evening it’s not unusual to see half a dozen of these tiny foxes in a single mile.

Eventually our slope levels and we enter a sparse woodland punctuated by blue witch (*Solanum umbelliferum*) and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), intertwined in a post-fire tangle of morning glory (*Calystegia* spp.), California blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*) and poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*). Aptly named Escondido Camp is indeed “hidden” under a cover of live oaks, perched on a terrace just ahead. A small expanse of adjacent grassland has long been fenced and converted to a stock corral. This entire area was ground-zero for the 2008 Indians Fire, ignited by a careless camper well before the summer solstice, and burning long enough to meet the lightning-sparked Basin Complex that same year. The result was a “perfect storm” of fire that blackened much of the Ventana Wilderness and fueled the aggressive return of shrublands that have reclaimed so many backcountry trails. For now, we sip the sweet spring water at the west end of this lovely camp and rest up in anticipation of the journey ahead.
Support the VWA

We would like to thank the CPA firm of Chiorini, Hunt and Jacobs for supporting the VWA at the Business Benefactor membership level. Since 1938 the professionals at Chiorini, Hunt & Jacobs have advised businesses, private clients and not-for-profit organizations in the community.

“The environment of the central coast has provided an unparalleled quality of life for humanity for thousands of years. Our natural resources are both the engine of our economy and a source of renewal for each generation.” says CH&J President David Jacobs. “Supporting the Ventana Wilderness Alliance is a shrewd investment in our most enduring and valuable resource.”

The VWA welcomes other businesses in the community to become members of our Business Council. Demonstrate to the community that protecting our public wildlands is important to you and your customers not just today, but for generations to come. Please call 831-423-3191 for more information.

There are Many Ways to Help Protect Our Precious Public Lands

Since we’re talking about giving, let’s review some other ways we “wilderfolk” can help protect our precious wildlands today, and for generations to come.

■ Gifts of appreciated stock are always welcome. The VWA maintains a Schwab account specifically for this purpose.

■ A donation “in memory of” a loved one is a great way to celebrate the life of a friend or family member. A donation “in honor of” someone is a nice way to recognize the efforts of someone special. In either case, we will provide a letter of acknowledgement to the entity of your choosing.

■ Gift memberships are fun and easy. Just provide us with a name, mailing address and email address and we’ll let your chosen friend or family member know that you made a donation to “get them in the Alliance.”

■ Donors providing gifts of $1000 or more to the Ventana Trails Forever fund are recognized on a commissioned fine-art piece (above) at Big Sur Station designed by Big Sur artist and sculptor Greg Hawthorne.

■ Renewing your VWA membership each year is important in several ways. Not only do you help fund programs and keep the lights on, you also help to position the VWA for grant funding. Grant makers use membership numbers to gauge the support of the community. By keeping current, you help the organization to secure critical grant funding.

■ Making a year-end gift to the VWA provides critical dollars where they are needed most and leverages the organization’s effectiveness in the year ahead. Best of all, you can double your contribution by making a year-end gift through the Monterey County Gives! campaign. A generous donor has agreed to match your gift, up to $10,000 between November 14th and December 31st, 2013. Find out more at www.montereycountygives.com/wild.

■ And finally, and we can’t say it enough, thank you to all of the amazing people who volunteer with the VWA each year. Please see page 8 for the names of the 210 people who gave their time, energy and expertise to the VWA over the past year.

Thanks again!

Your Wilderness, Your Legacy

Please consider including the Ventana Wilderness Alliance in your will, trust or estate plan. With thoughtful planning, you can create a win-win situation for yourself and the VWA. Enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that your legacy will help protect central coast wildlands in perpetuity. See this link for the VWA’s Planned Giving pages or contact Tom Hopkins at tom@ventanawild.org to learn more:

www.legacy.vg/ventanawild
Wild & Scenic Film Festival 2013

On Saturday, September 14th, 270 Ventanaphiles packed the Henry Miller Memorial Library in Big Sur to hear great music and watch amazing conservation and adventure films. Thanks are in order to the many wonderful folks who made the event possible. Thanks to our MC, Natural Resource Secretary John Laird, to filmmaker and co-host Erik Gandolfi, to Henry Miller Memorial Library and to Songs Hotbox Harry Taught Us. Thanks to the local media who reported on the event: KUSP Radio, Monterey County Weekly, the Carmel Pine Cone and the Big Sur Chamber of Commerce. Special thanks to the generous sponsors who provided great raffle prizes: Big Sur River Inn, Big Sur Roadhouse, CLIF Bar, Frame Circus, Julie Himes, Juniper Ridge, Lucia Lodge, Marie Gabrielle, Monterey Pine Forest Watch, Mother Jones, Nepenthe Restaurant, Patagonia, Point Sur Lighthouse Tours, REI, Sierra Nevada Brewing, and Ventana Inn. Most of all, big thanks to our stellar volunteers and to all of you who attended the festival. We hope to see you next year!