

# Summer in the nature park

This month, in response to a friendly request, I started going to the nature park on Wednesday mornings for park clean-ups. Since it has gotten hot, we meet at around 8:30 and work until 10 or 10:30. For the past three weeks we focused on weeding, and lining a path with rocks that will allow people to walk through the mounds.

Last January nearly 300 one-gallon native perennials and shrubs were planted, mostly in this area. Now the goal is to keep the weeds down so these plants can get established and naturalize. This means they need to make it through a few seasons during which time they will flower and set seed; the seeds will germinate, spreading these low-growing coastal sage scrub plants through this central area.

We have made a lot of progress in the park over the years. Thought this photo retrospective, focusing on the central part of the park ("the mounds") might be fun. I tried to only include pictures with the central information plaque (the sign is long gone now due to graffiti) so you can see how the park is growing.



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March 2005. Three months after the park opened the central area ("the mounds") is overrun with weeds. Clearing and hydroseeding the area, done by the contractor to create a grassland, proved unsuccessful.



April 21, 2005. I was unable to find any native plants among the weedy grasses and forbs.

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January 26, 2006. The mounds were covered with mulch to control weeds. The city also treated it periodically with herbicides. Notice there are few plants in front of the sign. The orange flags mark some small plants. Friends of the Nature Park was started at this time to try to improve the park through community stewardship.

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October 2007. Little is growing on the mounds, though some of the native plants around the sign are beginning to fill in. The red flowers are California fuchsia, probably the cultivar Route 66.

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May 2009. The city again brought in loads of mulch, on request from the Friends in spring of 2009. Unfortunately this time they did not spread the mountains of wood chips, leaving it to volunteers.



January 2010. MLK Service Day Planting Party. Girl scouts, Oxy students, and other volunteers participate in the first park planting party. Funding for the plants was provided with discretionary funds from City Council Member Rick Schneider. Most of the plants we placed east of the sign shown above. The idea was to move out from the earlier successful plantings.

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January 2012. Second MLK Service Day planting in the park. The plants from the earlier planting did remarkably well. Since weed control in the areas where native plants are taking hold is proving to be much easier than in bare, open space, we continued planting from the sign eastward across the mounds. A small group of volunteers led by landscape architect, Amy Nettleton, had marked the location of an informal, winding path through the mounds - to be created at a future time.

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June 2012. View over the mounds from the central information area (rocks in lower left corner) shows the establishment of native coastal sage scrub plants. The white flowers are California buckwheat. The plant located in the lower center of the photo is the Route 66 California fuchsia, shown in bloom above. It flowers in late summer to fall.





June 20, 2012. Volunteers began lining with rocks an informal path that will wind through the mounds. The upright green vegetation is Canadian horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*) a native plant that is found in disturbed soils. We will only remove Canadian horseweed that crowds the natives we planted. The large white flowers in the upper left are sacred thorn apple (*Datura wrightii*), another native found in disturbed soil. For a while it was the only native plant that grew on the mounds.

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June 27, 2012. Young, strong volunteer (thank you, Matt!) placed more large rocks along the path. Further to the right is a volunteer (my sister-in-law) who traveled all the way from Philadelphia to weed in the park (thank you, Judith!).

Although there will be no work days in July, I may start the Wednesday morning work days again in August and continue them until December. If there is interest, I can also schedule monthly Saturday or Sunday morning work days from September through November. Please let me know what days/times work best for you.