

Notes on Deerfield Pump Station / Mission Trails project (1995)

These notes recorded an initial information gathering meeting with Mission Trails Park Ranger, Randy Hawley, and members of the design team working toward a proposal for public artwork at Mission Trails Regional Park. Notes written by artist Aida Mancillas for the group.

Park Development

The underlying philosophical issue raised by the design team, and reiterated by park ranger Hawley, was maintaining the park's unique coastal sage, scrub and chaparral environment, while at the same time developing the area for use by the general public. Concern over the impact of large numbers of visitors on the park's fragile ecosystems is part of an ongoing dialogue involving community groups and park and environmental professionals. Day users of the park include hikers, rock climbers, mountain bikers and runners. Future use may include horseback riding. The group was shown evidence of the park's former use as a site for off road vehicles. These areas are now in a process of repairing themselves.

A commitment to the expression of the Native American experience embedded in the park's history was emphasized by Ranger Hawley as one of the primary considerations in shaping the development of a vision/metaphor for the park. This commitment would extend significantly to educational programming. A relationship between park professionals and the Kumeyaay people indigenous to this area is being developed through a series of ongoing, informal meetings. It is hoped that the Kumeyaay will be an important resource for park development and programming. The group spoke about Native American trained docents, indigenous ethnobotany, rethinking the idea of interpretive centers from an indigenous perspective, and methods of giving voice to the Kumeyaay experience in all aspects of the park. New signage should reflect the non-European historical and cultural perspective.

Site for Artwork

Discussion of the site for the proposed public art piece reflected sensitivity to the ecology. Artwork should be non-intrusive yet invite the public to experience the park. It should reflect the ecological and historical aspects of the park.

Any gates must allow pedestrian traffic when closed. The group looked at how the existing gate allows for a single pedestrian with a bicycle to pass through a narrow opening where the gate hinges. Braces at the bottom of the opening keep motorcycles out of the park. New gates should include this setup.

Site is part of a series of proposed staging areas throughout the park. Possible links to other areas under consideration.

Site and proposed artwork could be used to inform park visitors. The group discussed various strategies for informational signage or markers.

There was an ongoing discussion of the importance of the Kumeyaay presence on the land. Group was informed by Ranger Hawley of the negotiations between the park service and the Kumeyaay nation in developing future park programming. An indigenous perspective was stressed. A possible liaison with Richard Bugby of the Museum of Man, and Jane Dumas, a Kumeyaay ethnobotanist was suggested. Mr. Bugby is known to Aida Mancillas. Ranger Hawley offered to serve as facilitator for meeting other Native American elders or activists involved in the park's development.

A discussion arose concerning accessibility to the park by the differently abled. Aida Mancillas proposed a possible nature trail for the blind beginning at the entrance to the park at the Deerfield pump station site. Emphasis on sound, touch and smell built into the nature trail. Signage would be etched Braille plates. Development of this proposal would be outside the artwork being commissioned.

Site will probably include a parking area at some future time. Design team is aware that park development will take place slowly over a period of years, and will involve changing priorities.

The proposed park staging area at the Deerfield pump station is a "disturbed area." Vegetation is not that of native chaparral or coastal scrub. The site was once a quarry. Existing vegetation is basically weeds. The vegetation is reclaiming an old asphalt access road through the quarry site. The land is in the process of healing itself. References to the indigenous vegetation must be gathered outside the immediate site.

The group visited the site of the old mission dam. Noted were the forms and materials used in constructing the dam. Emphasis on water and its importance in this region were discussed.

The group was informed of various Kumeyaay sites within the park. Aida Mancillas discussed an approach to the Native American presence that was respectful and non-exploitive, and did not appropriate important cultural symbols out of context.